IN PURSUIT OF GLOBAL EDUCATION:
CULTURAL CAPITAL AND SUCCESS IN SOUTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT

Over the past 20 years as South Korea has experienced rapid and intense globalization, South Koreans have increasingly looked to global education as a strategy to remain competitive. In this dissertation I use the Korean case to examine the ways in which various global educational strategies have been used to obtain global cultural and social capital. In particular I focus on the experience of studying at foreign universities and the rewards for obtaining a foreign degree in local markets. A total of seventy-five in-depth interviews were conducted with locally educated Koreans, foreign educated Koreans and various evaluators with experience and insight on foreign educated returnees.

I rely especially on Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital to understand what Koreans attending foreign universities gain from this experience and how the various cultural components to studying overseas may be valued or “institutionalized” in the workplace. I find that the pursuit of marketable skills in the global economy takes many forms including both local and global options. There are important differences among Koreans studying abroad as they leave at different times, for different durations and for different reasons, and with varying levels of cultural and social capital. As a comparison, I also examine the varying degrees of global cultural capital among locally educated Koreans using alternatives to studying in foreign universities.

The Korean case provides insight into understanding the nature of global cultural capital. For these returnees it represents a combination of instrumental, or directly applicable human capital, and cosmopolitan experience. Global cultural capital is a long-term investment that provides Koreans with time in a global context to obtain specific skills,
connections with foreigners and authentic global experiences. Koreans describe this
difficult experience as an opportunity for independence that provides confidence in their
capabilities.

According to my interviews, these elements of global cultural remain beneficial in
specific occupations and teams where global cultural capital is most needed. These include
positions in government, research and development, and on specific global marketing,
strategy and sales teams in the business sector. Outside of these specific occupations and
teams, I find the general benefits of global cultural capital are declining. The Korean
business field has changed in the 15 years after the IMF crisis. The supply of Koreans with
foreign credentials has outpaced the demand in Korean business fields today and there are
greater concerns with employee fit or integration. The competition has also intensified, as
locally educated Koreans have been able to improve their global capacities through what I
call global cultural capital lite. They have narrowed the gap. Finally, the process of
becoming global participants through authentic global experiences provides great life
satisfaction for foreign educated Koreans even if it does not easily translate to economic or
occupational advantage.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades as South Korea experienced intense globalization and rapid change internally, the number of South Korean students studying at foreign universities almost doubled (McNeil 2008; International Institute of Education 2013). In 2013, despite a population only a fraction the size of either China or India (1/27 and 1/24 the size respectively), South Korea had the third highest number of students at American universities and sent more students abroad per capita than any other country (Student Exchange Visitor Program 2014; Institute of International Education 2013)\(^1\).

Once a privilege of the South Korean elite, studying abroad has increasingly become a middle class educational strategy (Kim 2010). In the 1990s as incomes in South Korea (hereafter Korea) were growing and passports became more readily available, foreign travel and various forms of study abroad became much more common. By the late 1990s in Korea, studying abroad at all ages exploded. Pre-college study abroad increased during this time from a few thousand in the 1999 to nearly 30,000 by 2006 (Ablemann et al. 2014; An 2011). At the tertiary level, just under 34,000 Koreans were studying at American universities in 1994 (Institute of International Education 1996). By 2000 the number had increased to 45,000 and peaked in 2008 at 75,000 (Institute of International Education 2013). Between 2008 and 2012 there were more foreign students from Seoul (56,503)

\(^1\) There is a variation in the way international students are counted by different organizations. For example, the Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), which is a part of U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement, claim there were 91,693 Korean students in the United States in January 2014. Whereas the Institute of International Education Open Doors Data reported that in the 2012/13 academic year there were 70,627 Korean students.
studying at American universities and colleges than from any other city in the world, spending an estimated $2 billion dollars (Ruiz 2014). Beijing provided the second most foreign students with 49,946.

Existing research suggests that Koreans are studying abroad because of intensifying competition (Becker and Kolster 2012; Park et al. 2010), distrust of local educational institutions (Kim 2011; Parry 2011; Ablemann et al. 2009; KEDI 2007), to learn English (Park 2009) and for the perceived value of foreign credentials (Becker and Kolster 2012; Kim 2011; An 2011). They are also going for what they believe are enhanced employment possibilities (Becker and Kolster 2012; Kim 2011) and for cosmopolitan experiences (Kim 2011; An 2011; Koo 2010; Ableman et al. 2009). There is a distinctly Korean form of globalization and it is intricately tied to global education. Neoliberal globalization in Korea has simultaneously provided more educational opportunities while stretching the financial limits of most families. The intensifying competition has convinced more and more Korean families that the educational luxuries of the past are the educational necessities of the present.

The Korean case provides an interesting example of both internal and external influences of neoliberal globalization shaping a context where global educational strategies have been pursued at a remarkably high rate. The roots of this form of globalization began in 1994, when in an attempt to initiate an era of a more globalized, modernized and economically viable Korea, President Kim Young Sam delivered what has since been called the ‘Sydney Declaration’. His declaration announced to Koreans and to the world that the Korean government was determined to make changes that would facilitate “a Korean way of globalization” (Shin 2003:10; Kim 2002). In Kim’s speech he sought to justify the need
for Korea to take charge of its globalization efforts with a historical comparison to the early 20th century, when Korea had failed to adapt to the changing world outside their borders, leaving them vulnerable to Japanese occupation (Shin 2003). This time, Korea would not be left out of the global race by ignoring the changes outside of their closed doors.

Globalization or *segye.hw*a, as it’s called in Korean, became a word the Kim administration would use to symbolize not just globalization but Korea’s striving for economic, social and cultural relevance (Shin 2003).

To accomplish Korean globalization, the Kim administration reorganized the executive branch (Kim 2002), set up committees and instituted educational reform, each with the express goal of facilitating a Korean form of globalization (*segye.hw*a). Large Korean corporations also sought to shift Korea’s economic model to more readily reflect the prevailing global economic model, neoliberal economics. These corporations wanted more flexible labor markets with the ability to lay off workers and use irregular labor for a more flexible labor force (Harvey 2005). These changes in labor practices were resisted by powerful Korean labor unions. However, the seeds of economic change were planted in 1996 as the Clinton administration tied financial liberalization to the Kim administration’s most important symbol of Korea’s global intentions, membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Harvey 2005). The cost of membership in this club of developed nations was that Korea had to adopt some of the group’s prevailing policies. Therefore, along with the prestige of this membership Korea began its commitment to neoliberal economic reform in exchange for formal association with industrialized nations. While neoliberal economic policy, such as deregulation, flexible labor and liberalization of trade were at odds with Korea’s protectionist economic
approach and unpopular within Korea, after a generation of economic success these concerns were ignored in the name of international development. For a nation yearning for global relevancy, these changes were seen as a necessary step. The mid-1990s was a time of great economic opportunism, optimism and most importantly, change.

Not long after the Sydney declaration, in the spring of 1996, I traveled to Seoul for the first time and witnessed this economic climate firsthand. While I was struck by a country very different than my own (Canada), I remember being particularly impressed by the palpable feeling of economic optimism. I’d often heard the word “burgeoning economy,” but until that first visit to Korea, I had never felt a “burgeoning economy.” Unlike Canada, which had been suffering through the malaise of economic recession through the mid-1990s, the Korean entrepreneurial spirit and economic optimism was everywhere. At the time, this economic optimism was justified, reflecting almost 30 straight years of miraculous economic growth². In the mid-1990s, a decade after democratization, the future for Korea seemed so bright. Korea was soon to join the OECD and was known as one of the four ‘Asian Tigers’, clearly a nation on the rise.

Throughout my stay, I worked in a handful of large corporations and in these companies there was a lot of excitement about the future. Many Koreans expressed the belief that like Japan’s economic emergence in the 1980s, this was “our time.” If things continued at this pace, I was told by some white collar workers in a large conglomerate, they might even start getting Saturdays off work. Unbeknownst to these workers, the full effects of globalization were not experienced in Korea with economic success but with

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² According to the World Bank (2014), the Korean annual GDP growth rate exceeded 5% every year between 1962 and 1996 except in 1962 (2.5%), 1972 (4.5%) and in 1980 (-1.5%). During that same period of time the United States’ annual GDP growth rate exceeded 5% only once (7.26% in 1984).
In July of 1997, the Thai currency began to devalue rapidly, triggering the beginning of an Asian Economic Crisis that changed the national landscape of a number of Asian economies. After Thailand’s currency crisis, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia experienced dramatic currency devaluation. By October of 1997, the Hong Kong stock index plummeted and the South Korean Won began to decrease in value. In November of 1997, Korea requested aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and in December received the largest bailout in IMF history (nearly $60 billion). By January of 1998, the Korean Won decreased in value by 50%.

Attached to the IMF bailout were stipulations that had profound effects on the Korean economy (Stiglitz 2002). For example, the bailout and subsequent economic restructuring, in part, caused 14 of the largest industrial conglomerates to collapse and 12 of the 32 largest banks to either close or restructure (Fackler 2011). A nation with near full employment before this economic crisis (2.2%, 2.2% and 2.8% unemployment in 1995, 1996 and 1997 respectively) very rapidly increased to 7.4% unemployment (International Monetary Fund 2014).

Perhaps even more important than the short-term spike in unemployment was the long-term restructuring of employment. The Korean government, emboldened by the IMF crisis and encouraged by the IMF’s stipulations, passed major neoliberal labor market reform, which allowed an important shift to flexible or irregular labor (Kim 2004). Korean conglomerates also began large-scale layoffs and systematic or forced retirement of their employees, replacing these workers with irregular or temporary workers who exceeded regular workers for the first time in 1999 (Kim 2004). The effects of this were widespread
Conditions of the IMF bailout also included opening up “financial services to foreign ownership... to let foreign firms operate freely” (Harvey 2005:112). The Korean business field changed dramatically as an influx of foreign companies and personnel entered a previously closed economic system. At once, global skills and experience became increasingly important.

Two years from my first trip, I returned to Seoul in the Fall of 1998. The atmosphere had completely changed as a result of the Asian Economic Crisis (or IMF crisis). In the ashes of this economic crisis, there was now a weight among Koreans where there was once optimism. There was insecurity and uncertainty where there once was confidence. There were demonstrations led by white collar workers in front of the banks where they had been laid off. The number of homeless in Seoul Station’s cavernous underground had increased and changed, as sleeping alongside the elderly or single men I had seen in 1996, were fathers and sons, families. The career trajectories and economic stability of a generation of Korean workers changed. Even restaurants like McDonalds were offering discounted meals or “IMF discounts” to the down-trodden customers. In a very short period of time, the “IMF crisis” dominated Koreans as so many aspects of life were altered. Neoliberal globalization had entered Korea and brought with it insecurity and increased anxiety over maintaining class position. But in true Korean fashion, the main response to economic hardship was an intense reinvestment in education, both locally and abroad. If neoliberal globalization created an environment where more individual investment in education was required, where educational consumers must look for the best educational value and opportunities, Koreans became perhaps the world’s most savvy and strategic consumers.
A few years after the Asian Economic Crisis, Korean students participated in the first rounds of testing that would become the most important comparative educational benchmark: the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Korea’s dominance in this and subsequent waves of testing brought international awareness to what was becoming one of the world’s hotbeds of educational attainment. Even as early as 1988, Koreans had begun impressing the international community with their test scores (Sorensen 1994), but by the late 1990s Korea was positioning itself as a global educational powerhouse. Korean students and Korean education were garnering international attention for their famed educational intensity, fervor and performance. Governments and educators around the world looked to the Korean model of education where school days and school years were longer and more intense.

The uniqueness of contemporary Korean education is in the combination of the passion Koreans historically have for education and the rapid and intense manner by which the nation globalized. Korean families have long been willing to go to extreme lengths to obtain an education, investing large amounts of money to supplement whatever deficiencies they perceived the educational system to have. However, after the importance of having global skills was so violently and suddenly thrust upon Korean society, Korea’s educational zeal quickly extended beyond national boundaries. Desperate to avoid unemployment or the irregular labor force, obtaining global skills became a commonly used educational strategy in Korea. These factors together have combined to create a perfect storm for the use of globalized educational strategies by a comparatively larger proportion of the population. As a result, for topics such as international student mobility, globalization and internationalization of education and global cultural capital, Korea
represents a unique case for observation. To examine the motivations for globalized educational strategies, what better location to study than the nation sending more students per capita than anywhere else? To evaluate the benefits of this educational strategy, what better case to examine than the nation with so many foreign educated returnees in their workforce? Using this uniquely intense context of globalized educational pursuits, in this dissertation I focus on the experience of studying at foreign universities and the rewards for obtaining a foreign degree.

The central questions of this research are:

(1) Why are Koreans pursuing global forms of human capital at such high rates? What forms of capital are they hoping to acquire by using this educational strategy? Are these pursuits purely instrumental? What role do cosmopolitan aspirations play in the pursuit of global education? Why choose these locations to obtain global forms of cultural and social capital? For students not studying abroad in the same capacity, can global skills or global cultural capital be acquired in local contexts?

(2) What forms of capital do international students acquire in their time overseas? Is there a global cultural capital and if so what is the nature of this concept? To what extent do foreign educated students internalize the values and culture of the institutions/nations they are studying in? What factors influence this socialization and internalization process? What do students get from studying at western universities?

(3) How do global forms of capital obtained in global contexts help status attainment in local contexts? In what way does global cultural capital help in the Korean work place? What are the payoffs for undertaking this expensive and extreme educational strategy? What obstacles exist in the conversion of this form of capital for graduates returning to
their home countries? What rewards exist beyond job-related skills and occupational attainment?

In this research I show how the imprint of neoliberal globalization is evident in the educational pursuits of Koreans both inside and outside Korea. As neoliberal market-friendly principles increasingly influence educational institutions around the globe, international students are increasingly relied upon as sources of revenue. To procure the best minds as well as a larger portion of the billion-dollar global education industry, Korean and foreign universities compete for rankings and the students that chase these rankings. As the government’s role in education diminishes, Korean students today must navigate the process of becoming competitive and marketable in an increasingly individualized manner. These student consumers must become experts in acquiring recognized forms of global credentials and skills to maximize marketability, leading to various forms of overseas studying. Also, the changing structural forces outside and inside Korea have not only made global education easier to attain, but also possible to attain within Korea. As a result I will show how there is greater variation in the forms of global cultural capital Koreans can acquire. These forms of global cultural capital have different strengths and weaknesses and must be considered together with the varying volumes of local cultural capital obtained, and not as separate items.

From interviews with foreign educated returnees, I will show how Koreans are studying abroad more than just for instrumental reasons or practical skills associated with status attainment. They are also leaving their home country’s educational environment because of cosmopolitan aspirations. Through their experiences, I examine the concept of
global cultural capital in a concrete manner focusing on the instrumental and cosmopolitan pursuits that within Bourdieu’s more common distinctions.

Through my interviews with evaluators in Korean business fields, I also discuss the specific contexts where these components of global cultural capital are most valued or beneficial and why the overall sense among the people I interviewed was that outside of specific locations, the value of foreign degrees is declining. Finally, I explain how even as the instrumental skills have become easier to obtain locally and more common, the cosmopolitan components of global cultural capital are more exclusive and highly valued by returnees.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In Chapter 1, I describe the context within which global education gained global popularity in Korea particularly and why this has made Korea the ideal case for examining the acquisition and use of global cultural capital. I discuss the fundamental questions driving this research and outline the basic findings.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on three specific topics. I first discuss literature on neoliberal globalization that helps to explain the intense competition and insecurity felt by students deciding on study abroad as well as the principles that have led to government cutbacks on educational spending. I then present Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social capital as related to global educational strategies. This includes research on study abroad in Korea and China. Finally, I discuss research on the cosmopolitan component to studying abroad as a form of cultural capital.
In Chapter 3 I discuss the data I used to answer these research questions. This includes a detailed explanation of the locations, respondents and methods used to select, interview and analyze this data.

Chapter 4 is a discussion of larger context for the Korean case study I use in this research. The topics in this chapter move from most global and macro toward the more specific Korean example. I first present research on international student mobility, describing the extent of this strategy and the factors influencing this decision. I discuss how nations and institutions are recruiting and competing for foreign students. This has become more important and necessary as a result of the globalization of neoliberal economic policy and the development of the knowledge economy. The massification and marketization of higher education, the vital role international students play in Information Technology (IT) and economic innovation in the knowledge economy, as well as the development of the multi-billion dollar international education industry, are driving international student mobility.

I then look at how Korean higher education in particular has adapted to this neoliberal global context. I focus particularly on the Korean government’s investment of billions of dollars in an effort to internationalize Korean higher education and providing global opportunities within Korea at specific universities. Finally, from a societal level I focus on the domestic characteristics of Korean education that are influencing the decision of so many Koreans to exit the educational system to obtain skills and credentials overseas.

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters representing my findings. Chapter 5 begins with the pursuit of global skills. I first examine who is going abroad among my sample and then focus on their reasons for studying abroad. I separate my foreign educated sample
into two groups Early Exiters and Late Exiters. I find this distinction meaningful in how it relates to the amount of global cultural capital they obtain abroad as well as how it is related to the amount of local cultural capital acquired before leaving. I also add as a comparison the pursuits of global skills among locally educated Koreans by examining some of the ways locally educated Koreans have used various strategies to increase their global cultural capital without studying in foreign universities.

In Chapter 6 I focus on the global cultural capital Koreans studying in foreign universities obtain. I present a model of global cultural capital and provide evidence and insight for each factor based on the experiences of my respondents. I distinguish the components of global cultural capital into a number of key categories. These include instrumental components related to the job market as well as cosmopolitan experiences.

Chapter 7 is my final findings chapter and focuses on the last stop of this educational journey for my respondents: the workplace. In this chapter I first present three specific locations where global cultural capital remains especially valued. I then discuss why the value appears to be declining overall. I reexamine my respondents’ success and struggles returning to the Korean work world, focusing on the problems with reintegration that seems to be especially problematic for Early Exiters. In the final section I discuss the value and reward of obtaining global cultural capital itself. The authentic and hard fought experience of living and studying in high status countries, in “real” degree programs provides enriching life experience and lasting rewards for returnees. They have become global participants.
Chapter 8 is the conclusion. In this chapter I revisit the research questions and findings and reengage the sociological implications. I then discuss future research possibilities.
INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present previous studies that have examined globalized educational pursuits. Regarding the growing popularity of university students studying outside of their home countries and how these skills and experiences are valued back in their home countries, I address the three fundamental questions posed in Chapter 1. To engage these questions sociologically I use the ideas of neoliberal globalization to explain the context in which unparalleled numbers of students are exiting their home countries to study at foreign universities. In particular I rely upon this to explain why students feel so stretched and stressed over their academic attainment, and how educational institutions have adopted market principles of reduced government spending that places more of the responsibility on students and families to acquire the skills needed in the global economy.

Regarding the interpretation of what international students are getting from these experiences, Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social capital and fields are used. I rely especially on the concept of cultural capital to understand how the various cultural components to studying overseas may be valued in the work place. Because this research focuses on studying outside of one’s home country, I discuss cultural capital in terms of global and local cultural capital to capture the acquisition of these forms of capital in different contexts. Finally, I add cosmopolitan experience to global cultural capital to discuss and examine how this element of global participation may be a form of capital for those acquiring it.
NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

Globalization

The term ‘Globalization’ has become a popular catch phrase for politicians, journalists and academics when describing anything from free trade, to modernization, to the spread of American culture. This over simplistic use of globalization usually refers to an unstoppable, primarily economic based phenomenon that is unidirectional, moving from the biggest and most powerful nations down to the less powerful. However, globalization is more complicated, diverse and affects a number of areas on a multitude of levels. The effects of globalization are not unidirectional or homogenous, but multidimensional (Steger 2009).

Globalization is practiced by economic, political and social actors (Holton 2005) and has a local component that is contingent upon the singular nature of the localities in which it is embedded (Sassen 2007). Globalization is uneven and is experienced differently in different places (Steger 2009). The economic, political, cultural and technological impacts of globalization may vary in terms of “velocity” of change and to what extent these factors of globalization “impact” localities (Held et al. 1999). Globalization has been described as the process of bringing the distant to the local, or as a compression of the world, which leads to an intensification of interdependence or “connectivity” (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004; Robertson 1992).

Borrowing from these global scholars I define globalization as the interconnectedness, integration and influence between nations as far as cultural, social, economic and political forces. Importantly, globalization, as defined by Robertson, Sassen and Steger, acknowledges the power and importance of the local when considering global influences. This understanding of globalization is especially beneficial when examining
concepts like cultural and social capital in the context of surging international student mobility. Bourdieu developed these concepts at a time when global movement, interconnectivity and interdependencies were not as prevalent or influential as they are today. With the help of these global scholars I focus on how the movement of students with cultural and social capital from various locations leads to new contests in fields between varying forms of capital. In these competitions, varying forms of global capital do not simply replace local forms of capital or act as another layer that is added to the local forms of capital. Instead, as global theorists suggests, global forms of capital combine with the preexisting forms and volumes of local capital, transforming these global experiences and skills, rooting them in the local.

Internationalization, which I refer to in subsequent chapters, is a response to the greater economic, political, technological and social connectivity that is globalization (Altbach and Knight 2007; Altbach 2004). Internationalization is the policies and practices governments have adopted in order to adapt to the powerful effects of globalization (Altbach 2004). This allows for creative and personalized responses to global pressures and changes that are country specific (Altbach 2004). In the case of Korea, internationalization of higher education has involved the strategy of bringing the foreign to local institutions. In this regard, Korean higher education has been strategically altered to more closely reflect and influence the international rankings that international students rely upon so heavily.
**Neoliberalism**

The present-day global economy is a product of four decades of a particular model of capitalism dominating global markets. This economic model is known as neoliberalism. As Steger and Roy (2010) suggest, there are many variants of neoliberalism that include nation specific contingencies influenced by history, culture, economics and geopolitics. The Korean case provides a clear example of this. By the 1990s, neoliberal economics became the dominant global economic ideology (Steger and Roy 2010). This rise to prominence was a product of both aggressive promotion by large international organizations around the globe, and by politicians, academics and journalists within nations (Steger and Roy 2010; Harvey 2005). Influential academics and politicians promoted neoliberal ideology as necessary for competitiveness and individual self-sufficiency. According to this ideology, in order for individual entrepreneurs to be most effective, neoliberalism needed freedom from the restraint of the government (Steger and Roy 2010; Harvey 2005). These efforts by influential individuals within nations helped to legitimize neoliberalism as the most effective form of governance, while international organizations simultaneously tied economic bailouts or loans to the adoption of this policy from.

Powerful governments and large international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank, pushed the neoliberal economic model, encouraging consumer spending, government deregulation, borrowing, open markets, flexible labor and particular forms of production (Perruci and Wysong 2007; Stiglitz 2002). In this economic model, state interference in the market is not only encouraged to protect private property, prices and taxes but also to shape markets based on the neoliberal values of enterprise and competition (Apple 2001).
Governments adopting this economic ideology have made it easier for large firms to trade and invest huge amounts of capital to dominate markets, nations and regions and systematically ‘deregulate’ the protection of welfare and other government safety nets in the name of competition and individual accountability (Perruci and Wynsong 2007). These structural changes have also affected individual practices.

At the individual level, while these changes associated with neoliberal economic ideology have been made in the name of global competitiveness and economic efficiency, a social and cultural bi-product has been growing class insecurity and inequality (Koo 2007; Economist 2006; Harvey 2005; Devine 2004; Ball 2003). While inequality, risk, and even class insecurity are not new, with neoliberal globalization there is a new intensity in the sense of insecurity and ‘fear of falling’ (Ball 2003). In a political and economic environment where the competition continually grows larger and stronger, there is a pervasive risk of losing class position. This sense of insecurity has only been exacerbated by the market values of the neoliberal economic model that champion the freeing of the “entrepreneurial energies of the individual” (Steger and Roy 2010:49) while simultaneously promoting individual responsibility and accountability (Marginson 1997).

Among developed nations, these global economic changes and subsequent intensification of class insecurity and competition, have led to a massive increase in educational aspirations among all classes. The competition for rewarding and stable employment has intensified (Brown et al. 2010), and more and more people are continuing their education (Macready and Tucker 2011). This increase in education has not only led to standard universities expanding their local student base, but also to recruiting foreign students (Altbach et al. 2009; UNESCO Statistics 2009; Leidow 2005). Policy reflecting
neoliberal ideologies left individuals more to their own devices as social benefits and government regulation were cut in the name of fiscal responsibility and greater efficiency. With deregulation of this sort, individuals were freer to use all sorts of educational options, complementing, supplementing or even circumventing the formerly rigid system. They were also freed from much of the government assistance that, in nations like South Korea, had long focused on equalization of educational opportunity.

**Impact of Neoliberal Globalization on Education**

The popularity of neoliberalism has led to widespread acceptance and push for privatization and the “attractive” benefits of the market model, namely innovation, efficiency, productivity and accountability through measurability. In the educational sphere, this has led to a change from the pursuit of equity and access (democratic aspirations) to focusing on the development of the most advantaged or best students (Lynch 2006). The underlying agenda is to cut costs while focusing on the high skilled and high performing. The market model is touted as being able to do this the most efficiently (Carnoy and Levin 1986).

**Privatization & Competition**

As neoliberal ideology has entered the world of education, the adoption of neoliberal values has fundamentally changed the institution (Apple 2001). These changes have included a move toward privatization and valorization of competition. One of the first outcomes of these changes has been a diminished government role. The government and government funded educational institutions were “trimmed down” (Steger and Roy
and infused with market principles of competition and measurable accountability. The market is said to be “natural and neutral, and governed by effort and merit” (Apple 2001:413). Therefore, if markets don’t exist, they must be created (Harvey 2005). Hence the growth of “for-profit” and private education in an industry previously governed by public institutions. Other changes include deregulation and liberalization of organizations and institutions, as incentives to innovate and adapt (Stromquist 2002). The justification is that better management of precious resources like education is needed to remain competitive. The market management style provides a return to higher standards (Apple 2001), infusing organizations with the necessary emphasis on competition and the production of valued outcomes needed in an increasingly competitive environment (Carnoy and Levin 1986).

Competition is the defining characteristic of neoliberal education and justified as a helpful and healthy way to increase efficiency and productivity (Harvey 2005; Stromquist 2002). The stresses, pressures and inequalities this competition creates are tolerated or dismissed as a necessary part of a competitive market portrayed as a zero-sum game with inevitable “winners” and “losers” (Altbach 2012; Stromquist 2002). While some individuals won’t be able to succeed in this environment, everyone will be held to the same high standards to incentivize hard work and in hopes of creating “an individual who is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur” (Olssen 2011: 360). Students become like customers that schools must innovate, adapt and compete for (Stromquist 2002). And, as privatization and the market model focus more on accountability and efficiency, there is a greater commitment to various forms of measurable outcomes, like tests and rankings. Determining who the winners and losers are is of utmost importance.
Efficiency & Measurables (Testing & Rankings)

Neoliberal education focuses more on measurables by way of more testing and standardized testing to compare schools and classrooms, and teachers and counties, and states, and nations. This process of comparison is thought to increase “healthy” competition and determine more “fairly” who is deserving of the diminishing state or federal funding. Universities, and departments within universities are under greater pressure to prove their value or risk being cut. No longer will failing schools be propped up by over-generous public funding, public support now requires “accountability” (Jons and Hoyler 2013; Carnoy and Rhoten 2002). In this model, only the schools that are “performing” are worthy (Apple 2001).

In higher education, universities have turned to the market model to evaluate the performance of professors, departments and majors, as they are forced to rely less and less on public funding and more and more on outside sources of funding. The universities themselves are also being held to these same criteria of evaluation as rankings are determined based on these same principles of quantifiable output, or productivity and the ability to obtain research grants, top faculty and students. This is evident in the newfound importance of Impact Factors and citation indexes. These rankings and quantifiable measures of performance affect behaviors, making the competition more apparent and intense (Marginson and van de Wende 2007). They are the “the latest manifestation of the neoliberal corporatization of higher education.” (Jons and Hoyler 2013:47)

In this model of education, the students have become like consumers looking for the best value and the best direct payoff for their investment (Lynch 2006). Schools have become like corporations, competing for professors, money and students, meanwhile
commodifying these fundamental elements of education and changing the very nature of what an education is and should be about (Jons and Hoyler 2013).

GLOBAL PURSUITS OF CULTURAL & SOCIAL CAPITAL

Consumer Students

In many recently developed countries, as a result of these neoliberal economic influences on education, students are forced to more actively manage their educational careers, relying less on public and local options, instead choosing private and foreign educational options (Ablemann et al. 2009). These educational options are thought to more effectively add skills that match the “non-routine” and “ill-defined” environments of the global market (Ashton and Flastead 1998:9), skills such as problem-solving and strategy (Reich 1991). These abilities empower their possessors with “labour market power which enable(s) them to compete for high skilled jobs across national boundaries.” (Brown 2000:647). These are the skills globalizing occupational structures are believed to be demanding (Ashton and Falstead 1998; Reich 1991).

Through the numerous global rankings suggesting certain credentials are worth more (Kim 2011a; Waters 2009; Zimdars et al. 2009), a growing number of internationally mobile students are strategically looking to internationally recognized universities (SEVP 2014; Waters 2006). The “consumer citizens” (Lynch 2006) believe western education is superior and will enhance employment possibilities through better or more recognizable skills and/or credentials (Lee and Morrish 2012; Kim 2011a; Weenik 2008; Szle’enyi and Rhoads 2007; Ong 2004; Waters 2003). Western nations have worked hard to promote this belief and maintain the educational trade imbalance.
Global Educational Trade Imbalance

International organizations and individual governments have made concerted efforts to make it easier for students to come to their countries and study (Macready and Tucker 2011; Zheng 2010:70-71; Altbach et al. 2009). Multi-billion dollar initiatives, such as Brain Korea 21, Bologna Process, Lisbon Agenda, and the Erasmus Mundus program, have been created to establish educational hubs and to better recruit students. Laws regarding visas have been streamlined and simplified, scholarships sponsoring international students have been created and immigration policies in many countries have been altered to appear more attractive to international students (Zheng 2010; Altbach et al. 2009; Stiasny 2008; Verbik and Lasanowski 2007). The result of these fundamental institutional alterations is to “institutionalize a global asymmetry in the provision of higher education services and to privilege the developed countries as suppliers” (Barrow, Didou-Aupetit and Mallea 2003:12). It has also perpetuated inequality.

As the recruiting and influence of universities in developed nations reach the developing world, new inequalities are created and existing inequalities in higher education are increased (Altbach et al. 2009; Altbach 2004). At the institutional level, as competition for students and faculty has globalized, a number of factors favor institutions in developed nations. One important factor is the use of the English language. A large part of university rankings are determined by research grants, faculty output (the number of publications), the prestige of publications and the times these publications are cited (Pratt 2010). The most prestigious and cited journals are in English, inherently favoring universities and scholars in the English-speaking world (Altbach et al. 2009). Again, the disproportionate amount of prestige garnered by English language journals is not new, but
what is new is the importance of the international rankings which are based in part on English language publications and research. This advantage is further compounded, as these universities are then able to recruit top students who want to work with famous professors publishing in English in the most prestigious journals.

Elite schools in the wealthiest nations also have a huge financial advantage. They have much larger endowments, budgets, government grants, more historically impressive reputations and as a result, recruit a disproportionate amount of talent, keeping the international trade of students leaning heavily in their favor (Altbach 2004). Universities in developing countries or even recently developed countries are then faced with many obstacles and struggle to compete in the all-important rankings and race to recruit. For example, South Korea’s BK21 project (1999-2012) provided more than 3 billion dollars (Korean Research Committee 2013) for recruiting world-class researchers, developing their research infrastructure and internationalizing and thoroughly Anglicizing their higher education. And while their academic output has increased dramatically, they have only recently been able to crack the top 50 in global rankings, they lose thousands of students to foreign universities and have yet to produce a homegrown world-renowned researcher. The advantage is in favor of the established institutions, and this advantage has been strengthened and institutionalized by the policies implemented by multinational organizations.

The current global structure keeps the flow of high-skilled, high-impact, highly innovative students from all over the world to developed nations’ universities and into developed nations’ workforces. This has been accomplished through a number of mechanisms. The popularity and prestige of western education allows it to dominate
curricula all over the world, create a mobile global labor force, and insure that students come to their countries to be “properly” educated (Robertson and Scholte 2007). The use of English instruction, a direct policy change by European and Asian nations, is a tool used to recruit and draw students to their schools (Marignson 2010). Korea’s English initiative at elite universities is an example of this. Not only are they internationalizing their curriculum for Korean students, but also using English as a way to recruit foreign students (especially Chinese students).

The popularity of university rankings favors western universities in general and American universities in particular. Rankings are seen as objective or empirical measures of the value of universities and are used by international students and employers alike. American universities dominate the international rankings, and attract many of the brightest foreign doctoral students and American schools through their cutting edge research and generous scholarships (Marginson 2010). According to the 4 most popular and widely used rankings systems, American Universities represent 60%, 70%, 60%, and 80% of the top 10 rankings, 65%, 70%, 65% and 85% of the top 20 rankings and 40%, 60%, 40% and 70% of the top 50 world rankings of universities (U.S. News and World Report; The Times Higher Education 2013; QS World University Rankings; ARWU World Rankings). American institutions of higher learning also dominate at the graduate level in the most popular and marketable majors (MBAs, Law degrees) as 60% of top 10 MBA programs and 50% of the top Law schools are in the United States (Financial Times 2013; QS World University Rankings 2012). This dominance also includes a variety of research-oriented fields as American universities enroll 100,000 foreign doctoral students a year (Marginson 2010).
Developed nations without the same level of prestigious universities to recruit the best minds have devised alternate strategies to attract and keep these same students. Since the September 11th terrorist attacks and after the most recent economic crisis, work visas and opportunities have been harder to obtain for international students in the United States, other than the very top students. Conversely, visa restrictions in Australia and Canada and the UK make it easier for these innovative minds to stay and contribute to the local economy. For example in Australia a graduate can stay for an additional 18 months after graduating, allowing a chance to work (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007). In Germany, there has been a concerted effort to strategically replace the graying population with global recruits (Zheng 2010). Through these strategies developed nations are using all of their advantage to attract and keep the brightest minds working in their local economy.

Therefore, with these highly ranked and “proper” degrees, foreign degree holders are thought to have an “edge” in the job market (Lee and Morrish 2012). Kim's (2011a) respondents described western education, in this case a PhD from an American university, as the “primary avenue to professional jobs in Korea.” (115) In the educational zero-sum game, students are in direct competition with everyone else, and seek to establish global portfolios by partaking in “cosmopolising projects in international education” (Huang 2013:2) to present global experiences and a world view that extends beyond their domestic boundaries: they are using foreign education to become active global participants and then using cosmopolitanism as a resume bullet point (Huang 2013; Kim 2011a; Koo 2010; Weenik 2008).
What the Foreign-Educated Are Seeking

Traditionally, domestic elite universities in particular have been a predominant site for status attainment, high-level skill acquisition as well as an opportunity for students (mostly from similar class backgrounds) to learn in an environment where skills and marketable traits are recognized and reinforced (Arnold 2002). As a result, attendance at elite schools in particular is strongly correlated with career prominence, even when accounting for individual aptitude, parental education or income (Arnold 1995; Arnold 2005; Lerner, Nagai and Rothman 1996; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1998).

With the preeminence of neoliberal ideology, educational pursuits have increased making elite school attendance increasingly significant (Brewer et al. 1998) and the importance of cultural credentials (especially the most prestigious cultural credentials) more prominent (Arnold 2005). In some newly industrialized Asian global economic centers like Hong Kong and Singapore, western credentials and skills are even more highly recognized than locally obtained credentials (Waters 2006). Research done by Waters (2006) and others suggests that these credentials serve as representations or symbols of a number of traits and global aptitudes that are of particular value in the global economy. By this we see that these elite credentials extend beyond borders (Brown 2000), include skills and knowledge that are valuable assets in the new global market and can be taken back to their home countries to alter students’ “career trajectory” (Szele’nyi and Rhoads 2007:26). The skills associated with global cultural capital extend beyond human capital, such as elite technical training, to include transnational connections and access to gatekeepers (Kim 2011a; Weenik 2008 citing Wagner 1998). They also include cultural capital, which can be things like a global awareness, value orientation or cosmopolitanism: the tools for dealing
with the turbulence of globalization (Weenik 2008; Koo 2010; James 2005). In summary, students going abroad to acquire global skills or credentials are believed to be obtaining an edge or a “head start” (Weenik 2008:1092) in the intensified middle class competition for rewarding employment and occupational stability. Students with the economic capital to become internationally mobile are looking to global cultural capital as an asset in the global job market.

Once a privilege only the most elite could entertain, global education has increasingly become a middle class strategy, even while it stretches economic capacities. In the previously mentioned zero-sum game of capital acquisition, middle class students and families are seeking the most competitive form of cultural capital to win the competition and are willing to use all of their social and economic capital to acquire this. Many have settled on the pursuit of global cultural capital by way of international education in the “right” countries and the “right” schools within these countries. The strategy for the new elite mobility is adding status through cosmopolitan experiences.

VARIOUS FORMS OF CAPITAL
In order to better understand how different forms of capital potentially translates to class mobility or stability, I use Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social capital. Cultural and social capital have been instrumental in understanding how social class intersects with education and how resources, beyond economic capital, can be used to transmit advantage within national borders.

Social capital is described as a “durable network” or “membership in a group— which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital”
These are networks of recognition that facilitate and empower skills and experiences. This is not only helpful in finding employment but also in validating the credentials and experiences needed to be qualified for a position. Cultural capital's role in the reproduction and preservation of class position has been described as the credentials acquired through institutions like universities and the embodiment of tastes, knowledge, dispositions and cultural signals privileged to members of particular classes (Bourdieu 1986; Lamont and Lareau 1988). Lareau and Weininger (2003) focus their definition more on cultural capital as a “resource” that is used to obtain “scarce rewards” (567) which better applies to the notion of acquiring cultural capital in one location and using it as a resource to obtain scarce rewards in another location.

As students have increasingly moved across borders for educational pursuits, these definitions have been altered and a global component has been applied to what was previously thought of from a national or local perspective (Kim 2011a). Recently studies have begun to use cultural and social capital to describe the manner by which global education is thought to be advantageous or has been advantageous for international students upon returning to their home countries (Kim 2011a; Waters 2009, 2008; Weenik 2008). For example, Weenik (2008) used interviews with Dutch parents whose children have been educated in what he refers to as an internationalized stream of schooling. Weenik finds that these parents are trying to use these international or cosmopolitan experiences strategically, as forms of social and cultural capital to better prepare their children for the global occupational arena. Waters (2009) used interviews with Canadian educated returnees and HR personnel in Hong Kong’s financial district and discovered that the global experiences these students acquired were preferred in multinational companies.
What was valued and recognized by these occupational gatekeepers was the embodied global cultural capital, including “traits” and “attributes” they internalized while overseas like communication skills, English speaking ability and global world view, “irrespective of the actual degree” (119).

These are new twists on the traditional understanding of capital accumulation, extending the focus beyond national borders to include the process of obtaining cultural and social capital in one country and using it in another. The concept of “global cultural capital” or “global social capital” have been used to describe these aforementioned forms of capital that are obtained while studying overseas and used either overseas or back in home countries. These forms of capital are the outcome of choosing to study overseas and are both part of the payoff (i.e. cosmopolitanism or global cultural capital can be a form of status) and used to obtain the payoff (ex: employment, job stability or success) of this investment.

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is a concept used in a variety of ways. In this context I refer to cosmopolitanism as an “openness” to people and places in different nations (Matthews and Sidhu 2005; Szerszynski and Urry 2002; Hannerz 1996). Weenik sees cosmopolitanism as having the eyes to look “beyond borders”, to be flexible, adapt and have “international character” (2008:1094-1095). For Weenik these abilities, dispositions and competencies to participate or “engage in globalizing social arenas” are a form of capital used in the competitive neo-liberal environment (Weenik 2008:1092). Research on studying abroad suggests that cosmopolitanism also has a symbolic value related to status and class.
Many students going overseas express a desire to gain a better understanding of the West (McMahon 1992). While some of this is utilitarian or instrumental as far as the human capital ramifications, this is also about curiosity and knowledge of things foreign. In describing the Chinese business elite who go abroad, Ong (1999) found that they get more than just economic capital from their time abroad, but also symbolic capital. Because of the recent exclusiveness of studying and even traveling overseas in places like Korea and China, acquiring cosmopolitanism still has an elite feeling to it and is associated with increased status (Koo 2010). Cosmopolitanism is not only associated with a global sensibility but also forward thinking. Ablemann and colleagues (2009) argue that there is a distinction between being a globalized student and the old-style “hardworking” students. Success in the global era requires more than working hard, but individuality and a commitment to “a cosmopolitan ideal” (Ablemann et al 2009:230). In this sense being global or cosmopolitan is seen as having the right attributes to compete and succeed in a business environment dominated by neo-liberal ideology.

More recent research has been critical of how cosmopolitanism has been rather casually included as a category or a part of global experiences, separated from discussion of stratifying mechanisms most often required to obtain global forms of capital and successfully convert them (Calhoun 2008; Igarashi and Saito 2014). This research suggests that cosmopolitanism should be recognized as a form of capital that is distributed unequally and can be stratified or exclusive when represented as a credential (Igarashi and Saito 2014). As mentioned previously, the flow has been from East to West as the historically prestigious western universities and their dominance of the global rankings serve to institutionalize and legitimize the cosmopolitan component of cultural capital.
through these education systems. For Asians, just gaining access to these expensive, exclusive and predominantly English speaking universities requires large sums of economic and cultural capital. And yet, what has not been examined to a large extent is how this cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan experience, as a part of cultural capital, relates to employment or performance (Igarashi and Saito 2014). How and where these globalized forms of cultural capital, including cosmopolitan experiences, are legitimized or “institutionalized” in the business field of home countries is one of the main contributions of this dissertation research.

The Return of the Foreign Educated: Using Global Cultural Capital

Research on foreign educated returnees in general, and on the use of global cultural capital in particular, remains in the early stages. Until recently there was very little research on the topic of foreign educated returnees, with most of the previous research focusing on motivations for leaving home countries or on the experiences of obtaining a foreign education, not on its use or the return process. The most comprehensive research on what occurs when the foreign-educated return and how this affects occupational success in domestic job markets has been done from an economic perspective on Chinese returnees, focusing more on networks, salaries, employment rates or entrepreneurial success (See Hao and Welch 2012; Obukhova et al. 2012; Gill 2010; Zweig and Han 2008; Gross and Connor 2007).

This research on foreign educated returnees reentering the local job market in China describes a job market and occupational structures that similar to Korea, are going through a transition period. The value of foreign education and foreign experience is in flux
(Hao and Welch 2012; Obukhova et al. 2012; Li et al. 2012; Zweig and Hon 2008; Gross and Connor 2007). Where once foreign educated and foreign experienced were treated like “national treasures” (Hao and Welch 2012), domestic employers have become more conservative about hiring them (Zweig and Han 2008) and opportunities are not as abundant. With almost 30 million Chinese enrolled in higher education domestically and nearly a million international students (Hao and Welch 2012), tens of thousands of whom are returning to China each year, the competition for positions locally has become more intense. Despite the growing competition, returnees in China can still be highly valued. Hao and Welch (2012) found that 75% had a job within 3 months of returning and over 90% had jobs within 6 months and on average made more money than their locally educated counterparts. Where returnees struggle is in the mismanagement of their expectations (Hao and Welch 2012; Zweig and Han 2008; Gross and Connor 2007). Zweig and Han (2008) found that while Chinese returnees come back to China with high expectations, many graduated from worse schools than returnees in the past and with little or no work experience. With the benefit of a huge surplus of college-educated applicants, Chinese employers have become more selective. Chinese returnees are also struggling with reintegration into local work environments (Obukhova et al. 2012; Li et al. 2012; Chen 2008). Without local networks or ties to the local market, Chinese returnee entrepreneurs, for example, didn’t perform better than local entrepreneurs or have as profound an impact on local industry (Chen 2008). What we know from Chinese returnees to Chinese fields is that local ties or social capital and local cultural capital matter.

