

THE NEOLIBERAL GENERATION:
FORMATION OF NEOLIBERAL IDENTITIES AMONG SOUTH KOREAN YOUTH

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Timeline of Relevant Events

- 1945 – The surrender of Japan in WWII and the beginning of American Trusteeship
- 1948 – The Republic of Korea is founded with Syngman Rhee as its President
- 1950 – The outbreak of the Korean War
- 1953 – The Korean War is halted by an armistice
- 1960 – The April Uprising overthrows the First Republic of South Korea
- 1961 – A military Coup led by Park Chung-hee overthrows the Second Republic of South Korea
- 1962 – The beginning of Korea's first Five Year Plan
- 1972 – The creation of the Yushin Constitution, making Park Chung-hee permanent ruler
- 1979 – Park Chung-hee is assassinated by Kim Jae-gyu, head of the KCIA
- 1979 – Chun Doo-hwan takes power in subsequent military coup
- 1980 – *hagwon* are banned as a symbol of inequality
- 1986 – The end of the Fifth Five Year Plan, which took steps to liberalize the economy
- 1987 – The student led June Democracy Movement paves the way for open elections
- 1987-1989 – South Korea experiences the period of the three lows, boosting its economy
- 1992 – Election of President Kim Young-sam, who began the globalization drive in Korea
- 1996 – South Korea joins the OECD after taking significant steps to liberalize its economy
- 1997 – South Korea experiences the Korean financial crisis and undergoes substantial reform
- 1998 – The Labor Standard Act revised to meet global neoliberal standards of flexibility
- 2000 – The first inter-Korea summit meeting occurs
- 2000 – The Korean Supreme Court rules *hagwon* bans unconstitutional
- 2009 – South Korea is affected by the global financial crisis, raising pressure for liberalization
- 2014 – The number of non-regular workers in South Korea reaches an all-time high

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My friends from middle school and my friends from high school are at different levels. Their lifestyles are now totally different. We can't judge other people's lives but you can wish that you lived someone else's life, you know? If you saw their schools and what they are doing now they are very different... My friends from middle school just play a lot. They earn money by doing part time jobs, but then they spend it all... They don't know how to save money. Meanwhile my friends from high school are preparing for their future. They have a plan for how to use their money as well. My middle school friends are not reluctant to work in manual labor or in physical work in construction sites. My friends from high school, they are not like that at all.¹

As Lee Young-sik, a junior at Korea's prestigious Yonsei University, draws the distinction between his middle school and high school classmates, he draws the line between what happens to those who work hard and those who do not. The consequence of his message is: if you work hard in school then you can succeed, and if you choose to not do so then you must accept a mediocre life. This quote reveals the cultural conception of the rigorous preparation and sacrifice required by youth in South Korea in an effort to get into top tier universities. It also reveals the strong notion of individual agency that permeates Korean society. The idea that each person is responsible for their own development and preparation stands as a central theme in the dialogue of success and social mobility in Korea

Abelmann et al. (2009) examine underlying discourses in South Korea about such responsibility and find that the burden of self-development and the responsibility for one's circumstances have become increasingly individualized as a result of the neoliberal turn. However, this discourse has now become a common social logic in Korean society, put on display for the world to see. New Korean television series such as *Incomplete Life* (Misaeng, tvN, 2014) give testimony to the fact that neoliberal norms of social behavior (the advancement of those who 'deserve' to succeed through their personal 'merit') have become commonplace and almost common sense. In the drama, the main character Jang Geu-rae (Yim Si-wan) testifies that throughout his life he has blamed himself for his failure to achieve. He rejects that he failed to achieve his dream because of bad luck, or because his family was too poor to support him with

any allowance, or because his father died leaving him to support his mother, or because his mother couldn't keep working after his father died. Accepting these truths as explanations would be too painful. Instead, he believes that his failure was that he did not work hard enough. "So, that's why it had to be that I was just a person who didn't work hard. It's not really that I didn't work hard... but I will just think of it that way... Since I didn't work hard, that is the reason I was abandoned." This attitude reveals the ways in which new social logics are blurring barriers to social advancement, and hints at the continuing development of neoliberal subjectivities in Korean society.

This study aims to explore the continuing development of such neoliberal subjectivities in South Korea by examining the ongoing neoliberal project in Korea as well as the development of neoliberalism in South Korea and how it has reshaped Korean society.

About the Study

Research on neoliberalism in Korea is not new, and discussions of neoliberalism and Korea predate the development of a neoliberal state (Kay, 1993; Onis, 1995; & Brohman, 1995). However, this study has developed in a response to the recently growing body of literature on neoliberalism's impact on Korean society and the lack of literature on the generation that has been most impacted by the changes in Korean society since the financial crisis: those who grew up inside of neoliberal South Korea. Though articles about South Korean youth regularly make headlines, such as the OECD finding Korean youth the unhappiest subgroup in the OECD in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 (McDonald, 2011; Pesek, 2012) and a the Korea Times' discovery that youth suicide increased 57% between 2001 and 2013 (2013), few scholarly works outside of Abelman et al. (2009) and Abelman and Kang (2014) have investigated the perspectives of

youths themselves. Moreover, no studies examine the origin and development of new neoliberal subjectivities among youth and the various ways that they are displayed. In order to fill the gap in this literature and understand the ways that Korean youth have been influenced by Korea's ongoing neoliberal project, this study seeks to identify the modes through which neoliberalization has impacted the world view of this "neoliberal generation" as well as the ways in which new subjectivities are displayed as they prepare themselves to enter the economy.

The term "neoliberal generation" was first used in 2007 by Dr. Karen Nairn and Dr. Jane Higgins in reference to the generation of New Zealand students who grew up during the 1980s and 1990s in the era referred to as Rogernomics. This period greatly resembles the economic change that occurred in Korea in the 1990s and brought with it market-led restructuring, deregulation, and the creation of a floating exchange rate. Nairn and Higgins examined how these neoliberal reforms impacted the identities of the students that grew up during and after them. They found that this neoliberal restructuring "obscures the structural basis of inequalities and insists that failure to achieve a straightforward transition from school to tertiary education to employment is the result of personal inadequacy" (Nairn & Higgins, 2012). Due to the similarities in the restructuring that occurred in Korea and New Zealand, Nairn and Higgins' term accurately describes the group that this study examines. Additionally, the results of Nairn and Higgins' study provide reason to believe that neoliberalization has had a significant impact on youth in Korea today.

Many other more common terms have been used in the literature and in the discussion on this new group of Korean youth matriculating into the Korean economy. Some of these terms include the "88" generation, a term representing the salary of 880,000 won a month (about \$800). This is the typical salary of young people employed in non-regular work who struggle to

survive economically in modern Korea. Another term currently emerging is the “spec” generation. This refers to the fact that people today are judged by the skills and awards that they have on their resume, leading to an obsession over increasing one’s “specs” relative to others. Though both these terms do describe current trends in Korean society, the focus of “88” on work opportunities for young people and “spec” specifically on resumes and self-management does not completely capture both the origins and characteristics of the new identities that I am investigating. Instead, I choose to use neoliberal generation as a term with broad associations and fewer political connotations than other commonly used terms.

Specifically, Korea’s neoliberal generation is the portion of the population whose formal education began during or after the Korean financial crisis. Since students in Korea begin their formal education in the classroom when they are 8 years old in Korean age, according to this definition, Korea’s neoliberal generation includes those born in or after 1990. Since boys who do military service generally finish their final semester of college at 25 years old in Korean age, Korea’s current college cohort in the 2014 school year, is the first cohort to generally include only members of the neoliberal generation. For this reason, this study which took place between May and December, 2014, was perfectly timed to gauge the impact of neoliberalism on the first full generation of neoliberal students in Korean universities. This is one of the many reasons, discussed in greater detail in a later section, why this study examines the impact of neoliberalism in Korean college students.

Research Question

In order to direct this research project throughout the course of this study, it is organized around one central research question.

To what extent have South Korean youth embraced the values and practices of neoliberal personhood and how do they develop these attitudes?

This question focuses on both the extent to which Korean youth display the values and orientations of neoliberalism while questioning how these values and orientations come to exist inside of Korean youth. This study seeks to identify neoliberal values and orientations through individual perspectives on fairness, equality, and distributive justice in the social-economic system. For example, the belief that hard work and diligence can lead anyone to success would evidence some neoliberal orientation. At the same time, neoliberalism has also changed the economic system of rewards and therefore changes modes of being successful and paths to such ends. This may encourage individuals to adopt compatible values and/or identities to fit such ends while modifying preexisting notions of “success” to meet more neoliberal criteria. This understanding is in accordance with the accepted notion that neoliberalism exists as both a social ethos and a political-economic logic (Harvey, 2005; Song, 2009) and thus simultaneously changes both the meta-structure in which society operates and society itself.

The second part of this question addresses how Korean youth come to adopt neoliberal identities and attitudes. This question assumes that the neoliberal values of individualism and competition are neither universal nor naturally occurring and therefore Korean youth must choose to adopt them or have these values instilled upon them. Since Korea remains globally known as a ‘Confucian’ country, it would seem actually seem natural that the Confucian values of collectivity, cooperation, and submission stand out among Korean youth. However, as early as 2001 studies found that neoliberal values and characteristics were replacing Confucian values among youth as individualism, materialism, and instrumental rationality replaced traditional values (Yang, 2003). This indicates that a social mechanism exists through which Korean youth

learn to adopt non-Confucian values. Thus, neoliberalism's impact on family structures, family values, educational systems, and societal organization as a whole may have a large impact on how children are raised and the values systems which they adopt. This might encourage the adoption of neoliberal values in new generations depending on their formative experiences and their environment.

In order to answer this primary research question, this study has three sub-questions which will help answer the primary question. These are:

1. *How have students' experiences with Korean education, designed to prepare them for entering the neoliberal economy, impacted them and what are these experiences?*
2. *How do college students frame their notions of success and deservingness?*
3. *In what alternative ways may neoliberal personhood be displayed in the attitudes and values of South Korean youth?*

Since neoliberalism stresses competition at the unit level in order to yield best results, this first question attempts to understand the extent educational structures in Korea turn the classroom into a competitive marketplace, gain buy-in from students, or successfully plant neoliberal ideas, and to what extent this impacts different students. Since Korean schools are globally reputed for their systematic design, strict discipline, and focus on education with the goal of boosting test scores and college admissions levels, the school environment stands out as the foremost place in which children learn how to compete and the necessity of competition. Moreover, the long hours that Korean students spend in schools (often surpassing 12 hours a day) makes schools a key source of socialization for youth.

The first part of the second question focuses on how students understand the ways that society works, the ways of living a "successful" or "proper" life in society, and the reason why some paths are "better" than others. The second part of the question relates to how students

justify the system of winners and losers as it exists in Korean society. It attempts to answer how students understand why some people succeed and why others fail and why that outcome is relatively fair.

The third question focuses on understanding the deeper implications of neoliberal subjectivities. Neoliberalism as a social and political ethos cannot remain contained in the realm of ideas. Its characteristics manifest themselves in people's attitudes, opinions, biases, and in decisions of career, family, and priorities. However, the extent of the impact of neoliberalism varies depending on individual buy-in and their ability to compartmentalize their ideologies, enabling them to hold many different perspectives on different issues that do not contradict each other in the mind of the believer. Hence, this study seeks to understand the broad trend lines along which neoliberalism impacts various aspects of students' lives.

Each of these questions attempts to help paint the picture of the extent to which youth in Korea display neoliberal identities and values and how these subjectivities were formed. By answering these questions, this study hopes to draw new conclusions about the oldest members of Korea's neoliberal generation.

Why College Students and the Neoliberal Generation

There are a number of reasons why this study chooses to examine the impact of neoliberalism on the neoliberal generation, particularly college students, in Korea. First and foremost, as mentioned earlier, this study looks at the neoliberal generation due to their unique characteristic of spending their entire developmental life in neoliberal Korea during or after the financial crisis. This gives reason to think that the neoliberalism has impacted this group in society the most. As opposed to other generations in Korea who experienced different

developmental paradigms, such as the developmental state, and might display ambivalence in their acceptance of new, neoliberal paradigms, this study expects at least some populations of the neoliberal generation to energetically embrace and fully embody the characteristics and values of the neoliberal society in which they developed. Evidence of the impact of neoliberalism on the Korean society should be most apparent in this generation, if anywhere.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, a lack of literature exists on the impacts of neoliberalism on this generation outside of a few selected works. Understanding this generation in the context of Korean society has widespread repercussions. Since this group will soon move into the workforce and policymaking spheres and even begin families of their own, understanding new norms and cultural logics can help predict whether current trends in Korean society will continue or break down as this generation matures. This study intends to contribute to existing body of literature on Korean youth to provide a better understanding of the future of South Korean society.

