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**THE DIASPORA OF KOREAN CHILDREN: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF
THE EDUCATIONAL CRISIS IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH KOREA**

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Dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Montana
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ABSTRACT

Cho, Young-ee, Ph.D. August 2007

Individualized Interdisciplinary Program (IIP)

The Diaspora of Korean Children: A Cross-Cultural Study of the Educational Crisis in Contemporary South Korea

Chairperson: Dr. Roberta D. Evans

The diaspora of Korean children first started after the Korean War in the 1950s. Abandoned by their impoverished mothers and shunned by society, many orphan children were sent abroad for adoption, which was the best, if not the only, available solution at the time. Half a century later, South Korea today is no longer a desperately poor country, and yet an increasing number of young children are still being sent abroad. The exodus of children, termed as the diaspora of Korean children in this study, is an out-of-country solution chosen by both students and parents in response to an educational dilemma in Korea, which signifies the urgent issues of public education in the increasingly globalized world today.

By anchoring the educational crisis in contemporary South Korea in historical and cultural contexts, a primary purpose of this interdisciplinary study is to explore the seeming contradiction between the remarkable successes of Korean education, in particular its role in Korea's remarkable social and economic transformation, and its fundamental weaknesses. Its historical and cultural background, including the experience of war, provides context for understanding the phenomena of Korean society manifested in the expressions such as parachute kids, wild geese families, cuckoo mommies and penguin daddies.

This study also investigates the relevance of Confucian values in explaining Korea's educational crisis today. It places Korea's cultural underpinnings and complex historical experience in the context of the quest for modernization. Some critics blame Confucianism as the main culprit for the educational crisis today. But others disagree and argue that, despite its excesses and rigid applications in the past, Confucianism holds promise for addressing some of the problems of modern society. By reevaluating the efficacy of Confucian values in contemporary Korean society and in particular its complex and even conflicting interpretations in justifying competing models of education, this study addresses the question that many societies are facing today, including the United States, "At what cost, education?"

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following women who devoted their lives for others. Their patience with the heavy weight of tradition and quiet suffering in the tragedy of the war have been a constant inspiration for my life and the motivation for this work.

Choi Seo-un, my grandmother.
Park Gye-soon, my mother.
Cho Young-sook, my sister

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An African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” certainly applies to me. Indeed, completing the dissertation took more than a village—an international community of loving support and encouragement by many individuals. Without the help and guidance of my professors, colleagues, my family and friends, both in Korea and in the United States, this arduous journey would have been harder, if not impossible.

I am deeply grateful to my dissertation committee, Professors Bobbie Evans, Roy Anderson, John Lundt, Bill McCaw, and John Spores, who have been generous with their time and advice. I would like to thank especially Dr. Anderson and Dr. Spores for their detailed comments on my earlier draft, and Dr. Lundt and Dr. McCaw on the later version. Their suggestions significantly improved my dissertation.

I am truly indebted to Dr. Evans, the model of an ideal committee chair and mentor, who has been supportive and encouraging at every stage of this project. Her meticulous and perceptive readings of many drafts have shaped the development of this dissertation. Without her firm guidance and advice, I would have been lost in the universe of intellectual pursuit, and because of its immensity, going everywhere and ultimately nowhere.

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I am also grateful for the love and support I received from my family and friends both in Korea and in the U.S. My brother, Ki-bok, and Professor Suh Ji-moon at Korea University have provided me with a continual supply of invaluable information and research materials from Korea. The staff at the Interlibrary Loan Department of the Mansfield Library, Megan Stark in particular, has been a great help in finding materials in a timely and professional manner.

My Korean soul has been sustained by wonderful friendship and comforting presence of a small community of Koreans in Missoula. The Reinhardt family, Chin-won and Howard, and their daughter Elizabeth, has been the main spring for growing my roots in Montana. Their endlessly interesting conversations over Chin-won's fabulous soul (Seoul) food are always nourishing, as well as stimulating, to both my body and mind. It is my good fortune to have crossed paths with them. Also, I thank Dr. Woodam Chung and his wife, Sun-young Park, Dr. Changwon Yoo and his wife, Soo-young Kwak, for their love and support. They are all an integral part of my enriched life in Montana.

The seed for this study might have been planted long ago in Bloomington, Indiana. I am grateful to my good old friends, June and Larry Onesti and Karen and Bill Hicks, who included me in their family lives of intimacy, affection, trials and triumphs among their fourteen adopted children from Korea. They showed me a beautiful process of how families were created. Nita Levison, coordinator for international students at Indiana University, knows what to do and how to help foreigners who are new in this country.

I wish to thank to my two children, Daniel and Juni. Their intelligence and abundant talents never cease to amaze me. Their fearless independence inspires me to face life with confidence. As I try to stand still and listen to their march, I am often reminded how lucky I am to be their mother.

Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to my always cheerful husband, Phil West. He has been a steady source of intellectual and moral support. His breadth and depth of knowledge in Asian history not only helped me to sharpen my analysis, but his contagious passion for learning about the 'other' has also broadened the significance of my work in many crucial ways. He read and reread virtually every word of this dissertation and his expert comments have enhanced every aspect of this study. But most of all, I am grateful for his unfailing optimism that pulled me out for countless times from dark moments of my discouragement. For that, I couldn't have asked for a better life partner, and I feel evermore blessed.

Summer 2007
Missoula, Montana

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

In 1955, seeing a large number of children lined up waiting for their flight at *Kimpo* Airport in Seoul, Republic of Korea (South Korea or "Korea" hereafter) had to be an unforgettable sight.¹ Only a few Koreans, however, witnessed the scene. Coming out of four decades of brutal colonization by Japan (1910-1945) and the ravages of the Korean War (1950-1953), Korea was then an extremely poor country and not many Koreans ventured outside to travel overseas. Children were hardly carrying any bags since they did not possess much. Some of the older children were looking after the younger ones who were told to hold hands so as not to get separated from the group. Other than a few faint murmurs and tired sighs, the children were mostly quiet and obedient in their places. The air was filled with uncertainty, only to be broken from time to time by a sudden cry of hungry babies. No mothers or fathers were present to respond

¹ Until 2001, *Kimpo* Airport in *Seoul* was the hub of international air traffic in Korea. According to Andrei Lankov, a historian of Korea at the Australian National University, the Japanese colonial military government devised the original plan was in 1939 and completed its construction in 1942 primarily by unskilled Korean laborers, including high school students drafted for the project. For a brief period of time at the end of the World War II, the airfield was used as a training ground for kamikaze suicide pilots. For more historical details, see Andrei Lankov, "The Dawn of Modern Korea: Kimpo Airport," *The Korea Times* 27 Jan. 2005. 2 June 2005
<<http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/opinion/200501/kt2005012715444654130.htm>>.

to their urgent callings, but only a few adults were scurrying around to take care of the last-minute details of their impending departure.

A half a century later in 2005, a crowd of children gathering to leave Korea continues to be a familiar sight at *Incheon* International Airport.² The airport terminal, considered to be one of the largest passenger stations in the world, is filled with luggage and people who are endlessly coming and going.³ Vibrantly dressed and carrying backpacks filled with the latest electronic gadgets, children are noisy and impatient waiting at the check-in lines. With frequent airport announcements, hurried shouts, beeping sounds of electronic equipment, and the incessant musical ringing of cell phones, the air is brimming with busy excitement. Fathers are giving last-minute advice to their children who are today going abroad, while mothers are watching them with teary eyes. As the children head for the departure gates, many parents, grandparents, and their relatives and friends are also moving in the same direction, lingering until they gradually disappear behind the gates.

In half a century between 1955 and 2005, Korea has achieved tremendous economic growth. At the end of the World War II when the liberation from Japan finally came, Korea was one of the most impoverished countries in the world. In 1948, the overall economic condition of Korea was so dismal that Charles Helmick, then Deputy

² Claimed to be a "winged city that is more than an airport," the *Incheon* International Airport (IIA) is located in the port city of *Incheon*, about thirty-two miles west of *Seoul*. IIA was opened in March 29, 2001 to handle the growing international traffic that *Kimpo* Airport in Seoul was no longer able to accommodate.

³ Its floor space comprises 5.5 million square feet that houses 44 boarding gates and 272 check-in counters, which process 6,400 people per hour. It is one of the newest and most modern international air traffic centers in Asia. According to a global passenger survey reported by Airports Council International in 2006, it was named as the best airport in the world. See Roger Collis, "The Frequent Traveler: Finally, a consensus on the world's best airports," *International Herald Tribune* 6 May 2005. 6 May 2005 <<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2005/05/05/travel/trfreq.php>>; also, "Asian airports lead in a passenger poll," *International Herald Tribune* 8 March 2006. 16 March 2006 <<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/03/07/news/travel8.php>>.

Governor of the United States Military Government in South Korea, estimated that some nine million non-food producers would face starvation, if the United States stopped assistance to Korea.⁴ His assessment may sound extremely grim and even hopeless, but the condition indeed got worse after the Korean War began in 1950. Only in the 1960s, with consecutive five-year economic development plans in order, did the Korean economy start to improve.⁵ When the first plan was implemented in 1962, Korea's GNP was a mere 1.9 billion dollars. By 1995, however, it had increased 238 fold to \$451.7 billion dollars. Korean's GDP per capita in the 1960s was \$79, which increased to \$14,162 in 2004. Korean exports also grew from 55 million dollars to over 172 billion dollars in 2000. After three decades, when the economy grew at a dizzying speed, South Korea today is the 11th largest economy in the world.⁶

The two airport scenes illustrated above present a glimpse of South Korea's spectacular transformation from one of the world's poorest countries to a prosperous, industrialized and technologically advanced nation.⁷ Apparent affluence brought by rapid economic growth has never been experienced by previous generations. In addition,

⁴ His report to Washington includes also the following assessment: "Korea can not attain a high standard of living. Koreans do not possess the necessary technical training and experience required to take advantage of Korea's resources and effect an improvement of its present rice-economy." See Yong-Teh Lee, "Accomplishments and Challenges of Korean Education over the Past 60 Years," International Conference on 60 Years of Korean Education: Achievements and Challenges, ed. Jai-seok Kwak (KINTEX, Korea: Korea Education Development Institute (KEDI), 2005).

⁵ For a full analysis on the South Korean economic development, see A.H. Amsden, Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization (NY: Oxford U Press, 1989).

⁶ See Mary E. Connor, The Koreas: A Global Studies Handbook (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002) 69-99.

⁷ With 72 percent of all households connected to the Internet which is at 10 megabits per second, faster than most conventional broadband, Korea is one of the most wired countries in the world. See Norimitsu Onishi, "In a Wired South Korea, Robots Will Feel Right at Home," The New York times, 2 April 2006; also, So Young Choi, "Techno Mart: Showcase of Korea's Electronics Prowess," Koreana Autumn 2002: 62-67.

positive changes in political and social spheres have also greatly improved life in South Korea as it has become also a truly democratic society. Beneath all the economic and political hustle and bustle, however, a peculiar phenomenon continues today. That is, the crowd of children leaving Korea.

The diaspora of Korean children first started in the 1950s. As a personal mission to help war orphans, Harry Holt, an Oregon farmer, and his wife Bertha adopted eight children from Korea.⁸ Back then, foreign adoptions were almost unheard of in America. The arrival of these children received national attention in the media.⁹ As a result, the Holt International Children's Services was established to assist those American families who also wished to adopt Korean children. Regarded as "dust of the streets," many of these Korean orphans were biracial children, who were fathered by foreign soldiers, mostly American, during the Korean War and abandoned by their impoverished Korean mothers and shunned by the society.¹⁰

Traditionally, adoption in Korea was carried out in a highly secretive manner, primarily because of the effects of Confucian influence, deeply imbedded in Korean

⁸ See Courtney Peifer, "Their Mission Was to Adopt Korean Orphans: Holts Were Moved to Act, Changing a Nation in the Process," Seattle Post-Intelligencer 18 August 2003. 28 April 2005 <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/135396_koreaadopt18.html>.

⁹ See Deann Borshay Liem, "First Person Plural: Adoptions from South Korea," P.O.V. (2000), PBS. 14 March 2006 <<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2000/firstpersonplural/historical/skadoptions.html>>.

¹⁰ Estimated in the tens of thousands, bi-racial children during and after the Korean War were mostly "Amerasians" who were the offspring between American soldiers and Korean women. In recent times, however, mixed-race children in Korea come from mainly Korean men, mostly farmers, laborers and blue collar workers, acquiring foreign brides. Pressured by aging parents who want their sons to get married and produce grandchildren, many desperate bachelors unable to find wives in Korea turn to Asian countries such as China, the Philippines and Vietnam to find a wife. Pearl Buck International, a charity organization that addresses the issues of mixed-race children, estimates there are about 35,000 bi-racial children currently living in Korea. For more details, see Liem (2000).

society, which abhorred birth out of marriage and out of the family bloodline.¹¹ Because of this cultural taboo, Korean families were reluctant to take in any non-blood-related children. Furthermore, for over 400 years until 1873, Korea had been closed to outside contacts remaining as the “Hermit Kingdom” and resisting any influence from the West. In the process, Korea maintained herself as one of the most homogeneous countries in the world.¹² As a result, the very idea of adopting "mixed-blood children" was naturally “foreign” and not at all easily accepted in Korea.¹³ Besides, almost all Koreans were dreadfully needy and destitute themselves from the chaos and destruction of the aftermath of the war. For the survival of the large number of orphans, especially bi-racial children, sending them away for adoption abroad was the best, if not the only, available solution at the time.¹⁴

¹¹ When my uncle and aunt decided to adopt a baby boy who was left in front of the gate of their house in the early 60s, they immediately sold their house and moved to a different part of Seoul where nobody knew them. It was a desperate effort to keep their adoption secret. All the family members and relatives naturally understood that the nature of their adoption was a secret never to be disclosed, even to the adoptee.

¹² First started a decade ago, the number of foreign laborers immigrating to Korea has steadily increased to the current estimate of over 300,000. Today, however, racial prejudice against these workers is rampant in Korean society. Although religious organizations have been actively involved to protect human rights of both legal and illegal immigrant workers who are reportedly abused, discriminated, and exploited in their work place in Korea, the Korean government has been slow to respond, if not remaining passive, in addressing the needs of the influx of foreign workers. As a result, it is one of most pressing social issues in Korea. See Shin Wha Lee, The Realities of South Korea's Migration Policies (Seoul: Korea University, 2003).

¹³ In spite of the fact that Korea made a great deal of economic, social, and political progress during the last 50 years, the cultural prejudice against children of mixed marriages still persists in Korean society today. According to a national survey in 2001, the drop-out rate of mixed-race children from middle school was 17.5%. This strikingly high rate, compared to a national average of 1.1%, underscores the painful experiences of bi-racial children who are often discriminated against and stigmatized early on in their life. Their unfortunate saga continues even later in life as evidenced in their high unemployment rate and the fact that the majority of their occupations are concentrated in low wage manual jobs or temporary part-time work. This may be the result of their lower qualifications from the lack of schooling by dropping out early. See "A Standing Reproach: Amerasian Pride and Prejudice," The Economist 4 March 2006: 40.

¹⁴ See Aidan Foster-Carter, "Adopting, Adapting: Korean Orphans," Asia Times July 17, 2002, sec. Korea. 28 April 2005 <<http://www.atimes.com/atime/Korea/DG17Dg01.html>>; also, D. James

That was then. Half a century later, South Korea is no longer a desperately poor country. Yet an increasing number of young children are still being sent abroad. Unlike the children in the 1950s, however, most children who are sent abroad today are not poor orphans.¹⁵ Instead, they are well-fed, well-clad children whose parents are mostly well-educated and financially affluent professionals. Furthermore, the current exodus of these young children is not instigated by any international agency or the Korean government, but by their own parents.

Statement of the Problem

In 2004, the number of Korean children who were sent abroad was reported to have reached a record high of 12,317 in total with a daily average of 34 children.¹⁶ A survey published by the Korea Education Development Institute (KEDI) in 2006 substantiates this reality: one out of three parents would like to send their children abroad, if they could afford it financially. Moreover, 60-70% of those parents and students who had been abroad replied that they would like to leave Korea again.¹⁷ This

Anderson, "Orphans in South Korea? Don't Ask, Don't Tell," CBC News Analysis & Viewpoint 2 March 2005. 28 April 2005 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/viewpoint/vp_anderson/20050302.html>.

¹⁵ Since the Seoul International Olympics in 1988, there has been a drastic drop in the number of Korean children adopted by American and other European families. In 1986, the number of Korean children who were adopted was 6,200, but by 1993, it was reduced to 1,700. A major factor in this change is the impact of foreign media highlighting Korean adoption as a prominent cultural feature during the Olympics. Bryant Gumbel, an NBC host, for example, focused on the topic characterizing "Korean babies as Korea's primary export." Other major newspapers such as The New York Times and The Progressive published articles with similarly unflattering titles like "Babies for Export" and "Babies for Sale: South Koreans Make Them, Americans Buy Them." Embarrassed by such exposure and also harsh condemnation from North Korea criticizing South Korea selling its children to Western countries as the ultimate form of capitalism, the South Korean government delayed the scheduled departure of adopted children and halted its adoption program altogether for awhile. For more details, see Liem (2000).

¹⁶ Jin Kyun Kil, "Maeil 34 Myeong Kkol Hanguk Tteunda ("Daily 34 students leave Korea")," Dong-A Ilbo 29 March 2005; also, Hee Kyung Son, "The Number of Elementary, Middle and High School Students Studying Abroad Hit Record High," Arirang News 29 March 2005.

pervasive willingness of Korean parents to let go of their children, combined with the strong desire of Korean children to go thousands of miles away and leave behind the comfort and security of their homes and parental care, may explain the current exodus of Korean children.

Children as young as five years are leaving Korea, and the number of children being sent abroad is expected to continue to increase in years to come.¹⁸ Why are so many Korean children being sent away from their homeland? What motivates parents to send their young children away at such a tender age? Furthermore, why are Korean children so eager to leave their country? And where are they going? This exodus of young children, termed the “diaspora” of Korean children in this study, is indeed a curious and unique social phenomenon. The key to understanding this peculiarly contemporary Korean experience lies in what many Koreans believe to be the failure of public education, characterized as the "educational crisis" in Korea.¹⁹

In April 17, 2001, The Korea Herald, a highly reputable major newspaper in Korea, reported that 94.9 percent of 277 professors and full-time lecturers in 36 Korean

¹⁷ More detailed survey statistics are provided in a study by Hongwon Kim, et. al., Jogi Yuhak E Gwanhan Gukmin Uisik Josa Yeongu ("A Study of Korean Perceptions on Pre-College Study Abroad") (Seoul: KEDI, 2006).

¹⁸ In 2004, the total number students who are studying abroad is estimated 390,000, an increase of 13.3% from 350,000 in 2003. See Sung Jin Doh, "Gireogi Appa ui Nunmul ("The Tears of Wild Goose Daddy")," Jungang Ilbo 18 Febuary 2005; and "Cho.Jung.Gogyo Haeoe Yuhaksaeng Sasang Choedae ("The Number of Elementary, Middle, High School Students Studying Abroad Hit a Historical High")," Chosun Ilbo 29 March 2005. 30 March 2005
<<http://www.chosun.com/national/news/200503/200503290060.html>>.

¹⁹According to Samhwa Ju, Professor of Education at Chungnam University in Korea in a study published by KEDI, the emerging crisis in schooling is not new. The term “crisis” has been surfacing since the 1980s. However, the crisis referring to the weakening in school’s core function of transmitting knowledge and information and the closed down communication between teacher and students has become a serious social issue since the 1990s. For more details, see Samhwan Ju, Hanguk Gyoyuk ui Wigi ("The Crisis of Korean Education") (Seoul: Dongmunsa, 2002); also, Jong Tae Yi, et al., Hakgyo Gyoyuk Wigi ui Siltae wa Wonin Bunseok ("Analyzing the Reality and Causes of the School Education Crisis"), (Seoul: KEDI, 2000).

universities who were surveyed agreed that the country's public education system was in a serious crisis. They expressed a deep concern for “school collapse,” as manifested in the increased number of secondary school dropouts, school violence, truancy, and other behavioral problems in classrooms.²⁰ By and large, Korean parents are extremely supportive when it comes to their children's education. However, they are increasingly unhappy, frustrated, and disillusioned with the current educational environment in Korea. A survey conducted by KEDI in 2003 reaffirms widespread dissatisfaction of many Koreans. A majority of Korean parents report that Korean education has become a heavy "burden" and "pain" to their lives, rather than “joy” and "hope" for their children’s future.²¹

What has happened with Korean education is an ironic twist. As a driving force behind South Korea's “economic miracle” and the main engine pushing Korea toward democratization in the 1980s, it has been highly praised around the world and often recommended for developing countries as a model of success endorsed by countless academic studies done in the West. One cause of the educational crisis in contemporary South Korea stems largely from high-stakes testing. Its impact is clearly evident in deteriorating school environment and the quality of student life in Korea which is supported by a survey result by the National Youth Committee in Korea. It reports only 34.5 percent of students are satisfied with their school life. This survey, carried out three

²⁰ Jae Hoon Lim, "Class Reproduction and Competing Ideologies in Korean K-12 Education: A Critical Discourse Analysis on "School Collapse" between 1999 and 2001," 11th Hahn Moo-sook Colloquium in Korean Humanities, ed. R. Richard Grinker, et al., (Washington, D.C.: The Sigur Center for Asian Studies, 2005), vol. 24 of The Sigur Center Asia Papers.

²¹ Sa Gyoyuk Munje E Daehan Daechaek ("The Problem of Private Tutoring and Its Proposed Measures") (Seou, Korea: KEDI, 2003).

months from September to November in 2006, includes subjects totaling 14,430 middle and high school students, plus an additional 1,500 at-risk youth who were out of school at the time of the survey.

Surprisingly, 57.1 percent of the survey respondents reported they had an urge to run away from home. Meanwhile, 19 percent actually had the experience of doing so. As for the main reason why they wanted to run away, 28.3 percent indicated that it was because of the conflict with their parents, while 14.8 percent cited their poor school records. However, unhappiness with their parents is largely caused by school related issues. More than one out of three, 35.1 percent, reported conflicts were over their school records, while 14.5 percent indicated they had disagreement over college plans.²² As with other social issues involving children and young adults, the crisis is closely linked to the problems of public education, in particular to the college entrance examination in Korea.

Educational problems that stem from high-stakes testing are not limited to Korea. Anna Quindlen, a highly admired writer and social commentator in the United States, laments how American children are “drowning in multiple-choice questions, No.2 pencils and acronyms.” She lists many tests such as the GQEs (Graduation Qualifying Exam), the SOLs (Standards of Learning), the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) and the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test). She also cites a group called the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, which estimates that each year public schools give out more than 100 million standardized tests. She is infuriated at how American kids are

²² Ju-hyeong Sim, "Cheungsonyeon 5 Myeong jung 1 Myeong Gachul Gyeonghum Issda ("One Out of Five Korean Adolescents Have Experienced Running Away from Home")," Hangug Gyooyuk Sinmun (Korea Education Daily) 31 Jan. 2007, Sec. Society. 1 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.hangyo.com/app/news/article>>.

“tested out” and by the maddening process and the forced march “that seems to have replaced creative thought, critical thinking and joyful learning for so many kids.”²³

Testing, as a useful tool in sustaining the system of meritocracy and equality for all, is an unavoidable practice in modern democratic societies, especially in the field of education. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that testing is conducted in every phase of a student’s educational experience in Korea. Nevertheless, the crisis in Korea stems from the excessive attention placed on college entrance exams. Because students have a single chance to take the test and the score from the paper-and-pencil test will determine the course of a student’s life, the stakes in Korea are arguably the highest. As a result, the pressures to prepare for tests start as early as elementary school. In fact, many parents begin the training at the preschool stage. In some cases, they begin at birth or even before birth.

The aggregate cost of college examination preparation in Korea has become astronomical, particularly in the form of private tutoring. In the eyes of many Korean parents, that financial burden alone signifies the failure of public education in Korea. In an effort to improve educational equality and reduce the financial burden born by parents, the Korean government has implemented numerous educational policies. The abolition of the high school entrance examinations and banning private supplementary lessons and tutoring, for example, were enacted to alleviate the intensity of the competition. However, increased societal demands for higher education and the weight of Confucian tradition have made it impossible to reduce the stress.

A recent study indicated that, in fact, educational policies implemented by the Korean government have not only failed to achieve major goals, but instead, they

²³ Anna Quindlen, "Testing: One, Two, Three," Newsweek 13 June 2005:88.

intensified the negative effects of examination-focused education. The outcome was lowered levels of academic achievement, limited students and parents' choice of school, and strengthened the government's control of schools.²⁴ As a result, many Korean parents have lost confidence and started to abandon Korean public education altogether by relying heavily on the private institutions for their children's education or by seeking a less expensive and less competitive educational environment elsewhere outside of Korea.

The diaspora of Korean children is an out-of-country solution chosen by both students and parents in response to an educational dilemma in Korea. The large exodus of Korean children is an unmistakable sign of the education crisis in Korea. What is driving the actions of zealous Korean parents who are willing to bear not only financial burden but also the emotional pain of separation for both themselves and their young children in their search for an alternative educational environment outside Korea? In order to resolve that question, however, it is important to find out, first of all, whether the education crisis in Korea is found in reality or is it a conjured-up perception exaggerated by overly aggressive and competitive parents? Furthermore, the question begs deeper explanations that are based on fundamental core purposes of education. If the sacrifice of parents is all for the sake of providing a bright future and happiness for their children, how does one explain the acceptance of the breakup of their family; the real price of children's education acquired "at any cost"?

²⁴ See Ju Ho Lee, "The School Equalization Policy of Korea: Past Failures and Proposed Measure for Reform," Korea Journal Spring (2004) 221-34.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the educational crisis in contemporary South Korea. By focusing on the social phenomenon of the diaspora of Korean children and placing it in historical context, the study also seeks to explore a better appreciation for how the education system in Korea has developed over the years and, in the process, helped to transform Korean society. Furthermore, by linking the cultural underpinnings of this particular social phenomenon with the complexities of modernization, this research investigates how relevant Confucian values may be in explaining Korea's educational crisis today. By reevaluating the efficacy of Confucian values in contemporary Korean society and in particular its complex and even conflicting interpretations in justifying competing models of education, at its core, this study addresses the question that many societies are facing today, including the United States, "At what cost, education?"

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative method that draws upon the tools of descriptive, interpretive, philosophical, and humanistic research.²⁵ Such an approach is appropriate because the current educational crisis in Korea must be understood in historical and cultural contexts which entail a description or interpretation of past events or stories.²⁶ Historical perspective yields insight into the very different and sometimes conflicting forces from China, Japan, and the United States that impact on Korean education today.

²⁵ See, J.W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003) 182-83.

²⁶ J. H. McMillan and J.F. Wergin, Understanding and Evaluating Educational Research. 2nd Ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2002) 3-7.

Confucian influence from China, for example, can be used to explain both the success and the current crisis in Korean education.

In carrying out this qualitative approach, the literature review is incorporated in each of the subsequent chapters comprised primarily of six different kinds of resources.²⁷ One is the theoretical literature, primarily sociological, that frames my analysis. A second resource is published and unpublished doctoral dissertations, in both Korean and English, which analyze questions related to the educational crisis. A third is extensive use of educational statistics. The results of many recent surveys and research studies conducted and published in Korea, primarily by the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), are incorporated as important resources. A fourth resource is the scholarly discussion in published books and journals, both in Korean and English, that address Korean education and the larger issues of contemporary Korean society. A fifth resource used in this study is magazines and newspaper articles, again in both languages, that deal in particular with the nature of the Korean diaspora but also with contemporary social issues in Korea. Finally, for the discussion of related historical and cultural issues and also the contemporary debate on education in Korea today, I have relied on primary sources, including Confucian texts as they appear in Korean publications.

The terms used in this study are defined, if necessary, and embedded in the section where they appear, rather than locating them as a separate discussion. Doing so allows the reader to grasp more easily the translated meaning as a majority of the terms used in this study are the translation of Korean words. They are selected from recent

²⁷ Limited availability of data, described as one of shortcomings of historical research, is largely resolved by the use of the Internet. For more detailed discussion about non-experimental qualitative research, see N.J. Salkind, Exploring research, 5th Ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003) 208-11.

newspaper articles, magazines, scholarly journals, and academic research, mostly published in Korea. Since these publications document the public's major concerns of the time, they have played a major role shaping this study. They also provided background for understanding educational migration and explain how Korean education is still in the making.

Korean words in the text are given in italics and are limited in use and where possible substituted with the terms in English translation. With the exception of famous people and well-known phrases in the West, the Romanization of Korean words mostly follows the newly revised system of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.²⁸ The debate between advocates of the newly revised system and defenders of the old system, the McCune-Reischauer system created in 1939, was over the role of *Hangeul*, the Korean alphabet, in the maintenance of Korean cultural identity.²⁹ As a result of this recent development, inconsistencies in the use of Korean Romanization may exist.

²⁸ The Ministry of Culture and Tourism in South Korea instituted a new Romanization orthography on July 2, 2000. The first system of Romanization of the Korean language was originally emerged around 1900 when Korea became known to the Western world. Since then, there have been as many as ten other orthographies introduced without any standardization. Among them, the most well-known and widely used is the McCune-Reischauer system created by two American scholars, George M. McCune and Edwin O Reischauer. For more details on the MR system, see G.M. McCune and E.O. Reischauer, The Romanization of the Korean Language: Based upon its phonetic structure (Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1939)

²⁹ The current debate over Romanization of Korean is an interesting issue because it reflects not only the continuing conflict between nationalism and globalism in Korean orthographic and Romanization policies, but it also shows how the pressures of globalization are causing a nationalist reaction in transliteration systems as well as native language orthographies around the world. In Korea, supporters of the new revised system argue that the old system deviates greatly from *Hangeul's* orthography and is difficult for Koreans to use. They furthermore claim that the old system, which was devised for non-native speakers, offends Korean national pride as it distorts the purity and scientific intent of *Hangeul*. The defenders of the old system, however, stress the aesthetic appeal and more accurate delivery of Korean pronunciation that is superior over all other systems of Romanization to non-Koreans. Romanization of Korean (Vienna: United Nations, 2006).

Research Questions

Employing a qualitative approach, this interdisciplinary study uses the opening story of the Korean diaspora as a springboard to raise three main questions that shape the analytic framework and give focus to the educational crisis in Korean society.

The first question is the phenomenon of the diaspora itself. Why and how, for example, do families choose to migrate and decide where to go? It explores what happens to them and their children living outside of Korea after migration and what kinds of problems they face in their daily lives and in family relations. This question is framed in the social context of their exodus in general and more particularly the educational crisis that impacts on both the parents and their children. Answers to these questions will help to explain the hyperventilated education fever and its impact on family life in contemporary Korean society.

The second question explores the historical and cultural background of Korean education. What is the impact of the turmoil of twentieth century Korean history on Korean education and how have the political and economic pressures of globalization shaped Korean education? It asks who the central players are in directing the course of Korean education today and illuminates how education as a social institution is shaped by history and culture.

The third question comes to the heart of this cross-cultural study. What are those core teachings of Confucius that shape the assumptions and arguments used to justify various positions in the debate on education? The task here is to examine the complex role of deeply imbedded Confucian values in Korean society. It identifies how these

Confucian values and perhaps moral education in general are used by scholars and educators throughout history to create and validate a particular system of education.

Organization of the Chapters

To address these three key questions, this study is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter One introduces the background and the structure of this study. Chapter Two examines the phenomenon of the diaspora of Korean children. By applying a broad historical perspective, the diaspora is discussed in the larger framework of global migration. In that context, we can see the uniqueness of the diaspora of Korean children and its role in defining the educational crisis in Korea.

Chapter Three investigates the background of the diaspora. By introducing social terms that are coined after the names of birds, which is how the diaspora is discussed in the Korean language and expresses how "education fever" is shaping the lives of ordinary Korean families, the contemporary landscape of Korean society is illustrated in this chapter. Its focus on the lives of children and their families shows how the weight of Korean education has led to the exodus of children from Korea.

Chapter Four explores the roots of the phenomenon by analyzing important historical contexts. Recognizing Korean education as an adaptive mechanism responding to political and economic pressures, it summarizes major events in Korean history as external factors, primarily the influence of China, Japan and the United States, that have shaped the current educational system in Korea.

Chapter Five explores the emerging education system in modern Korea through a cultural lens. It examines how both Confucian and Western values impact the perceptions Korean people have about education. In particular, the role of Korean mothers, the media, and the demand for English language in modern Korean society are studied in depth to illustrate the crisis.

Chapter Six presents a Confucian debate that has shaped Korean understanding of the educational crisis today. It is a debate quite different from educational discourse in the West today. It demonstrates how the teachings of Confucius are still deeply influential but at the same time challenged by a younger generation that increasingly embraces modern democratic ideas and individualistic ways of life. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes this study by summarizing the findings and suggests possible policy considerations and further research.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the following ways. First, it places Korea's educational crisis in two larger contexts that are often missing in contemporary discourse on education. One is a migration pattern that is produced by globalization of education. Another is the historical and cultural forces that have shaped Korean education in modern times.

Second, by demonstrating the difficulties of synthesizing traditional values with modern democratic values, the study serves as a mirror for analyzing educational problems in other societies, including China and Japan in particular, and to a lesser extent the United States. The difficulty in Korea is compounded by the continuing threat of

civil war, essentially the unresolved Korean War of fifty years ago, and the ongoing military and cultural impact of the West, particularly America, in Korea today. The efforts of the Korean people to shape a cultural and national identity which they hope can be sustained in the 21st century should present a valuable lesson.

Third, by suggesting geo-political implications that are closely related to the future development of Korean education, this study provides a platform for further discussions to clarify other social and cultural issues which continue to respond to the effects of globalization. Specifically, the depth and nature of Confucian influence in Korean society will continue to fuel the debate on education in Korea.

Finally, in a more mundane and immediate sense, this research may be significant to the readers who are interested in East Asian history and culture in general, and educational issues in particular. They may find some insight in the Korean educational crisis that resonates with much of ongoing discourse in American education today.

CHAPTER 2

DIASPORA OF KOREAN CHILDREN: A MODERN EXODUS

Introduction

Migration has been a part of the human story since before the dawn of civilization. The very survival of human beings depends on their physical and spatial movement. Fleeing from the hostile environment of natural disasters and man-made catastrophes, human beings have left behind them the trails and inevitable signs which offer us the opportunity to study the trials and trepidations of the past. Recognizing human movement as an important part of modern history, migration studies carried out in various disciplines have identified various patterns of migration flows.³⁰

In The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity,

Nikos Papastergiadis, a sociologist at the University of Manchester in England, suggests

³⁰ All social and human sciences, especially human geographers who have made fundamental contributions to migration studies, are investigating human migration to find the causes and consequences of people's movement. To name a few, the following titles from a collection of publications by the International Library of Studies on Migration, attest to a wide range of ongoing research areas: "Theories of Migration," "Geography and Migration," "Sociology of Migration," "Migration in European History," "The Politics of Migration," "Law and Migration," "Migration and Social Cohesion," "Migration and Public Policy," "Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism," and "Gender and Migration." See Robin Cohen, ed., The Sociology of Migration (Cheltenham, UK: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1996); Robin Cohen, ed., Theories of Migration (Cheltenham, UK: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1996); Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, eds., Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism, vol. 9 (Cheltenham, UK: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1999); Christine Inglis, "The 'Rediscovery' of Ethnicity: Theory and Analysis," The International Handbook of Sociology, ed. Stella R. Quah and Arnaud Sales (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2000); Gabriel Sheffer, "A New Field of Study: Modern Diasporas in International Politics," Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism, eds. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, vol. 9 (Cheltenham, UK: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1999); Robin Cohen, ed., The Cambridge Survey of World Migration (Cambridge, Great Britain: University Press, 1995).

“a new cross-disciplinary approach” to study modern migration.³¹ He explains the relationship between the worldwide migration movement and modernity in the following way:

Migration studies are no longer confined to the domain of sociology, demography, politics and economics. Key contributions have also been made by anthropology, history, psychology, geography, philosophy, cultural studies and art criticism. Disciplines like literary theory and political economy, which a decade ago were considered to be poles apart, have now discovered new borders of interest. These new studies have increasingly drawn attention to the complex links between diffuse levels of experience and deep structural changes. (5)

This chapter examines the diaspora of Korean children within the larger context of Korean migration history in modern times. Its purpose is to recognize the particular sociological implications in the migration of Korean children. Although this diaspora is relatively new and peculiarly Korean, the phenomenon is linked to other migration movements and the effects of modernization.

Korean Diaspora in Modern History

There are two reasons why the term “diaspora” is used to describe the migration of Korean children. The first is to link the study to the revival of the diaspora idea in migration studies. Despite the extensive work of migration scholars, theoretical

³¹ Nikos Papastergiadis, The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

explanations for the ever changing nature of contemporary diasporas are limited.³² The purpose here is to capture the cultural and social meanings of the transnational- or multi-locality peculiar to Korea.

The second reason is to avoid the overly simple explanation of diaspora as the experience of leaving home to get to an unfamiliar faraway place. Rather, it is to see the Korean diaspora as an unending journey of modernity and its unexpected consequences. In this way the term diaspora is used as a metaphor that captures the unique and largely unrecognized nature of the Korean diaspora. Typically the term diaspora is used too loosely to refer to any displaced populations. The discussion here attempts to be more specific and embed the Korean experience in the context of Korean culture, while incorporating the large impact of globalization on modern Korea.

The Concept of Diaspora

Diaspora is a Greek word meaning “dispersion.”³³ Because it referred to the traumatic experience of Jews who were expelled from their homeland and scattered outside Palestine in biblical times, the original use of the term was applied exclusively to Jewish exiles.³⁴ Since then, many other ethnic groups have also suffered the same brutal fate of forced migration from colonization, economic collapse, and political and religious

³² The topic of global diaspora is a much researched subject and an impressive number of publications exist on the subject. “Global Diaspora: An introduction” by Robin Cohen, a prominent migration scholar at University of Warwick in the United Kingdom, presents credible meanings of diaspora created by a systematic attempt to analyze the history and sociology of the world’s diasporas. For more details, see Robin Cohen, Global Diasporas: An Introduction (Seattle, WA: U of Washington Press, 1997): 276-93.

³³ “Diaspora,” Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. 2002.

³⁴ Steven Vertovec and R. Cohen, eds., Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism, Vol. 9 (Cheltenham, UK: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1999) 1-29.

oppressions. As a result, the concept of diaspora has been broadened in meaning to connect territorial, political, economic, cultural, and ethnic identification with the collective human trauma that comes from displacement, victimization, alienation, and loss outside of their homeland.³⁵

The basic assumption in the earlier studies of ethnic diasporas focused on a single or very limited cases of a visible minority. It was because the diaspora of most migrants, who were once separated from their homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, were seen as transitory and therefore destined to disappear through eventual acculturation and assimilation.³⁶ However, advanced modern technologies in transportation and communication have brought about significant changes in the relationship between migration and globalization and require a new framework to understand its modern form.³⁷ This need is articulated by Papastergiadis, who writes:

In the past there was a tendency to discuss migration in the mechanistic terms of causes and consequences. Space was often seen as a vacant category, reduced to a neutral stage upon which other forces were at play in the narratives of migration. Space was rarely seen as an active part in the field of identity formation. However, it is increasingly evident that contemporary migration has no single origin and no simple end. It is an ongoing process

³⁵ See Russell C. Leong, "Asians in the Americas: Interpreting the Diaspora Experience," Amerasia Journal 15.2 (1989): vii-xvii; Richard Marienstras, "On the Notion of Diaspora," Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen 357-63; also, Gabriel Sheffer, "A New Field of Study: Modern Diasporas in International Politics," Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen 381-95.

³⁶ One of the most striking examples of the transitory nature of diaspora through assimilation is found in a recent discovery that the famous founding father Thomas Jefferson may have had Jewish ancestry. His DNA test suggests a genetic line known as K2, which links to the Semite people. It is not so surprising but a very plausible possibility considering its long history of human migration and the fact that this 20,000 years old K2 gene has been found scattered around Western Europe, notably in Iberia, France and Britain, but most ubiquitously in the Middle East. For more details, see Nick Summers and Marc Bain, "Jefferson, the Chosen President?" Newsweek 12 March 2007:10.

³⁷ See, for example, Aihwa Ong, "Diasporas and Cosmopolitanisms," Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality (Durham, NC: Duke U Press, 1999): 12-16.

and needs to be seen as an open voyage. Departures and returns are rarely, if ever, final, and so it is important that we acknowledge the transformative effect of the journey, and in general recognize that space is a dynamic field in which identities are in a constant state of integration. (4)

In the past, Korean migrants followed the earlier pattern of settling mostly in their places of destination and eventually assimilating to the culture of their host country. In the 21st century, they are no longer isolated as a small community to be integrated. Since they are now able to link easily and quickly with their home country, they maintain family connections and support. Many Korean immigrants eagerly embrace their transnational identity and accept the changes in family structure that in the past were often regarded as disintegration or dysfunction. In the global age, Koreans, just as people voluntarily relocating elsewhere, regard their shifting position rather as a strength with a reinvigorated sense of adventure and opportunity.³⁸

Early Korean Migrations

As millions of people around the world have moved away from their homelands as laborers and refugees, the main features of early migration have become labor and refugee movements.³⁹ Korean migration is not an exception and can be explained in part by the geographical identity of the Korean peninsula. Located between the three

³⁸ For more on the same subject, see Barbara H. Settles, "Sociology of the Family: Global Advances and Challenges," The International Handbook of Sociology, ed. Stella R. Quah and Arnaud Sales (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2000).

³⁹ While the great nineteenth century thinkers such as August Comte and Emile Durkheim described the changes of migration in rather passive evolutionary terms, the view expressed by Karl Marx is to depict it as a more violent process. Marx saw migration as a traumatic event that detached the peasant from the soil for industrial purposes or suddenly and forcibly tore great masses of men from their means of subsistence, and hurled them on to the labor market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. For other theoretical key issues on migration, see Cohen, ed., The Sociology of Migration (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 1995): xi.

powerful countries of China, Japan, and Russia, Korea has endured countless foreign invasions and eventual colonization by Japan.⁴⁰ Korean migration, as both voluntary and forced laborers and refugees, reflects Korea's turbulent history which is itself the context for the profound changes of Korean society in modern times.⁴¹

In December 1902, the first group of 121 Koreans left for Hawaii from the port city of *Chemulpo* (now called *Incheon*), thus marking the beginning of Korean migration.⁴² It was twenty years after the signing of the Korea-United States Treaty of Amity and Commerce when Western agricultural and industrial capitalists turned to Asia in search of cheap labor.⁴³ Motivated largely by poverty, destitute Koreans from all walks of life responded to the opportunities for a better life in the West, thus beginning the labor diaspora of Korean.⁴⁴ Over the next three years, 65 more groups, totaling 7,226 Koreans, moved to Hawaii. In addition, 1,033 Koreans, beginning in April 1905, went to Mexico to work in plantations. Faced with widespread famine and starvation at the turn

⁴⁰ Steinberg, a scholar and specialist in Korean studies, compares Korea's tragic history to that of Poland which has endured as much political turmoil as Korea because of geographic position. See David I. Steinberg, Korea: Nexus of East Asia. An Inquiry into Contemporary Korea in Historical Perspective (NY: American-Asian Educational Exchange, Inc. 1968) 1.