In more sociological research, researchers have begun to examine foreign educated returnees’ experience and value in terms of cultural and social capital. As I mentioned
previously, Waters (2006, 2009) found that acquiring these foreign degrees represents or symbolizes a number of characteristics that are valuable in the global knowledge economy and that in many sectors foreign degrees were “valorized” and extremely beneficial in obtaining employment for foreign educated returnees (Waters 2009). Employers in Hong Kong’s financial district had an “unequivocal preference” (119) for what the foreign educated were thought to possess. Returning students with this foreign degree and accompanying social network were able to secure employment in highly coveted positions. Interestingly, Waters also discovered that social capital was instrumental in this successful reintegration of foreign educated students from Hong Kong. The networks of graduates from overseas were well established in the local market and a powerful influence in job acquisition. The social capital obtained from western universities was firmly rooted in the local context and empowered the foreign credential as locally situated social connections “gave value to an individuals’ cultural capital.” (Waters 2009:120). This research is helpful in understanding how various forms of capital work together to facilitate the conversion of global experiences to locally valued forms of capital.

Kim (2011a), in his study on why Korean foreign educated choose American universities in particular, importantly suggests that just going abroad is not enough but where you go matters too. As previously mentioned, because of the U.S. hegemony in higher education, the acquisition of foreign cultural capital by way of an American university degree is a mechanism for South Koreans to achieve upward social mobility, as an American degree can been seen as “a screening device to exclude other competitors” (Kim 2011a:121). Importantly, Kim’s (2011a) respondents were mostly PhD students returning home to work in academic settings where there remains a premium on foreign
degrees even as other markets appear to be waning. This illustrates the need to be aware of
the occupation and market foreign educated are returning to when evaluating their global
experiences.

Kim argues that returnees to Korea with these revered American graduate degrees
are rewarded with enhanced occupational opportunities as well as elite cosmopolitan
status. In other words, there are payoffs for these global experiences that are beyond the
financial or occupational. I try to develop this idea by including the payoff of attaining a
form of global consciousness or activity through legitimate or authentic global experiences.
The foreign educated, through this rich and often difficult time overseas, develop a sense of
independence and confidence that is deeply meaningful and rewarding. It allows them to
be active participants in globalization.

**FOREIGN & DOMESTIC FIELDS**

Bourdieu uses the term fields to describe the class locations of social actors with
various amounts and types of capital (Bourdieu 1987). Social fields have their own rules
and practices (Calhoun et al. 2002) and it is in relation to these fields that capital has
meaning (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Social fields are dynamic, changing as the rules
are challenged or changed. Social actors are both influenced by social fields and construct
social fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Fields are intricately tied to the various forms
of capital. In the case of foreign educated returnees, most importantly, social fields are
where competition between social actors takes place as they try to establish, preserve and
transform their positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996). This is where the “games” are

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played and the struggle to determine the value of various forms of capital occurs (Bourdieu 1987).

Bourdieu’s field theory highlights the importance of our social existence in relation to others (Benson and Neveu 2005) and the struggle we undertake. The struggle in these fields is not just between social actors with low and high volumes of capital, but also between social actors with high volumes of different types of capital (Calhoun et al. 2002). A traditional application of this would be to compare someone with high economic capital competing with someone with high cultural capital, say an oil worker in western Canada and a professor at the University of Alberta. The worker may even earn more money but the professor may feel superior due to the prestige of his or her form of capital. What has not been considered until recently, as transnational educational strategies have become increasingly common, is how this struggle also applies to different forms of cultural capital. In this case high volumes of global cultural capital and high volumes of local cultural capital acquired in two different educational fields (local or Korean universities/western universities) that are now competing in the Korean business field.

The two key points I wish to emphasize in this research regarding Bourdieu’s field theory is first, that social actors struggle over the value of various forms of capital. Positions of prominence are contested. Secondly, the characteristics of fields are dynamic and changing. Things have changed and are changing. As I focus on the Korean business field I will discuss how global economic events have impacted the Korean business field, influencing the forms of capital that are most rewarded and the strategies social actors (both locally and foreign educated ones) use to acquire capital and improve their positions in relation to other social actors.
The Korean Business Field

The Korean economy and the business fields foreign educated Koreans are returning to, are dominated by large family-controlled conglomerates known as Chaebol. After the Korean War, Koreans took control of assets left behind by the Japanese. The military government, in power after 1961, sought long-term economic development by choosing specific markets to be developed by Korean firms (Powers 2010). They focused primarily on the export-oriented manufacturing sector.

Already some of the largest companies in the world, Korean Chaebol have become even larger since 2002. In 2011, the sales from the ten largest conglomerates represented 76.5% of South Korea’s Gross Domestic Product, increasing over the past ten years as these companies continue to grow and expand into even more aspects of Korean life (Kwon 2012). Like Japanese Zaibatsu, the number of employees working for these giant companies and the prestige associated with them, influences hiring trends and Korean work culture. If a Korean Chaebol requires a minimum TOEIC score, other companies soon follow. If a large Chaebol includes an English interview when hiring, other companies follow. If one Chaebol develops and begins to use their own applicant aptitude exam (like Samsung’s SSAT), others soon follow. Much of the competitiveness of getting into the best schools in South Korea is about getting a job at a Chaebol like Samsung, LG, or Hyundai. In many regards, Chaebol dominate Korean culture the same way they dominate the Korean economy.

The Chaebol dominated corporate culture in Korean business fields is characterized as being heavily centralized, hierarchical, family-owned businesses (Murillo and Sung

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3 When I last lived in South Korea I had an LG television, an LG armchair and ottoman, and the closest convenience store to my house was an LG 25.
The business culture in these conglomerates tends to be top-down and disciplined (Morden and Bowles 1998). Although performance based promotion is increasing, work practice generally involves long hours, includes complicated relationships with coworkers, and a promotion scheme based primarily on seniority (Chae and Rhee 2009; Morden and Bowles 1998). Until the Asia economic crisis in the late 1990s, employee turnover was less common in Korean Chaebol than other western corporations, as loyalty and stability were seen as important elements of the work culture. For decades the Korean Chaebols had very little competition within Korea, as protectionist governments restricted imports and limited foreign investment. Travel restrictions began to loosen in the 1990s, Koreans started to study abroad in larger numbers, and expats, Korean-Americans and foreign educated Koreans started to enter the Korean business field. With the opening of the Korean economy during the Asian Economic Crisis, the foreign influence on Korean business practice became much more pronounced, further altering Korean business fields.

Presently, the Korean business fields are in a relative state of flux. The once dominant traditional Korean business culture where seniority, hierarchy and alumni networks are crucial characteristics remains dominant, but is slowly being transformed as more foreign and foreign educated workers enter and compete in the field. Global business practices favoring performance-based promotion over seniority and more horizontal or open channels of communication have been introduced through global talent hires and foreign mergers or partnerships. As these fields adapt to global economic changes, the contest over which cultural capital is most valued and recognized in these fields continues. The competition takes on new forms as varying degrees of local and global cultural capital are rewarded.
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I draw on the literature of neoliberal globalization to understand the desperation and intensity by which these global educational strategies are being employed. Neoliberal ideologies are also influential in that they have permeated the institutions granting educational credentials. Universities have adopted the market model, and the emphasis on privatization and profits have changed the way many organizations work. As students are seeking more and better cultural capital to assert distinctiveness in their local work fields, they have pursued various forms of global cultural capital from outside their home countries. How these globalized forms of cultural capital, including cosmopolitan experiences, are institutionalized or legitimized in the business field of home countries is an area of particular interest to me in this research. I contend that a better understanding of this process of assessing the value of the transfer and institutionalization of these global experiences, requires a concrete examination of the nature of global cultural capital. I rely on Bourdieu’s forms of capital to explain the mechanisms by which these global experiences translate to status and occupational success, and why various obstacles persist. I also add to this theoretical discussion by examining how cosmopolitan experience, as a form of global cultural capital, may be a reward in itself.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS & DATA

DATA

In December of 2008 I began an 11-month process of in-country preparation for my dissertation research. The first 6 months consisted of intense language study where I attended and graduated from the Korean Language Program at Sogang University. The remaining 5 months were spent making contacts among employees and educators (South Korean and foreign) in the areas I was planning to research and conducting informal field observations in a mid-sized Korean software company that had recently been purchased by a large American software company.

My primary research (in depth interviews and some other informal observations) was conducted in Seoul, South Korea from February 2010 to February 2011. Interviews continued until May of 2011 but were done in Hawaii using Skype. Some follow up information was also gathered from interviewed respondents by email. In the summer of 2014, additional follow up interviews were conducted with 8 respondents I had previously interviewed. These interviews were done over the phone.

Many people worry about being exposed in closed fields that have valuable information. Therefore, gaining access and finding possible respondents was at times very difficult, but also quite exhilarating. I often related the experience to investigative journalism, where I was trying to find informants who would go on the record to share information about a coworker, corporation, and research team or government office. I was
fortunate to speak with upper executives at a number of companies, consultants at top recruitment firms and high-ranking government officials.

What was interesting was that when I introduced the topic of discussion as pertaining to educational experiences, everyone wanted to speak with me about it. Foreign educated returnees seemed especially excited to discuss this momentous time in their lives when they lived abroad. Locally educated Koreans as well were very willing to share their thoughts on education in Korea, the hiring process and work life. They also provided valuable commentary on the changing Korean work environment and working alongside “global talent” such as foreign educated Koreans and expats. Many were also very interested in talking about studying overseas, even if they had not done so.

I chose Seoul as the location of my research because of the high concentration of Korean conglomerates, foreign companies, government and the country’s best universities. This is where change is occurring the fastest in Korea and where those with global cultural capital are the most likely to be living. As a Caucasian, North American who has lived in Korea off and on for five years since the mid-1990s, I occupied a unique space while living in Korea. As a non-Korean I am an outsider and sometimes denied access to things as a form of image protection. At the same time I could also be immune to the same restrictions other Koreans experience. I could occasionally ask more direct questions that otherwise may have been considered rude. I could sometimes get Koreans to discuss important educational or occupational issues that are taken-for-granted among Koreans. Sometimes I believe Koreans felt freer to go off of the normal script and tell me things because my outsider position would not include judgment or scorn. Because I speak Korean and I am more familiar with the culture than most westerners living in Korea, I felt I was also
afforded a unique position. Since foreigners so infrequently speak Korean, when I would talk about my dissertation research to taxi drivers they would often tell me they had never spoken with a westerner before. Many were thrilled to hear that I, a foreign “scholar”, was studying some of the fundamental Korean problems like study abroad, private education and economic restructuring. Korea is a country seeking a global voice, and there is often an expression of flattery or appreciation over being the subject of study by foreigners. Also, as a foreigner in a country with so few other foreigners, there is a brotherhood or sisterhood among “outsiders” living in Korea. As a result I met CEOs, executives and people working in very prestigious jobs who gladly talked to me about working in Korea. I believe normally I would have had a much more difficult time gaining access to them. I was invited to expensive lunches and breakfasts sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce that included high-level bankers and executives. My foreign status made my attendance at these meetings less conspicuous and allowed me access to an interesting group of people who are a part of this story.

The research in this dissertation is focused on how neoliberal globalization is affecting education. In particular I look at how this has led to a surge in Korean students studying outside Korea: why they are leaving, what happens when they study abroad, what happens when they return to Korea and what have Koreans who have stayed in Korea done to remain competitive? Because I was looking at exit and then re-entry of workers and students in various fields, I had no one field where I could observe all of the behavior I thought would be valuable. Instead I looked for particular experiences and locations where returnees are most present. I focused on a variety of locations where locally educated and foreign educated employees were working together and competing with one another. Data
were gathered and presented from multiple perspectives. The data in this dissertation include structural level information gathered from government databases, previous research and newspapers, as well as concrete examples and narratives of those who are experiencing global education first hand. I also include stories from my own observations of these sites where education is occurring or where foreign and locally educated Koreans are using these skills and being evaluated.

**Locations: Observations & Visits**

The Korean work world is nuanced and unique. While the large Korean conglomerates have become globally recognized names, their inner workings remain heavily influenced by Korean work culture and relatively closed to non-Koreans and the outside world. Only in the past 15 years have people from outside Korea been able to really get a glimpse at the inner workings of Korean businesses as co-workers or observers, and rarely if ever in an examination of globalized labor. As a result, the experiences of foreign educated returnees in Korean companies remain under researched. As of yet I have seen no systematic quantitative research on foreign educated returnees in Korea and very little qualitative research. Even government organizations I met with in Korea were unable to provide “hard” data on foreign educated Korean returnees, telling me they know when Koreans leave but aren’t tracking them when they return or in what capacity they return. Evaluative data of this sort is generally protected by the companies hiring returnees and not accessible to people outside of the company. Through interviews with evaluators and executives, I attempted to work around this block, relying on individual accounts of company policy, experiences and work environments. Nevertheless, good data collection
on this topic is still in the earliest stages. I spent the better part of two years trying to gain access to these elusive fields and finding important players who were working in these sites and could provide key information on this topic.

*Industries*

To capture the variation in the Korean work world I focused on a few major industries that value foreign education. These industries included business (e.g. marketing, finance & banking), research and development (engineering and technological research) and the government. Each of these fields provides a different look at foreign education as each field has a different history with the foreign educated. There was also a different expectation of the benefits of foreign education in these fields and in each field the locally educated vary in their competitiveness. There are often Korean and foreign companies, which are slightly different in their use and evaluation of foreign education. I was able to visit both foreign and local companies and I was able to spend time in a number of organizations in these varying fields by way of short-term visits with a few observations.

*Observations & Visits:*

Through various informal employment opportunities I was able to spend time in a number of Korean organizations. Usually this was as an English teacher, but also as an interviewer for undergraduate and MBA students. The longest I had access to one company was 5 months. Between June and November of 2009 I visited a Korean software company that had been recently purchased by a multinational company, several times a week. My class was for the best English speakers and therefore included both top-level employees and the
youngest employees fresh from university. Through regular interaction in this company I was able to discuss some of the work related behaviors. I spoke with them about their new relationship with the American company that recently purchased their company and informally observed how they behaved when leadership from San Francisco came to visit them. I formally interviewed one of the employees from this company.

In another larger Korean conglomerate I taught “business English” to members of a global team for one month. While this experience was shorter in duration, I also spent time with some of the employees out of class and was able to discuss a number of interesting issues concerning the business culture in this company. This included the direction the upper executives were hoping to move the company and the characteristics most suitable for success in this company. I interviewed three members of this team, meeting with one of the members on a regular basis even after he left this company and moved into an administrative position at the MBA program of his alma mater. After he moved to this new position I continued to meet with him, gaining access to other executive MBA students and one of the top administrators in charge of employment for the graduates. I was able to interview her as well as a human resource worker who was getting an Executive MBA.

From October 2010 until I left Korea at the end of February 2011 I spent significant time at one of Korea’s top Global MBA programs. I had two close friends teaching at this university who granted me access by using me to interview the MBA students as a part of their preparation for the job market. I also came to one of the classes to speak with the students. Through interviewing every member of one cohort as a part of an employment fair over a number of weeks, I was able to gain valuable insight into the workings of one of Korea’s most successfully internationalized university programs. I had access to the
students’ employment history and education through the resumes they provided at our mock interviews. I was then able to find the ideal candidates for my research based on their occupations, the companies they worked for, short-term educational experiences and the local universities they attended. I interviewed several of the students, the dean of the college as well as one of the top administrators who had worked for a number of years as a recruiter for one of the largest companies in Korea. I also interviewed two of the Korean employment specialists who were brought in by the school to interview the students in Korean.

I also participated in employment camps at different universities around Korea. One was for a large university in Seoul and the other was for a smaller university in Busan, Korea’s second largest city. In both cases I spent 12 hours with undergraduate students from these schools as part of a panel of interviewers preparing them for the job market. From this and my interaction with the other Korean interviewers on the panel, I gained insight into how students at mid-ranked or smaller specialty schools were being prepared for the job market.

Finally, in order to conduct interviews I made multiple visits to the headquarters of many of the largest companies in Korea, to foreign companies with offices in Korea as well as to government agencies (including the Blue House). Through the various contacts I made, I gained access to some of the most prestigious departments and with employees at many of the most important organizations in Korea. At a lunch and breakfast sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce I was able to observe fascinating interactions between expats working in some of the more powerful positions in Korea. These expats worked in banking, finance, law, as executives in large conglomerates and also worked at various
embassies. I interviewed three people I met from these meetings who provided fascinating comparative insight into the Korean business culture.

**People**

As the primary source of data I initially interviewed three groups of people and then added a fourth group to provide greater context and insight into the Korean work place. These groups include; (1) executives and human resource personnel at the multinational corporations, government ministries and recruiting firms in South Korea who had experience evaluating, hiring students or placing Koreans with both domestic elite and foreign credentials; (2) graduates from local universities working in Korea’s most prestigious private occupations; (3) graduates of foreign universities hired to work in Korea’s most prestigious private and public occupations; and, (4) expatriates primarily working in close proximity with Korean employees in large Korean conglomerates. Some of these expatriates worked in slightly different locations including the American government, a large Korean organization and an American multinational company opening an office in Korea.

*Human Resource Personnel & Executives*

The first sample of respondents is comprised of people who have experience recruiting, hiring, evaluating or placing people in jobs. This includes Human Resource representatives (HR reps) or executives with hiring experience at large firms, and academic administrators in MBA programs responsible for placing their students in jobs (See Table 3.1 in *Appendix*). I call them “evaluators”. These respondents could be employment
specialists that are acutely aware of the skills, credentials and abilities most highly prized in the contemporary Korean job market, or they were HR personnel whose occupation is centered on either hiring or evaluating employees. The companies I drew my sample from all have strong global ties and market objectives, assuring that the skill assessment of potential employees will contain a global element. Because of the global nature of these firms, large Korean companies often use foreigners to help in recruiting for specific departments. As a result, these “evaluators” consisted of both Koreans and foreigners (non-Koreans). I conducted interviews with HR specialists working at “head hunter” firms or as recruitment specialists. These recruitment specialists were hired to provide large companies with applicants. I also interviewed administrators at 3 of Korea’s top MBA programs whose programs are judged based on graduates employment rates. I wanted to find “evaluators” from both Korean and foreign companies because of the claim some of my respondents made that perhaps foreign companies with branches in Korea might be a better landing site for foreign educated Koreans. Therefore I wanted to see if “evaluators” from these different business environments might evaluate global talent differently.

In total I interviewed 20 people who met this criteria, representing a diverse group of people working in Korean and foreign companies, recruitment firms and at universities. Three of the respondents were women, 6 were non-Koreans, 13 were Koreans and 1 was Korean-American. Four of the respondents worked for recruiting firms. Eight worked for corporations specifically as HR personnel. Two worked as executives that had experience evaluating and hiring talent. Four worked at MBA programs and dealt directly with employment of graduates, and one was a research fellow who had to develop and evaluate
a large research team in a prestigious division in one Korea’s largest conglomerates. In total 14 worked for Korean companies while 6 worked for foreign companies.

_locally educated_
The second sample consisted of locally educated employees at large companies (See Table 3.2 in Appendix). I was particularly interested in finding locally educated Koreans working in large companies with experience working alongside foreign educated Koreans. Therefore the locally educated Koreans I interviewed were concentrated in teams or divisions with a global emphasis, or working on global projects. When possible, I also focused on locally educated Koreans who attended top schools in Korea (‘SKY’ schools). This was because I wanted to see how their employment experiences differed from Koreans who were hired from foreign schools, in a way comparing the best of local with foreign degrees and experiences. I also wanted to compare how the most prestigious locally educated respondents used their networks as well as cultural capital in the workforce. Koreans with degrees from ‘SKY’ schools or top ten schools were also more likely to be placed in large firms and global positions within these companies. I was interested in how locally educated Koreans were acquiring and using other global strategies like exchanges, short-term language study and joint degrees. I made sure a number of the locally educated I interviewed met one of these criteria.

In total I interviewed 20 locally educated respondents. Four respondents were female and 16 were male. At the time[^4] I interviewed them, all worked in Korean companies,

[^4]: Matt has since moved from a Korean conglomerate to an International company with an office in Seoul. John was initially a locally educated respondent working at large Korean conglomerate. When I interviewed him again this summer he had studied abroad and was working at the present time in an American law firm.
4 of which had an American partnership. All of the companies were very large. The respondents working in research-oriented positions were slightly older than the rest of the sample, but given their higher level of education (all of them had at least Masters Degrees and 3 had PhDs) this isn’t that surprising. Eleven worked in business-oriented fields, 3 at banks and 6 were in research or engineering based occupations. The respondents’ educational background indicates that this is a very prestigiously educated group. Half (10) graduated from a SKY school, another 5 graduated from schools in the top 5 or 10. The remaining 5 graduated from second to third tier schools.

Foreign Educated

The third sample consists of foreign educated employees at South Korea’s larger and more prestigious companies or in government positions (Table 3.3 in Appendix). These are respondents who have gone through the reentry process or were going through the reentry process at the time of interview and can speak about gaining employment and also to job success and satisfaction. Employees are considered “foreign educated” if they have either an undergraduate or graduate degree from a university in the United States, England, Australia or Canada (the most popular western destinations). These workers were concentrated in four areas of the Korean workforce I believe are most affected by the demand for global skills: business/marketing, computer engineering (research), banking and government.

Because of the recent increase in foreign educated South Koreans, I tried to limit my sample of foreign and domestically educated employees to those having completed their education and entering or re-entering the job market after the Asian economic crisis of the
later 1990s, although I included two cases because of their unique perspectives. Lee was an authority on the changing legal profession in Korea and represented a new and growing number of foreign educated lawyers being brought to Korea to work in Korean law firms as consultants. Dan was one of the first government officials to be sponsored to study overseas and provided invaluable insight into the program and its purpose as well as providing contacts for me to interview who have used this program more recently.

In total I interviewed 26 foreign educated Koreans. Seven of the respondents were female and 19 male. Interestingly, 6 of these respondents had studied or lived abroad during high school. All but one did this with their entire family, indicating that they were raised in families with more global experience and understanding than is common. Of the 16 foreign educated respondents who obtained a degree in Korea before studying overseas, 8 studied at ‘SKY’ schools and 5 studied at top 10 schools (See table 5.2). While elite educational backgrounds like this are not reflective of the population as a whole, I contend that this is more common among Koreans working in the most prestigious global positions in the most prestigious companies and government ministries. Nevertheless, the possibility of selection bias is taken into account. Five of these respondents worked for the government and had been sponsored by the government to study abroad. Three additional respondents were sponsored by private companies. The most popular degree was an MBA, as 12 of the 26 had studied abroad and received MBA degrees. Six of the foreign educated respondents work for foreign companies and 20 worked for Korean companies. All of these companies were large in size. At the time of our initial interview, four of these foreign educated respondents were attending a Korean Global MBA program after getting a foreign
degree. This was a tool for developing a local social network and as a reentry strategy into the Korean job market. All but one of them was employed at the time of interview.

**Expatriates**

The final group of respondents I interviewed was expatriates working in close proximity with Korean employees (Table 3.4 in *Appendix*). This group of employees work in large Korean companies, had many transactions and dealings with Koreans and provide a unique perspective on Korean work environment. Most had work experience in other companies and cultures and provided an interesting perspective on Korean business culture and organizational structure. Many of the people I interviewed were a part of the company's attempt to globalize. These respondents were generally brought in for specific tasks, were short term in nature and could be isolated within the companies. In total I interviewed 9 expatriates. This group is different than the foreigners who were included in the Evaluators table in that their roles were not specifically dealing with hiring or assessing performance. Five of the nine were part of global teams that large Korean conglomerates created to focus on specific global tasks such as strategy and marketing. They also had access to Korean co-workers who were both locally and foreign educated.

**METHODS**

Global educational strategies, like studying at a university overseas or even short-term language study abroad, have increased rapidly in popularity for recently industrialized and industrializing nations. As a result, good data remains scarce. An important way to examine new phenomena is through the voices of those who have completed this journey and those
they are competing with. This method allows for the examination of the patterns and processes of this phenomenon, as well as the meaning and identity issues this dramatic educational strategy influences.

**Interviews**

I used semi-structured qualitative interviews to examine three groups of South Koreans at varying stages in this global educational process as well as expats working alongside these three groups of Koreans. Semi-structured interviews allow for greater flexibility in the interview process permitting interviewers to follow unforeseen insight or themes as they emerge throughout the interview process, drop certain questions if they are not applicable or change the order of the interview to fit the interviewee. Lofland and Lofland (1995) describe this process as a way to “discover the informant’s experience of a particular topic or situation” (18), something vital in order to examine sensitive and complicated concepts like global skills or the use of cultural capital. While statistical measures are helpful in explaining the extent of this phenomenon, they are unable to provide the depth and insight into a new and complicated process that is occurring over time and space. Particularly as a number of my research questions involve descriptions of experiences or reflections on processes, qualitative methods are more appropriate. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me to gather data from a diverse group of people involved in the global educational process particularly suited for my research questions, something impossible to get from expansive quantitative datasets. Of the 75 people interviewed, several were interviewed more than once. All but five of these interviews were conducted in person in both English and Korean, depending on the language ability of those involved. Structured
follow up questions were administered in person and/or completed by email, with a relatively low response rate (16 completed).

Due to the global nature of the positions and companies where most of the interviewees worked, many of the subjects of this research were foreign educated, native English speakers or many spoke English with great fluency. The option of conducting the interviews in either Korean or English was offered before meeting and before beginning each interview. I tried to create an atmosphere that was most comfortable for the respondents. At times a mixture of Korean and English was used, depending on the language ability of those involved. The interviews generally took between 1 and 2 hours. I became friends with many of these respondents and met with them regularly to discuss their insights and my research.

**Gaining Access**

I used a variety of contacts to gain access to these fields and respondents. I found candidates through my church, through academic contacts from Seoul National University where I was studying as a visiting researcher and from people I taught English to. I also cold-contacted employees at universities and recruiting firms, relatives of friends and co-workers. One of my greatest successes came when a Korean friend told me he would show me how the famous Korean network system works and help me find candidates for interviews. Within days I had contact information for a number of his alumni and social club members who had information on various people who fit my research criteria. Other friends working at universities introduced me to friends who worked in a number of capacities from the dean of the business school to recruiters. Even a few people I met
randomly in Seoul provided excellent referrals and some were even ideal candidates themselves. I found that Koreans were curious and excited that a foreigner was interested in Korean education and most often very generous with information and contacts.

**Sampling**

I created quotas for each category I wanted to fill with respondents. Initially I had the goal of 15-20 respondents that were foreign educated, 15-20 respondents that were locally educated and 15-20 respondents that worked in HR. After I reached these goals I purposely exceeded the category of foreign educated respondents because it was the group I was most interested in examining. I used snowball sampling and asked every person I interviewed if they had coworkers or friends who were similarly employed or had studied overseas.

**Analysis**

After receiving consent from each respondents, I recorded each interview. Following each interview I spent 15-20 minutes writing thoughts and notes on the interview, interviewee and the context in which the interviews took place. These included my thoughts and initial reactions, many of which became important themes later when I coded the interviews more thoroughly. I later transcribed each of these interviews personally and for accuracy hired two Koreans to transcribe the interviews that were done predominantly in Korean. During transcription, I highlighted parts of the interview I thought were interesting and important. Upon completion of transcription I coded the interviews looking for themes. This process was often guided by my thoughts, post interview, but was also guided by my
research questions. Nevertheless, as is the case with much qualitative research this process was also inductive as themes emerged from the data that I did not foresee, and changed as I began to attempt to write my initial findings. Oftentimes I returned and recoded my interviews based on new directions and thoughts that had crystalized during the research.

Upon my final analysis of the data I used the qualitative research software Dedoose to help recode my interviews. This facilitated the coding process as this qualitative software easily creates nodes or groups of themes and quotes that can be selected and placed into each coding node. After completing the coding in this fashion, I was able to quickly examine all the quotes marked by a particular node. With this final round of coding, I focused especially on what I considered to be examples of global cultural capital and the benefits and problems associated with returning to the Korean work place. Nodes within these larger coding themes included such things as, “better career trajectory”, “comfort with foreign things”, “confidence” and “cosmopolitan aspirations”, under the theme labeled global cultural capital. “Better pay”, “better performance” or quotes related to international networks were included under the theme labeled “benefits of studying abroad".
CHAPTER 4
KOREAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I discuss the global and local contexts in which studying abroad is occurring. This includes an examination of international student mobility in general and the structural factors that are encouraging and facilitating this educational strategy. In particular I will discuss the overall picture of international student mobility to try and assess the extent to which this is occurring in order to contextualize the Korean case. This includes the role universities in western countries play in perpetuating this phenomenon as they rely on international students for research innovation and as a source of revenue. Higher education has become an industry worth billions of dollars and universities are aggressively recruiting customers and consumers. I will then look at Korean education from a broader or structural perspective, as it exists within this changing global educational environment. I discuss how the Korean government has invested billions of dollars to internationalize higher education in Korea and how this has affected the content and experience of studying in Korean universities. This investment has pushed select Korean universities up the global rankings as more foreign and foreign educated faculty are teaching classes and producing research. The prevalence of global degrees and foreign students are changing the possibilities for acquiring global experiences on Korean campuses. In the final section of this chapter I will look at the educational dilemmas and concerns within Korea specifically. I try to understand why Korean students are leaving to study at universities in other countries just as Korean students are being lauded as perhaps
the top educational performers in the world. Common explanations such as educational intensity and cost are examined.

GLOBAL EDUCATION INDUSTRY

At the crossroads of neoliberal globalization and the knowledge economy, proudly sit institutions of higher learning. With the transnational movement of students and professors into and out of these institutions, the rapidly changing policies and procedures, and the international significance in the knowledge economy, few institutions capture the impact of globalization and the marketization or liberalization of institutions like higher education.

As universities deal with a globalizing environment, they have internationalized and marketized. They are no longer merely the grantors of credentials or creators of knowledge, but also like companies competing with other “companies” (Wildavksy 2011; Altbach et al. 2009; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002). Institutions of higher education are in the business of generating revenue by attracting students and scholars, establishing campuses and affiliations around the globe, all the while consciously aware of their international rankings and reputation and the impact this will have on their ability to recruit and obtain funding (Wildavsky 2011; Zheng 2010; Altbach et al. 2009; Marginson 2007).

Today over 4 million students are studying outside of their home country (OECD Education at a Glance 2012). This movement of students is unprecedented and asymmetrical (Stromquist 2002), as most students are going from developing or recently developing nations to developed nations (Atlas of Student Mobility 2012). Almost half are going to four English-speaking countries alone (United States, United Kingdom, Australia
and Canada), and the largest host country is the United States (International Institute of Education 2012; Atlas of Student Mobility 2012). Asian countries, China, India and Korea in particular, have been the countries driving the growth in intentional student mobility over the past 20 years, but what has really facilitated the growth of international student migration is neoliberal globalization.

Neoliberal ideologies (see Chapter 2) have become firmly entrenched in higher education, changing policies and the fundamental practices of universities, affecting the manner in which they have internationalized (Altbach et al. 2009; Stromquist 2002; Marginson 2010). With neoliberal globalization, large multinational organizations (IMF, GATT, WTO etc.), governments and universities are changing rules, laws and policies to make it easier to recruit foreign students (Becker and Kolster 2012; Zheng 2010; Altbach et al. 2009; Barrow et al. 2003). These organizations have worked to liberalize trade and dissolve borders, decrease restrictions, make visas easier to obtain and generally remove the obstacles that otherwise make it harder for students to study abroad (Zheng 2010; Altbach et al. 2009). In host nations like Germany, Canada and Australia, governments have tried to make it even easier for foreign graduates to work after graduating and keep them contributing to the local economy for as long as possible (Zheng 2010; Altbach et al. 2009).

The neoliberalization of tertiary education has been both driven by and a result of two key factors: the intensified competition for talent and the need for economic revenue. University research is intricately connected to the vibrancy and health of a nation’s economy, and foreign graduate students in particular have become the life-blood of research in the most marketable disciplines (Wildavsky 2011; Robertson 2008; Hoffer et al. 2007). Secondly, neoliberal policy and the market model becoming a part of the
universities have led to a restructuring of higher education institutions (Altbach et al. 2009; Marginson 2007). The tenets of neoliberal globalization, privatization, productivity, efficiency, flexibility and competition (Steger and Roy 2010) are now the hallmarks of the new higher education (Altbach et al. 2009). No longer able to rely as much on government funding, neoliberal globalization has also led to an increased reliance on private funding. International student education is an industry that provides tens of billions of dollars to host countries around the world. This is a trade imbalance developed nations are dominating and a revenue stream universities need more than ever.

**International Student Mobility**

As recently as thirty-five years ago there were fewer than 1 million international students (OECD Education at a Glance 2012). These students were different than the students studying abroad today. These students were not from the same highest sending countries today and were more likely to be select individuals from more exclusive or wealthy families. In the nations now sending the highest number of students, studying outside of ones country before the 1990s exceeded the financial means of most students. By 1990 the number of international students had increased to 1.3 million, increasing again to 2.1 million international students worldwide by 2000 (See figure 4.1). Today more than 4 million tertiary students are studying outside of their home countries, a 95% increase from the previous decade (OECD Education at a Glance 2012).
Where are they going?

Increasingly more and more developed nations across the globe are competing for international student tuitions and innovative contributions. The United States hosts more international students than any other nation as 19% of all international students are studying in the United States, which is down from 28% in 2001 (IIE – Atlas of Student Mobility 2012). As more and more nations have seen the economic prospects of recruiting international students and realized the potential benefits they provide local economies, the American university dominance in this regard has decreased even as their total numbers of international students continued to increase over this time (582,996 in 2001, compared to 819,644 in 2013). While traditionally popular destinations like the United Kingdom, France and Japan have retained constant market share over the past 10 years (12%, 7%, 3% of the total respectively), China’s share of the international student market has grown to 7%,
while smaller English speaking destinations like Australia and Canada (5% and 6%) have
grown considerably (IIE – Atlas of Student Mobility 2012).

When international students are separated by degree type, the United States
maintains a much stronger hold on international innovative “talent”. Two-thirds of all
international graduate students study in the United States and half of all PhD students
(Robertson 2008). In three of the majors most valued in the knowledge economy
(Computer Science, Engineering, Physics & Mathematics), American universities are by far
the most popular destination as 65%, 64%, 56% and 55% of the graduate students in these
majors respectively are international students (Wildavsky 2011 see also Hoffer et al. 2007).
Wildavsky (2011) describes the imbalance as so one-sided that a form of “affirmative
action for Americans” is in use to maintain at least some American doctoral students in
these departments.

Asian Nations and Study Abroad

Among the nations sending the most international students to American
Universities, China, India and South Korea send by far the most students (48% of all
international students in the US) and over half of the total number of international students
is from Asian countries alone (IIE – Atlas of Student Mobility 2012). Among East-Asian
nations, the number of students studying in the United States has changed dramatically
over the past 15 years. Japan, once the leading sender of students to the United States, now
sends less than half the numbers they sent in 1997/98 and trails China, South Korea and
Taiwan among East Asian nations (Figure 4.2). Economic crises have had profound impacts
on the number of students going overseas to study. Taiwan consistently sent around
30,000 students a year to the United States until the most recent economic crisis in 2008 after which the numbers have now dropped to below 20,000 for the first time in over two decades. In this regard, China is the true anomaly. While other countries decreased the number of students studying overseas during the Asian economic crisis (1997/1998) or the Global Recession (2008), China has almost tripled the number of students it sends to the United States since 2007/2008 alone, pulling away from other top sending nations. The Chinese capacity for sending students abroad appears to be recession proof.

**Figure 4.2. Number of College-Aged International Students in the United States**

![Graph showing the number of college-aged international students in the United States from 1997 to 2013.](source)

**Koreans Studying Abroad**

Presently 219,543 college-aged Koreans are officially studying outside Korea, or just over 4% of the college student population (Statistics Korea 2014), spending an estimated 4.36 billion dollars (Rahn 2013). While the United States remains the top destination of
choice for Korean students studying abroad (30.7% of all students studying abroad),
Korean students are studying in a number of different nations (Figure 4.3). China is the
second most popular destination and now receives 26.3% of Korean students studying
abroad, three times as many as the next largest destination (Canada 8.6%).

Figure 4.3. Top Destinations for Korean Students Studying Abroad (%)

![Bar chart showing top destinations for Korean students studying abroad.](source: Statistics Korea 2012)

Studying in China has become a newly popular destination for Korean students
seeking educational opportunities outside of Korea. The popularity of this strategy is due in
large part to the strong Chinese economy and trade ties between Korea and China. China is
Korea’s largest trade partner representing 24% of all exports (nearly 2.5 times more than the US) and 15% of all imports (Global Edge 2014). Also, students studying in China can learn Mandarin and English for a fraction of the cost of studying in the United States. However, because Chinese universities are not as highly ranked and still do not have the prestige of the traditionally prestigious western universities, I focus predominantly on western schools. This is also because I am focusing on status and cosmopolitan aspirations and greater admiration for western schools and western style global cultural capital still exists (Kim 2011a).

Interestingly, after the most recent economic crisis as the Chinese number of international students exploded, Korean international students going to the United States decreased for the first time since the Asian economic crisis in 1997 (Figure 4.2). This is due in large part to devaluation of the Korean currency as during the global recession the Korean Won decreased in value from around 1100 Korean Won to the US dollar to 1500 Korean Won to the US dollar. In a moment, the cost of living and tuition went up almost 50% for Koreans studying in the United States. This suggests that global economic conditions impact studying abroad capabilities, but not always in the manner we would expect. During the global recession, the total number of Koreans studying abroad did not decrease, just the number of Koreans studying in the United States, where university tuition is the highest in the world. Instead, Koreans studied in less costly locations and the number of college-aged Koreans studying overseas still increased until 2012, when it decreased for the first time in years and has continued to slowly decrease (Figure 4.4). The importance of external forces facilitating and promoting international student mobility
cannot be understated. These external forces include pull factors such as economic policy change at the international level and legal and institutional changes at the national level.

**Figure 4.4. Koreans Studying Abroad & Foreign Students Studying in Korea**

![Graph showing Koreans Studying Abroad & Foreign Students Studying in Korea (Source: Statistics Korea 2014)]

**Traditional Pull Factors**

Push/Pull factors have been used to explain in/out migration for years (McMahon 1992). When considering international student migration many of the same principles apply. Popular pull factors drawing students out of their home country into host countries include (1) the relationship between the sending and receiving nations (2) the size of the host economy (3) the prestige and quality of the institution (4) the active recruitment and marketing of high-skilled laborers (5) specialized study opportunities (6) teaching an in-demand language (7) affordable costs (8) good prospects for returns on the degree (9) post-graduation work opportunities (10) social links and (11) helpful visa arrangements (Macready and Tucker 2011; Han 2010; UNESCO 2009; Mazzerol et al. 1997; McMahon 1992).
While widely used and helpful in understanding what influences international mobility, push/pull factors have been recently criticized as not accounting for the “geopolitics” of educational attainment and degree production (Kim 2011a). Specifically, they don’t account for the fact that higher education is stratified and that there is an American hegemony in higher education (Kim 2011a). As a result of the position atop the global higher education hierarchy, degrees from American schools may provide greater status to graduates upon returning to their home countries. Hence, this standard list of factors tends to overlook the symbolic value of American foreign degrees.

Higher Education in Flux

Higher education has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, as the market model has shaped curricula and university agendas. When universities are run more like companies, students become a source of revenue and expanding this source of revenue becomes of utmost importance.

Massification of Higher Education

Among developed nations, these global economic changes and subsequent intensification of class insecurity and competition, have led to a massive increase in educational aspirations among all classes. The competition for rewarding and stable employment has intensified (Brown et al. 2011), and more and more people are continuing their education (Macready and Tucker 2011). This increase in education has not only led to standard universities expanding their student base, but also an increase in non-traditional post-secondary education in the forms of online education and community colleges.
Worldwide, in 1970, there were fewer than 30 million tertiary students (Macready and Tucker 2011). In the next 30 years the number rose to 100 million tertiary students (Macready and Tucker 2011). By 2007, the number increased another 50 percent to 150 million students and today stands at 177 million students (UNESCO 2012). The increase in numbers of tertiary students exemplifies the intensified competition and parallels the changing economic environment. The shift from industrial economies to the knowledge economy has led to greater emphasis on education as a tool for job acquisition. The assumption is in the knowledge economy, more knowledge will pay off with better employment opportunities (Brown et al. 2010).

As globalization has become an increasingly important variable in this equation, the assumption has changed to include a global component. In the global knowledge economy, more global knowledge will pay off with better employment opportunities locally and globally. Therefore this intensification of competition has led individuals to go to even greater lengths and global lengths for a competitive advantage (Zheng 2010). Interestingly, as more and more students are considering the selective and extremely taxing strategy of studying abroad, this path has been facilitated, promoted and exploited by nations looking for innovative talent and universities looking for increased revenue.

*International Organizations and Policy Changes*

While international economic institutions advocating the neoliberal model were initially created to maintain economic stability at an institutional level, they increasingly represent the interests of large corporations/organizations and industrialized nations rather than those most in need of economic protection (Stiglitz 2002). Social programs or institutions
created to protect or insulate those experiencing the most risk and insecurity have been labeled economically burdensome, unnecessary, inefficient or in opposition to the “salutary effects of inequality and exposure to risk.” (Garland 2001:99) As a result, many governments have pushed to corporatize institutions, forcing them to trim, downsize and to make cutbacks (Altbach et al. 2009).

With the globalization of neoliberal ideologies, higher education and especially public institutions of higher education have implemented neoliberal tenets (Torres and Roads 2006), such as privatization, increased competition, and policy changes focused on profit generating (Zheng 2010; Torres and Roads 2006; Altbach et al. 2009). There has been a clear shift within public universities toward “managerial autonomy and flexibility” (Altbach et al. 2009:72), while universities in general have been forced to turn to supplemental revenue (Altbach et al. 2009). In this context of decreased government subsidies and increased student applicants, the more efficient market model emphasizing cost effectiveness, efficiency, and expanding revenue generation to compensate for budget constraints may seem appropriate. However, neoliberal ideology changes the very nature and mission of higher education institutions. The content of courses changes to more closely match the market demand or in a manner that generates the most profits (Stromquist 2002). In order to recruit more effectively, rankings become a much more important consideration for universities. Understanding what factors affect these rankings and then changing policy, programs and content accordingly becomes a standard practice.

Of course competition between universities for top students and faculty is not new, but decreased budgets and the increased importance of department and university rankings worldwide has made the recruitment of students both locally and internationally
more strategic, important and intense (Altbach et al. 2009). A global industry has been created (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002) and new revenue generating strategies have been developed. Universities are now in the business of marketing their value globally. They are much more aggressive recruiters of rankings savvy educational consumers or students (Bloom 2005:21), while policy changes in OECD countries have made exporting their education and importing students easier (Zheng 2010).

**Universities: The Engine of the Knowledge Economy**

In the knowledge economy, where employers rely “on technological innovation, applied knowledge, and the intellectual capital of the highly skilled workforce” (Brown et al. 2010:19), the competition for “knowledgeable” workers is intense. Many of the highly skilled and specifically skilled workers have invested years in their education and preparation for the global knowledge work force. Because of the potential for big payoff in innovative research or investment (Brown et al. 2010), any advantage a corporation or nation can use to corner the global market on top talent is being used (Zheng 2010).