Finally, inside of the neoliberal generation, this study chooses to focus on college students. College students offer the best population of the neoliberal generation to study for a number of reasons. First, they are the oldest members of the neoliberal generation. In fact, the male, college seniors in the school year that this research will take place were born in year 0 of this generation. This provides college students with the most experience inside of neoliberal Korea and inside of more neoliberalized institutions, such as the Korean college system. Additionally, universities in Korea have long represented a liberal space for sharing and developing knowledge and represent the finish line in the “educational race.” For this reason, universities provide students’ first educational environment where they can think critically about their lives and society without focusing solely on standardized tests and college entrance exams.

Also, college students' proximity to entering the workforce has forced them to seriously consider their futures and life goals. Moreover, for many college students who live in college dormitories, they have the ability to plan for and manage their future independently for the first times in their lives, and thus have space to think critically about their personal goals and optimum paths to success. Therefore, current college students, more than any other group of the neoliberal generation, can provide insightful and wide ranging commentary on their world view and notions of success that may reveal the influence of neoliberalism in Korea.

Finally, I have a practical motivation for studying the views of college students in Korea. During the summer of 2014 I attended the Korean Language Center at Ewha Woman's University to further my Korean education and in fall and winter of 2014 I was an exchange student at Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies. Both of these programs are located in the heart of Seoul's most famous and populated college district and provided ample opportunities to meet students from colleges throughout the Seoul area and do ethnographic research as a qualified participant of this environment. Investigating the views of college students allowed me to take advantage of my presence in Korea while pursuing course work for my Master's degree.

Organization and Research Methods

This study is organized around three chapters. The first chapter consists of a literature review on neoliberalism and its progression in Korean society. It begins by illustrating the tenets and history of neoliberalism in South Korea and the agency that economic transformation has to cause social change. It then focuses on exploring the transformation of the relationship between the government and the private sector between the 1960s and the 1990s which led to a new

economic landscape in South Korea. I argue that as the government enacted new, neoliberal policies and increasingly weaned the private sector off of government support, companies abandoned their growth oriented policies in favor of new neoliberal practices. Under this paradigm, the drive to increase profits has led to new strategies, causing a more difficult employment situation in Korea despite increasing levels of human capital. This chapter closes by looking at how neoliberal logic has changed the operation of many social institutions in Korea, particularly the education sector. It illustrates both the ability of these institutions to shape the identities of youth in Korea as well as their incentives for doing so.

The second chapter will focus on the ways in which neoliberalism in Korea has come to be reflected in the educational sector. The educational sector is important in both how it itself reflects neoliberal values and practices and how it influences Korean youth, particularly this Neoliberal generation. Since the educational system is designed to provide high quality workers to the economy, as the needs of the economy have changed, so have the educational standards. At the same time schools rely on their ability to send students to top colleges to maintain their public funding and student enrollment. Thus, as the economy has become more and more neoliberal and schools treated more like businesses, neoliberal values have become a central component of education. Thus, this section takes the Korean educational system as a perfect lens through which to view the laboratory in which Korean youth are transformed into competitors and neoliberal economic subjects. Specifically the chapter investigates the role of supplementary education, the college entrance system, and English education as ways through which students are trained to compete and to justify growing inequalities in Korean society.

The final chapter explores the ways in which students aspire to join the labor force while preparing themselves for vague or often unforeseen futures. In this preparation, students

embrace various levels of self-management based on their personal experiences and positions Korea's social structure. Since the economy provides the foundation of social life and defines proper ways and modes of being in the neoliberal economy, we survey how students at various tiers of schools and with various class backgrounds have chosen their future and conceptualize the market's role in their life. This, in turn, reveals their perspective on their role in the economic and necessary modes of survival.

In the final two chapters, this study will incorporate the contents and results of interviews held with college students in and around Seoul. These interviews were conducted with 18 college students in person between May and December, 2014, with follow up questions and conversations had since. I selected these students in order to get interviewees from a variety of university tiers and geographical backgrounds. During the analysis we divide up students by school tier, where top tier schools were top ranked Seoul schools, mid-tier schools were top schools in the vicinity of Seoul and located in Korea's other largest cities, and low-tier schools were schools outside of the largest cities or technical colleges in large cities. Specifically, the "top tier" schools that this study interviews students from are Yonsei University and Ewha Woman's University, both in Seoul. These schools are considered top tier because of their reputation among students and due to their international rank and their location in Seoul. Meanwhile, I interviewed students from Inha University in Incheon which I classified as a "mid-tier" school. I classified it this way due to its reputation and location among students in Seoul. Students came from all provinces of Korea except for Jeju-do. Though not all 18 students are mentioned in this study, each interview substantially contributed to the writing of this paper.

These interviews lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour and 15 minutes with each student. Follow up conversations were held no closer than one month apart in order to provide the

respondent with time to reflect on issues discussed in the interview and prevent previous interviews from affecting the consecutive interview's results. Follow up conversations and questions were used to shed light on areas that needed clarification and investigate details of certain testimony. The interviews were all conducted in person in public places based on the interview outline provided in Appendix A. Interview questions focused on topics related to the world view of these interviewees and their notions of success regarding their personal and professional lives.

Each interviewee had the choice of determining whether the interview would be conducted in English or Korean. During each interview the researcher was assisted by a research assistant and translator. Should the interviewee request to speak in Korean, during the interviews the researcher only spoke in English while the research assistant spoke in English to the researcher and in Korean to the participant. In this way, even when speaking in Korean the interviewee would remain aware that they needed to make sure to explain cultural assumptions and stereotypes for the researcher due to the researcher's foreign identity. At the same time this set up allowed the researcher to supervise the progression of the conversation and direct it onto different topics while the research assistant investigated those different topics with the interviewee.

The interviews were recorded with two recording devices, both cellular phones, and notes were taken throughout the interview to accompany the recording. Due to the excessive work of transcription for the Korean interviews and the limited amount of time on the part of the research assistant, interview recordings have been held for reference along with the note sheets from the interview. After each interview, the research team annotated and analyzed the interviews, transcribing important sections and outlining the progression of each interview. The results of

each analysis were used to help inform and direct future interviews since they revealed new areas to investigate and allowed the research team to focus their investigation on particular areas as the research progressed. Charmaz (2006) justifies this type of research for inductive investigations such as this with the goal of allowing the data to direct the research and lead to its own conclusions, allowing this study to practice theory building. The methods of analysis undertaken in this study are described below.

Methods of Analysis

In addition to using anecdotal evidence and individual experience as testimonial evidence, I will use three methods of analysis that should provide deeper insight into the interview results. In an effort to approach my analysis from different directions, I will conduct conventional content analysis, directed content analysis and social discourse analysis. Though it is technically not a mode of analysis, this section also includes what I label “framing analysis.” This study will use the other modes of analysis to analyze frames through which world views and success are perceived. I discuss framing analysis here in order to emphasize the importance of understanding frames and their contribution to understanding modes of thought in relation to large, abstract concepts such as neoliberalism.

Content Analysis

Conventional content analysis analyses textual data in order to find symbolically important themes and ideas. It is an inductive method that is used to generate theory, which this study aims to do. This text data can be in many different forms, including the results of interviews with open ended questions (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). The end state of this process is to reduce large amounts of data into a manageable number of clusters that have similar

meanings in order to find broader themes (Weber, 1990). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) outline the steps of this approach as follows. First, a researcher immerses themselves in their data as if reading a novel. From this reading, they identify key words and terms. Then, they cluster these words and terms into key thoughts and ideas as the researcher reflects on and repeatedly reviews the material. Researchers then group these key thoughts and ideas, or codes, into clusters and develop connections between them. Through this process, new connections and theories are developed in an inductive fashion.

Conventional content analysis stands in contrast to directed content analysis or summative content analysis. Directed content analysis is a deductive approach (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) and usually aims to validate or extend existing theory through targeted questions with predetermined code words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After engaging in conventional content analysis for all of our interviews, I used directed content analysis to test my conclusions from the conventional method. For example, after finding the theme that a group of students mentioned disagreeing with their parents, I searched through all of the interviews to see if this theme appeared consistently or not. If this theme does not appear as strongly in some interviews as others, it may appear in the conventional analysis of only a few despite its wide ranging presence. However, reviewing interviews in search of a particular theme helped me rescue some themes that may have been lost. This allowed me to broaden the conclusions drawn in the conventional analysis across my study.

Social Discourse Analysis

The second approach that this study will use in analyzing interview results is social discourse analysis. Social discourses matter in reference to this topic because they shape how people talk and think about certain subjects. This kind of analysis is difficult because it

inherently requires researchers to read between the lines to know about the content of prevailing analyses and the implied meaning of certain word choices and phrases. The presence of a research assistant allowed me to take advantage of this form of analysis. Social discourse analysis determines how people incorporate or reconcile different prevailing discourses with their own perspective. Thus, depending on the level of integration between these two, Strauss (2005) identifies three levels of how frames become incorporated into individual's world view: compartmentalization, ambivalence, and integration. This study employed these same categories during its analysis.

Compartmentalization exists when different social discourses coexist together or with the individual's perspective in separate, unconnected schemas. This allows one person to hold many contending views without recognizing their contention. Ambivalence occurs when an individual begins to recognize the contention in their views and these views become inconsistent and demonstrate psychic conflict. Finally, integration is the stage at which social discourses are most clearly integrated with personal views. At this stage individuals draw on different discourses selectively in a way that makes sense to the viewer. Using these criteria during the analysis, this study seeks to better understand both how and to what extent students have adopted social discourses.

Since neoliberalism is as much a social discourse as a way of economic management, this form of analysis is perfectly suited for this study. Identifying the level to which students incorporate social discourse into their own views allows us to measure the extent to which they have embraced neoliberal world views and through analyzing areas in which full integration has occurred, allow us to identify the topics around which the social discourse is most powerful and connected to the subjects. Additionally, understanding the social discourses that have influenced

students can help shed light on anxiety toward Korea's new social and economic order and discursive strategies of dealing with this anxiety.

Framing Analysis

Finally, since neoliberalism and ideas about success are not things that students come to think about solely through personal experience, but also through talking with others and reading news and books, imaginings on these topics are developed inside a frame of negotiated meaning. Therefore, understanding how discourses about class structure and success are framed helps provide a deeper understanding of these topics. As opposed to social discourse analysis which emphasizes identifying and understanding the extent to which individuals have accepted different discourses, framing analysis focuses on the ways in which opinions are distributed and then absorbed through one's surroundings. It looks at the forces which create and spread frames of meaning and where the struggle over this meaning takes place.

Framing has been recognized as an important tool of analysis since the 1980s when scholars began to see actors engaged in social movements and other areas of large rhetorically based activity as engaged in a struggle over signification through the creation and maintenance of meaning (Benford & Snow, 2000). Framing matters because it influences how individuals "locate, perceive, identify, and label" (Goffman, 1974) the events within their lives and in the world. Moreover, framing influences how people perceive the world by "simplifying and condensing the world out there" (Benford & Snow, 2000). Framing matters in my study because they are not simply individually created. Because frames are widely held and are the "outcome of negotiating shared meaning" (Gamson, 1992) their nature and origin provide insight into the deeper cultural logic behind the way things are viewed as well as why individuals understand issues in certain ways.

There are 3 processes that influence the ways in which frames around issues are developed and elaborated: discursive, strategic, and contested (Benford & Snow, 2000). This study focuses mainly on the presence of strategic processes, which are more focused, goal-directed, and attempt to accomplish a specific outcome. This can include bridging multiple frames, amplifying a frame, extending a frame or transforming a frame. This kind of process might be seen in the government's attempt to mobilize society after the 1997 financial crash into a more self-accountable, entrepreneurial, and neoliberal society. Since the neoliberal world-view acts as a frame which organizations with interest in the current system have a stake in widening and strengthening, this study actively investigates how institutions might act to modify or implant such frames in Korean youth.

CHAPTER 2: NEOLIBERALISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Since the early 1980s Korea's economic system has changed from a directed economy to a neoliberal one. This economic transformation has had consequences in every sphere of life in South Korea, both in terms of how people earn their economic livelihood and how they behave outside of the economic realm. In the social realm for example, new norms have developed as a result of the expansion of economic logic, even changing the structure and the operation of Korea's national social institutions, such as Korea's education system. This transformation has led to new incentives for creating neoliberal subjects in the classroom while at the same time leading to widening class gaps as those with enough capital can fund their children's educational success. In order to review the literature on Korea's economic and social transformation, this study is broken into three parts.