⁴¹ According to an estimation made in 1996, approximately 7.2 percent of all Koreans live outside Korea, which in part makes Koreans the second largest diasporic people in the world. Kichung Kim, "Affliction and Opportunity: Korean Literature in Diaspora--a Brief Overview," Korean Studies 25.2 (2002): 261-76.

⁴² Without belonging to any organized migration groups, many Koreans at this time also moved to Japan and to north China and Russia on their own in search of work after losing their livelihood in Korea due to continued bad crops, rampant inflation, and exploitation by corrupt government officials.

⁴³ The labor shortage in the West was created by the ending of the slave trade by the late 1850s and by the increased labor demand from the economic development in the Pacific West Coast, discovery of gold in California in 1848, and the emergence of the sugar industry in Hawaii. See Liu, John M, "A Comparative View of Asian Immigration to the USA," The Cambridge Survey of World Migration. Ed. Robin Cohen. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 1995) 253-59.

⁴⁴ Unlike Chinese and Japanese immigrants to Hawaii who were mostly peasants, the first Korean immigrants to Hawaii came from various classes of society and only one-eleventh of the Korean immigrants were peasants. The others were common laborers, coolies, low-grade government officials, ex-soldiers, students, house servants, mine workers, and political refugees. See John M. Liu (1995) 254.

of the century, the main motivation to leave Korea was economic rather than political, even though both domestic and international politics were partially to blame for the horrific economic situation.⁴⁵ This voluntary migration opened a new era in Korea's modern history, offering for the first time a chance to see the world beyond the Hermit Kingdom. Despite the benefits of these new opportunities, this early migration brought with it great emotional suffering and the longing to return to the homeland.⁴⁶

Driven by desperation to move, the perpetual hope of Korean expatriates in those days was to return home to die and to be buried where their ancestors were buried.⁴⁷ Confucian values in Korean tradition stressed the duties of taking care of the graves of their ancestors, creating a powerful sense of obligation to carry out their family responsibilities by staying in or returning to their native communities. Leaving the

⁴⁵ Throughout its history, however, there had been migration motivated not only by economic or political circumstances but by cultural purposes as well. A small number of scholars, artists, and Buddhist monks had traveled to China to acquire advanced knowledge and culture. Their learning then was passed on to Japan. In the 19th century, however, Japan opened its door to the West and started to modernize the country, while China and Korea rejected Western influence. Soon Japan surpassed Chinese military and economic strength and Koreans turned to Japan seeking their learning. In 1881, the Korean government sent a group of young Korean students to Japan to study all aspects of a modern nation. See Hyungchan Kim, ed., The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, Inc., 1977).

⁴⁶ In the beginning, Korean labor and refugee migrations were carried out voluntarily by the encouragement of the Japanese colonial government offering employment opportunities. The coercive element, however, was present in most cases as men were forced to become indentured laborers and women and girls were driven to prostitution. As a result, Korean migration under Japanese colonization is characterized as a "victim diaspora." See Im Bom Choi, Korean Diaspora in the Making: Its Current Status and Impact on the Korean Economy (Institute for Int'l Economics, 2003); Cohen, ed., The Cambridge Survey of World Migration (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 1995); Gabriel Sheffer (1999) 381-95.

⁴⁷ The strong attachment of early immigrants to their native soil and their dream of returning to their homeland was evident by the fact that they were actively involved in the independence movement of Korea by making significant financial contributions during the Japanese occupation. See Yo-jun Yun, "Early History of Korean Immigration to America," The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America, ed. Kim Hyung-chan (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, Inc., 1977) 33-46. For a more detailed analysis on the relationship with ancestors in Confucian tradition, see Byong Ik Koh, "Korean Concept of Foreign Countries During the Yi-Dynasty," Paeksan Hakpo (Paeksan Review) 8 (1970):231-32; and Arthur H. Smith, Chinese Characteristics, 5th ed. (NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1894).

family home where ancestors had lived and were buried was regarded as a dishonorable and shameful act.

Well after the turn of the century, international politics played a larger role.⁴⁸

Unlike earlier labor migration, which was voluntary, Korean migration under Japanese colonial rule (1910-45) was systematically forced and much larger in scale. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans, primarily men in the beginning, were sent to Manchuria, Sakhalin, and Japan as forced laborers, while large numbers of Korean women and girls, some as young as twelve years old, were conscripted as sex slaves dubbed as "comfort women" and scattered throughout China and Southeast Asia, wherever Japanese soldiers were stationed.⁴⁹ During this time, a great number of Koreans also fled the country to escape the cruelty of Japanese colonial rule. Widespread Korean migration as refugees during this period is regarded as one of the most tormented "victim diaspora" experiences in the history of migration.⁵⁰ After the Japanese surrender in 1945, many Koreans living overseas returned home. Many more, however, never made their journey back home. As

⁴⁸In 1876, the Meiji government of Japan forced an unequal treaty on Korea. As a result, an increase in trade and diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea was created. At the end of 1880, a permanent Japanese diplomatic mission in Seoul was established, further intensifying the Japanese presence on the Korean peninsula, which then became a prelude to its eventual colonization of Korea. As a bone of constant contention between China and Japan, when Korea became free of being a tributary state to China in 1876 and after the defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the Korean peninsula was turned into a battleground ravaging Korean society in the struggle by these two foreign powers as they tried to settle their differences. See Hyungchan Kim (1977).

⁴⁹ In The Comfort Women, Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Forces, George Hicks estimated that over 100,000 Korean women were sent to battlefields in Southeast Asia and forced to serve as sex slaves for soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army. Thousands of them are still alive today. Although the trafficking of women and girls was banned by four different international treaties, Korean women and girls were regarded as a colonial property and rounded up to aid Japan's war efforts. For more detailed discussions on comfort women issues, see Bonnie B.C. Oh, "The Japanese Imperial System and the Korean "Comfort Women" of World War II," Stetz and Oh 3-25; and also Yoshimi Yoshiaki, Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (NY: Columbia U Press, 1995).

⁵⁰Although it has not been documented in publications, it is known from conversations with people in Ambassador Mike Mansfield's generation that Korean laborers were found in the Bitterroot Valley in the State of Montana cultivating sugar beets and vegetables in the 1930s.

the Korean War broke out in 1950, Korea again became a battle ground among the foreign powers of China, Soviet Russia, and now the United States. In effect, the Japanese occupation was replaced by new political forces which soon divided the peninsula in half and forced Korea to become the bloodiest battlefield in the unfolding and as yet unfinished cold war. The division of Korea, which even today remains as the most difficult and insoluble political problem for younger Koreans to overcome, made it even harder for many displaced Koreans to return home.

Gabriel Sheffer, a migration scholar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, suggests how politically leftist observers attribute continuing diasporas largely to economic factors. In that argument, as improvements in economic conditions occur, migration flows are reduced.⁵¹ In fact, the South Korean economy started to take off slowly in the 1960s and then at a dizzying speed in the 1970s. With the expansion of growing economic wealth and employment opportunities, Korea has become a highly attractive place to work, live, and to retire.⁵² Consequently, starting in the 1980s and especially in the early 1990s, many highly trained professionals working overseas have returned home, prompting a trend among many overseas ethnic Koreans to return to Korea. Despite this trend in reverse migration, however, Korean migration has continued with an outflow greater than the inflow, thus refuting the observations of the political left.⁵³ The political factor, however, continues as a force in migration. Korea is a

⁵¹ Gabriel Sheffer, Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 2003) 239.

⁵² Immigration visas to the United State issued to South Koreans were drastically reduced to 6,696 in 2002 compared to 29,572 in 1980. See Howard W. French, "Restless Koreans, Stifled at Home, Head Overseas," The New York Times May 16, 2003.

country divided along the 38th parallel and still caught up in the legacies of the Korean War. Although the armistice was signed in 1953, the Korean War has never really ended. Political unrest fueled by the sharp divisions between North and South and the threat of a nuclear crisis continues to provide a motive for migration.

Contemporary Korean Migration

Over the past half century, 5.7 million Koreans have migrated around the world settling in 151 different countries. Among them, 2.1 million, the largest number, now live in the United States, while the second largest group of ethnic Koreans about two million, live in China, followed by 640,000 Koreans in Japan. With the exception of agricultural laborers at the turn of the century, Korean immigrants have moved predominantly to large cities.⁵⁴ In the past 15 years, however, Korean migrants have been expanding to other locales, especially in rural areas across the United States. Current Korean migrants, compared to earlier immigrants, are mostly well-educated and skilled professionals. The trend of Korean migrants moving to non-urban areas where professional jobs are harder to find is a new development. For these Koreans, leaving

⁵³ According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service data reported by Noland (2005), the number of “foreign born” Korean-Americans, Koreans who immigrated to America, increased from roughly 11,000 in 1960, to more than one million in 2000.

⁵⁴ A majority of Koreans in Japan is concentrated in Osaka city while Koreans in China, as one of over 50 different minorities, are mostly settled in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Jilin Province in Manchuria. See Steinberg (1968) 16; Most Koreans in America reside in two metropolitan cities, with 30 percent in Los Angeles and about 25 percent in New York. See Ilpyong Kim, ed., Korean-Americans: Past, Present, and Future (Hollym International, 2004). The tendency for many migrants to live in clusters in mostly large cities of host countries has a twofold cause. First, there are generally more job opportunities available in the cities. The second purpose is to connect with both the formal and informal social networks established by the same ethnic migrants who arrived earlier in the area. The association with the group can help to ease new migrants’ initial step in settling in a new country. Along with Koreans, Vietnamese and Iranians in Los Angeles and Sidney, the Pakistanis in Birmingham, and people from the West Indies in London are a few examples of migrants residing in enclaves. For more details, see Sheffer (2003) 142.

Korea means uprooting careers securely established in Korea, demanding a great deal more sacrifice on the part of the migrants and their families.

Compared to earlier migrations motivated largely by escape from poverty, recent migrations from South Korea, which has become a prosperous and democratic society and an attractive place to live and retire, is a puzzling phenomenon. It is curious why they choose to leave, especially those who are professionals and financially well to do. The urge for most Koreans seeking migration in recent years is to pursue an educational advantage for their children. In other words, the motivation for migration has changed drastically.

“A Long Island Solution to Far East Stress,” a recent article in The New York Times, offers an important clue into the nature of the contemporary Korean diaspora. It reports a surge within the Asian student population, an “emerging new pattern of migration,” accounting for more than 30 percent of student enrollment in 2005 at Great Neck South High School. The community of Great Neck, a suburb located on the North Shore of Long Island in the state of New York, is one of the most popular choices of migration from South Korea. It is an area where houses typically cost up to a million dollars. But, more importantly, it is the location of first-rate public schools reputed for producing Ivy League college-bound graduates, which is the telltale goal for education migration.⁵⁵

Categorized as "education diaspora," Korean migration in recent years is a result of the high level of dissatisfaction with the current educational system in Korea. Why are Koreans so unhappy and frustrated with their education system, especially when Korean

⁵⁵ Paul Vitello, "A Long Island Solution to Far East Stress," The New York Times, 21 February 2006.

education by the numbers appears to be one of the more successful systems in the world?

International test results indeed show Korean students ranking consistently high, while their academic achievement is the envy of both developing and industrialized countries around the world.⁵⁶ The problem is in the overemphasis on examination success. High school students all over Korea take entrance examinations to universities, which in large part will determine the course of the rest of their lives. Since admission to the best schools generally leads to the most favorable jobs, many Korean high school students attend after school private tutoring institutions, *Hagwon* or cram schools, in order to better prepare for the extremely competitive exam. Inevitably, after-school learning forces children to study from early in the morning to late at night, leaving no time for any other activities. Meanwhile, parents are heavily burdened with the high cost of private tutoring. The ultimate price for excellence is paid by the creation of an educational environment commonly known as "examination hell."⁵⁷

Dr. Chung, a cosmetic surgeon in Seoul, is one of those parents who wishes to escape the Korean educational environment and send his children to America. In Asia Week, he said that his desire to send away his second grade daughter came from his parental instinct to protect his child. In this case, he saw himself as rescuing her from what he perceived to be a suffocating educational environment. "When I see my

⁵⁶ A BBC news report explains South Korea's education success by citing the OECD annual publication of comparisons in the education systems. Focusing on math scores as evidence of high academic achievements, it praises the efficiency of Korean education, as money spent on school pupils in South Korea is about half that of the United States. It is, however, important to note that this report doesn't mention the high education expenses privately funded by Korean parents. See "South Korea's Education Success," BBC News 13 September 2005.

⁵⁷ Sometimes called "examination mania" or "examination disease" *Siheumbyeong* in Korea, it is an important element in shaping the educational and social environment in Korea. So powerful is the hold of college entrance examinations in Korean education that much of public education is designed to prepare students to take them. As a result, South Korea has become possibly the most exam-obsessed culture in the world. See Michael J. Seth, Education Fever: Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea (Honolulu, HI: U of Hawaii Press, 2002): 4-5.

daughter, who is always tired from school,” he says as she comes home late and spends extra hours after school studying at a private institution, “I really want her to get an American education.”⁵⁸

Some parents are so determined to secure a better education for their children they are willing not only to send their children abroad, but to “pay” for their children to be adopted. In the past, there have been cases where some parents have arranged the adoption with their relatives who are living in the United States. But now a growing number of Korean parents are seeking out white Caucasian families, preferably retired couples. They are believed to have not only extra rooms to spare as their own children have grown and left home but also would welcome the extra income.⁵⁹ An L.A. resident quoted in the article verifies the practice by describing her retired neighbors who adopted three young children from Korea. Although they all came from different families in Korea, now these children live together as siblings.⁶⁰

The purpose of children’s migration in the past was to secure their physical safety. That is, children were sent away to a safe place where they were protected from disasters of wars, starvation, diseases, or physical abuses that threatened their lives in their home

⁵⁸ Aruna Lee, "Koreans Send Kids to U.S. For Adoption," Asian Week, April 7, 2006.

⁵⁹ Hefty sums upwards of \$30,000 have been reported to be paid to couples for each child they adopt with additional payments to cover room and board as necessary. See Aruna Lee (2006).

⁶⁰ These children are a successful case of adoption, since plenty of horror stories exist related to this new immigration strategy. A factory owner, for example, in Korea paid \$40,000 to a Korean pastor in the United States to help find adoptive parents for his son, who was already living in Florida, to gain U.S. citizenship. But the pastor disappeared with the money. Meanwhile the boy reached the age 16, an ineligible age for adoption, and ended up living in the United States illegally and is now unable to visit his family in Korea. Relating to a similar adoption fraud, a 14-year-old girl flew to the United States to meet a broker who was hired by her parents to help her but again vanished failing to deliver the obligation. This kind of unscrupulous cases should warn away Korean parents who want their children to be adopted, but apparently they are undeterred and still willing to take the risks. See Aruna Lee (2006).

country.⁶¹ Although the circumstances for the current diaspora of Korean children may be far from the conditions listed above, some scholars use the same terminology to describe the background for Korean children's migration. That is, "education diaspora" or migration of Korean children is to a large extent an escape from a threat or an abuse. The pressure to study long hours to prepare for a college entrance exam over a long period of time is so intense and unusual that Norma Field, an anthropologist at the University of Chicago, describes children's education as "endless labor" and the experience as child "abuse."⁶² Hae Joang Cho, a sociologist at Yonsei University in Seoul, describes the Korean educational environment as "examination war." The competition to get into a few prestigious universities in South Korea is so intense that education in Korea, she believes, has become a threat, physically and emotionally, to the lives of Korean children.⁶³

Getting higher education and, furthermore, earning a degree from a prestigious institution can bring higher earning power, thus bearing some similarity to the previous voluntary and economic labor migration. However, the causes of the diaspora of Korean children need to be understood within the complex social and cultural contexts of globalization. Although their reason for migration is not seeking protection from imminent physical harm but instead getting away from emotional and mental pressure,

⁶¹ As portrayed in the "Peter Pan" phenomenon, 15,000 Cuban children arriving in the United States between 1959 and 1962 is an example of children migrating unaccompanied by adults. Many children in Los Angeles and Oakland have also come to escape war from Vietnam, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and southern Mexico. See Marjorie Orellana, et al., "Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration," *Social Problems* 48.4 (2001): 581.

⁶² Norma Field, "The Child as Laborer and Consumer: The Disappearance of Childhood in Contemporary Japan," *Children and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Sharon Stephens (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U Press, 1995): 51-78.

⁶³ Hae Joang Cho, "Children in the Examination War in South Korea: A Cultural Analysis," Sharon Stephens 141-68.

the diaspora of Korean children can be understood as refuge or victim migration. In other words, the failure of the Korean educational system can be considered as a cause forcing Korean children to leave the country. Whether the phenomenon is interpreted with a literal meaning or simply metaphorically, the modern diaspora of the educational migration of Korean children reflects the educational crisis in contemporary Korean society.

Other nations have also experienced educational “crises.” In the 1950s, shaken by the surprise launch of Sputnik by Russia, the United States declared its education to be in crisis and, as a result, greatly increased government spending on scientific research and education. Another response to the crisis was the creation of the early satellite program, which eventually led to the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).⁶⁴ In the 1980s, this sense of crisis in education was expressed in a report titled A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. It served as a wakeup call to prompt American citizens to take a serious look at their education, this time in response to Japanese economic expansion. Blaming education as the cause of declining American economic power, it detailed the problems of American education and offered suggestions for remedy. One of the outcomes was to encourage more funding for the study of foreign languages. These educational crises in the United States, if they were indeed crises at all, seem to be created by external pressures, generated from the perception and reality of other countries doing well. As for Korea, the stress comes from within. As correctly observed by an American teacher who was visiting Korea, Koreans

⁶⁴ Since its establishment in 1958, NASA remains a leading force in the United States in scientific and technological research, undertaking voyages in space discoveries and inspiring public interest in space exploration.

are “doing well but feeling bad.”⁶⁵ Feeling so bad about their education, in fact, Koreans are leaving their country in massive numbers in search of educational alternatives elsewhere.

Migration of Korean Children Today

The study of family and children is at the heart of early sociological concerns. Since making choices about one's movement is closely linked to the survival not only of the individual but also the family, Emile Durkheim, one of the two principal founders of modern sociology,⁶⁶ was intensely aware of the profound impact that migration has on society. As more and more migration scholars are beginning to appreciate how migration decisions are taken not only individually but collectively as families, it is especially important to understand how the migration of Korean children is made in the context of the entire family and their individual experiences. Although much has been written about the major contributions of migration in the history of modern Korea, the claims about the importance of the Korean children diaspora have yet to receive any substantial attention. That may be because population movements led by children are a fairly recent

⁶⁵ See Thomas R. Ellinger and Deborah L. Carlson, "Education in Korea: Doing Well and Feeling Bad," Foreign Service Journal 67.n6 (1990). In 2003, for example, Korean high school students placed first in the problem-solving category, second in reading, third in math skills, and fourth in science in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test conducted by OECD. See Daehyun Cho, "Hanguk Gyoyuk, Segye 1 ui? ("Korean Education, Number One in the World?") (Seoul, Korea: KBS, 2005); and also Barry McGaw, "OECD Perspectives on Korean Educational Achievement," International Conference on 60 Years of Korean Education: Achievements and Challenges (Seoul, Korea: KEDI, 2005).

⁶⁶ Durkheim's younger contemporary Max Weber is considered to be the other principal architect of modern sociological theory. Emile Durkheim, Sociology and Philosophy, trans. D.F. Pocock (NY: The Free Press, 1974): xliii.

phenomenon, but more likely, as a “quiet migration,” the occurrence has gone largely unnoticed.⁶⁷

The diaspora of Korean children is an upheaval created by the tension between the role that children occupy in the center of modern family structure and the importance of education in Korean society. Driven by the zeal for education amidst their dissatisfaction with the Korean education system, parents are moving their children out of Korea and relocating them elsewhere for their schooling. The dream of finding a better education outside Korea however can become a treacherous road that brings nightmares of loss and defeat. Most fittingly, the characteristics of the diaspora of Korean children connect with the metaphor narrated by Professor Papastergiadis.⁶⁸ His interpretation of the interrelationships between modernity and migration is expressed in the following way:

Movement is not just the experience of shifting from place to place, it is also linked to our ability to imagine an alternative. The dream of a better life and the nightmares of loss are both expressed by the metaphor of the journey. It is not only our ‘life narrative’ but the very ‘spirit of our time’ which seems to be haunted by this metaphor. The journey of modernity--which sought to base action on the solid foundations of reason, which sought to build a rational order that would supersede all previous forms of waste, folly and mystification, and which believed that truth and proof could substitute for dogma and religion--has turned out to be an endless march into the unknown. (11)

⁶⁷ Although the concept of “quiet migration” was given to emphasize international adoption as the reason for children’s migration, it is applied here to focus on the children who are the major player in contemporary migration movement discussed in this study. See Richard H. Weil, "International Adoptions: The Quiet Migration," *International Migration Review* 18.2 (1984).

⁶⁸ Papastergiadis (2006).

The education crisis in Korea is a combination of social, economic, and cultural forces that are often blurred in the complex modern world. Inquiries about how families make choices in migration can begin with the questions of why and to where Korean children and/or their families are moving, and what happens to the children and their family when migration occurs. The social reasons for the movement and the impact of this growing movement clearly depend on a number of variables, such as the scale of migration, the motivation of the family, the degree of involvement by family members, as well as financial arrangements. What is remarkable about this diaspora in the context of the modern global diaspora is, although it is still a parental decision to migrate, children play an important role in the migration process. Until now, this important factor has been relatively unrecognized. This recognition, prompted by more and more cases reported in the news media, poses fresh challenges in framing the theoretical discussions on the meaning of global diaspora.⁶⁹

In order to illuminate the reality of contemporary Korean migration, three different patterns will be examined. The first pattern is for the entire family to migrate together. In these cases, many parents are not able to find the same professional jobs they held in Korea in the host countries. Nevertheless, in order to stay together, the whole family makes a move in search of better educational conditions for the children. The second is to send away only children. These children are referred to as “parachute kids,” as parents literally drop them off in a host country and then return to their home country

⁶⁹ To explain why people move or how they were dispersed, the concept of a diaspora has been defined by applying specific criteria. After suggesting nine dyads as building blocks for the theory of migration, Professor Cohen concludes that the study of migration is about “attitudes, policies, perceptions, and effects,” as there is no one single definitive theory on migration. He adds that migration theorists have unresolved challenges since the subject keeps changing and migration behaviors are still evolving and rapidly expanding to a wide range of new forms. For more details, see Robin Cohen, Theories of Migration (1996) vi-xvi.

to work. Children often live by themselves separated from their parents, while some children live with relatives or some hired adult to look after them. The third pattern is the so-called “wild geese families,” in which only one parent, almost always the mother, migrates with the children to take care of them, while the father is left behind in Korea working to finance the family’s living abroad.

Korean migration led by children in general presents profound changes from the past. Although migration for the purpose of education is not new, educational migration for young children of pre-college age is a uniquely contemporary phenomenon. The last two patterns of migration, “parachute kids” and “wild geese families” are especially problematic. The separation of families, especially for young children who are being left alone or growing up mostly without fathers, can cause unforeseen social, cultural, and economic complications. Although many families stay connected both to their homeland and to the host country by maintaining a temporary residence, migration for children’s schooling changes the socio-economic circumstances of Korean families and creates unprecedented challenges of living abroad, for both children and parents.

Migrating Families

Geographical destinations in Korean migrations for the sake of children’s education vary as widely as the economic ranges of the migrants themselves. Remarkably, the strong desire to secure a better education for their children, in spite of the uncertainty about the future, has driven many Koreans to move to rural areas in the United States. Many of them, some with relatively high education, are earning their living by manual labor. A story in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution published in April 24,

2005, for example, highlights Korean families migrating to remote rural areas. What is striking about the story is how profoundly the choices Koreans are making can alter the lives of their entire families.⁷⁰ Featured in the story are two Korean immigrants, both recently emigrated from Korea and settled in the small town of Claxton. Located about forty miles west of the city of Savannah, Georgia, it is described as being in the “middle of nowhere.” Before moving to the United States, Jae-sul Kim, a 42-year old, was the owner of a private educational institution in *Busan*, the large port city at the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. In Korea, he had financial security that afforded him and his family a comfortable upper middle class life style, including frequent family outings on weekends. Now in Claxton, he works at a chicken farm earning seven dollars an hour for chopping off chicken wings all day. His annual income at the chicken farm amounts to about fourteen thousand dollars. Kim says his decision to move to Georgia was entirely for the education of his two teenage daughters.

In Claxton, there are many other recently arrived Korean immigrants. Like Kim, many were professionals back in Korea, working as bankers, teachers, and company executives. Wu Chan-do, another 42-year old man interviewed in the story, moved to Georgia in 2002. He previously held a middle-level executive position working in the sales and marketing department at the Korean branch of Johnson & Johnson. He is now training himself to become an air conditioner repairman, while his wife works at the chicken farm in Claxton. Giving up professional careers to work as unskilled laborers seems to be a strange exchange in value, if not in money. The sacrifices, including the

⁷⁰ The article, "From Korea to Claxton, in Search of 'a Better Life'," by Dan Chapman in [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#) dated in April 24, 2005, is reconstituted into many daily newspapers in Korea. See, for example, Jin Lee, "Korean Middle Class Lives by Manual Labor in the U.S.," [The Dong-A Ilbo](#) 26 April 2005, sec. Economy.

\$10,000 broker fees to move to Georgia, they all insist, have been worthwhile since the move has enabled their children to attend American public schools. The parting comment by Kim on why he was more than willing to trade his writing pen for a carving knife, best summarizes the prevailing motivation of many Koreans moving to the United States in recent years: "Working in the chicken farm is hard, but this is all for my children's education and a better life."

The story of Kim and Wu may seem unusual but it represents a larger trend in modern Korean migration, as there are other places that now look like a settlement town for Korean immigrants in small rural areas, such as Statesboro, situated about twenty miles north of Claxton. At the Langston Chapel Elementary School, the number of Korean students enrolled is expected to rise to 110. Considering the fact that student population for the school in 2005-2006 was estimated to be 700, the number is significant. In Georgia's Bulloch County schools alone, a total of 300 Korean students were expected to enroll that year. Surging immigrant population and public school enrollment bring unseen problems in the area. The immediate one is that new Koreans moving to the area are squeezing school budgets as English education programs for non-English speaking foreign nationals expand, as required by law.⁷¹ In addition to pressures on the school budget, competition brought by the Korean diaspora is resented by the local

⁷¹ Recently approved ordinances by the city council of Hazleton, the former coal-mining town northwest of Philadelphia, are creating a controversy nationwide. The decision by the city council was based on financial pressure by soaring expenditures for new residents who are draining Hazelton's public school and health systems. Reportedly, their spending on programs for English as a second language, for example, has increased from \$500 in 2000 to \$1.1 million in 2006. Although these laws are designed to curtail criminal behavior in the community brought by, allegedly, illegal immigration, adopting the ordinances has the same effects on both legal and illegal migrants who are now discriminated against and harassed by hate mail and racial profiling as the town has become "divided and unfriendly." See Erika Hayasaki, "City's Illegal Immigration Laws Go on Trial," [Los Angeles Times](#) 13 March 2007, sec. Nation.

population, especially Hispanic immigrants in the area, who are nervous about losing their jobs to the newcomers, creating needless racial tension.⁷²

Economic down sizing, difficult language barriers, cultural adjustments, and sometimes racial discrimination are all part of the cost of immigration for many Koreans. Compared to “labor” and “refugee” migrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those engaged in this education migration in recent years tend to be highly educated and skilled professionals. Many of them hold advanced degrees and have firmly established careers with significant earning power in Korea. The fact that they often move to the United States on average with \$250,000 or more in savings clearly suggests these Koreans are upper middle class high achievers.⁷³ Consequently, their migration to the United States and employment as manual laborers earning a minimum wage entails higher economic sacrifice. Nevertheless, they are willing to make a move solely for the sake of their children’s education.

How are we to understand why Korean families are willing to pay such a high price, “at any cost,” for their migration? In the discussion that follows, the lives of “parachute kids” and “wild geese families” are seen not only as a new sociological phenomenon within migration in the age of globalization but also as the consequence of

⁷² Racial tension from intense competition involving new minority immigrants such as Koreans, Vietnamese, Cubans, and Mexicans, and African-Americans has been particularly evident in California, Florida, and other popular destinations of immigrants in the United States, where confrontations have resulted in sporadic violence. Such clashes, however, have also occurred during periods of growth and prosperity in the United States, which suggests that economic recession is not the only reason for racial conflicts. For more details, see Sheffer (2003) 126.

⁷³ H.W. French, "Restless Koreans, Stifled at Home, Head Overseas." The New York Times 16 May 2003.

the “wrenching choice” made by many parents for the sake of their children’s education.⁷⁴

Parachute Kids

The term "parachute kids" refers to young children and adolescents, who are dropped off or “parachuted” from a plane into another country, mostly to the United States but also to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and England for the purpose of attending school.⁷⁵ Mostly from Asian countries, they live alone unaccompanied by their parents who stay behind in their home country to work and finance their children’s education.⁷⁶ According to a former parachute kid who was interviewed for a study by Professor Albert Lee at the University of Pennsylvania, they are described as follows:

Parachute kids are children who arrive in the United States either accompanied or unaccompanied by their parents. If their parents join them, they only escort their children in order to make the necessary housing and educational arrangements before quickly returning back to the home country. If unaccompanied by their parents, these children arrive with “Unaccompanied Minor” tags to be picked up by relatives or by paid caretakers through previously made arrangements.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Phuong Ly, "A Wrenching Choice," Washington Post 9 January 2005: A01.

⁷⁵ Although this study describes the cases found mostly in the United States, this pattern of migration also exists in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and in other mostly English speaking countries. It is reported that during the economic boom in Asian countries in the 1980s and early 1990s, wealthy Asian families began to send their children to the U. S. to attend school with the hope of eventually gaining their admission to U.S. colleges or universities. Another purpose was, especially with migration from Hong Kong, to establish a foothold in the U.S. as a hedge against the political uncertainty when Hong Kong, a British colony for 100 years, was returned to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997. For more details, see Ronald Skeldon, "Emigration from Hong Kong, 1945-1994: The Demographic Lead-up to 1997," Emigration from Hong Kong, ed. Ronald Skeldon (Hong Kong: The Chinese U Press, 1995); and also Elsie S. Ho, et al., "The Hong Kong Chinese in Auckland," Skeldon (1994): 215-32.

⁷⁶ Although his focus was mainly on the experiences of Chinese children from Taiwan or Hong Kong in the 1990s, the description given by Professor Skeldon (1994) applies to many parachute kids cases, especially for those publicized ones in the media: “These are children who are established in a big house in North America to attend school while their parents remain in Taiwan, returning only every few months to visit.” (45).

The phenomenon of parachute kids has been reported in the media occasionally, suggesting that the evidence for this type of migration flow is more than anecdotal. Although the exact volume and its extent are relatively little known to the public, the phenomenon of parachute kids in the United States is quite widespread.⁷⁸ According to testimony given by Carol Joyal at the hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims in 1999, in California alone there were as many as 200,000 parachute kids.⁷⁹ Joyal, a former teacher and parent, appeared before the Committee to testify on her concerns over racial segregation at her son's school. She indicated that gang violence involving immigrant youth has increased rapidly in the area since 1985. From her experience with the illegal immigrant student population in California, in particular the pervasive phenomenon of parachute kids, she states:

... Our family was also aware of many students living alone or not in their own homes, these parachute children, illegal aliens left by parents who returned to their own countries. Often they are parented via fax machines, and they are very lonely. There may be as many as 200,000 of these youngsters freely attending our California schools; and indeed there was a gang happening in one of our local high schools involving this group. This is costly and our school districts are already having severe economic problems keeping up with the constant increases in student population...

⁷⁷ Albert J. Lee, "Asian American Studies: Identity Formation in Korean American Parachute Kids," CUREJ-College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania, 2006) 1-80.

⁷⁸ A few cases of "parachute kids" have also been found in Missoula, Montana. They include two brothers and a sister, and a few high school students. Various arrangements are made for these children. Some live by themselves, or with a host family, while one was left with a college student from Korea who attended The University of Montana.

⁷⁹ "Illegal immigrant student population in California," Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 106th Congress, June 10, 1999.

According to Joyal, the "parachute kids" are the children who are brought into the country often on a visitor's visa by their parents. The parents, however, soon leave their children and return to their home countries. Some as young as fifteen are left alone to attend school in the United States. She believes that fifteen-year-olds left unsupervised leads to the formation of gangs. She also points out that sometimes children as young as age six are left behind with people the parents have hired as housekeepers, rented aunties, or nannies and baby-sitters. Joyal's concerns extend to the fact that these children attend school without paying any tuition. What is worse, as a mother, she worries about six-year-olds who are living in conditions where they are not fed well and have no way to cry out for help. Since it is hard for school districts to enforce the existing immigration laws, the purpose of her testimony is to urge additional legislation to help solve the problem of illegal migrant children, namely "parachute kids."

In an article in The Los Angeles Times, Denise Hamilton details the lives of parachute kids in Southern California.⁸⁰ Her award winning report, which was reprinted worldwide, confirms how most parachute kids establish a foothold in the United States. They start with the entire family flying over from Hong Kong, Seoul, Taipei or Singapore. The parents buy a house, often in an affluent neighborhood that is perceived to be safe and have reputable schools, to enroll their children in school. Then, the parents fly back to Asia to continue working and running their family businesses. Although some children are left with nannies or housekeepers hired by their parents, many are on their own, while parenting is mostly done by email, fax, international phone calls, and occasional visits when their fathers are in town on business. The phenomenon of

⁸⁰ Denise Hamilton, "'a House, Cash, and No Parents'," Los Angeles Times 24 June 1993: A-1.

parachute kids is widespread in the San Gabriel Valley.⁸¹ A brick house in San Marino where Hamilton met the parachute kids for her article is described as “the type of place that a successful bank president might own.” Hamilton reports the parachute kids she interviewed receive a lavish monthly allowance of \$3,000, a considerable amount of spending money for any teenager, on the condition that they make good grades to qualify for top American universities.

The deeper truth about parachute kids is that their world is filled with pressure focused on educational success. Hamilton is careful not to impose her notions of Western propriety, because to her astonishment she discovered that many of these parachute children have done well and excelled at school. But when she found two teenagers living alone in that big house with an elderly Chinese housekeeper who did not speak any English, she became concerned about these children. She wondered how many parachute kids were hurting deep inside from alienation, lack of parenting and loneliness.⁸² Moreover, her extensive knowledge gained as a big city newspaper reporter reminds her of scary things that can happen, as she has seen many teens with good parents in nice American suburbs, for example, succumbing to gangs and drugs.

⁸¹ A survey taken by the University of California in Los Angeles reports that for Taiwanese children alone, there were over 40,000 "parachute kids" aged 8-18 years in the United States in 1991.

⁸² Soon after reporting about the reality of "parachute kids," Ms. Hamilton became a fiction writer. Her experience with parachute kids was so intensely haunting that she wanted to put it out of her mind. Using her skills as a journalist and her extensive knowledge and keen observations of parachute kids, she created the fictional work, The Jasmine Trade, which is a perceptive social document that explores in depth the plight of parachute kids who, according to Hamilton's description, inhabit a "parallel universe." Her book is a story of parachute kids but also of an unwieldy microcosm of American society offering a glimpse of immigrant experience and race relations of those in their teens who are emotionally adrift and suffer still harder because of the lack of parental supervision.

In 2004, the number of Korean children--elementary and middle school students--who were sent overseas was estimated to be 390,000.⁸³ In 1997, an estimated 7,000 Korean "early international students," a name used by the Korean Ministry of Education officials for parachute kids, were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in Southern California. Some of them entered the United States legally on student visas, but most arrived on visitor visas.⁸⁴ The purpose of children's migration after the Korean War was to find adoptive parents and new homes abroad as their only survival option. By contrast, the goal of parachute kids is quite different in various ways. First, the obvious purpose for children is to escape the intense and competitive educational environment in Korea. As an immediate short term goal, parents are providing an alternative mobility track that can channel children's aspirations into an advantageous position early on. As a long-term strategy, however, parachute kids serve as deployable resources to strengthen social and economic advancement for themselves and for their parents. Attending school in the United States, they believe, will help young children master the English language more easily and quickly and thereby increase their chances for gaining admission to American colleges or universities. Children's entry to colleges in the United States and earning American degrees then become what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital," which is a valuable asset in the age of globalization.⁸⁵ In other words, acquiring the

⁸³ Jin Kyun Kil (2005).

⁸⁴ This is reported by a former employee of the Korean Ministry of Education based on an undocumented conversation. Hee Kyung Son (2005).

⁸⁵ An excellent example on how Hong Kong emigrants convert "symbolic capital" into an ideological system of taste and prestige that generate high social and economic returns is discussed by Aihwa Ong. See "Fungshui and the Limits to Cultural Accumulation," in Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality (Durham, NC: Duke U Press, 1999) 87-96.

ability to speak English as well as the social trappings of their foreign university degrees and credentials, not to mention the personal network established through school connections, can enhance social prestige and status.⁸⁶

The parachute kid arrangement is a useful strategy that serves as a long-term risk minimization strategy. Since widely established family networks can provide a back-up support system, it is a kind of security to hedge against precarious political conditions and economic uncertainty back home.⁸⁷ By placing children in a different country, families establish transnational kinship networks which will help, if necessary, the rest of the family to migrate and join their children. Other times when their home country is experiencing an economic boom, they can continue to stay and reap the benefit of prosperity at home.⁸⁸ The parachute kid arrangement from Hong Kong in the 1980s and early 1990s is an excellent example that demonstrates how it was to hedge against Hong Kong's political uncertainty when it reverted to Chinese control in 1997.⁸⁹ South Korea has always faced political uncertainty and military insecurity from fears of attack from

⁸⁶ As a product of education, "social capital" is an asset that provides mutual trust helping to bind people together. See John D. Montgomery, "Are Asian Values Different?" Values in Education: Social Capital Formation in Asia and the Pacific (Hollis, NH: Hollis Publishing Co., 1997) 30.

⁸⁷ Based on Confucian teachings, kinship relations are especially valued by East Asians. Their ties to kin run deep and kin assistance is widespread. Among working class Koreans, they heavily rely on kin for quick help when they are under pressure, for instance, to find work. Kinship networks also affect decisions about major changes in life events, such as the decision to emigrate, as kin contacts can easily move across the seas. Kinship ties also create trust and render ready support and help where people feel uncertain about uprooting. For more discussions on how Chinese families draw upon kin when they decide to emigrate and develop a class-based model of emigrant networks that help them manage the diverse and complex settings for contemporary international migration, see Eric Fong, et al., "Kin Networks and the Plan to Leave Hong Kong," Emigration from Hong Kong: Tendencies and Impacts, ed. Ronald Skeldon (Hong Kong: The Chinese U Press, 1995): 213-33.

⁸⁸For more details, see Ronald Skeldon, "The Emergence of Trans-Pacific Migration," The Cambridge Survey of World Migration, ed. Robin Cohen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 1995): 532-36.

⁸⁹Paul M. Ong, et al., "Migration of Highly Educated Asians and Global Dynamics," The Sociology of Migration, ed. Robin Cohen (Cheltenham, UK: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1996).

the North and problems related to its dependence on American military power. Furthermore, Koreans are still recovering from the shock of the IMF economic disaster of a decade ago. Sending children abroad may create a chain of migration that can help other family members in case another economic disaster strikes in Korea. The arrangements made by parents for their children to live and study in the United States comes with the expectation that their children will graduate from college and establish a professional career in the United States that can later benefit their parents.

The high profile cases of parachute kids in the popular press present images of spoiled youngsters. With sensational titles such as, “The Perils of Parachute Kids,” “A House, Cash, and No Parents,” “On Their Own,” to list a few, the media portrayed parachute kids as children who live in pricey houses in wealthy neighborhoods with live-in maids, driving a BMW and with access to large amounts of spending money. Other parachute kids, interviewed for a study by Marjorie Orellana and others in 2001, stay with relatives or board with Korean and Korean-American families.⁹⁰ A seventeen-year-old boy named Tae, who migrated when he was fourteen, and Daniel Hoon, who is a seventh grader and came to California when he was ten, both attend a public high school and middle school respectively. They are boarding with a Korean couple, Mr. and Mrs. Park, who came to the United States in the early 1970s. As each child pays \$1,000 a month, taking boarders has become a way to augment their income.

Another example of parachute kids is Cindy, a seventeen-year-old, and her younger brother, Bill. They moved in with their relatives. Cindy has been living with their paternal aunt, cousins, and a grandmother for eight years, ever since she moved to the United States when she was only nine. It is reasonable that parachute kids who are

⁹⁰Orellana, at. al. (2001) 572-91.

living with other adults, acting as surrogate parents, are better off in maintaining their physical and emotional health and making good progress with their education. Yet, parachute kids with an arrangement as a boarder still display problematic signs of not having their own parents to whom they can express complicated feelings of being a teenager—happiness, hurts, anger, and sadness—whenever they want to. Sharing the times of triumph as well as the times of doubt when things happen is the occasion for parents and their children to bond and build a deeper relationship, as those moments so quickly fade and lose meaning. Cindy, her aunt reports, is always quiet, not saying much around the house, and rarely leaves the room that she shares with her grandmother. She never refuses whatever she is asked to do. Emotional outbursts are a common feature of teenager behavior, especially those living in the United States. In this regard, Cindy's compliant behavior seems to be quite unusual. It may be due to the fact that she is not living with her own family. Her extremely obedient manner may be her way to make her existence as unobtrusive and discreet as possible by disappearing inside her room and hiding her emotions behind the door. "Parachute kids" can be regarded as a product of a certain kind of war.⁹¹ They may have run away to the United States to avoid the "examination war," but many of them still remain as victims.