As knowledge is the currency in the knowledge economy, knowledge-creating institutions like universities have grown in importance. University research and training is intricately connected to the vibrancy and health of a nation’s economy by producing research, developing innovation and helping global competitiveness (Wildavsky 2011; Barrow et al. 2003). Governments then rely on universities as their anchors in innovation systems and as the motor for development in a knowledge-based economy (Altbach et al. 2009; Robertson and Keeling 2008). Having the best students and brightest minds is of utmost importance (Altbach et al. 2009). The main creators of knowledge are researchers
and their teams are filled with PhD students (Wildavsky 2011). Particularly in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) areas, foreign graduate students are a driving force in this research. If universities are the engines running the knowledge economy, then foreign graduate students are fueling innovation and research at universities.

Foreign graduate students in particular have become the life-blood and key contributors to research and innovation in the most marketable disciplines (Wildavsky 2011; Altbach et al. 2009; Robertson 2008; Hoffer et al. 2007). The percentage of foreign graduate students in STEM areas is particularly high, in some majors over 50% (Wildavsky 2011). The United States has increasingly used the inflow of bright foreign students at the doctoral level where they make contributions to research as graduate research assistants (Marginson 2010; Guellec and Cervantes 2002). Eighty percent of the students from two of the top sending nations (China and India) are not returning home immediately after completing their degrees (Altbach 2004), as after graduation many foreign students want to stay and work and some are recruited to work in key positions in the host economies.

National economies need these minds and are competing for talent with scholarships, research facilities, and opportunities to stay and work in the host countries. As the highly skilled moved from universities to important occupations, higher education has become “the frontier of talent competition” (Zheng 2010:43). The wealthier nations are at a great advantage in this competition as they can recruit and keep the global talent, further skewing the global imbalance of riches and innovation (Altbach et al. 2009). Whereas the globalization of higher education was once about nation building, it is now about obtaining a well-trained workforce (Guruz 2008:141).
Working in Host Countries: The Critical Role of High-Skilled Labor

In the world’s most dynamic and developed economies, foreign-born high-skilled workers are increasingly needed to supplement local workers in high tech or research driven industries (Brown, Lauder and Ashton. 2010). In recent decades, high-skilled labor in particular has been driving immigration to developed nations (Brown and Tannock 2009). Between 1990 and 2000 high-skilled migration increased at a rate 2.5 times faster than lower-skilled migration (Brown and Tannock 2009). By 2000 35% of migrants were college educated, up from 30% in 1990 and much higher than the world’s overall labor force (only 11%) (Brown et al. 2010 citing Docquier and Marfouk 2005).

In Canada between the mid-1980s and 1997, Canadian immigrant computer scientists increased by 15 times, engineers 10 times and natural scientist 8 times (Brown et al. 2010; Bambrah 2005). Today almost 50% of the foreign-born labor force in Canada has a university degree, compared to less than 40% of the native-born labor force (OECD Regions at a Glance 2011). In Britain, between 1997 and 2003, 80% of new doctors and 73% of new nurses were foreign-born as well as 22% of new college hires in the financial and business sector (Brown and Tannock 2009). There is a long history of using foreign talent for faculty positions at universities in the United States. Research suggests that the numbers of foreign-born faculty in Science and Engineering have increased overall since the 1970s from 12% to 25%, and are as high as 46% in Engineering and 51% in Computer Science (National Science Foundation, Science and Engineering Indicators 2012). High-talent foreign students are becoming high-skilled foreign workers in developed nations and making a profound impact on these economies.
Amidst this battle for foreign students, there is an interesting distinction between graduate and undergraduate students. While foreign graduate students are recruited for their contributions to the host country’s post-industrial economy, foreign undergraduates are targeted as a source of revenue (Zheng 2010). As important as the competition for the best minds in knowledge economies, foreign students (especially undergraduate students) also represent a huge financial boon for western universities and economies.

**The Higher Education Industry**

*Marketization and Privatization of Higher Education*

As mentioned previously, neoliberal globalization has fundamentally altered higher education. Decreases in government support for higher education began as early as post World War II (Zheng 2010), but it was the popularity of neoliberal economics and the implementation of corporate practices or market strategies in higher education over the past 40 years that really changed the institution (Altbach et al. 2009). Institutions of higher learning around the globe adopting the market model has become synonymous with funding cutbacks and the need for supplemental sources of funding (Altbach et al. 2009). As the number of students attending higher education has continued to increase, governments are no longer able to provide sufficient funding and public institutions of higher learning in particular are forced to focus on profitable sources of revenue.

*Students as Income Generators*

Capitalizing on the lucrative international education market has been a common strategy employed by universities with financial concerns. International students are a revenue-
generating stream for western and English speaking universities in particular, and recruiting them has become an increasingly popular strategy (UNESCO Statistics 2009). This increases the competition for student tuition money between schools, and even between departments within schools, as the common solution to financial woes has been to recruit more international students (Altbach et al. 2009). This practice of aggressively recruiting students has changed higher education, as universities have become like companies employing “entrepreneurial practices” to increase funding (Levidow 2005:157).

With the revenue international students bring to host economies and local universities, higher education has become an important part of economic policy, increasing the value of international students (Zheng 2010; Altabch et al. 2009). Economic motivations have come to trump other rationales for student recruitment (Zheng 2010:48). With such a positive trade balance favoring developed nations, and the need for revenue so great, the international education industry has become a robust business and has played a large role in transforming higher education from a social good to “a logic of economics” (Welch 2002:440).

As the reality of the international education market has become more necessary, governments have tailored their policy to attract more students and also capitalize on the economic payoff of enrolling international students. This is done by facilitating the path to enrollment in the host countries for international students, while adding further revenue by taxing international students with higher fees or tuitions. In the United States at public institutions, international students must pay out-of-state tuition (an average difference of nearly $12,000 - Green and Ferguson 2011) and at many universities around the world they are also forced to pay differential fees along with full tuition. Another strategy is the
recruitment and enrollment of international undergraduate students who tend to stay longer and are more likely to be funded by their families (Choudaha and Chang 2012). The end result of strategic recruiting and added fees is a payoff for local economies and universities that is enormous.

Globally, international education is estimated to be worth at least 60 billion dollars (Ruby 2009). In United States alone, by way of tuition and living expenses, international students contribute over 20 billion dollars to American economy (NAFSA 2012). The UK, Australia and Canada all benefit from close to if not more than 10 billion dollars a year from international student contributions to the local economy. This is revenue coming from nations that are otherwise huge exporters of goods and services, causing large trade imbalances in western nations. For example, South Koreans spent over 4 billion dollars on foreign education in stark contrast to the 54 million dollars international students spent studying in Korea (Rahn 2012).

To tilt this educational trade imbalance back in their favor and create a self-sustaining global research hub, the South Korean government has made huge investments in domestic higher education. In the past 20 years Korean universities have undergone a major overhaul and internationalized.

**KOREA’S INTERNATIONALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION**

In the 1990s, the Korean government began investing huge amounts of money into the internationalization of Korean higher education. Through a number of government programs (ex: BK21—phases 1 and 2, the World Class University project) and billions of dollars, the Korean government sought to bring foreign faculty to Korea, pay for Korean
graduate students to go abroad, modernize domestic research facilities and most recently bring world famous scholars to Korea to collaborate with Korean scholars. The goals of these investments were to firmly establish an engine of creativity and innovation for the knowledge economy within Korea, while augmenting Korean institutions of higher learning to the strata of global research hubs (i.e. move up the international rankings). Specifically, this government money was to be spent increasing the quality and quantity of academic output, by improving both the quality and quantity of students (both foreign and local) and scholars (both foreign and local).

**Government Investment in Higher Education**

In the 1990s, despite several decades of rapid industrialization, modernization and rising educational attainment, Korean universities were virtually invisible globally. While incredibly prestigious and renowned locally, Korean universities were almost unknown outside of Korea. At this same time, developed and developing nations around the globe sought to shift their economies to better fit the emerging global knowledge economy and the need for high quality universities that understood the global climate became more significant. In countries like Korea, these concerns were exacerbated by the devastating impact of the Asian economic crisis in the late 1990s, which created a sense of vulnerability to the impacts of globalization and a heightened concern over the quality of domestic higher education. Therefore the importance of quickly internationalizing Korean institutions to compete in the rapidly globalizing knowledge economy and having an education system within Korea with the ability to provide the necessary innovation and talent to remain competitive in the knowledge economy led to a series of government
initiatives. Before the Asian economic crisis, the government’s policy regarding higher
education had been much more about equalization of educational opportunity, whereas
after the crisis the focus changed to the development of specific world-class universities
(Byun et al. 2013). The government’s goals for these initiatives were lofty, 10 universities
ranked in the top 200, be among the top ten countries as far as publications and have
10,000 foreign faculty and 150,000 foreign students teaching and studying at Korean
universities by 2020 (Cho and Palmer 2013 see also MEST 2010).

The pre-Asian Economic crisis ‘5.31 Educational Reform’ in 1995 was the beginning
of what has become almost a twenty-year investment in higher education (Shin 2012).
However, the real investment began when the government launched the first phase of
Brain Korea 21 (BK21) committing $1.4 billion dollars in 1999, and another $2.1 billion
dollars\(^5\) in 2006 to build world-class research universities in Korea (Suh 2013; Shin 2009;
Seong et al. 2008). A major focus of BK21 was improving research capabilities by providing
funding to researchers, graduate students, post-docs and improving research facilities
(Shin 2012; Shin 2009). The majority of the budget went to select graduate programs in
natural and applied sciences, engineering, humanities and social sciences, as selected
universities were to become world-class universities while the other universities in Korea
would become regional universities tied to specific industries (Sohn et al. 2009; Shin 2009).
This funding was also designated to help Korean graduate students study overseas by way

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\(^5\) The exact amount the government provided for both phases of BK21 is reported differently in different
sources. For example Suh (2013) said the amounts were $1.3 billion and $1.8 billion per phase. Sohn et al.
(2009) said the phase 1 amount was $1.2 billion while Shin (2009) also reported $1.4 billion for phase 1.
Discrepancies like this are most likely due to the variable exchange rate between Korean won and US dollars
at time of reporting.
of 800 scholarships a year (in 2010) to acquire world-class skills and training they could bring back to Korea (Morgan 2010; Sohn et al. 2009).

In the middle of the second phase of BK21, the Korean government introduced the World Class University (WCU) initiative. The WCU represented a $750-$800 million push by the Korean government to bring foreign faculty and world famous scholars to Korea to teach and collaborate with Korean scholars (Wildavsky 2011; MacNeil 2011). As the title of the program suggests, this program is particularly concerned with the development of Korean “world class” universities that not only provide Korea with technological independence but also establish a global brand for Korean research, researchers and research institutes (Byun et al. 2013; Jang and Kim 2013; Han and Jung 2012; MacNeil 2011; SRI International 2009). As the second stage of BK21 concluded, the Korean government has now begun BK21 PLUS, which is scheduled to run from 2013 to 2019 (Suh 2013). BK21 PLUS is a combination of BK21 and WCU and focuses on improving Korean universities “qualitatively” rather than “quantitatively” (Suh 2013). Qualitative improvement in this sense means more internationalization and more international recognition. After nearly two decades of massive expenditures on higher education and determined internationalization, Korean higher education has changed dramatically. Korean universities are climbing the international rankings rapidly as courses have westernized, more global degrees and joint degrees with foreign universities are being offered, more and more classes are conducted in English only, and the faculty and student body are no longer only Koreans.
Changing Korean University Experience

English Language Instruction

By a number of important measures, Korean higher education has changed dramatically as a result of the aforementioned government investment in internationalization. One of the clearest ways these institutions changed is through the increased emphasis on English language instruction. As a whole, these dramatic changes can be seen in the percent of courses taught in English at Korea’s top schools over time. The most extreme examples of change in this manner can be seen at the science and technology universities, Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH) and Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology (KAIST), which both switched to full English instruction in the mid-2000s and hired hundreds of foreign professors to accomplish this (McNeil 2011a).

English instruction at Korea’s most prestigious schools (SKY schools) also steadily increased. In 2002 only 10% of classes at Korea University were taught in English, and by 2008 the number had risen to 38% before dropping recently to 25% in 2013 (Joongang Ilbo 2013). At Korea University, the SKY school many believe to be the most progressive as far as English language instruction, newly hired professors now must teach all their classes in English (Kang 2010). As late as 2006, Yonsei University offered 17.5% of their classes in English (Namgung 2009) but had nearly doubled the percent of courses offered in English (33.84%) by 2013 (Yonsei Annals 2013). Another source reported that half of Yonsei’s

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6 I found a number of sources purporting to know the exact number of English classes, each source with slightly different numbers, even at the same schools for the same year. I attribute these differences to how they are counting English classes (e.g. undergraduate only, undergraduate + graduate).

7 Korea University’s figures combine data from two campuses. Another source (Froese 2012), claims that 40% of courses at Korea University are offered in English.
undergraduate courses are now taught in English (Rhee 2011). The nation’s top university, Seoul National University, has been historically slow to adopt these measures and had as few as 5% of their courses offered in English by 2006 (Namgung 2009), but tripled the amount to 15.6% in 2011, with a goal of 30% of all classes offered in English by 2015 (SNU Media 2012). This is in stark contrast to lower ranked schools in Korea, as the percent of all classes taught in Korean universities (in 2006) was only 2.2% (Byun et al. 2011).

Interestingly, even schools not considered part of the prestigious ‘SKY’ schools are looking to internationalize by way of English language instruction. McNeil (2011a) reported that Sogang University in Seoul is looking to increase the English instruction from 20% of classes to 50% by hiring 60 new foreign professors (non-Korean) in the next four years. Byun and colleagues (2011) attribute the start of this increase in English language instruction to the “Study Korea Project”, which began in 2004 and gave money to schools offering English language instruction. This continued to be encouraged by linking BK21 funding to the proportion of all classes taught in English (Byun et al. 2011). As a result, all of the top schools have incorporated a special emphasis on English instruction and acquiring foreign or foreign educated faculty to help facilitate this. For all faculty, English proficiency has become a criterion for faculty evaluation and recruitment (Byun et al. 2011). At Underwood College (the international college within Yonsei University) for example, Koreans cannot even apply for faculty positions, only foreigners (Kim 2011b). With this English and foreign influence, the curricula and programs have changed as well.
Global & Joint Degrees & Foreign Extensions

The emphasis on English language instruction has also affected the curricula and programs at Korean universities. For example, Seoul National University, Hanyang University and KAIST now all require an English level proficiency for students in order to graduate (Byun et al. 2011). At Korea University, students are required to take 5 of their 45 required courses for graduation in English (Byun et al. 2011). For some this has been a cause for concern as professors and students must worry about the English variable in their learning and teaching, causing them to simplify course materials and content to facilitate teaching and understanding of English in the actual course (Byun et al. 2011).

Another important way in which Korean universities have internationalized is by creating international divisions and global degrees (Parry 2011). While Yonsei University first opened the Graduate School of International Studies in 1987, it took another 20 years that other Korean universities to develop degrees with a global emphasis. Today there are a number of departments with similarly internationalized focuses as well as completely internationalized programs at Yonsei University (Underwood International College), Ewha Woman's University (Scranton College), Korea University and at Pusan National University (Department of Global Studies). These programs, created to attract foreign students and faculty, are like foreign schools within the universities and are taught entirely in English, much of the time from faculty that are native English speakers. Other schools, such as Korea University (2002), Hanyang University (2004), Kyung Hee University (2005), Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (2005) and Yonsei University (2005) have also established Divisions of International Studies to provide a globally focused education in English on Korean campuses (Yun 2011).
At the graduate level, the word “global” has become a buzzword that is increasingly attached to business and occasionally law degrees seeking to establish global relevance or emphasis. Korean law schools for example, have not only started to add the “global” name to some law programs, but have also changed the entire legal educational process, adopting a more western or American style of law school. While law was previously an undergraduate major, in 2009 the Ministry of Education selected 25 universities to serve as locations for post-graduate legal education in the new western model (Harvard Law School 2011). This change in legal education not only mirrors the American model but is also shifting the curriculum away from the previous “academic” Korean law school emphasis to a much more “practical” emphasis (Harvard Law School 2011).

Since the mid-2000s there has also been huge growth in MBA programs in Korean universities. In 2006 and 2007, ten Korean universities launched MBA programs. Today there are 13 programs nationwide (Yoon 2013), 5 of them offer Global MBA programs (SNU, Korea, SKK, Hanyang & Ewha). Global MBA programs at Korea’s top schools have become a more intensely internationalized version of university education. A higher percentage of professors are foreign, there are more foreign students, and in many of the programs all of the instruction is in English only (SKK, SNU, Yonsei & Korea University). On average, 60% of all instruction in MBA programs in Korea is in English (Namgung 2009). The other draw of the Global MBA programs in particular, are the joint degree and exchange opportunities these programs offer their students.

Nine of the newly founded MBA programs offer dual degrees with prestigious universities. For example Sungkyunkwan University offers dual degrees with both MIT and Indiana University. Korea University has alliances with schools in Singapore and China and
Yonsei offers a dual degree with Duke University. Yonsei’s MBA program even requires “Korean students who have not previously studied [abroad]... to spend a semester with one of [their] global partners” (Yonsei Global MBA Creative Leadership 2010). These Korean students must go abroad for at least a semester. At the undergraduate level as well, many of Korea’s largest universities now have affiliations with foreign universities, providing opportunities to go abroad on exchanges. For example in 2012 Seoul National University reported alliances with 488 other colleges, a 25% increase since 2010 (Oh 2012). Therefore, even within the structure of Korean undergraduate and graduate education, students can study abroad at different/global schools, learning English and having other global experiences while remaining under the locally educated designation. The most extreme example of international educational opportunities in Korea is the Incheon Global Campus, which opened in 2012. Located in the Incheon Free Economic Zone, this campus now includes 4 foreign universities that have established campuses as an attempt to bring world-class universities to Korea and provide Korean students with foreign educational opportunities within Korea.

Study Abroad as a Marketing Scheme: The Rich get Richer

An important addition to this discussion of short-term educational opportunities is that these opportunities also exist outside of the university educational sphere. Through study abroad agencies, Koreans can pay professionals to find places to learn English and get help gaining admission to foreign universities. For example, in 2010 I met with an agent from Uhak.com, one of Korea’s largest study abroad agencies. She explained that more Koreans are using these types of firms than ever before and that 80% of customers using their
services are doing so first for language study, not as degree seekers. The options available are various and dependent upon finances, with the US at the top of the English learning hierarchy followed, by the UK, Canada, and Australia. Each of these options has different symbolic payoff (status) and instrumental payoff (possible transition from language study only to university). If customers had less money, Uhak.com would recommend the Philippines as a place to learn English, which costs half as much but had little of the status nor popular possibilities for transitions to universities. What agencies like this provide are short-term strategies for acquiring a less intense form of global cultural capital outside of formal education. These short-term language options focus primarily on English acquisition, and include interaction with foreigners. They also prey upon and perpetuate the fears parents and students feel in regards to having some form of tangible global skills on their resumes. This was confirmed by a number of locally educated interviewees who said that this form of language study abroad was absolutely a must, a basic component to the new globally oriented resume.

Clearly investment of this magnitude by the Korean government has changed and is changing higher education. Opportunities to study in English and to obtain globally oriented graduate and undergraduate degrees were once exclusively available to Koreans with the money and connections to leave Korea. They have now become available to students attending Korea’s top schools. These changes have not only created more and better opportunities to gain global skills locally for Koreans, but have also made Korea a more desirable location for foreign faculty and students.
Outcome of Internationalization

Changing Faculty

Another way in which the university experience has changed is in the faculty. Similar to the use of Japanese faculty in Japan, Korean higher education has traditionally been taught by Koreans. As we can see in figure 4.5, this has been changing since 1990.

In 1990, less than 1 percent (only 23 in total) of all faculty at Korean universities were non-Koreans (KEDI 2012). 10 years later in 2000, after the Asian economic crisis and the government’s emphasis on internationalization, the percent of foreign faculty was five
times higher but still only two percent (2.1%). Today there are more than five thousand foreign professors teaching in Korean universities, representing almost 8% of all faculty (Chosun Ilbo 2013). At Seoul National University in just a five-year period (2007 to 2011) the number of foreign faculty tripled (Oh 2012). These numbers will continue to increase as universities like Yonsei proudly publicize that the proportion of foreign professors among newly hired professors has increased from 25.7% in 2008 to 44.1% in 2009 (Yonsei Annals 2013). This is promoted as a positive movement.

As mentioned previously, foreign faculty and researchers around the world are important engines in the knowledge economy. They help establish research and innovation that keeps local economies competitive. They are also a symbol of globalization and a way Korean universities have chosen to respond to the present academic market. Korean universities have chosen to internationalize by focusing on their international rankings and therefore continue to pursue foreign faculty who can more easily teach core courses in English and publish in globally recognizable English language journals (Yonsei Annals 2013). Diversity of faculty and student body and especially publications in internationally recognized indexes are key variables in global rankings. This obsession with rankings is also why there are so many more professors with foreign PhDs teaching at Korean universities than in countries like Japan, where universities and graduate education have historically been ranked higher and considered higher caliber.

For many years the most prestigious place to study at the graduate level was outside of Korea. Graduates with PhDs from these locations were then more highly sought after and hired. Today, their ability to teach and publish in English is of great importance. Studying and writing in English during their academic training establishes the credibility to be able
to accomplish these tasks at Korean universities. When looking at table 4.1 we can see that the percentage of foreign educated Korean faculty in Korea’s best universities is especially high. Around half of all faculty at both Seoul National University and Yonsei University have foreign degrees whereas an astounding 90% of the faculty at POSTECH have foreign degrees (Kim 2011b, see also Shin 2010). This is even more shocking when compared to the low number of faculty with foreign degrees at Japan’s best school, the University of Tokyo. According to Kim (2011b), only 5.2% of faculty at Tokyo University had foreign PhDs, a tenth as many as at the comparatively prestigious Seoul National University.

| Table 4.1 Percent of Faculty with Foreign Degrees at Korean Universities |
|-------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------|--|
| Overall            | Humanities & Social Sciences | Overall            | Humanities & Social Sciences |
| Seoul National Univ. | 50.4%                          | Seoul National Univ. | 77%                          |
| POSTECH             | 90%                            | Korea Univ.        | 80.3%                        |
| Yonsei University   | >50%†                          | Yonsei University  | 81.7%                        |
| Korean Universities | 38.8%                          |                    |                              |
| Tokyo University    | 5.2%                           |                    |                              |

Sources: KESS 2013; Kim 2011b; Shin 2010; Namgung 2009

What is driving these high numbers at the elite Korean schools are programs in the humanities and social sciences. In these programs more than three quarters of all faculty had foreign degrees (Kim 2011b; see also Shin 2010). These programs are then major contributors to the high percentages at SKY schools, which in turn inflate the overall numbers in Korea. Presently in Korea, one-third of all faculty have a degree from overseas.

†Namgung (2009) does not give a specific number but says that more than 50% of the faculty at Yonsei have foreign PhDs.
Changing Student Body

Finally, internationalization of curricula and the increase in English language instruction have been effective tools for recruitment of foreign students (Byun et al. 2011). As figure 4.6 shows, the numbers of foreign students attending Korean universities in the 1990s was miniscule, only 0.1% (2237) of the total student population. This has increased with programs like BK21 and the “Study Korea Project” to just under 2% (1.7% or 63,578 students) in 2011\(^9\) (KEDI 2012). And while foreign students still represent a much smaller percentage of the student body than the OECD average of 8.7% (Jones 2013), at elite schools like Korea University, the number of foreign students nearly tripled from 2002 to 2008 (Byun et al. 2011) and tripled again between 2008 and 2013 (1.61% to 4.43%).

\(^9\) Morgan (2010) and Parry (2011) claim there are 80,000 and 85,000 foreign students in Korea respectively. Korea Focus (2012) also that said that in 2012 there were 86,878 foreign students. Because I couldn’t verify their sources I used data from KESS 2013 and KEDI 2012. Nevertheless, 63,578 may be a conservative estimate. Study Korea Project’s goal was increasing foreign student numbers to 100,000 by 2012 through various scholarships.
An Explosion of Publications and Rapid Ascension in Global Rankings

Perhaps the most impressive outcome of these drastic changes to higher education in South Korea has been the dramatic increase in publications and the rapid rise in the global rankings. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of BK21, WCU and BK21 PLUS was to raise the quality of research at local institutions by bringing in foreign and famous scholars to work with Koreans on groundbreaking research. This in turn would increase the prestige of local institutions through the rankings system and draw more students to Korean universities. It appears as though the investment of billions of dollars in select Korean universities to create a world-class academic hub is working.

In 2013 for the first time, Seoul National University (SNU) made the top 50 schools in the QS World Rankings, the Times Higher Education World University and the Center for World University Rankings. Along with SNU, KAIST (60) was also ranked in the top 100 schools and POSTECH (107), Yonsei (114), Korea University (145) and Sungkyungwan (162) were in the top 200. Hanyang (249) and Kyung Hee (255) Universities were in the top 300 (QS World University Ranking 2013). In comparison, in 1999 there were only three Korean universities in the top 300 (Suh 2013). The scholarly output has also increased. Between 1990 and 2008 the number of articles published increased by twenty times (Shin 2012). Articles included in the Science Citation Index (SCI) increased 2.5 times between 1999 and 2005, as in 2006 Korea was the 11th highest SCI publishing nation in the world (Kim 2012). In 1995 SNU’s scholarly production was only about 20% of Harvard’s. And yet by 2005, SNU professors had increased their productivity to nearly 50% of Harvard’s research output (Shin 2009). Meanwhile KAIST and POSTECH professors are publishing at about the same rate as professors from Yale and Stanford (Shin 2009).
What Internationalizing Means

Variation in Locally Educated Koreans

There are two important consequences for Korean students and workers when considering the impact of Korea’s rapid and profound internationalization of higher education. First, the opportunities to gain global experiences and skills locally are much more diverse and extensive than they were in the past. Second, the varying degrees of global abilities or skills that locally educated Korean students possess are based on their access to these global opportunities.

One way of thinking about this is to envision a checklist of global opportunities presently available in South Korea for locally educated students who have not attended foreign universities. For example, with enough money Korean students can have foreigners directly teach them English. For less money, students can attend English academies or institutes taught by foreigners or summer camps spending all day with foreigners in a group setting. For less money still, Koreans can learn English from Koreans who have studied abroad. These types of options have been available to Koreans for a number of years, although presently there are more of them. What is a more recent strategy is adding 6-12 month language study abroad to these standard practices of tutoring. Today this has become increasingly common and important for university students as a way to acquire English proficiency and just as importantly, confidence and comfort in actually using this English with foreigners. As individual educational consumers, Koreans can go to companies within Korea, like Uhak.com, and shop for various global options for developing this form of cultural capital. Each of the study abroad options varies by status, potential reward and by price. When considering the options for language study abroad, socioeconomic status

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determines whether someone studies in the US, Canada, the UK, Australia or the Philippines. Therefore families with the most economic resources can help their children check as many boxes as possible without having to enroll in university abroad. Those with fewer and fewer economic resources can check progressively fewer and fewer of the boxes. This creates variation in global abilities among locally educated Koreans ranging from those who have checked off all of the possible boxes to those who have checked off none of them.

Another key source of variation in the global abilities of locally educated Koreans is the university they attended. Korean universities are a key location for globalizing locally and as mentioned previously, the best schools in Korea have been especially determined to internationalize courses, curricula, degrees, student body and faculty. Therefore like the various options at Uhak.com, the global opportunities Korean universities offer are not all the same, but vary by status and instrumental payoff. Similar to shopping at places like Uhak.com, attendance at the most prestigious schools, the schools with the best global opportunities in Korea, is highly correlated with socio-economic-status (Park et al. 2010). It requires a huge family investment in time and money to help Korean children gain access to the local universities that provide the most global opportunities. If students can gain access to the highest ranked Korean universities, they are in an environment that has internationalized dramatically and continues to do so. With more foreign professors, foreign students, and foreign curriculum, locally educated students attending SKY schools are offered global experiences that as recently as 5 or 10 years ago, were only possible to Koreans attending foreign universities.
These opportunities are not available at every university. As the quality of the university in Korea decreases, the opportunities to acquire global skills decrease in number, quality, and authenticity. In many of the middle or lower tiered schools these chances are superficial or completely absent. Therefore the variation in global ability among locally educated Koreans depends on what kind of local tertiary institution they attended, which is highly correlated with the amount of money students have to spend on global activities. The end result is that Korea’s recent internationalization of higher education is benefitting an elite group of students. ‘SKY’ schools in Korea only admit around 2% of all applicants and the students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are overrepresented. Even if we extend this to the top 10 or 20 schools in Korea that were designated by the government for BK21 funding and internationalization, most students will not get into these schools and will have to cobble together a resume without the help of an educational institution.

In summary, through short-term study abroad, exchanges or language study, locally educated Koreans can acquire some of the elements of global cultural capital that previously made foreign educated Koreans unique (namely English ability, confidence and experience with things foreign). The benefit of these experiences is apparent in the speaking ability and general comfort of those who have gone abroad, even for a short span of time, to study English. For students who are fortunate enough to gain admission to the schools chosen to internationalize, especially the top schools, they are also obtaining a form of global cultural capital at internationalized Korean universities.

Like many institutions touched by neoliberal globalization, the selection of global educational experience within Korea has increased dramatically, but the costs required to enter these institutions or purchase these services make these options available only to a
select few. And because the government, with programs like BK21 and WCU, has
designated particular schools for internationalization, they are in a sense designating
certain locally educated students for internationalization. These students are the physical
embodiments of the ‘transformationalist’ understanding of globalization (Held et al. 1999).
By acquiring global cultural capital through Korean institutions in Korea, global cultural
capital is “transformed” through the local educational institutions into something more
recognizable or desirable in the local workforce.

**KOREAN EDUCATION**

In this final section I examine the education system many Koreans have chosen to exit.
With such a high relative rate of Koreans studying overseas, one assumption would be that
the quality of education in Korea is poor. And yet, Korean students perform as well as any
students in the world on international testing. Korean education is uniquely intense and a
complicated mix of high achievement and stress (Sorenson 1994; Seth 2002; see Park et al.
2010; Park 2009). Korea is also a place where parents and students worry about the cost
and intensity of education and growing inequality in admissions to local elite universities.

**The Puzzle of South Korean Education**

While research on Korean education has historically focused on the problems of Korean
education, Korea's educational environment has many opportunities for the development
of skills. While educational opportunities in Korea are highly stratified and vary in quality,
for Koreans with resources, they can be amazing. There is an entire industry established to
bring college-educated tutors to your home to help your child with any subject. There are
institutes of varying quality on every corner and in every neighborhood to help with math, science or any number of languages. Some of these institutes are like colleges, staffed with native speakers brought to your town to help you acquire accentless English. There are teams of Ivy League graduates who can help students excel on the American SAT or with their college essays. There are high tech government educational programs available on every tablet and smart phone, designed to help students learn at a high level for free. These programs feature an all-star cast of Korea’s best teachers presenting lessons in their subjects of expertise. While educational opportunities exist for the many, Korea has become an educational smorgasbord of variety and selection for families with the means to afford them.

As a result, by any academic measure South Korea performs as well as any country in the world. South Korea is among the global leaders in academic attainment. Ninety-eight percent of South Koreans between the ages of 25-34 have graduated from high school, which is first among OECD countries (Chung 2012). South Korea also leads the world in the percent of 25-34 year olds with a college degree at 65.0% (See table 4.2) (OECD 2013). These society-wide academic achievements are astonishing considering that 50 years ago, advancement levels to junior high and high schools in Korea were as low as 54.3% and 69.1% respectively (International Bureau of Education 2004). Just in the past 30 years alone, the enrollment rate in higher education in South Korea has increased nearly 7 times from 11.4% in 1980 to 70.4% in 2009 (Yu 2010). Another way to understand the rapid educational advancement is by examining the difference in the percent of Koreans with university degrees by 10-year cohort. When comparing the percentage of older cohorts with university degrees to 25-34 year old Koreans with university degrees, the difference is
dramatic. As mentioned previously, at 65.0% Koreans now have the highest percent of 25-34 year olds with university degrees in the world. Fewer than 50% of Koreans between the ages of 35-44 have degrees, just over a quarter of 45-54 year olds and only 12.8% of 55-64 year olds have graduated from university (OECD 2013).

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Source: OECD 2013

South Korean students also excel in areas beyond degree attainment alone; they excel in academic performance. According to the most recent study conducted by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)\(^\text{10}\), in math, science and reading scores (2009), South Korean students scored in the top position in Reading and Math and scored third in Science among OECD countries (OECD 2010b)\(^\text{11}\). Overall, in 2009 Korea was the best performing OECD country on these exams (OECD 2010b). South Korea’s place at the top of these scores globally has become commonplace. In fact, over the past 10 years

\(^{10}\) PISA is an OECD organization that tests the knowledge of 15 year olds around the world on subjects such as Math, Science and Reading.

\(^{11}\) In 2009 students from Shanghai scored the highest in Reading, Math and Science. However, because comparing city scores to national scores is often misleading and because Shanghai was not tested from 2000-2006, I omitted them from this table. I also did not include Singapore and Hong Kong who are also highly ranked but not OECD countries. I instead included two other OECD nations that traditionally had high scores (Finland & Japan), the OECD average and the US as comparison groups.
the PISA exams have been conducted, South Korea has consistently scored among the top nations in all standardized measures of academic performance.

Another informative measure of Korean academic performance is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Similar to the PISA testing, TIMSS provides internationally comparative data on 8th grade and recently 4th grade knowledge of math and science. Unlike PISA, TIMSS focuses on younger students and has included nations that are not a part of the OECD from inception. According to the TIMSS measures, Korean 8th graders are among the top performers (See figure 4.7). Since 1999, Korea has scored no lower than fifth in Math and Science. Most recently they were first in math and third in science. Clearly South Korea has become a global leader in educating their population.

And yet despite comparatively outperforming most students in the world, and with all of this variety of supplemental education, many South Korean students seek to leave this high
performing educational system. Why is this? Why would Koreans leave an educational system where they are achieving such remarkable results? Research has focused predominantly on the perceived dissatisfaction with the quality of local education and the desire to avoid the intense and costly local educational environment. Recently some research has identified cosmopolitan aspirations as reasons for leaving (Kim 2011a; An 2011; Koo 2010).

**Dissatisfaction with Korean Education**

One reason students from around the world choose to study outside of their home countries is the low quality of local education (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). This includes limited access to specific programs, majors, areas of specialization in local schools or even exclusion from the most prestigious local schools as a result of intense competition (Becker and Kolster 2012; Macgready and Tucker 2011; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; McMahon 1992). At the tertiary level this is particularly true. Globally there has been rapid expansion to match the growing demand for higher education and the quality of tertiary institutions has subsequently been watered-down to meet this desire (Altbach et al. 2009). Part of the reason for the perceived low quality has to do with the comparison to programs, majors and overall quality available in western and specifically in American universities by way of globalization, marketing and the ubiquitous rankings that have grown in significance. The feeling is that these foreign schools have what is lacking in local educational options (McMahon 1992), whether it is a particular major, top research and researchers, or English language acquisition.
Like other countries experiencing rapid educational expansion, Koreans are dissatisfied with local education. In primary and secondary education dissatisfaction has to do with competitiveness, costs, and fairness. At the tertiary or postgraduate level, in light of the previously mentioned rapid expansion (Becker and Kolster 2012; Parry 2011), the perception is that this expansion has been detrimental to teaching, research and even the graduates themselves (Parry 2011). On all levels, there is concern with the method of learning still prominently used in Korean education which is hierarchical, rote learning. This form of learning, while seemingly effective in some areas, is viewed as “unattractive” (Becker & Kolster 2012) or potentially incompatible with the global business field. Therefore, many Koreans wonder if they can get the education they need to compete globally or even locally (Becker & Kolster 2012), especially if the majority of the curriculum and textbooks in use at universities are from the United States (Kim 2011a).

If universities in the United States are seen as the center of higher learning, Koreans want to learn “first-hand” from the source rather than through “second-hand” copies or translations (Kim 2011a). Also, credentials from Korean universities have great prestige locally, but are still not well known outside of Korea, and are generally lower ranked. Their quality and competitiveness is perceived as low (Becker & Kolster 2012; Parry 2011; KEDI 2007). Even within Korea, part of the foreign education craze is based on the belief (true or not) that foreign degrees will be more highly valued in large Korean companies than local degrees. With so many top-ranked schools outside of Korea (Marginson 2010), especially in the United States, Koreans are drawn to these schools in hopes that it will translate to success in the Korean workplace.
This negative perception of local education is also related to the exclusion most Koreans experience as a result of intense competition for the few spots in the most prestigious schools. The system has limited positions where the quality seems adequate and getting into these spots is too competitive and expensive. Furthermore, the market model continues to reshape institutions, the Korean government is doing less to preserve educational equality.

An example of Koreans exiting because of concerns over the quality of a specific type of education or skill is English. With so much of the Korean economy focused on exports, English remains a valued skill and an important part of getting a job. Its value continues to be promoted in the South Korean work environment. With the universal testing of English and standardized measures, minimum scores on TOEIC exams are needed to even apply to larger companies. Often these scores are seen as a proxy for employee aptitude or even intelligence like an IQ test. As a result, the English industry in Korea has become gigantic with an estimated $15 Billion US spent a year by Koreans on English education (Shinyoung Securities 2010). Companies themselves also spend large amounts of money offering English education to their employees, even if the actual use of English in the Korean workplace remains limited or the need uncertain.

After nearly 2 decades of intense focus on English education, the average English speaking ability in Korea, according to recent international testing, is slightly above average (Education First 2013). Koreans ranked twenty-first in the world in English ability and are considered to have “moderate proficiency” (Education First 2013). According to the same measures, among Asian nations Koreans are the 5th highest country in English proficiency, scoring 2 tenths of a point ahead of the Japanese (Education First – Asia EF EPI
Rankings 2013) despite spending 3 times as much money on English education (Park 2009).

Given the high costs, the return on this investment as far as fluency does not appear to be as “satisfactory” as Koreans would like (Park 2009) and English remains a huge source of stress and consternation for job applicants and employees. In fact Korean job applicants find the English interview process to be the most stressful part of the interview (An 2010), and Korean workers cited English as the biggest obstacle to career advancement, even more so than academic background (Kang 2010). In this case, despite all of the time and energy spent on English learning in Korea, Koreans are not speaking as well as they would like. The quality of instruction is then questioned and viewed as unsatisfactory.

**Educational Intensity**

Among the education systems in the world, it is hard to find one more competitive, intense and expensive than South Korea’s. Along with its educational success, South Korea’s educational fervor has been extensively documented (see Park et al. 2010; Park 2009; Seth 2002; Sorenson 1994). This competitive climate, commonly referred to as “education fever” (Seth 2002), is an intensely stressful environment for Korean students and families, beginning as early as primary school.

There are several ways to document educational intensity and competition. One way of examining this is by looking at how many school days there are within an academic year. According to 2010 OECD measures of teachers work time, Korea had more school days than any other OECD nation with 220 school days a year in primary, secondary and upper-
secondary school\textsuperscript{12} (OECD 2012b). In comparison, the United States averaged 180 school days a year nearly a 20\% difference, with some states until recently having as few as 163 school days a year.\textsuperscript{13} By these same measures, formal instruction time for Korean students is also above the OECD average (OECD 2012b). And yet in regards to school intensity, formal education is not where Korean student experience is really distinguished from student experience in other countries. It is in the use of supplemental or “shadow” education that Korean educational intensity truly becomes apparent.

The use of “shadow education” to supplement public schooling is a common feature of East-Asian education in general and Korea in particular (Park et al. 2010). Shadow education refers to educational experiences such as private tutoring, “cram” schools, and learning academies. As far back as the 1960s when Korean junior high schools had entrance exams and first received rankings, 90\% of 6\textsuperscript{th} graders had private tutoring (Park 2010). Equalization policy attempted to contain the educational intensity through extreme measures such as abolishing the middle school entrance exam, not letting schools choose students and mixing around the best teachers (Park 2010). In 1980 President Chun banned tutoring altogether, sending this educational practice underground until 2000 when this ban was lifted.

While more help in understanding principles and or vocabulary may be helpful for students, the way shadow education adds to the educational intensity is the added time spent on studies beside what is expected in class. When comparing how Korean and

\textsuperscript{12} According to this measure, Indonesia has 244 days of school at the primary level but then drops to 200 for both secondary and upper-secondary. Indonesia is also not an OECD nation. Also, recent legislation in South Korea has shortened the school week to more resemble the OECD average, yet these changes are not yet represented in this OECD measure.

\textsuperscript{13} In 2010 the state of Hawaii enacted a law requiring at least 180 school days after a furlough cut the total to 163 days in 2009.
American students spent their time, Hwang (2001) found that the hours students spent studying in school per week were pretty similar (33 and half in the U.S. compared to 36 and a half in Korea). However, when Hwang looked at studying done after school, that was where the real difference existed. Hwang found that according to the Korea National Statistics Office (KNSO 1999), Korean students spent more than 4 times as much time studying after school as American students did (15 hours and 52 minutes versus 3 hours and 40 minutes), and that because the majority of these hours are spent studying in shadow education, we can even assume “South Korean students study far more unreported hours than indicated” (Hwang 2001:612). More recently, studies suggest Korean students participate in 7 hours a week of tutoring (Choi 2012). In the late 2000s, as many as 80% of Koreans were participating in some sort of private education (Choi 2012; Park et al. 2010). The most recent reports on participation rates find them slightly lower with 80%, 70% and 50% for primary, middle and high school respectively and a total average of just under 70% (Korea Statistical Information Service 2013). The participation rate is highest in Seoul where it remains above 70%.

Finding the best tutors and cram schools for their children to attend requires immense effort. This is a great source of stress for parents trying to find the best educational opportunities for their children (Park et al. 2010). This pursuit is justified by the belief that private tutoring yields greater results. Although intense and difficult, it is better quality than mainstream education (Choi 2012). While the burden of attending and navigating the free market educational services is challenging in itself, the financial burden is most crushing for Korean families.
Costs of Education Fever

As a nation, Korea spends the second most on education (public and private) as a percentage of their GDP (Chung 2012). However it is the use of private education and the immense costs that are Korea's defining educational characteristic. For example, Koreans spent nearly $18 billion in 2012 on private education (KOSIS 2013). Korea's share of private expenditures on primary and secondary education is the highest among OECD countries at almost four times the OECD average (Chung 2012).

At the family level, the costs of this level of private education vary by socioeconomic status as those with more money spend more money on private tutoring. Wealthy families spent on average six times as much on private education as did poorer families (KOSIS 2013). Spending also varied by geographic location. Families in Korea's most wealthy district, Gangnam, spent around $500 a month on private education (Kang and Hong 2013). These expenditures account for close to 20% of monthly household income (Park et al. 2010).

So why do Korean families do this? With so many Koreans now university educated, the value placed upon elite degrees has increased. The elite universities are the oldest, most established and have a reputation for the highest quality professors and students. As mentioned earlier, elite universities in Korea have been targeted for internationalization by the government. As a result, they have developed ties to other foreign prestigious institutions by way of exchanges and joint degree programs in hopes of adding the ever-important global component to their product. They are more likely to have English language core courses, global degrees, foreign students and foreign professors. This further increases the value of attending these institutions as they are generally regarded as the
place to attain the skills needed to compete globally. Educational pursuits intensify as skills needed to succeed are in shorter supply and higher demand, and the perception is that perhaps these elite universities alone may offer a chance to obtain these skills.

The elite universities are also associated with the best jobs and elite social status in Korea. One study found that 70% of South Korea’s “elite” had graduated from Seoul national university (Jin Hyun-joo 2005, citing Kim Yong-hak’s study). In a more concrete examination, the vast majority of the most prestigious occupations in South Korea have been held by graduates from the three most prestigious universities (Chae, Sunhee et al. 2005; Kim, Gwang-Jo. 2005). This includes 40% of the senior managers at 15,000 corporations listed in the Korean Stock exchange (Chae, Sunhee et al. 2005), 72% of the chief public prosecutors (Kim, Gwang-Jo. 2005), 57% of the members in the 17th Congress (Chae, Sunhee et al. 2005; Kim Gwang-Jo 2005) and two-thirds of the senior officers in the government (Chae, Sunhee et al. 2005). These institutes are the ticket to stable, well paid employment in an environment that with globalization has become increasingly less stable and worse paying.