First, this chapter will examine the development of neoliberalism globally and its associated logics and ethos. Using the ideas of social theorists and scholars across a range of studies, I will pull out the tenets of neoliberal thought, demonstrate the ability of neoliberal logic to transform people and the society they live in, and illustrate the danger of abiding by strict neoliberal economic logic in everyday life. Secondly, this chapter reviews the history of Korean economic transformation over the last 60 years in order to show that Korea is today an unambiguously neoliberal state. Moreover, this chapter will show that this transformation has directly changed Korean society through the new relationship between state and business and new corporate practices and objectives. For corporations, the lack of government protection and increasing pressure by shareholders to focus on profitability over growth has led to the employment of various new strategies. This, in turn, has changed society by modifying the ways that people find work and market themselves into the economy.

The final sections of this chapter explore how the impacts of neoliberalism extend beyond the economic sector by showing that neoliberalism as a logic of governance and social behavior has become a new norm as well. It has had far reaching consequences impacting both Korea's educational structure and the nation's use of supplementary education through changing institutional norms and ideas surrounding "proper" educational competition. This chapter connects the nation's economic logic to the changing system of standardized tests and Korea's regulation on private academies. These changes, in turn, directly impact the institutions and discourse in which Korean youth mature and negotiate their identities, laying the groundwork for new competitive practices and the development of neoliberal identities.

Defining Neoliberalism

Simply put, neoliberalism is the belief that competition at the unit level in accordance with proper rules and regulations yields the best results. It advocates that the best competition occurs in a borderless realm in which the market determines winners and losers. Hence, neoliberalism and globalization are often spoken of together as joint economic projects since both wish to break down barriers and promote free trade with the intention of increasing economic activity globally. As Harvey (2005) puts it, "neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade." In this way, under the rule of neoliberalism, each individual becomes responsible for his or her own economic survival and hence each person is transformed into an "entrepreneur of the self." In this way, people rely on their individual skills to provide their economic livelihood. "In practice, the stake

in all neo-liberal analysis is the replacement every time of *homo economicus* as a partner of exchange with *homo economicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault, 2008).

This system stands in stark contrast to its predecessor, embedded liberalism, which relied on Fordist modes of production. Fordism takes its name after Henry Ford, and is focused on the accumulation of wealth through the division and exploitation of labor through common ideological commitments. In this system, government and management use mass production systems to maximize industrial output through economies of scale and exercise direct control over industrial production and the development of necessary labor (Rupert, 1995). Under this system, the state used its power freely with the goal of creating full employment, economic growth, and citizen welfare, even sometimes superseding the existing market. This system relied on a close relationship between government authorities and the capitalist class in order to maintain high levels of production where the government plays a highly supportive role of national business through social and monetary policies (Harvey, 2005). Under this system, the government helped groom national champions, such as GE and Ford in the United States, to lead the nation’s economic growth. This mode of production captures the West’s approach to economic production and development throughout the first half of the Cold War and remained as the dominant capitalist mode of production until the rise of neoliberalism.

Fordist practices and modes of production began to decline as a result of the 1970s recession that affected the Western countries in the Cold War. By the end of the 1960s, simultaneous high levels of inflation and unemployment were affecting economies across the globe (known as stagflation). At this point, the governments strove to find new ways to restore

profitability to mid-1960s levels. This led the government to impose a new set of policies that decreased its intervention in the economy while emphasizing the regulatory role of government to increase competition. These new policies favored the free hand of the market over government controls. Hence, with a new market emphasis, a post-Fordist system began to develop which began using the premise of international comparative advantage to employ a flexible, globalized labor force which consequently placed a larger emphasis on capital as opposed to industry (Mittelman, 2000; Harvey, 2005).

The intensification of these strategies over time led to theories of government deregulation, privatization, liberalization and a focus on international competitiveness which were soon adopted by major world players. Led by economists at the University of Chicago, professors, think tanks, media, and powerful organizations around the world including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization began to adopt these views (Mittelman, 2000; Harvey, 2005). Additionally, in the 1980s, leading Western powers including Britain under Margaret Thatcher and the United States under Ronald Reagan adopted these policies as a neoliberal replacement for Keynesianism (Harvey, 2005; Steger, 2009). Hence, these principles began to comprise the essence of neoliberalism and became linked to globalization and the liberalization of economies, societies, and modes of governance throughout the world.

Since neoliberalism was designed originally as an economic theory, scholars most often apply this paradigm to economic systems. Thus, this paper will investigate the neoliberalization of Korea using the established characteristics of Iain Pirie (2008), who identifies the necessary and sufficient conditions for a state to be considered neoliberal. First, in terms of monetary policy the central bank should be independent from politics and focused on using its monetary

and fiscal tools to promote stable growth. Second, the state should develop financial regulation in an attempt to ensure institutions properly manage risk. Third, forms of corporate governance should focus on using market mechanisms to discipline corporations. Additionally, regulation should focus on correcting market failures, encourage discipline, and attempt to achieve global standards. Though industrial policy seems out of place in a neoliberal economy, Pirie says that industrial policies exist nonetheless, but can be neoliberal in character if they focus on increasing meso-level competitiveness. Finally, public service in neoliberalism should be transferred to the private sector and the labor market should be oriented toward flexibility and international competitiveness.

Of course, neoliberalism has evolved far beyond the bounds of economics and now exists pervasively as a regulator of everyday life. Its emphasis that government play only a regulatory role has led to the withdrawal of direct governance over not just industries, but also individuals in society. Contrary to former modes of governance, in neoliberal governance the state largely replaces its governing role in society with “self-governing and self-governable agencies and actors” (Song, 12). In this way, the government partners with civil-society to create socially accepted and enforced norms as a replacement for punitive laws and regulations. Ironically, though state power seems to dissipate, its control is amplified through the norms created in this partnership since they actively regulate proper forms of living daily life. These norms reduce the need for punitive enforcement of rules and regulation because they actually create self-governing subjects. In concurrence with this, Song points out that governing the population by promoting the “deserving subjects concurs with *regulation of the self* through creating a self-governable subject” (10).

This self-governance intends to increase market efficiency by reducing distortions caused by government intervention and letting the market (ideally this means all of the people in society) determine the scale and diversity of its production. Thus, individual choice replaces government quotas in the new system. In this way, neoliberalism gives “individual social members the freedom, responsibility, and rationale to collectively choose an optimal form of social management in pursuit of the common good and economic prosperity” (Song, 10). Of course, an interesting contradiction arises in this statement since this requires individuals in society to collectively decide and act, drawing tension around the notion of individuality in this new society. As individuals now manage the social system, new socially accepted norms develop which limit the true bounds of individuality. This had led many authors to conclude that governance now pervades the public and the private domains of life, creating predictable, self-governing citizens with little ability to organize beyond the limits of publicly accepted rationale (Deluze, 1995; Maasen et al., 2007).

Hence, clearly neoliberalism operates as much at the social level as it does at the economic. In the words of Bourdieu (2008), Neoliberalism is “[a] programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic.” This refers not just to economic behaviors, but to all parts of life. Under neoliberalism, the social logic that gives value to things which cannot be easily priced (happiness, free time, hobbies, spiritual development, and socialization) and which values fairness and equity among people is dominated by economic logic. As Bourdieu (2008) points out: the problem with economic logic is that it applies the same rational to “economic logic, based on competition and efficiency, and social logic, which is subject to the rule of fairness.” In this way human behavior becomes regulated by the same rules

as economic competition, leading to new “right” ways of living (the ways that enable one to compete) and new wrong ways of living (everything else).

Thus, just as Foucault argued that in the resistance to power structures new power structures are formed, new proper ways of acting become controlled by powerful social entities in the wake of the government’s retreat from social life. Often, since the survival and dominance of these institutions relies on their finances (and therefore on the market), control by the government has essentially been replaced by control of the market. Hence, Rose (1996) points out that this leads to a devolved government which disperses power outside of its institutions and into society, and thus through the economy people are “govern[ed] through freedom” (Dean, 1999). This pattern has led to the commoditization of everyday life in which people’s value lies in their skills and abilities and they must take full responsibility for their livelihood. This is a far cry from the state’s attempt to guarantee a certain standard of living for people under embedded liberalism and has transformed the way that people view themselves and “proper” modes of behaving.

Thus, economics has become regularly applied to everyday life and has started to define “worthwhile” pursuits and “proper” ways of being. A child who finds joy in playing the piano or painting is praised because of its cultural capital which may aid with school admissions. A child who loves learning languages is admired because language is an economically useful skill. Meanwhile, the child that wants to play video games gets no praise for this uneconomical, “frivolous” pursuit. Though young children do not have an idea of “right” or “wrong” interests, society has clear ideas of which interests are ideal and which are distasteful. From this small example it is easy to see how neoliberalism has become so ingrained in society that the economic system of evaluating the worthiness of everything cannot be separated from the way that we live

in and understand the world. This method of evaluation has led to the idea of “self-management.” In tandem with the idea that we are all the entrepreneurs of ourselves, we are expected to discipline and direct ourselves to ensure our economic survival. At the same time, society increasingly views people who do not pursue the “rational” or “economic” path as being personally irresponsible since they refuse to follow society’s ‘common sense.’ Hence, neoliberal governance has had direct social impacts and clearly has the ability to impact unit level behaviors.

Neoliberalism and the Neoliberal Generation in Korea

The neoliberal character that this study seeks to identify in Korean youth stem from the broader changes in the Korean economy in the last 35 years. Much scholarship reveals the powerful influence of broader structures, such as the economy, on individuals; on the creation of their world views and identities. Bourdieu (1998) goes as far as to say that no economic theory can stand apart from the social practices which it informs. In Korea specifically, Lim and Jang (2007) find that neoliberalism has led to people to choose to have fewer children, leave the country or develop a “loss of social hope in the future” (457). Nancy Abelman et al. (2009) point out that in general, “changed economic and political formations across the globe have led to powerful changes in ideas about desirable/required ways of being” (230). These new, desirable ways of being have manifested in the new forms of self-management due to increasing difficulties in finding secure employment and the remaining uncertainty in class reproduction. While conducting a study on college students in Korea, Nancy Abelman et al. found this idea of self-management widely and openly talked about by their research subjects.

This idea of self-management is a key component of neo-liberalism and organizes thoughts, behaviors, and even identities along neoliberal norms. Seo (2011) points out that self-management in Korea refers to the “nascent neoliberal configuration of Korea as it has created an array of political, economic, and socio-cultural systems known as neoliberal characteristics... [producing] guiding norms.” Since self-management is the internalization of neo-liberal principles through the act of self-governance, it intimately affects the neoliberal subjects themselves. For this reason, Song warns that we must be aware of neoliberalism’s power in society not just in financial institutions, “but in our individual bodies, in our own thoughts” (139). In this way, neoliberalism’s power comes from its locality in the body of the individual who fulfills and enforces neoliberalism’s imperative.

This understanding of how neoliberalism as a governing philosophy is internalized by and actually changes its subjects leads this study to hypothesize that entrenched neoliberal perspectives will characterize the aspirations and world views of South Korea’s neoliberal generation. Evidence of neoliberalism’s impact on South Korea’s youth has already surfaced in numerous studies. As early as 2001 a study of 17 Asia-Pacific countries revealed that South Korean youth were the least likely to display Confucian values despite the fact that Korean society is still considered highly Confucian. The study found that that these youths, between 9 and 17 years old, generally subscribed to neo-liberal values including individualism, materialism, and instrumental rationality. This indicates that youth in South Korea have already adjusted themselves to the neoliberal environment of South Korea after the crisis (Yang, 2003). Additionally, Yang found that substantial culture gaps exist between generations in Korea today. Younger generations are more progressive, egalitarian, materialistic, and individualistic. This has impacted the world view of younger generations as well, shown by their changing attitudes

toward family life. Younger generations are more accepting of divorce, more willing to share house chores, and more willing to live separately from their children after they become parents in law. These value changes, though not all neoliberal by name, certainly show a break from traditional values in favor of new, “modern” values, many of which are also neoliberal.