Many parachute kids fare well by meeting the challenge of being alone and go on to college and successful careers. Unfortunately, some of them fall hard by joining Asian youth gangs or working as hired underlings for older gangsters or shady organizations established by them.⁹² They may have a hard time and internalize their difficult

⁹¹ Hae Joang Cho (1995).

⁹² Working as a voluntary Korean interpreter for the Police Station in Missoula, I encountered an incident involving a young student from Korea who was caught while working as a hired underling in a

experiences into a state of resignation, hopelessly scarred by their hurt and anger. Ironically, it is not easy for these unfortunate parachute kids to talk to someone or ask for help. Since it is illegal for these children to live alone in America, the price of talking to teachers or classmates at school can be very high, including the risk of being pulled out of school and sent back to Korea. Parents who are living far away in Seoul, Taipei, Hong Kong, or Singapore cannot see or comprehend how their young children in nice American suburbs could be in danger and go bad. They have no idea that their children are in trouble and need help. Infrequent communication is one of the biggest difficulties facing children separated by long distances. Many parachute kids experience estrangement from their parents. Although the various means of modern technology facilitate instant communication among people, when children are physically separated for long periods of time, they miss the immediacy of emotional content that makes communication real. Reportedly, most parachute kids talked with their parents fairly often in the beginning by phone or email to keep in touch. As time passed, they spoke to each other less, while their diverging daily lives made it difficult to hold on to their common thread.

Parental involvement in children's lives becomes the foundation for the cultural identities of children. Although most parachute kids were born, raised, and attended schools in Korea for some time, the sudden loss of parental influence during their

gang related smuggling enterprise. He and his group were captured at the Montana and Canadian border and brought to Missoula. It was his first crime, driving people to cross the border, which he thought was "an easy little job" to earn some money. "There are many casinos in the neighborhood," he confesses, "and I started to play first at a nearby bar because I was curious and bored." Then, he kept playing more and more hoping to get his lost tuition money back until he was completely broke. He was so desperate that he felt lucky to be offered a job, which he took without any second thought. He was too ashamed to call his parents in Korea for any help. Meanwhile, his parents in Korea were anxious to death in trying to find their son's whereabouts.

childhood, especially during the high school years, may greatly affect their Korean identities.⁹³ Bill, Cindy's younger brother who lives with their relatives in Los Angeles, reports that he and his mother don't talk. The conspicuous absence of his parents in Bill's formative years may explain why he cannot relate with his family in Korea. When his mother calls, she usually gives the phone to his younger brother in Korea, perhaps because she doesn't know what to say or perhaps wants her sons to connect with each other. Whatever her motivation may be, the two brothers have nothing to talk about.⁹⁴ Bill's cultural identity is more strongly linked to America as a result of his leaving Korea so young and Bill is unable to connect with his brother whose cultural affinity is deeply rooted in Korean culture.

The transnational child is often caught between two distinctly unlike cultural settings and educational systems. Parachute kids have the extra burden of battling abandonment and resentment on top of the usual problems of being teenagers, as they are sometimes marginalized in both countries. Some parachute kids experience blatant discrimination by American parents, as well as by other Korean immigrant kids and their parents in the United States who disapprove their children playing with parachute kids. Since parachute kids live alone without parental supervision, sometimes they are unfairly suspected of "doing something bad."⁹⁵ The experience of parachute children relating to this kind of unfair and hurtful presumption and stigma could deeply scar them for the rest

⁹³ For more details, see Albert J. Lee (2006).

⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that although Bill regularly uses e-mail to communicate with his friends and even young people from around the world whom he has never met, reportedly he does not email with his own family back in Korea.

⁹⁵ For more discussion on discrimination against parachute kids by other immigrants, see Orellana, et. al. (2001).

of their lives. It is a somber reminder that to achieve the American Dream, sometimes a terrible price must be paid.

Meanwhile, their troubles are not isolated in America. Those parachute kids who returned to Korea found it also difficult to adjust back in Korean society. They struggle both academically and socially.⁹⁶ After the 1996-1997 financial crisis, the South Korean economy suffered a huge setback. As many parents were no longer able to financially support their children in the United States, many children were forced to return to Korea. According to an estimate by the Korean Ministry of Education, of the 35,000 elementary and secondary school age children studying in America in 1997, about half of them had returned by the middle of 1998.⁹⁷ Shifting out of the tightly tracked and intensely competitive South Korean educational system is a daunting task for most parachute kids to overcome, but breaking into the closely woven social network back home is an even harder undertaking. A former parachute kid named Daniel reports how frustrating it is to be back in Korea. He was beat up by other children at school because of his American accent and awkward use of the Korean language.

In the end, one must ask, "What is better education?" To answer that question, it is important to recognize the costs and benefits that are measured by not just monetary considerations, but also intangible elements such as the psychological and emotional well-being of individual parachute kids and their family. Joshua Park, a Harvard Law School graduate and a Korean who came to the United States to attend high school in 1993, doesn't think a foreign degree is worth a childhood spent without a parent or

⁹⁶ Adjustment difficulties come from the differences between cultural and social values of Korea and America and difficulties in school life. See Sung Eun Noh, "Returned Korean Immigrant Children's Perceptions About Their Educational Environments in Korea," The University of Connecticut, 1988.

⁹⁷ Orellana, et. al. (2001).

parents. He strongly believes that the childhood memories filled with parental interaction cannot be measured in monetary terms.⁹⁸

In an effort to remedy the shortcomings of the parachute kid strategy, a new pattern of diaspora from Korea has emerged in recent years. One parent, typically the mother, accompanies the children to take care of them while children are attending school in a host country and the father is left behind in Korea working to finance his family's living abroad. The phenomenon is so widespread that it has a name. They are called "wild geese families." The case of wild geese families presents a new kind of sociological perspective on modern migration. The wild geese strategy may be an improvement over the perils of the parachute kid arrangement. But the advantage may be offset by the problems of separated parents and dispersed families.

Wild Geese Families

A pair of carved wooden geese is a central feature of traditional Korean wedding ceremonies, representing the new husband and wife with the image of wild geese carrying the hopes and dreams for the new marriage.⁹⁹ The geese symbolize several virtues of the Confucian tradition that new couples should follow in their married life and in the creation of an ideal family. Wild geese are believed to keep the same partner for life and maintain a strict hierarchy and order as seen in the way they are structured and harmonious when they are flying. Moreover, they diligently take care of their young, sometimes traveling great distances to bring back food. *Kirogi Gajok*, wild geese

⁹⁸ Joshua Park, "The Lone Father Goose - A Worthy Sacrifice or A Wild Goose Chase? (I) & (II), "The Korea Times, May 3 & 4, 2004, sec. The Crimson Report.

⁹⁹ Jane Portal, Korea: Art and Archaeology (NY: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2000).

families in Korean, a term coined by the Korean media, however, doesn't convey the image of the tightly bonded family by an ideal marriage identified with tradition.¹⁰⁰

Rather, the Korean word "*Kirogi*" wild goose, or "*Kirogi Gajok*" wild geese families, refers to a family that is separated by an ocean as children live abroad to attend school while they are young.¹⁰¹

How did the bird "*Kirogi*" associated with "*Kirogi Gajok*" for wild geese families, come to symbolize this particular kind of education related migration? Wild geese are winter migratory birds and they breed in the areas of cold climate, such as Siberia and China, and annually make a long journey to stay in Korea during the winter months.¹⁰² They travel back and forth between breeding areas and wintering sites in Korea. It is always an extraordinary sight to watch the hundreds, if not thousands, of birds flying high in the sky in a magnificent group formation. Against the wide open blue canvas of a cold winter sky, the scene of flying wild geese often evokes in many Korean people the quality of "*han*," which is described as deeply buried feelings of longing, loneliness, sorrow, and regret, especially for older generations of Koreans whose existence is filled with heartaches and grief from their experience of historical tragedies.¹⁰³ Since the birds, *Kirogi*, are migrating in search of areas with more plentiful

¹⁰⁰ According to the new revised system of Romanization in the Korean language, the correct Romanization for wild geese family is "Girogi" not "Kirogi." However, the latter has been widely used in the Western media so "Kirogi" is also used in this study. "A Wrenching Choice," Washington Post, January 9, 2005.

¹⁰¹ Phuong Ly (2005).

¹⁰² Hui Yeong Chae, "Migratory Birds of Korea," Koreana: Korean Arts & Culture 20.4 (2006): 10-11.

¹⁰³ "*Han*" is the emotional pain in a suppressed psychological condition which is said to be peculiar to Koreans. Recognized as central to the Korean national character and shared by all as a collectively broken-hearted people, this unusual notion of lingering rage, inactive resentment, and

food and milder climate, the wild geese's migration in search of a favorable environment may serve as a fitting metaphor for migrating Koreans who are leaving Korea seeking a better educational environment. The term wild geese, *Kirogi*, certainly stirs up the feeling of sadness more than the happiness of joining two people and two families in a marriage. The following poem, When We Two Parted, by British poet Lord Byron (1788-1824) captures the sentiment associated with the term "*Kirogi Gajok*," wild geese family.¹⁰⁴

If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee? --
With silence and tears.
--- (91)

The phenomenon of wild geese families sociologically speaking is significant in two ways. One is how the decision is made to separate the family. That is, the choice is made not under dire situations of economic and political hardship, an external factor. For example, most migrant workers who come to the United States are in search of work with the hope of sending money back to support their families. By and large, they have to endure the painful separation of family in order to provide the basic needs for their families to survive. As for political refugees, the purpose is the same. The separation is forced in order for an individual or a group to stay alive. On the contrary, the split family of *Kirogi Gajok* is made willingly, a choice made by an internal factor. For the sake of

sublimated helplessness is attributed to the historical battering Korea has received over centuries. See Michael Breen, The Koreans: Who They Are, What They Want, Where Their Future Lies (NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004): 35-40. For more details and an excellent explanation for the idea of "Han," see Jimoon Suh, trans. The Golden Phoenix: Seven Contemporary Korean Short Stories, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998): 3-5.

¹⁰⁴ Byron, Lord. "When we two parted." The Macmillan Dictionary of Quotations. Eds. John Daintith, et al. (Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, Inc. 2000).

children's education, parents are willing to maintain their family fractured, often for as many as ten years, until their children enter universities. The separation of wild geese families is undertaken not out of necessity for imminent physical survival, but rather for deliberately designed long term social advancement. Second, the split pattern of the migrating family member is curiously reversed. Instead of the wage earner moving alone to a country where jobs are available, which is generally the case, for wild geese families, mothers and children are leaving, while fathers, the wage earner, stay behind in the home country.¹⁰⁵

A nickname is given to those fathers who are left behind alone in Korea. They are called, "*Oe Kirogi*," a lonely wild goose.¹⁰⁶ The exact number of *Kirog Gajok*, wild geese families in Korea is not known. However, according to a study of wild geese families in Korea in a doctoral dissertation by Yang Suk Choi, an estimated 10,000 pre-college students left Korea to study in 2004 alone, while those leaving with their parents were 30,000.¹⁰⁷ To profit from this great exodus and the huge costs involved, hundreds of websites have been set up in Seoul for mothers and children who are moving to English-speaking countries, offering tips on real estate, banking, and school information, including practical advice on how to handle the stress of being wild geese families.

¹⁰⁵ The phenomenon of wild geese families was created at the end of 1999 when the Korean government abolished a law prohibiting pre-college students studying abroad. See Gil-won Song, "Nalja Kirogi ("Fly, Wild Geese")" Wolgan Chosun ("Monthly Chosun") 16 May 2006. 17 May 2006. <<http://monthly.chosun.com/coreporter/cowriterboardread.asp?idx=2871&cPage=1&cowid=hifamily>>; and Jung, C.K. "Neuleonaneun 'Kirogi Gajok' deul ("Increasing number of wild geese families")" Wolgan Chosun ("Monthly Chosun") 31 July 2005. 1 August 2005. <<http://monthly.chosun.com/coreporter/cowriterboardread.asp?idx=2346&cPage=6&cowid=C.K.Jung>>.

¹⁰⁶ Songchul Kim, "Weekend Couples' Among Korean Professionals: An Ethnography of Living Apart on Weekdays," Korea Journal 41.4 (2001):28-47.

¹⁰⁷ Jang, Byeong Uk. "Kirogi Gajok Yeongu Choi Yang-suk Baksa ("A Study of Wild geese families by Dr. Yang-suk Choi)," Jugan Hanguk ("Korea Weekly") 2 March 2005. 5 March 2005. <<http://weekly.hankooki.com/lpage/people/200503/wk2005030219040737470.htm>>.

Emerging as a new development in international ethnic migration at the global level, the phenomenon of wild geese families appears to be especially widespread among Koreans.¹⁰⁸ A recent article in The Washington Post, appropriately titled "A Wrenching Choice," reports about a typical *Kirogi Gajoks* now living in a white frame townhouse in Ellicott City, a suburb of Washington, D.C.¹⁰⁹ According to the article, Hannah Kim, a seventh grader, lives with her mother and two younger siblings separated from her father who is a business executive in Korea. It has been a year living without their father for the children and without her husband for their mother. Their plan is to live this way for nine more years until the youngest goes to college. In Hannah's neighborhood, there are at least two more families who are *Kirogis*. There are several other wild geese families at their church, which is the main gathering place for many Korean people living abroad.¹¹⁰ Each year, nearly 400 Korean-speaking students are reported to be enrolling in English for Speakers of Other Language classes in Howard County schools, a suburb of Washington, D.C., making Koreans the largest ethnic group in the program. In the

¹⁰⁸ The migration strategy for educational purposes has been employed also by Japanese and Chinese, but they are not as extensive as the case of Koreans. For Chinese examples, see Skeldon (1994): 11.

¹⁰⁹ Ly (2005).

¹¹⁰ Many Korean churches are established in foreign countries to serve Korean immigrants, reflecting the strong faith in Christianity held by a large part of the Korean population. Christianity is enthusiastically received in Korea and more than 50 percent of the entire Korean population claims belief in Christianity. As a result, Korea is one of the few places in Asia where a spirit-filled version of Christianity such as Pentecostalism has prospered. For more details, see "Christianity Reborn," The Economist 23 Dec. 2006 - 5 Jan. 2007: 48-50. According Donald Clark, a historian at Trinity University in San Antonio, the strength of Christianity in Korea has been influenced by history, politics, and the unique characteristics of the Korean people who are believed to be much more receptive and responsive to the Christian gospel. See Donald N. Clark, Christianity in Modern Korea (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1986). Many Korean churches are established in foreign countries to serve Korean immigrants, reflecting the strong faith in Christianity held by a large part of the Korean population.

meantime, more families are turning up in other suburbs where highly-regarded public schools are located.

More and more South Koreans are choosing to split their families in an effort to escape the endless hours of rote learning and the relentlessly competitive Korean school system, in favor of a better education and a more balanced life abroad for their children.¹¹¹ Education certainly is the main reason for Hanna and other Korean children and their families coming to the United States, yet the price of their American education paid in fractured families may not be so clear at first. However subtly it may be expressed in the following description, the complicated emotions of wild geese families and ambivalent interactions between family members are clearly evident.

...Eugene (Hannah's younger brother) struggles with English. Hannah feels guilty about her parents' separation. Jungwon Kim (Hannah's mother) finds herself questioning the choices they made. And Keeyeop Kim (Hannah's father) senses an odd distance from his children: With just three visits in the past year, his chief connection is a nightly phone call.

When the phone rings in Ellicott City and the caller ID flashes "Out of Area," they become a family again. "Appa," Eugene will say, grabbing the phone. "Daddy...

Upon closer examination, the sacrifice may be costlier in the end. When family members are physically separated for long periods of time, they gradually lose touch and become emotionally separated. Although various means of technology are available nowadays, such as e-mail, fax, and international phone calls, which can help to keep the transnational family connected, their effect is relatively superficial. Park Jin-soo is one

¹¹¹ Gil-won Song (2006).

of thousands of *Oe kirogis*, lonely wild geese fathers, featured in The Seoul Times, a popular internet English newspaper for foreign residents in Korea. He continues working in South Korea, while his wife and three children have migrated and now live in Montgomery, Virginia. He feels his children are “Korean on the outside but American on the inside now,” as his children are no longer so fond of eating *Kimchi*, one of the most celebrated Korean dishes. He says he feels miserable sometimes living alone, but he and his wife are committed to the idea that their children must have “the best education.”¹¹²

The number of wild geese families has been steadily increasing over the years, and the educational diaspora has had a serious impact on Korean society. One of the most severe problems they face is the slow disintegration of family unity and the erosion of emotional attachment.¹¹³ The estrangement of children from their fathers and of wives from their spouses is one of the most painful outcomes. The spouse who lives alone especially feels the blunt effects of this lonely lifestyle. There are numerous news reports, such as the suicide by a wild goose father as a result of his disintegrated marriage, divorce, and external marital affairs—a tragic ending related to the unsustainability of wild geese families.¹¹⁴ Emotional isolation from the lack of meaningful conversation, poor eating habits from eating alone, and alcohol abuse from

¹¹² Anna Fifield, "Koreans Make Big Sacrifices to Study Overseas," The Seoul Times 18 Jan. 2007, sec. National.

¹¹³ Choi, Yang Sook. "Kirogi Gajok, Kirogi Abba Eui Silsang ("Reality of Wild Geese Families and Wild Goose Daddies")." Mailzine: KEDI. 24 February 2005. 25 March 2005.
<<http://mailzine.kedi.re.kr/Column/MailZine/ColumnViw.php>>

¹¹⁴ Ho-yeol Choi, "30 Dae Kirogi Abba Jasal Sageon Jeonmal & 'Kirogi Gajok' eui Hyeonsil ("Suicide of a wild goose daddy in his 30s & the realty of 'wild geese families')," Yeoseong Dong-A 1 August 2003. 2 August 2003.
<http://www.donga.com/docs/magazine/woman/2003/07/31/200307310500046/200307310500046_1.html>.

loneliness are all common complaints among fathers in Korea living away from their families.¹¹⁵

Communication with children and between spouses suffers immensely. Psychologists view healthy communication as one key to lifelong happiness since it has a powerful impact on biological well-being, which in turn is affected by the complex inner workings of emotions. Being happy does not come from the avoiding life's inevitable frustrations and upsets but learning to recover from and repairing interpersonal disconnection. The faster one recovers from frustration, the greater the possibility one has for expanding the capacity for joyfulness. In his best selling book, Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships, Daniel Goldman explains how warm personal relationships act like vitamins bringing health benefits, while bad relationships act like harmful poisons. Furthermore, prolonged isolation or relentless social stress can be life-shortening, as the hormones that regulate everything from our hearts to our immune systems respond negatively.¹¹⁶

One need to ask, is the separation of families and the estrangement and the trauma to the children, since the separation is taking place for a long time during the formative years of childhood, worth the risk? Although the answer lies in the choices made by each individual, the aggravated result certainly creates serious social and economic problems already evident in Korean society. From the standpoint of the national economy, for

¹¹⁵ In one story of a lonely goose father whose health deteriorated from living alone, his lone death was not found until five days later. See "Kirogi Abba Ui Jukeum, Gajok Ui Jukeum ("Death of Wild Goose Daddy, Death of Family'," The Hankyoreh 19 October 2005. 20 October 2005. <<http://www.hani.co.kr/kisa/section-008001000/2005/10/008001000200510192136418.html>>.

¹¹⁶ See Daniel Goleman, Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships (NY: Bantam Books, 2006) 173-75.

example, the educational diaspora significantly affects the trade and investment flows of South Korea. A significant monetary outflow is generated by the Korean diaspora. In 2003 alone, over \$1.85 billion was sent abroad.¹¹⁷ In 2004, there was a twofold increase in spending from three years before, while the number of students studying abroad and per student costs have steadily increased and are expected to continue to rise in the future.

Created by Korea's education crisis, the phenomenon of wild geese families presents further future economic and social problems. A sizable emigration may produce a serious brain drain, which eventually will affect Korean labor markets. The Korean diaspora may not have caused any real brain drain until now because tens of thousands of Korean students graduating from American universities in recent decades have returned home and have contributed significantly to the development of South Korea with their acquired knowledge and skills. However, the growing diaspora of Korean children for education is a continuing trend, clearly suggesting it is not a workable solution to Korea's current educational crisis.

Chapter Summary

Historically, diaspora has played an important role in the ongoing regional and global processes of cultural, social, and economic change. Although parachute kids and wild geese families from Korea have evolved as one expression of modern migration, as a contemporary new pattern of diaspora, their social and cultural contributions have not yet been systematically studied. Today, the Korean diaspora continues to help in developing new attitudinal and cultural patterns and inspiring our daily lives with

¹¹⁷Park, J. (2004).

multiculturalism.¹¹⁸ There are wild geese families that do just fine in such arrangements as their children get admitted into the top universities and thrive in American society, contributing to various economic, social, cultural, educational, and scientific fields. Those who become poets and writers also enrich the field of multilingual poetry and literature in the United States and Britain.¹¹⁹

The diaspora of Korean children is an issue that calls for urgent attention, as an educational issue that profoundly affects the welfare of Korean children. Children are the most vulnerable members of society. The notion of what children are expected to and can do on their own at particular ages differs from one culture to another and poses questions about children and parents living and working in two very different cultural environments. One of the most satisfying results for parents sending their children abroad is to see their children gain confidence and have fun in school, free from the mental and physical stress of preparing for the competitive college entrance exam. At the same time, their decision to migrate and live separated may also be simply the result of societal pressure. The pressure to “keep up with the Jones,” ironically, leads them to follow “the Jones” to wherever they may move. Whatever the motive, the sacrifices and costs for both parents and children are high and must be measured. In her doctoral

¹¹⁸ Much has been written about the major cultural contributions of African Americans, but other segments of the modern diaspora--the Indian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, black West Indian, Caribbean, etc.--are also contributing significantly to contemporary music, cinema, literature, and poetry. See Sheffer (2003) 219-20.

¹¹⁹ Shena-mei Ma, an Associate Professor in the Department of American Thought and Language at Michigan State University, directs our attention to the Asian Diaspora literatures which map out a terrain largely uncharted by scholars of various disciplines. The works by such writers as Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, Amy Tan, and Bharati Mukherjee, portray unique yet representative experiences of Asian immigrants in the United States, making a major contribution in the realm of American literature. See Sheng-mei Ma, Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures (Albany, NY: State U of NY Press, 1998).

dissertation on *Kirogi* families, Yangsook Choi concludes that the phenomenon of wild geese families represents the many ill effects of rushed modernization in Korean society.¹²⁰ For the purpose of children's educational success, for example, the whole family's life becomes distorted. In the process, the sacrifice the family is making seems to be noble, but in the end it is the selfish end of individualism that is imported from the West. Therefore, wild geese families may represent an educational crisis, but in reality, it is also a social and ethical crisis where Western values confuse and clash with traditional Korean values.

¹²⁰ Yang Suk Choi (2005).

CHAPTER 3

A SOCIETY OF EXCESSIVE LEARNING

Introduction

Throughout its history, Korea has placed a high premium on education. Even during the devastation of the Korean War and in the postwar years struggling to overcome the vicious cycle of poverty, children's education was the highest priority for both the government and families in Korea.¹²¹ As human capital, this commitment to education is often given credit for Korea's transformation from a "Third World U.S. military satellite into an industrial giant." Nancy Birdsall, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, reemphasizes the importance of education in speeding economic growth and reducing high income inequality.¹²² She writes:

¹²¹ The existence of old photos showing classes that were held on the street or bombed ground of a school yard during the Korean War is touching and clear evidence of Koreans' profound commitment to their children's education. Although both public and private sectors in Korea are dedicated to education, the public sector played a much more active role in the earlier period of the 1950s and 1960s, especially in elementary and secondary education in the 1960s. As the Korean economy started to take off and the average income for Korean households rose, the private sector increasingly assumed a leading role. By producing trained and hardworking workers, while reaffirming traditional values and instilling in them a sense of commitment to modernization, the role of education has been significant to Korea's "economic miracle." For more details on Korean economic development, see Paul W. Kuznets, Economic Growth and Structure in the Republic of Korea (New Haven, CT: Yale U Press, 1977): 84-110. The contribution of Korean education is also found in the growth of a democratic government and the development of citizenship in Korean society. See Frank Gibney, Korea's Quiet Revolution: From Garrison State to Democracy (NY: Walker & Co., 1992).

¹²² Nancy Birdsall, "Education: The People's Asset," trans. Brazil Ministry of Land Reform, Asset Distribution, Poverty and Economic Growth: Theory, Empirical Evidence, and Policy Implications (U of Brasilia, Brazil: Center on Social and Economic Dynamics, 1999).

Education, the most easily measured form of human capital, is like land and other forms of wealth, an asset. In today's global markets, it is a scarce asset, and can therefore, generate income for its owners. It is a special asset in two respects. First, once acquired it cannot be stolen or sold--it cannot be alienated from its owner. Second, as the amount of education increases, other assets such as land and physical capital decline as the proportion of total wealth in an economy; since the ownership of these latter assets is usually more concentrated than that of education, the overall concentration of all assets declines. Thus, an increase in education is likely to have an equalizing effect as long as it is broadly distributed. (1)

The case of South Korea is one of the best success stories of economic development achieved through the accumulation of human capital as measured by high levels of schooling in a large percentage of poor households in Korea.¹²³ Indeed, standing as the 11th largest economy in the world, Korea's dedication to education explains much of the astonishing economic growth in the short period of three decades. Education also plays a crucial role in Korea's social progress and the building of a remarkably democratic society. As greater opportunities for economic prosperity came to those who had acquired academic degrees in higher education, the race began and increased the competition to enter prestigious schools. Soon preparing for entrance examinations became the focus of education. The overheated competition, which has tended to reduce education to test preparation, created enormous financial burdens on families hiring expensive private tutoring to increase the chance for their children to succeed on entrance examinations. Traditional beliefs in the transformational value of formal learning, American democratic ideas of equal opportunity, and a booming

¹²³ Although there are differences in the accumulation of human capital, the role of formal education has played an important role in the rapid economic development in all four "Asian Tigers," namely Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea. Paul Morris, "Asia's Four Little Tigers: A Comparison of the Role of Education in Their Development," Comparative Education 32.1 (1996): 95-109.

capitalist economy, all contributed to an overheated zeal for education in Korea. As a result, many Koreans looked for paths to success, while avoiding the intensity of competition and reducing the heavy financial load, outside of Korea.

An observation made by Michael Seth, a historian and an expert in Korean studies at James Madison University, succinctly summarizes Koreans' feverish zeal for education as both a contribution and a problem. In Seth's words, Korea was once "a land of illiteracy" with "a very small urban middle class," but has now become one of the world's most well-schooled democratic nations.¹²⁴ Yet, for all its noteworthy successes, Korea faces formidable challenges because of the nation's obsession with education. Starting with the *yangban* class in traditional Korea,¹²⁵ Seth explains the problems of "education fever" as the result of combining the traditional habit, even obsession, of learning with the modern democratic idea of equality. He writes:

The linking of education with traditional Confucian, or more properly *yangban*, notions of social status has made implementing technical and vocational education difficult and has produced a constant oversupply of graduates in the humanities and social sciences. The intense pressure for educational attainment created the competitive entrance examination system that has reduced much of schooling to test preparation, placed enormous pressure on young people, and stifled attempts at educational innovation. It has also created an enormously expensive and arguably inefficient system. In their ceaseless effort to gain a competitive edge,

¹²⁴ Seth (2002) 256.

¹²⁵ The *yangban* was part of the ruling elite class which was created during the *Joseon* Dynasty in an effort to replace the noble class of the prior *Goryeo* period, who had been educated in both Buddhist and Confucian studies, with a well educated scholarly class of male Confucian scholars from new educational foundations. Anyone could become a *yangban* by taking the civil service exams, the results of which would determine placement into high ranking civil positions. In practice, however, because of heavy physical, emotional and financial commitment required in the studying for the exams, it was often only the wealthy and the connected had the resources to carry out. In the later years, the tests were rigged to favor those from wealthy families and the sons of *yangban*. It therefore perpetuated the ruling class of *yangban* that was formed based on educational fellowships and alliances.

families have spent huge portions of their incomes on tutoring, private lessons, and various other expenditures. This has not only placed a great burden on most families, but has also caused various distortions in the economy and has generated tension between egalitarian ideals and the reality of discrepancies in wealth and financial resources. The competitive nature of education, the focus on prestigious degrees, and lavish financial expenditures have helped to perpetuate traditional methods of rote memorization and have, in the opinion of many, stifled creativity. (254)

Just as fever is a sign of medical problems in human health, the metaphorical term of “education fever” also signals a peculiar social malady, “*shiheum byeung*” in Korea, translated as examination sickness. In other words, this obsessive passion for education indicates a crisis in the Korean educational system. Starting as an internal conflict and educational dilemma, it is now spreading outside of Korea, switching away from “the best schools that South Korea has to offer to elite American schooling.”¹²⁶ As the degree of education fever increases, the social and economic cost has also risen, producing an outcry from ordinary citizens who are weighed down from the financial burden of education.¹²⁷ Contemporary Korean society is afflicted with this peculiar education fever, for which parachute kids and wild geese families are the most obvious expression.

This chapter explores the Korean educational environment as context for the diaspora of Korean children. Korea’s overheated zeal for education has a powerful impact on every aspect of family life, especially the lives of children. Exploring the lives of Korean children and their parents before the diaspora, in particular their obsession with examinations, is helpful in explaining the “education fever” crisis and other problems in

¹²⁶ French (2003).

¹²⁷ Kang, Chang-Dong. "Hanguk Chodeung Gyoyuk ui Hakryeok Jabonhwa e daehan Sahoihakjeuk Gochal ("A Sociological Study on School Career Capitalization of Korean Elementary Education"), The Journal of Research in Education 26 (2006): 103-125.

the contemporary Korean social landscape. In short the chapter explores how Korean children have lost their childhood and why parents are feeling trapped, leading in turn to the exodus of children from Korea.

The Lost Childhood

The study of children and childhood has been, until quite recently, ignored or marginalized at best, as children have been most often viewed as future adults and held in check by the family. That all changed with the publication of Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life. Written by Philippe Ariès, a French historian and medievalist, its thesis sparked heated debate among historians and other social scientists, who had long neglected children in their studies. Ariès explores the evolution of the modern perceptions of family life and the changing image of children from the Middle Ages. He suggests that the discovery of childhood, a distinct phase of life, is an abstract idea, as children used to be regarded as small adults.¹²⁸ The development of schools and their curricula, he adds, brought changes in family attitude by orienting children and their education.¹²⁹ The concept of childhood has evolved from a lack of awareness to a coddling period where children were idolized and valued as a source of amusement for adults to a moralistic period in which childhood was seen as a period of training and

¹²⁸ Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, Trans. by Robert Baldick (NY: Random House, 1962).

¹²⁹ Best known by his critical book on the role of television in America, Amusing Ourselves to Death, Neil Postman, a professor, cultural critic, and media theorist, suggests that the idea of childhood as a separated world of children was born by the invention of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century when a new symbolic written world of adulthood excluded children. Presently, this division between adult and children is disappearing as the bombardment of the adult secrets of sex and violence is turned into popular entertainment. For more discussions on childhood in modern technological society, see Neil Postman, The Disappearance of Childhood (NY: Vintage Books, 1994).

discipline in preparation for adult life. The study of children and childhood has now widely accepted the view that children contribute to societal preservation as well as societal change.¹³⁰ As a result, there has been significant theoretical and empirical work by a number of scholars relating to how children affect and are affected by society.¹³¹

William A. Corsaro, a sociologist at Indiana University, is dedicated to this new sociology of children. He promotes the conceptual autonomy of children by stressing the idea that children are “active, creative social agents who produce their own unique children’s cultures while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult societies.” For Corsaro, childhood is the core concept in the study of children, because it defines the processes by which children adapt to and internalize society. He writes:

Childhood--that socially constructed period in which children live their lives--is a structural form. When we refer to childhood as a structural form, we mean it is a category or a part of society, like social class and age groups. In this sense children are members or incumbents of their childhoods. For the children themselves, childhood is a temporary period. For society, on the other hand, childhood is a permanent structural form or category that never disappears even though its members change continuously and its nature and conception vary historically. It is somewhat difficult to recognize childhood as a structural form because we tend to think of childhood solely as a period when children are prepared for entry into society. But children are already a part of society from their births, as childhood is part and parcel of society. (3)

¹³⁰ William A. Corsaro, The Sociology of Childhood, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2005): 80.

¹³¹ In the past, the theories of children in sociology were based on traditional views of socialization that were related to the behaviorists’ views of child development, which relegate children to a primarily linear and passive role. However, they have been seriously challenged by the rise of constructivism in contemporary developmental psychology. Best represented by Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory and Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach, it emphasizes the children’s active role in their development and their eventual participation in the adult world. For more details, see J. Piaget, Six Psychological Studies (NY: Vintage, 1968); and L.S. Vygotsky, Mind in Society (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1978); Corsaro (2005) 27.

Changes in the structural arrangements of categories like family, gender, occupation, and social class all affect the nature of childhood. In modern societies, as many mothers work outside the home, their young children spend much of their time in institutional settings like daycare centers and early childhood education programs, which didn't exist in the past. At the same time, many women pursue "self-realization" in the labor market and want to be defined "not by familial relations but as individuals." They are forced to give up their careers because there is little institutional support and less help from family for child care.¹³² Korean mothers in particular are conflicted between not being able to satisfy the desire to be "independent and self-sufficient" as working women and being housewives. Even though they do not work outside the home, most stay at home mothers in Korea do work full time, managing their children's education, contributing even more to the problems of education fever.

In this sociological tour of children and childhood, the lives of children are explored in two settings: underage school children and older and mainly high school students. To begin, the lives of Korean children are programmed with a certain kind of labor, mainly studying, which is changing conventional ideas of childhood. Recent as the social concept may be, the idea of "lost childhood" is not a completely new idea. The eighteenth century poet, dramatist, novelist, and philosopher, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) observed in Germany how "too many parents make life hard for their children by trying, too zealously, to make it easy for them."

¹³² In an old tradition of extended families, older generations often took care of their grandchildren in Korea. In the modern living arrangement of nuclear families in urban settings, although the older generation of mothers in their fifties and sixties understand their daughters' struggle in balancing career and childcare, they are not willing to give up their private space and individual freedom to take care of their grandchildren. See Hae Joang Cho, "Living with Conflicting Subjectivities: Mother, Motherly Wife, and Sexy Woman in the Transition from Colonial-Modern to Postmodern Korea, Laurel Kendall (2002) 179-180.

Squirrel Tribe

The Squirrel Tribe, “*Daramjwi Jok*” in Korean, is a term referring to busy children who are toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarteners in age. The reason for this nickname is because these children mirror the physical image of little squirrels that are small in size, cute and adorable in their looks, but always busy, constantly moving about gathering and hiding nuts and coming and going everywhere. The symbolic identity of the squirrel in this case represents the basic nature of children who are naturally simple and generally joyous in their outlook on life. The “self-delighting life of the squirrel” portrayed in a poem, An Appointment, by W.B. Yeats provides a fitting example for this point.¹³³ He writes:

...
I took a broken root to fling
Where the proud, wayward squirrel went,
Taking delight that he could spring;
And he, with that low whinnying sound
That is like laughter, sprang again
And so to the other tree at a bound.
Nor the tame will, nor timid brain,
Nor heavy knitting of the brow
Bred that fierce tooth and cleanly limb
And threw him up to laugh on the bough;
... (584)

Clearly, Yeats saw much joy, lightness, and the playful busyness in a squirrel’s life.¹³⁴ Although affectionately named as “squirrel tribe,” many small children in Korea and their “squirrelly” lives do not necessarily display the same upbeat tendencies.

¹³³ William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was an Irish poet, dramatist, mystic. In 1923, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

¹³⁴ For more discussions on Yeats’s work, see Robert Langbaum, "The Exteriority of Self in Yeats's Poetry and Thought," New Literary History 7.3 (1976): 570-97.

Korean youngsters today are too busy to be playful, too burdened to be light, and too tired to be joyous. Their daily schedule is fully packed with lessons at many special schools during the day. Some attend kindergarten in the morning and private tutoring schools in the afternoon.¹³⁵ As the number of both working parents increases, many parents in Korea are substituting private tutoring schools as places for childcare.

Among a large number of parents, especially mothers, one pervasive belief about good parenting is based on the idea that successful children are made through nurture as much as through nature, genes.¹³⁶ As a result, many children who are barely able to walk are bused around from school to school until late at night being trained and schooled. A survey conducted by *Ang Pang*, a popular baby magazine in Korea, reports that, on the question on how gifted children were made, 50% of those surveyed mothers answered nurture is responsible and that early education is an important part of the nurturing. Children who are read to and played with, not to mention properly fed and cuddled, have better chance of succeeding in school and in life.¹³⁷ Likewise, children neglected and

¹³⁵ Unlike in the United States, kindergartens in Korea are profit-making enterprises of privately operated special schools. Reportedly, some of these kindergartens located south of the Han River in Seoul cost more than university tuition. These private schools such as the so-called “Name Brand Kindergarten,” *Myeungpum Yuchiwon* in Korean, are “luxury schools,” completely equipped with imported foreign educational toys and play equipment. Although these schools are advertised as simply English Language *Hakwon*, they provide six hours of classes structured with a famous kindergarten program from England for mainly four to five year old children. “Suyeobryo 1800 Manwon 'Myeungpum Yuchiwon' ui Deungjang (‘Name Brank Kindergartens, the Tuition costs 18,000,000 Won’),” *Segye News* 28 Febuary 2007.

¹³⁶ The gold standard for studies of nature versus nurture has been to compare children who are adopted with ones who are raised by their biological parents. This lets researchers assess how much a trait such as aggression is due to influences from the family and how much to biology alone. Studies of adopted twins show what portion of a trait or ability is due to genes and what portion to the way a child is raised. A teenager’s scholastic ability is about 60 percent due to genes, while the sense of self-worth is only about 30 percent genetic and morality but 25 percent. Goleman (2006) 154.

¹³⁷ There are many home and school related factors that influence students’ academic success. Some of non-school related influences are self concept, socioeconomic conditions of family, home environment, including “plain luck.” See, J. Lundt, “The Effects of Self-Concept, Home Characteristics, and Western Montana High School Environments on Academic Achievement.” Diss. U of Montana, 1988.

poorly parented face increased risk of dropping out of school, drug problems, teen pregnancy, and even ending up in jail. An article in The Economist, a weekly news magazine, reiterates the point by reporting that by the time children get to school “many dim two-year olds from good homes have overtaken bright children from bad ones and... good parenting and the early education of children become an advantage in improving the likelihood of success in later life.”¹³⁸

As in America and Europe, intervention in the early years of children’s lives is increasingly popular in Korea. Early education is all the rage in Korea. Based on the widespread idea that early education increases children’s IQ and that the first three years of education build a solid foundation for able children in the future, two out of three Korean mothers, 66 percent, believe that 0-24 months is the right time to start children’s education.¹³⁹ Only four percent of mothers think that after four years is the appropriate time. One out of three mothers, 31 percent, believes that teaching languages is the most important area for early education, which is followed by music, 26 percent. As for physical education, interestingly, only four percent of mothers think it is of any importance. A study on toddlers' daily life conducted by Professor Ki-sook Lee at Ehwa Women’s University, further supports this trend. According to her research, which was conducted with 2,350 children between three to five years old and their mothers, 22 percent of children attended language schools or *hagwon*, private education institutes or after school classes.¹⁴⁰ An American who teaches at a language institute in Seoul

¹³⁸ "The Nanny State: How to Save Children from Bad Parents," The Economist 20 December 2003: 79.

¹³⁹ "Korean Mothers - Intriguing Mix of Old and New Views," The Chosun Ilbo, April 28, 2005.

confirms the fact that children as young as two attend 20 minute lessons where they are taught basic math and English-language skills.¹⁴¹

The nickname, “squirrel tribe,” applies to many preschool children who are coming and going just like busy squirrels. They receive six to seven hours of instruction a day, which requires an additional two hours spent in commuting as children are sent around to three or four different schools.¹⁴² Their schedule is full with learning activities and, naturally, they are very tired. A boy named Kim, five years old, for example, leaves his home around ten in the morning with his mother to attend a school to learn English. His English school ends at two in the afternoon. But he gets on a shuttle bus to get to another school in order to take his piano lesson for an hour. After that, he takes a martial arts lesson, *Taekwondo* training for another hour. The reason he is being bused around the city which takes more than two hours of commute time, is his mother’s strong desire that he attend the well known best schools. Another boy Yang, also five years old, who attends the same school as Kim, is in a similar situation. He also takes art and piano lessons after school. His parents are heavily burdened by over \$1,000 of monthly lesson fees. His mother reports that her little boy is very tired from his many activities during the day. Seeing him falling asleep as soon as he returns home makes her feel sad and guilty. Nevertheless, she feels caught and has no better choice. First of all, there is no alternative for reliable child care. But more importantly, she is compelled to continue

¹⁴⁰ Hyun-Chol Cho, "Yua Daramjwajok Neunda ("Expanding Squirrel Tribe")," Kyunghang Shinmoon 4 October 2003. 15 October 2003.
<http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=200310031926201&code=940100>.

¹⁴¹ Hyunsung Khang, "Education-Obsessed South Korea," (Radio Netherlands, 2003).

¹⁴² Hyun-Chol Cho (2003).

their daily routine. She is afraid that if she doesn't educate her son early, he will be left behind all those kids who are receiving early education.

A 28 year-old female teacher at the school the boys Kim and Yang are attending observes that many children, a majority of over 60 percent, attend more than two different after-school classes. The children in her class, she reports, are often starved for attention and clinging.¹⁴³ Could overscheduled learning activities be depriving these children of parental affection? Coming and going from one place to another and staying only a short period of time to take lessons may not provide sufficient time for these children to bond with their teachers or care givers and to create any sense of a safe haven at their learning places. Security may be important in fueling another basic human impulse: the urge to explore the world at large. Through exploration, children develop deeper curiosity and expand creativity and build positive human relationships in society, fundamental ingredients of human happiness.

Daniel Goleman, a psychologist at Harvard and a former long time reporter for The New York Times reporting on the brain and behavioral sciences, emphasizes the need for safe haven and its importance in children's lives, as it promotes their well-being, feeling well-loved and cared for, creating "a reservoir of positivity."¹⁴⁴ His report on the latest research findings on human brain and behavioral science suggests that there is more plasticity early in life than later on and some of the effects of early experience are quite

¹⁴³ Hyun-Chol Cho (2003).