According to Park and colleagues (2010) and others (Byun & Kim 2010), the clear winners in Korea’s domestic educational race have the most resources. As stated previously, the costs of competiveness are demonstrated by need to live near Seoul’s best high schools, hire private tutors or better private tutors to attend the best cram schools (Park, Byun and Kim 2010; Byun and Kim 2010; Jo 2005; OECD 2006). While all socioeconomic classes in Korea participate in shadow education, they don’t participate equally. Families spend more and spend better, finding the best cram schools and individual tutoring, and this results in better educational achievement. Parents from homes
with higher incomes monitored their children’s private education more intensely (Park et al. 2010). Students from families with more money scored higher on math and English than students from poorer families (Park et al. 2010) and this gap has increased over the past decade (Byun & Kim 2010).

The ease at which economic capital is being converted to optimal educational experiences and outcomes has created a class tension centered on the fairness of the Korean educational system. Despite the historically egalitarian educational policy, the neo-liberal economic shift post-Asian economic crisis has weakened the government’s resolve to maintain the “social contract” they have upheld for 50 years and the chances of a “dragon emerging from a stream” has become even more unlikely. As Park (2010) explains, “the egalitarianism previously embedded in Korea’s educational system is being rapidly undermined, replaced by such neoliberal slogans as ‘competition’ and ‘autonomy’.” (Park 2010:595). The system feels more unfair and unequal than ever.

Considering these concerns with the local educational system, it is not hard to see why Korean families are so unhappy with the educational process and why so many are seeking alternative paths. Going abroad can be a strategy to overcome failure or an opportunity to enhance current career trajectories. More so than in the past, Korean families and students are responsible, forced to choose what path to take to successfully reach the educational and occupational destination of their desire. Ablemann and colleagues (2009) refer to Korean students in the era of Neo-liberal economics and marketized educational systems as “autonomous student-consumers” who are “responsible for managing [their] own lifelong creative capital development” (232). Marginson (1997) describes the “individual responsibility” and “individualized investment” (116) that is part
of being a student and parent in the current economic climate. Being “self-managers”
charged with the task of shopping for the right skills needed to succeed puts Korean
families under even greater pressure, especially for those with limited economic capital
(Ablemann et al. 2009). As research has shown (Park et al. 2010; Byun and Kim 2010), in
the present Korean educational system so much of winning the educational game is about
strategically finding the best educational avenues for your children, or at least better
avenues than their competition. The more money you have, the better and more varied the
educational experience you can purchase. This is where studying abroad enters the
equation, as a way to get ahead in the educational race or as an educational option for
families struggling to remain competitive.

CONCLUSION

In this broad sketch of educational literature I have focused first on the international
structural level factors that are influencing the growing trend of students studying outside
of their home country. The numbers have increased dramatically in recent years as
students are studying abroad like never before. As neo-liberal economic policy has entered
the educational institution, governments are spending less, leaving universities more
reliant on outside sources of revenue. International students have become a vital revenue
stream as well as important contributors to knowledge creation in the knowledge economy.

To both attract international students, and become a renowned research hub, the
Korean government has invested billions of dollars in select universities in Korea. This
investment targets specific strategies to raise Korean high educational awareness and
attractiveness to foreign students, as well as create a sustainable source for high-end
research within Korea. This investment has changed Korean universities dramatically as more foreign and foreign educated professors are teaching courses in English to Korean and foreign students. Internationalized Korean universities has also provided Koreans studying in Korea increased opportunities to gain global experience without leaving the country. These opportunities are generally reserved for the best schools in Korea, stratifying global opportunities for Koreans in Korea and creating variation in the global cultural capital Koreans in Korea can obtain.

Finally, I discussed the specifics of the Korean educational case. Koreans have a love hate relationship with education. It is so highly revered, the most stable of class markers in a turbulent society. Hated due to the pressures to compete, the costs of competing and the seemingly unfair manner by which the wealthy can successfully exploit the educational system. The education system has long been run by egalitarian principles that have been stretched as the market model and neo-liberal economics have infiltrated government and institutions like education. The system is feeling more unfair and worries about the quality abound.

What is changing is that the educational environment is becoming even more intense and the pressures of choosing the correct path is more individualized. As a result, Koreans are looking for any advantage. Studying overseas is seen as a new and attractive strategy for creating distinction.
CHAPTER 5
PATHS TO GLOBAL SKILLS: FOREIGN EDUCATED AND GLOBAL LITE

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of marketable skills in the global economy takes many forms. The possible strategies employed to obtain these skills include both local and global options. As discussed in the previous chapters, the stress of obtaining these forms of capital is an increasingly heavy burden for an increasing portion of society (Brown et al 2010; Devine 2004; Marginson 1997). As the options to go global and to globalize locally expand, greater variation in the forms and amounts of global capital will naturally exist. Previous research has generally overlooked the variation in cultural and social capital in both the locally and foreign educated, as these two groups tend to be discussed homogenously (Kim 2011a; An 2011; Waters 2008). I found the levels of local and global cultural capital could vary dramatically.

The foreign educated Koreans I interviewed pursued foreign education at different times, for different durations and for different reasons. From those leaving as teenagers after failing to gain admission to elite universities, to Koreans leaving later in life as sponsored students, the differences between Koreans studying abroad are vast. The importance of distinguishing between Koreans leaving to study abroad is that they not only leave with different volumes of local cultural and social capital but also acquire different amounts of global cultural capital based on when, where, why and how long they studied abroad. While these respondents are not representative of the entire population of Koreans studying abroad, they provide informative perspectives as those who have gone abroad...
and returned to the Korean work place. Why people are leaving is an important variable as far as it informs us about the motivations for undertaking this extreme educational strategy and as a way to provide insight on the varying levels of cultural and social capital returnees leave with. Why they leave Korea may help us understand who benefits from this experience the most.

As a comparison, I also examine the varying degrees of “global skill” among locally educated Koreans. I focus on how they too are using opportunities to develop their global skills without getting a university degree abroad. As I discussed in Chapter 4, there are growing opportunities for locally educated Koreans to obtain global cultural capital within Korea as alternatives to studying in degree programs overseas. In the latter section of this chapter I will discuss some of the ways the locally educated Koreans I interviewed have tried to develop global skills through these alternate strategies. I believe this is an important factor in assessing the competitiveness or value of a foreign degree in the South Korean job market, as the locally educated Koreans serve as the primary competition in the Korean business field.

**FOREIGN EDUCATED: WHO ARE THEY?**

In focusing on why Koreans are studying abroad and when they left, I interviewed 26 Koreans who graduated from universities in western countries. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all their experiences, throughout this and subsequent chapters I try to represent parts of as many of their experiences as possible. To help with this I have organized the respondents into two tables based on when they left Korea to obtain a foreign degree (See Tables 5.1 and 5.2). I have separated the two groups of foreign
educated Koreans along these lines because I believe that when Koreans leave is a key point of distinction in understanding studying overseas. The first six foreign educated Koreans in Table 5.1 were living abroad with their families in Junior High or High School and stayed abroad to complete an undergraduate and in some cases graduate degree (see Table 5.1). The respondents in the lower portion of Table 5.1 were in Korea through high school and took the college entrance exam. Kami, Joon and Julie were unable to get into the schools they wanted and left Korea shortly thereafter. Thomas only applied to foreign universities. All the respondents on this list lived overseas from the youngest age, and for the longest periods of time among my sample. None of them had any work experience in Korea before returning.

In Table 5.2, the remaining 16 respondents all left Korea to study overseas after graduating first from a Korean university. Two respondents in this table left after graduating from a Korean Master's program as well. Within this list of what I call ‘Late Exiters’, I separated the respondents by the ranking of the local university they graduated from. This included ‘SKY’ schools, top 10 schools, and top 20 or second tiered Korean universities. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the ‘Late Exiters’ represent a select group of Koreans as far as the ranking of their Korean university degree. However, I argue that this caliber of education is more common among Koreans working in global positions. As far as work experience, all but one of the ‘Late Exiters’ worked in Korea before pursuing a foreign degree. I separated these respondents in this manner because I contend that prior work experience and the volume of local cultural capital foreign educated Koreans acquired before leaving Korea are important variables. I also believe it is important in assessing how well and in what capacity returnees are able to use global cultural capital when they return.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>When Left</th>
<th>Reasons For Foreign Degree</th>
<th>Degree Obtained Abroad</th>
<th>Work Experience in Korea Before Leaving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Best Credentials, Best Skills, Critical of Korean education</td>
<td>US Undergrad, US Masters, US MBA</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Best Credentials, Particular Degree</td>
<td>US undergrad, US LLB</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Best Credentials, Global Experiences, a different life</td>
<td>US Undergrad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eunice</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Global Experiences, Parents wanted her avoid the stress</td>
<td>US Undergrad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>In High School</td>
<td>Global Experiences, Wanted to stay</td>
<td>US Undergrad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kaitlin</td>
<td>In High School</td>
<td>Avoid Korean College Entrance Stress. No stress in Canada</td>
<td>CAN Undergrad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kami</td>
<td>After High School</td>
<td>Failed to get into good Korean school, Frustrated with culture</td>
<td>US Undergrad, US MSc</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Joon</td>
<td>After High School</td>
<td>Failed to get into good Korean school, More freedom</td>
<td>Australian Undergrad, US MBA</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>After High School</td>
<td>Always wanted to go abroad</td>
<td>US Undergrad, US MBA</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>During Undergrad</td>
<td>Better Skills, More Challenges, Upgrade University</td>
<td>US Undergrad</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>When Left</td>
<td>Ranking of Local School Attended</td>
<td>Reasons for Going</td>
<td>Degree Obtained Abroad</td>
<td>Work Experience in Korea Before Leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. J</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Skills, Career Upgrade</td>
<td>US MBA, UK PhD</td>
<td>Yes - Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leane</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Always wanted to go abroad</td>
<td>US Masters</td>
<td>Yes - Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Career Change, Add to Prestigious Local</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Business Consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Career Change, US Law School offered unique skills</td>
<td>US Law Degree</td>
<td>Yes - Computer Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Global Career, language study wasn't enough</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Global Skills, Career Upgrade</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Going was the reward</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Skills and Network</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Career Upgrade</td>
<td>US MSc, US PhD, US Postdoc</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Career Upgrade</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Global Experiences</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Global Experiences, Going was the reward</td>
<td>US MA</td>
<td>Yes - Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>After Korean Masters</td>
<td>Top 20</td>
<td>Career Upgrade, Particular skills</td>
<td>US Masters Degree</td>
<td>Yes - Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>2nd Tier Local Undergrad</td>
<td>Career Change</td>
<td>US Masters, US LLB</td>
<td>Yes - Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>After Korean Masters</td>
<td>2nd Tier Local Undergrad, SKY Graduate Degree</td>
<td>Always wanted to go abroad</td>
<td>US MBA</td>
<td>Yes - Marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To better contextualize a few of these cases, in this next section I briefly present short narratives of 7 people. I have organized their stories around the reasons and times for leaving Korea and what their lives were like before leaving Korea. From these vignettes, the contrast between these two groups of Korean foreign educated becomes more readily apparent.

**Early Exiters**

Kami and Joon grew up in relatively affluent families in Seoul, South Korea. Growing up, they both had high educational aspirations and like most Korean students, dreamed of attending South Korea’s most prestigious universities. Despite years of preparation, Kami failed to achieve this goal. So devastating was this experience that she described herself as a “loser”, someone who even if she succeeded later in life, must always carry around the “scarlet letter” of college entrance failure. The bitterness Kami felt over this experience was still palpable when I met her years after taking the college entrance exam. Even though she had done many other great things in her life, the impact of this experience is still very raw. Joon also failed to get into the best schools in Korea and described feeling real despair and suffering as a result of not achieving this goal.

Joon tried again to retake the exam the next year, even enrolling in a very costly and extreme preparation school where he told me they locked the students in at night, “like prison” so the students would study longer. Unfortunately this didn’t work and he failed to get into a ‘SKY’ school again. Joon became disillusioned with the system, saying he especially detested having to compete with his friends for coveted spots. Joon and Kami left South Korea as a result of these failures, Joon going to Australia and Kim going to New York.
For both of them, attending a foreign university was a second chance, an alternate route, a way out, a way to redefine themselves and their self-worth. Both of them left hoping foreign education would provide a chance to find meaningful employment or an escape from what they described as a dysfunctional education system.

Kami and Joon represent foreign educated returnees who went abroad at a young age, leaving for undergraduate study after graduating from high school and staying abroad for longer periods of time than others leaving for graduate school. Both lived abroad for over 4 years, doing language study before starting their degrees abroad and then transitioning into degree programs. Kami and Joon also studied abroad alone, unlike the first six returnees on table 5.1, who first lived abroad with their families before studying at a foreign university on their own. As a result of this longer period of time in English speaking countries at earlier ages, they both spoke English very well and became very comfortable with foreigners. They adapted to the Socratic method of teaching where students and teachers learn through discussion and questions. But because they left instead of attending Korean universities, they both left Korea without Korean university credentials and the accompanying undergraduate networks. They both left before turning 20, so neither of them had professional work experience in Korea. Everything they would experience upon returning to the Korean workplace would be new. Undergraduate schooling abroad is very expensive and less likely to include the stipends and scholarships graduate students often receive. The families of Kami and Joon spent thousands of dollars sending their children abroad, an option unavailable to most Koreans who do poorly on the college entrance exam. Most students have to use cheaper and local options or short-term foreign experiences instead. Returnees like Kami and Joon represent a group of Koreans
who left disappointed with the Korean educational system and have a much higher volume of global cultural capital than local cultural capital.

*Adding to Prestigious Local Experiences*

In stark contrast, Jay and John were clear winners in Korea’s local educational race *before* going abroad. John’s father was a very high ranking government official. He grew up in one of Seoul’s best neighborhoods and lived in the United States when he was in Junior high school. He spoke English extremely well even before studying at an American university. Jay also grew up in a wealthy part of Seoul, attending an excellent high school. Jay achieved every Korean student’s dream by getting accepted at a “SKY” school. He was accepted to Yonsei University and John was accepted to Seoul National University. As mentioned previously, to enter a ‘SKY’ school they both had to have scored in the top 2-3 percent on the college entrance exam. Success like this is not just facilitated by the best public schools, but through experiences overseas at a young age, like John’s, or extensive tutoring. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the cost of the best shadow education is very high (Park et al. 2010)

Foreign education is different for students with John and Jay’s level of local educational success. It is not supplementary, but complementary. They are already enjoying the best of a Korean educational system that while arduous and stressful, is comprehensive and advanced with many opportunities for people with resources. After graduating from SKY schools both John and Jay worked at Samsung, Korea’s most prestigious company. Despite this prestigious landing site, they still chose to get a foreign graduate degree. John’s reason for leaving was to move from computer sciences to patent
law and more fully capitalize on his exceptional language ability. Jay wanted to work in
global positions and believed the experience of getting an MBA from a prestigious
university was the “right tool” to achieve this. John and Jay were both 30 years of age when
they left, much older than Joon and Kami. Both left Korea with powerful local social capital
and a high volume of local cultural capital.

*Moving off the Mid-Level Track*

Some Koreans use foreign education as a way to move off a mid-level occupational track in
the Korean workplace. For example, Jo grew up outside of Seoul in a city in the South-East
of Korea. Jo graduated from a university that is prestigious regionally but is not as highly
regarded as the more prestigious universities in Seoul. After graduating, Jo worked as a
researcher. Despite feeling satisfied with the level of work he was doing, Jo had friends who
had studied overseas and decided that a degree from a prestigious foreign university could
be the path to upward mobility.

Like Joon and Kami, Jo could not get into the top Korean universities in Seoul, but his
response to this situation was much different. Jo didn’t go to the United States or a western
school right away, but instead finished his undergraduate and graduate degrees in Korea
and even started working before going abroad. His decision to study abroad was not only
about overcoming lower levels of local cultural and social capital but also about broadening
horizons and doing something different. Jo felt comfortable on the track he was on, but
wanted a way to distinguish himself from others. He also wanted to see what was beyond
his locally confined view of the world. With Koreans like Jo, there is not the same
hopelessness or disillusionment with the Korean educational system. Instead he is leaving
to change his career arc add global experiences. Like John and Jay, Jo left Korea to study in the United States at 30 years old, again much older age than Joon and Kami. Jo left Korea with work and educational experience in Korea. His local cultural and social capital, while lower than John and Jay, is much higher than Kami and Joon's.

*Studying Abroad with a Job*

Finally, not all Koreans are studying abroad to compensate for failure or to get a new job. People working in jobs go abroad too. There are foreign educated Koreans who were sponsored by both private and public corporations to get a degree overseas. Colin and Leanne were both working as government officials when they were sponsored to study overseas. Colin and Leanne are both from Seoul and had already graduated from prestigious local universities before they went overseas. After passing the very difficult government examination, they both had been working for the Korean government in various ministries for around five years. They both used the government sponsorship program to study abroad. Colin talked about how the program is very hard to qualify for and a prestigious achievement. He explained that the government has a number of regulations limiting the programs government officials can study overseas and even the majors they can take. The concern is that foreign educated government officials graduating from Ivy League MBA programs and Law school in particular will not want to come back to the Korean government. Colin was keenly aware that qualifying for this program was an opportunity to develop world-class skills he could use in his present job. He also sought to extend his international network and use this training as a way to move into the most prestigious positions in the government, foreign embassies and international organizations.
Colin mentioned that both Ban-Ki Moon (now Secretary General of the UN), as well as the Korean Ambassador to the United States at that time, were known to have used their Ivy League networks to create connections leading to better assignments and careers.

Leanne’s situation was a little different than Colin’s. Leanne had always wanted to travel and be a part of the global community. She wanted global experiences but believed that when she was younger, the variety of life chances available for women in Korea were limited. She decided working as a diplomat would help her achieve this goal of working globally. The government sponsorship was a path to realizing this dream as Leanne was finally able to live in the United States with her husband and children. For Leanne the pull abroad was of course skills that she later described as invaluable, but also the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream of living and studying abroad. Colin and Leanne studied abroad at older ages, after being firmly established in Korean society. Though tied to existing employment, both left with impressive local networks and high volumes of local cultural capital.

**WHY GO ABROAD?**

*Educational Disappointment*

I first met the aforementioned Kami in the middle of a huge research facility. She was one of a number of team members I was interviewing that day. Our interview started very casually. She lived abroad for a number of years and was quite excited to talk with me about her educational experience and life in New York. Kami explained how her time abroad was deeply meaningful, shaping much of who she is today. It was also a second chance at life, an alternate path that qualified her for this prestigious research position in
one Korea’s largest companies. And yet, when I asked her about her decision to leave Korea in the first place, her demeanor completely changed. She became much more somber, spoke in quiet tones, almost whispers about her ordeal.

Jarvis: You went through all of the difficulty of college entrance exam and then you decide to go somewhere else. Why?

Kami: I was a promising student, a good student... and in Korea you only have one chance and it determines your whole life, right? I set a goal like ABC top university, but then I failed, I couldn’t get into it. Then, you become a loser, you don’t have any future anymore.

Jarvis: So there’s no second chance?

Kami: No second chance. You can have [a second chance], but still it becomes your scarlet letter. So that’s the reason I decided to go abroad... I couldn’t get in After working toward a goal almost all of her young life, failure to gain admission to the top schools was a shameful experience for Kami. As a result, exiting the system became an attractive and welcomed alternate path.

Joon’s decision to leave Korea, as I mentioned earlier, was also a result of poor performance on the college entrance exam and the psychological burden of intense competition and repeated failure.

Jarvis: And then [you] decided, I’m going to Australia to go to University?

Joon: I’m one of the person who knows about those system and who kind of suffered a lot through them. Cause I tried like twice to go to like Seoul National University in Korea, my father really wanted me to go to a really good university, but somehow... that course wasn’t for me... I even had like those prep schools in Korea, for university, I even stayed at one of those schools that they locked the door at night

Jarvis: Really?

Joon: Yeah like prison. You were supposed to be there a study... all day... Yeah and then finally I told my dad, I’m really sick of this system, education system and... I wasn’t really happy with that situation. I have to consider my friends as my competitors... so those things really hurt me and I didn’t really like that kind of situation and I asked my dad, ‘I want to go to overseas. I want expand
my views.’ My father recommend me first like the US and second Australia. And back then I really liked Australia a lot, so I went to Australia.

While Joon was failing in what he had internalized as the most important achievement of life, he met a friend who had recently returned from studying in Australia and immediately envied her.

Joon: I had a friend in high school and... my friend was in Australia, and then she came back to Korea for a holiday and I met her and she was totally different person. She was really happy with herself... she really enjoyed her life there.

Australia represented another path for Joon, a path of confidence and happiness. Foreign education represented a way to reconcile his pain and failure by focusing on the global. For Koreans who are disappointed like this with their college entrance exam scores, studying abroad is an alternative to staying in Korea and attending a lower ranked and less prestigious school. Leaving at this point is more expensive and leaves Koreans without important cultural and social capital. But it is more prestigious than staying and the quality of education may be higher, especially at the tertiary level.

**Disappointing Education**

*Low Quality*

As I described in Chapter 4, there is a growing disillusionment and frustration with the Korean educational system (Park 2010). The feeling among parents and students is that the system is becoming too stratified and is too intense for the students. Much of this has to do with the second shift most Korean students have to work. This second shift of schooling is also known as shadow education.

In the late 1990s before the ban on tutoring was officially lifted, I witnessed the use
of shadow education first hand. An upper middle class family living in one of Seoul’s best neighborhoods asked my friend if I would teach their two children English. The father of the family was a doctor (American educated) and the mother had also received a degree from a university in the United States. Their daughter attended an international school and their son went to a Korean school. I was told by my friend that they wanted to meet twice a week for an hour. After meeting the mother, she told me she wanted me to come to their house as often as I could, every day if possible, and teach at least one if not both of the children English. After leaving, I passed a math tutor waiting outside. I would be one of many tutors coming to their house every day.

Extensive research has documented how intense and expensive educating children in Korea has become (see Park et al. 2010; Park 2009; Seth 2002; Sorenson 1994). Dissatisfaction with the educational system has been measured in a number of ways, suggesting there is much distrust and disappointment with the quality and manner in which education is being taught (Becker and Kolster 2012). The foreign educated returnees I interviewed echoed a number of these same sentiments.

Harry (left before High School) explained how his decision to study at a university in the United States was related to the belief many Korean parents share. This belief is that universities in the United States are of higher quality than Korean universities.

Harry: Korean parents, as you know... they have this, what do you call it, they have this eager[ness] of sending out their students abroad because they know that the Korean education system is very limited.

While this perception may be biased by history, prestige and modern rankings obsession, the perception for many Koreans is that the quality of education will be higher overseas, especially compared to non-elite Korean universities. Julie (left during Undergraduate) was
attending a mid-level university in Korea and felt the school was not challenging enough.

She looked for something more challenging overseas.

Jarvis: And did you go straight from high school here to undergraduate in the States?

Julie: No I actually went to university in Korea first, then, I didn’t really like my university because academics was never challenging so I got scholarship all the time... But then they sent me to Michigan State for exchange student for one year. Then I just loved it there. It was very challenging, in terms of language, because I couldn’t speak any language back then. So it was very challenging so I liked it there and I liked environment, how big the school is and that kind of thing. So I was, why don’t I just stay here and study more and see what actual students do. So I just decided to transfer there.

As I mentioned earlier, rapid expansion of higher education has led to a watered down product in many countries. Korea has not been immune. While recent investment in the top schools has led to better research and better global rankings, the educational experience in one of Korea’s lower ranked universities was too easy for Julie. Going abroad represented a new challenge in a new language. Other foreign educated Koreans were critical of the style of education in Korea as well as the content. Brian (left before High School), explained that he wanted to go to the source of the knowledge.

Jarvis: That was the big push to move you guys to the states?

Brian: Yeah, because I know that Korean education system versus North American or global standard. The education system are very, very different. So in a way different... but in a kind of an awkward way. Because when we taught, when we learn, it’s a one-way communication.

Jarvis: Just the teachers talking not the students?

Brian: Yeah. And then all the material, all the information in English is a lot more updated and a lot more, I will say practical and useful compared to the information that is in Korean. Because there’s a gap, there’s always a lag, a time lag between the time you read English material and then you read Korean material. They have to translate and it takes time and when they translate, you lose a lot of value of the original meaning of a lot of information and that was the critical issue here.
I found this sentiment regarding quality was more common among the Koreans I interviewed who had not studied at SKY schools or even schools in the top 10 in Korea. They expressed a desire to learn at what they believed was the center of knowledge creation, or the top of higher education. They believed this could not as easily be accomplished in Korean universities.

Jarvis: What did you think you were going to learn at Rutgers?
Eunice: Maybe I had this fantasy about American professors. Because the language itself is different... here they speak English with an American accent. In terms of books and research, most of the well-known professors are from the US. And there were some good professor from Rutgers too. I thought I would be getting more valuable lessons from them, compared to [Korean professors].

For foreign educated like Eunice (left before High School), knowledge consumption feels less authentic when it is coming from a second-hand source that is struggling to present the original material.

**Practical Pursuits**

*Creating Distinctiveness*

An important theme among the motivations for studying overseas is the pursuit of distinctiveness. Korea’s fiercely competitive educational environment is mirrored by a fiercely competitive labor market saturated with high-achieving students. Koreans leaving for foreign education both early and late shared in this desire to be more distinct and more competitive. Returnees like Jo (left after Masters), explained that intense competition forces Korean students to consider extreme lengths to differentiate themselves from other students.

Jo: In Korea, very small country, but so many higher-educated people. Students are every year coming out of university. So how can I differentiate from
them? One way is taking a PhD or higher degree from the States. Typically in Korea, people, employer[s] in big company in Korea prefer the United States university degrees.

Jarvis: And, so then how did you decide what school to go to in the United States? What influenced you decision?

Jo: My decision, so that’s pretty much, typical in Korea, for Korean students who are really willing to go abroad, for their degree in advanced university or prestigious university. So this is one way to get a better job, a high degree from the prestigious university... First of all, just name. The name of the university... just name any kind of state University. There are 50 state universities or more state universities there. All of them are much better than Seoul National University

In such a competitive environment Jo felt the need to create separation from other competitors and chose to study abroad to do this. To compete with the Koreans who had the Seoul National University credentials he was lacking, Jo sought out one of the number of American degrees he believed would put him on equal footing.

Franklin (left after undergraduate) graduated from Seoul National University and was working in a good job as a consultant when he felt the need to add a prestigious foreign credential to enhance his distinctiveness. He believed, the brand or name of the school and the status he attained from attending this school would help him do this.

Franklin: I wanted to get business [skills], education and, I mean, by studying in a US school I thought I could extend my network... also, you know, the brand of those schools, are also, [helpful] in my future careers.

While Jo and Franklin have chosen similar strategies, Jo can compensate for his good but not great local cultural capital with a foreign degree. Franklin is adding to an already distinct resume. Both believed a distinct degree from a prestigious foreign university would provide this. The options for adding distinction are to stay in Korea and use local options, or exit and retool. Others I interviewed also described leaving as a competitive strategy to add marketable skills.
Skills

The pursuit of skills was a common justification for studying abroad by Koreans from all backgrounds. In particular, studying in the United States was seen as a strategy for adding high-level job related skills, and better English ability.

Jarvis: Before you went to Duke University what were you hoping to learn?... What were you thinking before you left?

Paul: Before going to Duke, I just expected some knowledge. I think some kind of more cutting edge knowledge about marketing or finance and then I expect some foreign network, some people from Wall Street, something like that... Yeah and then, frankly speaking I expect some Korean network... or some network from a major university... Harvard or Wharton... It's kind of their own network and they help each other.

Jarvis: In Korea?

Paul: In Korea.

Paul's (left after undergraduate) expectations for his time abroad included specific knowledge not available in Korea as well as connections with helpful people. This included foreign and western connections.

Colin (left after undergraduate degree) was already in a job so he had a very specific idea of what kind of skills he wanted to acquire from time overseas. He could much more easily narrow his focus on developing skills that would directly apply to the job he would be returning to.

Jarvis: What about learning skills? Did you think there might be something specific you could learn in the classroom as well? Did you have expectations about your classroom experience?

Colin: Yes, I wanted to get theoretical knowledge about the media and planning media policies and planning public information strategies so I could learn theoretical, media theories from the class, media effect such as 2 step laws... I believe that those kind of theories will help me to more effective media polices and public information strategies, so yes it was helpful.
In contrast, Ben (left after undergraduate degree) wanted a more authentic venue to acquire more authentic skills. In this case English.

Jarvis: When did you decide that you wanted to do an MBA abroad?

Ben: When I went to San Diego, I studied English as a second language and I just realized that it’s not going to work because I’m just a foreign student and I should be studying with other US people to increase my level of proficiency in English. So that made me think about that. I have to think about going to the United States for an MBA to get a higher proficiency of English. So that was kind of a moment.

When Ben spoke about studying overseas, the skill he was determined to acquire was English. Interestingly, the English focused language program he first attended was seen as inadequate. He wanted to be in a program with American students and he wanted his language proficiency tied to business related skills.

Career Track

Among the Koreans I interviewed, I believe Franklin and John were in the most advantageous position in Korea before leaving to study abroad. As I mentioned earlier, both had lived abroad with their families in Junior High School and spoke English very well. Both attended Seoul National University and both were working in excellent jobs before deciding to leave (Samsung and a Korean consulting firm). So why would these two feel the need to add to a tool set that was already as prestigious and effective as any I saw in Korea? For John this decision to study abroad facilitated a career change, and for Franklin this was a career enhancer.

Jarvis: There is more and more opportunities to study English in Korea, for people to have global experiences in Korea. So why go abroad to study?

John: For me it was, I think it was more to leverage what I already had, the skill set I already had which was not only my technical background and my interest in
John explains in this quote that studying overseas was about becoming more than a computer engineer who speaks English really well. He wanted to find a profession where he could more fully leverage his English skill set and his computer engineering background. He believed Law school in the United States was a way to maximize this. Franklin’s aspirations to study overseas were less about leveraging his distinct English ability and more about adding a unique business education.

Jarvis: When did you decide, I want to get an MBA abroad?

Franklin: Most consulting firms, business school was kind of, career tack, after certain years in consulting you are usually expected to get an MBA. My firm was a little bit different because it was focusing a little more on IT consulting services. They didn't emphasize too much on the business school training but because, I didn't have any business background I felt the need to study more and maybe explore more opportunities, so that's why I decided to get an MBA.

Franklin wanted to use an MBA at university in the United States to add business skills he felt were lacking to become senior management in a consulting firm. He wanted to have all the necessary skills and credentials to move onto an even more elite track.

**Cosmopolitan Aspirations**

While today many more Koreans study and travel abroad, as recently as the 1980s, this was still uncommon. Over the past twenty-five years, studying abroad has become a way for individuals to be participants in globalization, a way for Koreans to attain status by way of cosmopolitan experiences. In early 2011 I informally met with a Korean professor
working at one of Korea’s most prestigious universities. He had lived in the United States for a number of years while pursuing his PhD and spoke and wrote in English very well. While we were discussing the topic of my dissertation, I asked him a question I asked every one of my interviewees, do you want your children to study abroad? His response surprised me. Rather than mentioning the typical skills so many Koreans describe when talking about studying abroad, this professor spoke almost exclusively about the importance of being a member of the global community, seeing beyond the constraints of Korean society, and acquiring the tastes and dispositions of an authentic global participant. In other words, of paramount importance was the ability to assert some form of cosmopolitanism. For this professor, the importance of studying abroad was about the status cosmopolitan experience provided.

As I continued to meet with Koreans who had studied abroad, I discovered that this professor was not so unique in his desire for his children to have cosmopolitan experiences. For many returnees I met with, the draw of studying abroad included the opportunity to actually leave Korea, broaden horizons, experience new things and meet different people. Many respondents reported that going abroad to study was a dream of theirs, a chance to really experience life outside Korea. For others it was about the freedom to live differently.

Jarvis: And so you mentioned your friend went and came back and seemed happier, did you think, well I want to feel happier too?

Joon: Of course. Well back then I didn’t feel that way, but now when I look back from my part maybe I was looking for some kind of freedom. And some kind of space I can express myself... And... you can see that I shaved my head, and then when I had internship it was kind of a big [deal]. Like I mean, my manager was fine with it, but my colleagues are like why did he shave his head? Whenever I went to business meetings, the first question I got was, ‘why did you shave you head?’ and then my answer is always, ‘what’s wrong with shaving your head? It’s my choice.’ I’m not really sure if you know about Korean educational system, it’s really hard to be different in Korea... even in
fashion and even in the trends. Once it’s popular, once it’s very like general, everybody follows that trend and if you’re different you’re already outside the community. And I couldn’t take it. I couldn’t take it. Because I didn’t want to be same with them. So maybe I was looking for my freedom. I was looking for more, space for myself and to be myself.

Joon left Korea at the most disappointing period in his life. As I shared earlier, failing repeatedly to accomplish his goal was devastating. He struggled to fit into the ideal vision of Korean society and this retrospective example illustrates how he instead focused on creating a unique space for himself. The cosmopolitan experience he was looking for by studying in Australia supported this new focus. It allowed him to go and become something different.

Kami’s recollection of the Korea she left was also quite negative. As an Early Exiter, she had also experienced a particularly difficult aspect of Korean life (college entrance failure). As a result, she also talks about wanting a new path that was free from the social constraints she was frustrated with.

Jarvis: Why did you decide to go abroad?
Kami: Because, in the school systems here... let me compare... you don't have any freedom to talk to the professor, or to the teacher. Your relationship with people is pretty much like hierarchy, like this, you have to obey you can’t really ask anything... Since I was little I always felt that I needed something different

Her retrospective aspirations for global experience includes a criticism of the system she is exiting. She has changed the dialogue from I failed the system to the system is bad. Because Kami and Joon both left under sad circumstances it is not surprising that their cosmopolitan aspirations are tinged with the desire for something better. What was surprising was that for other Early Exiters like Harry, cosmopolitan pursuits also could
include negative undertones. Harry, who went to High School in China, was debating coming back to Korea for his undergraduate degree.

Jarvis: So why did you decide to go to Penn State? Did you ever think about coming back here?

Harry: It was much more easier for me to enter SNU... I got accepted but, during the first week of senior year, they had the seminar about the States, the United States college and it looked so intriguing. I was like wow, it's like a whole different world. I won't be in Asia. So I talked to...my parents and my parents were like hesitant at first because they thought I was like a baby and all that stuff. And they were like, no you won't be able to adapt into it. They didn’t really know me though. And then suddenly it just came to me, I don't want to go back to Korea, I don't want to live the same life. So that was the main reason why. So I prepared for the SAT for a month...it happened just like that

Even though Harry got into Seoul National University (the source of so much pain and suffering for Kami and Joon), he still chose to stay away. He justifies his decision by saying that he didn’t want the same life his parents and friends have. Other Early Exiters (see table 5.1), like Eunice and Kaitlin, also specifically associated their cosmopolitan aspirations with wanting to avoid the stresses of the Korean system. Studying at a western university was thought of as free from this form of harmful stress. Both Eunice and Kaitlin came back to Korea after graduating from university abroad.

These sentiments differ from how Jo, Leanne and Kim express their cosmopolitan aspirations. These three foreign educated returnees are what I refer to as 'Late Exiters' (Table 5.2). Their experience with the college entrance exam is long behind them when they start thinking about going abroad, and their experience with the Korean system has been more positive in general.

Jarvis: When you went abroad at the time what did you want to get from going abroad. You mentioned you wanted to get a job, that name brand, anything else? Did you want skills, different kind of experiences? What was on your list of going abroad reasons?
Jo: First I want to see... the bigger world and actually it worked. I met lots of international students I was grown up in Korea, a small town, Pusan... and I thought that’s the all, in the world.

Jo wanted to move out from what he considered a small town (3.5 million people) and see new things. Studying abroad represents an exciting journey to really experience the differences outside of the world he grew up in. Leanne’s cosmopolitan aspirations, like Jo’s, involved seeing the world and experiencing new cultures and people. She wanted to live and work around the world.

Leanne: In the years of 60s, 70s and 80s, in Korea, we really studied very hard but at that time we cannot such a, you know, a variety of life opportunities at that time. So... and especially for girls. It’s for teacher or doctor, at best is professor of university they are best careers that we can imagine in the future, so, and I thought that... I want to be a diplomat. And, something that I can move freely around overseas and I can travel around the world. So it was my, yeah I wish to work and to move around the world when I was really little.

Finally, Kim (left after undergraduate degree) described studying abroad as something he had always wanted to do. He had always wanted to go to the “best” countries, his dream countries.

Jarvis: So when did you first decide that that was something you wanted to do?
Kim: Even before entering this company, when I was an elementary school student.
Jarvis: Why did you think it would be something that would be helpful?
Kim: Because, in Korea, even though Korea has also been one of the global countries, still there are lots of things to catch up. And so I wanted to go to world best countries, particular the US, one of my dream countries.

While cosmopolitan aspirations were prevalent among Koreans who studied abroad, the timing of the exit and the experiences prior to exiting are different. I argue that by looking at these three foreign educated Koreans we can see how these prior experiences and timing shapes their reasons for leaving and their outlook on going. They focus much more on
positive pursuits such as seeing the world, visiting dream countries and the dream of working abroad, not on overcoming disappointment or escaping the repressiveness of the Korean system.

From this analysis, we can see that Koreans who graduated from a foreign university decided to do this under very different circumstances. They left at different times and with different skills and this affected what they were focused on achieving while abroad. In general, those leaving earlier were much more critical of the local education system they were fleeing, which is not surprising considering their troubled experience or avoidance altogether. Among the respondents I interviewed who left later, most had graduated from the top 10 schools in Korea, if not the top 3. Their experiences were at the schools with the most new funding and the most global curricula. Many respondents sought distinction by way of skills and credentials, although I found Koreans leaving later had a more concrete understanding of what skills they need and how they could directly apply them to enhance or even change their careers. Finally, pursuit of foreign education for these two groups also differed as far as the pursuit of cosmopolitan experience. The bitter experience of failing or the concern with the Korean educational system from afar led to Early Exiters to focus more on escape and avoidance of stressful situations as motivations for exiting rather discussing this pursuit in terms of living a lifelong dream.

GLOBAL LITE

The main focus of this chapter is to examine the various paths used to obtain global skills. If the main question for Koreans graduating from a foreign university is ‘why go’, the main question for locally educated Koreans who did not, is what did you do instead? In this final
section I examine some of the ways the locally educated Koreans I interviewed have tried to develop global skills through these alternate strategies. This includes the use of global degree programs, internationalizing universities and short-term language study.

In the fall of 2010, in a beautiful new building in one of Korea’s top universities, I spent 10 hours a day conducting mock interviews with 62 MBA students. My official task was to interview them in English, to ask difficult questions about their qualifications and abilities and assess how well they could work in an international environment. My unofficial task was to be an “authentic foreigner”, asking questions in “native” English to students who were generally non-native English speakers. In what is perhaps the top MBA program in the country, these 62 students are a part of Korea’s internationalization efforts; the Korean students in this program are globalizing locally. They’ve taken all their MBA courses in English and had almost all native English speakers teach them their courses. In the last year of their program they have the option of studying for a year at one of the best MBA programs in the United States and even obtaining a joint degree with these schools.

For the native Korean students I was to interview, they first had to complete two interviews in Korean with Korean alumni now working as head-hunters or executives in various industries. My English interview was their last stop and for many the most difficult. And yet, as far as English interviews went, these Korean students were by far the best prepared, most comfortable, relaxed and English-ready of all the students I had linguistically and culturally intimidated.

On two other occasions I worked in a similar capacity as a mock-interviewer, but for much less reputable and certainly less well-funded Korean universities. In these instances I served as part of a panel along with Korean interviewers in what was to be the highlight of
an employment preparation “camp”. The difference in the students could not have been starker. Unlike the Global MBA students, these students were undergraduates, younger, much worse at English, having little or no experience traveling outside of Korea, and as a result, they were much more afraid and much less comfortable with me. In what I can only describe as a very militaristic fashion, the interviewees’ mannerisms were so rigid, males with arms at their sides, hands clenched into fists, almost shouting out their introductions upon arriving in the room, females often with hands clasped tightly in front. Even while sitting, the students’ hands were clenched on laps, voices delivering brief clipped answers, obviously learned by rote. I wondered throughout this experience about who had coached these students to present this front to interviewers. For me as “the westerner” charged with giving them a real experience of getting interviewed in English, the experience could not have been more foreign.

What these two very different examples of English testing or training within Korea illustrate is that similar to Koreans studying overseas, Koreans who study within Korea, or “locally educated Koreans” as I call them, are not a uniform or homogenous category and vary as far as the ways they have been able to acquire global skills locally. The increasing opportunities to obtain higher volumes of global cultural capital at local institutions, as well as the growing popularity of short-term language study abroad are two important ways the competitiveness of the locally educated Koreans has changed. Koreans with these types of experiences can now portray a favorable combination of the most visible elements of global cultural capital (namely English) with their recognizable local credentials, extensive local networks and local cultural expertise.
This new form of global cultural capital, obtained locally and heavy on language, is what I call global cultural capital lite or *Global Lite*. What makes this especially appealing is that it is cheaper and can be obtained locally. What makes this especially valuable is that this form of global cultural capital is complementary to local cultural capital not supplementary. Therefore locally educated Koreans have found a way to become global enough, while still firmly planted in the Korean work environment. As a result they present a global package that still feels Korean. As I discuss further in Chapter 7, success in the Korean work field is not simply about acquiring global cultural capital at the expense of local cultural capital, but is instead a carefully choreographed performance presenting elements of both forms of cultural capital at the appropriate times.

Among locally educated students there is a keen sense of awareness that they have to present a form of global capability if they want to be competitive in the Korean workplace. This is even the case for graduates from elite local universities.

**Jarvis:** And so, do you feel like nowadays, if you were starting again and you went to Yonsei, do you feel like it would be harder to get a job against the people from... or do you feel like Yonsei still competes well against the foreign schools?

**Ron:** I think that it would be harder, because these days, I heard from the older guys in management in Yonsei University... when they were graduating from the university, they didn't, they could get several jobs. Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motors and other, some kind of bank. They can choose anything... But these days, it's very hard to get just one job because I think that the labor market had changed. We have some irregular jobs. I think it's very hard, if... a student does not study English and other certificates then they cannot easily catch the jobs.

**Jarvis:** Even if they went to Yonsei or Korea?

**Ron:** Yeah.

As Ron explains, everyone has to add something global to their resume. They must have
global specs, as Koreans say. Koreans without the means or opportunity to acquire the highest form of global specs (foreign credentials), have been aggressively using locally available options to add global skills or strategic short-term experiences abroad.

Globalizing Locally

Opportunities to globalize locally are products of the intense internationalization process the Korean government has invested in over the past decade (see Chapter 4). From the many new opportunities this investment has provided, the locally educated Koreans I interviewed mainly used the increased English language classes at Korean universities in core courses and global degrees to acquire global skills.

Using the Local Global Infrastructure: English Classes and Global Degrees

In one of the earliest discussions I had with a locally educated graduate from Seoul National University, the respondent, who has since graduated from a foreign university, cited the increasing number of core courses in English as one of the first signs he saw that the university was internationalizing in the early 2000s. John described how the change toward English language instruction during his time as an undergraduate student was palpable and dramatic. He described students and professors as scrambling to keep up with the institutional changes as the school was moving from no English language instruction to prominently featuring this. To encourage students to take English core courses, John said there was no grade curve in these classes. If students took the same course in Korean, there was a curve. He also said professors would “get points” for teaching in English.
Howard, who attended Korea University, describes a similarly chaotic environment. Not everyone was prepared for the change to English instruction.