Nancy Abelmann et al.’s investigations into the world view of Korean youth also had telling results. In her interviews with college students, she found strong neoliberal opinions regarding self-management as each student “accept[ed] the ‘burden’ of managing their personal formation” (242). She sees this acceptance as a sign that these students aspire towards the neoliberal values of democracy, individualism, and cosmopolitanism. Additionally, Abelmann et al. found that students often focused on their personal responsibility to succeed without discussing the structural and class differences between students, their opportunities, and their success. This indicates additional neoliberal influence for two reasons. It reveals the individualistic character a neoliberal subjectivities as well as obscuring class differences in opportunities by emphasizing the character of the individual in their struggle to become a proper neoliberal subject and thus changing the ways in which social inequality is perceived. Abelmann et al. quotes Walkerdine that under neoliberal world views “‘class differences are taken to have melted away’ because diverse people, including low-paid manual and service workers, are constantly ‘enjoined to improve and remake themselves as the freed consumer, as the “entrepreneur of themselves”’ (Walkerdine 2003: 239). Thus, for the neoliberal person, stories of institutional inequality carry less weight than stories of personal success or failure in the recreation of oneself.

The evidence of these studies in addition to the findings from Nairn and Higgins’ investigation into New Zealand’s neoliberal youth provides every reason to believe that

neoliberalism has also significantly impacted South Korea's neoliberal generation. However, this study does not intend to assume causality through fiat. The next sections illustrate the economic transformation in South Korea and its impact both in and outside of the economy. Both through changing the social-economic system and through imposing a new set of logics inside of Korean society, the rest of this chapter proposes a direct cause and effect relationship between economic transformation and the development of neoliberal subjectivities in South Korea beginning with the developmental state and its relationship with Korea's largest businesses: the *chaebol*.

The Developmental State and *Chaebol*

Similar to the way that the Japanese *zaibatsu* led Japan's economic growth in the post-war boom, *chaebol* led Korea's development. In fact, the partnership between these groups and the government provided the lynchpin for Korea's economic growth from the 1950s into the 1980s before a new economic paradigm began emerging. The term, *chaebol*, means something similar to conglomerate, though its literal translation equates to something like "family money." The term appears in almost any discussion of economics in South Korea. Workers' rights, minimum wage, imports/exports, tariffs, mergers and acquisitions, and every other topic of discussion have *chaebol* near its center. In the United States people are likely most familiar with Samsung, LG, and Hyundai, though in Korea the list of well-known *chaebol* goes on and on.

However, the traditional notion of *chaebol* as a large conglomerate such as P&G or, IBM, or GE leaves an incomplete understanding of this group's distinctive characteristics based on their own unique, historical grounding. Though *chaebol* are groups of firms with similar management structures and some social and financial connections, they also have distinctive

features. For example, many authors including Hattori (1986), Kang (1996) and Yoo and Lee (1987) identify two primary characteristics of *chaebol*: ownership by family or relatives and diversification. While many authors agree with this, they also identify other conditions. Lee and Lee (1985) perceive *chaebols* as multiple, large scale, organized, monopolistic firms in various industries. Byun (1996) considers common financial, labor, and management systems the primary characteristics of *chaebol*. Meanwhile, Jwa Sung-hee, the former President of the Korea Economic Research Institute, focuses on the informal collective action of *chaebol* as their most important and defining feature. Accordingly, Jwa (2002) defines *chaebol* as “multi-product firms composed of smaller subsidiaries with the purpose of maximizing group benefits and which operate under a single managerial center, mostly through cross-shareholding and managerial connections.” These definitions lay the foundation for understanding both the benefits and the dangers that these conglomerates represented over the last 60 years.

Historically, firms developed from a desire to internalize prices inside an enterprise rather than contract them from the market and hence ideally reduce transaction costs (Hennart, 1990; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Hence, the development of family oriented management structures takes the theory behind firm development one step further: modifying transactions costs by employing familial ties, loyalties, and hierarchies. From this point the reasons why family structured businesses can lead to economic problems becomes rather obvious. However, in the chaotic years in the beginning of the Republic of Korea, the state relied on the stability of family ownership structures to provide a stable base for the development of the Korean economy. The partnership between Korean developmental state and favored family owned conglomerates provided the foundation of national growth into the 1980s. To understand the full nature of this partnership and its change, however, it is necessary to look back to the end of the colonial era.

After the end of colonization, the government began relocating newly reclaimed assets. This began with the redistribution of 166,301 assets confiscated from the Japanese. The government sold these assets at prices below the already heavily discounted book price and provided favorable interest rates to a chosen few buyers. The beneficiaries of these assets quickly gained a large profit from the transfer of these resources and many of them would later grow into *chaebol* (Kang, 1996). Soon after this, two other lines of support from the government helped these *chaebol* dominate and lead Korean economic growth. The first of these is aid. Once a company secured government aid, it could build factories with only 15-25% of its own funds, which it could gather from low interest loans from government controlled banks. In this way, aid dollars became a critical factor in *chaebol* development in the 1950s (Kang, 1996). Access to bank loans provided another key avenue to growth and development. The high inflation rate and low interest rate in the 1950s led to negative real interest rates. This means that the real value of the money that borrowers had to return to banks at the end of their loan period was less than the initially borrowed amount. Hence, companies could essentially make money through taking out loans.

This preferential treatment strengthened the position of those with government ties since the government controlled banks based their loans on the presence of property and aid dollars as collateral. It was also related to credit, which the government gave favorably to *chaebol* (Kang, 1996). This allocation often did not happen on any strong economic ground, but as Amsden (1989) points out, the choice of credit allocation had much more to do with political connections than entrepreneurial ability. Therefore, in a very intentional way the government played the leading role in the development and consolidation of *chaebol* by granting them access to critical

aid and loan dollars. At the same time, the government maintained its ability to discipline corporations based on its ability to choose economic winners and losers.

Large firms continued to grow throughout the 1960s and 1970s through strong state support. President Park's desire to legitimize his regime through continued fast economic growth and a limited budget caused him to focus on the development of a few, large, profit oriented developments that would produce large returns on reinvestment. This policy supported *chaebol*, as economy of scale enterprises, over smaller companies (Kang, 1996). Park pursued this economic drive during the government's series of Five Year Plans that began in the 1960s and continued until 1991 (Jeong, 2004). In this period, the government more actively directed the movements and growth of different companies, especially the *chaebol*. To this end the government focused 60% of its aid dollars on companies (often *chaebol*) entering select industries and 25% on the structural needs of supporting these industries. These select industries included oil refineries, electricity, telecommunications and transportation (Jwa, 2002). Thus, the government played a very supportive role for businesses moving into "critical" sectors and eliminated the normal market forces that would force businesses to increase their efficiency.

The government partnered with corporations in other ways as well, such as in the sale of public corporations in the 1960s. The government's continued focus on growth targets led it to place restrictions on sales which essentially limited buyers to large corporations, regardless of their current area of specialty. However, at the same time, corporations benefited from these sales due to the favorable terms included such as long term, low rate loans and the government's continued protection of the SOEs monopoly in its field (Kang, 1996). A similar situation arose when the government sponsored acquisition of ill-managed companies by other companies. In the 1970s, Park Chung-Hee's government took over the management of about 62 ill-managed

firms. Before the end of the decade it sold 17 of these companies to the private sector. Of these 17, the top ten *chaebol* purchased 13 of them. Hence, the government continued to partner with big businesses to increase their size despite the risks it posed.

These purchases encouraged large conglomerates to needlessly diversify into entirely unrelated ventures from their current business. For example, Daewoo's purchase of Korea Machinery Company, Shinjin Motors, and Okpo shipyard gave it access to the machinery, automobile, and shipping industries. Samsung's acquisition of Korea Engineering Company allowed it to enter the construction business. Hyundai's acquisition of Incheon Steel Company gave it access to the steel industry (Kang, 1996). This growth oriented diversification was not in an effort to expand profitability and did not have some brilliant strategy at its core. Instead, as Woo (1991) points out, this expansion aimed to grow companies so large that they would become 'too big to fail' and become eternal receivers of state support. As Park's presidency continued into the 1970s, the centrality of *chaebol* to the Korean market and the necessity of maintaining economic growth led to just that.

By the 1970s, economic growth not only stood as Park's platform, but also the solution to public unrest. Park promised large economic growth, including a \$10 billion export target, to the people as a way to legitimize the creation of the Yusin constitution that kept him in power post-1971. This policy continued to place *chaebol* at the center of the new growth policy because of their management experience at scale and already existing connections to the government (Jwa & Seo, 2000). Additionally, the government relied on *chaebol* because of their advantage in domestic and international financial markets, in which *chaebol* dominated because of their large amounts of industrial credit and large existing operations (Kang, 1996). Hence, when the government began the HCI drive in the 1970s, it pushed *chaebol* to diversify into a new array of

sectors including iron, steel, nonferrous metals, shipbuilding, general machinery, chemicals, and electronics (Jwa, 2002). The tax benefits, aid, and export market share that the government gave large corporations that got permission to enter these sectors continued to increase their size while growing the national economy through economy of scale (Jwa, 2003).

However, this blissful environment for Korean business would not last forever. The sun was setting on the Fordist era of production in which the state partnered with industry to meet production and growth quotas. By 1979, these signs existed both internally and externally in Korea. On the outside, the United States under Reagan and the United Kingdom under Thatcher had already begun the transition to a neoliberal paradigm of production. On the inside, the Korean miracle seemed to have reached its end and the economic was crumbling. Rampant inflation at 25% percent threatened the Korean economy. Moreover, the Korean economy was contracting at the same time as the Korean won suffered a major exchange crisis and the Korean state bankrupted itself through its drive toward heavy and chemical industrialization (Woo, 1991). Hence, with the assassination of Park Chung-Hee on October 26, 1979, a new set of perspectives on economic development prepared to take over.

Gradual Reform before the Crisis

Starting in 1980, the long, slow lurching of the leviathan state toward neoliberalism began. Though gradual, the Korean state began to end its blind support of *chaebol* and focus on developing a financially healthy economy under the leadership of the American trained economists in the Economic Planning Board. Using Pirie's application of Jessop's (2002a, 2002b) framework, this paper classifies the transformation between 1980 and 1993 under Kim Young-sam as a period of "neo-liberal policy adjustment" to reflect the use of selected neoliberal

policies in an effort to improve the functioning and global competitiveness of the directed economy while learning the core of the system in place. Meanwhile, the period from 1993 to 1997 represents a period of “neo-liberal policy adjustment” in which the government modifies some parts of the core structure and increases the scope and speed of transformation. These two phases proceed a phase of neoliberal regime change, which occurs in force in the wake of the Financial crisis.

Korea’s difficulties at the end of the 1970s illustrated the limits of the Korean government in managing the growth of the Korean economy and maintaining necessary levels of R&D funding. Korean state planners in the Economic Planning Board, who had been largely ignored since the HCI drive began in 1973, knew this and in a stroke of luck found themselves with a large degree of control under the new Chun Doo-Hwan regime as he looked to reform the economic system in the early 1980s (Clifford, 1998: 181). These economists and reform minded officials such as Kim Jae-ik, who tutored the new president on economics 3 to 4 times a week (Hart-Landsberg, 1993: 190), would begin to lead Korea into the era of neoliberal policy adjustment (Jessop, 2002b). Their influence led to an alternatively conceived fifth Five Year Plan focused on economic structural reform.

In striving to reach the goals envisioned in the Fifth Plan, Korea will depart from the quantitative target-oriented methods, as were the primary tactics of the last four Plans. The present Plan, in its place, relies on structural reform of economic institutions and policies, working towards, among other things, import liberalization, autonomous banking, an efficient industrial incentive system, and a competitive banking system (Republic of Korea Government, see Kong, 2000, 73).

This represented a major shift in Korean policy. Far from big business nursing at the breast of the government without competition, the Chun Doo-hwan government declared that competition and more objective measures would now characterize government-business

relations. Thus began the end of the developmental state in Korea. In fact, small but significant changes had already taken place by the end of the fifth Five Year Plan in 1986. This included reducing government's role in credit allocation, selling off commercial banks, increasing national interest rates to stabilize the economy, and eliminating interest rate subsidies (World Bank, 1986: 49). This had the dual intention of creating a more independent, market based economy and sending a message to the *chaebol* that reform was in order since the government would no longer support their mindless expansion.

Despite these changes, government reforms proceeded both slowly and intentionally and sometimes to little effect. In the big picture the Korean economic reform meant to increase Korea's competitiveness and solve internal pricing issues. Moreover, the historical protection that the Korean government could afford to give its corporations from foreign competition began to fall out of style as new neoliberal norms increased the speed of globalization and preached free trade. At the same time, the government recognized the need to reform the *chaebols*, who stood in a precarious position by the early 1980s. To this end, new policies to force *chaebol* to concentrate their activities and increase their transparency such as the real name financial transaction system and the Monopoly Regulation and Fair Trade Act came into effect. However, such laws had little impact due to lack of enforcement and deceptive family practices (Kim, B.K., 2003).