¹⁴⁴ Goleman defines a safe haven for children as "an emotionally secure place" where they can return after going out and exploring the wider world. And that exploration, he explains, can be "physical, as in riding a bike around the neighborhood, interpersonal, as in meeting new people and making friends." Goleman (2006) 178.

permanent and irreversible.¹⁴⁵ Children develop self-regulatory skills, as well as sensory and language systems in early childhood. Although it is less obvious and less definable in precisely measured numbers, such as IQ tests and other school tests, it is imperative to recognize the importance of emotional and social intelligence that develops in childhood when circuitry in the brain system is developing.¹⁴⁶

Behavioral scientists and developmental psychologists have long suggested that children acquire a range of social expertise through serious play. Recent discoveries by many neuroscientists verify the important benefits of playful fun and show how playing arouses joy in the brain circuitry.¹⁴⁷ Learning how to negotiate power struggles, how to cooperate and form alliances, and how to concede with grace are all vital in developing life regulating skills. Consequently, children's interaction with family members and friends has a profound effect in learning, more valuable than many parents seem to realize. For most Korean parents, however, formal education has become a single-minded drive, especially for higher education. Since students' performance on the tests has life-long ramifications--getting into a good school that leads to a good job that guarantees a good income--the pressures that are placed on children are relentless. As young children in Korea devote their lives entirely to studying to enter college, teaching in the secondary schools is reduced to preparing students how to take tests for university entrance exams. This intense competition and pressure filled environment is what many

¹⁴⁵ Goleman (2006) 156-59.

¹⁴⁶ IQ tests are designed ad hoc, to predict success in the classroom. They are almost entirely atheoretical as they are merely constructed to "model the sorts of things which children do in school." Goleman (2006) 334; also see Howard Gardner, *To Open Minds* (NY: Basic Books, 1989) 95-96; and Dan Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (NY: Bantam Books, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ Goleman (2006) 178

refer to as “examination hell.”¹⁴⁸ In fact, elementary and preschool children have also become a part of “education fever,” further contributing to unprecedented educational and social problems in Korea.¹⁴⁹

The education of an individual human begins at birth and continues throughout life.¹⁵⁰ Even today, many believe that education begins before birth, as evidenced by some parents' playing music or reading to the baby in the womb.¹⁵¹ The remaining question however begs the question whether or not this kind of early training is effective. At best, the statistical result remains mixed. Nevertheless, a piece of news reprinted below can urge unsuspecting parents to keep splurging on their children in the hope that their children’s prodigious talents may be awakened and bloom soon. The news item in 2004 reads:

N.Y. Philharmonic Director Praises Prodigy Education in S. Korea

SEOUL, Nov. 9 (Yonhap) -- The music director of the New York Philharmonic has praised South Korea's education of young musical talents. "Korea must have the most advanced program in the world for the education and nurturing of young talent in the field of classical music," Lorin Maazel said Oct. 19 in a note posted on his official Web site (www.maestromaazel.com).

¹⁴⁸ Seth (2002) 4-5.

¹⁴⁹ Ju Hyun, Hanguk Hakbumo ui Gyoyukyeol Bunseok Yeongu ("A Study of Educational Fever of Korean Parents") (Seoul, Korea: KEDI, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ Traditional prenatal care in Korea is similar to that of China, which begins as soon as a woman is discovered to be pregnant. The pregnant woman is instructed to be mindfully aware of every physical movement and be proper and correct in conducting her daily life, as this behavior, they believe influences the unborn child’s development. She is further directed to keep herself clean, remain erect when she sits, and avoid any strange food or unpleasant colors, odors and thoughts. She is never to sleep pillowing her head on an arm, but to spend her leisure time listening to poetry and the classics. For more details, see Ichisada Miyazaki, China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China, Trans. Conrad Schirokauer (New Haven, CT: Yale U Press, 1976): 13.

¹⁵¹ For more related discussions, see Fred J. Schwartz, “Music and Perinatal Stress Reduction,” Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health 12(1), Fall 1997; and Sallie Han, “The Baby in the Body: Pregnancy Practices and Kin and Person Making Experience in the United States,” Diss. U of Michigan, 2006.

The idea that early training through formal schooling determines children's future success is a powerful motivation for many parents. Even so, some parents, following Mark Twain's famous admonition, "never let school interfere with your education," bravely hold back their children from formal schooling and let the struggles and triumphs of daily life in the playground and at the park provide instruction for life.

Night Owl Club

Night Owl, *Olbbaemi* in Korean, refers to Korean students studying late at night. In general, Korean children spend far more time on their studies than American students.¹⁵² The following report by Thomas Ellinger, an American teacher who taught in Korea, was a typical daily schedule for most Korean students in 1990.¹⁵³

An average middle school student wakes up at 6 am and goes to school at 8 am. At 4:30, he or she goes home to eat dinner and study. From then, students whose parents can afford the tuition attend a second, private school to study math and English, then continue studying at home until about 1 am. These studies include watching an educational broadcast (KBC) on television, which provides more mathematics instruction. This schedule continues for six days a week, leaving Sundays for family and recreation.
(16)

A 17-year-old named Chong Min San is a typical *Olbbaemi*, night owl, in Korea. His daily schedule, featured in a news report, "Education Obsessed South Korea," serves

¹⁵² High school students in Korea reportedly spend 43 percent of their waking hours doing school work, compared to 23 percent in the United States. See Meery Lee and Reed Larson, "The Korean 'Examination Hell': Long Hours of Studying, Distress, and Depression," Journal of Youth and Adolescence 29.2 (2000): 249-71.

¹⁵³ Ellinger and Carlson (1990).

as a representative portrait for many school children in Korea today.¹⁵⁴ Chong gets up at seven in the morning to be at school by eight. His classes at school finish at four o'clock in the afternoon, but his day is far from over. He has to get on a bus not to return home but to head for a *hagwon*, a private educational institute, to supplement his studies. Since these private establishments are operating after school, study hours for children are stretched out leaving practically no time for other activities.

"It's a frustrating lifestyle, but I want to go to university, so there's nothing I can do about it," says a 16-year old Korean student named Yi Moon Song. Her typical schedule on weekdays reported by Time Asia further confirms many high school students in Korea are doing nothing but studying.¹⁵⁵ Her schedule looks like this:

6:50 a.m.	Wakes, gets dressed for school and eats some toast
7:40 a.m.	Walks to school
8:10 a.m.	Attends a 40-minute English comprehension lesson
8:50 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Classes
5:00 p.m.	Eats some rice cakes, starts homework
6:00 p.m.	Private math tutorial
8:00 p.m.	More homework
8:50 p.m.	Leaves home for cram school
9:20 p.m.	Attends English lesson at cram school
Midnight	Teacher drives her home
12:30 a.m.	Arrives home, takes a shower, does more homework, has a snack, plays computer games
2:00 a.m.	Time for sleep—for less than five hours

¹⁵⁴ Khang (2005).

¹⁵⁵ See Michael Elliott, "Doing Time: A Student's Day," Time Asia (2006). Time <http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/asian_education/cover.html>; and Hannah Beech, "School Daze" Time Asia 15 April 2002. 10 April 2005 <http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/asian_education/cover.html>.

What is interesting about the daily schedules of Chong and Yi in 2005 is that it is almost identical to the schedule reported by Ellinger, over a decade before in 1990. Astounding as it may be, the study habits of contemporary Korean students described above have not changed that much for 500 years, when one considers the experience of children in the *Joseon* dynasty.¹⁵⁶ In *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, Bruce Cumings, a historian and an expert of Korea at the University of Chicago, describes the role that education plays in the lives of Korean children.¹⁵⁷ Based on Confucian teachings where human relationships are saddled with an enormous debt of love and gratitude, studying hard and long is closely linked to filial virtues that are part of an enduring tradition in Korea.¹⁵⁸ Cumings writes:

In addition to filial virtues, the practical glue holding the (family) system together was education, the paradigmatic figure being the “true gentleman,” the virtuous and learned scholar-official who was equally adept at poetry and at statecraft. The primary route to bettering a family’s station in life was through education, a kind of socio-academic upward mobility; study therefore went on ceaselessly, morning, noon, and night; just as it does for Korean schoolchildren today, who may sleep as few as four hours a day. The eye of the needle through which every family hoped their children would pass was the civil service examination system. (59)

In the United States, high school students generally follow a core curriculum and then may choose electives. After school, they usually participate in sports, music and art

¹⁵⁶ It is sometimes referred to *Yi* Dynasty and its period covers from 1310 to 1910. The Romanization of “*Chosun*” is frequently used according to a modified McCune-Reischauer system.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, Updated Edition from 1997 ed. (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005) 59.

¹⁵⁸ Korea is described as the most “beholden” society. Starting with, first, one’s parents, everyone is beholden to one’s family, to the extended family, then clan, and by school ties, by region, branching out to the relationships varying by age and gender that cover other social class or standing. David I. Steinberg, *Stone Mirror: Reflections on contemporary Korea* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2002) 5-8.

activities, academic clubs, and so on. Korean students by contrast, have no elective subjects or extracurricular activities in which to participate. Most of them attend a private after school program that emphasizes supplemental lessons in mathematics, English, and the subjects that will be on the college entrance exam. As a result, they study many hours beyond the dictates of their school work. For example, it is around one o'clock in the morning when Chong finally comes home. However, he still has his assignments from school or *hagwon* to finish. He works through the night to get them done. He comments about many Korean students who have bad backs. He himself, however, clearly lacks sleep. From the pressure to excel and to prepare for the college entrance exam, many Korean students today are night owls who are burning the midnight oil. Not getting enough sleep night after night, they are exhausted during the day. Their study schedules take an immense toll on their physical and mental health.¹⁵⁹

Many epidemiological studies around the world have consistently found a correlation between poor sleep and obesity in both children and adults. In other words, people who sleep less are more likely to have weight problems. Worse yet, sleep deprivation, which leads to obesity, may be building an unwitting vulnerability to the long-term health effects of other diseases. According to the World Health Report 2002 by the World Health Organization (WHO), for example, about 58 percent of diabetes, 21 percent of heart disease and 8 to 42 percent of certain cancers are attributed to obesity.

¹⁵⁹ There is a saying commonly heard in Korea, "*Sa Dang, O Rak*," four pass, five fail. That is, if a high school senior sleeps four hours a night, he will make it to college, but if he sleeps five hours, he won't. This clearly summarizes the intensity and pressures for Korean adolescents face. See Frederic Halsey Rogers, "Four Pass, Five Fail": Multiple Ability Signals and Cross-Country Differences in Educational Effort," Diss. (U of California at Berkeley, 1996).

At present, alarmingly, two-thirds of Americans, and some one billion people worldwide, are overweight or clinically obese.¹⁶⁰ As an integral part of the package for maintaining good health, sleep is an essential activity for people, especially for growing children. Ideally, sleep should take up one-third of the day.¹⁶¹ Mounting evidence from scientific research on the brain also suggests good sleep facilitates learning by improving memory performance in humans.¹⁶² Ironically, a majority of Korean adolescents who need brain power and good health to sustain their studying are not getting enough sleep. Under these conditions of prolonged fatigue, it is easy for children to fall victim to emotional, psychological, and physical problems. In fact, an alarming rate of increase in school violence and teenage crimes and the increase in youth suicide are but a few signs of the troubles caused in part by sleep deprivation and extreme stress on children.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ A scientific study on sleep habits and people whose body mass index is more than 9,500 from across the United States, which was carried out for 10 years between 1982 and 1992, found that those between the ages of 32 and 49 who slept for five hours each night were 60% more likely to be obese than those who slept for seven or more. The result is consistent when controlling for other obvious factors connected with obesity, such as education, age, physical activity and smoking. A study done on the British children also showed that poor sleep in three-year-olds is an important factor, along with well-established risk factors such as having overweight parents or watching television for long periods, in predicting obesity at the age of seven. See Helen Pearson, "Sleep It Off," *Nature* 443.7109 (2006): 261-63.

¹⁶¹ American's daily sleep has reportedly dropped from between eight to nine hours in 1960 to less than seven hours today, a trend that has occurred in most industrialized nations. Although modern technology such as television, computers, and all-hour supermarkets are blamed to be the main culprit, widespread cavalier attitude among young people misconceiving sleep as a superfluous pastime that could be filled with fun and games or other activities may be partly responsible for the pandemic sleep deprivation and for our expanding bodies. Since emerging research points to strong links between poor sleep patterns and appetite, that is less sleep with more eating, sleeping half an hour extra a night may bring benefits not only individually but en masse in the arena of public health by reducing obesity.

¹⁶² G. Miller, "Neuroscience: Hunting for Meaning after Midnight," *Science* 315 (2007): 1360-63.

¹⁶³ Compared to high school students in the United States, Korean students experience a higher degree of clinical depression and more negative emotion in their daily activities. See Meery Lee and Reed Larson (2000); and Samhwan Ju (2002).

Findings by the world's leading neuroscientists link brain science to joyfulness in living and learning. It is important to remember that more than merely surviving the daily grind, joyous moments allow us to be creative and flourish, to live, feel, and learn well.¹⁶⁴ Lack of sleep, as well as boredom, fogs the brain with its own brand of inefficiency and causes loss of focus. Active ingredients for learning come from a potent combination of full attention, enthusiastic interest, and positive emotional intensity. This state of total involvement, called "flow," the term coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist frequently cited for his study of human happiness and creativity today, is regarded as being "inspired" and the joy in learning comes during these moments.¹⁶⁵

In 1990, when asked how far they expected to go in school, 86.3 percent of Korean children in grades four through six said they planned to go through four years of college, and 52.3 percent expected to go to graduate school.¹⁶⁶ In 2004, the rate of high school students in Korea entering college reached 84 percent. As remarkable as it may be, it is critical to assess the price for such an impressive achievement. In Korea, the entire education system is devoted to preparing students for a very few, but very important, tests, rather than providing for the joy of learning. Why? It is because every high school student wants to go to college. What then are the benefits of going to college? From an economic perspective, it is an easy question to answer. As long as college graduates have a wage premium over what high school graduates earn, earning differentials are the most convincing evidence of the value of a college education.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Goleman (2006) 268-70.

¹⁶⁵ See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Find Flow: Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life (NY: Basic Books, 1997).

¹⁶⁶ Ellinger and Carlson (1990).

Korean students consistently rank high on international tests.¹⁶⁸ Their performance reflects impressive efforts in education, but the price of excellence is, dramatic as it may be, commonly known as "examination hell." Every year in November, high school students all over Korea take college entrance examinations with a single goal in mind--to become eligible for admission to one of the few "best" colleges in Korea known as SYK--Seoul National University, Yonsei University, and Korea University.¹⁶⁹ The admission to one of these universities supposedly will lead to the best jobs and best marriage prospects.¹⁷⁰

Globalization intensifies economic competition and increasingly demands the acquisition of more formal education. Korean parents and students are worried about adequate preparation for both local and global competition. Competitiveness in college entrance examinations is a part of that pressure. In response, Koreans are increasingly relying on the additional instruction from profit making supplementary educational institutions.¹⁷¹ Often referred to as cram schools, these private establishments operate

¹⁶⁷ For example, those who have a bachelor's degree earned US\$41,738 in the United States, while high school graduates earned \$23,608, in constant dollars in 1997 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998).

¹⁶⁸ Linda Blackburne, "Young South Koreans Stay in and Stay On," Times Educational Supplement 8 July 1994: 6.

¹⁶⁹ The frenzy of parents who are trying to send their children to top universities is everywhere. A book titled "Harvard Girl," written by the parents of a Chinese student who is at Harvard, describes the meticulous regimen the girl took to get admitted to Harvard quickly. It is sold nearly a million and a half copies in China. See Ann Hubert, "For Chinese Schools, a Creative Spark," International Herald Tribune 1 April 2007. Written by two Korean-American authors, a popular book which emphasizes parental involvement reveals "17 secrets of Asian families" that can be used to create Ivy League bound straight A students in America. For more details, see Soo Kim Abboud and Jane Y. Kim, Top of the Class: How Asian Parents Raise High Achievers--and How You Can Too (NY: Berkley Publishing Group, 2005).

¹⁷⁰ Sunhwa Lee and Mary C. Brinton, "Elite Education and Social Capital: The Case of South Korea," Sociology of Education 69 (1996): 177-92.

¹⁷¹ Several studies on private tutoring all found that its effect on school performance was not significant. Many students and their parents, however, report that taking supplementary lessons reduces examination anxiety and provides psychological comfort. The sense of security may come from the

after school which makes children's studying hours stretch out to late in the evening, leaving virtually no time for other activities, including sleep. Stressed by financial burdens and worried about their children's education, many parents in Korea also fall victim to emotional, psychological, and physical problems. In the age of globalization, they are deeply involved in the diaspora of Korean children whose problems are part of the education crisis.¹⁷²

Since the 1970s, the Korean government has formulated numerous equalization policies to correct problems created by the examination fever, such as the deteriorating quality of education, the increased financial burden of private tutoring, and limited school choices. Although they have made a positive impact during the time of rapid industrialization in Korea by producing a large trained work force, such measures have mostly failed.¹⁷³ The elimination of high school entrance exams and instead assigning students to schools, for example, provided equal and expanded educational opportunities. On the other hand, school choice has become extremely restricted.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, in the process of applying and maintaining educational uniformity across all schools, government control over schools was fortified, producing an even larger bureaucracy that

knowledge that they are doing the same thing others are doing. Soja Hong Han, "Private Tutoring and Academic Performance among High School Students in Seoul, Korea." Diss. Boston U, 1992.

¹⁷² Ju (2002).

¹⁷³ Frustrated by the failure of government policies, but attracted by the fresh and more humane conception of alternative education, many Korean parents are seriously considering leaving public school. However, they are reluctant to make the transition because of fear that their children may be left behind in the race for college admission. Since the strength of alternative education is not in the preparation of exams, parents are naturally worried. At the end, children are remained in public school system and continued to suffer from its detrimental learning environment. For an interesting comparison, more discussions on the "fear of change" in American education, see Jon Wiles and J. Lundt, Leaving School: Finding Education (St. Augustine, FL: Matanzas Press, 2004) 183-84.

¹⁷⁴ For more details, see Ju-Ho Lee (2004).

has become extremely ineffective in responding to cultural and social demands within Korea and to the political and economic changes in the globalized world.

The Trapped Parenthood

Commonly known as "examination hell," this notorious sounding metaphor comes from the intense competition of the college entrance exam. The huge financial success of private education institutions indicates the prevalence of after school supplementary instruction to prepare for the exams. In 1990 alone, it was estimated that over eight billion dollars was spent on private education in South Korea. Now that figure has more than tripled, as some Korean parents spend one-third to half of their income on their children's education.¹⁷⁵ Reportedly, the high financial and emotional cost of children's education is one of the major reasons why young women in Korea are reluctant to have children.¹⁷⁶ The dropping birth rate today is causing serious social problems. The total fertility rate for Korea reached its population replacement level of 2.1 in 1983 and then fell to 1.7 in the late 1990s. This downward trend continued and in 2002, fertility in Korea hit the record low of 1.17, the lowest rate among OECD countries.¹⁷⁷ If low fertility continues, this demographic challenge will seriously undermine Korea's

¹⁷⁵ Khang (2003).

¹⁷⁶ One of the major reasons why many women choose to stay home in Korea is to help their children to prepare for college entrance exams. Since it costs so much financially, not to mention requiring an enormous amount of time and energy, young women simply decide not to have children. A survey conducted by the Korean Women's Development Institute supports the fact that the single biggest reason, 28 percent, for not having children is the high cost of children's education. For more details on the parent-child relationship in Korea related to birth rate decline, see Uichol Kim, et al., "Values of Children, Parent-Child Relationship, and Social Change in Korea: Indigenous, Cultural, and Psychological Analysis," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 54.3 (2005):338-54.

¹⁷⁷ Geun Tae Kim, "Korea: Quality Childcare," *OECD Observer*, March 2005.

economic vitality and result in a tremendous increase in the burden of supporting the elderly population.

The widespread practice of late night supplementary study at *Hagwon* is one of the stresses Korean parents are enduring for their children's education. They are deeply worried about the health of *Olbbaemi*, their night owl children, and their late night commute between school and home. As the parents wait for their children's safe return home late at night, their anxiety and lack of sleep also have a negative effect on their health.¹⁷⁸ Their financial stress is also huge, as reported in Motivating Students for Lifelong Learning by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2000. In 1997 Korean parents spent over 9.6 trillion won on private tutoring for their children, which equates to more than half of the education ministry's budget of 18.1 trillion for the year 1998. Since they believe school instruction is too poor in quality to prepare them for the college entrance exams, they assume these after school expenses in the hope of raising their children's test scores. Assuming this heavy financial burden indicates their loss of confidence in public schools and provides a plausible explanation for sending their children to study abroad, or even emigrating with them. Parents feeling trapped and stressed in ways described below seem peculiar to Korea.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ When the city of Seoul banned after school institutions to operate after 10 pm, these private educational institutions opened branches outside the city limits which created more hardship for both parents and students. It required a longer commute time for children and a higher cost to parents.

¹⁷⁹ "Sa Gyoyook Munje e Daehan Daechaek ("The Solutions for the Problems of Private Tutoring")," Seoul, Korea: KEDI, 2003.

Cuckoo Mommies

Cuckoo birds practice fascinating breeding strategies in parental care. They lay their eggs in the nest of other bird species. This practice, called “brood parasitism,” is a survival response to the process of natural selection. Facilitated by ecological changes, cuckoo birds migrated from the ancestral state of tropical forests to more open and seasonal habitat, which expanded vastly the size of their breeding-range, while altering their diet to include smaller prey. According to numerous scientific studies on their breeding strategies, they need only about half the energy to achieve the same reproductive success as a parental cuckoo.¹⁸⁰ The real price for this unusual and peculiar reproduction strategy employed by cuckoo birds, letting other birds do their work, is paid by the offspring of the unfortunate host which dies in one way or another while young cuckoo chicks are raised at their expense.

Parental care practiced by parasitic cuckoo birds may be clever, certainly, but it is also deceitful, selfish, and yet, interesting. Because of these colorful elements, cuckoo birds are one of the most popular characters appearing in literature and arts. Shakespeare, for example, illustrates cuckoo birds in his various works as intriguing creatures that are often replete with multiple meanings. The case in point is included in the bright song at the end of Love’s Labour’s Lost.¹⁸¹ He writes:

¹⁸⁰ Among 136 different cuckoo species, there are 53 species of so called “brood parasites” which lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species. The other 83 cuckoo species, although some may also try to lay eggs in the nest of birds of their own species, raise their young themselves. See O. Kruger and N.B. Davies, "The Evolution of Cuckoo Parasitism: A Comparative Analysis," The Royal Society 269 (2002):375-81.

¹⁸¹ William Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Comedy of Love's Labours's Lost (London: J.M Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1909).

When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocked all silver-white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight;
The cuckoo then, on every tree
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo: O Word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear! (124-25)

Although this song starts with much joy and pleasure expressed with cheerful colors of spring flowers, the cuckoo is implied as “an omen of adultery” that is unmistakable not only to an Elizabethan ear but also to our modern sentiment.¹⁸² According to an entry in the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, cuckoo is defined as “a silly or slightly crackbrained person.”¹⁸³ It is an interesting twist for cuckoo birds to be implied as “an idiot, a fool,” since their brooding practice suggests so much cleverness. This allusion has an origin in England that probably dates back to the early days when people were concerned about who was the lawful offspring of the king. As a matter of life or death, if the king really was the father, then naturally the heir to the throne was hereditarily legitimate. However, if an imposter had slipped into the queen’s bed, then the king became a “cuckold.” Whether the man is King or not, he who is deceived by his wife who lies with another man, must be a fool taunted by the cuckoo.¹⁸⁴

Who then are cuckoo mommies? Cuckoo mommy, *Bbeoggugi Eomma* in Korean, is not an adulterous or foolish woman, to follow the Shakespearean allegory, who is cheating on her spouse or being cheated on by an unfaithful husband. Rather, she

¹⁸² McLay, Catherine M., "The Dialogues of Spring and Winter: A Key to the Unity of Love's Labour's Lost," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 18.2 (Spring 1967): 119-27.

¹⁸³ “Cuckoo,” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. 2002.

¹⁸⁴ Lee Dye, "Cuckoos May Be Dim, but They Are Strategic," *ABC News* 20 April 2005.

symbolizes a determined mother who goes “far and beyond” to secure favorable conditions for her children’s education. An article in Time magazine with the headline, “International Delivery: A Very Junior Year Abroad,” presents a few examples of typical cuckoo mommies who will go “extra miles,” literally, for their children’s education.¹⁸⁵ The report describes an expecting mother, 8 ½ months pregnant, signing a waiver with the airline to make the 12-hour long arduous flight to Los Angeles. She is taking this risky trip to have her baby born in America. Her mission is twofold; to “deliver” the baby now and to “deliver” her child later from the “hellish” South Korean school system. Since children in Korea suffer physically and mentally from the stress of schooling, she is creating an option for her baby’s future by securing American citizenship, which is guaranteed to anyone who is born in the United States.

Although the exact number of these brave new world mothers is not known, The Korea Times reports an estimate of 7,000 in 2003, up more than 100 percent from a figure of 3,000 in 2001.¹⁸⁶ According to Dr. Chang Kyu Kim, an obstetrician practicing in an upscale neighborhood in Seoul, there are thousands of women going to the United States to deliver babies every year, thus confirming the estimated number. Argus Lee, CEO of Hana Medical Center in Los Angeles, further confirms the prevalence of cuckoo mommies, citing that there are at least five babies a month delivered from Korean visitors. The estimated number may well be underestimated, considering many expecting mothers are making a trip staying with other family members or relatives. The Asian Pacific Post, an English language Asian newspaper published in Vancouver, British

¹⁸⁵ Chisu Ko, "International Delivery: A Very Junior Year Abroad," Time 1 April 2006. 15 April 2002 <http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/asian_education/overseas.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Duk-kun Byun, "Education, Military Service Drive Women to Take US 'Birth Tours'," The Korea Times, 22 September 2003.

Columbia, also reports Canada as a preferred destination for many cuckoo mothers from Korea since Canada does not require a visa for visiting tourists.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, Canada, as well as other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and England, also automatically grants citizenship to babies born on their soil.

The parental strategy of cuckoo mommies is not to migrate, but to obtain the document that will serve as an insurance policy, since it will be valuable for their children 17 years later when their children have a better shot at getting into an American, or Canadian university. The price for this guarantee, however, is not cheap, as it costs up to \$20,000 or \$30,000. Like an expensive name brand designer product, this investment also has a name: “birth tours.” They are sold by many travel agencies as a complete travel package that includes “airport transfers, an apartment to live in before and after the delivery, medical treatment at clinics catering to Koreans, sightseeing and assistance in getting a birth certificate and passport for the newborn.”¹⁸⁸

In a democratic and free society like Korea, birth tours are open to anyone who has the necessary means. However, given the fact that a Korean male child who has a foreign citizenship will be exempted from mandatory 26-month military duty, the cuckoo mommies’ brood strategy has outraged many people in South Korea. Acquiring foreign citizenship for their babies may be clever, but they are frowned upon as “selfish,” and

¹⁸⁷ See "Passport Babies Delivered in B.C. For \$22,000," The Asian Pacific Post, 3 June 2004.

¹⁸⁸ Su-hyeon Wahn, a “birth tour” agent who operates his business in Canada, openly advertises and aggressively promotes his business, since he competes with at least five other companies in his area in Canada and more than ten establishments in Korea. Although a fee payment of \$20,000 in cash before the trip sounds costly, his sales pitch emphasizes an eventual huge saving they are making by thinking ahead to prepare their children’s future in 20 years and by going overseas to give birth. He argues that they are saving at least 150 million won (\$175,000 in Canadian dollars) for each child since if they were to send their children overseas to study or to local foreign schools, the cost would be about ten times as great. Ko (2002).

hotly criticized as “unpatriotic.” In a divided country where the cold war is at a standstill, those are stinging words. Exposed, but undaunted, cuckoo mommies defend themselves from being criticized as “unpatriotic.” They insist that they are not abandoning Korea, unlike other migrants who want passports or green cards to leave their home country altogether. Whatever their argument may be, the motivation for cuckoo mommies is not to escape Korea. Not just yet, as their life in Korea is obviously comfortable and they want to take all the available advantages in life for now. “Selfish?” That may be, but, one thing is clearly on their minds. That is, they all want their children to avoid Korean education “at any cost.”

Though not exactly the same as birthing cuckoo mothers, there is a similar pattern among professional working mothers in Korea who like the cuckoo bird, let others do their parental work.¹⁸⁹ Specifically, mothers who are living apart from their children or working mothers who let others to take care of their children are also labeled as *Bbeoggugi Eomma*, a cuckoo mother or a “selfish mother.” Schools in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, are generally considered to be superior to those in outlying areas. For the sake of children’s education, an increasing number of parents with jobs located outside Seoul, decide to live apart during weekdays so their children can still attend schools in Seoul. They are called “*Jumal Gajok*,” weekend-family, and “*Jumal Bubu*,” weekend couple, as they become a family or a couple again on the weekend. This arrangement is a fairly common practice for fathers. They commute coming home on the weekend while mothers stay with their children to look after them. For mothers, this kind

¹⁸⁹ “*Bbeoggugi Gajok*,” cuckoo families in Korean, has a completely different meaning as opposed to “*Bbeoggugi Eomma*” cuckoo mommies. Cuckoo family is a nickname for blended step families. This blended family structure is still a fairly new development but it is inevitably becoming a more common feature as the divorce rate has been steadily rising in Korea.

of lifestyle living away from their spouses and children is not as common, although it is increasingly visible for the number of working mothers whose jobs happen to be located outside of Seoul. If she decides to keep working outside of the home, she is the one who needs to travel. She comes home on the weekend and her children are cared for by their father, grandparents, other relatives, or by a hired adult in order to attend school in Seoul.

Although family structure has changed greatly in modern Korea, from extended multi generations living together to a single unit family, the ideas of motherhood still adhere to tradition. That is, the core of motherhood is based on “self-sacrifice,” and the selfish mother goes strongly against the general expectations that Korean society holds for mothers. Pursuing a career that a woman really wants and seeking satisfaction from working in a job, while being a mother, is not an easy idea to pursue, nor is it widely accepted. The notion of “self-fulfillment” is not a part of the motherhood design in Korea. Consequently, professional working mothers who live apart from their families, especially from their children, are nicknamed “selfish mothers,” not unlike cuckoo mommies.

Cuckoo mommies, despite their disparaging name, bring a measure of self-fulfillment and financial benefits to their families as well. Many professional women who are weekend commuters do not think that their independent lifestyle and commuting deters them from maintaining a close family relationship. On the contrary, because of the space between them during weekdays, their time together on weekends is viewed as more enjoyable. Furthermore, they don’t feel their life choice prevents them from achieving their goals. In fact, they become much more resourceful in using their time by organizing their tasks more efficiently. A working mother who was studied by Professor Song-Chul

Kim, an anthropologist at Inje University in Korea, admits how much she likes her life working and living away from her family. First of all, since she is living alone, she is “relieved from daily household chores” and can spend her time as “she wishes” and do “what she really wants.” She also claims that she is much more productive, without the distractions from her family.¹⁹⁰ As more young mothers in Korea opt to work outside the home, there will be more “selfish mothers” trying to balance their lives between jobs and responsibilities at home. Like the cuckoo birds, they inevitably have to leave their parental care to others.

In spite of the many advantages that weekend couples or weekend families may have, split families with separate living arrangements also have painful consequences. The spouse who lives alone may suffer from health problems as a result of poor eating habits. Alcohol abuse and ongoing fatigue from long commutes sometimes lead to an inability to concentrate at work. One of the more serious problems that weekend couples face is the erosion of their spousal relationship. Unintended infidelity facilitated by physical and emotional separation often endangers the very core of family relations. Furthermore, the long distance and infrequent face to face communications between family members jeopardize positive solutions to family problems. Unresolved issues, no matter how insignificant they may be, can snowball into more serious problems if not dealt with in a timely manner.

The traditional ideas of motherhood and family structure are rapidly changing in contemporary Korean society. New lifestyles and alternative living arrangements for working mothers and families such as “*Jumal Gajok*,” the weekend family, or

¹⁹⁰ Songchul Kim, "Weekend Couples' among Korean Professionals: An Ethnography of Living Apart on Weekdays," Korea Journal 41.4 (2001): 28-47.

“*Bbeoggugi Gajok*,” cuckoo family, are becoming more common. Rejecting them out of hand as dysfunctional and broken, however, misses the point of seeing them as a variant to the existing fabric of family life in post-industrial Korea. This unconventional family structure appears to be an unavoidable development and may be understood as a different conceptualization of the family.¹⁹¹

According to an OECD education report, Koreans spent the highest percentage of government revenue on education, 40 percent compared to an average of 11 percent for other OECD countries. In addition, private educational expenses paid by Korean parents amount to over a half of the country’s defense budget. Although the constitution guarantees children's right for education, parents are weighed down by the burden of heavy education expenses.¹⁹² To mark the 60th anniversary of liberation from the Japanese occupation and the 85th anniversary of its establishment, the Chosun Ilbo, a major daily newspaper in Korea, conducted a special poll by telephoning 1,027 mothers across the nation to find out what Korean mothers think of themselves and the lives around them. For the views of Korean mothers, one thing is clear. They overwhelmingly feel motherhood is most difficult. The biggest reason is the heavy burden of educating their children. Some 81.8 percent of those who responded, regardless of region, age group, or employment status, worry about their children's education, specifically getting their children into good schools. A substantial number of mothers, 26.2 percent, indicated that the biggest burden for educating their children is private tutoring costs.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Songchul Kim (2001) 44-45.

¹⁹² Sungyoung Kang, "Gyoyuk Nanmin Ei Nara ("The Nation of Educational Refugees")," Kyounghyang Shinmoon, September 25, 2003:6.

¹⁹³ "Korean Mothers - Intriguing Mix of Old and New Views," Chosun-Ilbo, April 28, 2005.

The fact that the financial problems, emotional stress, and the psychological sufferings of Korean parents, relating to children's education, is widespread, poses the burning question: as a new kind of motherhood, is the selfish cuckoo mommy a product of the stressful environment of Korean education or the impact of Western values, in particular individualism, in modern Korean society?

Penguin Daddies

The term, "*Oe kirogi*," lonely wild goose, refers to fathers who are left alone in Korea while their families live abroad. Although most wild geese families are affluent upper middle class professionals, more and more families in Korea that are not financially well-off are also choosing the option of living separately for the sake of their children's education. Most lonely geese fathers are in their 40s and 50s and many of them are financially stretched thin. Some of the lonely wild geese daddies are penguin daddies. Because penguins are birds that cannot fly, penguin daddies earned their nickname from the fact that they cannot afford to fly, that is, to buy an occasional plane ticket to visit their families abroad. Gordon Snell, a well known Irish author for children's books, describes penguins rather humorously in his book of poems, Cruncher Sparrow's Flying School, by treating penguins' inability to fly with deep compassion and understanding.¹⁹⁴ He writes:

...
She gave a whistle, shrill and loud,
And then, to laughter from the crowd,
The Penguins in a waddling group
Came forward like a circus troupe.
They look, thought Cruncher, more or less

¹⁹⁴ Gordon Snell, Cruncher Sparrow's Flying School (Dublin, Ireland: Poolbeg Press, Ltd., 1991).

Like clowns who'd put on evening dress.
Their feet stuck out, their wings were flapping,
As though their own show they were clapping.
With bulging chests, and toes spread wide,
They shuffled to the water-side.
Poor Cruncher now was feeling sad--
The outlook was extremely bad
For teaching birds like these to fly--
But even so, he'd have a try.
... (52)

Although quite delightful in its narration, Cruncher Sparrow's failure to teach penguins to fly resembles the rather hopeless and sad state of some Korean *Oe kirogi* daddies, lonely wild geese fathers. Penguin daddies in Korea are weighed down heavily by financial burden, as well as loneliness from spousal and family separation. Hee-yeon Geum, an *Oe kirogis* in Korea, has been living by himself for four years, apart from his family who live in the United States. While he stays back in South Korea to work, his two teenage children are across the ocean more than 6,000 miles away attending school while his wife is taking care of their children.

Geum, head of the Political Science Department at Seoul City University, confesses how much he misses his family but he wants his children to have an American education because he rejects the rigidly conformist education in Korea.¹⁹⁵ There are many other penguin daddies in Korea who share Geum's disappointment with Korean education and want their children to study abroad to learn another foreign language, particularly English. Although they believe families should stay together, they have made the same decision to remain behind because as the heads of family, they feel

¹⁹⁵ "Janyeo Gyoyuk wihae Oiroum Gamsuhaneun Hanguk ui 'Kirogi Abbadeul' ("Kirogi Daddies in Korea Endure Their Loneliness for the Sake of Children's Education")," *Voice of America News*. 2 October 2006. 17 January 2007. <<http://www.voanews.com/Korean/archive/2006-10/2006-10-02-voa11.cfm>>.

obligated to support the future happiness of the family, as measured by their children's educational success.¹⁹⁶ For the sake of family and to finance the best education for their children, wild geese fathers endure loneliness living alone, some as long as ten years, if not longer. In the end the price for lonely wild geese fathers symbolizing their marital love and sacrifice for their mates and offspring may be too high.

A doctoral study on wild geese fathers by Yang-suk Choi at Yonsei University in Seoul reports there are no exact figures but she estimates between 30,000 to 50,000 wild geese daddies in South Korea.¹⁹⁷ She says the number is increasing, as the parents even with modest resources are joining the bandwagon.¹⁹⁸ The trend troubles her since the physical and psychological effects of being wild geese fathers are signs of serious social problems. Geum knows at first hand the detrimental effects of being a wild geese daddy. After his family had been in the United States for a while, he began to feel irrelevant. The fact that his wife and his children were doing just fine without him made him wonder about his role as the head of the household. He felt insignificant to the family and worthy only as the supplier of money. Many penguin daddies suffer similar health problems. Geum describes how as a wild goose dad he was diagnosed with a stress induced panic disorder. His doctor's prescription to cure his illness was to have his family come back

¹⁹⁶ For more discussions on the economic, social and cultural demands on the role of Korean fathers, see Byungchul Ahn, "The College Admission and the Family - Centering on the Role of the Father," Korea Journal 35.2 (1995): 74-88.

¹⁹⁷ Yang Suk Choi (2005).

¹⁹⁸ Some South East Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines have become popular destinations. Because the distance is closer and also living expenses are much cheaper compared to North America or England so less affluent families can afford to be wild geese families. Meanwhile, children can still learn to speak English as they are attending international schools where teaching is conducted in English.

to Korea to live with him. His family came back to help him to recover, but after several months into his recovery, they planned to return to the United States.

The story of Jeong-seob Bak, who made a difficult but necessary decision to stop being a wild geese daddy, has a happy ending.¹⁹⁹ He is now reunited with his family who had been living in Australia for two years, leaving him to struggle with his lonely life. He missed his family so terribly and became so fragile psychologically that tears would well up seeing happy families on the street or on TV. He also developed an after work drinking habit. At the bar he met many lonely wild geese fathers who were drinking alone and with whom he was happy to share the loneliness. At first, his wife was reluctant to move back to Korea, worrying about education of their two boys who are 13 and 12 years old. Since they were excelling at school, she thought they might not want to go back to a Korean school. To her surprise, the boys were eager to return so they could live with their father. In fact, the younger son happily confessed that he had been upset because in sketching his mom's face on the paper, he couldn't add his daddy's face next to hers. He simply couldn't remember his face well enough to draw.

Many children of wild geese daddies are not aware of what their fathers are going through. It is easy for them to take their father's sacrifice for granted. After all, it is their parents who made the decision to separate the family and to have the children study abroad. Furthermore, as many children enter teenage years, they begin to grow apart from their father. It is a well known fact that people who are engaged in emotionally warm social activities are generally happier and physically healthier. For elderly people, for example, those who are surrounded by loving family and supportive friends display

¹⁹⁹ Hye-jin Song, "'Gajok' Doichajeun Kirogi Abba ('A Wild Goose Daddy Reunites with His Family')," *Chosun-Ilbo* 10 May 2007. 12 May 2007.
<http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2007/05/10/2007051000082.html>.

better cognitive abilities than those who are isolated. Apparently, however, loneliness has little or nothing to do with how much time people actually spend by themselves, or how many social contacts they have in a given day. Instead, it is the lack of intimate and friendly contacts that are linked to loneliness. The quality of human interactions matter much more than the sheer number of acquaintances or contacts people may have. In general, the lonelier a person feels, the poorer immune and cardiovascular functions tend to be, which correlates with their general health.²⁰⁰ For all wild geese daddies and Korean parents who are willing to do anything and “at any cost” for their children’s education, it is time to seriously rethink what the price of “at any cost” really is.

Chapter Summary

Educational ideas and systems play an important role in shaping the economic and social environment. In this chapter, the lives of Korean families, both children and parents, are illustrated to understand the transforming effect of education fever on Korean society. Examining popular social terms such as squirrel tribe, night owl club, cuckoo mothers, and penguin fathers, indicates how Korea’s overheated zeal for education is shaping the lives of families, that is, how Korean children have lost their childhood and why parents are feeling trapped, which in turn resulted the exodus of children from Korea. The Korean struggle to define and achieve educational goals is of consequence to all interested in education. In general, education is a good thing. It improves one's lot and en masse, it brings tremendous benefits to the society. A study by Alice Wolf, an

²⁰⁰ For more on loneliness and related health issues, see Sarah Pressman et al., “Loneliness, Social Network size, and Immune Response to Influenza Vaccination in College Freshmen,” Health Psychology, 24 (2005): 297-306.

education specialist, demands our attention because, in contrast to our common belief, her educational cost benefit analysis indicates that educational benefits for individuals don't necessarily add up as a positive return to society as a whole.²⁰¹ Her point resonates truthfully in the case of Korea. Focusing too much on university entrance examinations, for example, tends to reduce education to test preparation. The cost of private tutoring also creates an enormous financial burden on families. As a result, young children are leaving Korea for a better education elsewhere. And for the sake of children's education, Korean families are split apart across the ocean. In the next chapter, the history of modern education in Korea is examined to find out why there is so little room for creativity in Korean education and how the inflexibility created by the emphasis on uniformity of standards, and the misuse of education for political purposes by successive governments for political and economic purposes, have been major factors limiting the development of creativity in the school curriculum.

²⁰¹ Alison Wolf, Does Education Matter? Myths About Education and Economic Growth (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2002).