Jarvis: Did you take courses in English at Korea University?

Howard: We had to... 30-40% of the classes that you're taking should be English. If you don't, you cannot graduate.

Jarvis: How were those classes? Were they good?

Howard: Sucked. Cause they (professors) don't speak English very well... They don't even study English. Professors just come back to Korea, become professor then stop everything... You know I'm here to learn my major not English! ...But, the University asks, forcing them to teach in English. Their contract was like that.

Jarvis: They're trying to globalize.

Howard: Trying, in a stupid way. A really stupid way... they think if you're using English it becomes globalization. Really not good for understanding major.

Even though Howard was attending one of Korea’s top schools, he felt the English capabilities of students and professors were not adequate enough for this to be really meaningful. Therefore the quality of instruction suffered as Korean professors focused more on their language than content. For students like Howard, who are very passionate about their major, this was very frustrating and disappointing. Howard instead chose to supplement the internationalized curriculum with a short-term exchange at an American university.

Using the Local Global Infrastructure: Global Degrees

One of the most prominent examples of Korea's internationalizing higher education are the global degree programs. These programs are flourishing. Working with one of these programs firsthand I was able to see what these programs provided their students directly. The cohort I observed was quite diverse. There were 62 students in total. Twelve of these
students spoke English as their first language. Twenty-two students from this class were from countries other than Korea, 16 were non-Koreans and 6 students were of Korean descent but citizens of other countries. Among the 35 native Koreans in the program who had not graduated from a foreign university, 21 had some form of global cultural capital lite, or *Global Lite*, on their resume. This included very formal things like exchanges with universities and less formal English language programs, travel, and volunteer service. These students came to this Global MBA program with varying degrees of *Global Lite* and were hoping to add more traditional forms of global cultural capital through this program. In general I found that students in these Global MBA programs were satisfied with their opportunities to obtain global cultural capital. Many students were impressed with how “foreign” the Global MBA program felt.

**Jarvis:** This MBA program and your undergraduate program... Is it really different?

**Ron:** Really different.

**Jarvis:** What’s different?

**Ron:** The biggest thing is language. Also the professors are from other country. In (my) university most professors were from Korea. So, they teach like they're high school teacher. There was not so much difference. But here, we need to discuss and we need to have some cold call or, so we have our own team here. We studied for about 6 months, but it’s not like in the university life. It’s very different.

Ron makes a clear distinction between his experiences in the regular Korean university program he graduated from (Yonsei University which is an elite school), and this Global MBA program. The language, the background of the professors and the curriculum were much different. Shane, who is also attending this same Global MBA program, felt confident he could acquire global cultural capital (global skills) from this program.

**Shane:** In this university I can improve my English... all the professor when they teach us they speak English. Just English allowed in this university so it’s
really good to improve my English and English will help me do business with other countries.

The Global MBA program Shane is attending has a higher percent of foreign professors and is more prepared for the global curriculum. The prominent use of English in his Global MBA program was exciting and valuable for students. As a result the learning experience was more beneficial. Simon, who studied at global MBA at another Korean university also found the English instruction very helpful.

Jarvis: At the MBA... were the people in the program from companies all over Korea?
Simon: Also some foreign students. Because it's a Global MBA program.
Jarvis: What percent of the program was in English?
Simon: 100%
Jarvis: And the professors were from local and abroad? Abroad?
Simon: For the first 6 months, Korean professors who can teach in English. And the remaining 6 months the professors from abroad. We invite, the school invite (them).
Jarvis: Did you notice a difference between the two?
Simon: Of course. English, although most of the Korean professor spoke very good English, and some of them were almost native. But still there are quite big differences between Korean professors and real native (speaking) American professors. But among the American professors, some professors who were originally from India and China were not that (easy to understand).

Simon and Shane’s programs are clearly better prepared to provide the students with more global cultural capital. The strategies these programs are employing to achieve this is heavy recruitment of foreign students, foreign and English speaking faculty, and a more western-style classroom environment. The opportunities to acquire global cultural locally have expanded generally, but the quality and opportunity to obtain this varies. Koreans at the top universities are seeing more and more foreign professors and a higher percentage of classes taught in English. In global degree programs like these Global MBA programs, the
programs are even better at providing global cultural capital through an increased investment in foreign professors and foreign students. Students like Shane thought this experience was improving his global confidence.

Jarvis: Can you learn global skills, or to have a global mind in Korea?

Shane: Well like here (Global MBA program), if I can study with foreign students and foreign people I can learn.

Jarvis: Has it been helpful?

Shane: Yes I think it is helpful because Samsung has a lot of plant in the world. Maybe 2 or 3 years ago I worked in China but at that time I didn’t try to communicate with Chinese people, I just used a translator. Thanks to him I didn’t need to speak directly to Chinese people. But now I think it is better to speak with Chinese people directly. But I guess after graduating from this school if I can have the chance to work abroad, maybe I will try.

Specific and Strategic Global Experience

According to many of the respondents I spoke with, another recognized way to gain some global credibility was short-term study abroad. This strategy has become a standard practice among locally educated applicants. Emily graduated from Seoul National University and is working on a global team in a large Korean conglomerate. She describes how the popularity of this educational strategy has arisen out of the desperate need to have some sort of global experience on your resume.

Emily: Nowadays... everyone is trying to get a job and everyone knows that it’s easier for you to get a job if you have foreign experience, whatever that is. So nowadays... university students they don’t graduate after finishing their work. They spend like 6 months or at least 1 year like going to USA or whatever to learn language and they will spend like 6 months to go to Europe or... go to Australia for 2 years if possible... or some would go to Japan... So... everyone is trying to get those experiences abroad.

Some Koreans have the luxury of starting this form of language travel early in life, while others have used it very strategically before going on the job market. Sara spent every
summer growing up visiting her Aunt in Seattle.

Sara: I think I was lucky... my parents were very supportive so I was able to go to summer school almost every year... Besides 1997, well just maybe one or two years during the IMF period. Otherwise...

Jarvis: And when you’d go to summer school, you’d go where? Back in the States?

Sara: Back in the States, but my parents weren’t that academically driven so, I would usually go to summer school and I had a lot of activities, swimming, arts class...

Sara benefitted tremendously from this experience. She spoke near native level English and was also very comfortable with non-Koreans. Her parent’s yearly investment and family connections provided a high volume of global cultural capital for Sara, even without a foreign degree.

For students that don’t have the family living abroad or the resources to travel so frequently, their short-term language study or travel was their first time leaving Korea. While shorter in duration and intensity than studying abroad, it mimics some of the benefits and provides some of the same meaningful experiences.

Jarvis: And how long did you work at LG?

Mark: 4 years

Jarvis: And then you quit the job and you said you went to Vancouver. So why did you decide to add that kind of experience to your skills? Why was that necessary?

Mark: Um, going to Vancouver?

Jarvis: Yeah.

Mark: It... going to abroad is one of my dreams. So, but, in my university I didn’t have any opportunity to go to abroad... [I] had a lot of foreign friends so it was a precious opportunity to understand their culture.

Mark found great value in this experience, making foreign friends and fulfilling this dream of going overseas. Simpson expressed similar benefits to his short term experiences abroad.
Jarvis: And had you studied, did you study English during your undergraduate period?

Simpson: Yeah I did.

Jarvis: In Korea or did you go outside Korea?

Simpson: Basically I studied in Korea, but I had a chance to travel in Europe and also I went to Canada for several months.

Jarvis: To travel or also to study?

Simpson: Um... traveling in Europe was only for February, but visiting Canada... I took one semester in University of Calgary.

Jarvis: So you did one semester at University of Calgary, studying language, studying courses?

Simpson: Studying language... It was called... English as a Second Language.

Jarvis: Was it helpful? Did you learn a lot of English?

Simpson: It was helpful and very interesting.

As I mentioned previously, two-thirds of the Koreans in the Global MBA program I was associated with, who did not have a degree from overseas, had some form of short-term travel abroad. Most of these experiences were for 6 months or a year and were really focused on English. This is not surprising seeing as this instrumental form of short-term study abroad has a very visible payoff: better English speaking ability. The payoff is visible to the person who goes and does not require a very nuanced global understanding to be recognized back in Korea. In other words, this improvement in English speaking ability among locally educated Koreans isn’t going unnoticed.

For locally educated Koreans trying to acquire global cultural capital either locally at Korean universities or through these forms of short-term language travel, they are trying to address a perceived deficiency. They feel pressure to be able to show they are global enough. Through these local and short-term strategies they are meeting some of the basic
criteria such as communication skills and cultural familiarity. What these accounts of using these strategies demonstrate, is that the experiences are not all of the same quality. Students in the best Global MBA programs are most closely emulating the experience of obtaining a degree from overseas. Their schools have foreign faculty, foreign students, and an all English curriculum. This provides a much higher volume of global cultural capital than even students studying at the same schools but not in these special global programs can hope to obtain. Students at mid-level and lower level universities, like the students I interviewed as a part of the job camp, are adding almost nothing. Based on financial and familial resources, students can also use short-term travel to experience some of the things foreign educated Koreans experience.

Global Strategies on a Continuum

Foreign Educated

In examining these interviews I find that Koreans studying overseas are not a homogenous group but are leaving at different times and for different reasons. The decision for studying overseas is often justified with very instrumental arguments. These include such things as learning English, adding international networks, and specific skills or degrees they believe to be unavailable in most Korean universities. Many left Korea believing that these skills and credentials would be directly beneficial in the Korean workplace. Interestingly, along with these practical purposes for going overseas, are distinct cosmopolitan aspirations. The Koreans I interviewed described leaving the Korean educational system to broaden their horizons, to experience culture beyond the local Korean variety. They wanted global experiences.
Among my sample of foreign educated Koreans, leaving as a result of educational disappointment is much more likely to be an issue for those leaving earlier. They were the respondents leaving because they experienced this disappointment. Looking at table 5.2, among Koreans leaving later, the vast majority attended schools ranked in the top 10 (13 out of 16), and half went to SKY schools (top 3). Clearly their ideas of studying abroad as a strategy for overcoming educational disappointment will not be the same. This also affected their views on the quality of Korean education. Exiting because of perceived low quality of education was a theme much more prevalent for those who left because they failed to enter the schools they wanted. The same was true for those who avoided coming back to Korea because of academic stresses or concerns. Early Exiters have had almost no experience with the best of the Korean educational system at the tertiary level. As I explained in Chapter 4, the top schools in Korea have changed dramatically in the past 10 years and Early Exiters have not benefitted from this improvement. Their overall perceptions are more negative and this is apparent in their explanations for leaving the system.

Distinction as a motive for pursuing foreign education can mean different things for different educational exiters. The difference is between compensating for a pretty good degree with a more prestigious degree versus adding to a prestigious degree with special or global skills. Even Koreans who appear to have everything are studying at foreign universities. John and Franklin both had the most prestigious Korean degree but believed a foreign degree could lead to a career change or provide a career enhancement.

Finally, cosmopolitan aspirations were common among all types of respondents pursuing education overseas. What was different by group was what form of cosmopolitan
experience they were anticipating. For the *Early Exiters*, cosmopolitan experience was about freedom from the constraints of the Korean society, whereas the *Late Exiters* I interviewed were more likely to talk about travel and living abroad as a lifelong dream.

*Global Lite*

While often thought of as a homogenous group, interviews with locally educated Koreans suggest there is also important variation, a continuum of globalness, within this group as well. The variation along this continuum has increased as the number of options available within Korea has evolved over the past 20 years. Up until the early 2000s, the type of skills locally educated Koreans are now acquiring at Korean universities were only seen in foreign educated returnees. What has changed over the past 20 years is the investment of billions of dollars in the internationalization of higher education by the Korean government. This investment has profoundly altered global opportunities for students within Korea. With this investment came a dramatic increase in foreign professors, English classes, western curricula, global degrees and exchanges. As a result, what was once so unique and valuable about studying overseas is being offered in Korean higher education. Locally educated Koreans who have graduated from more internationalized Korean universities and improved their English through short-term language study abroad have found a formula that replicates some of what foreign educated Koreans are getting abroad. What they tend to be most closely emulating are the very instrumental forms of global cultural capital because it is easiest to do so with short-term or locally available options. What is much harder to emulate are the cosmopolitan experiences that take more time in country and are legitimated by foreign institutional credentials.
CHAPTER 6
THE NATURE OF GLOBAL CULTURAL CAPITAL

INTRODUCTION

For international students the acquisition of global cultural capital represents the culmination of their experiences overseas. Before they embark on the journey of studying abroad, global cultural capital is what students are wagering will be an advantage in their employment, career and life. And yet as a concept representing so much of what motivates international student mobility, there is little empirical research examining the nature of this concept. In this chapter I examine global cultural capital, linking the experiences of the foreign educated Koreans I interviewed to specific components that make up this concept.

I find that the Korean case study provides insight into understanding the nature of global cultural capital. Global cultural capital for these returnees represents a combination of instrumental, or directly applicable human capital, and cosmopolitan experience, or what has been called cosmopolitanism as cultural capital (Kim 2011a; Koo 2010; Weenik 2008). Instrumental forms of global cultural capital includes technical skills and English, cultural familiarity, and foreign credentials. These are all things that seem the most easily recognized and most directly relatable to the workforce. The cosmopolitan form of global cultural capital includes the experience of living a more global lifestyle and the confidence that is derived from living independent from family and friends in a foreign environment.
Global Cultural Capital

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bourdieu’s examination of capital assigns value not only to economically oriented forms of capital but also to cultural components. The value of these cultural components are stratified, as the most exclusive elite culture is more revered and rewarded than other forms of cultural capital. This culture can be recognized through institutionalized credentials or as embodied dispositions, attitudes, skills and competences that carriers acquire and display in the appropriate fields. With the global movement of students, a global component has been added to Bourdieu’s concept. This includes a newfound importance of rankings and prestige of foreign institutions and countries as factors involved in assessing value and ranking of cultural capital acquired at foreign schools. Also, the experiences themselves can serve as an exclusionary boundary, as cosmopolitan attitudes and lifestyle may be viewed as a form of cultural capital itself (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Kim 2011a; Koo 2010; Weenik 2008). This element of cultural capital is creating new lines of stratification between those who have the economic capital to leave the country and partake in global experiences, and those who cannot.

What I add to this discussion in this chapter is a concrete examination of what global cultural capital is comprised of for Korean foreign educated returnees. From this analysis the components of global cultural capital include Instrumental components that are directly related to work, and components that represent Cosmopolitan Experiences or aspirations.

Cosmopolitan components of cultural capital remain especially elusive and exclusive. Authenticity of experience is crucial when acquiring these cosmopolitan components and is acquired by foreign educated Koreans studying at “real” universities, not ESL centers, who get “real” degrees and study and interact, some even working in internships, with “real”
foreigners. These foreign educated returnees believe that they are acquiring “authentic” foreign or global experiences or "real" global cultural capital. This capital allows them to have a perspective beyond the local Korean perspective. They can see through and feel qualified to comment on what many consider or refer to as the limited Korean way of doing things. They are more independent or free from the confines of the Korean culture to pursue career paths or family practices that are not popular in Korea. This is justified as being global. They can be global participants who “get it”, who see why the way of doing things in Korea might be unhealthy or conservative.

My interpretation of global cultural capital is represented by the model below. This model is based on the interviewees’ descriptions of their experiences overseas. In this model global cultural capital includes tangible components, which are more easily applicable to their work, and experiences that are much less tangible and represent global or cosmopolitan experiences. The more practical or instrumental experiences include such things as (1) specific skills acquired overseas (such as English or technical skills), (2) foreign credentials, (3) relationships with foreigners and the confidence foreign educated Koreans gain through these relationships as far as cultural familiarity, and (4) confidence in their ability to accomplish difficult tasks. The less tangible components of global cultural capital include such things as (1) cosmopolitan experience, or tastes and lifestyle experiences obtained in other countries and, (2) the importance of gaining independence. I will first discuss these items and then analyze what these items mean in regards to concretely understanding global cultural capital.
THE INSTRUMENTAL

Skills

Language

Enhanced foreign language ability, namely English, was a key instrumental component of global cultural capital that Koreans described when recounting their time overseas. The improved English ability in returnees was the most obvious, the most tangible, and the most easily recognized symbol of their global experiences. For many returnees, a high-level of English proficiency was described as taking intense effort and time in a foreign environment. Many described the level of fluency they were able to attain as an essential and tangible work-related skill in itself, or as particularly unique in that their English ability was directly tied to work-related knowledge or skills.
Jarvis: Did you feel like there were things you could learn in America that you could not learn here? What kind of things can't you learn here?

Kim: Actually, the education itself is quite similar, because so many interesting stuff is already in Korea... when it comes to English itself, even though I studied English here (Korea) I cannot get a more in depth kind of level of English. So I mean if I study in the States, suppose I am in a classroom and some people (speak) in English, real English... that cannot be achieved in Korea. When I was first in the States, I felt very embarrassed because my English was very, very low compared to other, you know classmates... It was a really good experience. During my stay in the States, every time I felt, you know, difficulty with loss of communication. It was very tough for me to enter into communication, in terms of... kind of meeting, when they talk about some subject, I cannot interrupt or I cannot cut in between the conversation so I thought I had to study much harder than now. It was great, you know, motivation to study, to learn English well, more and more.

For Koreans like Kim (Manager, Korean Conglomerate), this painful process becomes a badge of honor that makes him unique in his ability to really communicate and discuss business in English in a sophisticated manner.

Kim: So, and in Korea many students are interested in English but they do not actually speak, in practical terms, they are just focusing on TOEIC, you know, just some test. But in my case, my English skill was kind of more practical in terms of other members...

Jarvis: So do you feel like English is the key to that, or is there more?

Kim: Ah sure, of course English is very important, but it is one of the means for communication. So, English plus some expertise, because I have been working for this company for over ten years... I'm very useful, as a communicator because I know... the strategies and kind of business model that most of the investing people are using so, yeah.

Like Kim, returnees in other fields described the value of their English acquisition overseas in terms of how it was directly tied to their field of expertise. It wasn't just English but English with a purpose. For Jo (Researcher, Korean Conglomerate), it helped with his research.

Jarvis: What skills did you learn from your time abroad that are the most helpful in your job now?... What helped you the most?
Jo: English

Jarvis: Really?

Jo: Because we are already in the top-level company, so our competitors are American companies or the western companies. So all information, we have to catch and we have to overcome, is based on English patents. All manuscript and articles are based, papers, are based in English. So I can easily... just look at articles and information and papers and documents in the same volume, the other guys (locally educated Koreans), pretty much slower than me...

Jo and Kim’s English ability was not separated from other marketable skills but infused with this knowledge, allowing them to broaden the application of their previous knowledge.

Like the example of Kim, this was often described as “real” English, in comparison to what they believed Koreans in Korea learned, or compared to what short-term visitors to language academies abroad learned.

For other returnees, English as a component of global cultural capital was about helping them to communicate with foreign counterparts proficiently and without hesitancy.

Jarvis: When you came back from Australia and in the job market in Korea, how did you compare in value to other Koreans who did not go abroad?

Joon: Absolutely I had advantage because of my language ability, because I could speak English and clearly communicate with English speaking people. Definitely I had an advantage for that.

Jarvis: Then you have an advantage in that sense?

Joon: I think so. Because, first of all, speaking English is pretty still big advantage in Korea. People can like, people can speak English of course but just speaking and like using English in business is totally different.

Joon’s (Manager, Korean Conglomerate) description of the instrumental benefits of English ability include both the ability to apply his language skill to a particular context and a higher level of proficiency than is commonly seen among Koreans. Harry (Senior Associate, Foreign Company) describes a similar advantage.
Harry: Advantage-wise, reading probably, and speaking. Because the Koreans, if they can't really speak well they're hesitant to speak up because they have this feeling that if I say something wrong, I'm going to get embarrassed and that's not really the case... but most Koreans... they don't think that way because, 'if I say something wrong I'm going to get so embarrassed. So what am I going to do?' So that's the reason why they hesitate to speak. So that's the main reason why their English doesn't improve as much.

Jarvis: Because they aren't willing to make a mistake? But you feel like you can?

Harry: Yeah. I can, no problem.

Harry's English language ability was especially high. His fluency was a real distinction from other Koreans who had not gone abroad. While most returnees may never speak English as well as Harry, Harry makes an important point. English is a more valuable resource if it can be really used in whatever environment you return to. Or, as in Kim and Jo's case, when it is intertwined with their expertise.

Job-Related Technical Skills

Another important instrumental component of global cultural capital is specific technical skills or knowledge that the foreign educated obtain overseas. These skills are believed to be more readily available to those studying at prestigious foreign universities or obtained through their experience abroad.

For example, Jo studied at MIT and through the recommendation of a strong Korean network at MIT he purposely chose an emphasis in his master's degree that was on the cutting edge of a discipline and unavailable in Korean universities.

Jarvis: Did it change maybe your strategies? Just being around those people...?

Jo: Yes. That's, interesting thing is, there's a group an association for Korean students at MIT... An Alumni of the Korean students, and they recommend(ed) me, 'taking a major at MIT is very important, so that will decide you to get a better job.' I know that MIT title(degree) is very nice,
(but) just MIT certificate is not adequate. You have to take a specific major which is very popular.

Jarvis:  Right, so, for example, what kind of major can you take?

Jo:    When I got there, the hot issue, hot topic is... Micro Electronics something... and another thing is control systems, Robotics... another popular part is healthcare bio something. So I take one of these hot topics... some bio-related thing... then I take some specific major and I start participating in a specific project. That project is also very specific in bio-related thing, health-care related thing. And my professor, my advisor is one of the top technology leading professors.

Similarly, Franklin (Vice President, Foreign Company) acquired financial knowledge that many coworkers were unaware of. Because he had this foundation of unique knowledge, he also described being able to more easily add to this with other cutting edge knowledge.

Franklin: I mean, they expect me to be more well aware of, better aware of what's going on in the US market... for example when I first joined my former employer, a lot of Korean venture capitals they've done networking here, common shares or convertible bonds, but in the US, like more than 90% of venture capital investment was made in form of preferred shares. The reason is, with preferred shares you could put a lot of terms and conditions around this so that you try to make sure that the company will... do what they are expected to do. But so I did some study on that and did some presentation to the company during the meeting and at that time that kind of study was quite active in the industry, so I was participating in some study groups and studied... with other people from other companies and it got spread really fast. I mean within a few years a lot of Korean venture capitals started to make investments in preferred shares because they saw the advantages of using that type of vehicle so, that kind of expectations turned into some kind of result in the market...

Jarvis: So you were the one who should know about that or have expertise in that area?

Franklin: Yes. When I was back in school, I took some relevant course but the courses weren’t focused on those kind of terms and conditions, more focused on evaluation and other more, academic areas. But, because I had some experience and knew which textbook to look at and all that, it was more easier for me to study, learn and share with other people.
Brian (Senior Manager, Korean Conglomerate), believed his training overseas at internationally renowned institutions like Johns Hopkins and University of Pennsylvania provided him with what he thought were unique hard and soft skills.

Jarvis: So why does that make you more valuable than somebody who hadn’t gone to the states and gone to SNU (Seoul National University)?

Brian: Well I think it’s in hard skills and soft skills. Hard skill-wise, you know computers and you know a lot of some modern advanced knowledge and… the way I handle the project, the way I do the research, the research methodology. How to make a better paper presentation. For example. I learned a lot but at the same time soft skills... I learned leadership, I learned teamwork, I learned interpersonal skills, by working with those people, classmates and professors as well. And in Korea that’s very rare. It’s not the environment you can work where you can learn that here in Korea.

Finally, Joon described his ability to assert himself to clients and his boss as a skill he uniquely developed in his time abroad.

Jarvis: So of all the skills you learned in your undergraduate in Australia, do you think English was the most important part of getting that job?

Joon: As I mentioned, I kind of trained to express my opinion, my own opinion… yeah so, like a marketing research analyst was something you take care of your own client. You know. It’s pretty different from other major companies in Korea. So you have to have your own opinions about certain issues. So I think that really helped me too, cause I was very free to express myself to my boss.

The instrumental job-related skills these returnees are referring to can be very specific to a particular job or task, but may also include the ability to add on to these skills with new valuable knowledge. The baseline or foundation they received seems to facilitate this. Also, the skills may not all be technical, like the bio-technological skills Jo obtained at MIT, but in the form of training that helps in providing ideas or expressing opinions, as Joon highlights.
Foreign Credentials

One of the components of global cultural capital I consider to be particularly instrumental is the actual credential itself. As discussed in Chapter 2, a foreign degree, and especially a western degree, is infused with the status of the institution it represents. A degree is a tangible symbol of a returnee’s association with this famous institute of higher learning. As Kim (2011a) and others (Marginson 2006; Brown 2000) explain, the position these institutions occupy in the global rankings increases the prestige of the degree and of the subsequent degree holder. Along with the status, this credential is a physical representation of the returnees’ ability to successfully navigate a foreign institution of high repute and acquire the skills associated with this. The credential is also a physical manifestation of their global experiences.

Prestige

Franklin, Haley (Lawyer, Korean Conglomerate) and Kim, are returnees who work in the business sector. Haley and Kim work for Korean conglomerates and Franklin works for an American multinational company. All three mentioned the prestige associated with their foreign degrees. The prestige was a tangible part of the global cultural capital they acquired abroad. The prestige was noticed and mattered.

Jarvis: And in your case what do you think you brought that was different?

Haley: Well I think the fact that I’m fluent in both languages, and the fact, I mean, I won’t deny it, but it’s not something I like to brag about but, the fact that I went to Harvard will just give me the best plus I’ll find in the entire universe. Just things like that.
Jarvis: Why did you want to study in America and why did (local conglomerate) want you to study in America?

Kim: Actually when it comes to MBA program, the US is the most famous worldwide, so actually top of the line schools are located in the States and after graduation they have a lot of great chances to get a job. So that’s why I decided to study in the states. And my company actually joint venture with Kraft foods. Kraft foods is an American company, so...

Jarvis: They wanted you to (go to an American MBA)?

Kim: Yeah

Jarvis: Why did they choose you at the first company and why here too?

Franklin: Well, I think, Korea background as well as international background all helped me, get my first job as well as this one. Because, venture capital is so-so area of finance, because Korean venture capitals usually make a lot of investments in the IT area, my undergrad also helped. And also, you know, it is still in finance area. So, it requires a lot of finance related skills and knowledge so my business school also helped and because my school (Wharton) was quite well known for finance so it also helped a lot in terms of, you know, brand equity.

With Haley, she had perhaps the world’s most prestigious diploma and knew that this generated attention. It was so prestigious she worried even mentioning it would be considered bragging. Kim associates the prestige of his degree with the common sentiment that the best business schools in the world are in the United States. Whereas Franklin, more specifically explains that the prestige from his foreign MBA derived from the fact that his business school was known for its expertise in a particular area.

Specific Experience & Global Experience

With some foreign credentials, the path to credential acquisition is particularly intense and arduous, especially for non-native speakers. This makes the degree less common and may
lead to increased prestige and higher volumes of cultural capital associated with this
degree.

John: I was an engineer and there was a perceived shortage of people who had
technical backgrounds that were willing to go through the whole experience
of law school and getting, taking the bar exam and actually getting licensed as
a patent attorney because my understanding is that there is a certain amount
of shortage in that field...

Jarvis: It's harder to get into law school in the United States than those other
programs?

John: Harder to get in. Harder to survive the law school. Harder to you know, pass
the bar exam for instance.

John (lawyer, foreign firm) was an excellent English speaker who had lived abroad as a
teenager and yet still felt the process of obtaining a law degree in the United States was
very intense and difficult. He mentions three concrete obstacles that serve as clear markers
distinguishing those with and without this credential (getting into law school, surviving law
school and passing the bar exam). All three are very difficult for native speakers, but
incredibly difficult for foreign students. As a result, John mentioned an alternative path
(Master of Laws or LLM) that was far more popular for foreign students because it had
fewer obstacles. The alternate path was also less prestigious.

John: There is a big chunk of people that come from abroad. For instance, China,
Korea, Japan and a lot of the European countries too, come to the US to do an
LLM partly because LLM is easier to get into than JD. Because for instance
you don't have to take an LSAT do an LLM, you just need to take a TOEFL and
prove that you can, you have the language proficiency and it requires that
you already have some sort of legal degree. So in the US it would be a JD. But
for foreign students it doesn't have to be a JD. Like you know how in Korea
before they started the whole law school program there, the legal degree was
basically a bachelor's degree... undergrad program. They did four years of
undergrad, you would go to a law university, and those people qualified, are
eligible to do an LLM and a lot of Korean law firms and even the government
sponsors... go to the US and do an LLM. And also doing an LLM makes them
eligible to take a bar exam in certain states. Like for example New York
doesn't require to have a JD and you can actually, as long as you have a JD or
an LLM, I think you can take the bar exam... A lot of Korean people, many Korean lawyers, judges and prosecutors they, they come to the US to do one year of LLM and it's kind of a, my impression of them going through the LLM program, not many people take it that seriously. It's almost like a sabbatical for them. They just take a year off from what they were doing, cause the grades don't really matter, because they're not really looking for a job here or anything and even if they were, they don't really look at your LLM grades anyway. So they just, take some of the entry-level classes and socialize and make friends, which is an important part of it too. You kind of network, throughout the year and after you graduate, after a year, you take the bar exam in one of the states that, when you go back to Korea you can tell other people that you're now licensed to practice in New York or whatever. And that gives them a boost in their workplace as well. If you're a lawyer in a private (Korean) law firm, having an extra degree and another US license gives them, helps them to get a promotion or helps them advance in their career. And the same goes to the judges and the prosecutors. So I see a lot of people who were already in the legal profession come here to do LLM programs, but even then, not a lot of JDs. For instance, my class was about I think 500, a little over 500 people in the class that I graduated with and there were a total of 3 people from Korea, actually from Korea, excluding all of the Korean Americans. Three people that have actually come straight from Korea to get a JD degree, although there were like a couple dozen LLM students. So that in and of itself gives you an edge.

By John's comments we can clearly see that he is distinguishing between the value and difficulty of the more common LLM and what he did. He is creating a barrier or a marker of social exclusion whereby his degree and subsequent credentials (bar certification), as result of the rigor involved, means more. I believe he is marking this kind of credential as "real" global cultural capital.

This same distinction exists for foreign educated returnees when they compare their degrees to similar credentials (global degrees) available in Korea. For example, Jay (Senior Executive Recruiter, Korean conglomerate), uses a similar manner of distinguishing returnee's "real" or authentic credentials from the more readily available local degrees.

Jarvis: These days SKK and SNU has their global MBA programs, also Yonsei and KAIST has them as well, or Korea university. What about when you compare those candidates with candidates who have a degree, like you did, from Berkeley MBA. How do they compare?
Jay: So I think MBA-wise, most people value more the experience in the overseas compared to the MBAs in Korea. So I thought about going to MBA school in Korea back in 2001, but if I went to that university for my MBA I would have regret a lot.

Jarvis: Why would you have regretted it?

Jay: Because for that MBA, and MBA in the United States are not considered as the same one. Totally different one. So even though, for example I went to SNU MBA, and if I tell someone I graduated from, I got an MBA from SNU, well it wouldn't be counted as important degree. Maybe it would be better to go to Indiana University, for Kelly business school because MBA is not about only academic aspects. It is about living out of Korea and then getting some network with global people. I think also the English speaking ability because if I studied in the SNU for my MBA, of course I may have to speak in English in the class. But still I need to speak with somebody with, somebody who speaks English as ESL, English as a second language. So I don't think it is considered as the same MBA. Global experience better than Korea, still.

As Jay explains, the first difference between the local and foreign MBA degrees is the prestige of these degrees, mentioning how others would react to this credential. He then explains what it is about this degree that elicits this response. Beyond the “academic aspects”, which are taken as a given, are the tangible benefits of this experience. These include English and establishing relationships with foreigners. All of this is grounded in the cosmopolitan experience of “living out[side] of Korea”.

**Cultural Familiarity**

Developing relationships with foreigners is a key instrumental part of global cultural capital. What these relationships provide in regards to cultural capital is a familiarity with foreign people and foreign environments. These experiences with foreignness become tangible skills for returnees. They are developing cultural familiarity. For many foreign educated Koreans, it is directly through their educational experience itself that they can
experience unique interactions with non-Koreans in ways otherwise impossible if they remained in Korea.

Leanne: They say that Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy it’s really special in terms of American education because you know in the United States it’s not quite international. We expect, sometimes we confuse things American and things international. But Koreans usually think that if it’s called American it’s international. But, Fletcher School is quite different from other schools, even international schools. They recruit about 200 students each class and my class was more than 50% are from overseas. So the Americans are minor there. They have great courses, and the environment itself is very international and they are trying to make, you know, students really mixed up. And they have their orientation program... at the beginning for one week. You know, and from breakfast to dinner we are really mixed up... The students, the class and you know the other, the other classes, and then the professors, and after that one week, we virtually know the names of our class... It was really great experience. And during... that 2 years of education we are not just going to class and taking exams, it’s not our, you know, we are really discuss[ing] things, really do the project together, and we really exchange our thinking and they have really various programs like, UN things and International Human Rights Laws and International Commerce Laws and also we have other regional studies like Asia, Middle East, America. We can see that how much, the regional perspectives... not only the Northern America, but South America, Latin America... and the perspectives from Asia. It’s really a... very big gap between the mutual understanding of those regional perspectives. And we also have really culture events... Passover, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Korean New Year... everything.

Leanne’s (Director, Government) educational experiences provided this unique opportunity to develop a tangible skill in regards to her ability to interact with non-Koreans. She had specific opportunities (training) to develop and enhance this skill with people from other countries. As she described, not only was this impossible to attain in Korea, but may even be difficult at other universities in the United States to have a truly global experience like this.
Jim (Researcher, Korean conglomerate), who works on a research team with a western project leader, emphasizes similar instrumental benefit from obtaining his multiple foreign degrees.

Jarvis: Which degree is more valuable? Local or abroad?
Jim: For PhD? I think abroad.
Jarvis: Why?
Jim: Because company want[s] it. Because company, is seeking persons who has knowledge in their field and also has English communication skills. Because the world is global, even, you can take example right here, [Our boss is a foreigner] we have to communicate in English and we have to make a report in English too.

Jarvis: Because you have a background in American style, as a Korean you can understand the give and take?
Jim: Sometimes it's not about English. Because I understand American guys and I also understand Korean people. So when they communicate sometimes I see big differences. Korean people never understand, 'why they kept saying that'. But I understand them.

Jarvis: That puts you in a valuable position
Jim: That's the most valuable thing I learned... being able to understand with both eyes
Jarvis: Could you have learned your... skills here in Korea?
Jim: Sure... The technical stuff, maybe I could have learned in Korea. But understanding, you know, [foreigners] is a big difference.

The tangible skills Jim is describing include English, job related skills, and also the skill of cultural familiarity that allows him to see multiple perspectives. This cultural familiarity is viewed by other returnees as something that is still too often missing in interactions between Koreans and non-Koreans. This is something they feel uniquely able to discern as a result of the experiences overseas.
Jarvis: So that was a special role you could play, just because you have that sort of experience?

Joon: Yeah it is. And maybe also, since I studied abroad and I like I stayed abroad for a while, maybe I have better understanding of about western culture too. For example, now I know what is like a boundaries or privacy. But for Koreans, the first question they can ask you is how old are you?... Are you married? How much money are you earning... but they are still people who don’t know about that, so maybe that’s why you hire someone who knows or can understand the culture.

A most basic and fundamental part of global cultural capital is being sensitive to and understanding the culture of other foreign citizens. These experiences provide the training and opportunities to be able to do this.

Confidence

Foreign educated returnees, through their extensive and authentic global experiences, feel uniquely qualified and confident to interact in foreign environments and with foreign people. They feel they have acquired real expertise in these areas and can speak and engage confidently with foreigners. They have also, through their difficult and often solitary global training, developed increased confidence in their own capabilities.

Confidence in Foreign Environments

Because of their experience living in foreign places and surviving the hardships and challenges involved in this, foreign educated returnees exude confidence that they can go anywhere and adjust. They are confident they can be in any environment and figure it out.

Jarvis: Why is that kind of experience important? The ability to go somewhere by yourself and survive... why are those things important?

Eunice: Well first of all... because I think it’s always better to be independent, like if you have the ability to be independent and strong in any environment, there
is a high possibility that you will survive. So I guess I kind of already tested myself in that environment so I know wherever, I have this confidence that wherever I go, for instance... if I get a job in Africa, I have no fear of going there because I already know I can do it. Like I know some people have this fear of, that if they go to a country where they have nobody, they are very afraid of it. They are afraid to try. But I am not afraid to try. I am very open to living abroad, anywhere in the world.

Fear can be such a liability for people with high potential or capabilities. As mentioned earlier, many Koreans are excellent English speakers but because of fear are reluctant to show their ability. Eunice’s experience in a foreign environment has provided her with a formula for surviving new and difficult environments. With this information she feels confidence that she could go anywhere and survive. She has already proved this to herself.

Harry's experience dealing with difficult and uncomfortable environments also provided him with confidence in his resilience. Like Eunice, he has proved to himself that he can survive in tough environments and this becomes a tool he maintains. This makes him confident.

Harry: Wherever I go, I’m able to adapt into that environment. Especially like living condition stuff. I had the worst living condition for the first two years when I was in Penn State because like the bathroom was crappy, I couldn't make any food because the kitchen was always malfunctioning. But I managed to survive. Like in the worst, in the harshest conditions I think I, I can probably say I'll find a way to survive. That's the thing that's really valuable to me.

Jay describes his experience of surviving in a totally foreign environment, as being like a chicken fighting to free itself from an egg. It has strengthened him, giving him confidence that he can adjust to any environment.

Jarvis: Is a foreign degree more valuable or less?

Jay: I think it’s still valuable, because the MBA is not about, for me, an academic degree, it’s about life. It’s about people. So you can get an MBA in Korea but, sometimes people say getting an MBA in Korea is enough but, for your life, 2
years of living overseas is still itself very valuable, especially for your family, for yourself. I can be put into wholly new environment. And then it's like... the baby chicken breaking out of the egg. That kind of experience. So getting an MBA in Korea is not enough. I think. So for my daughters I would like to recommend them to go to the United States or somewhere else to experience total different things.

Confidence with Foreign People

This confidence is not limited to dealing with unknown or foreign environments. The confidence returnees embody also applies to their interactions with foreign people. Their time abroad has provided them with countless opportunities to interact with foreign people on a regular basis. These interactions are varied and require courage to navigate, but lead to increased confidence for returnees around foreign people. As Colin explains:

Colin: I'm very, you may find that I'm very comfortable with you. But if I didn't get a chance to study abroad, if I studied just in Korea, I would be little bit uncomfortable with foreigners like you. So that's a big difference I think.

Based on time studying in the United States, Julie describes a similar distinction in her ability to be comfortable, to be confident around foreigners.

Jarvis: Why do you think it's an important thing to consider doing?

Julie: I think it's just basically broadened your mind and you can have open mind. Like before... I was like ‘oh my god foreigners!’ I just start running away (laughs). Because I don’t want them to start talking to me I don’t know what I'm supposed to reply. But now I’m just, be more friendly especially because United States you just walk down the street and people start talking to you and it's like, 'hey I love you coat', or whatever. But here you never see that. Even though people just bump into each other they don’t say sorry. So I think as I went to the States I started to have more open-minded and try to understand different cultures.

Julie goes on to make an important distinction in how she became confident with foreigners.
Jarvis: I know you mentioned I don’t want to just do the language I want to be in these [college] classes, why was it so important to move into the [college] classes rather than the language classes?

Julie: I think it’s different in terms of making friends. Because when I was there as an exchange student, I couldn’t make a bunch of friends because I felt that, like I’m going to go back to Korea after one year.

Jarvis: So short term...

Julie: Yes, yes a lot more short term, engagement. Where I was going to school I’m going to school with you. I’m taking the same classes and I’m going to graduate with you so there was a lot more bond between us.

When her experience abroad went from being a short-term experience as an ESL student to more long-term as a student at the university, it became a more authentic global experience where she had time to really invest in cultural adaptation. It was with this time and investment of energy that she made friends with non-Koreans who were also studying with her.

Confidence in Their Abilities

A final part of the confidence component to global cultural capital is the increased confidence in returnees’ abilities or capabilities. As I describe in great detail in this chapter, returnees have endured countless challenges. They have had to get accepted into their programs, survive the western styled pedagogy in English while living in a foreign country with a different culture, half a world away from their highly involved support network. Surviving this and succeeding is a momentous accomplishment for returnees. It provides them with confidence that they can do anything.

Jarvis: You mentioned interacting with people from other countries, but are there other things like your confidence, that increased because of your experience abroad?
Thomas: Yes. I had, I think I had many hard time while I studied abroad. So when I work in Korea there are maybe also many difficult times. In those cases, sometimes I think about studying abroad, and in that case I get some courage to overcome it because I had more, I think I believe more difficult experience... than studying in Korea. So that kind of sense of confidence.

Thomas’ ability to deal with challenges is grounded in the experiences he had studying abroad. He takes courage in knowing that nothing will be as challenging as studying abroad. He succeeded in that task, so he is confident he can do whatever is required of him now.

When Ben highlights his time abroad, what stands out for him it is how he overcame the list of challenges I have described in this chapter. There were so many new and hard things for him to deal with, that his confidence grew tremendously by navigating this global journey.

Jarvis: What was the best thing you got from that experience? What was the most valuable thing you got?

Ben: I think the most valuable thing is confidence. The language skill, you can improve language skill like anywhere. You know it doesn’t have to be in a foreign school. Someone who has language skill and someone in that academic program, however, being in the States by myself and then work with global students, faced with unexpected challenges and that builds confidence. So I can, I believe I can go, work in whatever the circumstance. That is the most valuable skillset I get from studying overseas. Not only in classroom but also life. Because you know I don’t have any family over there so that my living, I need to do all kind of the living difficulties. So, new friends, making new friends, I need to survive living on the weekends, some living difficulties, not only in the classroom but also living environment. You need to overcome many difficulties.

Ben contends that this is not just about knowledge but the total sacrifice and experience. It is becoming easier and easier to obtain a high level of English proficiency in Korea, but the multifaceted experience of studying abroad is hard to replicate.

Jarvis: So what do you think was your most valuable thing that you learned abroad... Something that has helped to be success in your job? For yourself, for you job, either way.
Paul: I want to say the self-esteem. Self-confidence. Yeah so I studied, I can say that, hey I studied at... North Carolina. Do you know where? North Carolina, it’s southern place and very, very calm, and small town but I already spent two years and I studied a lot, even in English, and I have traveled to... Orlando Florida or New York... So it was great experience but sometimes I had to, I should be alone or I have to do what normal people don’t want to do that. So if you ask a valuable asset I want to say that self-confidence is a really, really great value, valuable thing.

Jarvis: So you think, I can do anything?

Paul: Yes, exactly.

Studying abroad, while rewarding, was not a vacation or a tour, it was work. It was really challenging and varied in how it was challenging. Paul’s experience of doing real university class work at a top notch university, in English, is meaningful and has given him confidence. By actually living in a foreign country and doing the difficult things people on vacation or on short-term language visits don’t have to do, Paul has become more confident in his capabilities.

From these examples we see that for returnees, part of the global cultural capital they receive through studying overseas includes instrumental or more tangible skills. These components of global cultural capital include particular technical skills they believed were harder to obtain in Korea or even impossible to obtain. Along with these skills was proficiency in the English language and the ability to combine this language ability with these technical skills. The instrumental portion of global cultural capital also includes the foreign credential itself that returnees believed to be prestigious and a symbol of global ability and aptitude. Finally, the relationships returnees made while studying overseas provided them with confidence to interact with foreign people and survive in foreign
environments. It also facilitated cultural familiarity with non-Koreans, which becomes a tangible skill they bring back with them.