However, the actual impact of the law on *chaebol* activity has less importance in this paper than implications of these policies on the government-business relationship. By 1986 the government had begun to reverse course on its relationship with Korean businesses, particularly *chaebol*. The nursing, supportive government had disappeared, replaced by a government which attempted to encourage free competition. Hence, corporate behavior began to change as well.

For example, corporations began looking to borrow from banks that they acquired during government auctions instead of looking to the government to provide funding. Moreover, corporations began looking abroad for additional sources of funding. In ways such as this, the large conglomerates in Korea began to pursue new strategies to survive independent of government support.

The slow introduction of neoliberal reform and the gradual distancing between government and business continued as large conglomerates tried to adapt to this new environment. By the end of 1986, the government liberalized lending and deposit rates (OECD, 1996) and by 1987 it removed official controls from overseas investments by domestic companies (Van Hoesel, 1999). Finally, by 1993 the government allowed limited foreign equity investments (capped at 15%) in Korean firms (Kong, 2000: 164). Allowing foreign investment in Korean firms represents one of the most significant of these changes because it allowed financial institutions abroad who already operated on neoliberal paradigms of profit maximization to influence Korean corporate behavior. In contrast to the “traditional” Korean corporate practice of growth maximization and the pursuit of mindless expansion, foreign equity in Korean companies planted the voice of industry concentration and profit maximization into the leadership of Korean conglomerates.

The decline in the close government-business relationship accelerated in the Kim Young-sam period as the government came to odds with businesses over rationalizing their balance sheets. To reduce the debt of Korea’s overleveraged industrial sector, Kim liberalized rules on overseas borrowing (which had lower interest rates than the Korean domestic market) to the point that overseas borrowing was largely freed from controls by 1994 (OECD, 1998). However, when the Kim Young-sam government attempted to reduce the diversification of Korean

corporations in order to streamline them and make them more profitable, Korean corporations used new foreign loans to attempt to gain monopolies through empire building in their chosen sectors without evacuating unprofitable sectors. The government knew these practices were unsustainable but despite sky-rocketing debt-equity ratios, low profitability (Bello and Rosenfield, 1990), low efficiency and exposure to international capital markets, the government allowed the *chaebol* to continue in order to avoid the fallout of the inevitable economic, political, and social consequences that would accompany restructuring (Pirie, 2008: 100). This debt leveraged time bomb finally went off in the Asian Financial Crisis.

The nature of the relationship between the state and private sector had already changed from cooperative to mainly regulatory by 1997. In its new role, the state focused on trying to improve the profitability of national corporations in order to allow them to compete internationally in a new, more liberalized economy. However, large corporations consistently resisted these efforts and tried to retain their ‘too big to fail’ status by maintaining diverse operations and high levels of borrowing through conglomerate owned or international banks backed by cross firm debt-guarantees. After all, without continuing government protection it was unlikely that Korean conglomerates could retain financial solvency unless the government was so worried about the impact of a conglomerate in default that it would provide a guarantee against bankruptcy. In the wake of the financial crisis though, conglomerates would come to find that there was no such thing as too big to fail.

The Asian Financial Crisis and Post-Crisis Reform

The Asian Financial Crisis rang the death toll of the developmental state and ushered in a new regulatory era as it showed the unsustainability of corporate practices under the leviathan

state in the new era. Not only had debt-equity ratios sky-rocketed (as shown in Figure 1), even before this ratio rapidly increased leading up to 1997, it had already floated high above the world standard (as shown in Figure 2). To make matters of worse, the Korean Stock Exchange found that most *chaebol* recorded negative economic value-added by 1997 (as shown in Figure 3). These unsustainable practices, combined with low profitability, low efficiency, and exposure to international capital markets planted the seeds for the economic crisis of 1997.

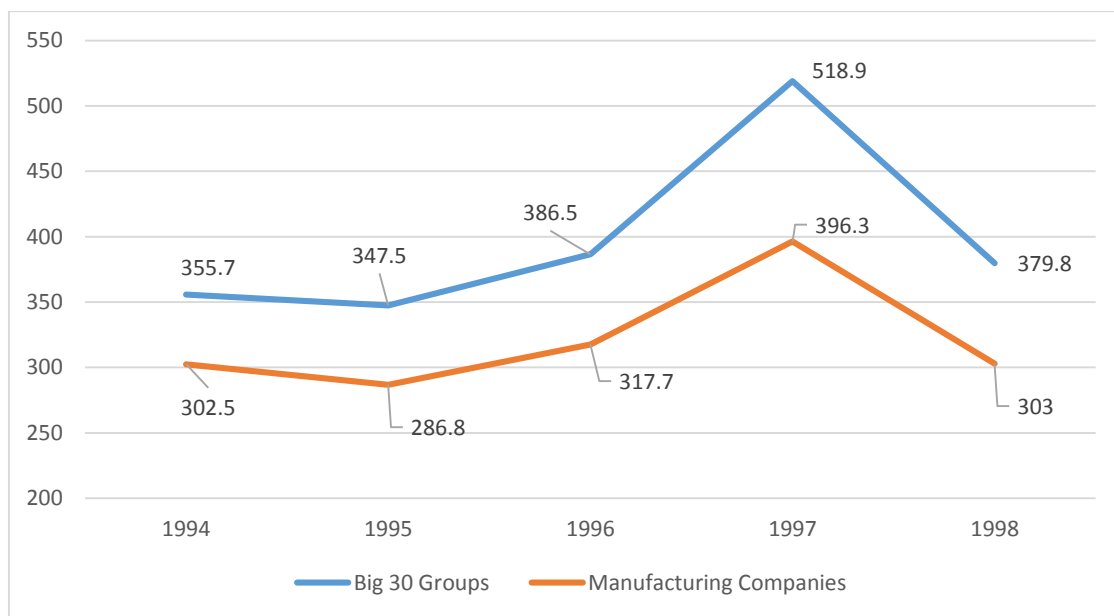


Figure 1: Debt-equity Ratio of the top 30 chaebol (Jwa, 2002)

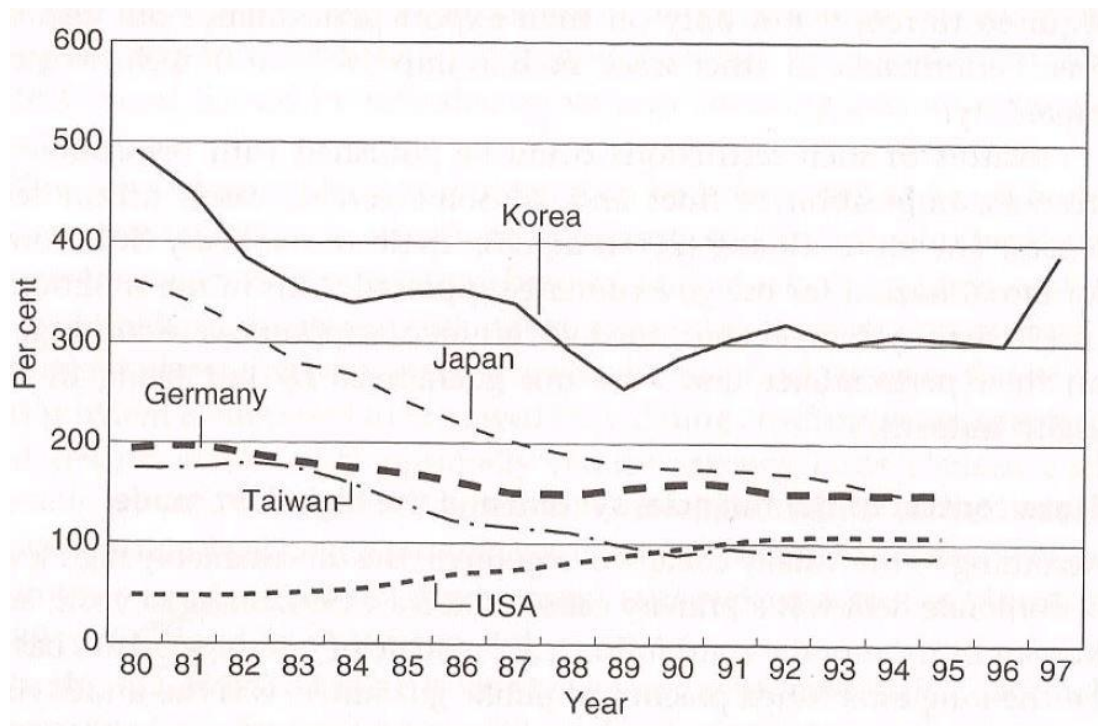


Figure 2: International comparison of corporate debt-equity ratios, 1980-97 (Kim & Rhyu, 1998)

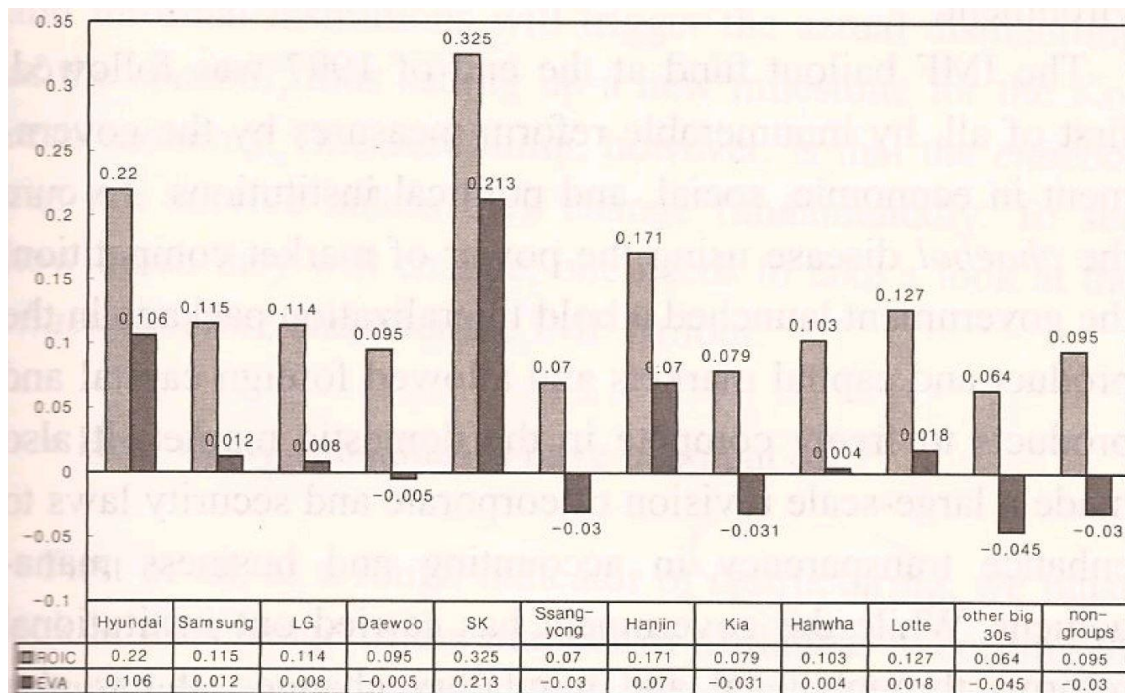


Figure 3: Economic value-added of the Big 30 groups and non-group companies (Lee, 2000)

Robert Emery (2001) places the beginnings of the crash at the bankruptcy of Hanbo Iron and Steel Company in January, 1997. The investigation into this bankruptcy revealed a previously unheard of level of corruption and bribery in the government including government forced loans to Hanbo by banks. Shortly after this, the collapse of Sammi Group, Jinro Group, Dainong Group, and Kia Motors in March, April, May, and July, respectively, led to shocks throughout the economy. Furthermore, this led to the collapse of banks such as the First Korea Bank and a downgrading of the credit of major banks such as Cho Hung Bank, Korean Exchange Bank, and Korea First Bank.

Thus, financial panic ensued. Banks began to refuse to extend loans or provide new capital. Japanese banks especially began to call in loans and refuse loan extensions. Meanwhile, capital flight occurred in the Korean market from foreign investors after the government announced that “even the *chaebol* can fail” (Chang, 1998). As opposed to the \$2.0 billion in foreign investment that flowed into the country in the first quarter of 1997, \$1.8 billion left the country in the third quarter (Emery, 2001). In this situation, no investor wanted to be the last one in the rapidly falling market, leading to a steep domino effect.