CHAPTER 4

THE MAKINGS OF KOREAN EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

Korean education is often credited as a main engine for Korea's remarkable economic transformation, which has been dubbed the "miracle on the Han River."²⁰² The expansion of Korea's educational system, the "other Korean miracle," is as remarkable as Korea's economic growth. In the first growth spurt between 1945 and 1960, Korean schools trained and prepared the workforce not only in the skills required for fast growing industries but also in discipline and work ethic, a kind of moral education, needed for a poor nation to develop.²⁰³ During that short span of 15 years, despite the fact that the lives of many Korean people were destroyed and disrupted from the Korea War (1950-1953) and its aftermath, high school enrollment grew eight times while tertiary education grew ten times. Korea's educational expansion and its accomplishments, when compared with other OECD countries, continue to be impressive. Since the 1970s, the number of universities has more than doubled from 152 to 358, while the number of college students has increased more than 15 times from 190,000 to 2,950,000.²⁰⁴ Barry McGaw, Director for Education at OECD, attributes Korea's extraordinary success to "the propensity of

²⁰² Cumings (2005) 300.

²⁰³ For more details on economic development in Korea, see Amsden (1989).

²⁰⁴ Seth (2002) 81-84.

Koreans to remain in formal education,” reflecting high commitment by individual students and their families as well as society’s larger commitment to education.²⁰⁵ Education statistics and other economic indicators compiled by various international agencies all indicate Korea’s tremendous growth in literacy and improved schooling in general. Korea’s upward leap is further apparent when measured by the rate of high school education completion, which was well below western European countries in the 1960s. Today, Korea has reached the highest educational level in the world. With a high school graduation rate of 97%, it is higher than most European countries and Japan.²⁰⁶ As for tertiary education, Korea placed 19th in the 1960s worldwide, but jumped to fifth place in the 1990s.²⁰⁷ In 2004, 84 percent of high school students proceeded on to college.²⁰⁸ That ranks Korea the first in the world, surpassing the United States where 65 percent of high school students advance to college.²⁰⁹

In terms of measured academic performance, Korean students also stand out among students in the OECD countries. They consistently earn high marks on the tests given by the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA

²⁰⁵ McGaw (2005): 1.

²⁰⁶ For example, although the rate of high school graduation in the United Kingdom also has improved reaching 71%, up from 64% in the early 1990s, it is still lower than that of Korea. "South Korea's Education Success," BBC News, 13 September 2005. 15 September 2005 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/education/4240668.htm>>

²⁰⁷ In the absence of reliable time series data on the percentage of the populations in OECD countries completing secondary education, these figures are derived from comparing the percentage of 55-64 years-olds and 25-34 year-olds in the current population who have completed upper secondary education.

²⁰⁸ "Korean Found to Have Exemplary Education System." Arirang News 13 April 2005. 15 April 2005 <<http://www.arirangtv.com/english/news/>>.

²⁰⁹ Niall Ferguson, "U.S. still Leads in Higher Education but Can't Rest on laurels," The Standard-Times 1 November 2005: L2.

tests assess the performance of 15-year-olds in school for reading literacy, mathematics, science, and a growing range of cross-curricular competencies such as problem solving. In general, Korean students rank high in all categories. Although the performance of Korean students is remarkable, the scores can be deceiving and don't give an entirely accurate picture.

Test scores are most frequently used for measuring educational achievements. However, their value is increasingly debated. A closer look at educational circumstances in Korea presents a curiously ambiguous reality. First, and most significant, students in Korea spend more time studying than students in any other country in the world. They spend more time both in school and out of school, doing homework and attending cram schools for private tutoring. Yet Korean students on PISA tests score no better than, for example, Finnish students. Students in Finland maintain constantly high achievements as well but, in fact, they spend only about 40 percent of the time Korean students spend in studying. Second, parents in Korea devote a large part of their income paying for their children's education. Statistically Korea spends the highest percentage of GDP for education, more than that of the United States. The following statement, a report given by Barry McGaw at OECD, gives a more accurate picture.²¹⁰ He writes,

Korea is not, by OECD standards, a wealthy country. Korea's GDP per capita of USD 15,916, in equivalent purchasing power parity, ranks it 24th among the 30 OECD countries. Yet no OECD country spends such a high percentage of its GDP on education as Korea's 8.2 percent. Public funding in Korea is only 4.8 percent of GDP, ranking it 14th on this measure. What pushes Korea to the top rank in overall spending on educational institutions is the 3.4 percent of GDP that comes from private sources. Among the others, only the US at 2.3 percent from private sources exceeds 1.5 percent. (4)

²¹⁰ McGaw (2005).

As astonishing as these figures may be, in reality they underreport true cost. The Korean educational expenditure given above does not include an exorbitant amount spent on private tutoring that is entirely borne by Korean parents. This high level of national spending on education clearly indicates Korea's total commitment to education. But, why are Koreans spending so much money and energy on education? And why are Korean students studying so relentlessly? In order to find answers to these questions, it is necessary to examine the Korean educational system in historical perspective. In this chapter, three historical factors from China, Japan, and the United States that have influenced modern Korean education will be examined.

Chinese Influence

According to Huston Smith, an American philosopher and professor of religion, Confucius, the 5th century BC Chinese philosopher, was a moral teacher. As the "first teacher" and founder of a great ethical moral system of Chinese civilization, the teachings of Confucius continue to play a critical role in influencing every aspect of Korean society.²¹¹ As a philosophical foundation rather than a religion of worship as some people believe, Confucian values were introduced in Korea more than two thousand years ago. The powerful impact of this great tradition is in creating and justifying the kind of relations in society that would promote harmony and peace.²¹² Frank Gibney, an

²¹¹ D. Adams and E. E. Gottlieb, Education and Social Change in Korea (NY: Garland Publishing, 1993).

²¹² Huston Smith, The World's Religions (NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991).

American expert on East Asian and Asia-Pacific affairs,²¹³ grounds the economic success in Korea—as well as all other East Asian countries such as Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and, People’s Republic of China today—in Confucian culture.²¹⁴ He writes,

The Sinic peoples in particular--that is, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Koreans--subscribe to an ethic which emphasizes mutual loyalties. They have almost religious regard for scholarship and learning. The acquisition of knowledge is prized as an end in itself. In contrast to the universal and absolute values of ancient Western tradition, in the Confucian world wisdom, virtue, and authority were seen to intersect. Through the centuries its peoples have displayed an instinctive respect for the official, the person in authority, which makes the bureaucrat’s role far more important than in most Western cultures. (5)

With a long history spanning back two millennia, Chinese influence is undeniably profound in Korean society. The Confucian impact on early education and on the formation of the examination system can be found in ancient texts in Korean history.

The Confucian Classics and Korean Education

According to *Samguk-sagi*, “Historical Record of the Three Kingdoms,” and *Samguk-yusa*, “Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms,”²¹⁵ Confucian education in

²¹³ Frank Gibney (1924-2006) was the late founder and president of the Pacific Basin Institute at Pomona College. He started his career serving as a lieutenant in U.S. Naval Intelligence during World War II, and a reporter covering the Korean War. He spent most of his life attempting to bridge the gap between both sides of the Pacific Basin, America and the countries of East Asia, by helping to understand each other’s cultures. Gibney was a keynote speaker at the Mansfield Conference on “Imagining a Global Community,” in October 1995. He died on April 9, 2006 in Santa Barbara, California.

²¹⁴ The 1997-98 financial crisis of East Asia countries has somewhat subdued the celebration of the East Asian countries as miracle economies, as it has brought great hardship to working people throughout the region. See P. Burkett and M. Hart-Landsberg, *Development, Crisis and Class Struggle: Learning from Japan and East Asia* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

²¹⁵ *Samguk-sagi* (Historical Record of the Three Kingdoms) is a text based on historical facts written in 1145 by a scholar named Kim Busik. *Samguk-yusa* (Legends and History of the Three

Korea had started already in the Three Kingdoms period (57 BC - AD 668).²¹⁶ All three kingdoms of *Koguryo*, which is located in the north, *Paeche*, occupying the southwest, and *Silla* in the southeastern Korean peninsula, established their own schools. Although Buddhist influence was at its height in this period, the teachings and texts of the Confucian classics were the core curriculum, following the same practice as in China.

In the seventh century after the unification of the peninsula by the Kingdom of *Silla* (668-918), an elite educational system known as *Hwarang*, “Flowers of Youth,” was instituted. The establishment was exclusively for the youth of the hereditary aristocracy, providing them with instruction in the Chinese classics, the military arts, and also physical training, with a particular emphasis on instilling the sense of comradeship among warriors.²¹⁷ Korean education at this time is characterized as a mix of Buddhism and Confucianism, as reflected in *Hwarang-do* (the Way of Youthful Warrior). This warrior oath emphasized five requirements: “loyalty to the king, filial love toward one’s parents, fidelity in friendship, bravery in battle, and chivalry in warfare (no wanton killing).”²¹⁸ The ethical principles of the *Samurai* class of Japan²¹⁹ during the *Heian*

Kingdoms), on the other hand, was written a century later in 1285 by a monk named Iryon (1206-1289). It is a compiled text of unknown sources that covers folktales, legends, and stories about people from earlier times in Korea’s ancient history. In this thirteenth-century collection, the beginning of the Korean nation is recorded. In the third millennium B.C., a king named *Dangun*, born of a union between the son of the divine creator and a female bear, founded Old *Joseon*. The name *Joseon*, translated as “morning calm,” was used again by the last dynasty of Yi (1392-1910), as the *Joseon* dynasty, and remains still as the name of North Korea, *Joseon Minjuju ui Inmin Gonghwaguk* (the Democratic People’s Republic of *Joseon*). As no written sources support the creation story of Korea by *Dangun*, it remains as a myth. Both are written in classical Chinese, since Korea then didn’t have its own writing system.

²¹⁶ Jeong Kyu Lee, *Historic Factors Influencing Korean Higher Education* (Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Co., 2000) 4-5.

²¹⁷ Fairbank, et al. (1973) 277-92.

²¹⁸ Cumings (2005) 34.

period (794-1185)²²⁰ are very similar to the military value system of *Hwarang*. In both emphasis was placed on educating young men in the arts of war and training them to adhere to the warrior codes of “unquestioning loyalty to one’s lord, fierce defense of one’s own status and honor, and strict fulfillment of all obligations.”²²¹ Codified as *Bushidō*, the Way of the Warrior, during the feudal period in Japanese history, it was developed under the guidelines of the Neo-Confucian teachings that emerged in 11th century China with its stern emphasis on obligation and accountability.²²² While the warrior tradition in Japan helped to establish a strong military force eventually to withstand Western power in the seventeenth century and Western aggression in the nineteenth century, Korea’s great military tradition, *Hwarang*, did not sustain into later centuries. As a result, with no military system strong enough to defend herself, Korea became the closest target for Japan’s expansionist ambition, first in the 1590s and three centuries later in the 1890s, beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95.

Throughout the *Koryo* period (918-1392), education became the means for building a new political structure to govern the reunified Korea. In 958, the government

²¹⁹ Because their training extends beyond the discipline of swordsmanship to the worlds of art and literature, “Samurai” is referred to as “gentlemen warrior.” Robert Murphey, *A History of Asia*, 5th ed. (NY: Pearson Longman, 2006) 175.

²²⁰ The *Nara* period (710-794) is considered as the high time for the Chinese cultural system of government that prevailed in Japan. The city of *Nara* is an almost exact replica of Chang An, the capital then of Tang China. *Nara* contrasts with the *Heian* period when Japan’s return to a more native culture and pattern was made by relocating its capital to *Heian*, present day Kyoto.

²²¹ Fairbank, et al. (1973) 411.

²²² James McClain, a professor of history at Brown University, lends new light on the common belief about the lofty ideals of the samurai. Although under *Bushido*, the samurai stressed bravery, indifference to pain and exhaustion, and willingness to die with loyalty to one’s lord, many samurai did not always live up to those rules, and their faithfulness only lasted so long as the lord protected them and presented them with rewards or favors. Their bravery tested on the battlefield also confirms otherwise, as “some broke and ran when the tide of battle turned against them.” The fact that samurai sold their services to the highest bidder or even changed sides in the middle of battle further confirms that not all samurai followed the codes prescribed in *Bushido*, but pursued their own self-interests. James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 1st ed. (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002): 78.

instituted an examination system, following the Chinese model, to prepare students for civil service and to promote Confucian learning and moral training. The examinations were comprised of three categories. The first was to test the aspirant's knowledge of Chinese literature and ability to compose Chinese literary works in the form of poetry and essays. The second area of examination was concerned with mastery of the Chinese classics, in particular the Confucian annals and commentaries. The third category included all other miscellaneous areas of law, mathematics, calligraphy, medicine, divination, geomancy, astronomy, and engineering.²²³ Considering the rigidity of *Koryo* society, the examination system was clearly a tool to introduce some measure of meritocracy and social mobility in a system of government that was otherwise dominated by the aristocratic class.

Although the Confucian classics were mainly taught in schools, it is important to note that the teachings of Buddhism were also widely studied during this period and wielded significant influence throughout society in the *Koryo* period. Buddhism, an Indian religion, paved moral and spiritual path ways, guiding the people of *Koryo* in a way that balanced and coexisted side by side with the reality-based and more practical Confucianism.²²⁴ By the late 14th century, both the central government of *Koryo* and its state religion of Buddhism gradually declined. When the Yi dynasty (1392-1910) was founded, Confucian principles and ethics became the dominant guiding light for political and social institutions. In the process, Korea perfected certain Chinese patterns of

²²³ Jeong Kyu Lee, Korean Higher Education: A Confucian Perspective, Korean Studies Series No. 22 (Seoul: Jimoondan International, 2002) 32.

²²⁴ The eventual decline of Buddhism in Korea after the *Koryo* period is due in part to the loss of vigor due to mixing with indigenous shamanistic religion from the earlier period in Korean history and with Taoist philosophy. In fact, the practice of geomancy, a Taoist idea, was a powerful factor that profoundly influenced the choice of the building sites of Buddhist monasteries. Fairbank, et al. (1973) 294-95.

Confucianism, more so even than China itself as some scholars claim, and became known as “a model Confucian society.”²²⁵ Neo-Confucianism, for example, strengthened by incorporating into Confucianism key elements of Buddhism and Daoism, emerged even more powerfully in shaping Korean society. It dominated even more the core curriculum within the examination system, which in turn defined more sharply Korean governance and the political order. In other words, for government to be run by men of merit, the examination system became the means for creating the “bureaucratic” and “administrative” model that has been admired throughout pre-modern East Asia.²²⁶

Meritocracy through the Examination System

Education during the *Joseon* period was viewed as a means to prepare young aristocratic men for future public service. The purpose of the examination system, which became virtually the only route for men of talent to enter high government office, was to establish meritocracy as the basis for governance. Confucian concepts and the texts which made up the core curriculum for the exams justified a rigid social hierarchy that gave successful candidates status and power. Ever since the civil examination system was adopted in 958, upward social mobility and prestige through examination success largely defined Korean politics and society. Success in the exams established not only a

²²⁵ One of the reasons Korea adopted Confucianism so fully, incorporating its value system and social practices in the early *Yi* dynasty, is Korea’s relative homogeneity and small size. Compared to China, which was an empire consisting of many different tribes within a vast territory, Korea was a uniformly homogeneous country, making it easily manageable for the spread of Confucian ideas. Fairbank, et al. (1973) 301.

²²⁶ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture (Albany, NY: State U of NY Press, 1998) 37.

name for the candidate but also power and prestige for his family. The effect was to place a high premium on education and schooling throughout Korean society.

Because the Chinese model of education prevailed so long in Korea, introducing these aspects of traditional China's "examination hell" creates the historical context for understanding the powerful role that family relations and the centrality of the group have played in Korean education, down to today. According to China's lengthy and well-documented experience, the competition for the civil service examinations started early, so early that it began before birth and in fact, in a way, prior to the baby's conception. A familiar etching of the five-character phrase, "Five Sons Pass the Examinations," shows a set of copper mirrors worn on the backs of young women, items they were sent away with upon getting married. These mirrors are clear evidence reflecting the women's deeply imbedded yearning desire to bear five successful sons in ancient Chinese society.

Prenatal care was an important part of the process, moving from the period of pre-conception, during the time when women were simply wishing for a son, to the phase that requires pregnant woman to follow strict prescriptions for "right conduct." It was believed that both her physical and mental movement would determine the attributes of the unborn child.²²⁷ Paying attention and carefully adhering to behavioral formulas was supposed to bring "an unusually gifted boy."²²⁸

Professor Ichisada Miyazaki, the long-time Chair of Oriental History at Kyoto University in Japan, explains how the process began for young boys, starting to write the

²²⁷ Miyazaki (1976) 13.

²²⁸ Daughters were generally thought to be undesirable and were regarded as "liabilities" to the family. Girls had no chance of bringing any benefits to the family, as they were ineligible to take the examinations to become officials. Rather, they incurred a heavy burden to the family by requiring dowries at the time of their marriage.

strokes of characters with a brush at the age of three. He then was introduced to the “Primer of One Thousand Characters,” which is a poem of two hundred and fifty lines. Each line consists of four-characters with each character in this total of one thousand character text being different, none to be repeated.²²⁹ Formally structured education began at about seven years of age. Boys from prosperous families and officials were taught at home by a privately hired tutor in a pleasant environment conducive for studying, often in a room located away from any distraction. Boys from less affluent families took lessons at a temple or private schools in the village with eight or nine other children.

Teachers were “former officials who had lost their positions, or old scholars who had repeatedly failed the examinations, as the years slipped by.”²³⁰ Besides learning the Confucian classics at school, literary works reinforced proper behavior and right conduct for boys, training them to maintain appropriate relationships with their elders, superiors, officials, and even members of their own family according to their social standing. Regarded as downright undesirable and lower grade, other areas of study which modern sensibilities see as professional subjects such as medicine, pharmacy, law, including foreign languages, astronomy, mathematics, and science and technology, were left to merchants, artisans or working class people. Preparing for the exams required an enormous amount of effort. Even though the core curriculum was limited to the Confucian classics and related literary works, the texts were voluminous.²³¹

²²⁹ Miyazaki (1976) 14.

²³⁰ Miyazaki (1976) 15.

²³¹ Confucian classical texts refer to the Four Books and Five Classics (四書五經) written in classical Chinese. The four books consist of Analects, Mencius, Great Learning, and Doctrine of the Mean.

Table 1. The Number of Characters in the Classics.²³²

English Title	Chinese Title	# of characters
Analects ²³³	論語 Lún Yǔ	11,705
Mencius ²³⁴	孟子 Mèng Zǐ;	34,685
Book of Rites ²³⁵	禮記 Lǐjì	99,010
Book of Changes ²³⁶	易經 Yì Jīng	24,107
Book of Documents ²³⁷	書經 Shūjīng	25,700
Book of Poetry ²³⁸	詩經 Shī Jīng	39,234
Tso Chuan ²³⁹	左傳 Zuo Zhuan	196,845
Total		431,286

while the five Classics include Book of Poetry, Book of History, Book of Divination, and The Zuo Zhuan Commentary (that includes Spring and Autumn Annals), and Record of Rituals.

²³² Miyazaki (1976) 16.

²³³ The Analects were a collection of Confucius' sayings and dialogues with his disciples. Speculated to be written some time during the Spring and Autumn Period (722 BCE – 481 BCE) and the Warring States Period (ca. 479 BCE-221 BCE), it is the canonical work of Confucianism which influenced Chinese and East Asian thought and is highly valued even today.

²³⁴ The Mencius is a book written by Mencius, who was a philosopher sage and also one of the principal interpreters of Confucianism, about his conversations with kings of the time. As one of Four Books in the Confucian Classics, it served as the core of orthodox Confucian thought. In contrast to Confucius's Analects, which is written in a short and self-contained style, the Mencius is written in extensive prose, consisting of long dialogues and arguments. Mencius believed in the goodness of human nature and thought bad moral character was caused by the lack of positive influence in the society. Thus he emphasized the importance of education as a critical cultivating influence.

²³⁵ The Book of Rites constitutes two works of the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Golden Mean. Both are considered to be a part of another collection known as the "Four Books." The Great Learning consists of nine commentaries by Zeng Zi, one of Confucius' disciples, and is attributed as the gateway of learning to Confucius. The Doctrine of the Golden Mean prescribes how to gain perfect virtue focusing on the idea of the Dao or "way." To know what is the right way is to follow in the steps of the heaven-mandated rulers, as Heaven directs to the perfect way, that is, to Confucian virtue.

²³⁶ The Book of Changes which is the oldest of the Chinese classic texts describes an ancient system of cosmology and philosophy. Regarded as a system of divination in the West, it centers on the ideas of the dynamic balance of opposites and the inevitability of change. This ancient wisdom and philosophy teach the evolution of events as a process.

²³⁷ The Book of Documents is a compilation of documentary records related to events in the ancient history of China.

²³⁸ Sometimes called the Book of Songs, the Book of Poetry is the earliest existing collection of 305 Chinese poems, some possibly written as early as 1,000 BC. Its compilation is traditionally ascribed to Confucius.

²³⁹ The Tso Chuan commentary is the earliest Chinese work of narrative history which covers the period from 722 BCE to 468 BCE and is one of the most important sources for understanding the history of the Spring and Autumn period.

Aspiring students had to memorize much of this material in order to compose poems and essays that would reveal their command and correct interpretation of the content, detail, and meaning of the canon. The figures in Table 1 sum up the total number of characters in the Confucian classics, from which one can speculate how much learning was required for children to prepare for the civil service examination. Although the same characters are used in different texts, and there are many repeats in the total number of 431,286 characters, still, the task of learning them all by heart required immense patience and sheer determination. Suppose a boy entered school at the age of eight and completed his education at fifteen, he would have to learn about two hundred characters every day, a heavy load. The psychological stress, not to mention financial burden, of preparing for the examination was heavy not only for the students who took the exams but also for their families.

How was it possible to inspire young boys who were impulsive and responsive to more immediate gratifications to sit still quietly and study endlessly? They certainly needed some serious cheerleading to inspire them to get on with their studies. And the encouragements did come, from their parents, teachers, government officials, and people from every corner of society. Young boys were constantly urged to study hard and become “a great man” by passing examinations. With promises of a wonderful life of wealth and fame, they were pushed and nudged to study harder and harder. In ancient times as well as in modern day, many stories and poems have been written on the theme, “if you study while young, you will get ahead,” supplying endless motivation for young boys not to give up studying. A poem composed by the Sung emperor Chen-tsung is an excellent example illustrating how young boys were coaxed to study when their days

were tedious and dull from memorizing and reciting the Confucian classics from early morning to late evening. The poem goes like this:

To enrich your family, no need to buy good land:
Books hold a thousand measures of grain.
For an easy life, no need to build a mansion:
In books are found houses of gold.
Going out, be not vexed at the absence of followers:
In books, carriages and horses form a crowd,
Marrying, be not vexed by lack of a good go-between:
In books there are girls with faces of jade.
A boy who wants to become a somebody
Devotes himself to the classics, faces the window, and
reads. (17)

In later years, the promise of material riches and especially beautiful girls with “faces of jade” suggested in this poem could be seen as poorly chosen motivation. But they seemed to work. The temptations of money and pretty girls were appealing incentives for boys then, and they still are today. They may come as a terribly delayed gratification, but the fact that the rewards are tremendous explains the capacity to endure “examination hell.”

The deeply embedded promise of these rewards in East Asian cultures helps to explain the ability of young Korean students to persevere in study and endure the pressures of examinations. In modern Korea, admission to one of the top rated universities in general guarantees a life of prosperity, as it improves the chances for getting a good job and better prospects for finding a wife from a wealthy family.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Ironically, the promise of the Emperor Chen-tsung from the Sung dynasty is fulfilled in modern Korea, as young women from wealthy families are reportedly the major patients at the clinics for cosmetic surgeries making it possible for beauty and wealth to be delivered in the same package. See Chisu Ko, "Peer Pressure Plastics," *Time* 29 July 2002. 1 August 2002. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,332098,00.html>>.

As long as formal education in Korea remains as a means for obtaining prestigious degrees and advancement in social status, most Korean families will continue to struggle spending a great deal of time and energy, and more money, to send their children to school to prepare for the college entrance examination.

Self and Family in Confucian Society

Under the Confucian ethical system, the “self” is defined in relationship to the group such as family, clan, village, and nation, to which one belongs. Consequently, the Western definition of “person” and “self” is inadequate to explain how the image of self captures the realities of shame and face in the Confucian tradition.²⁴¹ In that tradition, the “self” or “person” and “personhood” is not defined in the isolation, development, or fulfillment of an isolated individual. Rather it is determined by one’s role in society and the esteem and the relationship with others in the community. It is rooted in a kind of “selflessness” and “self-abnegation” that favors the strengthening of group status and power.²⁴² Nonetheless, Chinese definitions of the “self” should not be necessarily interpreted as denying oneself or suggesting that personhood is of no importance or that individual interests are of no consequence. More accurately, the assumption in the “selfless self” suggests one’s interests on behalf of the well-being of the group and

²⁴¹ The lack of individual human rights in the Confucian countries has become a contentious issue in contemporary American East Asian relations. The concept of “selflessness” is one of the oldest ideas found in Taoism, as well as in Buddhism, and especially in Confucianism. This concept of the “self” is fundamentally different from the Western concepts of freedom and the individual that we associate with the Enlightenment.

²⁴² Hall and Ames (1998) 23-28.

actions are motivated primarily by the needs of group and are consciously chosen to benefit the larger good of society.²⁴³

Just how this works is eloquently, if disparagingly, explained by R. Randall Edwards who teaches Chinese law at Columbia University.²⁴⁴ He writes:

Most Chinese view society as an organic whole or seamless web. Strands in a web must all be of a certain length, diameter, and consistency, and must all be fitted together in accordance with a preordained pattern.... The hope is that each individual will function as properly as a cog in an ever more efficient social machine.

In Korea, preparing for the examinations in pre-modern times, and today as well, involves the entire family, making the education of children the highest priority. Clark Sorensen, an anthropologist at the University of Washington, writes of the “corporate family type,” in which the head of a Korean family operates from the top. As members in the family are hierarchically organized and their roles are clearly assigned in creating a successful educational environment, parental pressure is much more intense—and more efficacious—than it is, say, in the United States.²⁴⁵ In The Pacific Century: America and Asia in a Changing World, Frank Gibney reiterates the prevalence of group orientation emphasized in Confucian tradition in East Asia.²⁴⁶ He writes:

²⁴³ The Confucian model that is based on the idea of collectivism may be a powerful justification for why the notion of individualism, which is not to be confused with “individuality” in the West, is not as important as in China as well as all other Confucian societies.

²⁴⁴ R. Randel Edwards, "Civil and Social Rights: Theory and Practice in Chinese Law Today," Human Rights in Contemporary China, eds. R. Randel Edwards, et al., (NY: Columbia U Press, 1986).

²⁴⁵ Clark W. Sorensen, "Success and Education in South Korea," Comparative Education Review 38.No. 1, Special Issue on Schooling and Learning in Children's Lives (1994): 10-35.

²⁴⁶ Frank Gibney, The Pacific Century: American and Asia in a Changing World (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).

Asians, particularly those raised in the Confucian tradition, are strongly group-oriented. They have shown a willingness to respect authority, however oppressive, as long as family or other societal units are left alone. Traditionally unsteeped in Western concerns for individual human rights and win-or-lose legal justice, they have a relatively high political boiling point. They will work long and hard for the prospect of distant future gain. It is not for nothing that they have been called Confucian capitalists. (4)

Although all East Asian countries within the Confucian sphere of influence share its great tradition, claims for Korea as “a model Confucian society” did not come without a price. Both the strengths and failings of social practices based on Confucian ideas emerged in more extreme form in Korea, more so even than in China. For example, although the phenomenon of modern day “examination hell” is also observed in Japan,²⁴⁷ Japan, unlike Korea, has not experienced the exodus of children leaving the country. There may have been wild geese families, cuckoo mommies, or penguin daddies in Japan and in China, but the numbers are not substantial enough to create the kinds of social issues faced in Korea today. Indeed, in pre-modern China, there is a literature that describes the focus and intensity of the civil service examination system as a kind of “examination hell.” As the country that created the civil service examination system, China’s experience extends to the closing years of the Ching dynasty (1644-1912). Faced with the relentless pressures from the West, China summarily abolished the system in 1904 and began implementing Western curricula and Western style education. For almost two millennia, however, China maintained this labyrinthine system of supplying high talent for the governing bureaucracy.

²⁴⁷ Seth (2002) 4.

Just as the rewards of a successful candidate were tremendous, by the same token, the plights of those who failed the examination were also immense. The shame and lost face created embarrassment for the failed individual as well as the whole family or entire clan. This working of the examination system illustrates the dynamic of the tight interlocking of human relationships within the responsibility system that we associate with East Asian cultures. At the same time it helps to explain the high cost of success and the burden of failure that endure within modern Korea and the stress and frustration that lead to the diaspora and outward migration of Korean children today.

Korean parents, and Chinese and Japanese as well, are willing to bear the burden because of the payback that could be expected among generations within the family. These relationships and expectations can be seen as a kind of reciprocal dependency. Sorensen (1994) suggests the following explanation for how the “corporate system” of the Korean family operated between generations. He writes:

Korean parents expect to be cared for by their children in old age, and filial piety (*hyo*)--the obligation to respect and obey parents while young, care for them in old age, give them a good funeral, and worship them after death--is the core of Korean ethics. Though modernization has brought modifications to traditional ethics, the obligation to care for parents in old age is still written into the civil code and falls especially heavily on the eldest son, because it is he who is supposed to co-reside with his parents and continue the family line. Since parents expect to be economically and socially dependent on their eldest son in their old age, and since the status not simply of their son but of themselves and of the whole family line depends on this son’s educational success, parents are disinclined to allow considerations of self-actualization and personal inclination to interfere with children’s obligation to get ahead. (25)

The hardship Korean parents were willing to bear can be explained through the dynamics of the “corporate system” of the family. Their willingness to make heavy financial investments and other sacrifices to assist their children’s education has been motivated by plans and expectations for their old age.

The phenomenon of “examination hell” in Korea as an organized hardship for young children will unfortunately continue to be around for a long time to come. Known as a strong advocate for socialism and women’s rights, but a vocal critic of formal education, the famed Irish writer George Bernard Shaw considered school a horrible place for children, “crueler than a prison.”²⁴⁸ Prison in Shaw’s view might even be better because in prison one is not “forced to read books written by the wardens and governor.”²⁴⁹ His humorous, yet deeply poignant, comment makes us rethink the problems posed by the excessive Confucian emphasis on schooling. If children were not forced to read, and worse, to memorize all those Confucian classics, more than 200 characters in a day, would there still be the “examination hell” in contemporary Korea? One wonders.

Japanese Influence

The beginning of modern education in Korea coincided with the end of the "Hermit Kingdom," as Korea had become known in the modern West. The waves of Western culture and modernization were forced onto Korea as the *Yi* dynasty was being

²⁴⁸ George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), a Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1925, was one of the most prolific writers of his time. Born in Dublin, Ireland, his literary works as playwright, novelist, essayist, and critic include more than sixty plays. He is one of the most quoted social observers of his time, as his comments are not only honest but witty and deeply entertaining, reflecting his razor-sharp intellect.

²⁴⁹ John Daintith, et al. The Macmillan Dictionary of Quotations (Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, Inc., 2000): 179.

eclipsed by the forces of imperialism and modernization. It was a time of great changes in the world and also in Korea. With Japan's economic and military rise through the rapid industrialization in the Meiji period (1868-1912), Korea was awakened out of its cultural isolation and hibernation by foreign war vessels, first American and then Japanese. It was a military assault, carried out by vastly superior guns and cannons while bringing with it a whole new way of looking at the world. Throughout history, Korea's relationship with Japan has been much more ambivalent than that with China. As a tributary state and a direct recipient of China's largesse, Korea's relations with the outside world throughout much of the *Joeseon* period were controlled largely by China. But the association with Japan, particularly after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, became especially bitter and painful. Korea was outright annexed as a colony by Japan in 1910.

Korea as a Japanese Colony

The depth of mistrust and conflict between Japan and Korea, notwithstanding much that they have in common linguistically and culturally, poses thorny and difficult but necessary questions. Cumings (2005) offers one succinct explanation. He writes:

Colonialism is often thought to have created new nations where none existed before, drawn new boundaries and brought diverse tribes and people together, out of a welter of geographic units divided along ethnic, racial, religious, or tribal lines. But, as we have seen, all of this existed in Korea for centuries before 1910. Korea had ethnic and linguistic unity and long-recognized national boundaries well before the peoples of Europe attained them. Furthermore, by virtue of their relative proximity to China, Koreans had always felt superior to Japan at best, or equal at worst. (140-41)

Considering the shared Confucian cultural affinity between Japan and Korea, Japanese colonial rulers were convinced after 1910 that their model for public education in Korea would aid in the absorption and assimilation of the Korean people as colonial subjects. Before the Japanese colonial government instituted the Educational Ordinance of 1911, which outlined the system of education for Korea, Korean was still the language of instruction, although Japanese had already been offered in some schools. However, after the implementation of the ordinance, Japanese replaced Korean as the language of instruction, while Korean in the later years of the colonial period was allowed to be spoken only at home and the Korean language press practically eliminated.²⁵⁰ The educational policies instituted by the Japanese colonial government have left a bitter legacy among Koreans.

As colonial subjects, Koreans were expected to take Japanese names.²⁵¹ For centuries in Korea filial piety, *hyo* in Korean, served as “the core of all virtues.” The most important relationship within it was between father and son. Family names, therefore, came to substantiate the very existence of the family and its unbroken lineage between generations. The cultural practice of preferring sons insured that sons would carry the family name inherited from their fathers. Losing their names was an unthinkable tragedy. Losing one’s name meant losing one’s identity, not only for the individual, but for the entire family, bringing shame ultimately to the ancestors.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Seung-won Yi, Hakgyo ui Tansaeng ("The Birth of School") (Seoul: Humanist, 2005) 100.

²⁵¹ Fairbank, et. al. (1973) 881.

²⁵² The importance of relationships between ancestors and their descendants is clearly evident in the elaborate and complicated process of ancestor worship rituals in Korean tradition. For more details, see Dawnhee Yim, Josang Jerye ("The Rituals of Ancestor Worship in Korea"), (Seoul: Daewonsa Publishing Co., Ltd., 1990).

Many Koreans refused to give up their names as Korean remained the language of the home. Most children would use their Japanese names only for public activity such as attending schools. Helie Lee, a Korean-American writer, writes in her book, Still Life with Rice, about the life of her grandmother who was born during the Japanese occupation.²⁵³ She describes her grandmother's experience and the deeply felt anger which was suppressed in the hearts of many Koreans. She writes:

For months, I had dreamt vividly about tigers and not flowers; I was certain this meant my unborn child was a son. When the delivery time came, however, a head strong girl emerged from between my legs.

...

And all on her own she seized the air of life with no enticement or coaxing. I knew then that this daughter of mine, Tanaka, Katsuko, whom we secretly named Lee Dukhwa, was a true survivor. The name Grand Flower suited her perfectly. She would grow and blossom even under the malevolent rule of our Japanese oppressors.”
(105)

Richard E. Kim, another Korean-American, whose popular books have in some reviews earned for him the title “Pearl Buck of Korea,” also recounts his boyhood experience under the Japanese rule. In his autobiographical book, Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood, Kim describes a poignant sadness he felt in losing his name in childhood.²⁵⁴ One day at school, he was sent home because he didn't have a new Japanese name. Upon his return home, his father took him to the police station where new names had to be registered. For that undertaking, his father dressed in traditional

²⁵³ Helie Lee, Still Life with Rice (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

²⁵⁴ Richard E. Kim, Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood (Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 1988).

Korean clothes and wore a black armband as if he were attending a funeral. Arriving at the police station, they found more than a mile long line of Koreans all standing in silence in the freezing cold snow, many of them also wearing black armbands. When their turn came after a long wait outside, a detective at the station presented the boy's father a list of Japanese names for Koreans to pick and choose. The boy's father, however, brought a new name with him, "Iwamoto." In Japanese, the name means "Iwa," rock, and "Moto," root, base, or foundation. From that moment, "Rock-Foundation" was the boy's new name, a Japanese "family" name. Kim recounts this moment of defeat, resignation, but also, defiance, and resurrection:

"What does our new name mean, sir?" I ask my father
when we are down the hill and on the main street.
"Foundation of Rock," he says, shielding my face from the
bitter-cold snow with his hand.
"...on this rock I will build my church..."
I do not understand him.

"It is from the Bible," he says. (106)

The experience of Taiwanese people under Japanese colonial rule was very different, Korea's having been more cruel and intense. The living standards for Koreans were extremely low, as economic conditions were fraught with exploitative measures imposed by the colonial government. Under the pressure of Japan's war effort, Korean agriculture continued to deteriorate. The per capita rice consumption in Korea had declined 45 percent by the 1930s as half the rice crop was shipped to Japan. In addition, Japanese large-scale landlordism increased several times during the 30 year span between 1910 and 1940, leaving most Koreans in even worse condition than before and turning

more peasants into desperately poor tenants.²⁵⁵ It was extremely hard for Koreans to get professional jobs during this time. A majority of teachers, for example, were recruited from Japan to teach Korean children in school. Japanese teachers were rigorously trained and empowered to assert their authority and administrative power. To display their bestowed power and authority, Japanese teachers wore swords in their classes, as prescribed in the Japanese educational regulations.²⁵⁶

Establishment of Public Education

Our understanding of the Japanese impact on Korean education can begin with an appreciation for the model of modern Japanese public education that was designed by the Meiji leaders in 1871. By establishing a Ministry of Education, a nationwide compulsory system was set up to realize the goals of Meiji reform expressed in the slogan, “Civilization and Enlightenment,” a term coined by Fukuzawa Yukichi, the most prominent educator and tireless propagator of Western knowledge in Meiji Japan.²⁵⁷ Universal education in Japan was promoted by Meiji leaders such as Ito Hirobumi who believed that educated citizens could play an important role in creating a strong state. Others, such as Iwakura Tomomi and Okubo Toshimichi, emphasized the role that public education would play in training future national leaders in their common effort to meet

²⁵⁵ Fairbank, et. al. (1973) 880.

²⁵⁶ Seth (2002) 20.

²⁵⁷ Born into an impoverished samurai family from Kyushu, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) became one of the most respected teachers and influential thinkers in the Meiji era of Japan. He was an educator, publicist, writer, translator, political theorist and founder of Keio University, one of Japan’s most prestigious universities, and one of Japan’s leading training centers for young men interested in Western scholarship.

the challenge of Western imperialism.²⁵⁸ The Japanese occupation in Korea introduced into Korea the Japanese model of education that laid the foundations for the comprehensive national system of modern education in Korea.²⁵⁹

To the Japanese colonial government, the establishment of a public education system in the colonial state of Korea was an efficient way to train and politically subjugate the people of Korea, the colonized subject. In order to administer its colony, Japan set up layers of bureaucracy and policies under which new industries were built, labor was controlled and political dissidents suppressed.²⁶⁰ However onerous Japanese colonialism may have been for the Korean people before the end of World War II, this “bureaucratic-authoritarian” legacy served Korea well after the war into the 1970s overcoming the weakness at that time of Korean policies of export-oriented industrialization.²⁶¹

Japanese colonial policy made no provision to support teacher training for Koreans. The Seoul Teachers’ School, the country’s only modern teachers’ college, was itself shut down.²⁶² Although Japan brought mass education to Korea, the purpose of elementary education for Koreans was to enhance their productivity and as a subjected people of inferior quality, to serve the empire. The welfare of Koreans was further lowered with limited access to higher education, which paralleled the limited

²⁵⁸ McClain (2002) 260-67.

²⁵⁹ Seth, (2002) 18-19.

²⁶⁰ For a study presenting two interconnecting issues of exploitation vs. modernization and alienation vs. participation, see Moon Jong Hong, "Japanese Colonial Education Policy in Korea (Colonial Policy)," Harvard U., 1992.

²⁶¹ Cumings (2005)150.

²⁶² Seth (2002) 21.

opportunities for Koreans to work in any administrative area and in any teaching jobs. As a result, the bureaucracy and the schools for Koreans remained dominated by Japanese, which made extremely difficult the training of any political leaders for the future independence of Korea. All political activities were prohibited and newspapers and all publications were tightly controlled during this period.²⁶³

Wartime policies after 1938 redirected the curriculum even more away from literary to less prestigious technical education and vocational training which further limited access to higher education. Korean students were also drafted to participate in military duties by this time and sent off to fight in the Asia Pacific war in China and Southeast Asia.²⁶⁴ The shortage of trained professionals was especially problematic after the Japanese surrender and Korean liberation in 1945. Korea was unable to fill the bureaucratic vacuum created by the massive exodus of Japanese officials. The lack of trained professionals and capable Koreans created much confusion and chaos in postwar Korean society, which further jeopardized nation building and the creation of a stable political order, thus anticipating the civil war of the late 1940s and later the Korean War in 1950.

Designed to serve colonial policy, the Japanese system of public education never intended to provide for Koreans the opportunity to become able, confident, and trained professionals. Rather it was to control colonized people as obedient and loyal subjects to fulfill the needs of the empire. Hence, Japan's policy of operating two educational

²⁶³ Fairbank, et. al. (1973) 880.

²⁶⁴ By this time, all student organizations were required to be involved in extracurricular activities to support the war effort such as collecting metal to make weapons and attending patriotic rallies. See Seth (2002) 28.

systems. One was for Japanese residents in Korea as imperial citizens. The other was for Koreans as colonial subjects, understandably creating great anger and frustration among Koreans and serving, somewhat ironically as the impetus in the mass pursuit of education in the post-1945 period.²⁶⁵ According to Cumings (2005), Japanese colonialism in Korea can be explained in terms of “substitution.” The effect was ominous. He writes:

Instead of creation, the Japanese engaged in substitution after 1910: exchanging a Japanese ruling elite for the Korean *yangban* scholar-officials, most of whom were either co-opted or dismissed; instituting colonial imperative coordination for the old central state administration; exchanging Japanese modern education for the Confucian classics; building Japanese capital and expertise in place of the incipient Korean versions, Japanese talent for Korean talent; eventually even replacing the Korean language with the Japanese. Koreans never thanked the Japanese for these substitutions, did not credit Japan with their creation, and instead saw Japan as snatching away the ancient regime, Korea’s sovereignty and independence, its indigenous if incipient modernization, and above all, its national dignity. (141)

Although the Japanese colonial educational system had an open door policy providing access for all Koreans to elementary education, entry beyond that level was severely limited. Under Korea’s “subordinate status in the empire,” the duration of schooling available to Koreans students was shorter and its curriculum inferior. By contrast Japanese citizens living in Korea received six years of compulsory primary education, exactly the same as in Japan, followed by five years of secondary or technical school and then three years of college preparatory or higher technical school. Elementary education for Koreans, however, was limited to only four years of “common school.” Korean students could continue with a four-year “higher common school” or “industrial school” after completing “common school.” In total, fourteen years of schooling was

²⁶⁵ Seth (2002) 19-26.

available to Japanese, while education for Koreans was limited to eight years, except for the three-year “special higher school,” designed to train civil servants to work in the colonial administration.²⁶⁶

Reinforcing the Examination System

The educational experience of Koreans under Japanese colonial administration reinforced some of the qualities that we associate with “examination hell” in various ways. Although colonial education emphasized discipline in learning, class instruction was given largely through rote memorization and choral recitation. Koreans were accustomed to this style of instruction, as they had equated learning with the vigorous memorization of Chinese characters and the ability to quote from classical texts.²⁶⁷ Although limited opportunities for higher education frustrated Koreans, the Japanese colonial government developed an impressive level of professionalism and improved the quality of teachers by rigorously enforcing a high standard. Several other aspects of Japanese education remained as positive qualities in Korean education. For example, “concern for ritual performance, neat uniforms, lining up smartly at the morning assembly, and performing student duties, such as keeping classrooms and lavatories clean” had become characteristics of Japanese education. Today, these practices are still

²⁶⁶ Seth (2002): 20.