**COSMOPOLITAN EXPERIENCES**

As the Koreans I interviewed described in Chapter 5, deciding to study overseas includes a combination of the pursuit of tangible skills or human capital and the pursuit of unique lived experiences. Going overseas is not just about work and employment, but it is also about living better or living beyond their present lifestyle. In this section I argue that an important part of global cultural capital is the realization of cosmopolitan aspirations through global experiences. Traveling, living with foreign people and in foreign places is liberating for many of these returnees. They see how people in other cultures live and gain confidence as they too live with them. They feel like they are becoming active global participants.

**Lifestyle**

*Living Abroad*

Living abroad itself, is an important cosmopolitan experience and is a fundamental component of obtaining authentic global cultural capital. The notion of living in what is often perceived to be a more developed and cosmopolitan world, and to see in reality how people in other countries live, is a part of this concept.

**Jarvis:** And do you think, your investment, are you satisfied with the payoff or the return that you received on this investment?

**Jay:** So I am a very positive person... And I got a lot of benefit from my MBA and experience, especially in San Francisco... Because that experience, you cannot buy that experience with money. Because it is buying time with that money,
and I think the time is not reversible. So you bought some time with that money and then if the time was worthwhile then it was not a bad investment.

Jarvis: What do you think it added to your life, the most advantageous thing... what was the best thing?

Jay: The global friends, like friends from all over the world. I could get closer to different way of thinking and good memories about taking advantage of the life in the United States with my family. Maybe the last part would be the biggest, because as a person that grew up in Korea, I spent 2 years in the United States, in particular the Bay area, I think it was invaluable.

Jarvis: So if somebody said, ‘why go abroad, you can learn English in Korea now?’, ‘Why go overseas?’...

Jay: It shouldn’t be about speaking English. So for example, you go back to students life, right... all the people who spent some years in real world, companies... they get back to school life in their MBA for 2 years and then they have a feeling of camaraderie and they develop friendship and later on they would meet, or they’d be connected for the rest of their life, then I think it is more, it’s is quite valuable to the investment or money you spent.

Here Jay (Senior Executive Recruiter, Korean conglomerate), in describing the benefits of studying abroad, explains that the investment is worth it because he was able to buy time to live abroad with his family. By living abroad like this he creates memories, experiences new things and meets friends from all over the world. After interviewing Jay again this past summer, he invited me to be his friend on Facebook, to stay connected. I have also become one of his global friends. Connected in this way through social media, Jay’s homepage is a steady stream of pictures of travel with his family, and meetings with these global “comrades” he met while studying in the United States. Jay continues to live with them through his travel and virtual communication and aspires to live like them.

John (Patent Lawyer) mentions similar benefits to this lifestyle. His family is happier living overseas.

Jarvis: When you thought about going abroad, did you think... career or even like lifestyle, this might be better for us?
John: Ah yeah, one of the things, one of the big factors that played into my decision of whether I go back to Korea or stay here is the lifestyle and opportunities that I have here, which include our children’s education. I feel like maybe, in terms of their education I think it’s better to be here. I can’t decide whether being educated in the US is actually better, [if it] gives them an advantage over people in Korea or not, but the perception is that they will at least have a better time, at least enjoy going to school here. So I kind of want to give them that opportunity. So that definitely is a big factor.

Interestingly, John considers the possibility that the education process in Korea may even be better than in the United States, but still wants to give his children this time to live abroad because he believes they will enjoy this lifestyle more.

Experiencing New Cultures

Many returnees described their experience with new cultures abroad as an awakening or eye-opening opportunity to learn. This included the realization that what they thought they knew about foreign cultures was not always accurate. Colin (Director, government) and Brian (Senior Manager, Korean conglomerate) express these sentiments well.

Brian: I thought before I went there, I thought Korea was the entire world (laughs). And I feel so comfortable living in Korea. And once I moved there I was like Korea is one of the tiniest countries in the world. I didn’t know. I mean I watched American movies. And then I listened to American song, I ate hamburgers, American food. And I thought that’s all there is but, when I got there I think okay, there are a lot of things I can learn besides just schooling.

Colin: Most of Korean learn American life from watching TV. There is a big difference between life portrayed on TV and the real life... I found that there is a really big difference. We usually think that the American life is violent (laughs), so fancy but the, and the people are very tough. Usually we imagine the American life from the Die Hard movies. But it was very different... The most valuable experience is that people are the same. We have, yes as I told you, before I went to US I had some kind of prejudice about American people, some distorted impression about American society but I found that, ah, it’s very different. That’s not what I thought, American society is not what I thought. I can be wrong. So I think that I can be more open-minded to other
culture and I can, I began to I don’t believe what is being portrayed on the TV. There is a background. If there is violence, there is a background... so I think I can be more open-minded and internationalized and flexible. That’s the most valuable asset I got from the experience studying abroad.

Colin’s experience with new cultures and people seemed particularly shocking because of his mistaken preconceptions about American culture. His first-hand experience made him more open-minded and a more critical consumer of local media. Brian realized that living abroad in this capacity provided him with more than just an opportunity to add credentials and technical skills. Like Colin, he realized everything he thought he knew about this foreign culture would have to be reevaluated.

Joon (Manager, Korean conglomerate) similarly shared the sentiment that the experience of living in a different culture was surprising and life changing. He importantly adds that cosmopolitan experience also involves dealing with new problems and new people.

Jarvis: Do you think it’s worth it? Are you satisfied with your investment in your foreign experience, your foreign degree?

Joon: Definitely. I mean yeah, I’m not sure I answered the same way back then (in our previous interview), but I believe my experience in Australia was one of the most valuable experience in my life.

Jarvis: Why was it so valuable?

Joon: Before I went to Australia my culture experience in Korea was very limited. It’s like in terms, like the frog in the well that only look at the hole right, and that’s the only sky I can see. And I didn’t know there were other worlds outside there. Of course some of the experience I had were not really positive experience in Australia. As I mentioned, I had to have some racism experience and I have some kind of isolation experience, solitude, because of my race but also because of my language as well. And even if I speak English, still I’m the outsider, I wasn’t Australian. So this kind of interaction with others and if you think about my age, which was early 20s, still I was developing my personalities and my characters. It influenced me a lot and it actually helped me a lot to learn about myself as well as others. Because of that kind of racism I actually opened up my eyes... before I went to Australia, I wasn’t aware about racism... But because I had that experience myself in
Australia I kind of opened up to the true values and what is more important in my life, what is the right way to think and how stupid I was back then. So without that kind of experience I couldn’t really develop or grow myself.

The bad experiences of dealing with new cultures were also valuable learning experiences. Again part of the authenticity of this form of global cultural capital is the exposure to the harshness of new cultures. Stripped of the familiarity of their home environment, Joon, like many others, struggled to adjust to a new culture and grew as a result.

Phil (CEO, startup) left Korea in high school and also described the transition as painful but deeply rewarding. Like Joon, the cosmopolitan experience of interacting with new cultures was invaluable.

Jarvis: From your time in American school system, especially university time, what was the most important thing that you learned from that experience?

Phil: Ah, first knowledge. I could expand my horizon, my view. And then because since US, American universities are like very diversified so I was able to interact with so many different background like people, like students from different backgrounds. So I was able to like build my interpersonal skills like and then how to, know how to accept like different cultures.

Jarvis: Why are those kind of things important? Why is it important to have that kind of experience?

Phil: Because these days we are very, we have very open society and like if we take one flight we can go to the US in one day and come back to Korea. Everything is very connected you know. And then more, we’re globalizing. So without that kind of skills, like interpersonal skills you won’t be able to succeed. And then it’s kind of missing the chance of enjoying more and new things, you know. If you don’t know how to accept new cultures, then you don’t know how to enjoy... new cultures and new people... it’s sad for me to be missing the chance of enjoying and like learning new things.

Phil feels as though his experiences with these many different cultures have made him a more open person. He has learned what he believes is the method to most easily be a part of this connected global society: embrace change and learn from difference.
A very common theme among returnees was that the rewards of living and studying overseas can be expressed in terms of broadening their horizons. Many discussed life-enriching experiences that change their perspectives.

Jo: First, lots of challenges I can meet, because I'm just studying in the lab in Pusan National University grad school and I just write, wrote my words on paper about some specific things, and I thought, I'm pretty much good at this part. Just thinking, I'm kind of expert. But still that paper quality is not for the kind of top-level class. I can't submit my paper in renowned and prestigious journal. Instead it was in local part. In university, in Pusan National University, I'm the expert. But, I'm pretty much satisfied at that position but when I go abroad, what I've done is very small. Here is a professor, professors and experts, world class. I saw the Nobel Prize professor!

Jo's (Researcher, Korean conglomerate) previously held notions of quality, of possibility, were directly challenged by his interaction with professors and students at MIT. His evaluation system changed and his expectations expanded. Thomas (Senior Manager, Korean conglomerate), describes the difficulties as growth opportunities.

Thomas: Yes, you know, a new experience because everything there was quite new to me. The people and the environment, and the language, so of course I had some hard times to speak good English or communicate with people... Those, new and different experiences, I think it helped me grow.

Thomas: How? Well in terms of English, I tried to get only American roommates... to learn English more effectively. And then, even I stayed with some black American people too, like for almost one year. It was really fun experience... and I think it helped me a lot to make my English better, and then in terms of sense of understanding different culture, I also stayed with foreign people, international people, and it helped me a lot. And interact with American people in class and different meeting. That taught me how to interact with
people, and how to overcome some hard time, due to the language difference, and a lot of cultural difference.

Thomas even purposely made his experience harder, looking for roommates who were different to help his English and cultural understanding. Eunice (Marketing Manager, foreign company), who first left Korea before high school, expresses the impact of broadening one’s horizons through living and studying overseas simply and profoundly:

Eunice: Well I guess my, I am more open to, I guess in some ways, to some degree I am more open to different cultures. Although I cannot say I am perfectly open. Because I have this experience I am sure I’m different in a way. How can I be the same as somebody who stayed in Korea for all his or her life, right? So with my, I think my global experiences outside of Korea definitely help me to be more open, open-minded.

As someone who invested significant amounts of time and energy living in another culture, how can she be the same as somebody who has not? For returnees experiencing this global lifestyle, their views on foreign people and cultures have changed.

*Independence*

An important subcomponent of cosmopolitan experience as global cultural capital is independence. Independence is a fascinating part of this form of global cultural capital that emerged as returnees expressed how the process of living and studying overseas was often a solitary journey. While their time outside of the home culture and away from their families was of course hard and even shocking, it allowed for the development of independence. Returnees described this as independence from their parents, family and friends as well as being able to survive alone. This experience also freed some returnees from cultural constraints, as they saw how other cultures valued parenting, time with family and other values. While independence can be experienced locally if students leave
their hometown to study in another city, I contend that studying overseas provides a more intense version of what could be experienced locally. Students leave all that is known, familiar and comfortable and move to a western country. The experience of studying abroad alone, away from not only the family safety net but also the cultural and social safety net of your home nation enhances the solitary experience. The distance and the difference make independence a meaningful component. The distance from the families and culture worked as a catalyst for returnees’ changing perspectives. They were alone and had to solve problems and learn on their own.

*Interdependence to Independence*

Independence as cultural capital seems particularly important for Asian returnees, as research on Asian and Asian-American parenting finds that parent-child relationships are more interdependent (Fu & Markus 2014; Kim & Hong 2007; Kim & Wong 2002; Chao & Tseng 2002). Unlike children of European descent who tend to be motivated more by independence and personal goals, Asian and Asian-American parents tend to be more controlling and involved in their children's life choices (Fu & Markus 2014; Dundes, Cho & Kwak 2009; Kim & Hong 2007). Their children come to expect this form of involvement. The family unit and the individual become inseparable as the relationship is interdependent in nature (Kim & Hong 2007). Studying overseas provides Koreans an opportunity to live outside of this heavily involved and codependent relationship.

In Jay’s case, studying abroad was his first experience living on his own.

Jarvis: What was the most valuable thing you learned from being abroad?

Jay: It sound a little bit weird, but I’d been living with my parents all the way, since I was born and that was my first time to be away from my parents and
then I had to take care of my family so I felt sort responsible for my family and I think just it's, those experiences are very valuable.

Joon also saw this experience of stepping outside this form of interdependent relationship as a growth opportunity and a challenge for him to overcome.

Joon: When you go to overseas, that means in Korean culture, the family is very important part, by going to overseas by yourself, that means you actually separated yourself from your family at that point and you kind of put yourself into very different or very difficult environment as well. That's kind of like a very good opportunity for yourself to test yourself, also grow yourself and experience a lot of different things.

This form of self-reliance is an empowering experience for returnees who have been raised by very involved parents who may be shielding them from these forms of difficulty.

As Harry explains:

Harry: I don't think I could have learned it here because I mean, Asian parents are kind of, their arms fold inward. You know that expression? You're a family you're a son or a daughter, even though we want you to work hard, if they seem like so having a difficult time, they call their Mom or they come visit them or they can do something for them, but in the United States it's like $2200 to get to Penn State. So that doesn't happen so you're going to have to find a way to survive without your parents, or whatever relative's help. But in Korea, I mean if your Grandma is where you are, if your Grandma is there, she's going to come and help you if you're having problems. But in the United States, even though you're having a problem, unless it's like financial and your Dad and Mom can send you money, like cultural differences or like personal conflicts, that, that you have to solve by yourself cause they're not going to fly in and help you out.

The geographical limitations make the same level of involvement impossible. In a globalized world with modern technology facilitating communication or travel, there are very few ways we can be truly alone. The experience of studying abroad is one of the ways people can really feel alone. These students are often isolated in a sea of difference. They are too far to import friends and family or even familiarity. With no other options, returnees have to overcome these new difficulties by themselves. They are experiencing a
new environment, fraught with difficulty and adjustment, without their normal level of familial support.

**Surviving Alone**

For returnees like Harry and Eunice, there is also a real loneliness to studying abroad. With all of the securities of friends and family stripped away, international students find themselves alone and having to really work to adapt to make new friends.

Harry: Well, I learned how to survive alone. Because the commonality among international students is basically the loneliness they get when they first go abroad because they’re away from their families. They have to live in this old-fashioned dorm. And they have to figure out a way to survive. They have to get adapted to the food. Korean food is not there. Like usual things are not there, and then all of sudden, they always see Asians around and the see Black people, they see White people they see Indians. It, the first thing they, the most important thing the first international students get, when they get into the United States is culture shock. Because, it’s really hard to adapt... So that’s a hard one but what I learned is that I tried to, put my time into all races. Black people, like I went to a Black party and I was like the only non-black guy. And it was kind of awkward, but I had a lot fun. And I hang around with the Frat boys. So, and then I kind of learned how to adapt into them, so it’s easier for me.

Jarvis: What w[as] the most important thing you learned from your time at Rutgers?

Eunice: Maybe it was not the knowledge I gained from professors from class, because I had to, I was really alone in the US. I became more independent, I learned to live in this global environment where I’ve never been and do not have anybody. So all the friends I met there, I had to put my best effort to make friends, be friends with them. I think that was what I really got from that whole experience of staying in the US... although I spoke English in the Philippines, I never had a chance to test myself outside. And then it was kind of, it was not really surprising, it was relieving to know that I didn’t really have any problems adjusting myself in this English speaking environment without any extra effort... I can do it.

There is real pain in these experiences for these returnees. These examples highlight how hard obtaining these global experiences was for them. The process is lonely and requires
real effort as they must open themselves to new people and cultures. All of these elements are almost impossible to replicate back in Korea, even at the best Global Degree programs.

Liberated from Cultural Constraints

A final part of the independence component to global cultural capital is the cultural independence returnees experience through their time in foreign environments. Immersed in a foreign culture, students observe and try on culture that is often very different from their own culture. Upon returning to Korea, returnees like Janice (Manager, Korean conglomerate) and Joon described how they were more critical of their own culture.

Jarvis: Would you want your son to go abroad at some point?
Janice: Yes
Jarvis: At what age and why do you think it’s important to go?
Janice: Especially in elementary school
Jarvis: So you think early?
Janice: Yes. Early, because, like my son, he’s only in kindergarten, he takes tests 2 times a week and I don’t want to make him do that, but I don’t want him to consider himself stupid. So I don’t think this is the right way to do it, but still everyone else is doing it. So he has to take tests and he has to get good grades and if he gets something wrong then I have to scold him and like ‘if you do this again you’re going to get in trouble’ and he’s like ‘ok’ and then he has to study hard and from my point of view I don’t think that is the right way to raise a child so, especially in elementary school I hope that he could have education in states... my son he goes to 8 different institutes right now. I’m embarrassed to say that but, it’s how everybody does it.

In this example, Janice’s experience abroad helps her to critically examine the popular manner of educating children in Korea. While many Koreans agree with Janice’s criticism of the Korean educational system, because Janice has seen something different first hand, she feels free to criticize from a position of authority. Even if she can’t act upon this knowledge,
her cosmopolitan experience gives her unique insight and perspective on what she doesn’t like and what she aspires to do to remedy this situation. She can speak with confidence on this topic.

Joon at times struggles with cultural reintegration as a result of his extended time overseas. He adopted what he considered the best parts of the Australian culture, but these values and ideas are not always congruent with what people value in Korea.

Joon: Okay. The biggest thing and the most important thing what I learned from Australia was people there they know how to satisfy their life with what they have. In Korea, people always look up and they always looking for something they don’t have right now. So if you, if you’re parents are not well educated, they force their kids to be educated... But in Australia, if you earn a $1000 per week, they know how to enjoy that money within their boundaries. They don’t really envy someone who earns like $10,000 per week. And I thought that was right attitude to be happy in their life. That’s what I learned and I’m trying to follow that attitude actually. Of course I respected like a Korean perspective that you always try harder... but still... It’s like endless race. They always want something more and they’re always looking for something more.

Jarvis: So has it been difficult then, that balance, sort of taking the desire to succeed from Korea but the idea from Australia that okay I have to be satisfied with what I have or live happily with whatever situation. Is it difficult to do that in Korea?

Joon: It is very difficult.

Jarvis: So why is it so hard?

Joon: Um, because you, you’re living in a society... you live in a society and sometimes you are happy with what you have, but people around you keep telling you that this is not what you can have. You can have more and more and more. And, that can be very stressful, that can be very stressful... for example like the other day... I had a meeting with my friend and then he told me that... it seems like you’re too laid back. Seriously. And I said why, he said, you seems like you don’t really plan for your future. And we had kind of serious conversation about that. And, yes he is right, I’m a little bit laid back, from Korean’s perspective, point of view, but I’m happy with what I am. Maybe I’m not that rich, I don’t have very expensive car, but I’m happy with my family... yes I’m happy but I have to admit that I was very stressed that day because all of my friends they’re like, 30, middle 30s and that friend works for like those investment bank and he earns a lot of money.... And so when I asked him what is the most important thing your life, his answer was
money. Yeah the first answer was money without any like hesitation and that really shocked me a lot because my priority was always the family. And I, when I answered family he looked at me as I’m so like stupid person, or very naive. And I think this attitude, what I have right now I learned from overseas, not from Korea. And I’m happy with it.

Returnees like Joon and Janice feel they can see their old culture from a new perspective. This has led them be critical of cultural elements they think are worse in Korea than the cultural practices in the country they lived in while studying. They have lived and seen another way and even if they can’t easily remedy the differences, they can have solace in knowing that their global experiences help them to know better than those who haven’t gone.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have attempted to dissect the experiences of Koreans who have studied overseas to better understand the nature of the global cultural capital they obtained. I add to this by examining the attributes of this concept along what I called *instrumental* and *cosmopolitan* components of global cultural capital. Instrumental forms of global cultural capital included things such as technical skills, cultural familiarity, and foreign credentials. These are skills and credentials that are the most easily recognized and most directly relatable to the workforce. While the credentials are of course most obviously a form of institutionalized cultural capital, instrumental and cosmopolitan parts of this model include the embodied elements of Bourdieu’s cultural capital. I find these forms of embodied cultural capital are not mutually exclusive but instead mutually reinforcing. English and technical skills serve as more obvious validations of the overall global cultural
package, while foreign credentials provide an institutionalized form of global cultural capital legitimizing the experiences.

Unique to this research is that I provide a Korean case study to ground this concept of global cultural capital and these terms in the lived experiences of the Korean foreign educated returnees. This model reflects how they feel about this experience. So what is global cultural capital? What does it look like and feel like for those obtaining it through studying overseas?

I find that global cultural capital is a long-term investment, an activity that includes both practical and less tangible experiences. Returnees obtained technical skills through training at the most elite institutions in the world. They also learned English in a way that was more proficient and usable because of its connection to business related skills and their own comfort with using the language. Through their long and substantial interactions, global cultural capital is also cultural familiarity with non-Koreans in general but westerners in particular. Global cultural capital also includes authentic cosmopolitan experiences such as living overseas apart from family and friends. These experiences provide a confidence for returnees in their ability to interact with foreigners and adapt to foreign environments. These experiences provide confidence in their ability to overcome challenges. After having completed the task of studying overseas, they believe that they can do anything. Finally, global cultural capital includes a foreign credential that validates and legitimates these other forms of cultural capital.
I met Brian when I was being interviewed to work as a “Business English” teacher at a Korean conglomerate. I had used English teaching opportunities to try and get inside Korean companies and to find candidates to interview. Brian was a foreign educated manager heading a global marketing team at a large Korean conglomerate. I was to help his team not only with their English but also with their “global” business acumen. Brian’s English was excellent. He was really enthusiastic and brimming with confidence, especially with foreigners. We met in a huge circular conference room that would be the location of the daily class. Brian had another associate with him who was older but appeared to be in a subordinate position and they both asked me questions about my qualifications and ideas for teaching the team members. Brian was in control of this interview process, casually interrupting me, and his coworker on a number of occasions. The interview was much more intense than the average English interview. In fact I thought Brian was trying very hard to assert his global capabilities in front of his older yet subordinate coworker. Brian had graduated from a number of prestigious American universities and had worked for an American company. Clearly Brian was able to successfully turn his prestigious degrees and work experience into a very good job in Korea. However, he was less successful at navigating the Korean work environment. Despite being a Korean and speaking Korean perfectly, he had lived abroad since he was in High School and had never worked in this capacity in Korea. I was also told off the record later by two of his coworkers that Brian’s attempts to inspire or motivate his team members were considered “strange” or
“awkward”. Apparently the company also wasn’t happy with his performance. He sometimes went home “early” at 5 o’clock. In our subsequent interview Brian complained to me a lot about how hard it was to work in the Korean business environment as someone with many years of global experience. He said there was a lot of jealousy among coworkers because of his young age and high position, his compensation and relationship with executives. Shortly after my teaching position ended and despite how qualified Brian seemed for his position, the company fired him. When I asked him what he wanted to do next, he said he was sure to have many options but that there was probably better money teaching English and he wouldn’t have to deal with a hierarchical and rigid work environment.

Foreign educated returnees like Brian represent one group of globalized Koreans with excellent English skills, a global network and even work experience abroad. These seem like the ideal credentials to succeed in the globalizing Korean work place and for Brian led to many job offers in Korean companies. And yet as I discuss in this chapter, foreign credentials and experience alone do not guarantee success for returnees.

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 7 I examine where and why global cultural capital is most beneficial for Korean returnees and what aspects affect this. In the previous chapter I presented a model of global cultural capital. In this chapter I first discuss where these elements of global cultural capital are most beneficial in the Korean workplace. I find there are specific skills that remain especially beneficial for returning foreign educated Koreans and specific occupations and teams where global cultural capital is most rewarded and the value
“institutionalized” (Igarashi and Saito 2014). These include positions in government, Research and Development, and on specific global marketing, strategy and sales teams in the business sector. This is where “legitimate” global experience and skills can be an advantage. These employment fields are particularly global and share the need of a cultural and social capital that helps their workers confidently move back and forth between foreign and local environments and interactions.

I then argue that there has been a general decline in the benefits global cultural capital provides returnees in the Korean workplace. Overall I find that the Korean business field has changed in the 15 years after the IMF crisis and the global cultural capital foreign education provides is changing in value. The supply of Koreans with foreign credentials has outpaced the demand and there are greater concerns in Korean business fields today with employee fit or integration, even for the globally skilled. The competition has also intensified, as locally educated Koreans have been able to improve their global capacities through what I called global cultural capital lite in Chapter 5. They have narrowed the gap. As a result, I believe that outside of these specific occupations and instances, the general benefit for this form of global cultural capital is declining.

Finally, I discuss how the most consistent and meaningful payoff for returnees may be the process of gaining “authentic” membership in a global community. I find that authentic global experiences, especially cosmopolitan experiences, provide great life satisfaction for foreign educated Koreans even if it does not easily translate to economic or occupational advantage. Deeply meaningful, the cosmopolitan payoff is more than a simple reflection of economic or occupational recognition as the cosmopolitan values returnees acquire may even deemphasize the importance of monetary forms of compensation.
SPECIFICALLY BENEFICIAL

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, Koreans are studying overseas for a number of reasons. Many are pursuing instrumental skills and credentials they hope will make them more valuable and distinct as workers when they return. The assumption is that their most tangible global cultural capital will be recognized and valued. From my interviews with returnees and evaluators in the Korean workplace, I find global cultural capital is most valuable in a few specific occupations and instances. One of these occupations is in the Korean government.

Unlike in the business sector, Korean government officials have all been locally educated when they are first hired. They enter the government after passing a very difficult exam many applicants take 1-2 years to study for. Therefore Koreans with foreign education that work in the Korean government are older and have added these degrees to their Korean undergraduate degrees. With a number of globally oriented government ministries and an eye for greater global trade, negotiations, and presence, in 1979 the Korean government began sponsoring government officials to study overseas. Today the program provides between 2 and 3 years funding (around $15,000 US per year) to study at a foreign university. These fellowships provide government officials with the opportunity to obtain global skills and credentials and put them on an occupational track that is more likely to include foreign assignments. These foreign assignments, at foreign embassies and international organizations, are the most prestigious positions.
Government

Specific Skills

Returnees working in the government described how a combination of both instrumental and cosmopolitan forms of global cultural capital was directly beneficial in their jobs. Leanne explains that her experience studying abroad helped her understand other governments’ perspectives.

Leanne  But I can use my ability to compromise the perspectives. From that experience that I learned from studying in the United States and also international studies, I can see that perspectives... I can understand how different can be the perspectives of other countries and other, you know, peoples of those countries. And from 2006 to 2007 I worked in the Presidential Office, and Spokespersons office... I was in charge of dealing with overseas media. And my job was, you know, in the morning I monitored all of the main overseas media as articles on Korean peninsula and then my job was answering to the, you know, overseas reporters, questions or anything... the spokespersons' job is to communicate with the journalists and let them understand the president’s plan the president’s thoughts and president’s vision and to deliver those, you know, things to the journalists and then to people itself... But it is so hard for even the national journalists and in Korean, to deliver those things but to just imagine how it would be difficult to overseas journalists, who has really a little background and knowledge of Korean society and culture and to let them understand what is happening in Korea is really serious. So, those experience kind of helped me to understand society.

In Leanne’s example, she was responsible for disseminating information as a spokesperson for the presidential office in a manner that could be understand accurately by representatives in a number of different countries. This was more than just technical language ability, but also familiarity with how non-Koreans may perceive the message. She had to consider multiple perspectives, something many foreign educated Koreans believe to be hard to accomplish if you have not spent significant time in other countries with people of different backgrounds. Their time abroad is training them to be sensitive to this. Also, this required confidence in her understanding of non-Koreans.
Colin also talked about a very specific manner in which a combination of his skills and relationships with people in other governments helped him perform his job better.

Colin: And I wanted to extend my network.

Jarvis: Improve you English, extend your network. How does it extend by going abroad?

Colin: Like, for me I could make friends with some scholars. I can utilize them in my work. Usually we go many seminars related to government public information activities and government policies and so I think that I can utilize those networks, I can invite them to Korea, I can consult with them about Korean policies, especially the media policies. So I think that I can utilize my network and I also thought that there are, there will be many government officials from other countries, such as underdeveloped countries. So I thought of that, I could make some network with them. So it could be very helpful for me to work with those countries some day.... Our institution is operating many overseas Korean cultural centers and we are also dispatching public information office and press secretaries. To embassies in many countries and I expected that I would work someday, in foreign countries as a press officer. If so, it will be very helpful for me to have those kinds of friends and networks so that’s what I expected to get from studying in the USA.

Colin explains in this quote that he relies on his networks from his foreign education for information about policies, to establish cultural centers and like Leanne, spread information. This requires relationships and a level of comfort with these people so that he can establish long-term connections. Government workers like Colin continue to use these connections throughout their career and as a way to perform well in whatever jobs may arise. As I mentioned earlier, Colin's only regret from studying abroad was studying in Madison, Wisconsin, a relatively small city that prevented him from potentially meeting more contacts working in a larger American city.
Different Tracks

So how does the use of these skills and experiences translate to occupational success for government employees? Dr. J explains that global cultural capital helps indirectly as returnees are given better chances to show what they are capable of. They are provided important opportunities to display their potential.

Dr. J: It’s not fixed, but for certain periods of work, almost 90% of employees get promoted. So... there are 9 levels in Korean government. So if... I passed kind of top-level exam we can enter the fifth level... First is the highest level... To promote one level it takes 10 years. So, if I want to promote one level again, it takes another 10 years. And then 5 years, 3 years and go out... a seniority emphasis.

Jarvis: If you go abroad and pass these high tests... does that move you up faster or does that position you for different types of opportunities?

Dr. J: There is just kind of a small gap. If I said 10 years, then some people get promotion shorter period like 8 years. Some people take longer period like 12 years... I believe that kind of studying abroad [doesn’t] directly influence this kind of things. But some people think, if you graduate from Harvard, that means you are a quite able person. So then in that case you can get jobs, very significant, important jobs, which means you have more chance to prove you are an able person. So it’s helpful indirectly. But the PhD is not helpful directly to the promotion. You have to prove by work... performance is the most important factor.

Jarvis: How has your training abroad helped your performance here?

Dr. J: It’s better. I think it’s better... We have to understand other society’s perspective... I think I more understand the people compared with before I studied there. So understanding other country’s system and perspective, is very helpful... because it’s a global society... Korea is quite open and small country. We are quite easily influenced by other countries’ conditions or situation.

Dr. J (later): In my case, the return is not financial, but self-confidence in my job... it’s quite helpful specifically when to develop new policy or to understand other countries’ policy.

Dr. J outlines quite clearly that in his case there has not been a direct reward for studying overseas, but there have been better opportunities to show his abilities and his global
cultural capital has helped him to perform better. In this case global cultural capital helps
Dr. J understand other countries’ perspectives and policy. It gives him confidence that he
can maximize these key opportunities. For Dr. J an example of the “important jobs” was
working as an advisor on an important economic committee in the Blue House. For Colin,
these jobs are the global jobs.

Jarvis: So in the government, for example, why would it [foreign education] be more
important in government positions?

Colin: Government wants its officials to be more globalized... There are more and
more and more globalized issues so our government wants its officials to be, to have more globalized perspective, more globalized networks...

Jarvis: And do they reward employees with global experience?

Colin: Yes... if we have global experiences we can get more chances... more options.

Jarvis: In the government job, like different kinds of jobs?

Colin: Yes

Jarvis: Or better kinds of jobs?

Colin: Better kinds of jobs...

Jarvis: What would a job that global experience would qualify you for? Like if you
didn’t have it maybe it might be difficult to get?

Colin: Diplomats. We think that, we have just diplomat at the embassy but we have
many government officials at the embassy... So we are dispatching many
people. And many Korean government officials wants to work at the embassy.
If we can have a globalized experience it’s easier for us to get a job at an
embassy and we can take our family to abroad and we educated children in abroad and they can learn English. So that is a personal interest... that’s one
of the area, working abroad.

Jarvis: So then you can work in an embassy around the world?

Colin: Around the world and we can also work at an international organization like
WTO and OECD, UNESCO...

Jarvis: So all of those global organizations they tend to choose Korean government
workers with global experience?
Colin: And if you get those government officials who are successful in the Korean government they usually have the experience at international organization or overseas organizations.

Jarvis: That's a common characteristic of a successful government worker?

Colin: That's right, yea that's right. It's almost, I believe that it's almost impossible for government officials now to be successful without any globalized experience, international experience. It's a prerequisite for that position.

Colin further clarifies that not only can the experience provide confidence, skills and connections, but also serve as part of the prerequisite to what many consider the best jobs: global jobs. This global government experience then becomes necessary occupational experience for the upwardly mobile working in the government.

Government Field

As evidenced by these interviews, in the government field there are particular needs to be able go abroad and communicate with those abroad. There is a direct need for confident and competent communication and negotiation as well as a need for connections and relationships. These are the conditions by which the global cultural capital that government workers like Colin, Leanne and Dr. J have acquired is recognized and legitimated. Furthermore, because they all went abroad with government sponsorships, there are fewer worries about employee fit as all of these employees are leaving Korea with high volumes of local cultural capital. They have already proven they understand the Korean work world and have the cultural capital to navigate this field.
Research and Development

Another location where global cultural capital continues to be recognized and valued is research and development. According to respondents working in this industry, the persistent benefit of global cultural capital is based on a few key factors. First, being able to comfortably contribute in an innovative environment is of utmost importance. With Korean companies becoming global leaders in various technological industries, being innovative and creative is increasingly rewarded in these industries. Second, there is a premium on the ability to read and contribute to the most recent and relevant research in English. Third, using international networks for collaboration is vital. To be able to communicate confidently enough to reach out to international scholars requires a level of English ability and confidence that is difficult to obtain without substantial time and training in an English speaking nation. These are specific components of global cultural capital that Koreans who have not studied abroad find hard to replicate. While they are improving, they are still not as good at speaking English, or perhaps more importantly, are not as confident or as comfortable actually using their English with foreigners.

Innovation

Shawn is an expat research fellow who was brought into a large Korean Chaebol to head one of their most innovative technologies. He ran a large team of both foreign and locally educated researchers, many of whom I interviewed. Having worked on a number of research teams around the globe, I found Shawn to be a very astute observer of performance. Shawn described some of the difficulties he experienced developing this new technology in a Korean conglomerate.
Shawn: They [locally educated Koreans] still honestly, still don’t have good strong skills in innovation in general... I think I attribute that to the hierarchical nature of society. I attribute it to the fact that they have been fast-followers who have always had something very clear in front of them that they are chasing. But now we’re moving in another direction and you can’t look this up in a textbook any more... You can’t go online and find 20 other companies doing it... We are now going to have to be the ones that everyone else is looking at. They’re getting better at it, but that has definitely been a difficulty.

Shawn discussed a key point about innovation and creativity. There are creative and innovative people among both foreign and locally educated, but “the ones that have been educated abroad are more comfortable with [innovation]... it’s not a foreign idea to them.”

Time studying overseas acquiring a form of cultural capital in an educational field emphasizing these attributes or dispositions has better prepared returnees for innovative work environments. When we spoke again a few years later I asked him about his experience with innovation among Korean researchers.

Jarvis: I was looking at some of our previous discussions and in some of your follow up comments you talked about one of the bigger differences between foreign and domestically educated researchers was the ability for foreign educated [Koreans] to think outside the box... What do you mean by that? What would be an example of when they did that?

Shawn: There are two things really and they’re kind of related... The first one as far as that ability to innovate, to go down a path that isn’t directed necessarily, it’s really a difficulty... if you look at it it’s a Korea specific issue for sure, it’s probably Asia in general in my experience... but to give you some examples. If I were to sit down and have what I would constitute or construe, a brainstorming session, and let’s just go through some ideas, you know, on any given technical topic, and you just start throwing them out on the board and then talking about them and everything else. My experience in the US or... the western environment, would be, people would take that, they would digest it, they’d probably glean from it what they agreed with. They may add to it, they would probably spur some unique or independent thought and from that you would see a richness begin to evolve, beyond probably what the conversation directly was necessarily about... If you go up to the Asian and Korean market on the other hand, what you tend to see, is they would take copious notes, they would write down everything that was written on the board and then what you would see a week or two later would be at best a regurgitation of what we discussed...
Jarvis: I see, I see.

Shawn: And I found myself to a larger extent having to be a little bit careful in the sense that if I suggested something that I thought was an idea or food for thought and didn’t caveat it and really stress, hey, now don’t go do this necessarily, this is just a thought, they would take it as direction to go do something and the next thing I know, they would have charged down a road which at the time of the thought was probably nothing more than a passing curiosity or an afterthought. But they didn’t seem to have the ability at all to delineate between that kind of freewheeling, creative process and then putting that to concrete development or study or whatever the case may be.

The creative environment that Shawn was trying to establish was confusing to the Korean educated workers who had less experience in this setting. They seemed less able and confident in their ability to create in this manner. Other foreign educated Koreans who were working in this environment believed their training in American universities and in American labs helped them to develop the skill of independent problem solving.

Jarvis: I have questions about working at the start up company and also about your school experience. What was surprising about the American graduate experience, what was different?

Jo: That’s one clear difference I perceived. In a simple problem in the test, like simple calculation and just fill in the blank, Korean students are excellent. But somehow creative solutions, the test required from students, group discussion or so some answer I have to make from the scratch, Korean students suck. We don’t know how to approach from the scratch. But American students somehow they have pretty much learned on that issue.

Jarvis: So in your Masters program at PNU you didn’t have to do tests like that? Or think that way? So it was setup differently? So you get to MIT and you have to change your approach to answering questions?

Jo: Right.

Jarvis: Is that approach helpful now in your work? Learning how to look at things from scratch?

Jo: Yea, seeing things differently. So what I’m doing is like a business development... which means I have to find some new business, new opportunity which is pretty much from the direction the [company] is now taking. So there’s a lot of changes, because they don’t know, it’s a new business... So I have to persuade them and also I have study by myself in the
new things so now I’m doing project which is pretty much different from background and my major. So I have to find new things, learn new things...

Jarvis: So when you finished that training did you feel more confident in your ability to solve problems or to find solutions or to work?

Jo: Yes, I cannot say I made it in that class, but could taste, what is that and I saw what the other students are doing and I learned that. So now at least if a new project is given to me I’m not frustrated. Now at least I know how to approach.

Jo identifies a fundamental difference he observed in the way the two educational systems teach. He believed that he did not have enough opportunity to approach problems from “scratch” when studying in Korea, even in graduate school. This was something he feels like he has improved on and it is now helping him as he works in a particularly innovative area of research. Jo feels better equipped to do this than his locally educated coworkers. Kami, a foreign educated coworker of Jo’s, expressed a similar sentiment. She describes how different American graduate school was and how hard it was to change her approach when studying in the U.S.

Jarvis: If the teaching style is so different in America and Korea, are the students learning different things?

Kami: Learning the same thing, but here is the thing. Korean students are very smart and bright. Number one in Math, number one in science. But there is no Nobel Prize from Korea. That’s the difference. I learned all the calculus in high school... I’m so good at solving the problems, but I don’t understand, what’s the concept behind what’s going on, you know? So [I] talked to the teacher [in Korea]], ‘I can solve the problem but I don’t understand, what’s the calculus meaning?’ But he told me, ‘Just do. Do your work and solve the problems’. But then I went to the college in the States. The funny thing is that they learn calculus in the college level. So easy right? So I’m pretty good. But then I thought at the beginning that they are so stupid to learn those easy things... in college. But then I realized they more focus on the foundation, not the skill but the foundation. What is concept? What is the theory about how to apply those concept to other fields? So that, although they learned all of those technology or whatever pretty late, but they know how to apply to the other field...Me, my, like Korean brains are so fixed. We just know, we just know how to solve. We just have the skill but we don’t know how to apply...
they know how to apply all those like theories to the other field. So they are more flexible thinking. We are very rigid.

Kami and Jo are referring to developing a different way of approaching problems. They were learning a new skill. Both of them believed that their experience in western educational environments helped them develop this ability to problem solve differently. As factors of the global cultural capital model I presented in Chapter 6, we see that these students have been away from their most comfortable and familiar environment (independent), and confronted with challenges to their previous approaches to problems. Their culture of learning expands to include at least the possibility of a new way of doing things (skills). They became more comfortable working in this foreign environment and approaching problems in this manner. This new culture is reinforced by their relationships with revered non-Korean professors and trusted students.

**English, International Networks & Collaborations**

While the opportunities to study English locally through the internationalization of Korean education have increased, English is still an area where foreign educated employees can stand out. While this is changing, there is still a general lack of confidence or comfort speaking English with foreigners. This is seen in many work environments, but is important in the research field for a few reasons.

**Jarvis:** Nowadays you have a lot of Koreans who are going for short-term study abroad, 6 months, 12 months, instead of doing a degree, they’re just going and studying language specifically and some people think that’s good enough... enough global to be able to be useful in a global environment and I’m curious as to whether or not you think that’s enough?

**Shawn:** Right, and I wondered about it, to be honest with you. I mean, this is an interesting curiosity to me as well, but... the [researchers] that had the best English skills were also the ones that typically had spent the years abroad
and earned a degree at one of the primarily US universities... they were also the ones that handled the literature, in this case technical literature, so like general articles and presentations, because it’s all in English, for the entire community... all of your top-end journals are in English... if you wanted to drill down on any of the subjects, technical engineering, whatever subject, you were going to run into it in English. And I wondered, on occasion that it was just a little answer to maybe the fact that that also played into it that they gained a greater exposure to the global community even as they were back in Korea based on the fact that the language skills opened up those windows wider to them...

Jarvis: So they have the language skills, but then even when they come back they can kind of tap into that that global research...

Shawn: Exactly, right, and whether that be go to a conference and feel comfortable that they can understand the talks or the presentations or read journal articles or research on the internet or whatever the case may be, it’s so heavily dominated by English.

As Shawn explains, the top journals are primarily in English. Continued research and expertise requires the ability to read the most recent studies. As I mentioned in Chapter 6, returnees like Jo believed they could read in English faster and understand these types of materials more easily than locally educated researchers. Jo also believes he is more comfortable at conferences and connecting with people abroad.

Jarvis: If you didn't go abroad, if you just stayed here, I’m trying to understand the difference between what you would get from your educational experience. So, like what are some things you just can't get here, that you learned there?

Jo: I think that’s related to network... so 2 years ago I got a chance to attend a conference, one of the big conferences for Optics... I attend there with my colleague here, and then I met lots of professors and experts there, professionals there who is connected with MIT and my lab at MIT... so they actually have wide network. So a graduate student when I was at MIT, my colleague in my lab, now... professor in Northwestern University, top university, and... chair in this session... So that’s quite big network now.

Jarvis: So they're working at good places doing good things.

Jo: So I can easily catch some more information, informal information when I talk and chatting from that, some valuable information... But my colleagues... small network.
This very positive and promising experience for Jo is in stark contrast to how conferences and collaborations were described by one of his locally educated colleagues.

Jarvis: How was the experience?

Greg: I always felt somewhat wanting. At the time I like to have had some relationship with foreign countries and foreign cultures and foreign knowledges but there was little chance to have those kind of things... Professors (in Korea) were very, very good, with enthusiasm to educate... Very good professors but among classes sometimes there was a conference or meetings with foreigners or international conference and I was unhappy that I could not communicate with them very well. I could learn more if I could speak English well. But I could not speak English well and was unhappy.

Koreans like Greg are acutely aware of the power and necessity of networks. Korean alumni networks are very powerful and helpful. This is why he is so frustrated with his difficulty establishing these networks globally. He described how he had success communicating with high-level Koreans in the company he worked for, but that studying abroad could add a global layer to one’s network and connections.

Jarvis: Does going abroad help your network?

Greg: Yeah. Certainly

Jarvis: Do you learn different skills abroad?

Greg: Their skills and abilities are almost the same, but their networking power and communication power is somewhat different. Their experience abroad is very important.

For engineers in the research and development field, connections with people abroad are vital. It can lead to collaborations and sharing of important ideas and research.

Jarvis: Were there any noticeable sort of characteristics, like their approach to problems or their strategies or anything like that that you noticed that would correlate or go along those lines of foreign educated versus domestically educated, did you notice anything like that?