Before the end of August, 6 of the top 30 *chaebol* declared bankruptcy and many of the remaining firms were experiencing difficulties. By October, the government’s continuing policy of guaranteeing all bank loans and the nationalization of Kia Motors led both Standard and Poor and Moody’s Investor Services to downgrade Korea’s sovereign credit rating. This was soon followed by a speculative attack on the Hong Kong dollar that sharply reduced the value of the Korean stock market. At the same time, capital continued to flow out of Korea in the fourth quarter, leading to a massive depreciation of the won. This trend accelerated in November as the won approached W 1,000 / dollar (the government had always planned to keep the won stable at

W 500 / dollar). The government began to use its international reserves in order to slow the depreciation of its currency, however just two weeks of this practice used half of Korea's \$30.5 billion in foreign reserves. With the U.S.'s decision that Korea should look to the International Monetary Fund for help, Korea had no choice but to request the IMF's assistance (Emery, 2001)

The bailout brought many of the remaining neoliberal reforms to the Korean economy. The \$57 billion extension from the IMF and World Bank brought with it many conditions, especially in the area of corporate and national economic reform. The financial crisis provided the government the opportunity it needed to reshape the economic landscape by implementing a comprehensive set of neoliberal reforms. These neoliberal reforms focused around the theme of introducing market forces into every aspect of economic life in Korea and removing the protected status of large corporations. Generally, these reforms have reformed institutional structures, the financial regulation system, corporate governance, the level of economic openness in the economy, and the privatization of the state (Pirie, 2008: 107).

Almost immediately, the government quickly went to work after the crisis setting up a functioning bankruptcy system. Oh (2000) explains that before the crisis, not only had institutions not often file bankruptcy in Korea, but that even the concept remained alien to both the general public and the legal profession. As a result of this, bankruptcy proceedings took unusually long in Korea. Pirie points out that delays of over ten years were not uncommon (Pirie, 2008: 132). Therefore, creditors favored informal agreements with debtors over going to court. However, the reform of bankruptcy proceeding, particularly the increased speed of those proceedings, made bankruptcy procedures a much more attractive option than informal agreements or allowing insolvent businesses to carry on business like usual. This played a key role transforming the focus of corporate management from expansion and debt-leveraged

operations to profitability and sound financial structures. It also marked the end of the protectionist, nurturing practices of the state.

In the aftermath of the crisis, in order to make sure that such dangerous lending and investment practices did not happen again, the government (with IMF guidelines) began to put in place new regulations for corporate governance. These reforms included protection for minority shareholders, instalment of outside managers, and a stronger board of directors. Additionally, to increase transparency for the government and stakeholders, the government made companies start using international accounting practices and combined financial statements so that money could not be hidden from one subsidiary's balance sheets. These new corporate governance structures in tandem with a functioning bankruptcy system had the ultimate intention of increasing the focus of corporate managers on increasing profits and stock value as opposed to unnecessary diversification and mindless expansion.

Additionally, the government allowed for huge increases in the levels of foreign ownership of Korean companies as well as the purchase of some struggling domestic firms by foreign entities. This served two functions: to draw in foreign capital to refinance struggling companies through non-debt means and to provide further safeguards against uncompetitive behavior in Korea by improving corporate governance. The large increase in foreign ownership signals the success of these policies. By the end of 2005, foreigners owned 50 percent of all stock on the Korean Stock Exchange. Even large firms were not immune to this wind as foreigners possessed 46.5 percent of stock in the top ten conglomerates in Korea. Even banks became largely foreign owned with 59 percent of commercial bank stock and 63 to 100 percent of privately owned banks in the hands of foreigners (Pirie, 2008: 137-139). This essentially

entrusted the destiny of the Korean political economy to global capital and greatly contributed to ending the era of fleet like management and mindless expansion.

In addition to these changes that have directly impacted the behavior of corporations, a host of new neoliberal policies have come into play in Korea which demonstrate the government's direct attempt to rely on market mechanisms for economic governance. This primarily occurred through institutional reform in Korea. First, on the last day of 1997, the Korean government passed into law the new Bank of Korea Act, giving the bank more autonomy over its operations. Second, the independent regulatory agency, the FSC was established in line with practices of regulatory enforcement and direct intervention. Third, new standards on regulation creation were developed to ensure the legality of new regulations and to ensure that all regulation can be justified by neo-liberal criteria. Thus, this change established the Regulatory Reform Committee in Korea which establishes the direction of reform in Korea. All of these changes show that neoliberal ideas have become the new common sense and litmus test for Korean economic activity and reform.

Other neoliberal reforms in Korea similarly attempt to lock in neoliberal logic as the foundation of economic life in line with global notions of "best practice" while maintain its dominance. Many of these changes are prudential standards meant to enforce market discipline in economic behavior. For example, the government loan classification schemes to match a borrower's ability to pay instead of historical performance. Additionally, new laws made regular risk management checks standard procedure. Finally, new systems require regulators to act to aggressively to correct solvency issues in order to prevent the continual operation of failing firms. All of these systems have been meant to reduce risk while increasing market forces.

Neoliberalization has continued in Korea until the present day to the point at which neoliberal policy recommendations come as common sense. Due to the institutional reform that has taken place, Pirie says that Korea is now unambiguously a neoliberal state (Pirie, 2008). Inevitably, all of these changes have increased the openness of the Korean economy to global financial flows and global competition, focusing businesses more intensely on increasing profit margins and cutting costs while creating a new sense of insecurity among Korean businesses. This is not to argue the financial strength of Korean businesses hasn't improved; it has. However, in the process of creating more efficient modes of competing in the global economy, Korean corporations have changed their modus operandi and their priorities. This reflects changes in the behavior of corporations at all levels of the Korean economy and, therefore, the structure of the Korean economy itself. Inevitably, these changes in the economy have second and third order effects on the societies in which they operate. The next section seeks to examine how the labor market and labor relations have developed in the age of neoliberalism as the government continues to balance making Korea a favorable location of global capital and creating a balanced society while corporations try to find new ways to increase their competitiveness.

Korean Labor and Labor Law

When looking at the ways in which the economy impacts society, no one aspect of the economic affects as many people as directly as employment. Inside of employment, countless issues literally impact the everyday life of citizens in the capitalist society including labor-capital relations, employment security and tenure, employment contracts, wages, benefits, insurance, etc. Employment also relates to society in that different levels, types, and fields of employment

stand as the ultimate aspiration of the individual who relies on it for his or her livelihood. Therefore, this section examines labor in Korea pre-1987 for comparison later when looking at the modern day. Inevitably, I will argue that despite the initial gains by labor during the beginning of the globalization process due to the labor movement between 1987 and 1989, overall, companies have worked to reduce regular workers and hence, labor cost, in order to increase profits while increasing workers' sense of insecurity. This has led to more competition in Korea for these jobs despite their reduction in number.

Korean Labor and Labor Law Pre-1987

The suppression of labor during the Park Chung-Hee period underpinned the period's economic growth. The availability of cheap and disciplined labor sustained production and provided the groundwork of Korea's miracle. To develop this pool of labor, the government enacted policies to create a pool of cheap labor and to enforce its discipline. First, agricultural pricing caps forced workers out of agricultural jobs and into dangerous factories. The goal of these policies lay in making the lives of peasant so uncomfortable that they had no choice but to go work dangerous, underpaid jobs in cities. Hence, government policies were the root cause of the mass urbanization in Korea from 1960 to 1980, with the farming population falling from 72 to 28 percent (Lie, 1998).

The government also took large steps to enforce the discipline and repress the working class in order to make sure funnel additional capital into development. To this end, Park Chung-hee banned strikes and independent unions to prevent labor organization while implementing extensive wage caps across the economy to prevent "feckless" consumption among the working class (Pirie, 2008). Though this allowed for relatively evenly distributed growth, it also led to unfavorable working conditions. It even allowed the government to suspend employees' rights

should their activities “have a serious impact on the national economy” (Ma, 2011: 728). What labor disputes did exist ended in favor of employers due to the limitation of collective bargaining rights (Ma, 2011). Therefore, the government ignored and even sometimes supported corporations’ use of military style organizational structures and physical discipline on the factory floor (Rho, 1995: 42). Beatings and torture were not unheard of for disruptive workers. Moreover, these policies allowed Korea to stand as the country with the most industrial accidents and longest working hours in the world.

If this wasn’t bad enough, the Korean government provided almost no support or safety nets for the working class. During this time workers remained unprotected from illness, unemployment, injury or old age. Pirie (2008) notes that the Industrial Accident Insurance Scheme of 1964, the Public Assistance Programme of 1965 and the National Health Insurance Scheme of 1977 all existed, but that only the Public Assistance Programme focused on helping the poor and that its levels of support remained essentially non-existent. Rather than the working class, these programs targeted the core group of working in capital-intensive production areas of large firms. Far from truly aiming to support the whole of the Korean working class, these programs aimed to forge an alliance between core workers and the government in order to create a solid base of support for the economic drive. This can be seen as part of the government’s middle class drive explained by Yang (2012) aimed to develop a strong (if not large) middle in Korean society to provide support for the regime.

Korean Labor 1987 until the post-Crisis Era

However, this completely changed due to the labor movement in 1987 which grew out of the discontent first voiced by Jeon Tae-il. The labor movement led to amendments of the Labor Standards Act (LSA) including tougher safety standards, higher wages, favorable leave policies,

and extensive procedures for letting workers go that basically guaranteed lifetime employment. Unions found themselves in greater positions of power to bargain for increased pay and benefits from employers due to changing laws to make unions more independent and growing union membership. In the three years from 1986 to 1989 the number of unions increased from 2,658 to 7,883 and members nearly doubled from 1,036,000 to 1,932,000 (Koo, 2000: 231). Additionally, union density increased from 12.3 percent to 18.6 percent during these years (Park & Leggett, 1998: 279). On top of these quantitative changes, qualitative changes also took place. In these years more than any other, labor realized its ability to contest capital and win. This is reflected by the fact that the number of labor disputes in 1987 stood five times higher than a decade before. Between 1977 and 1986, 174 disputes occurred each year in comparison to 846 disputes a year between 1987 and 1996 (Koo, 2000: 231). Simultaneously, labor gained increased power over the discipline on the shop floor, demonstrating the weakening of capital's control on labor.

Labor disputes with employers within singular enterprises led to new, corporation based wage gaps determined by the success of union negotiations. This created an increasingly unsustainable and unequal system. Inevitably, corporations with large revenue streams and larger, stronger unions (i.e., Korea's *chaebols*) gave larger concessions in pay, benefits, and leave, leading to employment gaps between large and small corporations (Lee, 2011). However, these concessions also led to conditions that remained profitable only during the limited time of the three lows (low value of the Korean won supporting exports, low interest rates to promote growth, and low oil prices to reduce the cost of production). Despite large account surpluses during these years,¹ as the won began to revalue in 1988 with 16 percent growth (Hart-

¹ During the period of the three lows, Korean industry benefited from massive account surpluses. These surpluses are recorded at \$46.1 billion in 1986, \$98.6 billion in 1987, and \$141.7 billion in 1988 and \$50.6 billion in 1989 (Chang, 2002: 19).

Landsberg, 1993: 237-238), export growth declined from 36.4 percent in 1987 to 3.0 percent in 1989 (Chang, 2002: 19). The declining growth of Korean exports meant that companies had to begin investigating new methods of production to remain sustainable and decrease the cost of labor. At this point the government's neoliberal restructuring and desire to conform to international norms provided a perfect opportunity for businesses.

Recognizing the precarious state of the Korean economy, the government and capital began to pursue a variety of methods to decrease labor costs. This began with the Ministry of Trade and Industry's proposals on labor law revision in 1991. These revisions included increasing labor flexibility and restrictions on union activities. The ideas for increasing labor flexibility directly reflected trends in advanced neoliberal economies such as the U.S. and Britain and included easing the hiring and firing process, allowing dispatch workers, allowing scab labor use during industrial conflict, and introducing more flexible labor hours (Kim & Moon, 2000: 57). Though these discussions ended up having little impact on the state of employment relations at this point, it did provide the foundation for the development of the Tripartite Commission, an organization of labor, corporate, and government representatives which has led labor relations until the present day.