²⁶⁷ Why Confucianism is embodied in Korean society so profoundly and formal education is stressed in Korea even more than in China can be explained in part by the role of Chinese language. Since the Confucian classics and all other subject matter of education in Korea are written in the foreign language of Chinese, Koreans are required to study harder and be even more disciplined than Chinese. Furthermore, concentrating and sincerely devoting oneself to the study of Confucian texts perhaps helped Koreans to develop a very literal understanding of its principles. As a result, studying Confucian texts became the all-absorbing intellectual interest of the ruling class and Koreans developed an almost zealous devotion to Confucian rituals. Fairbank, et al. (1973): 301.

carried out in Korean schools, promoting the school as a “model of discipline, orderliness, and cleanliness,” qualities associated with moral education.²⁶⁸

Class bonding, another important element in Korean education today, was also reinforced by Japanese colonial education. This closely tied and caring friendship formed among students carries with it lifelong affection and mutual support and helps to explain why fewer students drop out of school or fall behind in class. In terms of organizational aspects, following the educational practices under Japanese colonialism, all Korean schools operate under a uniform system of mass education, following the same curriculum and using the same textbooks with teachers who are trained in the same educational standards that are tightly regulated and controlled by the Ministry of Education.²⁶⁹

Finally, one of the most critical elements Korean education inherited from the colonial experience is the reliance on competitive entrance examination to progress to the next level of education. From elementary school on, students have had to take tests to enter middle school, high school, and the university. Encountering relentless educational pressure is not new to Koreans, since their experience of “examination hell” during the *Joseon* period was notoriously severe. But from the Japanese colonial experience, education became more centralized, while creating a multi-track system with an open door policy that provided equal access for all Koreans to public education. The effect, however, was to deepen the level of competition and intensify the pressure for educational advancement.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Seth (2002) 29.

²⁶⁹ Seth (2002) 30.

American Influence

American influence on the birth of modern education in Korea is no less substantial and extensive. It began with Christian missionaries, most of whom were American Presbyterians and Methodists, who arrived soon after the opening of Korea to Western contact in 1882.²⁷¹ Besides training a Korean pastorate, they founded hospitals and schools, notably schools for women.²⁷² It is important to recognize that the contributions American missionaries made in the late 19th and very early 20th centuries started a few decades before the impact of the Japanese colonial government. The influence of the American occupation in Korea after liberation in 1945 is especially significant in the development of education in postwar Korea but the idea of equal opportunity in education remains one of the most enduring American influences on Korea's modern educational development.

²⁷⁰ Seth (2002) 31.

²⁷¹ The beginnings of Protestant influence in Korea came when the Korean Catholic community was suffering in the nineteenth century. According to Donald N. Clark, a historian at Trinity University in San Antonio, and the son of missionaries in Seoul who spent his childhood in Korea, Protestant missions to Korea began in 1884. In his book, Christianity in Modern Korea, Professor Clark describes a significant role played by Dr. Horace N. Allen who was reassigned from China to his post in the Presbyterian Mission in Korea. However, to gain access to Korea, Dr. Allen came not as a missionary but as physician to the U.S. Legation in Seoul. A short-lived palace coup in December 1884 gave him the chance to heal the wounds of a Korean prince, thereby earning the gratitude of the king, and he was permitted to start a clinic. As a result, Dr. Allen won toleration for religious missionary work in Seoul and in 1885 his missionary work began in earnest with Horace Underwood and Henry Appenzeller, Presbyterian and Methodist, respectively. Clark (1986) 6.

²⁷² Even today, schools built by American missionaries in Korea are considered to be the best and finest. The offspring of Presbyterian Minister Underwood, who are still active in Korea today, founded *Yonsei* University, one of the most desirable universities in Korea. Similarly, the children of Methodist Minister Appenzeller created *Baejae* Boys' High School and *Ewha* Women's University, again two highly respected schools in Korea.

Christian Missionary Legacies

At the very beginning, widespread fear created by dreadful rumors about foreigners, scared Koreans away from American missionaries. Tales of Korean children kidnapped by odd-looking strangers to harvest children's hearts and eyes for medical use terrified Koreans and made them avoid any contact with missionaries, including their schools.²⁷³ Henry Appenzeller, a Methodist minister, for example, was able to recruit, after a long and hard try, only two students, Gyeum-na Yi and Yeong-pil Go.²⁷⁴ By the end of the year, he was able to increase the number to twenty students. Attracting girls to school, however, was an even harder task.

In 1886, Mary Scranton, the wife of a Methodist minister, established Ewha Academy (*Ihwa Hakdang*), the first school for girls in Korea. Mrs. Scranton's grand dream of spreading Christianity training girls to become modern women in Christian principles met with difficulties in finding girls for her school. One day after a long wait, she finally got a gentle knock on her school's front door. When the door was opened, a single woman stood outside the entry. Her full name is not known but recorded only as the wife of Kim (*Kimssi Buin*), though she was mistress to one of the officials in the government. Her decision to become a student at Mrs. Scranton's school, however, was not motivated by her pure desire to learn. Rather, it was a plan premeditated by her lover, scheming for a promotion in the Korean bureaucracy. His design was to have his mistress learn English and become a translator for the Queen. He was hoping to gain a favor through this connection in the royal court and to secure a higher position for

²⁷³ Children were also told that lepers take children's liver to treat their own disease. It was an effective scare tactic to keep away children from horrid sick people. Yi (2005) 18.

²⁷⁴ Seung-won Yi (2005) 21-22.

himself.²⁷⁵ Whatever the reason was, on that day, a young mistress cracked open the locked door of tradition that had denied education to Korean women for centuries. Astonishingly, the history of women's modern education in Korea was begun with a single student.

Christian missionaries, through their active involvement in education, stimulated the spread of Korean nationalism. Out of their honest efforts to build modern education, they also contributed to rising nationalism in Korea and created a political environment that by comparison was quite different from Taiwan. After 1895 when Taiwan was brought under Japanese control, Taiwan as a rather fresh Chinese province was spared the effects of the rising nationalist movement that was sweeping through the Chinese mainland. In contrast, nationalists were already active among elite Koreans, making the Korean experience much more intense and violent. Like much of Asia between 1895 and 1910, Korea in fact was at a breaking point, struggling between "traditional xenophobia and modern nationalism." The year 1910 was indeed a critical year in Korean history, as that was the year Japan took control of the Korean peninsula. By then, Korean Christians had risen to an impressive number of some 200,000 as the result of the labors of about 50 foreign Catholic priests and more than 300 Protestant missionaries.²⁷⁶ One reason for the rapid expansion of churches in Korea was that their affiliated schools were opened to the children of commoners. The contrast with Korea's pre-modern education set up exclusively for the aristocratic class, *Yangban*, can hardly be overemphasized.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Seung-won Yi (2005) 23.

²⁷⁶ Fairbank, et. al. (1973) 878-79.

²⁷⁷ Clark(1986) 7.

The phenomenon of “examination hell” did not exist in the early days of modern education. In fact, entrance examinations were not implemented because the challenge then was simply to find enough students to teach. Early schools actually provided notebooks, pencils and lunch for students to encourage them to come to school. As it was even more difficult to recruit female students, Mary Scranton, the founder of *Ehwa* Academy for girls, used to bring in sick girls who were left to die outside the city gate with small pox. They were treated and stayed on as her students.²⁷⁸ It was a period when students were a rare commodity and therefore anybody who was willing to learn was accepted in school. Young students in contemporary Korea can only dream of and look upon with great envy.

Private schools in Korea, especially those founded by foreign missionaries nourished patriotic discontent nudging Korean students to become ardent nationalists. After World War I (1914-1918), Christian liberal attitudes and “Wilsonian ideas”²⁷⁹ on the self-determination of peoples had a powerful influence on world opinion and in Korea found expression in the inspiring great March First Movement, known as the *Samil Undong* of 1919.²⁸⁰ This nationwide unarmed demonstration organized by Korean

²⁷⁸ Yi (2005) 37.

²⁷⁹ Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), the 28th President of the United States, made his famous “Fourteen Points,” which assured statehood for formerly oppressed nations and an equitable peace after World War I (1914-1918). With the idea of a League of Nations, incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles (1919), Wilson’s intent was to help preserve territorial integrity and political independence among large and small nations alike. However, Wilsonian ideas were applied only in Europe as petitions by Koreans, and also by Chinese, were completely ignored and Japan’s territorial claims were granted. To Koreans, it is forever ironic that Wilson was awarded the 1919 Nobel Peace Prize for his peacemaking efforts.

²⁸⁰ The March First Movement, *Samil Undong* in Korean, literally means “Three-One Movement as it occurred on 1 March 1919. It was one of the earliest organized unarmed mass protests for Korean independence during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Japanese official reports on casualties from the event counted 553 killed and over 12,000 arrested. However, Korean nationalist sources placed the total at 7,500 killed and 45,000 arrested. Cumings (2005) 155.

nationalists inspired the very famous Chinese May Fourth movement, launched in Beijing a few weeks later in a similar atmosphere, although with very different results.²⁸¹

Women, especially those who were educated in modern schools established by American Christian missionaries, also took part in the independence movement against the Japanese occupation demonstrating no less vigor, determination, and courage than men.²⁸²

The Christian missionaries were largely sympathetic to the Korean plight under Japanese imperialism and assisted in Korea's modernization, following Western models. The Japanese government, not surprisingly, saw Christianity and Western liberalism as subversive to their colonial interests. In 1911, Korean Christians, accused of conspiring to assassinate the Japanese governor-general, were arrested. The connections between Christianity, modern education and Korean nationalism in the early 20th century anticipates and helps to explain the remarkable popularity of Christianity in Korea today.²⁸³ A big decline in the number of private schools between 1910-1920, from 823 to 279 for mission schools and from 1,300 to 410 for non-mission private schools, was clearly the result of the tightly regulated school policy of the Japanese colonial government.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ The May Fourth Movement was anti-imperialist and anti-Confucian, both a cultural and political movement. It began on May 4, 1919 in China and marked the upsurge of Chinese nationalism and the re-evaluation of Chinese cultural institutions, mainly Confucianism. The movement grew out of dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles settlement and was inspired by the March First Movement in Korea. Fairbank, et al. (1973) 880.

²⁸² As a high school student at Ehwa Girls' Academy, Gwan-soon Yoo (1902–1920) participated in the March First Movement. She was involved in organizing more protests and was arrested by the Japanese military police. Because of her political activities, she was jailed and died in jail while being tortured, and her entire family was also executed. She is considered Korea's Joan of Arc and is revered as a national heroine.

²⁸³ Fairbank, et al. (1973) 879.

²⁸⁴ Seth (2002) 21.

American Occupation and Democratic Ideals

The influence of the American occupation in Korea after liberation in 1945 is also important in understanding the development of education in postwar Korean. With a vision to create “a peaceful, democratic, and anti-Communist society,”²⁸⁵ America supported liberal reforms to improve Korea’s educational system. Based on the ideas that the educational system can reshape the character of the state and society, the American military authority made education a major priority.²⁸⁶ As a result, the period from 1945 to 1948 under the American occupation witnessed dramatic changes in Korean education. According to Seth (2002), the U.S. Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) had two goals for new educational policies to rebuild the nation. The first one was to eradicate “the fascist, militarist, and totalitarian nature of imperial Japanese education,” as embedded in Korean schooling under Japanese control. The second was to raise literacy by providing equal educational opportunity for all young people to fulfill their potential.²⁸⁷ To achieve these goals the USAMGIK carried out educational policies that are based on the democratic principles of equality and liberty and also American

²⁸⁵ Seth (2002) 34-35.

²⁸⁶ The rationale for public school grew out of the American experience and served the purpose of democracy. In Korea, however, the community of commitment linking the people and their schools based on a broad-based public philosophy of education, which should serve to establish a seedbed of democracy, was never institutionalized during this period, thus retarding the process of democratization of Korean society. For more on the role of education in American history, see David Tyack and Elisa Beth Hansot, Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980 (NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1982).

²⁸⁷ Seth (2002) 35-36.

progressive educational ideas,²⁸⁸ championed by the American educational philosopher and reformer, John Dewey.²⁸⁹

In spite of ambitious new policies and plenty of good intentions, however, the American military government was faced with several formidable obstacles, which prevented the full implementation of American style democratic education. How did this happen? First of all, the task of building a nation came unexpectedly and was assumed by the American military which was unprepared to deal with the tremendous problems of economic, social and political chaos left by the thirty-six years of Japanese colonial rule. Restricted educational opportunities for Koreans under the Japanese colonial government resulted in a severe shortage of teachers and the lack of school facilities, which was exacerbated by the growing demand for increased school enrollment in Korea.

Meanwhile, political pressure to control the spread of grassroots leftist activities was mounting, feeding off the comparative success and political ferment in North Korea. The Seoul government, supported by the American occupation, faced the chasm between American ideals of democracy and the necessity to reinstate the carryover Japanese bureaucracy and to rehabilitate Korean collaborators during the war. The three-year American occupation in the South was simply too brief to implement the necessary reforms. For the sake of expediency, the Japanese authoritarian design, the very system

²⁸⁸ American progressive educational ideas are based on Dewey's view of education which emphasizes expanding intellectual development by incorporating the student's life experience into the classroom and emphasizing problem solving and critical thinking skills, rather than rote memorization. His ideas however have been criticized as "anti-intellectual and catering too much to the whims of children, and as politically radical and promoting group conformity." For more on Dewey's influence on American education, see Joel Spring, *American Education*, 9th ed. (Columbus, OH: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2000) 253-254.

²⁸⁹ John Dewey (1859-1952) was one of America's most influential philosophers and educational reformers. Along with Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, Dewey is known as one of the founders of the philosophical school of Pragmatism. His ideas and thoughts led the American progressive education movement during the first half of the 20th century. For more details, see Spring (2000).

that needed a structural change under the American military government, was preserved with more authority than ever before.²⁹⁰ The result was the alienation of many Koreans.

One of the most difficult problems they faced was the severe shortage of teachers, teaching materials, and school buildings. Before 1945, 40 percent of 13,782 elementary teachers were Japanese.²⁹¹ Finding qualified Korean teachers to fill the void left by the collapse of the Japanese colonial government was an almost impossible task. To exacerbate the dilemma, once the restrictions on educational opportunities under the colonial period had been lifted, Koreans responded enthusiastically to liberation with a huge increase in student enrollment, beginning already in the fall of 1945. Out of expediency, the school system inherited from the Japanese was simply continued without any major changes to correct its many deficiencies. Preserving this colonial system in place would become a major problem in contemporary Korean education.²⁹²

The centralized bureaucracy, despite its mounting problems, continued to function even after 1948, when the Republic of Korea was formally established in the process of ending the American occupation. The new nation was faced with a worsening economy badly in need of a trained workforce. In 1948, the Korean government enforced a six-year compulsory elementary school education requirement, despite the destruction and economic suffering lingering from colonialism and the war. Meanwhile, the political and

²⁹⁰ Political oppression under the American Military government in late 1945 and early 1946 was reportedly as widespread and severe as under Japanese colonial imperialism. The American occupational force was completely ignorant of Korea's history, culture, and its people; also it had no experience or any preparation for rebuilding Korea. As a result, the American military preferred to work with pro-Japanese collaborators who were generally more educated and experienced in administration but were vehemently disliked and mistrusted by the rest of the populace. Jeong Kyu Lee (2000) 116-123

²⁹¹ Seth (2002) 47.

²⁹² Seth (2002) 40.

ideological conflicts between the right and the left were tearing the country apart. In these desperate conditions, the authoritarian colonial structure known as the Department of Education persisted. After 1948, it was renamed as the Ministry of Education.

The new Ministry controlled all schools, both public and private. It regulated school instruction by administrating its entire standardized curriculum, compiling and approving textbooks, supervising teacher certification and training, all under strict control and a uniform prescription. As a centralized system of decision-making, the Ministry signed off on virtually all significant decisions, with almost no local input.²⁹³ Although this authoritative bureaucracy was highly efficient as an administrative instrument, its inflexibility and enforcement of uniform standards impeded the promotion of creativity in the learning environment and lacked leadership vitality.

The failure of the American occupation to carry out educational reform more fully also came from its preoccupation with maintaining political stability in the face of active communist groups and the network of popular communities that had offered resistance to the Japanese occupation. Even education became entangled in the political struggle between leftists and rightists, while strikes and protests by high school and college students became a major problem.²⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the educational policies implemented by the three-year American military occupation provided educational opportunity for millions of Koreans and resulted in the enormous expansion of schooling. This rapid development of public education in Korea succeeded in virtually eliminating illiteracy.²⁹⁵ By creating a school system that offered equal opportunity to all its young

²⁹³ Jeong Kyu Lee (2002) 140-45.

²⁹⁴ Seth (2002) 42-44.

citizens, and also providing its students standardized primary and secondary education, Korea was able to transform itself from a nation where a majority of the population had no formal education to one with some of the world's highest literacy rates.

Education as Hopes and Dreams

The idea of equal opportunity in education, first brought by American missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century, was central to democratic schooling and remains one of the most significant American influences on Korea's modern educational development. Koreans embraced their newfound educational opportunity and the open door policy with great eagerness. This burst of enthusiasm, especially for higher learning, must be seen not only as a corrective to the pre-modern system that created opportunities only for the aristocratic class, called the "yangban" in the *Joseon* period, but also to the severe limitations Korean people faced under the thirty-six year Japanese occupation. Despite these limiting historical legacies, this comprehensive system designed to provide education for all Koreans and now strengthened economically by successful industrialization led by the South Korean government in the 1960s provided poverty stricken Koreans the real possibility to rebuild their lives from the destruction created by the Korean War.

America's contribution to the development of modern education was pervasive in several ways. Schools were started for children who were denied education at the end of the nineteenth century, while democratic ideals and progressive education introduced to Korea following liberation from Japan transformed Korean society. But, more than

²⁹⁵ In 1945, the overall illiteracy rate in Korea was 78 percent which was reduced to 15.8 percent for male by 1960, and below 15 percent for female by 1966. Sorensen (1994) 16.

anything else, with equal opportunity and through its open door policy to education, America brought hopes and dreams for all Koreans.

In his exposition on the Harlem Renaissance, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, one of the most successful and best known basketball players in America, who later became a coach and an author, offers his thoughtful perception on the importance of the piano for African-Americans. In his book, On the Shoulders of Giants: My Journey Through the Harlem Renaissance, he explains why the piano was not just a musical instrument but a unique vehicle of “a speedy getaway car to escape the black stereotypes” which had denied them artistic, educational, and economic opportunity. Only a few blacks played piano in the pre-Civil War times, Abdul-Jabbar reasons, because during slavery they had little access to pianos. The prevalent image of the African-Americans among white Americans was “dumb and lazy Negro, too slow-witted and undisciplined” to learn to play the piano, a complex musical instrument. They were seen as managing only the drum or banjo, the simplest instruments.²⁹⁶

The experience of African-American families in America and the symbolic sentiment of the piano to them as described by Abdul-Jabbar offers an uncanny parallel to the role of education for Korean families after the liberation in 1945. For the vast majority of Koreans, their experience under Japanese control during the colonial period was one of rampant discrimination and poverty. But most of all, they were deprived of any opportunity for betterment and thereby denied hopes and dreams for the future. In general, Koreans under Japanese control were considered to be uncivilized, a backward second class people. Koreans carried that horrid image which did not die even after

²⁹⁶ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, On the Shoulders of Giants: My Journey Through the Harlem Renaissance. (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2007) 205.

liberation from Japan. In a comment made in the 1960s by an admissions officer for an international program in an American university, Sorensen (1994) reports, Koreans were regarded as “dumb” among international students on that campus.²⁹⁷

After liberation, millions of Koreans became obsessed with educating their children and an experience that was denied them for so long. Once liberated, they encouraged their children to dream of a different future, rising out of dire poverty. During and after the Korean War, 1950-53, there were many Korean families who could not afford to own rice bowls to serve cooked rice for their meals. So they used instead empty spam cans thrown away by American GIs and picked out of trash piles. They saved every cent for school tuition so that their children could attend college.²⁹⁸

Likewise, after emancipation, many African-American families bought small organs or harmoniums, as pianos were too expensive. It was both to proudly display their independence by owning what had been denied them for so long, as well as to encourage cultural assimilation for their children. For African-American families, raising children who could play the piano not only dispelled the derogatory myths, but also boosted the children's chances for rising up out of their class, even within the black community. And the cost for this opportunity was only fifty cents down and fifty cents a week for the rest of their lives.

In his autobiography, Up From Slavery, Booker T. Washington recounts a dinner visitation with one such hopeful family in their Alabama cabin.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Sorensen (1994) 12.

²⁹⁸ There are many stories like this in Korea told by elderly people of previous generations who lived through the time of Japanese colonial period and the subsequent Korean War.

²⁹⁹ Booker T. Washington, Up from Slavery (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, 1996).

When I sat down to the table for a meal with the four members of the family, I noticed that, while there were five of us at the table, there was but one fork for the five of us to use... In the opposite corner of that same cabin was an organ for which the people told me they were paying sixty dollars in monthly installments. One fork, and a sixty-dollar organ!' Fingers could substitute for forks, but the organ was the hope for the future. (54)

What pianos brought to African-American families in the post Civil War period, and what open educational opportunity did for Korean families after the liberation and the Korean War, was the possibility of big dreams. Surely, tin cans and fingers substituted for rice bowls and forks, but the education and piano for children were the “hope for the future.”

Chapter Summary

Korean education is characterized by long hours of study and strict discipline preparing for competitive college entrance examinations. Confucian influence from China, the Japanese colonial experience and American influence in the late 1940s and early 1950s all share in shaping the history of Korea’s educational development. After enduring the heaviness of Confucian cultural influence for centuries, traditional Korea was shaken by the great social upheaval and political turmoil of modern times.

Korea’s experience as a victim and later survivor of the imperialist adventures and warfare that marked the last years of Japanese rule, profoundly impacted Korean education and society, leaving an everlasting scar on the personality of the Korean people. America’s involvement in Korean education is substantial and its influence still

shapes contemporary Korean society. America's efforts for educational development especially after the Liberation in 1945 took place in a nation where millions of dislocated, restless citizens were hopelessly illiterate and poor.³⁰⁰ Although the expansion of the educational system is impressive in accommodating the growing demand for education, some important features of Korean education remain basically unchanged, as seen in the emphasis on entrance examinations and the heavy financial burden for schooling.

One consequence of the serious shortcomings in the Korean education system is the exodus of Korean children today. In their search for a less stressful and more open educational environment, Koreans today are emigrating to countries such as the United States and Canada where education is less expensive and less demanding on students, even as Koreans maintain unflinching faith in education and as academic credentials serve as the kind of social capital they can proudly display. Korean education is still in the making. As a majority of Koreans continue to strive for more education, their zeal for education, education fever, has increased, rather than diminished. Internal pressure from the demands for education under the Confucian tradition, combines with the external economic force of globalization to create the phenomenon of the "examination hell" that continues to exist in Korea today.

³⁰⁰ According to Bruce Cumings, forty percent of the adult population in Korea was part of the uprooted labor force to aid the Japanese war effort. Cumings (2005) 177.

CHAPTER 5

THE MAKERS OF KOREAN EDUCATION: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

There is an old saying in Korea: "One should never step even on the shadow of his teacher." This proverb relays the degree of reverence traditionally accorded to teachers and ultimately the high appreciation of formal education. While the social and political turmoil of early modern times has brought profound changes to the educational system in Korea, much of the Confucian tradition of examination centered education, that is, the basic teaching method of rote memorization and strict control of teachers in the classroom, still characterize much of modern education in Korea.

In the previous chapter, historical factors associated with three major powers, Chinese, Japanese and American, which profoundly influenced Korean education, were examined to find clues to explain the educational crisis in contemporary Korea. The centuries-old practice of preparing students for the competitive college entrance examination that devotes enormous amounts of time and energy and financial resources is undoubtedly a major factor contributing to the education crisis in Korea today.

The highly centralized Japanese colonial educational system, designed to exploit Koreans as colonial subjects, is also a major feature in the crisis. Its rigid authoritarian bureaucracy resisted any creative solutions and existed as a huge obstacle to the

democratization of modern education. After liberation, with all their good intentions and honest efforts, the American military government did not succeed fully in implementing the reform policies that were formulated to resolve the highly centralized bureaucracy of the educational system. The failure to establish a system of local school boards early on, for example, thwarted attempts to decentralize and democratize schooling early in postwar Korea.³⁰¹

The centralized and authoritarian system of public education was further strengthened by Korea's violent experience with the Korean War (1950-1953). Although the country had undergone the transition from totalitarian colonial rule to political democracy, the primary concern after the war was to revive the system to provide mass education. One of the most substantial changes made during this time was the indoctrination of students with the ideology of anti-communism and moral education. They were injected into the curriculum for the purpose of preserving the idea of a unified Korea and providing guidance to fill the moral vacuum created by the war. The use of moral education by the government to inculcate political and cold war ideology along with traditional Confucian values of hard work and loyalty may have served well in the early years of national economic development in Korea. In subsequent years, however, the younger generations came to display much more individualistic tendencies influenced by rapid Americanization. Pitting “traditional values against individualism” created both confusion and a moral dilemma in Korean education.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Seth (2002) 39.

³⁰² Jong Ho Joh, "A Dilemma in Moral Education in the Republic of Korea: The Limitation of Individualistic Cognitive Approaches," Journal of Moral Education 31.4 (2002) 393-406.

Korean education is still in the making; in other words, it is a work in progress. In this chapter, three major players that are shaping Korean education will be examined. In addressing the issues that inspire the exodus of young children and their families as manifested in parachute kids, wild geese families, cuckoo mothers and penguin daddies, attention will be given to cultural factors at work in Korean tradition. Korean mothers, for example, play a significant role in the education crisis. As they are deeply involved in their children's education, their presence is at the center, as the victims of the crisis and paradoxically also as main actors who are deepening the crisis. The prominent role of English language in the globalized economy is another critical element heating up Korea's "education fever." Learning English is one of the main reasons why Koreans emigrate to English speaking countries. Finally, the modern media of our time is intricately related to the crisis. In its insidious ways, it shapes the national psyche, which reinforces current obsessions in contemporary Korea.

Role of the Mothers

"Madame Butterfly," first performed on stage in 1904 as Puccini's operatic adaptation of a short story, surely belongs to the genre of "West meets East."³⁰³ Taking place in late 19th century Nagasaki, it is one of the most popular and successful operas in the world. The role of Cho-Cho-San, a decorous, pretty, and faithful Japanese wife, however, reinforces stereotypical "Orientalist assumptions" about the docility of Eastern

³⁰³ According to Opera America, a service organization in North America promoting all areas of opera, Madame Butterfly is the most frequently performed opera in North America. Published first as a short story by John Luther Long in 1898, it was turned into a play by David Belasco. The opera was also based on the novel by Pierre Loti, Madame Chrysanthème (1887).

women.³⁰⁴ Although Japanese elite culture is bravely honored through Cho-Cho-San's ritualized final suicide, American naval officer Benjamin Pinkerton's plundering attitude embodies the imperial nation at its worst, suggesting the tragic fate of Oriental societies in the face of an encroaching Western cultural imperialism.³⁰⁵ With its huge success in opera theaters around the world for more than a hundred years, the image of Cho-Cho-San, an American improvisation of a Japanese cultural product, has left a deep imprint as Officer Pinkerton's frivolous muse or ephemeral lover, rather than the venerable Asian mother, who was willing to sacrifice herself as a nurturer and caretaker, or simply be a good mother.³⁰⁶

Mother Ideals, East and West

What then is a good mother? According to Merry White, a sociologist at Boston University and an expert on Japanese education, the definition of a good mother differs largely from culture to culture. She suggests that a good mother in America has "a task-oriented concept of her role." As a result, Americans have an exaggerated image of the "supermom," who accomplishes "positively inhuman numbers of tasks" during the day

³⁰⁴For more on the issues of orientalism in the U. S., see Malini J. Schueller, U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890 (Ann Arbor, MI: The U of Michigan Press, 1998).

³⁰⁵ Edward Said differentiates the American understanding of the Orient as "less dense," compared to a European representation of the Orient, since American adventures in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam brought much more sober and realistic "Oriental" awareness. Edward W. Said, Orientalism (NY: Random House Inc., 1979) 1-2.

³⁰⁶ According to cultural analyses of the ideal of mother, Japanese people give more meanings to the image of mother than the personal experiences of the mother, that is, the real, flesh-and-blood physical mother of children. She exists in a personification of "devotion to children, parental affection, and self-sacrifice," which is a rather symbolic concept powerfully imbued with a value that comes close to religious faith. For Japanese, this image is a more powerful influence in establishing control over people's behavior than any honor or monetary reward. For more discussions, see Masame Ohinata, "The Mystique of Motherhood: A Key to Understanding Social Change and Family Problems in Japan," Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future, eds. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda (NY: The Feminist Press, 1995): 205.

and still looks “fresh and appealing at the door when her husband returns” in the evening.³⁰⁷

Motherhood is a gender issue that all women face in modern society. Elizabeth Stanton, a social activist and leader of the women’s rights movement in early nineteenth century America, declared the following: “Womanhood is the great fact in her life; wifehood and motherhood are but incidental relations.”³⁰⁸ Naturally, then, women who want to devote themselves to labors that have been traditionally viewed as “women’s work” confront ambivalent feelings about their role, especially as stay-at-home mothers. Under Confucian influence, women of all East Asian countries have been confined largely at home for housework and family services. In a social environment where no virtuous woman would have any kind of ambition of her own, she was taught to follow her husband “no matter who and where he was.” In the rigid Confucian dogma, it meant “if married to a rooster a woman should follow the rooster, and if married to a dog she should follow the dog.”³⁰⁹

A Confucian phrase expressing the traditional ideal of womanhood, “wise mother, good wife,” still carries great meaning in East Asian societies today.³¹⁰ It is imperative however to recognize that this aphorism was exploited in early twentieth century Meiji Japan to serve as an ideological tool to train Japanese women to “remain in the private

³⁰⁷ Merry White, The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children (NY: The Free Press, 1987) 33.

³⁰⁸ Elizabeth Stanton (1815-1902) was an influential American suffragette who shaped the history of woman suffrage in the U.S., with Susan B. Anthony and Mathilda Gage.

³⁰⁹ Xinzhong Yao, An Introduction to Confuciansim (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 2000) 183.

³¹⁰ Pronounced as “*Hyenmo Yangcheo*” in Korean and “*Ryosai Kenbo*” in Japanese, the characters are the same written in Chinese.

sphere.”³¹¹ At the same time, women were to participate in the grand national plan of building the new Japan into a “prosperous nation, strong military.”³¹² The slogan accorded an especially high esteem to the role of mother as “the person responsible for properly raising and educating the children,” and as “the moral foundation of the family.”³¹³ With more weight on the role of “mother” in the “wise mother, good wife,” the burden of being a wife for most Japanese women became less heavy. Their duties as wife are sufficient with “a home-cooked meal for her late-arriving husband,” with less emphasis placed on being “temptress and lover,”³¹⁴ which contrasts with that role in the image of “supermom” in the West.³¹⁵

In Japan and Korea, as Confucian societies, a woman’s source of influence and her worth in the family come from the “vertical ties of parent and child,” rather than from the marital bond expressed in the “nexus of husband and wife” in the West. With the following statement, White further compares the role of mother perceived in Japan and that in the West. She writes:

The expression “just a housewife” in no way conveys a Japanese mother’s sense of her life and role. Her work, whether loving preparation of an artfully composed and nutritious lunchbox or thorough immersion in her child’s math lesson, is seen to demand

³¹¹ At the time of Professor White’s writing, this ideal was still strongly supported by Japanese women themselves as evidenced by 76 percent of respondents in the polls, saying that their first responsibility was to their children. White (1987) 34.

³¹² “Fukoku Kyohei” in Japanese was a popular slogan in the Meiji period in Japan and was borrowed from a phrase from the ancient Chinese historical work on the Warring States Period. It was the central objective of the Meiji reform to transform Japanese society in an attempt to catch up with the West. McClain (2002) 178-82.

³¹³ McClain (2002) 256-60.

³¹⁴ White (1987) 34

³¹⁵ For more examples of husband and wife relationships in Japan, see Bruce S. Feiler, Learning to Bow: Inside of the Heart of Japan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991)167-70.

the best of her. There are few Japanese mothers drumming fingers waiting for their youngest child to enter full-time school so that they can get back into a career a Western woman might need to feel productive and important. (33)

In Korea, the model Confucian society, where Confucian principles are more strictly observed, the primary virtues of a young woman stress much more her filial piety, *hyo* in Korean, which emphasizes a strict hierarchical order of human relationships. Thus, a married woman's devotion was demanded more towards her parents and parents-in-law, before subordination to her husband and assisting her children. The most important duty of woman as a mother was to produce sons to continue the family lineage³¹⁶ and then to devote herself to help children's education.³¹⁷

As Confucian ideals, both filial piety, *hyo* (孝), and loyalty, *chung* (忠), are highly esteemed virtues. In Korean tradition, however, family-focused filial piety, *hyo*, precedes *chung*, the nation-centered patriotic sense of sacrifice and devotion, in importance. The Japanese colonial government wanted to switch Koreans' devotion to their parents to its empire and to train colonial subjects to become more obedient and loyal in order to bring greater benefits to the colonial empire. Although the Japanese language was already taught in the schools as a means to assimilate Koreans, the Japanese colonial government also had a plan for Korean mothers to train their children more effectively at home. By shifting the emphasis to the role of mother, this well known imperative to be a "wise mother, good wife" indoctrinated Korean mothers to

³¹⁶ Korean women who were childless were considered to suffer the greatest misfortune, which compares to those Hebrew women illustrated in the Bible (Genesis 30:1). The desire of Korean women to have many children, specifically sons, was to fulfill their duty to their ancestors to continue the family lineage, while the idea planted deeply in the hearts of Hebrew women was to fulfill the promise to God to make Israel a populous nation. (Genesis 18:18 22:18; Exodus 19:5 & 6).

³¹⁷ Jeong Hey Jeong, Hanguk Gyoyuk Sasang ("The Educational Thoughts of Korea") (Seoul: Moonumsa, 2005) 179-80.

become more deeply involved in their children's education. Although the maxim, "wise mother, good wife," was widely accepted and understood by women throughout East Asia, the heavy emphasis on mothering devoted to children's education, that is, Korean mothers serving as education managers, can be seen as a colonial legacy. As children's education has become the major concern for mothers in Korea, other forms of professional work, self-expression, and, even the enhancement of the marital bond itself, have become less important in their lives.

Model Confucian Mothers

The image of role models for young women who would soon be mothers comes from historical figures of good mothers who devoted themselves to their children's education. The following examples are strong moral messages. The mother of Mencius, the most important Chinese interpreter of the Confucian classics, is an excellent example of nurturing her son by carefully providing an environment to nourish her son's education. In Korea, an old saying "*Maeng mo sam-cheon ji-kyo*,"³¹⁸ meaning "three choices of Mencius' mother for (her son's) education," defines the on-going responsibility expected of Korean mothers. Its underlying moral teaching of the adage is how critical the mother's role is for the success of her children and how the mother must do everything possible to provide the best environment for her children's education. The story of Mencius' mother goes like this. The first place where Mencius' mother and her children lived was near a cemetery. Everyday, her son, *Meng Zi*, was out playing, imitating a funeral procession. Alarmed, Mencius' mother packed the family and moved

³¹⁸ Borrowed from one of many Chinese four-character idioms, 孟母三遷, "*Meng Mu San Qian*," its literal translation in Chinese is: "Mencius' mother, three choices."

far away to the other side of the town near a marketplace. Here, her young son was playing with merchant children every day, counting money from his pretend game of buying and selling. His displeased mother again uprooted her family and moved away from the marketplace, this time, near a school. There, she finally found a perfect place to raise her son, as he was emulating a teacher playing school with his friends. He learned to be a serious student and eventually became the greatest scholar philosopher of Confucian teachings in Chinese history.³¹⁹ As a result, Mencius's mother also became the most famous role model, and her deed for centuries has guided women in East Asia to also become good mothers.

Mencius's mother herself has become a most famous historical figure, and her tale is told repeatedly to every child growing up in Korea, and for that matter, everywhere in East Asia. Her persistence in finding a perfect location for her son's education creates a powerful image and model to follow. Her responsibility is to choose a place where there are good schools, since school choice may become most important in determining the children's future success. Whatever the historical accuracy of the story may be, Mencius's mother reminds Korean women to have the wisdom to create the optimal learning environment for their children. All women with children aspire to be good mothers.

Just how seriously Korean mothers follow Mencius' mother as a role model can be seen in the way the price of an apartment complex in the part of Seoul south of the Han River skyrocketed when it was rumored that schools there were better and that it was an area famous for private tutoring after school. The question, "You are still living North

³¹⁹ Mencius (385-303 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher and sage who was undoubtedly the most famous Confucian after Confucius himself, and one of the important interpreters of Confucianism.

of Han River?" can be interpreted as a subtle incrimination, raising the doubt, "how can you provide an adequate education for your children?"³²⁰ It's as if to say, "Are you not a good mother?" These are stinging accusations for striving mothers.

A Korean woman named *Sin Saimdang* is the best known role model in Korea, "mother of all mothers."³²¹ During the *Joseon* period, she was an accomplished artist and an outstanding painter, calligrapher and embroiderer. Yet, it wasn't the brilliance in her paintings or intricate embroidered delicate flowers and insects, or her beautiful calligraphy that brought her fame. Rather, it was her son, *Yulgok*.³²² As the mother of one of the most eminent Neo-Confucian scholars and influential thinkers in Korean intellectual history, her son's distinguished scholarship produced for her the high regard and endowed celebrated social position as *Sin Saimdang* in Korean society.³²³ Even today, in honor of her name, an annual *Sin Saimdang* award is given to an "exemplary woman," whose first and foremost qualification is being "a good mother, wife, and

³²⁰ Kang, Sungyoung (2003); and . Chung, Sung Hee. "Daechidong Eommadeul Eui Sinhwa ("The Myth about Mothers of Daechidong")." Dong A Ilbo 6 April 2005.

³²¹ Known as the wisest mother in Korean history, Lady Sin is also famous for her intellect and excelled in literary ability of writing poetry.

³²² "*Yulgok*" is the pen name for *Yi I* (1536-1584). His portrait is one of a few national historical figures chosen to be printed on the Korean currency today. As the prodigious son of *Sin Saimdang*, he surpassed in his learning of the Confucian Classics. He wrote many highly influential books that are related to Confucian teachings including The Essentials of Confucianism. In his *Hakgyo Go* ("The Inquiries on School"), for example, he suggests a dilemma of school education. In sixteenth century *Yi* dynasty Korea, as is the case in modern Korea, students studied the moral philosophy of Neo-Confucianism more to pass the highly competitive Civil Service Examination, than to apply its teachings to their life to be self-cultivated individuals. See Jin-Hong Kim, "Yi Yulgok's View of Neo-Confucian Education in Practice," Diss. Columbia University, 2001.

³²³ Youngkey Kim-Renaud, ed., Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth through the Twentieth Centuries (NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004): 11.

daughter-in-law," as selected by the Korean Housewives' Club, a powerful women's organization in Korea.³²⁴

Comparable to *Sin Saimdang*, there is another exemplary role model for all women in Korea. She is the mother of *Han Sukbong* from the *Joseon* period. She was an austere and stern mother who disciplined her son without mercy. She was poor and widowed but dedicated her life to her son's education by selling rice cakes. At a young age her son was sent away to a temple school to receive a more rigorous education. One day, suffering from homesickness, he walked a long way arriving home late at night. He was so pleased to see his mother. She, on the other hand, was unhappy to see her son interrupting his study to come home. When he protested that he had done enough studying, she blew out the oil lamp and demanded him to write in the dark. While he was writing, she returned to cutting rice cakes. After awhile, when she relit the lamp, *Han Sukbong* saw, to his great dismay and shame, how disorderly and unrecognizable his writings were, while his mother's rice cakes were all perfectly made. He left home that night, walking all the way back to school. He was told by his mother never to come home until he completed his study. Indeed, he finished his study and became one of the finest calligraphers in Korean history. His writings remain as some of the most exquisite and exemplary calligraphy. It is preserved as a national treasure, reminding Korean women for generations to come how his stellar accomplishment was all due to his mother's stern influence and complete devotion to her son's education. The moral of this touching story yet again reinforces the idea of a "good mother," a mother who sacrifices her own self-fulfillment to devote herself to her children's education.

³²⁴ Kim-Renaud (2004) 19.

How would this cultural confirmation of sacrificial motherhood be received by future generations of young girls? The reaction may come not in the form of angry and noisy protests but rather in an innocent “what if” question posed by little girls who hear the story with different expectations for their lives. They may feel saddened by their sense of the injustice done to that little boy, *Han Sukbong*. At the end of the story, young girls in modern Korea may ask, why did his mother send him back? It was late at night and it was cold and may have been raining. If so, how could his mother send her little boy, who was already tired from his long walk home, back into the night? Surely, the little girls may protest his mother was not a good mother. This whispering little verdict might finally break the spell of the old image and cultural expectations for being a “good mother.” What’s more, the little girls may extend their inquisitive minds a littler further with more “what if” questions. What if *Sukbong*’s mother had encouraged him to be an engineer or a scientist? He could have built a rice cake machine to ease her labor. What if his mother had directed him to be a merchant to end her poverty? What if she, rather than pushing him to become the best calligrapher, had guided him to become a general? He could have developed a strong military and defended Korea from Japanese aggression. What if, and again, what if? The role of mothers in Korean society today is being slowly but surely changed, as those little girls with innocent questions are starting to sit in the drivers’ seat.³²⁵

³²⁵ Soon-hyung Yi, "Transformation of Child Socialization in Korean Culture," Early Child Development and Care 85 (1993): 17-24.