Shawn: In a sense... there was a greater comfort level for reaching out to experts within a given subject by those again, that either had the better language skills or had better, a greater deal of comfort dealing with those outside of Korean domestic. In other words, let’s say someone was pursuing a subject
or a field of study, that there was somebody in Europe or the US or Russia or whatever, which was the known expert in a particular field. What I would typically see is, those that again that had studied abroad and studied in the US, for example, and had better English skills, would be very, at least comfortable or at least willing to reach out directly and communicate and engage those people, which gave them an advantage. Those that were timid about that either didn’t do it or, they would often come to me and say, hey, could you help me make this connection and reach out and establish. And then once it was established, their comfort level would come up and they’d engage a little bit better.

Jarvis: Right, right. And those kind of connections can help you in your tasks and projects?

Shawn: Oh yeah, uh-huh

Jarvis: Right, so that’s how you’re gaining insight from these experts from around the world on something you’re working on?

Shawn: Exactly, and it’s potentially collaborative on occasion. We would even employ one of those experts ultimately to do a piece of work with us. I mean, so, that relationship could go anywhere from a quick answer to a 5 minute question all the way to a... one thing in particular a fellow in Russia... who was a tissue optics expert and we actually spent probably a year together collaborating with him... You never knew when you started those discussions where they were going to lead, but you knew that there were people out there in a particular subject field and they knew more than you did, and it was always a wise course to reach out.

Being able to more comfortably initiate these transnational collaborations is a tremendous advantage for the foreign educated researchers. In this case their global cultural capital, namely cultural familiarity and English confidence with non-Koreans, has a direct application in their work field. They can independently initiate collaborations that help projects as well as raise the prestige of the institution.

Global Business

In the business sector, there are particular teams and positions where “legitimate” foreign experience can be an advantage. These include global marketing, strategy and sales
positions where responsibilities may include regular interaction with foreign personnel or knowledge of foreign markets or foreign dispositions. The ability to navigate and negotiate with people from both within Korea and outside Korea, can be facilitated by the educational experience overseas. Unique approaches and knowledge can also be advantageous components of global cultural capital for returnees.

Confident English Infused with Business Skills

Over the past 20 years, Koreans have spent huge amounts of money on English education to become better English speakers (Education First 2013; Shinyoung Securities 2010). However, many are still afraid to actually use their English conversationally and even more afraid to try and use their English in a professional or business environment. I witnessed this firsthand as I taught English at a Korean company that had a partnership with a large American software firm. Every Thursday, a number of the leading computer programmers had to communicate by conference call with the headquarters in San Francisco. I would meet with the class in the morning before this weekly call, and they were all petrified and absolutely dreading this call. When I asked them about their job satisfaction and difficulties working for this company, for many, this call was the most stressful moment of their week. When I asked what caused the most anxiety, they replied “What if I have to say something?” or “What if I can’t understand them?” What surprised me was that many of these employees spoke English very well and certainly could have expressed their opinions and understood the caller, but they had no confidence in their abilities. When I asked how they communicated, they told me they relied heavily on two workers to translate or speak for
the group. Both of these workers spent extensive time overseas studying at American universities.

Joon described a very similar reason for his value as a foreign educated returnee in the global marketing research firm he previously worked for in Seoul.

Joon: Okay, even in [a global marketing research firm], less than 20% of people had experience, educational experience in overseas. So, since like [this company] is global marketing research company they need more people who can communicate in English. First of all. And second, we need someone who can have like a regular contact with the regional office in Hong Kong and Singapore and all other South East Asia [countries], even in Australia. So, definitely my English was advantage when I get a job.

While the opportunities to study English locally through the internationalization of Korean education have increased, English is still an area where foreign educated applicants and employees can stand out. Koreans who have not studied abroad still lack the confidence and comfort to use their English with non-Koreans.

Jarvis: Do you think that your experience in Australia and with your MBA, are you really gaining unique experiences that people who do language training can’t get? Or is it just more English?

Joon: ...because I can speak better English than my colleagues, so the information I get exposed to in my current job, actually gave me more power in my work and more authority for my job as well. So I have more experience or opportunity to work with not only Korean side but also local (American) leaders as well. So I think that’s pretty advent(ageous).

Jarvis: How does it give you those opportunities, your better English speaking ability? How does it provide you with more power?

Joon: So for example, because I can speak better English than my colleagues, I’m the one who runs the actual meetings for what we call TF team, the task force team... that’s a team mixed with Korean dispatchers with local (American) organizational leaders and I have to collect all the information from the both sides and then make a Korean report as well as English report for my vice presidents. But if your English is not fluent enough you are okay to work with Korean dispatcher side. However whenever there is some kind of communication must be involved then you can’t be a part of that project. That will limit your chance to grow in that organization.
From these two quotes, Joon clearly identifies how his ability to speak English confidently has specific value in his job. His level of English speaking allows him to be a part of projects and run meetings to develop relationships with more people. It provides him with more opportunities to use his business knowledge and gain experience. He is not limited to the Korean side. Ben also describes positions in his company where comfortable and confident communication with the foreign customers or employees is valuable.

Jarvis: Do you think it’s becoming, is it still an advantage though
Ben: Yes it is. It’s still an advantage, the foreign degree.
Jarvis: Why is it an advantage? How does it help you?
Ben: I think, first, the first thing is... Number one, is a big company like Samsung, LG and Hyundai, their main business is global business. So those people who only get education in Korea, they don’t know how to work with foreign (people) in terms of language, as well as experience and how to negotiate and how to deal with foreign local employees as well as customers. So those who have a foreign degree at least they stay 4 years or 2 years in the states, in class activity and team activity, they have experience work with non-Korean. So they have a value. And also, even though Samsung employee sitting in Korea, but in terms of daily communication there is a lot of communication between HQ and local, like foreign subsidiary with Samsung local employee. For example, I’m in the mobile business, 90, more than 90% of revenue comes from overseas. So we need to deal with all the local employee and also customer and so we need language skill and we need to have a, like skill set to deal with analytic skill and communication skill. I mean, happens to be English happen to be global language.

In Chapter 6, one of the instrumental components of global cultural capital model was English infused with business acumen or knowledge. Ben and Joon provide strong examples of how this is actually used and why it is valued in this context. Other returnees like Kim discussed previously how his confidence in English speaking combined with his business skill was particularly valued. Kim explained how it qualified him “to go on a business trip to Europe to the US” and how “in most cases I have conference call with France.” His ability to communicate transnationally is directly beneficial.
What is incredibly difficult and a great source of concern for many locally educated Koreans becomes a source of pride and opportunity for Koreans in the right companies and positions.

_Innovation in Global Business Fields_

Innovation is of course important in many occupations, but like the research field I discussed previously, there is a particular global interpretation to this in the business field. When I spoke with HR personnel and executives in Korea’s most global fields of business, the sentiment was that it is very difficult to obtain and develop a pattern of creativity and innovation without varied life experiences. Without extensive time interacting with different cultures in different environments and with different people who think differently, it is hard for people to think in a new way. Many of the components in global cultural capital contribute to the development of innovative and adaptive thinking.

William: Organizations are striving for more creativity, innovation and unfortunately you don’t get that out of your education if you’ve just spent all your time in Korea, unless you’re a very unique individual. And that’s one of the handicaps I really see day-to-day, I mean I’ll ask somebody for some information, or to put together in my department compensation program, a new plan. Well if it’s something they’ve done before and they’ve had a similar experience with it, it’s not a problem. But if they have to use some creative out-of-the box thinking, that doesn’t fit with their own beliefs with what they’ve learned and what they know, it’s very difficult. And if I give people scenarios and say well of these three scenarios what do you think is the best, they’re really struggling. Everything is defined as black and white.

William (Global HR, Korean conglomerate) is touching on some of the same issues Shawn (research fellow) did. They believe certain cultural constraints make taking chances or moving down new paths independently a challenge for workers who have not been educated outside of Korea. Ken, a 1.5-generation Korean returnee and CEO at an
international trading firm, works in a particularly fluid environment and describes similar
disappointment with the limitations in innovation he observed among locally educated Koreans.

Ken: Koreans are preoccupied by schools in Korea, like SNU, but I find them quite disappointing. These applicants learn tricks to answer questions, rather than understand the material. I find them to be very rigid in their thinking. They are stuck with or rely on protocol. Tell them to do XYZ and the will do XYZ. Generally they have a hard time, have a harder time thinking outside the box and being creative. People who were abroad were able to be adaptive.

Ken’s evaluation of the performance and potential of both locally and foreign educated Koreans is harsh but reflects what he specifically requires in the very fluid and global, trading market. The fluid nature of trading requires regular adaptation and confidence asserting novel approaches. Mack, a president of an executive search firm who has spent years recruiting in South Korea, describes the skillset he believes is required to be successful in global positions in multinational companies.

Mack: For me as an executive recruiter searching for mostly bilingual Koreans, to work in multinational companies in Korea, one of the things that we like, we like for the people to have a combination of education... if they've gone [K-12] in Korea then gone on and got higher degrees in...western Education, then they have a better worldview of globalization and how things work. They get out of this mindset that is very predominant in Korea, of this is just Korea... this is the way we do it and that's it. So begin to break that stereotype that maybe there is another way of doing things... In a globalized society where we’re working, you must develop a more global view of things. You must first accept the fact that not everybody is going to see things the way you want to see them. So it’s probably important to learn at least a little of who you’re dealing with and why they think the way they think because until you do that, it’s hard to negotiate... I think this open-mindedness, this ability for creativity and creative thoughts and different ways of looking at things, the initiative that they develop and learn in more global situations to where its just not all given to them... these kinds of things that you learn is very helpful because a lot of the foreign companies will say, ‘here’s the guidelines, here’s the rules here’s the principles by which you’re supposed to lead and manage now go to it’.
Mack is alluding to a few important things. First he believes having experiences that broaden horizons will be an asset in multinational companies. Understanding that there is more than one way to approach things is valuable in the international business field or even in particular teams or divisions in Korean conglomerates where there is more of a global focus, like the team Shawn manages. Mack also explained to me that in non-Korean companies especially, junior level employees have much more opportunity to lead projects or be in charge of particular elements of projects than their counterparts in Korean companies who are more micromanaged or controlled as junior employees. Therefore Mack describes a greater need for creativity and initiative in multinational corporations in particular because workers are given parameters but have more latitude to solve problems or use their own approaches.

Gene, a consultant at an international search firm also discussed some general differences in employees with and without global experiences.

Jarvis: What do the locally educated [Koreans] do better?

Gene: I don’t want to generalize too much... what the people educated in the West did very well was definitely, if you gave them a problem they would approach the problem very creatively, out of the box solutions... Koreans, if you give them a target and tell them they have to meet it, they will somehow meet it... Koreans educated in Korea... score very high in result orientation... People overseas score well in strategic orientation and collaboration and influencing.

Gene’s performance evaluation measures suggest there are quantifiable differences in the performance of workers with different educational background. His categories of result orientation versus strategic orientation or innovation are consistent with what William and Shawn have found. Similarly to the engineers in the research field, there appears to be something important about the experience of being independent from home cultural
confines that changes the way people think. Again, this change in thinking is developed in
an (foreign) educational context that emphasizes different approaches to problem solving
than Koreans are accustomed to. It also instills a willingness to assert what they are
interpreting as innovative thinking. It may just be that foreign educated Koreans are
learning to share their innovative thoughts, or the global fields these evaluators are
working in are especially looking for this type of thinking.

*Unique Jobs, Different Trajectories*

Global cultural capital can also be beneficial in the global business field in that it can help
returnees qualify for specific global positions. These are jobs or teams with a particular
global or foreign component. Many foreign educated returnees explained how their global
experience made them distinctly qualified for these jobs. There is also an expectation that
these jobs and experience may lead to better career prospects. For example, Kim felt like he
was being groomed as a result of his company sponsorship to study overseas.

Jarvis: What did [your company] expect from you, if you went and did this? Did they
tell you this? When you came back did they have certain expectations?

Kim: Actually, they expect me to become the CEO, probably. So it’s kind of an
investment. I’m not sure whether that is still in effect, at that time, they must
have thought that.

He expected his foreign experience to dramatically change his career trajectory. Other
returnees like Ben and Jay believed it provided them with more subtle, yet better
opportunities to prove themselves. Similar to the government officials I discussed earlier,
promotion wasn’t directly associated with foreign education, but they felt they had more
and better opportunities to shine.
Jarvis: The question I have is, if you didn’t go to San Diego State University, if you just went from Hanguk University, how would your career be different?

Ben: It depends on my skill set... maybe I’m starting at a different job in that position, if I would not have a San Diego State University. I would have a different, I would start at a different job position... since I have a San Diego degree, I was assigned to a team that needs language skill and global experience. So when I joined the new team, many of them, more than 15 employees, 15 team members has an MBA degree. So that team is responsible for global alliance. So that team has skillset in terms of language and experience. So I was assigned to that team. I don’t think I would be assigned to that team without an MBA degree.

Jarvis: So there was very specific jobs you could do because of your foreign degree?

Ben: Yes. Yes. Yes sure.

Jarvis: And it would have been much more difficult to be on that team without that?

Ben: Yeah, some people on our team were Samsung longer time members, more years, more than us, because they could developed that skill set while they are at Samsung. But for me I had an MBA degree and I was able to be assigned to that team.

Ben was placed on a global team because of his skillset. His MBA degree validated his skills that he had obtained while overseas. He described these skills as English (instrumental) and global experience (cultural familiarity and global confidence). With this form of global cultural capital he was placed on a team like this sooner than the locally educated Koreans.

For Jay, the benefit of his global cultural capital came gradually.

Jarvis: Do they pay differently if you have a foreign degree like that? Is pay better?

Jay: No, no. It is not about that. But perception matters and maybe more opportunity would be given. Maybe HR department would look for someone who got an MBA, then they may compare... one with a Stanford MBA and one with a SNU MBA. I think the Stanford MBA would have bigger opportunities.

Jarvis: Do you think it can help with promotion or a maybe a different career potential or track?

Jay: Yeah I think the different career track would be given. Yes. Not about the promotion. Promotion came from the capability. So even though they're somebody who got an MBA from Stanford, he didn't prove his capabilities to
work or then I don’t think there would be... opportunity for promotion. But still, the different track and different opportunities.

Jarvis: So how is the track different than for people who don’t have these foreign experiences?

Jay: So I think my example, my case would be the example. So I was about to work as, for example, some function, some role, then suddenly my resume stood out and the company, looking for someone who did global recruiting, who has experience with non-Korean people. So my resume stood out. I think, it’s little opportunity can make a lot of difference later on. For example I got an MBA from UC Berkeley and I could be recruited from global strategy and then that experience made me a little bit differentiate from other people, in terms of global recruiting...

Jarvis: So it provided you with a totally different job opportunity within the company?

Jay: So, little, little, little, then it is summed up, then it can make a lot of difference.

Jarvis: I see. Do you think that if you weren’t working in [this conglomerate] where there is a global strategy team or group, would this still be the case? Is it important to come back to the right company to use your foreign skills?

Jay: Yes, yes it is true but even though you went to an organization that doesn’t require that skill set or that experience, eventually that experience stood out and then I believe some opportunity would be given at the right time.

Little by little Jay was provided opportunities to distinguish himself. These opportunities add up to something substantial over time. When I spoke with Bart, an executive search consultant, I asked him about how career trajectory and positions in companies are different for foreign educated returnees. Bart explained that foreign educated Koreans from good schools can work in global positions like “global marketing or the kind of strategy planning part. Some people, the global sales team.” He said Ivy League degrees were comparable to SKY schools but could result in even faster promotion if returnees performed well.

Jarvis: Why can they be promoted faster?
Bart: You know... the viewpoint of globalization. Most of Korean Chaebol companies just look at the global market, not the Korean domestic market. Therefore, the globalized people, they want globalized people.

Jarvis: What if the person is not from Ivy League, but a lower ranked American school, a middle ranked American school? Do they have the same advantage?

Bart: Not advantageous. It’s much lower than Korean SKY...

Jarvis: If they are competing with another person with a SKY degree, how do they compare? Much lower?

Bart: Much lower... actually below middle class in the United States, Chaebol HR team just they are regarding, ‘oh this is not a good university’. So in that case they just can select the SKY student.

Bart confirms what Jay and Ben suggested. There are teams and positions in which global cultural capital can uniquely qualify returnees. They are provided with good chances to succeed if they perform well. What Bart adds to this are two important caveats. First, the local elite schools remain highly competitive. Bart said graduates from SKY schools do essentially the same things as Ivy League graduates. According to him, staying can be as helpful in your career as going abroad, if you stay and attend an elite Korean school. Second, the career trajectory can be altered if the foreign degree is a top school. Graduates from schools outside of the top schools are even worse off than those with elite Korean degrees. This points to an important element that will be the focus of the next section: These positions are extremely competitive. Not everyone with a foreign degree can qualify for these best positions and sometimes not going at all may even be a better strategy

In specific contexts, teams and jobs, global cultural capital can include skills that are valued in the right fields. For example, proficiency and confidence in English that is tied to work related knowledge can be very valuable in occupations where communication crosses borders. In research positions, government ministries and global business jobs there is the need to be able to connect with non-Koreans. Through their international school
connections and experience connecting with people while they studied overseas, returnees have the confidence and experience to collaborate and negotiate with non-Koreans in meaningful ways. Returnees also believe that their time abroad learning in a very different educational environment has helped them to be more adaptive and more easily able to consider new ideas. This experience in innovative environments prepares them for occupations that require new ideas, or at least gives them the confidence to assert their ideas.

And yet, as I will discuss, these benefits do not apply to all forms of global cultural capital and to any Korean work field. The examples in this section have all come from Koreans with high volumes of global cultural capital working within the right context or fields. The government has ministries that work very closely with other nations and need confident and competent internationally experienced officials. Research teams like Shawn's work in a Korean research lab in a famous Korean conglomerate, but the technology is particularly new and the expertise largely resides outside of Korea. Information is mostly in English and collaborations are vital to success. Joon worked for an international marketing firm and now works for one of Korea’s largest conglomerates, but in a foreign office. Kim is on the global team for a Korean conglomerate that has a partnership with a very large American company. Ben and Jay worked in global strategy for a huge Korean conglomerate with an entire team of expat hires for years. These are very specific fields that recognized and enabled the use of their skills.
DIMINISHING RETURNS

For most Koreans returning from university overseas, the benefits discussed in the previous section are not easily accessed. There is a stratification of global cultural capital. Some degrees are worth more. The high-end rewards still exist, but the field Koreans are returning to has changed. Today it is more competitive. Competition among foreign educated Koreans has increased as the best positions are coveted by more and more returnees and are often screened by international school rankings. The fields they are returning to are not the same as the time immediately following the Asian economic crisis. Korean companies are stronger economically, are in a better position to more carefully assess global talent, and have more returnees to choose from. There is now a longer history and track record for Korean companies to use in evaluating talent, and unfortunately the first generation of Korean global talent did not perform as well as was expected. The lasting impression today is that returnees in the past were more expensive, their performance wasn’t better, and they struggled to fit into the Korean companies. Finally, there is greater competition from Koreans who did not attend universities overseas. Locally educated Koreans have been strategically obtaining global cultural capital through internationalized Korean universities and short-term language study overseas. They have strong local networks and high volumes of local cultural capital. They are global enough and experts in Korean corporate culture. They are often perceived to be everything returnees are not.
Changing Korean Field

Too Much Supply

As mentioned in Chapter 2, social fields are dynamic and changing. Fields are the location wherein social actors are competing (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). It is in these fields that competition occurs. Fields and cultural capital are connected in that the fields are where the dominant forms of cultural capital are legitimized. After the Asian Economic Crisis, Korean business fields changed dramatically. Before the Asian economic crisis high volumes of local social and cultural capital were the most valued forms of cultural capital. After the Korean economy was forced to more fully adopt neoliberal economic policies and open its economy, global forms of cultural and social capital became increasingly valued. I believe this is changing again. One of the reasons the field is changing and no longer valuing high volumes of global cultural capital like it once did, is that there are so many more Koreans with foreign education. For example, Seung (2012) reports that returnees to Korea between the ages of 21-30, who were abroad for more than a year, nearly doubled from 23,710 in 2002 to 40,113 in 2010. This was reflected in my interviews with evaluators and foreign educated returnees themselves. Foreign degrees are not as valuable as they once were. The peak time to have a foreign degree was the period from the late 1990s through early 2000s. But as Jay explained, the numbers of returnees have grown since then.

Jay: So, so many people got MBA... So from time to time I talk to my juniors about getting an MBA... I’m class of 2003... And even at that time getting an MBA was not that special, but somewhat special. But these days so many people want to go overseas to get an MBA. So, it’s not the time to get a privilege from your MBA. It’s the time to get an MBA not to get demerit.

Ben also received an MBA at a similar time and had also seen a similar devaluation due to increased supply.
Jarvis: How did your MBA help you get a job at [large Korean conglomerate]?

Ben: It was helpful because when I get back in 2002 there is not many Koreans who got an MBA. Comparing demand and supply. Demand is much higher than supply. However, at this point, there are so many Koreans who study abroad, like not only undergrad and MBA, right now the supply is much higher than demand.

Jarvis: So it has become less valuable than when you came back?

Ben: Yeah, Yeah.

Thomas explained that a foreign degree in the 1990s was similar to having a degree from an elite Korean university, even an undergraduate degree from abroad.

Thomas: I realized the degree... I think at the time I got my first job at LG Electronics, it was very critical I think... if I went to Korean university like, Seoul National University or Yonsei or Korea University, like those top tiered universities. At the time of 1999 it was very helpful for me to get a nice job. Just like I got a degree from a top class Korean university. It’s very helpful. Compared with now, now, not as much as before. I think because there are a lot more people who study abroad so there is more competition. Still I think it is very helpful.

Jarvis: So at that time very helpful but now maybe less so? Now are the Korean degrees becoming more valuable against the foreign degrees?

Thomas: No, this doesn’t mean Korean degrees are more valuable than foreign degrees. But just in terms of getting foreign degrees before it was more valuable than now I think. Because there were not many people doing it, compared with now.

Thomas also believed that even the foreign MBA degrees are decreasing in value because, “it’s really not that unique at all to have graduate on your resume.” As a result returnees need something else like “work experience” or a “certain kind of certification from overseas.”

Haley explained that in the legal profession too, there are now many foreign degrees. Unless returnees have something else to distinguish themselves, it would have been better to stay in Korea.

Jarvis: Which do you think is more valuable?
Haley: To be in Korea only, I don’t think foreign experience is necessary. And I would actually advise, from my perspective, if they’re ever thinking, or anyone who wants to go to an American law school because it’ll give them an advantage in Korea, I’m like listen, there are so many of you out there that, you have to really bring something else to the table. I mean, it’s best to just stay in Korea and go to Seoul Dae (University) and do all the things you’re supposed to do in Korea well, because listen, like I know so many people who speak English well and do all these things. And you’ve got to really be able to bring something else to the table.

Finally, Gene also emphasized the need for something more than just a foreign degree.

Because the numbers have increased, Koreans returning have to add something else. The ideal is adding foreign work experience.

Gene: So another reason why it’s not as important is because now when you, for a lack of a better example, before if you had 10 CVs, one person might have a US university on there. Now if you have 10 CVs, you probably have 3 or 4 that have US or overseas university degrees on there. So versus that, they tend to like people who have actually worked overseas.

While the foreign degree still has status associated with many of the world’s most prestigious institutions of higher learning, it is not as unique as it once was. Unless the number of positions or the demand for these skills is increasing at the same rate, the increased number of returning foreign educated Koreans naturally decreases the value of the credential. In the South Korean business field the demand has not increased to match the supply. I argue that this is partly a result of foreign educated returnees’ disappointing performance and problems with fit in Korean firms.

Returnee Performance

Disappointing Performance, Worse Fit

The experience of studying abroad makes foreign educated Koreans feel exceptional. As I have discussed, they believe their training, skills, experiences and connections make them
better workers. As I explained, their global cultural capital has given them confidence. But how have they performed in the fields they have returned to? In many instances, their performance was described as disappointing.

Human resource personnel at Korean conglomerates expressed concerns with the performance of foreign educated returnees. Despite the high potential of global knowledge and English ability, their performance was often poorly regarded in a Korean business field where local cultural capital is still so dominant. Often their unique global abilities were overshadowed by their cultural differences or at times indifference to Korean business culture. For many, their performance was heavily influenced by overvaluing their foreign credential, their long period of time living abroad, general inexperience working in the Korean workplaces and general low volumes of local cultural capital.

For example, when I asked Kyle, (HR, Korean conglomerate) who performs better between the foreign and the locally educated Koreans, he responded:

Kyle: Actually, honestly [locally educated Koreans] are high performers in [the] company. Rather than foreign educated, in terms with performance.

Jarvis: So why is that, why do you think that is?

Kyle: As I told you, [locally educated] know. They know how to work in Korea, how to interact with other people, how to follow the company’s policy, even [if] they [have] the other intentions... they usually follow the company’s big picture. But, the other hand... [foreign educated] are a little bit... individualistic... So they sometimes, some employees with [PhD from abroad] feel, I think, because I have so many personal interview with them... they feel like ‘I’m a PhD in Stanford University, how can I do a little tiny thing in this company? Why [did] they hire me?’ They [are] always curious about it. Why, why, why... it is sometimes necessary, but too much concern about that maybe is not good for their performance.

In this quote Kyle definitively states that foreign educated are worse performers. However he also shows that it’s difficult separating performance from returnee inability to adjust to
the rules of the Korean business field. He mentions the unappealing manner by which they are showing dissatisfaction with their responsibilities and uses a buzzword, “individualistic”, as something typical of returnees. I found this to be common among evaluators in Korean business fields. Performance was expressed in terms of employee fit.

Jose (HR, Korean conglomerate) also mentions the cultural clashes foreign educated employees experience as they work in Korean fields. Fit stands in the way of performance or is intricately connected to how performance is being perceived.

Jarvis: So do you think [graduates from overseas] have an advantage?
Jose: No.
Jarvis: Do they work better or worse?
Jose: I think in fact, worse I think.
Jarvis: Why is that?
Jose: Because their job, many of the jobs in our company, are still based on Korean culture. So there is some personal conflict. But the jobs people who studied abroad can do better is [increasing]... Maybe in 5 or 3 years our culture will change and they can do more things in our company, because under this kind of Korean culture it’s more difficult to [perform].

Gene (HR, international search firm) also describes this pattern of high expectations, general disappointment and cultural difficulties.

Gene: A lot of the Korean companies first just hired people straight out of school or who graduated from good universities. And obviously they speak well, they articulate well. They've learned certain, like, theories that are very new in business and things like that. But once they got to Korea, performance-wise they didn't really see a difference between them or someone who graduated from Yonsei or Seoul National. The other thing, a lot of these guys, also because the cultural differences, some, most of them couldn’t adjust and left early. So they realized that there wasn’t really much of a big merit going after these people and giving them larger salaries and trying to court them to come. So that’s why now they still go over to the States to recruit straight out of school but their salaries are almost the same as someone coming out of a Korean school.
For Korean firms, this pattern was especially disappointing considering the high potential foreign educated Koreans bring to the workplace and the high expectations HR and executives had for these hires. According to evaluators like Gene, the Korean business field has adapted to a track record of poor adjustment and similar or worse performance by paying foreign educated similar salaries and hiring fewer of them.

Finally, Peter (HR, Korean conglomerate) and Charles (Senior Executive, Korean conglomerate) both spoke about the problems some returnees present, including arrogance, unrealistic expectations and a difficulty working the “Korean way”.

Peter: But from MBA school, those people are very, I think very, they have some kind of a global view and very innovative, but you know the work, they cannot do the work just by themselves. They need some help from the organization. And it’s very hard to get their help. So, so that’s going to be the key point… some people who graduate from Harvard and, ‘Oh I’m from Harvard and I’m very good, I’m the only one’ and then they cannot easily succeed in their relations.

He also went on to describe some other instances of returnee miscues.

Peter: This is my perception… I don’t know but, they [foreign educated employees] are like more individual… in Korea, drinking together is very important, but usually they are like very separated isolated from the group normally… Korea style is very, like very, [locally educated Koreans] are very diligent and they don’t go back home early at 9 to 10pm because they’re accustomed to [it], they’re used to studying here and they used to working like that. Some people from the States they just studied when they want to study. They work just like that, so I think it’s very hard to, hard to change their working style.

Charles describes very similar problems, but in a completely different conglomerate.

Charles: Because, the first thing is that far below than his expectation from company. ‘I studied at Harvard and Wharton school and George Washington University… Oh I must be manager level because I have a certain background instead of working on step line’, or something like that. Far below than his expectations that… so they cannot wait… The second thing is the salary. Of course the second thing is somewhat similar to expectation, but we cannot give much more salary than the other worker who graduated from, who studied locally in Korea. So it depends on his results or performance and he
wants to get much more salary. As he says, ‘I spent much more money than that guy, local person. So I have to get more.’ This is nonsense. The third thing is that he wants, they want to American way. Advanced lifestyle. That kind of thing.

Jarvis: In what ways do they want the American way? Working differently at the hours? Lifestyle? For example did they not want to work as long or not on the weekend? What kind of things did they want?

Charles: They, not only the working timeframe but also they told me some negative approach for everything. So like, ‘Oh that’s stupid’ or something like that. They say, ‘My study at Wharton school was so on and so on and so on.’ And ‘Morgan Stanley make a decision on so on and so on and so on and this way is different.’ But this company is not Morgan Stanley. We have no connection with Morgan Stanley. That’s what they expect.

By the way Peter and Charles talk about returnees, we can see there is a clear perception that time spent abroad changes Koreans. The dispositions or cultural signals they are sending or responding to, are not matching up with what is commonly expected in the local Korean business field. This is affecting their evaluation. Despite high levels of very instrumental global cultural capital, they are struggling to reintegrate and fit into the Korean work field.

Locally educated Koreans who work alongside foreign educated Koreans provide important insight into where the problems with reintegration often are. There is a sense among locally educated employees in these companies that the foreign educated Koreans and especially Korean-Americans, although Koreans, do not represent Korean values.

Mark I think they [Korean-American & Foreign Educated] have great capability, but I think sometimes they didn’t understand our culture. Even, for example... they don’t want to work overtime, even though they have don’t have any work [to do]. But in our case, we should work overtime even though we don’t have any work because our supervisor stayed here in our department.... Some colleagues didn’t understand their behavior... everyone [thought] that [Korean-American & Foreign Educated] will not work for our company very long.... They are very good at speaking English... a big strength for them. But... some people think some [Korean-American & foreign educated Koreans] have difficulty working in domestic companies because we have, as
I said before, we have our own business culture or also drinking culture. So some people didn’t understand that. So after working [for a] short time, they will, they moved to another global company like Ziemans or GE or GM.

According to Mark, there is almost a confusion among the locally educated Koreans as to why the Korean-Americans and to a lesser extent the foreign educated, just don’t get it or why they don’t understand that the business culture requires certain behaviors. It’s as though part of the global cultural capital Korean-Americans have acquired in a lifetime abroad and foreign educated Koreans have acquired in their time abroad, projects a foreignness that is confusing to their locally educated coworkers. Another locally educated coworker, Emily, described the difficulty foreign educated returnees appear to have with the constraints of the Korean work field.

Ja[vis]: You said if [foreign educated workers] have too much westernizing, maybe it doesn’t work or it’s harder for them to fit in?

Emily: Actually I have a friend... not a friend but I just know her, she graduated from our university (SNU) and then she had her MBA or masters [from] France... I met her here and then she was on a different team... like after a week she told me that ‘I cannot understand people here’, and I’m just like ‘why, why is that?’, and she was like ‘even though it’s already 6:30pm, these people are not leaving’. And she said, ‘I think these people aren’t leaving... not because they have work to do, just because they are like, trying to look good... They are wondering if our boss is going to go or not. If I leave now before my boss leaves would it look bad...’ So she was quite angry about the fact and she was like, ‘I cannot understand people here’ .... She was always like, ‘why are they staying until like 7:00, when we can leave 6:30?’ and all that. Anyway, and I heard that she quit already, like a week ago and she was like ‘I cannot work with these people here’.

Again, Emily is highlighting the confusion some returnees have with the tacit rules of the Korean business field. The expectation to work late hours, something very common in the Korean workplace, seemed unacceptable to this foreign educated returnee, as was the need to maintain that appearance of diligence or loyalty. Her quitting furthers the narrative that returnees don’t get it and lack loyalty.
Finally Sara, a fabulous English speaker and a true model of the globalized locally educated Korean, had a very interesting view on returnees.

JJ: Why is it better to go to a Korean school?

Sara: I think it’s because of the people. And since the majority of Koreans graduate from Korean universities, so it’s easier to relate to people to find seniors or to find alumni members who are willing to support their juniors. And because they graduated from a Korean university, they tend to prefer someone from a Korean university with a global perspective.... If [foreign educated Koreans] just come back straight after graduation, I would hear comments from my seniors at the company saying, ‘she’s so different’, and saying that they ‘don’t understand it’ because it’s not as if that person, he or she, is Korean-American, or completely flat out... American. But they have this very, some aspects are very Korean, some aspects are very American and because they don’t have working experience, I don't think they’re able to hide it as well.

Sara identifies two crucial elements of why performance has been seen as unfavorable.

First, she mentions the importance of networks. Sara describes these networks as “supporting” junior employees. I believe this same network has expressed concern to her about the behaviors of the foreign educated returnees. She benefits from the insight immensely, understanding what attributes to project and “hide” especially as an employee so good at English, people mistake her for foreign educated or Korean American. Foreign educated Koreans without a local network, have no such insight, no protection. Second, the behaviors and attitudes some returnees project, their embodied global cultural capital, is seen as unfamiliar and strange coming from a Korean. While I, as a foreigner, could project these attitudes and have some latitude, it is less acceptable for a Korean to be making the same mistakes. As Sara says, many need to “hide” these behaviors and generally haven’t done so. Jay also described something very similar. If returnees are not sensitive to the common stereotype that returnees are thought of as a “different person with a different
kind of mentality or way of thinking”, they will quickly be labeled as such. He had to “prove I am the same person like you.”

The Increasingly Competitive Korean Worker

As seen by the difficulty foreign educated returnees can have, success in the Korean work field is not simply about acquiring global cultural capital at the expense of local capital. Success is instead a carefully choreographed performance highlighting elements of both forms of cultural capital at the appropriate times. What makes the cultural mistakes more pronounced for returnees is how well locally educated Koreans navigate the Korean field. For locally educated Koreans, their ability to fit in to the Korean field is their strength and global skills have been their weakness. Of importance to them is whether adding global cultural capital through the internationalized Korean higher education and short-term language study is making them global enough. Based on my interviews of evaluators working in Korea, it is helping them. Through these strategies, locally educated Koreans have found a way to reproduce enough of the valued features in the foreign educated, while maintaining the local cultural and social capital needed to succeed in the Korea work world. As Ken, a Korean CEO of an international trading firm expressed to me, "without a doubt the differences between the two applicants are narrowing."

According to many of the respondents I spoke with, short-term study abroad has become a standard practice among locally educated applicants. For example, Emily, who was a locally educated Korean working on a global team in a large Korean conglomerate, described how the popularity of this educational strategy has arisen out of the desperate need for having some sort of global experience on your resume.
Emily: Nowadays... everyone is trying to get a job and everyone knows that it's easier for you to get a job if you have foreign experience, whatever that is. So nowadays... university students they don't graduate after finishing their work. They spend like 6 months or at least 1 year like going to USA or whatever to learn language and they will spend like 6 months to go to Europe or... go to Australia for 2 years if possible... or some would go to Japan... everyone is trying to get those experiences abroad.

This short-term study abroad has a very visible payoff: better English speaking ability. The payoff is the most visible form of global cultural capital and does not require a very nuanced global understanding to be recognized back in Korea. When I spoke with human resource personnel and even foreign educated Koreans regarding the competitiveness of locally educated Koreans, many recognized a vast improvement in global skills by the locally educated. It appears the internationalization of Korean higher education is not only closing the gap in ability but also affecting the value of global cultural capital obtained through foreign degrees.

Jarvis: Are the foreign degrees in business decreasing in value?

Kyle: I think in Korea, it's not [a] decreasing or increasing thing. But I can expect from Korean degree students, more globalized things than before. I mean, for example, at this school we only use English. We have a lot of students from outside [of Korea]. So, even though Korean students do not go to the United States, they can understand, they can learn some kinds of things from the global schools... Korean degree value is increasing I think.

Jarvis: So the expectations of what the Korean degree holder has...

Kyle: Is increasing

Kyle (HR, Korean conglomerate) suggests that locally educated Koreans are able to do more, as a result of their experiences at internationalized Korean universities (see Chapter 5). He was impressed with how much these global programs helped with English and cultural familiarity with foreign professors and students.
Charles (Senior Executive, Korean conglomerate) and Theo (General Manager, foreign company) both agreed that the global abilities of locally educated Koreans have been improving.

Jarvis: Over time, is the foreign education becoming more or less valuable? Over the last 10 or 15 years?

Charles: Nowadays, less valuable. Reducing in value.

Jarvis: Why is it reducing?

Charles: Because Korean local university, college, they’re adopting foreign curriculums and through the easy communication, they understand what those advanced universities are teaching them.

Jarvis: So the Korean universities are improving?

Charles: Yes, yes improving.

Jarvis: Is the value decreasing?

Theo: Yes, I think the value is decreasing. The reason is that firstly there is not much merit/advantage given to the foreign degrees due to overflowing candidates and secondly the language (mainly English) skill can be achieved even in Korea at much cheaper costs.

Both Charles and Theo frame the reducing value of foreign education in terms of the increasing value of the global cultural capital that locally educated Koreans are acquiring. Because foreign and locally educated candidates are seen as competing, for these two executives, one’s loss is the other’s gain. Also of importance is that locally educated Koreans are seen as cheaper.

Jarvis: Do you think that they are losing their competitive edge? The foreign educated Korean returnees?

Joseph: Yes I do.

Jarvis: When do you think that started to occur?

Joseph: Probably in the last 3 to 5 years.
Jarvis: If you were to sort of summarize what it is, why that is, what would you say?

Joseph: Kids being educated in Korea are starting to have more global experiences as they’re growing up. Their English is getting better. They’ve traveled, they’ve seen a little bit more. And so at [Korean conglomerate] we’re finding we can get that skill set in Korea, cheaper than going overseas and getting a foreign educated Korean.

Jarvis: And without the headaches of some of these integration problems?

Joseph: You got it.

Joseph (Global HR, Korean conglomerate) describes these candidates as having improved English ability, more global experiences and fewer problems. They were simply a better fit in the company. This combination of local and global, or this balance of the two cultural capitals, is what many Korean companies can most easily use. As Gene suggested, Korean corporations have reevaluated their hiring of expensive global talent. Now, Koreans with high volumes of local cultural capital (elite local degrees) who had developed impressive English speaking ability through short-term language study abroad and had attended a Korean university that offered more English language classes from foreign professors, can present a persuasive alternative to global talent. Local cultural capital with a healthy dose of global cultural capital lite is competitive.

**Outcome of a Changing Field: Decreased Demand**

One way of measuring the changing Korean business field is recent hiring policy at Korean companies. HR personnel I interviewed in some of Korea’s most desirable and traditional landing sites for foreign educated Koreans (LG, Samsung, Hyundai and SK), described how the value of foreign education was changing as far as employment prospects. Sam (HR, Korean conglomerate) described a changing trend in hiring practices away from foreign educated Koreans.
Sam: In the early 2000s Korean corporations were expanding globally, and this coincided with the trend of recruiting foreign MBAs... There was not an official announcement in terms of recruiting, but now the company is extremely selective about recruiting... for example in the 1990s, if Korean students graduated from top 5 MBA schools, for example Wharton, MIT, Stanford, we would recruit as many as possible... These days, for example, if someone studied very hard and graduated with a Cornell MBA, it would be hard for them to get a job. These days we are not able to hire them like in the past.

Sam very clearly describes a trend in his company's hiring practices. It was easier up until the early 2000s to get a job as an MBA student in this conglomerate but now it has become much more difficult. They are still hiring, but it's becoming harder. Peter, another Korean working in HR in a different Top 5 conglomerate, mentioned the same thing.

Peter: Well, some of them can get a good job, but I mean it’s very hard. It’s very hard... I think they believe they can get a good job after graduating from the MBA school and then come back to Korea. But most of them you know [are]... working as some kind of a English teacher like CMAT teacher... So maybe they hope... they’re going to be working in like Novistell in Korea... and then Samsung... something like that, but actually it’s not that easy.

Peter adds that despite the optimism that their degrees will translate occupationally, foreign educated returnees are likely to be disappointed or unhappy with the reality of the Korean business field. The job offers and salaries do not meet their expectations. Joseph (Global HR, Korean conglomerate) explains how this has led to decreased demand for even the elite globally credentialed.

Jarvis: Are Koreans with foreign degrees ever less valuable or less recruited than Koreans with local degrees?

Joseph: It can be harder for a foreign educated student to get a job compared to a locally educated student. Many educated overseas come back expecting their market salary to be based on the American markets. They are often disappointed to hear their salary will be significantly less... They know that, they've studied overseas. They know that their market, the market for them should be higher than Koreans who've gone to a top SKY school and they have higher expectations. Especially for certain schools. That’s one of the reasons we won't hire Koreans or non-Koreans out of MIT or Harvard as
their expectations on their job roles and responsibilities as well as their compensation are too high for what [Korean conglomerate] is able to offer.

Jarvis: How long has that been going on? Have you guys not been looking to hire the people from those places?

Joseph: We haven’t hired from an Ivy League for about 6 years.

Jarvis: Really? So they want too much money?

Joseph: Some of them want too much money. Other ones we feel that their mindset or their work ethic or, what they’ve got going on is not a good fit for our culture. They don’t fit in with the other people inside the company, to be honest.

The Korean business fields that were once in desperate need for workers with high volumes of global cultural capital have changed. Not only do they have more foreign educated returnees to choose from than ever, but they have learned that employees with a more balanced combination of local and global cultural capital may fit better. Koreans only able to highlight their global abilities find the field less inviting, especially if they expect more money and greater responsibility. What is most broadly valued now is a combination or hybrid of these two forms of capital, local and global.

Jarvis: So you would say at the undergraduate level it’s not an advantage anymore at [this large Korean conglomerate] to have a foreign degree?

Joseph: No, it’s not... In fact it may be a disadvantage to have a foreign degree right now, foreign undergraduate degree. To have a Korean undergrad, where you’ve built your network, and then you work a little bit and then you go to the States for a graduate degree in engineering or chemistry or something like that. One of core areas, and then come back, that gives you a leg up, on the promotion. You may get a year ahead of everybody else you might get promoted. But, for the undergrad, no.

From these accounts in this chapter we see that there are specific ways and locations where global cultural capital is highly valued and rewarded. And yet the value of global cultural capital as a whole is consistently described as decreasing. I find this to be the result of the increase in the number foreign educated degree holders, the perceived poor
performance and fit of foreign degree holders and the global cultural capital Koreans are able to obtain in Korean universities and through short term language study. A foreign degree has become a variable used to assess potential and skillset, not the variable that makes all the difference. Korean companies have gotten more sophisticated and have had more time to understand what they are looking for. As Gene explains:

Gene: Recently when we look at candidates, the schooling part has gotten little bit less important versus the past... somebody who... just went to school, without the work experience it’s not as big of a gap versus somebody who has just stayed in Korea... I think more and more companies are looking for relevant experience rather than just the background. Like before I think there was a time when having an MBA was definitely good. Like if you had two candidates, somebody with a top MBA and somebody with not, that would make a big difference... But now, companies are finding out that just because you hire somebody smart, book smart, that doesn’t necessarily mean that that person is going to perform well, because at the end of the day you’re looking for individual skillsets, but also you’re looking for a team player.