The Tripartite Committee undertook many negotiations in order to create a compromise that would increase Korea's economic competitiveness and retain workers' rights. However, the bill finally passed on December 26th, 1996, in a secret session of the National Assembly, remained one sided in favor of capital. According to Koo it "accommodated almost all the [employers'] demands" (Koo, 2000: 238) but gave labor only minor concessions. However, despite a new bill being passed in 1997 in the wake of a national strike, provisions increasing the flexibility of labor through legalizing flexible, selective work hours, allowing redundancy

dismissals, and providing for the hire of scab labor during labor disputes remained (Chang, 2002: 23; Lee & Lee, 2003: 509). These revisions intended to increase economic competitiveness, but it could not stop the collapse of the Korean economy due to the unhealthy financial structures of Korea's largest companies.

The crisis gave the Korean government the opportunity it needed to liberalize labor laws and force businesses to rationalize their financial practices while giving companies an opportunity to reassert control over labor. Suddenly, in the name of saving the nation, labor had to accept new laws that would lead a trend toward the continual reassertion of capital's domination. Immediately, the Korean government allowed companies to fire workers in order to rationalize financial structures and retain solvency. In 1998, the Korean government changed the Labor Standard Act. The new bill allowed companies to fire workers in times of "managerial need" if all other alternatives were exhausted (including putting workers on unpaid leave, dividing work shifts, and suspending pay) and relaxing the definition of "managerial need," making it easier to begin layoffs. Additionally, the government legalized temporary work agencies to increase labor flexibility (KCTU report from Chang, 2002: 25; Cho & Lee, 2007; Kim & Moon, 2000). However, despite these changes, even to this day regular workers in Korea remain well protected compared to their global counterparts in advanced economies (Pirie, 2008: 186). As will be discussed in more depth later, the real issue is the extension of the number of workers on the periphery who face significant disadvantages and the new relationship that has developed between labor and capital. Restructuring of the labor law alone did not directly lead to these issues, rather, businesses have taken advantage of new policies to increase cheap, non-regular work use and reduce labor costs. This paper now turns to the current debates in Korea

regarding the further progression of neoliberal policies to explore the continuing march of neoliberalism and its acceptance as just good practice or common sense.

Recent Trends and Ongoing Debates in Korean Labor Law

The debate in the media clearly illustrates the desire of businesses to continue the deregulation of labor in order to further reduce their labor costs and financial responsibilities to employee. When the neoliberal-minded Minister of Strategy and Finance, Choi Kyung-hwan made a statement on November 24th this year about easing the dismissal standards for regular workers, big business stood firmly behind him. He said, “The pie will not get any bigger, at least for several years, and the only way to make it feed as many people as possible is to break it down into smaller pieces... We are considering easing the dismissal standards for regular workers” (The Korea Herald, 2014a). The goal of this policy would be to make the Korean labor market more flexible to allow companies to size themselves based on changing demand. This would produce consistently higher levels of employment even if employees change workplace more frequently.

Kim Gwang-seok, a senior researcher at Hyundai’s think tank, the Hyundai Research Institute, strongly supported the idea saying that “Unless the pie expands, the government’s efforts to create new jobs may only lead to the downsizing of existing jobs, either in number or scale” (The Korea Herald, 2014a). The Korea Economic Research Institute (KERI), the research agency of the Federation of Korean Industries, the organization representing big business in Korea, also responded positively. In December, they released a statement that called for new out of court work out programs for companies (The Korea Herald, 2014b). KERI argues that this will make it easier and cheaper for insolvent companies to restructure so that they can prevent further losses (Yonhap News, 2014). However, based on past trends there is no reason to think

that companies will not replace 3 regular workers with 3 temporary workers as opposed to 5 new workers in order to “preemptively” address financial difficulties

Another hot issue in the media debate revolving around new neoliberal policy changes regarding employment lies in the government’s plan to extend periods of non-regular work. As it currently stands in Korea, non-regular workers over 35 in Korea may work in firm for up to two years as a non-regular worker. However, at that point companies must make consistently employed non-regular workers regular workers. New government reforms would extend this to four years. Additionally, as opposed to the current standard of 1 year, after just 3 months of work, companies must pay a severance pay to non-regular workers. Finally, on top of severance pay, if non regular workers fail to get regular jobs at the end of their contract, they will receive an additional compensation on top of the severance pay. The government estimates that this would benefit almost 2 million people in Korea fired by their companies after less than 1 year (Kim, 2014).

The government stance on this issue rests on the disparate hiring practices of Korean companies, which it says takes advantage of the cheap cost of non-regular labor. In the words of the finance minister, Lee Ki-kweon,

“While companies in advanced countries hire temporary workers in order to secure flexibility, Korean companies aren’t like that. Korean companies take advantage of the wage gap between salaried and irregular workers. It is difficult for companies to make all their employees staff workers. The latest plan is aimed at giving them the clear message that it is OK to hire temporary workers, but pay them well” (Kim & Song, 2014).

In this way, the government seems to have the goal of balancing the need for large employment numbers in the country while trying to balance with business leaders on the much higher cost of hiring regular workers. However, both sides take issue with this policy reform.

Labor groups argue that this law normalizes non-regular work and reduces the time during with employees have to endure non-regular work. According a Korean labor lobby, “The

working-period extension from two years to four years for non-regular employees would provide employers with a wider opportunity to dismiss them, as it will be more difficult for the workers to gain regular worker status in their position” (Kim, 2014). In this way, labor organizations argue that regardless of whether temporary workers have severance, the bigger issue lies in the pure disadvantage of non-regular work vs. regular work.

As a result, many labor groups care more about the number of temporary workers than severance pay. “The government’s plan announced today will let employers play around with seasoned temporary workers,” the group of contract workers said. “Among the 84 government measures, there’s no single measure to help reduce the number of contract workers or convert them into regular positions.” Therefore, many prominent spokesmen like Seo Young-kyo for the New Politics Alliance for Democracy argues, “What contract workers want is to become regular workers, not extending their guarantee years” (Kim & Song, 2014).

Of course, big business also stands against this change. The Korea Employers Federation argues that increases wages to non-regular employees or trying to hire them as regular workers remains difficult as long as regular worker pay remains at current levels (Kim, 2014). Hence, the debate between the “common sense” of what supports the growth of businesses again conflict with logics of social fairness. This paper does not pretend to have a solution for balancing the woes of the Korean economy, but it is useful to point back to the Bourdieu quote from the introduction at this point. “In the name of a narrow and strict conception of rationality as individual rationality, [neoliberalism] brackets the economic and social conditions of rational orientations and the economic and social structures that are the condition of their application” (Bourdieu, 1998).

Education Policy and Neoliberal Thought

The final section of this chapter examines how neoliberal economic change has brought with it new social logics regarding institutional structures, proper modes of competition, and fairness. These three areas deeply impact the educational paradigm of Korea, which grounds itself in the idea of fairness and providing equal access to all students in Korea. In a country where education is such a prized commodity, these principles remain of tantamount importance in keeping order and discipline in society. What is significant is that the logic of economic markets totally dominates the discussion of the educational system today in Korea. In fact, government affiliated institutes such as the Korea Development Institute have written numerous volumes exploring how to make the educational system more fair through enrollment quotas, raising tuitions, providing aid to students, providing ration coupons, changing entrance exam material and cut offs, increasing the cost of private tutoring, and many other issues. Such books such as Yoo (2002) test and justify all policy decisions based on the workings of the free market. Hence, neoliberal economic logic plays a deep role in determining educational policy in Korea, and therefore directly shapes the lives of young people preparing to enter the economy as productive citizens. This chapter will first explore the history of regulation on supplementary education and then the development of the national exam.

Hagwon

Today, supplementary education in the form of private academies, or *hagwon*, is a hallmark of the Korean educational scene. These academies can focus on anything from arts and music to foreign languages and exist for everything from certificate programs to government service exams. However, most commonly *hagwon* orient themselves toward school subjects and test preparation. Almost all Korean youth have experience with such institutions, with almost

90% of elementary school students attending regularly and over 50% of high school students attending regularly. These institutions pride themselves on allowing students to learn at their own speed and focus on areas of their interest while also allowing families to keep their child nationally competitive if the local school cannot provide adequate education.

However, the Korean government has not always looked upon the use of private, supplemental education favorably. The increasing dependence on supplementary education in the 60s and 70s favored mainly students whose families had large amounts of disposable income. Therefore, private education, far from being an ultimate equalizer in places with inadequate public education, came to represent the symbol of hardening of class barriers. Because of this, when Chun Doo-Hwan took power in 1980, he declared that this “infringes upon the basic rights of the people to educate their children” (Lartigue, 2000), and quickly banned any supplemental education including *hagwon* and private tutoring. In this way, the government attempted to equalize educational opportunities for Koreans and relieve poor families of the burden of private education.

This ban remained generally in place until 2000 though exceptions were made in increasing numbers throughout this period. In 1989 the government began to allow private tutoring by college students and middle and high school students were allowed to take extra courses at a limited number of private institutions. Then, in 1996, the government made it legal for Korean graduate students to offer private tutoring, but simultaneously began to crack down on the increasing number of foreign tutors illegally teaching in private academies (Lartigue, 2000). Finally, in 2000 the Korean Supreme court declared that restricting supplementary education was unconstitutional. Since this time, the size of the private education industry in every aspect has grown at an astonishing rate.

Though the path of the regulation of private education has followed a few years behind economic reform, its logic has taken a similar course. For example, in 1980 Chun Doo-Hwan's ban on supplementary education in order to prevent excessive spending on education aimed to equalize the educational playing field. This approach reasoned that since families would abuse supplementary education to give their children unfair advantages, banning all supplementary education would give every student the same opportunity. This resembles a developmental government paradigm which does not trust companies to compete fairly and thus keeps a controlling hand in economic affairs.

Second, the gradual process of making exceptions to the supplementary education law from 1989 to 1996 resembles the thought process behind the neoliberal transition initiated under Chun Doo-Hwan, Roh Tae-Woo, and Kim Young-Sam. Though these reforms did not lead to an immediate neoliberal policy shift, the liberalization of banks and the non-banking financial sector, the retreat of the government from industrial policy, and the Korean Free-Trade and Monopoly Act all had the intention of gradually allowing increased amounts of unit-level competition. In this way, the government hoped to improve efficiency and make up for price disparities among different sectors while preparing to enter the world economy and compete with the globe's most efficient producers. In the same way, by slowly liberalizing education policy the government aimed to allow for more competition and preparation outside of the public sphere but in a manageable way that would not lead to an immediate abandonment of the public system. In the same way that the government envisioned the economy slowly learning to manage itself with proper rules and regulations, it envisioned the gradual development of a competitive but fair educational market.

Finally, the full drive toward neoliberalization after the financial crisis marked the end of major government intervention in the economy and the establishment of stronger regulations and institutions with the purpose of ensuring fair economic competition. Today in the aftermath of the 2000 Supreme Court decision, the new regulation surrounding *hagwon* is similarly designed to ensure fair and healthy competition among students. These policies, like limitations on the numbers of foreign teachers and curfews for students, demonstrate that though the government has stepped out of the direct regulation or restriction of these intuitions, it has a strong desire to manage their activities through regulation. Thus, just as the debate on economic competition has focused on developing proper regulation on free unit level competition, the debate on education competition has followed the same trend.

The National University Exam and the College Admission System

The national university entrance exam in Korea has stood as the shaping force of the Korean educational system since as far back as 1954. The fact that the national exam has been a central component of college acceptance process for more than 50 years has led to a frenzy around it in Korea unmatched around the world as the entire city of Seoul comes to a standstill on exam day with flights delayed, a noise ban, military drills canceled. The Korean national college entrance exam first appeared in 1954 after concern developed among the original post-colonial education system. In the wake of 1945, each institution of higher learning decided autonomously on the timing and content of its admissions tests. This led to the belief that many college entrants may not be adequately prepared to enter the colligate level in some institutions. Thus, the government developed and deployed the first “Unified Exam,” designed to be taken along with individual university exams (Joo, 2000).

This original system only lasted for one year before it was abandoned in 1955 and implemented again in 1962 as the only criteria for college admissions in a revised form known as the Qualified Examination for College Admission. This new test had a similarly short life span and the government moved away from it after two years due to the shortage of qualified students based on the new exam. However, problems similar to the issues seen in the 1950s with a lack of preparedness among college applicants resurfaced between 1964 and 1968, leading the government to move back to a two test system similar to 1954. This two test system lasted until 1980 (Joo, 2000).