Mothers as Education Managers

The views of Korean mothers are an intriguing mix of modern and traditional impulses.³²⁶ But one thing is clear: motherhood is overwhelming and difficult. Korean mothers, however, are not the only ones to feel that way. American mothers also feel as besieged and miserable, frustrated that they can't make it all work out right.³²⁷ In her book, The Truth behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother, Miriam Peskowitz, an author and a former tenured professor who left her fulltime academic job when her daughter was born, writes about how every mother she knows is upset and feels alone in the her plight of unhappiness and hardship.³²⁸ She reports how every woman in America wants something more than life as “a mother and a wife.” Working mothers feel “rundown” and want more time with their kids and envy the stay-at-home moms who seem to have it easy at home with the kids all day. At the same time, the stay-at-home mothers are at loose ends feeling “lonely and isolated.” They may feel lucky to be with the kids, but they want more of the financial and professional independence of working moms. Even those who have given up their career to be with their children, like the author herself, are bored and want their old identities back.

Joan Peters, the author of When Mothers Work: Loving Our Children Without Sacrificing Our Selves on the subject of motherhood and parenting, proposes possible

³²⁶ Although women's attitudes about their own roles are changing, one of the major problems for slow progress in changes is the fact that women themselves still strongly believe in being “good housewives and mothers.” See Marian Lief Palley, “Women's Status in South Korea: Tradition and Change,” Asian Survey 30.12 (1990): 1136-53.

³²⁷ See “Mommy Myths.” The Economist 28 April 2005.

³²⁸ Miriam Peskowitz, The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother? (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005).

strategies on how to achieve the state of “having it all.”³²⁹ Her basic assumption is that having a life and identity outside of the home is critical to both men and women. In order to fulfill our fundamental needs conventional parenting practice needs to be changed first by sharing equal responsibility at home by both men and women, and working conditions must be improved to accommodate women’s employment outside the home. The proposals suggested by Peters are hardly enlightening or realistic considering how few changes or reform policies are coming into effect in the current work environment. That means mothers are left stuck in the “pool of misery” for a while longer.

The misery of many mothers in America comes from ambivalent feelings about their identity as mothers and the difficulties motherhood brings to women in the pursuit of happiness as individuals. As one of the “unalienable rights” written in the American Declaration of Independence, the pursuit of happiness as individuals is guaranteed and encouraged in American society. In fact, Americans seem to demand it almost as one’s endowment. Consequently, the stress of being a perfect mom, “a supermom,” who loses sleep at night thinking about the list of endless things to accomplish next day, does not come from widespread societal pressure in America, but rather is created by individual choices. By contrast, the psychological and emotional burdens of Korean mothers are a part of pervasive societal pressure, the condition of “examination hell.” That is, Korean mothers are also fighting the examination war. They too are experiencing the stress as much as their children.³³⁰

³²⁹ She offers some real portraits of American families who have successfully achieved balancing their work and equal happiness at home. See Joan Peters, When Mothers Work: Loving Our Children without Sacrificing Our Selves (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001).

³³⁰ Considering the fact that many parents feel rejected during their children’s teenage period, it is an interesting notion how Korean mothers are able to be deeply involved in their teenagers’ lives during

The education crisis in Korea encompasses many aspects of Korean society. The sufferings of Korean mothers, for example, from severe nervousness and extreme mental fragility, are so widespread that they have become a center of attention in family life and social circles. According to a report by Professor Cho, the mothers of high school seniors, *Gosam Eomma* in Korean, are so “extremely sensitive and hysterical” that they are compared to “a hen trying to hatch an egg.”³³¹ As they are emotionally fragile, family members, especially husbands, and relatives and friends all pour in their sympathies and are careful not to aggravate *Gosam Eomma* by making any request or household demands. In recognizing the suffering borne by mothers, many religious organizations, such as churches and Buddhist temples, provide special programs or retreat centers for *Gosam Eomma*, especially for the last hundred days before the exam. On the day of the examination, all mothers go to their favorite religious centers to “pray and cry together.”³³² All day they share their heartaches and painful miseries in group as their children are taking the examination that will decide the future of their young lives.

Why do Korean mothers have to suffer so much? What propels them to persevere and continue relentlessly marching their children off until late at night to after school private tutoring institutions, busing the little ones around to activities so as to leave no scrap of potential untapped? The answer lies in the mentality of middle class women in

their high school years. According to a socio-cultural study on perceived parental warmth and parental control, unlike many North American youths who tend to regard strict parental control with parental hostility, aggression and overall rejection, adolescents in Korea associate parental control with parental warmth and low rejection. As a result, Korean youth are more inclined to accept parental right and authority over their children. See Ronald P. Rohner, "Perceived Parental Acceptance-Rejection and Parental Control among Korean Adolescents," *Child Development* 56 (1985): 524-28; and Kim, Hyeon, and Siegfried Hoppe-Graff. "Mothers Roles in Traditional and Modern Korean Families: The Consequences for Parental Practices, and Adolescent Socialization." *Asia Pacific Education Review* 2.1 (2001): 85-93.

³³¹ Hae Joang Cho (1995) 159.

³³² Hae Joang Cho (1995) 151.

South Korea, a complex psychological state influenced by the traditional expectations of women's role and shaped by the present reality of modern Korean society, where ideas from the past and about the future are in conflict.³³³ According to many studies of mothers' roles in traditional and modern Korean families, Korean tradition strongly dictates the central importance of marriage, making it difficult for women to develop an independent professional identity. More significantly, most Korean women do not consider an outside career as a means to self-fulfillment.³³⁴

Under the influence of the Confucian tradition, the role of women, as well as every member in the family, is clearly defined, making an identity crisis less likely to occur. Gender roles however come with a distinct division of labor in a household. In general, the man provides for the family, while the woman manages housekeeping and child rearing and is involved in the children's education. According to a sociological study about the father's role in children's education conducted by Professor Byungchul Ahn, a sociologist at Hanyang University in Korea, 63 percent of Korean fathers believe that mothers are responsible for their children's education. Furthermore, there are ten times more families where mothers takes lead in teaching the children at home than families where fathers take the lead.³³⁵

³³³ Although both men and women's attitudes about women's roles have been changing, more slowly with men, the major problem is women's own consciousness in which women still believe that they should be good housewives and mothers. See Palley (1990).

³³⁴ Palley (1990).

³³⁵ His study also revealed that more than 54 percent of fathers answered that their wives are either "totally in charge" or "mostly in charge" of the family finances, and 57 percent of the mothers decide how much to spend on their child's education without consulting their husbands. Furthermore, there are four times more families where mothers make decisions for their children's private tutoring or other supplementary education than families where fathers make such decision. See Byungchul Ahn (1995).

Being a mother is a career to most middle class housewives in Korea. It is an occupation that requires fulltime and much energy, and also total devotion expressed as *Kyoiku Mama* in Japanese, education mother.³³⁶ Consequently, their engagement as a mother trying to do a good job brings vigor and purpose in their lives. Perhaps it renders more meaning to their lives compared to paid jobs outside the home, since being an “education manager” involves their children and affects directly their welfare and even more importantly determines their future. Rapid industrialization in Korea has brought more employment opportunities for women, and the current generation of mothers is mostly educated women. However, most women workers do not remain in the workforce, and most of them eventually resign from their posts, even though they no longer are “required” to do so when they get married.

The corporate environment in Korea is much like the military in applying a strict ranking system, which is inflexible and designed in general to favor men. As in traditional Korea, women workers are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and their chance of getting promoted is slim.³³⁷ Worse yet, one of the most ubiquitous parts of business practices in Korea is the ritualized late night drinking gatherings. These gatherings take place after work quite frequently and are an important get-together event that one shouldn't miss, since they serves as an informal socialization process and a bonding opportunity for officer workers. It is however extremely difficult for married

³³⁶ For more details on “*Kyoiku Mama*,” education mothers, and their role in Japan, see Bruce Feiler (1991)167-78.

³³⁷ An interesting and detailed study on the managerial and administrative practices and corporate culture of white-collar jobs in Korea, and their values associated with Western capitalism is done by a team of Korea experts. See, Roger L. Janelli and Dawnhee Yim, Making Capitalism: The Social and Cultural Construction of a South Korean Conglomerate (Stanford, CA: Stanford U Press, 1993).

women, especially if they are mothers, to participate in this process of building team spirit and trust in working relationships.³³⁸

What do education mothers really do? According to Hae-joang Cho (1995), a typical Korean mother whose child is preparing for the college entrance examination follows her child's schedule as described in the following:

His mother takes a nap after dinner and wakes herself with the help of an alarm clock before he comes home. She prepares fruit and cookies for him to eat before he takes a shower. She, and any other devoted *kyoiku mama* ..., is tense like her son. She believes that she is to a great extent responsible for her son's academic performance. Therefore, she tries to control and support her son's achievements as best she can. Any extra money is invested in encouraging her son to fight well in the monthly mock exams. Chang's mother is always short of sleep, like her son. She too is fighting the war. (150)

The war she is talking about here is not the Korean War, which their mothers had to live through. Rather, it is the examination war that middle class mothers in Korea are struggling with. Mothers in the previous generation tried to save their children from disease and starvation in a country torn apart by the Korean War. Mothers of younger generations are combating a different kind of battle. They try to rescue their children and to prevent them from "collapsing or falling behind" in their test scores. Mothers consider the examination war as their own fight and work hard like military generals. They are "extremely cautious and strategic" in carrying out their war plans, since many children do

³³⁸ In Korea, people seldom change their jobs, much like Japan's lifetime employment. As a result, employment of any kind is regarded as requiring total dedication and 100 percent effort. Men who are part-time workers or change companies are rare. If they do, they may face dire consequences. As Korean workers are frequently valued by the degree of commitment they invest at work and of engagement in the human relationships, they spend a large amount of face-to-face time not only on the job during work hours but also after work hours, in an attempt to deepen and solidify work relationships. Thus it becomes difficult and harder for mothers who work outside the home to give the necessary 100 percent dedication to their work and engage in after work activities. See Janelli and Yim (1993).

experience mental breakdowns, turn away to become juvenile delinquents, or worse, commit suicide under the unbearable pressure. According to one mother who endured profound anguish watching her child preparing for the entrance exam, she said her son during his senior year in high school was “like a very dried fallen leaf, a leaf that when touched, crumbled to pieces.” A year later after her son successfully entered an university, she expressed boundless joy in saying, “I see he eats moisture. He is alive now.”³³⁹

For many middle class housewives in Korea, being an “education mama” is in fact a full time job. As economic affluence left them with much leisure time, but without any meaningful jobs, their involvement in children’s education, in fact, provides them with a goal to accomplish.³⁴⁰ Their days are filled with informal meetings with old friends from their school days to exchange valuable information or to attend the many seminars or orientation sessions given by city or national organizations or held by education related businesses. One of the reasons Korean women are not more engaged in charitable social organizations is that their time and energy are so entirely consumed in preparing their children to gain admission to prestigious universities.

Since being an “education mama” also requires tremendous organizational skills, some women simply thrive on being education mothers. They are so concentrated on their children’s academic success that they are extremely nervous about missing out on

³³⁹ Hae Joang Cho (1995) 151.

³⁴⁰ Affluence alone does not seem to provide people with a sense of happiness. Rather, happiness comes from having a goal and interacting with other people. In the late 1940s to the 1960s, Japan was poor as real per capita GDP was only one fifth of what it is today, but they were mostly happy. Although their goal was to acquire more material goods such as TV, cars, washing machine, air conditioner, etc., they had something to work for, study for, and live for. An increasing number of young people in Japan today are floating without any sense of purpose in Japanese society, making Japan a society of many unhappy people. See Takamitsu Sawa, "If 'Affluence' Fails to Please," *The Japan Times* April 3, 2006; also Alex Kerr, *Dogs and Demons: Tales from the Dark Side of Modern Japan* (NY: Hill & Wang, 2002).

any information that might help them improve their college strategy. By carefully navigating and adjusting their preparation for the college entrance examination in an advantageous way, they do whatever they can to allow their children to compete successfully. They become absorbed in gathering information on changes in the examination format, its schedule, the availability of good tutors in town, the reputation of after school private institutions, newly published supplementary study guides, brain power enhancing special nutritional food or herbal supplements, and parenting strategies to motivate children to work harder.³⁴¹ All of these efforts are carefully incorporated in their college entrance examination strategy.

The activities of Korean mothers as “education managers,” however, contribute to “education fever” in Korean society. The busy schedule of education mothers in trying to keep up with other mothers obviously energizes them, but it also heats up the competition. Education mothers may be flourishing in the examination race, because it gives them a clear goal and, ironically, provides them “a second chance” to make up their own unfulfilled dreams. By pushing through their children’s educational success and helping them to survive “examination hell,” these mothers achieve ultimate satisfaction, as if the success of their children were their own. In the end, the struggle is shared by both mothers and children, and the stake in the struggle grows and becomes much more serious.

The devotion of education mothers may also come from their desire to be visible in a society where women’s roles have been confined to the home, with traditional legacies requiring them to remain in the background and go unnoticed. From a young

³⁴¹ Sung Hee Chung, "Daechidong Eommadeul Eui Sinhwa ('The Myth about Mothers in Daechidong') *Dong A Ilbo*, 6 April 2005.

age, girls were taught the virtues of subordination and trained to prepare for their future roles as wife and mother. Since women could not participate in society as men did, and their role was limited to household matters in general, and the Confucian ethic placed great emphasis on scholarship and education, getting her job well done meant ensuring that her children study diligently. Women find their worth and receive tremendous respect through children's educational success, since it brings honor to the family, but first and foremost, to the mothers who helped their children succeed.

Why is motherhood in Korea so forbidding and child-rearing so competitive and difficult? In Korea, where society is both conformist and competitive, Korean mothers seem to be their own worst enemies. Relentlessly marching their children off to make sure no bit of potential is left untapped, Korean mothers are under pressure to be an effective "education mother." The pains that mothers feel in modern Korea are not unique. Plenty of mothers in America also feel unhappy. Judith Warner, an author who writes about women's issues and politics and a former special correspondent for Newsweek in Paris, declares that being a mother has become one of the most stressful occupations in America. Her book title, Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety, sounds particularly pertinent if it describes the state of desperate Korean mothers who are all so anxious about their children's chance for succeeding in the college entrance examination. Warner's book is not about Korean mothers. Rather, it is about the misery and the pressure of trying to be perfect mothers in America where the feminist promise of combining motherhood and a glamorous career is a flawed option. It is about all mothers in America who are caught up in "the mess."³⁴² But can mothers, both in

³⁴² Betty Friedan, a founding member of the feminist movement in the United States, warns that women now suffer from a new identity crisis and new problems that have "no name." Warner and her

Korea and America, have motherhood with happy memories of children playing in parks? Warner has no clear answer to offer, apart from reminding us again of the urgent need for a social system that supports happy parenting, for a family-friendly work environment, for more available high quality day care centers for full-time working parents and occasional relief for the stay-at-home parent, and also for more part-time work opportunities for both parents.³⁴³ In the end, mothers, both in Korea and America, are waiting for reliable government plans which, for American mothers, will subsidize child care, while for Korean mothers, will ease the intensity of educational competition.

Susan Faludi opens her national bestseller, Backlash: the Undeclared War Against American Women, with these words, “to be a woman in America at the close of the 20th century--what good fortune.”³⁴⁴ The fight for equality of women in America is making progress, as women now have many opportunities in every aspect of American society, in business, medicine, academic, finance and the political arena. And yet, Faludi continues, women have never been so miserable. To summarize her point, she lists some of the headlines in the news media and study titles in academic journals. She lists:

Professional women are suffering “burnout” and succumbing to an “infertility epidemic.” Single women are grieving from a “man shortage.” The *New York Times* reports: Childless women are “depressed and confused” and their ranks are swelling. *Newsweek* says: Unwed women are “hysterical” and crumbling under a “profound crisis of confidence.” The health advice manuals

friends, who are, according to Warner, “the smartest-of-the-smart, well-off, and powerful women, with their Washington-insider” connections, coined the term “the mess” to describe motherhood in America.

³⁴³While Korean mothers’ activities seem to be much more focused on providing the perfect academic environment for their children, American mothers described by Warner concentrate on trying to create the perfect childhood for their children. Mothers in both countries are driving themselves insane in the process. For more issues on the motherhood in American, see Judith Warner, Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety (NY: Riverhead Books, 2005).

³⁴⁴ Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women (NY: Anchor Books, 1991).

inform: High-powered career women are stricken with unprecedented outbreaks of “stress-induced disorders,” hair loss, bad nerves, alcoholism, and even heart attacks. The psychology books advise: Independent women’s loneliness represents “a major mental health problem today. (ix-x)

The backlash, as Faludi sees it, to the intense focus on the exaggerated images of women’s sufferings in the media, forces those few successful women to doubt their own advancements. As a “social survival tactic,” they start to rethink their accomplishments, while many even wish to retreat from their establishment, asking just how much individual happiness has to be sacrificed to make a small social change? Are all the sufferings and misery of women throughout the ages, after all, worth whatever little progress has been made thus far in American society? Faludi is furious at those who blame feminism for women’s current afflictions. For her that blame misses the aim of feminism entirely. She believes the basic agenda for feminism is to expand the world for women so they can live many different experiences. But most of all, it is for women not forced to “choose” between public justice and private happiness. Women should be free to define themselves--instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, “by their culture and their men.”³⁴⁵

Modernization has brought many changes in Korea. As mass education has provided equal opportunity for women, women's lives have generally improved in Korean society. Nevertheless, the identity of Korean women remains an ambivalent and conflicting issue, as the social code continues to narrowly define the experience of women and motherhood. Equipped with modern education, the new generation of young women is on a collision course to find self-identity while struggling to overcome the

³⁴⁵ Faludi (1991): xxiii.

centuries old socially and culturally constructed tradition, which forces them to identify themselves as mothers, rather than as independent individuals.³⁴⁶ Finding a new modern ideal for women that is free and not constricted by their culture and their men is the urgent task for the next generation of women in Korea.

Role of the English Language

At present, English has much to celebrate. With a firm establishment in its status as a global language, it has achieved high regard and a certain kind of cultural victory, as can be seen in the fervor for learning of English taking place around the world.

Historically, the spread of English first started in the seventeenth century with the pilgrims' voyage to America, and in the eighteenth century English also moved to Australia with the creation of penal colonies. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the dominance of English was further established through the expansion of British trade and colonization, in which schools, administrative structures, railroads, the postal system, and other institutions of colonial control spread its use.³⁴⁷

Because of its flexible structure, many writers argue that English is the "best" literary medium. It allows for infinite possibilities in phrasings by assigning different grammatical functions for the same word. In his delightful journey through the history of

³⁴⁶ Reportedly, Korean mothers heavily influence their college educated daughters' future career development, more so than teachers at school. See Hyunjoo Song, Korean Women's Career Aspirations as a Result of Resistance to the Status Quo: The Empowering Aspect of the Mother-Daughter Relationship as a Resource for Resistance, Diss. U of Southern California, 1997.

³⁴⁷ Seth Lerer, The History of the English Language, Springfield, VA: The Teaching Company, 1998.

the English language, Bill Bryson, provides evidence of this claim by pointing to Shakespeare who exploited the flexibility of English.³⁴⁸ Bryson explains:

The changing structure of English allowed writers the freedom to express themselves in ways that had never existed before, and none took up this opportunity more liberally than Shakespeare, who happily and variously used nouns as verbs, as adverbs, as substantives, and as adjectives--often in ways they had never been employed before. He even used adverbs as adjectives, as with "that bastardly rogue" in *Henry IV*, a construction that must have seemed as novel then as it does now. He created expressions that could not grammatically have existed previously--such as "breathing one's last" and "backing a horse." (64)

The contribution of English in the literary world is made even clearer by the presence of prominent Indian and Pakistani writers who, as former colonial subjects, are now influencing the shape of English, through their mastery of prose fiction and political debate in new and challenging ways. As English has positioned itself as the new "lingua franca," it has also spread the ideas of freedom, individualism and human rights into politics and the world's understanding of humanity and democracy. These concepts may help to shape the world order and expand our ability to imagine different possibilities.

Defining the Globalizing Economy

Anthony Giddens, a sociologist at the University of Cambridge in England and author of many works in social theory and politics, defines globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice

³⁴⁸ Bill Bryson, The Mother Tongue: English & How It Got That Way (NY: Avon Books, Inc., 1990) 64.

versa.”³⁴⁹ The English language plays an essential role in globalization by facilitating international commerce through faster and more effective communication.³⁵⁰ It is remarkable that more than two thirds of all research papers are now written in one language, English, thereby promoting the exchange of scientific knowledge and technological development and speeding up globalization process.³⁵¹ In theorizing about mass culture, Leo Ching, a professor at Duke University, asserts that a global culture may not exist but certainly a “globalization of culture” is taking place right now, which is part of “the immense expansion and extension of global communications and world markets.”³⁵²

The issue of globalization stirs plenty of anxiety, declares Arjun Appadurai, an anthropologist at the University of Chicago, across academic, business, political, religious and cultural life. It creates a world of new possibilities, uncertainty, inequality, and hidden agendas.³⁵³ Joel Spring, a professor of education at the State University of New York, who supported an educational vision based on a “corporate model of schooling” in the early 1970s, articulates his ambivalence about the role of English.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity (Stanford, CA: Stanford U Press, 1990): 64.

³⁵⁰ Wm. Theodore de Bary, Confucian Tradition and Global education (NY: Columbia U Press, 2007) 81.

³⁵¹ John Naisbitt, Megatrends Asia: Eight Asian Megatrends That Are Reshaping Our World (NY: Touchstone, 1997) 252-253.

³⁵² Leo Ching, "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital," Appadurai (2003) 293.

³⁵³ For more on the debate in U.S. academia on issues of globalization, see Arjun Appadurai, Globalization (Durham, NC: Duke U Press, 2003).

³⁵⁴ The corporate model is an educational vision that is based on the ideas of industrial efficiency and equality of opportunity. The school’s function is to serve as “a sorting machine” to separate students. They are then trained appropriately to meet the demands of the labor market. By employing various

He begins with a series of meaningful doubts on how it is dividing the globalized world economy into “haves and have nots.” He writes:

The global use of English ensured world access to American and British culture, science, entertainment, and most important, economic and political ideas. English provides a language for world unity. However, is the dominance of the English language over other languages a result of its superiority or the political and economic power of the United States and Great Britain? Do the ideas of free trade, individualism, economic competition, and democratic republicanism embodied in American and British language and culture, provide the best means of ensuring the happiness and well-being of the world’s people? Should English be the central language and culture of global education? (30)

As English has become the dominant language for access to higher education, and thus an essential instrument to prosperity in the globalized economy, it has also played a role in creating new forms of social injustice and economic inequalities. Many scholars and intellectuals around the world are also concerned about the spread of masculinized political chauvinism as well as the sexism within gender prejudice that resonate strongly in the English language.³⁵⁵ The expansion of English language as the global language is not at all welcomed by everybody. Its detrimental impact, referred to by some on the left as “linguistic imperialism and intellectual colonialism,” and its role in globalization is making many quite nervous and anxious about its future.

scientific and business applications, students are managed as human resources by expert administrators with the use of standardized tests to measure students’ IQ and other achievements and interests and to identify student potential. Joel Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Global Economy* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998) ix-x.

³⁵⁵ Some associate English, the global language, with “linguistic imperialism” and “intellectual colonialism.” For more detailed explanations, see Spring (1998) 27-30.

Obsession with Learning English

Korea once was a colonized country. However, because it was colonized by Japan, not by Western powers, the English language in Korea does not carry the negative colonial baggage that it has in other parts of the world. In fact, English has become a “class marker” of prestige and cosmopolitan striving, and a positive ideological vehicle. Creating its symbolic value in Korea has come to exceed its practical use.³⁵⁶

Consequently, the popularity of learning English language in Korea has simply become epidemic. Barbara Demick, Seoul bureau chief for The Los Angeles Times, comments on the nationwide fervor for learning English in South Korea as a new national religion.

Although English is given great emphasis in the secondary and tertiary curricula, the Korean government recently announced plans to add English to the elementary curriculum and to expand college classes conducted in English. The main purpose for this new policy is to strengthen the competitiveness of Koreans in the global economy and to facilitate international commerce. Since that announcement by the Ministry of Education in 1995, the fever for learning English has greatly accelerated, opening up the fast growing market for private after-school English classes for children. The extent of the education market for English private schooling is estimated to be a \$3 billion-a-year industry.³⁵⁷ This astonishing figure does not include the expense of the thousands of

³⁵⁶ See So Jin Park and Nancy Abelmann, "Class and Cosmopolitan Striving: Mothers' Management of English Education in South Korea," Anthropological Quarterly 77.4 (2004): 645-72.

³⁵⁷ The ratio between the Korean students who are leaving Korea to study abroad and the foreign students who are coming to Korea to study is reportedly 22:1, which severely affects the Korea's balance of payments in education services. According to Trade Research Institute of Korea International Trade Association (KITA) report on February 6, 2005, Korean students who were abroad to study in 2004 spent 5.15 billion dollars while the expenditures by foreign students in Korea was .49 billion dollars. See, Keuk-in Bae, "Outbound Study-Abroad Students Outnumber Visiting Students 22:1", Dong-A Ilbo, 6 February 2005.

children sent abroad to improve their English skills, adding billions more in expense. In 1997, already 70% of the children in Seoul were consumers in this expanding English education market.³⁵⁸

The cost of learning English as measured in economic terms is clearly enormous, but the physical and psychological price paid in trying to learn English is immeasurable and has become a kind of social crisis in Korea today. Indeed, the pressure from parents and the stress of learning English at an early age have created an anomalous cultural and educational environment, which in the minds of some critics such as Professor Byoung-chol Choi, a leading promoter of Confucian ideas in Korea, has become pathologically unhealthy for Korean students. The detrimental effects of this seemingly blind passion for learning English have already created a Frankenstein-like social phenomenon. Doctors report frequent requests by parents of young children to perform surgery on the tongues of young children, in the belief that the surgery will help their children improve the pronunciation of English words.³⁵⁹

Many English schools for young children, seeking to capture a portion of the \$3 billion-a-year industry, are often over-priced, unqualified and ineffective. Consequently, many parents opt to send their children abroad to English-speaking countries in the hope they will learn English more quickly and effectively. Yet without the comfort and

³⁵⁸ So Jin Park and Nancy Abelmann (2004).

³⁵⁹ This “tongue surgery” is what is known as oral frenectomy, the removal of a frenulum, a small fold of tissue that is attached to the bottom of the tongue that prevents the tongue from moving too far. Frenectomy is often performed to treat a tongue tied patient to allow breastfeeding and help improve speech and promote proper tooth arch development in growing children. In Korea, however, English crazed parents believe that this surgery will help children to better pronounce the English “r” which is a particularly difficult sound for Koreans to make, since the articulation of “r” does not exist in Korean language. Obviously, this surgery is unnecessary since Koreans born in America or other English speaking countries have no problem in saying “r.”

security of home and parents, many of these children are too young to cope with the stress of living in a foreign country. Some children are developing serious psychological and physical problems. The most common symptoms reported include early hair loss, involuntary twitch, frequent stomach aches and headaches, phobia, ulcers, bedwetting, nightmares and stuttering.³⁶⁰ The popularity of “tongue surgery” and the growing trend of sending young children to an English-speaking country, a phenomenon rather inaccurately labeled as “early study abroad,” demonstrate the powerful role English is playing in Korean society today. Obviously, mothers think nothing of subjecting their children to a tongue operation, as it is a minor surgery. After all if it improves their offspring's English pronunciation, the benefit is large, so they believe.

An interview with Yoo-kyung Yoo, a graduate in the class of 2000 at Ewha Women's University, provides some insight into why Koreans believe acquiring English language skills is so important, which also explains motivation for the huge exodus of Korean children and their families. Yoo believes that, for example, sending seven year-olds to an English speaking country is all important because it provides an effective way to improve the children's English language skill. She argues that through such immersion, one year of study in an English speaking country can produce a learning result that is equivalent to five or more years of study in Korea. Yoo's remark becomes even more convincing because despite the inordinate amount of time Korean university students spend studying English, they still have a hard time conversing in it. Besides, she reasons learning English at an early age will reduce the need to study it later.

³⁶⁰ Barbara Demick, "A Snip of the Tongue and English Is Yours!" International Herald Tribune, 8 April 2002.

Advocates for young children studying English abroad urge others to recognize the fact that, given their flexible nature, young children are able to adapt to different cultures and learn different languages more easily than older students who are in middle and high school.³⁶¹ Furthermore, there are obvious advantages to learning English in a living and dynamic setting, compared to studying it as a foreign language from a book, especially if the goal is to take the test which may have little to do with speaking fluency.³⁶² Still, the risk of young children developing psychological and physical problems of phobia or stammering should be seriously considered. The question that needs to be asked is whether or not sending away young children for the purpose of learning English is a sign of parental short sightedness and greed. Subjecting children to such a precarious learning environment, especially in their fragile years, may after all not bring the best result.

The driving force for children being sent abroad is to learn English with a higher level of proficiency and to gain a strong competitive edge when they return to Korea. The power of this force reveals just how poor the teaching of English is in Korean classrooms. In recent years, the amount of time spent in English-language instruction has been increased in the belief that this will make students more competitive and prepare them for the global challenge. However obvious the benefits of increased time in the classroom may be, this misguided policy cannot provide high levels of English competency. Pushing English in university classes in fact raises more questions than providing solutions. The chief issue is whether the English skills of the teachers and

³⁶¹ Susan Youn, "Early Education in English-Speaking Countries," *Pioneer* 125 (2004).

³⁶² Japanese students share the same difficulties as Korean students in learning English. For more details on the experience of Japanese students, see Feiler (1991) 179-90.

students are good enough to ensure a quality learning environment and meet the expectations of many Korean students for the higher goal and rewards of university education.

"The frenzy and glorification of the English language in Korea has gone overboard," says Yoon-joon Lee, an elementary education student at Ewha Women's University, echoing the sentiment of many university students who believe that putting so much time and effort into education in English is a misdirected goal and waste of time. Because the challenge of overcoming the language barrier is so great, the very quality of the classes taught in English, given the poor language skills of the teachers themselves, is typically much lower than courses taught in Korean. As a result, classes taught in English are impractical and extremely inefficient in helping students to sharpen their analytical skills. As a result, many students feel that the universities' one-sided faith in studying the English curricula distorts the whole purpose of higher education. Although it is important to be able to speak English so that students can compete with others in the global market, many students believe learning more about the world by diversifying the scope of their knowledge is as important as increasing English proficiency.

Acquiring English speaking ability does not make children better students, declares Joshua Park, a Harvard-educated lawyer, commenting on the phenomenon of wild geese families who are migrating so that their children can learn English.³⁶³ Not all Korean-Americans, who were born in the United States and speak English as their first language are good in English. He reasons that to be good in English means to speak well, but also to be able to read, comprehend, write, and debate effectively in English. Park reminds Korean parents that without sincere effort, their child will be just another

³⁶³ Park, J. (2004).

mediocre student in America. Although the importance of English education cannot be ignored as Korea faces more and more economic competition in globalization, a key ingredient in increasing the nation's competitiveness may not be simply in raising the number of English courses in universities. In the end, competitiveness really depends on how universities in Korea can produce more critical thinkers in Korean society and not merely increase the number of English speaking students.

Despite the strong criticism toward the practice of early study abroad, the importance of acquiring English language skills in the globalized world can not be dismissed. As the technology and knowledge society became "one single market," English language skills are in demand. It is especially important to note that more than 70% of the information on the Internet is in English. Most linguists agree that acquiring a foreign language or languages is best done before children reach 15 years of age. If English skills enhance competitiveness in the world market, how can one not strive to learn English? What is the best way and is there any way for non-English speakers to acquire the ability without leaving the country? That is a big question and everybody is looking for an answer.

Role of the Media

What? Who? Where? When? Why? How? These "five W's and an H" are all the basic and necessary ingredients to be clearly included in the first paragraph for a news report to be objective and accurate. Regarded as the first commandment, they are the

mantra for reporters, acquiring their “second nature at journalism-schools.”³⁶⁴

Sometimes, however, what we have learned at school stays at school and does not at all apply to the real world. Reporters, even the best and most objective ones, operate under circumstances that shift the world from what really happens to what gets reported.³⁶⁵ It may be the inevitable outcome of the process of creation. Nevertheless, the media is an effective force that produces the double realities of intentional and unintentional fabrications and a powerful manufacturer of a parallel world that is full of imagination and fantasies.

Shaping Today’s Realities

“News is not what happens, but what someone says has happened or will happen,” asserts Leon Sigal, the author of Reporters and Officials who teaches at Wesleyan University. This is because reporters are seldom in a position to witness events first hand.³⁶⁶ What are the realities behind the images? Mary Pipher, a psychologist, discusses how television, with moving color visuals to aid, probably is the most powerful medium in shaping our reality today. As an example, she introduces one of her students who came from the Tonga Islands where she grew up without experiencing any media input and never saw television or heard rock and roll until she came to the United States in high school.³⁶⁷ The student reports how happy her childhood was, feeling safe all the

³⁶⁴ Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds., Reading the News: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986). p. 3,

³⁶⁵ For more details on the development of increased corporate pressures to emphasize events, policies, and politicians favored by media owners in the United States, see Ben H. Bagdikian, The Media Monopoly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

³⁶⁶ Leon V. Sigal, "Who? Sources Make the News," Manoff and Schudson (1986) 15.

time. She didn't know she was poor, or that parents hurt their children and that children hated their parents. Most of all, she thought she was pretty.

Images from the media can mess up our minds. The statement above is a poignant reminder how our hopes and desires, and our thoughts and outlooks on life can be shaped by the images on TV, magazines, and newspapers, and now on the Internet. Sometimes it is hard to completely differentiate between reality and fantasy. Pipher explains why:

Most real life is rather quiet and routine. Most pleasures are small pleasures--a hot shower, a sunset, a bowl of good soup or a good book. Television suggests that life is high drama, love and sex. TV families are radically different from real families. Things happen much faster to them. On television things that are not visually interesting, such as thinking, reading and talking, are ignored. Activities such as house work, fundraising and teaching children to read are vastly underreported. Instead of ennobling our ordinary experiences, television suggests that they are not of sufficient interest to document. (90)

How many social problems presented in the media are as real and urgent as they are portrayed in the media? Would the reality of "examination hell," without media attention, be as big an issue as it is? Many educational problems we are concerned with are probably in fact urgent and pressing issues. Equally, many of them are perhaps trivial. They may not demand our attention until a politician or a reporter makes them so. Who, then, creates and manipulates the images of education mothers in Korea and with what intent? Often we mimic media images to become someone else, even when we know better. It is all very plausible that the media's very reporting of "education fever" may have contributed to making the problem as heated as it is today.

³⁶⁷ Mary Pipher, The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families (NY: Ballantine Books, 1996): 89.

Creating a Culture of Anxiety

On the very day of the national examination, many mothers in Korea go to their churches, temples or other retreat centers to pray and cry. On that day, the images of nervous and exhausted mothers are flashed on every television screen all day in Korea.³⁶⁸ The devotion of these mothers to their children's education is visible everywhere, reminding women what motherhood is all about. The mothers who are staying home quietly reading, cooking, or taking naps while waiting for their children to return home are curiously absent from those images.

Many Korean women want to be independent individuals and have their own identities, even as most of them become full-time housewives. Choosing between a career and motherhood is always a tenuous decision especially for mothers with little children. But the images of mothers on TV, who are sacrificing everything for their children, influence their choice by strengthening the already pervasive belief in Korea that married women should stay at home and children should be taken care of by their own mothers. The media reinforces and manipulates the expectations of the audience.

Merry White, cited earlier, shares her experience of an encounter with the Japanese media at a panel on which she participated in Tokyo. On the subject of working mothers, she tried to convey the complexity of the issue. To her horror, however, her remarks were significantly changed to suit the TV station's intention. By employing a very graphic set of drawings to increase the tension on the issue, the situation of the latchkey child was too simply, and worse, negatively portrayed, leaving no room for any

³⁶⁸ Hae Joang Cho (1995) 151.

debate on this serious social issue.³⁶⁹ The following is her description of what she saw on the evening news:

The first showed an empty kitchen, with a child sitting at a table, and the clock showing 4:00 p.m. With tears running down his cheeks, he held a school report card with “failure” written on it. The next drawing showed a kitchen with a happy child sitting at the table, a snack in front of him, displaying a splendid set of grades to his apron-bedecked, attentive mother. The producers of the show had crafted the standard message, knowing how the audience would respond in advance, and ignored the more complex (and far less dramatic) picture I had tried to create. (35)

In The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things, Barry Glassner, a sociologist at the University of Southern California, nails the news media as one of the sources creating the culture of fear in America. By giving disproportionate coverage to certain issues, the news media clearly affects readers and viewers, cueing them to feel danger, even if there is none. A non-event becomes a reality as evidenced in many people responding with the phrase “I saw it in the news.”³⁷⁰ Likewise, the phenomenon of “education fever” in Korea may also be a response to widespread fear of being left behind, reinforced by the media. Linked with modern success, now, the value of higher education is to gain economic prosperity and material affluence. The goal of corporate marketing reduces one’s life to one happy and continuous movement forward to another day of shopping. When our lives are carried out in front of TV, our imaginations are manipulated by commercialism, which transforms our dreams, reducing us to believe that happiness in modern society can be bought and sold.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ M White (1986)

³⁷⁰ Barry Glassner, The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things (NY: Basic Books, 1999): xix-xxii.

Education, more than providing an economic means, should help students to become more creative and to be better thinkers. But most young Koreans breathe in and consume media and thus are deeply affected by the content in the media. According to one poll, the life goal for most university students in Korea is to make lots of money and be rich. A very popular class at a well known university was titled “Theory of Wealth - Intro to How to Become Rich.” In Korea, to increase viewer ratings for a TV drama, a character playing a millionaire must be a part of the show. Material happiness is so exaggerated by the media's presentation that daytime TV episodes and periodical articles need a glamorized view of the rich and famous included in the content.

One of the interesting new trends in Korea is the erosion of the traditional preference for sons among young mothers. The preference for daughters was higher among the highly educated higher income earners and big-city dwellers, with 48.7 percent of mothers in their 20s, 43.7 percent of those in their 30s, and 34.8 percent of those in their 40s preferring daughters to sons.³⁷² This is an indication that an alternate set of values and healthy common sense can develop even if they challenge traditional values and rebuild new gateways to the future. The power of media influencing families has become increasingly stronger, while the family's power to influence the media has become weaker.³⁷³ At the crossroads of “educational meltdown,” the Korean media can play an important role in reinforcing healthy values in family and community and

³⁷¹ The level of education is highly correlated with income, though it correlates little to human happiness. Education may be a factor to happiness only by helping to adapt better to a changing environment. In general, being highly educated tends to raise aspiration levels. As a result, such individuals are more prone to depression and get more distressed when they face economic hardship and unemployment. See Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer, Happiness & Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affect Well-Being (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U Press, 2002) 58-59.

³⁷² "Korean Mothers - Intriguing Mix of Old and New Views," Chosun Ilbo April 28, 2005.

³⁷³ Pipher (1996) 206.

reshaping the national system of education to preserve the best of their long tradition while implementing democratic ideals. The media, together with dedicated Korean educators, can have an impact on finding solutions to the educational crisis that hovers ominously over Korean society.

Chapter Summary

Korea's modern education system can be seen as the confluence of three major cultural forces, the deeply embedded Confucian values, the thirty-six years of colonial rule by Japan, and the influence of American democracy after the liberation of Korea in 1945 and particularly during and after the Korean War, 1950-1953. Whatever role one might assign to any one of these cultural legacies in the mix of Korean education, one cannot deny its fundamental role in explaining Korea's miraculous economic development over the past half century. At the same time the mix has deteriorated and raised serious question about the future direction of education, including most seriously the problem of "education fever" and the intense competition and narrowly defined school curricula that have become an instrument for preparing the college entrance examination.

The complex role that mothers play in Korean children's education is one of the important factors explored. Although a majority of Korean women expect to participate in the workforce today, they experience severe gender discrimination in getting a job and performing in the work place. Thanks to the unprecedented opportunities for girls to receive education, the larger problem of gender equality rests not with the schools but in the labor market. Furthermore, because of cultural constraints imposed by society, a

majority of university educated women still become full-time housewives and stay-at-home mothers after their marriage, focusing themselves on children's education. Being an "education mama" is a tough job and a uniquely Korean motherhood that is prescribed to aggressively push their children to study hard and strive for entering a prestigious college.

Korean society traditionally has created an unrealistic image for mothers. As a way of invoking traditional values, the stories of a few historical mother figures have been presented as a way of reinforcing those values. Although they demonstrated many admirable qualities, those same characteristics may also be considered outdated to modern sensibilities. Despite many years of education received, the cultural norm for young girls and women, who are encouraged to adhere to motherhood roles prescribed by Confucian tradition and to sacrifice themselves for their children's education, is so powerful that even today mothers in Korea often are not identified by their individual name but as so and so's mom. Understanding how the idea of motherhood is defined so differently within traditional Korean philosophy and culture helps in understanding why and how mothers' role is a factor creating a serious social problem of "education fever" in contemporary Korean society.

As the language of globalization, the role of English in Korean education is undeniably important and continues to affect cultural values in Korea. Acquiring English language skills has become the national obsession to bring advantages to both individuals and the Korean economy as a whole. The Korean government is partially responsible for education fever by implementing more English instruction and classes taught in the schools, in the belief that these programs will strengthen Korea's competitiveness in the

world market. Korea pays a high price for this English education frenzy, because it confuses teachers, parents and children in shaping their priorities and their ideas about citizenship, the nature of the good society, and the intrinsic benefits of learning.

As Korea has become more technologically advanced and equipped with widespread broadband internet connections, and with more cell phones by far per capita than any other country in the world, the role of mass media and its technology have played a powerful role in shaping Korean perceptions of the world and the expectations and values of younger generations. In imagining their future, young people in Korea seem to have narrowed their aspirations by focusing on economic success and material affluence. One cannot deny that the media have played a powerful role in shaping the perception on parental responsibilities for children's education, which, in turn may have turned up the heat in Korea's "education fever." With the same effectiveness, one wonders, how the media may be able to play a pivotal role in redirecting Korean education in more positive ways.