PLACING THE RESPONDENTS

Returning to the foreign educated respondents I interviewed, where did they land? How well did they reintegrate and how does their variation in global cultural capital and the timing of when they left, influence this? Looking at tables 7.1 and 7.2 we see some interesting differences within this group of foreign educated Koreans. Many returnees found excellent jobs in prestigious companies that valued their skills. Some used their global cultural capital to change their careers, while others used it to upgrade their career. However, some returnees were more frustrated with their reintegration into the Korean work field.

Among the Early Exiters (Table 7.1) I interviewed, four out of ten landed in multinational companies, foreign branches of Korean companies or non-traditional
companies like startups (Harry, Eunice, Joon, Phil). A fifth, Brian, was recruited to manage a
global division in a Korean conglomerate, got fired from that job and had not found a new
job when I interviewed him. He hinted that he might teach English instead because it was
good pay and “less annoying”. Joon, who first struggled upon returning to Korea because of
his lack of local network, first worked at an international marketing and research firm in
Seoul. He then used an MBA to get a job at one of Korea’s largest conglomerates, but in their
New York office. He found a job where he can work between the Korean home office and
the American customers/purchasers. The other five Early Exiters (Haley, Kaitlin, Kami,
Thomas and Julie), all work for large Korean conglomerates like LG, Samsung and Daewoo
in very globally oriented contexts (e.g. International Law, Biotechnology, International
Business).

Eight of sixteen Late Exiters (Table 7.2) studied abroad under company sponsorship
(Dr. J, Leane, Dan, Cory, Paul, Kim, Kevin and Colin) which makes it much more difficult to
change occupations. Because of the financial investment by the company, returnees would
have to buy their way out of their commitment. As a result, they all remained at the
company or in the government ministries that had sent them abroad. A few years after
returning to the Korean government from their study abroad, both Kevin and Colin
received foreign assignments (to Japan and to Indonesia). As described earlier, these
assignments are hard to get without foreign education and are prerequisites for the best
positions in the government. These foreign assignments are important opportunities to
perform and are signals they are on successful tracks within the government. For Koreans
with company sponsorships, global cultural capital was a career enhancer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>When Left</th>
<th>Reasons For Foreign Degree</th>
<th>Where they Landed</th>
<th>Problems with Reintegration?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Best Credentials, Best Skills, Critical of Korean education</td>
<td>Senior Manager - Large Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Yes - Highly critical. Management style questioned. Fired from Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Best Credentials, Particular Degree</td>
<td>Lawyer - Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Yes - Has to work hard to fit in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Best Credentials, Global Experiences, a different life</td>
<td>Senior Associate - Multinational Company</td>
<td>Yes - Highly critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunice</td>
<td>Before High School</td>
<td>Global Experiences, Parents wanted her avoid the stress</td>
<td>Marketing Manager - Large Multinational Company</td>
<td>Yes - Won't work in Korean conglomerate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>In High School</td>
<td>Global Experiences, Wanted to stay</td>
<td>CEO - Start up</td>
<td>Yes - Won't work in Korean conglomerate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlin</td>
<td>In High School</td>
<td>Avoid Korean College Entrance Stress. No stress in Canada</td>
<td>Research Engineer - Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>No - Did a Masters in Korea after returning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kami</td>
<td>After High School</td>
<td>Failed to get into good Korean school, Frustrated with culture</td>
<td>Research Engineer - Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Yes - Major difficulty adjusting to Korean business culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joon</td>
<td>After High School</td>
<td>Failed to get into good Korean school, More freedom</td>
<td>Manager - Top 3 Korean Conglomerate Foreign Office</td>
<td>Yes - Had no Local Social Network, Military helped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>After High School</td>
<td>Always wanted to go abroad</td>
<td>Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>During Undergrad</td>
<td>Better Skills, More Challenges, Upgrade University</td>
<td>Project Team Associate - Large Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.1 Foreign Educated Upon Return - Early Exiters
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>When Left</th>
<th>Ranking of Local School Attended</th>
<th>Reasons for Going</th>
<th>Where They Landed</th>
<th>Problems with Reintegration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. J</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Skills, Career Upgrade</td>
<td>Stayed in Government - Blue House</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leane</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Always wanted to go abroad</td>
<td>Stayed in Government</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Career Change, Skills, Add to SKY Undergrad</td>
<td>Changed to Global Investment Firm</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Career Change, US Law School offered unique skills</td>
<td>US Law Firm</td>
<td>Still Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Global Career, language study wasn't enough</td>
<td>Top 3 Korean Conglomerate, Global Strategy &amp; Recruitment</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Global Skills, Career Upgrade</td>
<td>Stayed in Government</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Going was the reward</td>
<td>Stayed at Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Somewhat - Frustrated with Korean Hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>SKY</td>
<td>Skills and Network</td>
<td>Stayed at Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Yes - Couldn't get the same pay, trying to make changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Career Upgrade</td>
<td>Research Engineer - Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Yes - Has had to change his work style. Military helped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Career Upgrade</td>
<td>Stayed at Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Somewhat - Had to manage expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Global Experiences</td>
<td>Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Global Experiences, Going was the reward</td>
<td>Stayed in Government</td>
<td>Somewhat - Frustrated with lack of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>Top 10</td>
<td>Global Experiences, International Network, Career Upgrade</td>
<td>Stayed in Government</td>
<td>Somewhat - Trying to make changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>After Korean Masters</td>
<td>Top 20</td>
<td>Career Upgrade, Particular skills</td>
<td>Research Engineer - Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>After Undergrad</td>
<td>2nd Tier Undergrad</td>
<td>Career Change</td>
<td>Senior Foreign Attorney - Top 3 Korean Law Firm</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>After Korean Masters</td>
<td>2nd Tier Undergrad, SKY Grad</td>
<td>Always wanted to go abroad</td>
<td>Top 3 Korean Conglomerate</td>
<td>Yes - Dealing with Korean Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the eight *Late Exiters* who were not company sponsored when they studied abroad, all had changed companies and were working in different jobs after returning. Six of them (Jay, Jim, Ben, Jo, Lee and Janice) were now working in very large Korean companies (conglomerates or a large law firm). Many are working in some of Korea’s best positions (Global Strategy, Executive Recruiter, Senior Attorney). Franklin, who works at a global investment firm and John, who is presently working for a law firm in the United States, are not working for Korean companies. For the *Late Exiters* who were not on company sponsorships, global cultural capital represents career changes and career upgrades. For example, Franklin worked as an IT consultant in a Korean firm but now works in finance for a global investment firm. He said in Chapter 5 that he lacked “any business background... so that’s why I decided to get an MBA.” He used his new technical skills and moved up to a more prestigious job in one of the world’s largest asset management firms.

John used his foreign degree to move laterally to a different career, patent law, which better capitalized on his unique language ability and career in computer engineering. He has used his foreign credential, previous experience and language ability to now work in the United States. He is adding to his global cultural in the way Gene and other evaluators recommended the most. He will be able to return to Korea with what is perhaps the most valued form of global cultural capital in the present work field, foreign work experience. By adding a global degree, John has the most prestigious local cultural capital (Seoul National University), and some of the most difficult to obtain global cultural capital (a JD and foreign work experience).
While they were able to find employment, perhaps the most interesting finding from the returnees I called *Early Exiters* is that they were much more likely to have problems with reintegration. Despite having high volumes of global cultural capital, *Early Exiters* had the least experience working in Korea, the worst networks and had been away from Korea the longest. They had the lowest volumes of local cultural and social capital. From table 7.1 we see some common problems, which include difficulty adjusting, being critical of Korean business culture, or lacking a local social network. This led to a very difficult and disappointing reintegration experience for some returnees. For example Kami, who left Korea in disgrace over her college entrance exam scores, graduated from Columbia and was recruited to come back to Korea and work in a prestigious research lab. This could have been a triumphant return, and yet she was really struggling to fit in and understand the Korean work field.

Jarvis: So if you go abroad and get a degree, you can get a job?
Kami: Easier.
Jarvis: But once you get the job it’s harder? Or is it?
Kami: Maybe, you need to, you got to be wise, how to get along with people. For example, I think, most people, because I hang out with a lot of people who was in the states, but most people 95%, 90% they feel miserable in Korea. They feel frustrated. That’s common. Everyone told me that. I’m Korean, but Koreans do not understand me. That’s everyone’s common opinion.
Jarvis: Because you’ve changed, or because of your time abroad? What is it that they don’t accept?
Kami: They thought, you know once you live in the States for like 10 years, you’ve changed. But people don’t really accept... your changes.

She explains that other Koreans don’t understand her and she struggles to understand them. She is trying to use the global cultural capital she acquired in New York and it doesn’t
fit in this work field. The signals and dispositions that served her well abroad are met with confusion in Korea.

Jarvis: Are there other people who were educated in America in your team?

Kami: This is a little bit funny, is it confidential?... In my group... I think only 3 or 4 are foreign educated, including me, we don’t really get along with the people here. I feel like we are kind of oil on the water. I see people, those people are like floating around.

Jarvis: Do they have some of the same problems you do?

Kami: Um... the one younger one, I think you have to talk with him. He has the same problem as me. The other ones, they are quite old and they are pretty much okay. They know how to adjust themselves to society, to the group. The one told me, “don’t act like, you act like you’re in America”. And he advised me, “here in Korea you better act properly, the way in Korea”.

Jarvis: So he was like “you have to adjust to this environment”?

Kami: And he says to me, “you behave differently. You behave like an American. So you better adjust, you better change your attitude, adjust yourself”. But I didn’t know that I behaved that way, but that’s why he advised me... So I figured that, like foreign people from study abroad, they don’t really quite get along with people.

Kami’s inability to fit in was noticed by Jim, another foreign educated returnee who tried to help her. Like Sara mentioned previously, without the local cultural capital as a toolkit, Kami is not able to “hide” her globalness well enough to fit in. It is negatively affecting her reputation in the company and affecting her integration. Other Early Exiters like Phil and Eunice had lived abroad for a number of years and were reluctant to change.

Jarvis: Do they ever say we don’t do that here or if you have an idea or a meeting where you make suggestions?

Eunice: I don’t know I sometimes say I don’t, I can’t do that. Like you have to go out for team dinner, I think you should be notice at least a few days, but they just say it in the afternoon. When you are like getting ready to go home they are like, ‘oh no we are having drink’. But that’s not acceptable. I cannot accept that.

Jarvis: Do you think it’s even worse in the big Korean conglomerates?
Eunice: Yeah exactly. I don’t see myself working in that kind of environment

Some Late Exiters also experienced problems, but I found they did so much less often. Because many of the Late Exiters attended top 3 or top 10 schools in Korea, it may appear as though successful reintegration was a result of the caliber of undergraduate degree and not the timing of their exit. While the prestige of the local credentials is of course influential and helped in the reintegration process, among Late Exiters those with problems tended to be company sponsored employees who came back to Korea with meaningful experiences and weren’t used in the manner they expected, or infrequently used the hard earned global cultural capital they had worked so diligently to obtain.

Jarvis: Do you use those skills these days?

Cory: I almost never have the chance to use them these days. Because when I returned I had to change my work style back to Korean style.

Jarvis: Are you doing the same kind of work you did before you left?

Cory: It’s sad, but yes I’m doing the exact same thing I did... I really wanted to do something different so I spoke with HR and asked to be transferred to another section of Risk Management. However my ex-Boss wanted me to work with him, so I’m doing the exact same thing.

Other sponsored foreign educated returnees like Paul, really identified with the western-styled structure he studied in and expressed frustration knowing how hard it is to implement back in Korea.

Paul: ... but that is my drawback, so it’s kind of because I’m exposed to more...horizontal western culture I demand a lot of my own power... yeah I demand more horizontal culture and work place. So it’s kind of my drawback.

Jarvis: So was it an adjustment for you then to come back to the, so you go and experience western style and culture and education system when you came back to work in Korea, then did you feel like, oh I want different things?

Paul: Exactly. I did. I really want that. I really want to change some of them under my control but I failed. So for most of Korean... returner if you spend two
years, you have to spend 2 years in Korea to adjust to Korean culture (laughs).

As these examples have shown, Koreans are not leaving for foreign educational experiences at the same time or for the same reasons. Some are leaving Korea after firmly securing high volumes of local cultural and social capital and after already working in Korea. As a result, who they are as a job candidate is much more defined by their past experiences and performance. These returnees are already proven commodities that have successfully navigated Korea’s grueling college entrance process and worked in Korea. They are more familiar with what is expected, and they have shown that they can successfully work in the Korean work environment. Generally speaking, I found among the foreign educated returnees I interviewed, it was easier for the most successful group before leaving, to stay successful. After getting into the best schools in Korea, graduating, working in Korea and then getting a master’s degree abroad, these returnees successfully returned to work in some of Korea’s most prestigious and largest companies. Examples of this would include Franklin, John and Jay.

The cultural capital acquired before leaving Korea by the returnees I interviewed impacted their integration when they returned to Korea. Previous research on foreign educated returnees underemphasizes the importance of the returnees’ preexisting local cultural and social capital in this reintegration process (Kim 2011a; Waters 2009). Foreign educated Chinese and Koreans are described as successfully using global social and global cultural capital to gain access to jobs. While I also find this to be true, the success stories both authors describe are not applicable to all foreign educated returnees in general. Some
struggle without a strong local network to find a job their skills qualify them for and once they've returned and found employment, many struggle to reintegrate.

**Local Capital as an Intervening Variable**

Based on these descriptions of how local and global cultural capital and local and global social networks work together, I believe there are a few possible ways to understand this relationship. First, the combination of global and local capital can be thought of as an additive relationship, where whatever volume of local capital one has acquired, is added to whatever global capital is acquired and this combines in some beneficial way. I believe this is how most Koreans think about studying abroad and this is why it remains so popular. Based on this explanation, anything you get from your time abroad will simply be added to what you already have, or can compensate or supplement low volumes of local capital with a better or higher volume of global capital. I think there is some value in this way of explaining the relationship between these two forms of capital, as quite a few of the respondents successfully returned and upgraded or have overcome low levels of local cultural capital or no local or social cultural capital and still ended up with a good job. However, this doesn't help explain why their performance and job satisfaction were not as high. An additive explanation can’t explain the difficulties returnees with high global capital and low local capital experience when trying to reintegrate. Their combined score or volume could be high, yet without the most powerful form of capital in the work environment, they may still be unsuccessful or unhappy.

Second, the combination of these two forms of capital can be thought of as interacting with one another as far their impact on occupational success. If we think of the
different forms of capital (local and global) as ranging from high to low, when we combine the two high groups, this would logically appear to change the slope of returnees’ occupational success. Their trajectory would presumably look steeper or to be rising faster than other combinations of capital. This is how I believe HR personnel and executives explain the greater potential they see in returnees with high volumes of both local and global capital. They see some combination of the two forms of capital affecting the long-term success of these employees in the company. But again, this explanation of the relationship between global and local capital, I believe, doesn’t adequately capture what it is about having local capital that remains important in what is a globalizing work environment. How does local capital matter in this equation?

The last way of understanding the relationship between local and global capital in the Korean business field, I believe is most helpful in understanding the persistent importance of local cultural capital. This is to think of local capital as an intervening variable between global capital and local success or performance. In this way of understanding the relationship, the effect global cultural capital has on occupational success is mediated by the amount of local capital the person has. In this sense, it is not just that the highest number wins or is most valuable, or even the steepest trajectory, but that high volumes of local cultural and social capital are needed for global capital to be effective. The amount of local capital returnees have will affect not only their relationship with the occupational structure they are returning to, but also the occupational structure they return to. So how does local cultural capital intervene in the relationship between global capital and local occupational performance or success? I identify three ways it intervenes...
and affects returnee job success which are evident in the previous experiences of both foreign and locally educated respondents.

First, high levels of local capital provide mentors to help find positions, especially in Korean conglomerates. For example, when Joon returned from Australia he did not have a local network and was frustrated in not being able capitalize on what he felt was a superior educational experience in Australia.

**Joon:** I wanted to work for Korean Broadcast Company. And in broadcasting area there are kind of major schools in Korea... and most of the like producers are from that school and if you have that background it’s easier to get a job there. But I didn’t have any [producers] in Korea that graduated from Melbourne University... It was really hard to get a network. It was really hard. So I felt really frustrated... In terms of degree, I believed that I have... advantage[s] compared to [an] other university or college in Korea. But in terms of network, I totally had disadvantage... and I couldn’t really find my kind of senior who graduated from Melbourne University in Australia... it was really hard to compete with someone who [graduated] from [a] Korean university.

As Joon’s experience suggests, having alumni already situated in organizations helps fellow alumni find jobs. Joon believed that even though his skill level was high, he had no connections in companies that could hire him. This is also why some foreign educated returnees are going to Korean universities after returning, to tap into this established network of people who will look on their application and potential favorably. Joon eventually changed his career path completely, working for a multinational corporation that recognized his exceptional English skills as an asset. But without these ties, as Brian emphasized in his interview continuously, foreign educated returnees will flock to foreign companies where these networks or ties are perceived to be less essential.

Second, once in these organizations, the social network provides guidance, coaching employees to help them shape their business reputation. This includes informal meetings...
where they may tell foreign educated employees who may be unaccustomed or still re-
acculturating when to downplay their global abilities or even when to or how to hide them. Sara discussed how her behaviors were directly influenced by alumni/coworkers who intervened and helped navigate her career. Kami, who has no local social network, received only informal sanctions from coworkers who thought her behavior was inappropriate or her style too western. She sensed that coworkers grew tired of her questions and attempts at interaction. With no social network to help manage her reputation, she turned to another returnee colleague to commiserate. She told me they were both miserable and contemplating leaving the company.

Finally, returnees with higher levels of local cultural capital obtained before leaving Korea for educational purposes, despite the reverse culture shock many experience, have tools to catch on to the cues and signals being used in the Korean work environment. They are more aware of the limitations of the use of their newfound skills. Colin talked about how he had big expectations to implement changes in his work to a more western style of management, but quickly recognized the limitations. He was sensitive to the fact that he had to wait until he was in a higher position before he could use the strategies he appreciated the most from his time in the US. The transition does not seem as harsh because of their past experience in these work environments. Through their local capital they are grounded in the system, and this capital helps provide the right packaging and infrastructure to navigate the local field. It’s tempting to attribute success or performance to a global credential or training because of how helpful it still is in specific contexts, but as far as performance and career success, the local cultural and social capital makes surviving in these organizations easier. As I mentioned previously when discussing HR evaluations of
returnee performance, their global capital or skills are ignored or overlooked because they aren’t fitting in. They need this local capital to be able to use their global capital.

**THE REWARDING EXPERIENCE OF BECOMING GLOBAL PARTICIPANTS**

Cultural capital is often discussed as the step between students and occupational attainment. It is not a reward in itself, but a necessary step to a reward, the key to unlocking upward social mobility or at least preserving class position. However, the process of obtaining global cultural capital, by way of leaving one’s home country and studying in a foreign country, is itself a reward. It is a reward because through these experiences foreign educated Koreans feel like they are now authentic global participants or members of the global community. What is life altering is not just the instrumental or tangible skills acquired from the center of higher learning, but also the intangible skills and experiences acquired through the process of living in the center of higher learning. The world’s greatest universities are commonly believed to be, as Kim suggested, in the “best” countries.

For the foreign educated Koreans I interviewed there is something status elevating and deeply meaningful about “really” living in prestigious locations and having “authentic” global experiences. The process of obtaining global cultural capital, especially the cosmopolitan components of global cultural capital, was most consistently expressed as the key reward for studying abroad. I believe this is because of deep-rooted cosmopolitan ambitions. Of course returnees also expressed the reward in terms of traditional status attainment, but it was when they described the cultural and social components to this experience that the reward for studying abroad was described most meaningfully.
I find there are three key reasons why the process of becoming an active global participant is itself is such a meaningful reward for the returnees. First, studying overseas at universities in real degree programs, for extended periods of time is a way that social actors can participate in globalization. These foreign educated returnees feel like active participants or contributors to the global narrative. There is a lived component to this. They lived in high status countries, interacting and establishing friendships with foreigners. As a result they have become true connoisseurs of globalization because they have lived it themselves. This can also be understood as social closure. Acquiring this level of expertise is intensely, even painfully difficult. Obtaining global cultural capital is about participation but often this is rough participation. Along with stories of happiness and wonder, the interviews with these returnees are filled with stories of how long it took them to feel comfortable, how alone they felt and how hard they had to work to adapt and complete their degrees. Becoming a real global participant is an arduous journey.

Second, an important component of the value of global cultural capital itself is authenticity. These returnees believe that their experiences were the “real” kind of global experiences or more real than other forms of global experiences such as traveling or short-term exchanges. When I asked John about Koreans using short-term language study to narrow the English gap, he very confidently explained to me that, “I guess it will help them a lot, but let’s just say I don’t feel particularly threatened.” This is a great example of his confidence in the authentic nature of his global cultural capital. It takes time in country. It takes really studying in real courses, in real degrees and then really working in a foreign company to reach his level of language proficiency and cultural awareness. His confidence comes from the belief that short-term language sojourners can’t possibly gain enough in a
year of English study to challenge his position. This confidence represents his global status and role as authentic global participant.

Finally, their global claims of authenticity are legitimized by their revered and recognized global credentials. This credential is a certificate of authenticity that validates and “institutionalizes” (Igarashi and Saito 2014) both their instrumental and cosmopolitan claims to global cultural capital. These experiences become what returnees believe are a path to authentic participation in the global community. By participating in authentic experiences that are legitimized by a revered global credential, their ticket to a form of global citizenship is punched. They have the experience to confidently comment on what is global and evaluate the merit of the local. They also have the skills and connections to continue to cross over into the international and participate.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the benefits of studying abroad is complicated. It appears that global cultural capital can be both highly rewarding and decreasing in its value. In this chapter I have attempted to distinguish where and why global cultural capital remains particularly beneficial and why there have been such declines in the overall value. I find there are specific skills that remain especially helpful for returning foreign educated Koreans and specific occupations and teams where high volumes of global cultural capital are most rewarded. These include positions in research and development, in the government, and global oriented teams in the business sector. These employment fields are focused on interactions and collaborations between the global and the local. As a result, confident business infused English and cultural familiarity interacting with non-Koreans is needed.
And yet these occupations are not the norm. In the past 15 years since the Asian Economic crisis the Korean business field has changed and I believe global cultural capital is not as beneficial to returnees in general. This is a result of an increased supply of Koreans with foreign credentials, heightened focus on employee fit or integration, and better competition from locally educated Koreans. I also find that the time in their lives Koreans go abroad impacts their reintegration. Without the local networks, or experience in Korean educational and occupational fields, returning to work in the Korean field can be very difficult. As a result these Early Exiters were more likely to struggle and then work in multinational companies.

Finally, what may be the most consistent benefit of acquiring high volumes of global cultural capital are the authentic cosmopolitan experiences. These experiences provide great life satisfaction for foreign educated Koreans even if they do not directly translate to economic or occupational advantage. While deeply meaningful, the cosmopolitan payoff is more than a simple reflection of economic or occupational recognition. The cosmopolitan values or orientation returnees acquire may include beliefs that deemphasize the importance of monetary forms of compensation or devalue the intense educational aspirations prevalent in Korea. As global participants and authentic global cultural consumers they derive great satisfaction and status in seeing the forest from the trees.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, to understand and examine the value of global education, I have focused on a particular example: South Korea. Korea’s unique educational fervor and rapid globalization has positioned Koreans to use global forms of education at exceptionally high rates. So why are they going abroad? What do they get from this experience and what happens when they come back? These three questions are the fundamental questions that have driven this research. In the previous seven chapters I have attempted to answer these questions using over 70 qualitative interviews with locally and foreign educated Koreans and various evaluators with experience and insight from the company side of this equation.

In this chapter I will first summarize and discuss the main findings from this research, revisiting some of the most interesting and important points. I will then contextualize these findings in previous sociological literature and discuss the significance of these findings in terms of future research and policy implications. This will include a discussion of what I think these findings really mean for the Koreans themselves. I end this conclusion by briefly discussing a few important areas of future research that could add to this topic in important ways.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

In my analysis of foreign and locally educated Koreans, I have discussed a number of topics relating to global education, but I can summarize my findings in five main points. (1) Koreans studying abroad and those studying within Korea both have varying amounts of
global and local cultural capital. Because Koreans studying overseas leave at different times, for different reasons, are abroad for different lengths of time, leave Korea at different ages and pursue different types of foreign degrees, the amount of global cultural capital they acquire varies. They are not a homogenous group but vary along this global continuum. Foreign educated Koreans also vary by the amount of local cultural capital they are able to obtain before leaving to study overseas. If they left to study overseas before attending Korean universities or working in the Korean workplace, they have lower amounts of local cultural capital than Koreans who left after graduating. The same is true for locally educated Koreans. The university they attended in Korea not only provides them with varying amounts of local cultural and social capital, but also varying opportunities to acquire global cultural capital in Korea. Because the Korean government has aggressively internationalized the top universities in Korea by recruiting foreign faculty and students, Koreans graduating from these schools can obtain higher volumes of global cultural capital locally. My research has helped to show that these are not either/or categories, but that there is important nuance and variation within these categories of educational distinction. (2) When examining global cultural capital concretely, I show that the experience of global education includes a number of factors that may be instrumental or cosmopolitan in nature. These factors can be mutually reinforcing, as items like confidence allow foreign educated Koreans to use the instrumental skills they acquired while studying abroad. Also the foreign credential itself, which is more of an instrumental component of global cultural capital, reinforces and authenticates the cosmopolitan experiences. (3) There are particular occupations or business fields where global cultural capital is especially valued. These fields include positions within the government, research and development positions, and
the most globally oriented business teams or divisions within a given field (e.g. global marketing, strategy). I find these three sites share an important need of workers who can comfortably and confidently communicate and engage transnationally. Workers with educational experience overseas are particularly well suited for these positions. (4) My interviews suggest that the overall value of foreign credentials in Korea is decreasing. This seems counterintuitive given the ever-increasing globalized work world. And yet this was an overwhelmingly common sentiment shared by evaluators, locally educated Koreans and even foreign educated Koreans themselves. Explanations for this include factors such as high numbers of returnees with foreign degrees, disappointment with the first wave of returnees, a growing concern with employee fit, and increasingly competitive locally educated workers. (5) I discuss how global cultural capital and local cultural capital are used together. Local cultural and social capital are important resources that may work as a mediating variable for foreign educated Koreans returning to a Korean business field that may have very different rules and expectations than western work and educational fields. Returnees leaving earliest and with the lowest volumes of local cultural and social capital struggle the most with reintegration as a result of the lack of this local anchor to mediate the use of their global cultural capital.

**Variation within Educational Categories**

An important fact when considering the benefits of studying abroad is that those who do and do not go abroad are not a homogenous group. While often thought of in a dichotomous fashion (studied abroad/didn’t study abroad), there is variation within these groups of students as they are more accurately represented by degrees of local and global
capital. For the foreign educated student, these degrees of difference derive from the fact that students do not leave their home countries at the same time, for the same reasons or for the same duration. These are meaningful distinctions as they are related to the level of local cultural and social capital these people acquire.

For example, in Chapter 5, I presented tables separating foreign educated respondents into two groups, Early and Late Exiters. The differences between someone like Phil, who left in High School, and Ben, who left after his undergraduate degree, are huge. Both had high cosmopolitan aspirations and both were highly motivated to study abroad in order to experience life outside of Korea. But because Phil left earlier and stayed longer, he feels more western. His demeanor, his speech patterns, his attitudes about work, are less like other Koreans respondents who spent more of their lives in Korea. His global cultural capital is much more apparent. This is a benefit to Phil in that he can navigate global settings with great ease, and his approach to solutions feels especially unique in Korea. However, he also had no local network and no experience working in Korea. As a result, he is limited in what he can do and where he is most valuable. He works for a startup, which is a work environment that is low on traditional Korean work culture and best suited for his global skills and creative approaches to business. Ben had studied and worked in Korea before he left. He was a tried and tested commodity who understands the rules of the Korean field very well. His strength is not in how western he feels to westerners, but how well he can straddle the two worlds. These differences are highly correlated to when these two left Korea and the variation in local and global cultural and social capital they have.

At the same time, Koreans who are not getting university degrees abroad are globalizing too, creating their own form of global cultural capital that in many regards
replicates what is obtained while studying overseas. This has become possible through the investment of billions of dollars in the internationalization of Korean higher education. This investment has profoundly altered global opportunities for students within Korea, resulting in important changes to Korean universities such as dramatic increases in classes taught in English, foreign professors, western-style curricula, joint degrees, study abroad and short term language study. As a result, those who are not getting degrees from foreign universities are becoming more global and more competitive. This group is highlighting the most visible components of global cultural capital (English proficiency), while preserving their local cultural and social capital. This has made locally educated Koreans a very competitive alternative to the more expensive and at times poor fitting foreign educated returnees.

**Global Cultural Capital**

By examining the experiences of Koreans studying overseas through qualitative interviews I have been able to provide a concrete examination of global cultural capital. My model examines the various components of global cultural capital focusing on a few important *instrumental* and *cosmopolitan* forms. There are two things I believe are particularly interesting about examining the instrumental and cosmopolitan forms of global cultural capital. First, while the more *instrumental* forms of global cultural capital appear to be the most applicable to occupational success, the *cosmopolitan* forms of global cultural capital reinforce their value. The authenticity of global experience that is derived from “really” living abroad provides foreign educated Koreans with a foundation to confidently use their
instrumental skills. In this way I find these different components of global cultural capital are not mutually exclusive but instead mutually reinforcing.

For example, I described how many foreign educated returnees believed that they were still distinctive in Korea as a result of how confidently they were able to actually use their English ability and how they could use English in real work contexts. Having lived and studied and worked with westerners for extended periods of time, they were ready to use English, and felt that their language ability wasn’t separated from other instrumental knowledge. Their confidence in interacting with foreigners facilitated the use of their more instrumental business English language. Another example of this can be seen when Joon described in his interview that he experienced racism while living in Australia, something he had never experienced as a Korean living in Korea. This byproduct of living a global lifestyle first helped him to feel like he was really experiencing something unique. While of course painful, it was authentic. And, it later helped him in his relationships with foreign coworkers in Korea. He was able to draw on his experience of being an outsider to really understand difference and be sensitive to these differences. In fact many respondents discussed the difficulty Koreans had relating to different perspectives or acknowledging different ways of doing things if they had limited experience outside of Korea. It’s just much harder to do this if you have limited experience with very different people or cultures.

Second, by using the voices and lived experiences of those who have studied abroad, I came to recognize the importance of cosmopolitan experience in itself. Because global educational pursuits are so often discussed in their most practical and tangible forms, the payoff beyond the economic or occupational is underappreciated or ignored. I was surprised at how life-altering and rewarding living and studying overseas was for my
respondents. For many this experience was a key moment in their lives. As Jay mentioned, with his decision to study at a foreign university, he bought time. He purchased two years with his family on an adventure in an exciting location, away from his very busy work life and interacting with new and different people and cultures. So many of my respondents described these kinds of experiences, cosmopolitan experiences, as the most valuable or important thing they obtained in their time abroad.

Global cultural experiences can also be of value back in Korea by providing a form of status for foreign educated Koreans. Authentic global cultural experiences allow for returnees to display the appropriate cultural signals and tastes acquired by consuming or observing these items and practices in person. In a rapidly globalizing country like Korea, and a global city like Seoul, there are increasingly opportunities to display this global cultural knowledge at places like foreign restaurants, museums or through social media. Understanding how to eat or appreciate foreign cuisine is becoming more common in a global city like Seoul, however sophisticated appreciation for these global items can be authenticated through legitimized global cultural experiences like living overseas for an extended period of time. When returnees can signal their authentic consumption and show their familiarity with these contexts, it is often seen as impressive. Their global cultural capital is seen as legitimate. This is also seen by having western of non-Korean friends on social media, allowing for semi-public displays of foreign language ability as well as familiarity with global cultural customs and an awareness of issues and events outside of domestic circles. These behaviors signal their global experience and active participation in the globalization. Cosmopolitan experience can be a payoff in itself, a rich reward separate from economic capital.
The cosmopolitan side of global cultural capital that I identify is also the most difficult for Koreans to replicate in Korea or through the strategic and short-term English language study. They get a taste of this in their global degrees in Korean universities. They can experience some cultural difference through travel and language study, but not to the same degree. Without the time in country in more diverse scenarios, they don’t get the same payoff. It does not provide the same life-changing experience.

**Where the Value Remains High**

The third key finding from this dissertation research is that unlike the time immediately following the Asian Economic Crisis where workers with global cultural capital were highly sought in a number of industries and occupations, today it is most beneficial in specific occupations. This included positions in research and development, in the government, and on global oriented teams in the business sector. These fields have similar needs. Returnees with longer and more intensive periods of time abroad, normally found in degree programs, seem to more easily satisfy these needs. One of these requirements is English language ability that is directly associated to work related skills. Because they have studied a specific major abroad in English, English is tied directly to their area of expertise, facilitating the application of their global cultural capital.

This business-infused English ability is most valued in fields that require frequent collaboration between the global and the local. In research and development positions, Shawn explained how collaboration with foreign scholars is important and very common, especially in an area of research where most of the scholars are outside of Korea. Tapping into these networks of knowledge and contacting foreign scholars is primarily done in
English. For workers with more extensive international networks through their study abroad, there may be indirect channels of communication they can use to reach these scholars. More importantly, they were described as having less fear contacting these foreign scholars themselves and greater ease establishing and maintaining these relationships for future endeavors. For government workers, Colin described how important establishing long-term connections are. He talked about how he can gain information from this communication with other governments and use these connections to get foreign assignments that are a prerequisite for the higher positions. In global business fields, when there is frequent communication with foreign distributors, customers and coworkers, workers with educational experience overseas are particularly well-suited for these positions.

**Why the Value is Decreasing**

The fourth major finding from this research is that while specific fields exist that are particularly well suited for returnees with high volumes of global cultural capital, overall I find the value is decreasing. According to my interviews, this is a result of an increased supply of Koreans with foreign credentials, heightened focus on employee fit or integration, and better competition from locally educated Koreans. The sentiment that the value was decreasing was overwhelming. Evaluators, locally educated Koreans and even the foreign educated Koreans themselves told me they thought the value had decreased over the past 10 years.

One of the reasons given for why the value has decreased was there are so many more Koreans today with foreign degrees than even ten years ago. The supply has
outstripped the demand. Therefore returnees are now returning to a job market with more competitors that have similar volumes of global cultural capital. Decreased demand also has to do with perceived poor performance by earlier generations of returnees and Korean Americans who came in the wake of the Asian Economic Crisis. As I discussed in Chapter 7, the performance of the global talent, so popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s, was not worth the high cost and problems with fit. These days, the evaluators I spoke with said they are focused more on the fit of the candidate than the potential for performance, and foreign educated returnees were described as having problems with fit. This seems to be especially problematic for the group of foreign educated Koreans I called Early Exiters. Without the local networks, or experience in Korean educational and occupational fields, working in the Korean field is particularly difficult. Early Exiters, who spent the most time abroad and left at the earliest ages, were more likely to express difficulty while reintegrating to Korean companies and ended up fitting better in multinational companies.

Finally, the locally educated competition has increased their global cultural capital. They have been especially effective at narrowing the gap in very instrumental types of skills, such as English speaking or cultural familiarity. They have done this while preserving their strong local networks and high volumes of local cultural capital. They have become global enough while preserving their expertise in working in the Korean business field.

**Mediating Influence of Local Cultural Capital**

The final major finding from this dissertation research deals with how the combinations of the different kinds of cultural capital work together. I explain that local cultural capital works as a mediating variable for foreign educated returnees. Their local cultural and
social capital is a connection to the Korean field they are returning too, an anchor that can protect and inform them. Returnees with low levels of local cultural and social capital lack this important buffer and resource through which they might navigate the business field successfully enough to actually be able to use their hard fought global cultural capital. Returnees like Kami, who had high levels of global cultural capital, struggled so much with reintegration that her abilities were overshadowed by her foreignness and problems with fit. Without work experience in Korea before leaving Korea, without the local cultural capital from attending a Korean university, Kami couldn’t recognize the cultural signals and cues needed to work in a Korean company. I interviewed a number of Kami’s coworkers, both locally and foreign educated, and she was indirectly mentioned as an example of how problematic foreign educated Koreans can be in the Korean workplace if they have gone overseas at an early age.

Koreans who left later also struggled at times with reintegration, but I found they could use their experience and understanding of what was expected in the Korean work field to adjust more quickly and naturally. Kami’s coworker Jim studied in the United States for many years completing a Masters, PhD and Postdoc. When he came back he also described many of the same things Kami did, but he was better at adjusting. Jim had studied at a Korean university before leaving and he had served in the Korean military. His military experience was a crash course in the most extreme forms of Korean work culture. As a result he had better tools to understand appropriate behaviors and techniques for succeeding upon return.
SIGNIFICANCE

So what do these major findings mean? Why are they important to anyone besides the people I interviewed? In this section I will discuss the sociological significance of these findings.

Research on global cultural capital and graduates returning from overseas to local occupations is still in its early stages. This is a new and developing area of research. The pursuit of and movement of cultural capital across borders has been examined to some extent (Kim 2011a; Waters 2006, 2009), but exactly what is included as global cultural capital and how and why it is valuable remains contested (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Kim 2011a; Weenik 2008). What I have called global cultural capital has also at times been called cosmopolitanism as cultural capital (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Kim 2011a; Koo 2010; Weenik 2008). In this sense these authors are referring to the global nature of cultural capital as cosmopolitanism, or cosmopolitanism as a form of capital. Nevertheless, we need more concrete examinations of what global cultural capital or cosmopolitanism as cultural capital represent. I add to this body of research by presenting a thorough examination of what I have found global cultural capital to be in the Korean case.

Also, there are very few studies that thoroughly examine how the acquisition of global cultural capital, or cosmopolitanism as cultural capital, translates to the labor market (Igarashi and Saito 2014). This research on the Korean case helps to start this discussion of how various components of global cultural capital are valued or institutionalized in local markets. As I mentioned previously, studies on Chinese foreign educated returnees to Chinese business fields have been economic in nature (Hao and Welch 2012; Obukhova et al. 2012; Gill 2010; Zweig and Han 2008; Gross and Connor
While interesting, I find that limiting the scope of outcomes to monetary measures misses important components to the payoff of studying overseas. I find the payoff goes far beyond that limited form of measurement. The reward can be about lifestyle and experiences. In other words, the payoff can be social and cultural as well as occupational or economic.

Waters (2006, 2009) and Kim (2011a) focus on the business fields of finance in Hong Kong and academics in Korea and present foreign educated returnees with seemingly homogenous volumes of global cultural capital. In contrast, I have tried to examine various fields (government, business, research and development) and foreign educated Koreans with varying volumes of global cultural capital. Also, absent from other research on global cultural capital is the importance of local cultural capital in translating the global experiences to the local business fields. As I have discussed, there is a negotiation of the two forms of capital, a balancing act as workers must present these forms at the right time and in the right manner to succeed. Those who are truly culturally ambidextrous are most successful.

Researchers have been highly critical of studies on cosmopolitanism and cultural capital removed from the fields where this capital is being used (Igarashi and Saito 2014). I have tried in this research to pay specific attention to how the business fields in Korea vary and change. As we see, there are some specific fields where particular forms of global cultural capital are still highly valued, even as there appears to be an overall decline in value of global cultural capital in Korean fields that previously held this form of capital in high regard. The rules of the field are changing and the fields returnees come back to matters. For the value of global cultural capital or what I call global cultural capital lite to
be truly appreciated and understood, the fields where these forms of capital are being used must be included in the equation.

Finally, these findings suggest that the Korean government’s investment in the internationalization of higher education is working. The Korean students I interviewed were not only able to obtain global cultural capital locally, but evaluators are legitimizing their form of global cultural capital by hiring them and using them in more globally focused positions. This strategy of using English language courses at Korean universities, global degrees, exchanges and short-term language study abroad (what I called *Global Lite*) is being recognized as a real form of global cultural capital. This process of validation and recognizing skills and strategies in the Korean work field is like what is occurring with global cultural capital in the more traditional sense. Discussion of how locally educated people can obtain global cultural capital in this manner is completely absent from other research at present.

**DOES IT PAY?**

As I conclude this research I have thought long and hard about the value of studying at foreign universities. Is it worth it? My initial thoughts are that the benefits for getting a foreign degree are rewarded in such a specific manner they are not of general value to most Koreans who study overseas. The best payoff seems to be for very specific people, who have specific majors and work in very specific places. Many international students are going abroad to study because they assume this credential has general value in the market they are returning to. If the value of the degree overall is decreasing for most returnees, as
my findings suggest, Korean international students need to manage their expectations or reevaluate how worthwhile this educational strategy actually is.

Students also need to be more strategic about when they go abroad and about what kind of skills they are seeking within the majors they select. While failing to gain admission to Korea’s top schools is very disappointing, and it is tempting to try and erase this failure with a still prestigious global educational option, from this research I find that going abroad earlier was the most risky path for Koreans. The belief that higher volumes of global cultural capital can easily replace lower volumes of local cultural capital seems outdated. I find global cultural capital works better in a complementary fashion, enhancing, rather than in a supplementary fashion. This is because fit matters so much in Korean companies. The local ties to schools and the cultural capital that accompanies undergraduate study in Korea should not be too quickly discarded as they are symbols of trust for many Korean employers. Korean employees with local credentials have shown they understand the rules of the Korean field. I believe upgrading trajectories by leaving later, with a more specific idea about what degree or skill is especially valued in the Korean workplace is a more successful strategy.

So are global educational strategies, like studying at western universities, worth it? As a strategy for success in the Korean workplace, I think studying abroad at the undergraduate level in particular can be a difficult path for Korean returnees. This path Early Exiters are choosing is more expensive, the returns are less certain, and problems with reintegration are more likely. Much of what they gain from this strategy is what seems to be decreasing in value the most. For example, the degree itself is not such a rare commodity anymore. Where it once was a truly unique symbol of one’s global abilities and
able to absolve global degree holders of local educational failure or avoidance, the value has become watered down. Also, English ability is decreasing in value because this is where locally educated students with Global Lite have narrowed the gap the most. Better English opportunities in Korea from K-12, in university, through exchanges and short-term English study, have really improved speaking ability and even familiarity with foreigners. Therefore I believe the decreasing value my respondents are referring to in these interviews are more instrumental in nature, including things such as skills, cultural familiarity, and credentials. Whereas the cosmopolitan components of the global cultural capital model include things that are the most difficult to replicate without authentic experiences, extensive time abroad and a legitimizing foreign degree (lifestyle, independence, and confidence). These also seem to be the most rewarding parts of studying abroad, the most life changing and the most stable.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Perhaps the most interesting future research possibility is examining the role that gender plays in not only the decision to go abroad, but also how it affects the reintegration process. My study includes some female respondents, but not enough to address this question. Do these same findings I have discovered apply to male and female returnees? I think there may be an interesting interaction here as gender may affect the conversion of global skills to the local market. While females in Asian countries have made inroads into these previously closed social networks, they are still often excluded or have to resort to using predominantly male social networks. If they are not getting the benefits their male counterparts get from these social networks from ‘SKY’ schools, the payoff of local capital
may never be as high for females. Also, I believe the likelihood to identify with a global rather than local identity may be different or even stronger for women who may feel marginalized in the more traditional, patriarchal local cultural practices. Another interesting component is that women in Korea do not serve in the military. This is important because for two of my male respondents, their time in the military was an important re-acculturating experience. It was a crash course in the most conservative Korean cultural practices. Surviving in Korean companies was much easier for them than the military. Korean women who have studied overseas are not required to serve in the military and miss this learning experience.

While I wanted to examine these fascinating issues in greater detail in this study, I did not have the right data to properly assess this. I found my data did not support a very thorough examination of this subject. The women I interviewed spoke of the helpful role local social capital plays less frequently than men, but I couldn’t capture a gender difference with enough detail to include in this study. Looking at a sample of just women studying abroad or having returned would be of great interest to me in the future.
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