CHAPTER 6

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE EDUCATION CRISIS

Introduction

In Stumbling on Happiness, Daniel Gilbert, a psychologist who teaches at Harvard University, writes about a simple but powerful idea. That is, what distinguishes human beings from other animals is the ability of humans to “think about the future.”³⁷⁴ He presents the peculiar habit of squirrels, which bury food now for later consumption, to support his argument. The behavior of squirrels seems to be rooted in some sort of serious plan for food scarcity in the future. However, it is not. Their behavior is simply an automatic response to the amount of sunlight triggering the mechanism of a food-burying program built in the brains of squirrels. Decreasing sunlight detected through squirrels’ eyes signals shortened days, which set the squirrels off to act. It really has nothing to do with the intervening contemplation of tomorrow.

Gilbert is quite confident on his findings as evidenced in the following. He writes:

Until a chimp weeps at the thought of growing old alone, or turns down a Fudgesicle because it already looks too fat in shorts, I will stand by my [statement]. We think about the future in a way that no other animal can, does, or ever has, and this simple, ubiquitous, ordinary act is a defining feature of our humanity.

³⁷⁴ Daniel Gilbert, Stumbling on Happiness (NY: Knopf, 2006).

.....
The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine objects and episodes that do not exist in the realm of the real, and it is this ability that allows us to think about the future. As one philosopher noted, the human brain is an 'anticipation machine,' and 'making the future' is the most important thing it does. (4-5)

Professor Gilbert's thesis, however, does not end with eternal optimism about the remarkable power of the human brain and its capacity to think. He also explores the limitations of the human imagination. Drawing from ample evidence of advanced scientific research and his vast knowledge in cognitive neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, and behavior economics, he cautions us about how our imagination can mislead us in a wrong direction in our search for happiness.

The diaspora of Korean children presents an excellent example of what happens when our imagination leads in the wrong direction. The educational goal pursued in the search of happiness can make the future an arduous journey. Although a great deal of progress has been made in the national education system in Korea for the past 30 years, educational policies to meet the challenges of modern society, which has become increasingly complex and much more tenuous, have largely failed. By focusing educational purposes on economic growth, Korean education has narrowed the true vision of education itself. The tight hold the Confucian legacy has on passive and repetitive rote memory-oriented education, for example, limits students in their ability to conceive of new ideas or become more creative.³⁷⁵ Furthermore, the single-minded

³⁷⁵ G.E.R. Lloyd, a professor of Ancient Philosophy and Science, and Master of Darwin College in Cambridge, UK, provides a persuasive explanation on the major difference between ancient Greek and ancient Chinese intellectual traditions which lie in the role of intellectuals in those two societies. He contrasts Greek philosophers who are constantly criticizing one another, to Chinese thinkers, who acting as transmitters and not as innovators, seek to find the common ground often repeatedly harking back to the

pursuit of learning English is another misguided goal in education. An educational approach based on the assumptions that human happiness can be achieved by becoming fluent in English in the pursuit of power and the accumulation of material wealth, which has become so rampant in modern Korea, can not produce a good society.

In The Purpose of Higher Education, Huston Smith, an American philosopher and professor of religion, raises the same question on how far we can agree on educational goals.³⁷⁶ In 1955, he asked,

What is the basic purpose of education? To transmit the past or to control the present? To nurture an elite or to make all men equal? To impart information or to elicit criticism? To cultivate minds alone or men as well? Should it take as its object man universal, stripped of all irrelevancies of time, fortune, and motivational intent, or man particular, shaped by crucial variables of culture and idiosyncrasy? (1)

A half-century later, those questions still echo eloquently to anyone who is engaged in the study and delivery of education, especially in Korea where the obsession with education, “education fever,” seems to be crowding out the true notion of what education is all about.³⁷⁷

Education is a central issue for every government, as it is believed to be the most effective mechanism to achieve a competitive edge individually and collectively for the whole nation in the globalizing world. In her book, Does Education Matter?, Allison Wolf, an education specialist, not a trained economist, meticulously analyzes the value of

teachings and wisdom of the past. See G.E.R. Lloyd, Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge U Press, 1999).

³⁷⁶ Huston Smith, The Purposes of Higher Education (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955).

³⁷⁷ An excellent and yet inspiring example of “the joy of learning” experiences by Japanese students in their English class is provided by Bruce Feiler who worked as an American English teacher in the Japanese schools. See Feiler (1991) 271-89.

education, using cost benefit analysis in economic language to describe why education does matter. Nevertheless, she surprises us with her conclusion that says more education does not necessarily bring more advantages to society. Her statement offers a stark contrast to the conventional wisdom about the power of education. How far then should a nation or an individual push its education agenda? The answer lies in how we measure the successes and failures of education. Unlike numerical indices such as income level or test scores, qualitative intrinsic factors of human happiness and decency, for example, are hard to compute, though they are critical ingredients in building the so-called “good society.”³⁷⁸

All parents in every society want their children to do better and improve their lives. The willingness of Korean parents to send their children away to a foreign country, comes from the exact same sentiment. They want their children to be successful and be happy and most of all receive a good education. The Korean people's strong zeal for education and drive for academic excellence, however, have created an extremely competitive environment where entering college has become the main purpose of education. Known as “examination hell,” this peculiar social phenomenon suggests a schism in Korean education that is ambivalent about conflicting demands of two modes, moving forward with modernization on the one hand, and standing still with centuries old tradition on the other.

³⁷⁸ Robert N. Bellah, an eminent American sociologist, reminds us that money and power are necessary as means, but they are not the proper measures of a good society and a good world. In order to achieve a good society, he suggests the need to include a richer vocabulary such as “attention,” “distraction,” “cultivation,” and “exploitation” in our discussion to define our priorities and to strengthen existing institutions and to create new ones, and most of all, to know what human happiness really is. For more discussion on the subject, see Robert Bellah, et al., The Good Society (NY: Vintage Books, 1992) 254-86.

Karen Armstrong, a former nun and a prolific writer, believes that fundamentalist religion is a product of modern culture. She offers a fresh way of looking at this dilemma by comparing pre-modern culture which contains both mythos and logos (two complementary ways of thinking), with modern secular culture which stands solely on logos. The society informed by logos generally forges ahead bravely, creating new things, elaborating on old insights, and mastering the environment. By employing rational, pragmatic, and scientific means, modern society based on the foundation of logos may be efficient and extremely practical in its dealings with human problems. Mythos, on the other hand, is concerned with eternal and universal meanings, which help human beings to relieve or endure pain and sorrow. By answering questions about the ultimate meanings of life, it provides people with a context that allows them to make sense of their daily lives.³⁷⁹

Alternative education in Korea, although in existence for only about a decade, has emerged as a force for change and has gained tremendous popular support as a grassroots movement. As parents and educators in Korea are desperately looking for a solution to the alleged failures of the public school system manifested in the exodus of children, alternative education with its humanistic and open approach to education may offer an opportunity to interpret Confucian values in a new light. Considering how short a period it required for Korea to transform itself from a traditional society to a technologically advanced industrialized society, Korea's educational crisis today may be understood as paying overwhelming attention to logos at the expense of mythos. If so, understanding core cultural meanings of Confucianism in Korean society may help to address the complex and seemingly insoluble educational problems in Korea. Whether or not

³⁷⁹ Karen Armstrong, The Battle for God (NY: Ballantine Books, 2000): xi-xviii.

alternative education can provide an effective solution to the educational crisis in Korea remains to be seen.

Confucianism: The Rising Phoenix

The Phoenix, “*Feng Huang*” in Chinese, is the mythical bird of China. It symbolizes the immortality of resurrection, life after death. Also known as the “Firebird,” the legend in the West says that it dies in the flame of a funeral pyre that is built by its own attempt, only to be born anew. When it rises from the ashes, it will live another thousand years. The famous ballet composed by Igor Stravinsky, “The Firebird,” for example, is based on the Russian folk tale in which the bird is depicted as both “a blessing and a curse” to its captor. Confucianism in East Asia is the rising Phoenix. Its enduring ideas and ideals are like the Firebird, which brings both “a blessing and a curse” to its holders for the countries in the East Asia. Confucianism, with its emphasis on the intrinsic value of study, the closeness of family ties, and obedience to authority, can be seen as a blessing that helps to explain the remarkable economic success and social progress in Korea.³⁸⁰ The curse, on the other hand, is seen in the financial and political crises, and educational failure in particular, as clearly manifested in the diaspora of Korean children.

³⁸⁰ T.R. Reid, who comments on the National Public Radio (NPR) is presently Rocky Mountain bureau chief, and previously was bureau chief in London and also in Tokyo for The Washington Post, talks about the “other miracle,” that is measured other than in economic terms, of Confucian societies of East Asia. See T.R. Reid, Confucius Lives Next Door: What Living in the East Teaches Us about Living in the West (NY: Vintage Books, 2000).

Confucian values, comparable to protestant ethics in America,³⁸¹ have shaped political, social, economic and educational institutions in Korea for nearly two thousand years. Consequently, understanding the role of the Confucian based examination system in Korea provides some clues to the complex and even conflicting interpretations that justify competing models of education. The question is whether it is reasonable to hold Confucianism accountable for many of the social problems--especially those associated with education and youth culture--facing Korea today. Although that is what many critics of Confucianism in Korea would claim, others would disagree and argue that Confucianism, despite its excesses and rigid applications in the past, holds promise for addressing some of the problems of modern society.

The Confucian Debate

Under 36 long years of brutal rule by colonial Japan, the aspirations of the Korean people, their identity, and their collective psyche were severely bruised. Even after the liberation from Japan, unimaginable destruction continued to plague Korean landscapes and communities, much of it by American bombing in the Korean War, and further contributed to Korea's economic, political, and cultural confusion. Through remarkable economic growth and progress in political democracy in recent years, Koreans finally have gained much needed confidence and reclaimed their identity. The educational system in Korea reflects the combination of an enthusiastic embrace of modernity and a

³⁸¹ For more discussions on the history of moral education in America, see Joel Spring, American Education: An Introduction to Social and Political Aspects (NY: Longman, 1997); and James W. Fraser, The School in the United States: A Documentary History (NY: McGraw-Hill, 2001).

tenacious adherence to Confucian tradition, which is both praised and also blamed for the successes and the failures of modern Korean society. As a result, the efficacy of Confucianism is now being reevaluated, as its ambivalent role has ushered in a heated debate in Korea.

Driven by an ever-expanding economy, Korea has become an aggressively innovative society. The collapse of Asian financial markets in 1997-98, or the so-called “IMF Crisis” in Korea provoked an intense debate among many Koreans concerned about the direction of Korean society, where capitalism has now strongly taken hold and monetary rewards and uncontrolled materialism are shaping Korean values. Reexamining the core of Confucian values in Korean society, as well as the assumptions and arguments used to justify both sides of the debate, should provide some clues to the underlying issues in Korean education.

Among various books published in Korea offering views on the causes of the financial disaster in particular, but also other social and educational problems in general, two are chosen to serve as useful marking points for this critical debate. Published in 1999, *Gongjaga Jukeoya Naraga Sanda* (“Confucius Must Die for Korea to Survive”) by Professor Kyong-il Kim is an especially critical book, instantly starting the wildfire of debate on the influence of Confucianism in Korean society.³⁸² Kim, a professor of Chinese Language and Literature, attacked Confucianism as the source of all maladies in Korea. His bold and impetuous view sparked the anti-Confucian movement in contemporary Korea.

³⁸² For more details representing one of the most vocal critics on Confucian tradition, see Kung-il Kim, *Gongjaga Jukeoya Naraga Sanda* (“Confucius Must Die for Korea to Survive”) (Seoul: Bada Chulpansa, 1999).

Within six months, *Gongjaga Salaya Naraga Sanda* (“Confucius Must Live for Korea to Survive”) was written by Professor Byoung-chol Choi, a challenge to Kim’s critical thesis.³⁸³ Choi is a specialist in Eastern Philosophy and Chinese Literature and a graduate of Korea’s leading Confucian academy, *Seonggyun-gwan* University.³⁸⁴ To make their points, both authors begin with various problems of Korean society today, including three major historical events that are regarded as the most painful, and shameful, experiences for Koreans in the twentieth century. The first is Japan’s colonization of Korea, the second is the Korean Civil War between North and South, and the third is the Asian financial market collapse in 1997-98. Kim dismisses Confucianism as an archaic system that needs to be abandoned, while Choi insists that its values endure and need to be strengthened for Korea to survive in the new millennium. A few of the more contentious issues within this debate are presented in the following.

Politics

The issue of Confucian influence on Korean politics starts with Confucian ideals that emphasize the cultivation of virtue and the creation of a hierarchical order in human relations. Close affection and, in particular, intense loyalty among family members and one’s inner group is emphasized as key to maintaining social and political order. Those values can be problematic, especially in Korea where democracy is still young and

³⁸³ For more details defending Confucian teachings, see Byeong Cheol Choi, *Gongjaga Salaya Naraga Sanda* (“Confucius Must Live for Korea to Survive”) (Seoul: Sia Press, 1999).

³⁸⁴ *Seonggyun-gwan* University was established in Seoul (then called, *Hanyang*) in 1288 AD and, until the Japanese annexation of Korea, considered as the educational center in Korea. As the highest educational institution, its faculty consisted of the most distinguished scholars, and its library contained a priceless collection of the finest works of Chinese scholars. Most importantly, all the royal examinations were held in its grounds.

fragile.³⁸⁵ In other words, Korean values that are based on Confucian tradition often collide with democratic values such as human rights, voluntary participation, privacy, freedom, and equality as defined by Western rationality.

Kim views Confucian hierarchy as a Machiavellian tool that is designed to position men over women, old over young, teacher over student, and most importantly ruler over common people, demanding their blind obedience and submission to authority.³⁸⁶ Kim believes this hierarchical structure legitimates those people in power to control and manipulate others to their advantage.³⁸⁷ Consequently, he argues, political corruption, widespread cronyism, and authoritarian regimes helped to hold together the Korean political system for much of the 20th century—all legitimated by this powerful legacy of Confucianism. Kim also claims the Confucian emphasis on bloodlines is the cause for the lack of unity in Korean society, so that every man is basically out for himself, his family and his relatives. This lack of unity, Kim argues, was one of the underlying factors that explain the easy takeover of Korea by Japan in 1910, the outbreak of the Korean Civil War in 1950, and the financial collapse in 1997-98.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ See W. T. De Bary, The Trouble with Confucianism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); and L. E. Harrison and S. P. Huntington, eds., Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress (NY: Basic Books, 2000).

³⁸⁶ For more discussions on Aristotelian notions of tyranny and the political thought of Mencius to dispute the concept of Oriental despotism, see Jung In Kang and Kwanyong Eom, "Comparative Analysis of Eastern and Western Tyranny: Focusing on Aristotle and Mencius," Korea Journal (2003):.

³⁸⁷ Gregory Henderson, a historian and an expert on Korea, explains the cause of this concentration of political power in the hands of a few as "insufficient general participation in the governing value system of Confucianism." He claims that Confucian philosophy and theory of government are complex and demanding so that lengthy education and mastery of the Chinese classics and ideographical text are required to participate fully in the system. Also, its complicated and costly ceremonial practice further discriminated against common people from participating in the system. As a result, few educated elite joined the ruling class. G. Henderson, Korea: The Politics of the Vortex (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1968) 26-29.

³⁸⁸ Kyung-il Kim (1999) 17-73.

Choi denies Kim's assertion that Confucianism serves only the ones in power. One of the examples he presents to demonstrate the Confucian concern for the common people is the examination system, which grants a high position in government to anyone, regardless of background, who is able to pass the rigorous exams--a true meritocracy. For him Confucianism is an ideal social system and can be seen as a kind of democracy based on its core values expressed in "the mind of people" and "the will of the people."³⁸⁹ He emphasizes the positive sides of the Confucian hierarchical structure, for example, beginning with the sons' obedience for their fathers as the first order in maintaining proper human relationships throughout society. He points out the perils of getting old in the Western society and its failure to take care of their elderly due to the lack of filial piety. He also denies the Confucian origin of authoritarian regimes for the reason that political systems under Confucianism focus on "virtues" rather than "might."³⁹⁰ His point reminds us of the fact that China is meanwhile reassessing its own views about Confucianism, as Marxism and capitalism in the eyes of many Chinese have failed.³⁹¹

Education

Robert Hutchins, a past chancellor of the University of Chicago, states one of the most important elements in the strength of a country is its education system. Since a

³⁸⁹ Byeoung Cheol Choi (1999) 119-26.

³⁹⁰ Byeoung Cheol Choi (1999) 65-96.

³⁹¹ The revival of Confucianism in China is evidenced by the popular demand for the Analects, a collection of Confucius sayings, which is dramatized on TV, published in books, and study programs are established all over the Chinese education system including kindergarten classes, in philosophy departments at universities, and also Confucian-themed executive-education programs offering guidance for business people. See "Ideology in China: Confucius Makes a Comeback." *The Economist* (19 May 2007): 48; and Peter Hessler, *Oracle Bones: A Journey Between China's Past and Present*, NY: Harper Collins, 2006.

democratic community needs the wisdom of the entire population, an educational system needs to guide in the right direction for moral, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual growth.³⁹² He believes that the good of our world today owes not only to business and economics, but also to the traditions of independent thought and critical inquiry that are required to sustain a large and complex modern society. Although the importance of vocational and professional skills cannot be entirely ignored, he argues, the foremost concern should be the attainment of knowledge that is worthwhile unto itself and is the indispensable condition for human creativity.

The educational crisis in Korea is characterized by aspirations, almost obsessive, that parents have for their children's educational attainment and economic success, raising the question about how relevant economic outcomes are in measuring the worth of higher education.³⁹³ What is the prospect for universities whose justification is based primarily on measurable rates of return in terms of monetary value? The views of Kim and Choi on the Confucian influence on education are deeply divided. Kim sees the Koreans' overly reverent stance on education and scholars as a serious impediment to Korea's future. He urges radical changes in the Confucian-based educational system that relies heavily on written tests promoting rote memorization and discouraging practical subjects. He believes the superiority bestowed on teachers over students is one of the major obstacles in the development of creativity. Restrained open discussions of opposing ideas or fresh new ideas in the class room, Kim argues, produces a stifling

³⁹² Robert M. Hutchins, The University of Utopia: Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1964).

³⁹³ Juhu Kim, "Understanding of Education Fever in Korea," KEDI Journal of Educational Policy 2.1 (2004): 7-15.

atmosphere and is the reason why much of Korean education is in crisis.³⁹⁴ Indeed, the phenomena of the Korean children's diaspora and the wild geese families is clear evidence of the stressful and unproductive educational system and a reason for many Korean students and their parents to be attracted to schools in the West which are regarded as open and more dynamic.

Choi, on the other hand, blames Western influence for the failure of the Korean education system. He asserts that removing the emphasis on cultivating core Confucian virtues from Korean education has led to rampant crime, disrespect for law and political corruption.³⁹⁵ He strongly believes the IMF crisis, for example, was the result of Western capitalist influence, which marks just how far the simple accumulation of monetary wealth has become the measure of success in society.³⁹⁶ He laments the fact that education too easily is a "tool" for economic advancement in Korean society and not the means for experiencing the "joy of learning."³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Kyung-il Kim (1999) 254-284.

³⁹⁵ Mainly, Choi is referring to "In" (仁 -- translated as benevolence, humanity, virtue) and "Euri" (義理 -- meaning justice, duty, obligation, faith, loyalty, or integrity).

³⁹⁶ Byeoung Cheol Choi (1999) 150-56 & 171-78.

³⁹⁷ The first phrase in the beginning of the Analects is translated as, "To learn something and then to put it into practice at the right time: is this not a joy?"--Leys' translation; and as "To learn and at due times to repeat what one has learnt, is that not after all a pleasure?"--Waley's translation. Although these translations by two different translators come with a distinctive flavor, both clearly deliver Confucius's intention to set the meaningful tone for the importance of learning (education) in one's life. For more interesting contrasts and subtle differences in the translation of the Analects, see Jimoon Suh, *Yeongeoro Baeuneun Noneo* ("Learning of Confucius Analects in English"), vols. I & II (Seoul: Changjak Shidae, 2001): 23-26.

Gender Issues

The social position of women, as determined by Confucian values, is one of the most controversial issues in Korea. Clearly, there exists an ideal image of woman in the Confucian tradition. Virtuous women are “to obey their fathers in youth, their husbands in married life, and their sons in old age.”³⁹⁸ Kim charges that Confucianism is a cunning device that maintains a social hierarchy in which men dominate women. Rigid social rules and unconditional obedience demanded from women have resulted in deep discontent and a high rate of women’s suicide in Korea.³⁹⁹

Choi, on the other hand, claims that the notion of equality was an important part of the Confucian tradition. The Confucian sense of “Ying and Yang,” “Male and Female,” “Heaven and Earth,” all play an equal role in the working of the universe, with no implication of male superiority over women. In fact, the respect given to mothers and motherhood in a Confucian society is a supreme example, proving that women are not subordinate in the Confucian system. Choi also insists that the domination of women occurred in the West, where philosophers like Aristotle, as well as the early Christian church, advocated male superiority.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Fairbank, et al. (1973) 16.

³⁹⁹ Kyung-il Kim (1999) 158-70.

⁴⁰⁰ Byeoung Cheol Choi (1999): 82-86. Aristotle who is regarded as a great philosopher and pioneer in the field of rational thought remarked that, “woman is an unfinished man, left standing lower in the scale of development,” and also stated in his Politics that “human male is superior to other beings and should therefore rule over animals and women.” R. Foy, The World of Education: An Introductory Text (NY: The Macmillan Co., 1968) 20 & 31. For more discussion on philosophical issues regarding women, see Walter Soffer, "Socrates' Proposal Concerning Women: Feminism or Fantasy," History of Political Thought XVI.2 (1995): 157-73.

The English Language

Regarding the role of the English language in Korea, Kim sees English not as an imperialist language of the West, but an essential tool to communicate in the information age of this globalized world.⁴⁰¹ Because of its extensive usage around the world, he feels it no longer belongs to any specific culture. Nor in his mind does English possess any particular potency that necessarily overwhelms the cultural values that are imbedded in the native language.⁴⁰² Kim presents the case of India, Hong Kong, and Singapore where English is used along with their native languages to support the argument that the adoption of English will bring more benefits than harm in improving education and the business environment in Korea.⁴⁰³ In fact, Kim envisions a flourishing and powerful Korean society in the 21st century, if the ideas of equality, honesty, originality, and critical thinking are valued in Korea, modeling from the West. Kim believes this can be achieved only by rejecting Confucianism. He warns of Korea remaining as a second rate country and not becoming an active participant in the world community so long as Confucian influence remains so strong.

On the other hand, Choi charges that anyone who urges the rejection of Confucianism is under the influence of Western imperialism. He argues such rejection will contribute to the demise of Korean culture. Especially, he believes, the idea of

⁴⁰¹ The strength of English at present time can not be easily reversed since its role of connecting economic, political, intellectual, and cultural activities is huge. Its overdominance, however, should not be accepted without reflection. More on the heuristic value of “mother-tongue” discussions, see Wm. Theodore de Bary, Confucian Tradition & Global Education (NY: Columbia U Press, 2007) 75-99.

⁴⁰² The current debates on “cultural imperialism,” the idea of the invasion of an indigenous culture by a foreign one, include dominance of a language, media, etc. For more theoretical discussions in depth, see John Tomlinson, Cultural Imperialism (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U Press, 1991) 11-19.

⁴⁰³ Kyung-il Kim (1999) 241-53.

making English an official language in Korea is irresponsible. He deeply regrets the fact that English ability is more important for landing a job or a promotion, than knowledge of Korean culture and literature.⁴⁰⁴ He deplores the heavy burden of young children who are pressured to learn English at an early age in order to get ahead. As communication facilitates the exchange of ideas, use of the English language naturally accompanies Western ideas that promote individualism and capitalistic tendencies. In this environment he warns that without serious efforts to preserve “Asian values,” Korea’s identity in the face of further globalization will suffer. He emphasizes how Confucius structured his philosophical system out of the wisdom of the past and how it has successfully guided Asian societies for thousands of years. He asserts only core values within Confucianism can lead Korea into the New Millennium.

Chapter Summary

Among scholars, both Asian and Western, there have been numerous discussions about the issues that are related to Confucian ideas and ideals, representing various political, socioeconomic, and philosophical perspectives.⁴⁰⁵ What does this debate between Kim and Choi mean for Korea’s educational crisis today? If Kim is right, it suggests that in time the dysfunction of the examination system might be resolved, however slowly, through government policies and cultural change, even as the number of

⁴⁰⁴Byeoung Cheol Choi (1999) 6-11 & 226-39.

⁴⁰⁵ More discussions on the issue of human rights in contemporary political culture of China in particular and modern democracy in general should bring a critical and meaningful contribution to the present debate. The following books are but two significant works of importance. See, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China (Chicago: Open Court, 1999); and De Bary (1991).

parachute kids and wild geese families continues to increase. But, if Choi is right, it implies a different kind of correction in the Korean education system, one that will bring some comfort to the parents, the children, and the teachers who seem caught up in a kind of mindless educational frenzy.

Furthermore, if Kim is right, the process of on-going globalization necessarily leads to further modernization, particularly the American pattern of modernization, at the expense of traditional East Asian values and sensibilities. If Choi is right, however much modern technology and globalization make the world a smaller place to live in, East Asian values will nonetheless survive and provide a kind of correction to the excesses of Western capitalism.⁴⁰⁶ In the wake of the failures of Western capitalism and communism, Confucianism is being reconsidered as offering positive alternatives for the future.⁴⁰⁷ All things considered, both sides of the argument have merit. Because of its complexity, the depth and nature of Confucianism and its role in shaping social values in Korean society will continue to be the focus of much discussion as Koreans assess to what extent it is relevant or obsolete.

⁴⁰⁶ It is unlikely that market capitalism is to be displaced in democratic countries since workings of market capitalism favor democracy. According to our historical experience, however, there are conflicting conditions that harm democracy requiring extensive government intervention and regulation to keep the economic, social and cultural order. See Robert A. Dahl, On Democracy (New Haven, CT: Yale U Press, 1998).

⁴⁰⁷ The promotion of Confucianism in East Asia is viewed as an effort to resurrect the indigenous culture which has eroded through modernization. See Huntington, Samuel. P. The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order. NY: Touchstone, 1996) 91-95.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions of the Study

The purpose of this interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research was to understand and explain the educational crisis in contemporary South Korea. Working through the lens of a particular social phenomenon, the diaspora of Korean children, this study placed the crisis in the larger historical context, showing how the education system in Korea has evolved over the years and transformed Korean society. In addition, the study explored the cultural underpinnings of Korean education, with a particular focus on the Confucian tradition, while linking the education crisis to the complex and unresolved issues of Korea's on-going social and economic modernization.

The diaspora of Korean children can be seen as an out-of-country solution to the widespread dissatisfaction with Korean education, in particular with the public schools. The large exodus of Korean children described in this investigation, chronicled by such stories as those depicted in the parachute kids and wild geese families and as expressed in cuckoo mommies and penguin daddies, is a disturbing development that makes clear just how serious the education crisis is in Korea today.

For nearly two thousand years, Confucian values have deeply influenced political, social, economic, and educational institutions in Korea. Some critics blame

Confucianism as the main culprit for the educational crisis today. Others, however, disagree and argue that, despite its excesses and rigid applications in the past, Confucianism holds promise for addressing some of the problems of modern society. As the debate on the Confucian legacy continues, the phenomenon of the diaspora of Korean children has become the focus of critical discussions on how Confucian values have been and will continue to be adapted to the inevitable processes of modernization.

Geo-Political Implications

Korean passions for education and demand for an alternative educational environment is made clear in the zealotry of Korean parents willing to bear financial burdens as well as the emotional pain of separating families as their children are educated abroad. In examining these issues, however, the geo-political reality of the Korean peninsula—described by some as the shrimp caught between two whales, first between China and Japan and after World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union—is extremely important as foundational knowledge when imagining how the educational crisis might be resolved.

South Korea, where the memories of the Korean War are still vivid and the possibility of war with North Korea creates a highly-conflicted political environment, faces complex challenges in resolving the problems of public education. Clearly defined and carefully implemented government policies, not limited to education but including politics and economics as well, will be major factors in correcting and resolving the crisis. The Korean government is keenly aware of the crisis and the Ministry of

Education has made various policy efforts to resolve the problems discussed in this study. However, the crisis remains unresolved because its efforts are patch work in nature and, more importantly, the goals for national education have become trapped in bureaucratic wrangling and too many contradictory and conflicting forces of modernization. A recent policy of expanding English classes at all levels serves as an excellent example to demonstrate how an outwardly sound policy can go awry. This particular policy has only fueled the obsession with learning English, which in turn leads to an increase of the diaspora. It is simply unrealistic to expect the Korean government to come up with a viable strategy that will resolve the education crisis in a short time, unless the plan calls for drastic changes in the entire educational system. Nor is it realistic to expect the government to resolve the deeper cultural conflicts over family relations and women's status, and the on-going rift, as analyzed above, between the proponents and opponents of Confucian influence in Korean society today.

Continuing Relations with America

Whatever policies may emerge, it is important to bear in mind the strong relations with America that frame both the understanding and realities of the crisis. All Koreans today, though they may differ in degree of desire, harbor the wish for reunifying the Northern and Southern halves of the peninsula and ending the Cold War, which was not created by the Korean people but rather by the post-war super powers, most notably the United States.

However different Germany is from Korea, its success in reunification offers hope that in time the two Koreas will be united as well. In fact, even the small steps toward

reunification between the two Koreas already suggest a fundamental political and cultural reorientation in the South.⁴⁰⁸ This reorientation may be catalytic in resolving the education crisis because if and when the South is reunited with the North, the goals of education will likely be shifted toward working out the fundamental political and economic differences between the two Koreas.

Nonetheless, America will continue to play an important role in Korea's geopolitical future. The Korean form of government has been significantly inspired by American democracy. Furthermore, the Korean economy remains highly dependent on trade with the United States, while American culture and values, as seen for example in the popularity of American films and music, have been deeply absorbed by Korean youth. Finally, it seems likely that a large number of American soldiers will remain stationed on South Korean soil for some years yet to come. At the same time, it is conceivable that the ending of the Cold War could allow the Korean people to integrate the best of Confucian values with democratic institutions.

Ambivalent Relations with Japan

Japan has gone through the same experience of struggling with rigid classroom environments, passive learning, obsessions with English, and its own examination hell, all constructive lessons for Korea. Nonetheless, the prospects for Japan playing a role in

⁴⁰⁸ Although it is received with much skepticism, the first historic test run of trains between the divided Koreas has also heightened hopes of reconciliation. In fact, the success of the first trains is already advancing the vision of reunification of two Koreas a step closer as the South Korean government proposed to run trains regularly to the North. See a news report by Jae-soon Chang, "Dream of inter-Korean rail link far off," *Seattle Post-intelligencer* 22 May 2007. 25 May 2007. <http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/national/1104AP_Koreas_Restoring_Rails.html>; and also Reuters' news report dated on 30 May 2007, "South Korea proposes regular trains with North," 3 June 2007. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSSEO4505820070530>>.

addressing Korea's educational crisis seem rather unlikely. Remarkable as both Japanese education and the economy may have been until two decades ago, the Japanese educational and political leadership no longer serves as a model nor offers imagination and fresh ideas.⁴⁰⁹ Examination hell has been a part of Japanese education for decades. However, the declining birth rate has resulted, unintentionally, in forcing universities to lower their standards and become more flexible for admission to college. Meanwhile, Japan's legacy of colonization in Korea lingers in the minds of the Korean people, whose memories are filled with deep bitterness from the unhealed wounds of the colonial period and World War II.

The Expanding Influence of China

Korea's geo-political relationship to China, on the other hand, may turn out to be more positive than that with Japan in addressing the educational crisis. In recent years, the study of the Chinese language and culture has become increasingly popular, while thousands of Korean college students are now studying in China. More profoundly, globalization and trade in particular have nudged many in South Korea, young people in particular, to turn increasingly toward China for influence.⁴¹⁰ This shift in attention towards China brings with it a renewed appreciation for the East Asian cultural tradition,

⁴⁰⁹ Alex Kerr, a longtime admirer of postwar Japan and its culture, reluctantly tells the "dark side" of Japan today. He writes, "Nothing is more difficult to change than a policy that once worked and works no longer...with a new age of services and information management dawning...flexible and inventive minds are called for...exactly what the Japanese system [education in particular] tends to stamp out. Mired in bureaucratic inertia, Japanese schools have been very slow to update the curriculum." See Alan Kerr, Dogs and Demons, Tales from the Dark Side of Japan (NY: Hill and Wang, 2000) 303-04.

⁴¹⁰ Korea is not the only country turning its gaze to China and its rising economic status. For more details, see Clyde Prestowitz, Three Billion New Capitalists: The Great Shift of Wealth and Power to the East (NY: Basic Books, 2005)

particularly Confucianism and its role in global education.⁴¹¹ The consequence of this shift in geographic, cultural, and economic orientation is far reaching. For both Korea and Japan, the total volume of trade with China now supersedes that with the United States. This shift will have powerful implications for education policy throughout East Asia.

At the same time, Korea's struggles in education may become useful points of reference for China, with its much larger challenges in education, for demographic and economic reasons alone. The ripple effects of this shift on their shared educational crises may alter the conceptual framework in which they are discussed. In other words, it may well be that the American model of modernization will become less dominating as new, more Asia-defined, models emerge. This possibility lends some credibility to the familiar comment heard about how the 20th century "belonged" to America while the 21st century may "belong" to the countries of Asia.⁴¹²

Recommendations

Imperfect though they may be American models of education are much admired, as evidenced by the craze for learning English in Korea today. However, the efficacy of American models, particularly in education, has been much debated in a similar discourse within America itself. Noam Chomsky, an eminent linguist and distinguished critic on politics and international affairs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for

⁴¹¹ For more details on why some deem it critical to keep Confucianism alive as a part of global education and to recognize the power of the classics in humanizing the modernization process in East Asia, see De Bary (2007); and Ruth Hayhoe, "Education as Communication," *Montgomery* (1997) 93-111.

⁴¹² Frank Gibney (1992).

example, laments what he characterizes as the increasingly deteriorating educational condition in American society where educational goals are hijacked and used as political propaganda.

One of the problems he sees stems from the mindless drive of media transmitting information as truth. Emphasizing the ideas of two philosophers, John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, the goal of education should be, Chomsky insists, to help create “wise citizens of a free community,” and to encourage a combination of citizenship with liberty and individual creativeness. Building on the "humanistic conception" that grew out of the Enlightenment, Chomsky believes young children will develop into an admirable form in their own way when they are provided an environment conducive to learning. For him, children are not empty vessels to be filled. Rather, Chomsky argues education must nurture children in ways and directions they are already inclined to develop.

The issues raised in this study are complex, and because there are so many variables which may result in unexpected outcomes, this study does not offer any definitive policy recommendations. It seems to this researcher that it would be short-sighted and even presumptuous to offer policy recommendations without more comprehensive study and discussion on how policy is made and carried out in Korean contexts. The purpose of this study was instead to examine the education crisis in the larger context; that is, to see it in terms of the powerful and imperfectly understood historical and cultural forces at work. Nevertheless, more extensive and comparative study of the diaspora, which is unique in modern times and far from finished, should offer more insights that will address the current educational system in South Korea.

Policy Considerations

Caveats aside, in developing educational policy, experts in Korea would be well-served by examining several key factors and monitoring their apparent growth over time. One of these has been the development of alternative education, or *Daean Gyoyuk*, which is defined not as a system of supplementary remedies but rather as complimentary to the current system of public education. It offers a specially-designed pedagogy, programs, activities, and learning environments for children and families who are seeking an alternative to the rigid structure and curricula of the standard public or government controlled schools. Emerging as a fresh new social movement, the many alternative schools on the rise may alleviate some of the serious problems of current public education in Korea.⁴¹³ The aims of alternative education are holistic in nature and designed to promote self-reliance, to prepare students to live their lives according to the principles of interdependence, cooperation and diversity, and peaceful coexistence with others and with the environment.⁴¹⁴ These goals seem worthy and valuable to a future citizenry and might be worth examining by educational policy-makers.

A second policy recommendation is to decrease the extraordinary emphasis given to college entrance examinations whose purpose is to control entrance to a few prestigious universities in Korea. The result of this intense focus is unhealthy

⁴¹³ Hyunjin Seo, "Alternative Education movement in Korea: Its Formation and Development as a New Social Movement," Thesis, Seoul: Kyung Hee University, 2001.

⁴¹⁴ Jared Diamond, Professor of Geography at the University of California in Los Angeles, reminds us of the urgent task of preserving our environment by detailing many examples of great civilizations in the past that collapsed because of their lack of environmental concerns. See Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (NY: Viking, 2005); J. F. Rischard, *High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them*, NY: Basic Books, 2002; and Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We can Do about It* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Books, 2006)

competition among students, which is seen in this research as education fever.⁴¹⁵

Underlying the educational crisis in Korea is the lack of development in creativity and individual personality in general and humanities based instruction in particular, potentially due to the over-riding emphasis upon the content tested in these examinations. However much initiative the Korean government is willing or able to take in addressing the education crisis, one major factor will soon come into play that will force changes. That is Korea's changing demography, namely smaller families and in time fewer college age students applying to colleges, even as the number of Korean universities has expanded in recent years. The effect will be, as it has been in Japan, to force universities to be more open and flexible in admitting students—even lowering standards for admission. It is impossible to say precisely when or how this demographic factor will come into play, but it will likely be within a few decades. Further, whether or not Korea's response to demographic change will be different from the slow and as yet unpromising change in Japan remains to be seen.

Finally, it is important to note that Korea has been an extremely homogenous society, free of racial tension and the need for multiculturalism. Increasingly, however, globalization of the world economy and Korea's own economic strength have attracted a diverse stratum of people from around the world to study, to work and to get married and have children in Korea. It is important to recognize these cultural and racial differences in Korean society, primarily because education can greatly enhance the ability of people to coexist and live harmoniously together by promoting multiculturalism in school. Programs focused upon developmental growth in this area allow students to exchange

⁴¹⁵ Seth (2004).

their views, share cultural differences, and maintain racial equality. Surely those involved in charting the course for Korean education would be well-served by considering the larger social makeup of the nation in developing appropriate policies. These complex and unresolved debates about the role of education in society, however, are not unique to Korea. They are uncertainties faced by educators around the world as trends are analyzed, policies are developed, and programs are implemented and revised.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research suggests that the education crisis in Korea is part of a social problem deeply rooted in its history and culture. Thus, many of the underlying social, economic and political questions raised in this study could be explored further in the following ways:

- As the diaspora of Korean children becomes increasingly widespread, as for example in the stories of parachute kids and wild geese families, there is an urgent need for qualitative research examining its impact upon the family unit and the development of children. Separated and deserted family members aside, recent observations suggest that the parents' financial resources, including much if not all their retirement savings, are spent on their children's education. Because of their obsession with education, assuming that it will guarantee their protection in the future, they often fail to make any other plan for their old age. Modernization in Korea, furthermore, has seriously challenged the traditional family structure. Increasingly, children are no longer willing, or unable if their education has not produced sufficient

economic success, to support their aging parents. How these social and economic trends are connected to the purposes, structures, and content of education--as well as to the vulnerable demographics of an aging society--beg further in-depth research.

- As college entrance examinations have become extremely competitive and as the dissatisfaction with the public school system and unreliable and expensive private tutoring has increased, Korean parents and students have begun turning to alternative education, which since the mid 1990s has gained rather sudden popularity. Although the philosophical foundation of alternative education in Korea encompasses a wide range of educational designs drawn from American as well as from European education experiences, its core idea strongly promotes Confucian values of communalism, which in turn presents a challenge to deeply embedded views on the purpose and nature of mainstream education. However, because of its short history, alternative education is still in an experimental stage, and the trade-offs between implementing some of its promises while preserving the values of the existing system are not yet clear. Therefore, more analytical studies of alternative education focusing on the fundamental goals and comparative achievements should be conducted.
- Comparisons of updated and more expanded assessment of students in China, Japan, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian, communities that share powerful educational legacies with Korea, should be investigated. Evaluating the successes and failures of schooling outside Korea, as measured not only in

financial terms but also in psychological and social costs, would enrich our understanding of the nature and depth of the education crisis and in turn suggest possible changes in education policy.

Postscript

In 1955, quietly, the war orphans left Korea. For the last half century since then, there have been tremendous changes in the political, technological and social life of Korea. Although space and time have transformed the world much further and faster than we ever before imagined, the diaspora of Korean children continues to be a journey in search of happiness, if only in our imagination. When our views of happiness and our outlooks on the future are dominated largely by economic success, we fail to grasp the real meaning of our cultural heritage, our values and our ways of ordering reality. However, that can change. Robert Stone, an acclaimed novelist who was raised by a single mother and left high school to join the Navy, remembers America in 1955.⁴¹⁶ His recollection brings nostalgia and much pleasure for older generations of Americans to look back into a time when they were young and innocent.⁴¹⁷ Such descriptions are also a delicious treat for younger generations, as they provide clear pictures of change over time and space. He writes:

⁴¹⁶ Robert Stone, Prime Green: Remembering the Sixties (NY: Harper Collins, 2007).

⁴¹⁷ Seemingly sweet and innocent as we look back upon it today, in truth the period of 1950s was also riddled with fear and mistrust fueled by the ideological conflicts of the Cold War, including the “Red Scare” of McCarthyism, air raid shelters, and the fear of nuclear attack.

The Navy I'd joined contained many young men who had never seen a television set in a private home. I was one of them. I was also a New York boy; I had never owned a car and I couldn't drive. American regions and their cultures had come out of isolation during the Second World War, but there were only radio and movies to further homogenization. Or sometimes resist it. In 1955, authentic country music, pitched to the white South, rarely employed a drum. Rock and roll was coming. It would change everything. One Sunday in the summer of 1955, a cook at the Naval Training Station, Bainbridge, Maryland, had the idea to serve his recruits pizza as a treat. He advertised it as pizza pie. Back where most of these men came from, pie was festively served with ice cream. Predictably, more than half of them put their ice cream on it. (22)

The year 1955 was the Year of the Goat, which comes around every 12 years in the Chinese zodiac. Even though the world was changing rapidly, narrowing the distance between people and their ideas, many children, both in Korea and America, failed to recognize it because they were in it.

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