By this time, competition for entrance to colleges again became too intense. Though students generally had no problem getting necessary scores on the national exam, over time institutional exams became more difficult and required intensive preparation. This led to an overreliance on supplementary education and the costs associated with it and a neglect of the common high school curriculum. Hence, in 1981 Chun Doo-hwan banned supplementary education including tutoring and private academies while requiring that universities make admission decisions based on high school records and the national standardized test alone.

This system generally remained in place until 1994 despite a few minor changes. In 1988, university interviews became part of the application process and the government abolished an essay portion that had been put in place two years earlier. Additionally, the test reduced its scope from 17 subjects to 9 and changed to include subjective and objective portions in order to better evaluate individual candidates' potential. At this same time, the government renamed the Qualified Examination for College Admission the Scholastic Aptitude Test to reflect its new focus on measuring aptitude for advanced study (Joo, 2000).

The government implemented a new, more flexible system in 1994. In this new system, colleges could assign their own weight to admission criteria and the government permitted three criteria to be evaluated. First, schools needed to evaluate high school records to the tune of at least 40% of admission criteria. High school record evaluations consisted of 80% grades, 10% attendance, and 10% extracurricular activities. Second, schools had the option of incorporating the Scholastic Aptitude Test into their Admission Decisions. This government remade the test in 1994 for this purpose and reduced the 9 subjects on the test into three broad categories: math and science, Korean language, and foreign language. Finally, colleges had the option of also implementing their own admissions test in their application process, though the government limited their test design to a maximum of three subjects. With these changes, most schools relied solely on the SAT and high school records for their admissions process (Joo, 2000).

In 1997, the system again changed to become more flexible. Suddenly, private colleges and universities gained the freedom to set their own admission criteria based on a broader number of factors such as essay tests. Table 1 displays a summary of these changes over the periods discussed. A few trends stand out when looking at the history of college admission reform in Korea. First, the government has always played an active role in negotiating the territory between supplying enough students to institutions of high education while trying to ensure their quality. Additionally, since 1980 there has been a move toward increasing the flexibility of university decision criteria within a government defined “acceptable” scope. Third, since 1980 high school performance has become an important criteria in the application process in order to bring a focus back to public education and relieve the cost of supplementary education (though seemingly to little effect). Finally, the standardized Scholastic Achievement

Test has become a central part of the application process and has become perhaps the most central component of a student's college application.

Table 1: The Characteristics of the University Entrance System (Park, 1989)

Period	Exam by Government	Exam by College	High School Records
1945–1953	—	X	—
1954	X	X	—
1955–1961	—	X	—
1962–1963	X	X	—
1964–1968	—	X	—
1969–1980	X	X	—
1981–1985	X	—	X
1986–1993	X	X ¹	X
1994 ² –1996	X	X	X
1997	X	X ³	X

¹College and universities could utilize an essay test in 1986 and an interview test in 1988.

²High school records is a mandatory criterion, but both an exam by government and an exam by college are optional.

³Colleges and universities should utilize only an essay test instead of tests in other subjects, including English, mathematics, and Korean.

Many of these developments are directly connected to the commodification of education and the progression of neoliberal thought. The government's role in attempting to ensure the quality of students applying to university illustrates the marketization of education and diplomas from universities. Moreover, the government has had to actively seek a way to match consumers' demands for college entrance preparation with developing a holistic national curriculum. These goals have brought significant challenges as households have developed innovative strategies to check the boxes for university admission. This frenzy had called for a

standard of “fairness” which the SAT has constantly attempted to fill. The transition to an aptitude test over a knowledge based test indicates both a government attempt to create a “fair” test which tests student potential while also orienting students on a small number of globally valued skills: writing, English, and mathematics. In this way the development of the SAT has conformed to neoliberal logic as it has created a system of open competition underpinned by globally accepted subjects related to generalizable skills.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to serve a number of different purposes. The first is to demonstrate the Korea is now an unambiguously neoliberal state. Going back to the criteria set out by Pirie (2008) in the introduction, we can compare the benchmarks with Korea’s neoliberal progression. Though Korea’s Central bank often gets bad publicity for the frequent pressure by the government, it does indeed operate independently (The Sunday Morning Herald, 2014; Hilsenrath et. al, 2010). Additionally, numerous regulation have come into force regarding financial regulation since the financial crisis. Third, corporate governance mechanisms in Korea have largely become market oriented in Korea with the induction of minority shareholder rights protects, elimination of foreign ownership limits, outside auditors, and a reformed board of directors system. Fourth, regulation in Korea today does focus on correcting market failures despite a few remaining restrictions on *chaebol* operation. Finally, as the discussion of post-crisis reform and current debates on neoliberal policy show, Korea has oriented and continues to orient itself toward a flexible labor market while new policies in regarding contracting, compensation, organization, and horizontal hiring for government jobs (discussed later) has

started to incorporate private sector practices into the government. Thus, we can say that Korea today stands as a neoliberal state.

These changes have led to new practices among the Korean private sector. In the 1960s and 1970s in Korea, companies aimed to grow as large as possible and diversify as much as possible in order to make them irreplaceable in the Korean economy, increase their political favor, and increase their chances of gaining government contracts and aid dollars. Since the neoliberal turn, Korean companies have become profit oriented, attempting to cut costs across the board. This has led to a new, more competitive employment system in Korea as companies attempt to use cheap, flexible labor to improve their balance sheets.

Moreover, under the new neoliberal order, companies use neoliberal logic to create a race to the bottom. As new ideas about the need to carry out profit maximization and cost cutting as much as possible become more accepted, companies use it to justify self-serving objectives. Kim Gwang-seok's thinly veiled threat that Korean businesses may down size in their own country should the government pass any policies that help employees but raise company cost. Far from sounding outrageous, increasingly this logic is treated as common sense. If companies can avoid costs, why shouldn't they?

However, this same logic of competition has now entered into mainstream thought and is applied to human behavior almost instinctively. People are economic agents viewed as private companies competing with one another for maximum returns (where returns are often viewed as a job's salary). Hence, educational institutions become the battleground in which students are sent to compete to gain top jobs and sustain their economic livelihood. Ironically, this has occurred at the same time the educational system, from schools to the college entrance system and the private education industry, has become ingrained with neoliberal logic. The business of

private education and the operation of schools as businesses has led to the institutionalization of the project of shaping neoliberal students who will internalize the drive to compete for college admission. Using the logics of the high-stakes education game, these institutions push students to value university status and their career over any other aspect of their lives. This breaks down group and community consciousness and promotes individuality for the sake of intensifying competition. In order to explore this theme further, Chapter 3 turns to explore students' experience with education.

CHAPTER 3: EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND NEOLIBERAL PERSONHOOD

My friends from middle school said, ‘Why should we study?’ Or they said ridiculous things like there were going to earn money selling things on the street or through joining the mafia; that was how everything was. However, on the first day of high school [at my new school], kids were already studying... It was just like it was natural to study. Except during times meant to play, the atmosphere was like, ‘of course we need to study.’ⁱⁱ

Looking back, Lee Young-sik sees the difference in the atmosphere of his middle school and his high school. His middle school, located in a poor neighborhood of Seoul, had students who never studied and never put serious thought into their futures. Meanwhile, his high school sat in the rich part of the town and had students from exclusively middle and upper-middle class families. His experience at these two different schools changed his life. Though he had never put much work into his school life as a middle school student, he began to study more seriously in high school. Looking back now from Yonsei University, one of Korea’s top 3 universities, he thinks that the difference between these students is obvious.

My friends from middle school and my friends from high school are at different levels. Their lifestyles are now totally different. We can’t judge other people’s lives but you can wish that you lived someone else’s life, you know? If you saw their schools and what they are doing now they are very different... My friends from middle school just play a lot. They earn money by doing part time jobs, but then they spend it all... They don’t know how to save money. Meanwhile my friends from high school are preparing for their future. They have a plan for how to use their money as well. My middle school friends are not reluctant to work in manual labor or in physical work in construction sites. My friends from high school, they are not like that at all.

Here he draws a distinction between the current status of his middle school and high school classmates. When he looks back at the difference between these two groups, he sees the difference between them lying in their work ethic and their attitude more than their social class. This experience has led him to believe that hard work or some minimal “basic effort” paves the way into the middle or even upper class in Korea. Through education he believes that hard work

can lead anyone into the middle class and that with some support people can even gain entrance to the upper class.

This mentality strongly supports the mainstream narrative in Korea that studying hard enough can catapult someone into the upper echelons of society. However, this chapter questions the narratives attributing success mainly to hard work and instead looks for how these ideas are incorporated in to the Korean educational experience. Rather than lying in reality, this section suggests that this narrative exists to justify the grueling competition that students face in Korean schools, competition that has only grown more intense as the educational standards of the country have continued to rise to meet workplace demand. At the same time, schools themselves have an interest in gaining competitive buy-in from students since schools rely on their ability to send students to top colleges to maintain their public funding and student enrollment. Thus, as the economy has become more and more neoliberal and schools treated more like businesses, molding all students into neoliberal persons who can compete to gain entrance to top colleges benefits both the school and the students lucky enough to win Korea's education game.

Moreover, the educational system widely reflects neoliberal trends and ideas of “best practice” in the way it designs and frames competition among students. From posting students' scores to preaching to students that they will have miserable lives if they do not study well to creating a privileged environment that can only be enjoyed by top learners, schools design every aspect of their environment to encourage competition among students and teach them to see each other as a competitor rather than as a friend or classmate. In fact, Kang Young-min, who will be mentioned later in this paper, brought up specifically that between Korean classmates there always exists a tension between them due to a never ending sense of competition. Essentially,

your friend today may be your rival tomorrow on the test, or in applying for a job. This is further reflected in the use of private education in Korea designed to enhance student competitiveness at the unit level. Thus, the fragmentation and atomization of Korean youth seen in the Korean educational system perfectly reflects neoliberal competition and its embedded philosophies.

Thus, this chapter takes the Korean educational system as a perfect lens through which to view the laboratory in which Korean youth are transformed into competitors and neoliberal economic subjects. Since education systems develop in students the skills and characteristics of successful workers, the world of Korean education is a place in which both to observe the functioning of neoliberalism and how neoliberal values become embedded in Korean youth who are striving to become members of the Korean (or international) labor force. Moreover, knowledge about oneself and the broader world plays a central role in how people learn to understand themselves. This, in turn, plays a central role in the process of identity formation since it determines how individuals, of their own free will, change their bodies, souls, thoughts, actions, and ways of being to attain a state of perfection or happiness (Foucault, 1988; Besley & Peters, 2007). Thus, schools, as the keeper and teacher of this knowledge, are the singular most powerful national institution in shaping the values and identities of Korea's neoliberal generation.

This study will first examine *hagwon* and their use as a reflection of the idea of competition in Korean society. I examine how supplementary education plays a central role in education in Korea and how it provides a way for those with the proper resources to get ahead without breaking down the perception of the education system as a meritocracy. Next, this study examines the college application process including the Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test and experiences within high school life to explore how students are trained to compete with one

another and eventually succeed in the college application process; where success is defined solely by the status or brand name of different universities. Finally, we turn to a discussion of the new cultural capital assigned to successful learners of English and how English has become both a new form of class reproduction and a barrier to class mobility. In this way, it has sustained the notion of deservingness among new social elite and reassigned the blame of failure to the language learners themselves. Through these three facets, this chapter hopes to illustrate the role of neoliberal ideology in shaping the world of Korean education and creating a generation committed to its principles.

The *Hagwon* as a Reflection of Korean Competition

Lee Na-rae has never been a stranger to the pressure to compete at the highest levels of education. She grew up in Gwangju, Korea's sixth largest city, and never felt the need to compete educationally the way her mother wanted her to. Ever since she can remember her mother has been pushing for her to study and get a highly respected and sought after job in Korea like doctor, judge, or lawyer (*sajajigeob*). But Na-rae never had that kind of ambition and by the time that she entered middle school thought that working to get one of those jobs was simply unrealistic. So day in and day out from her second year of middle school she found herself at odds with her parents. Her mother and father had wanted her to study and excel in diverse subjects since she had learned how to speak and had no interest in giving up on her now.

Since kindergarten her mother and other parents around her had said, "Studying is the only way to survive,"ⁱⁱⁱ and her mother did whatever she could to give Na-rae a leg up. When Na-rae was 5 years old her mother started sending her to a piano *hagwon*. By the time she was 7 her mother started sending her to a math *hagwon*. Before she entered middle school she was attending private English classes regularly. "My mom has education fever for her kids. Since

she has a strong desire to control her kids and as I was the first kid, she tried to make me study a lot,”^{iv} she said. When she was in 6th grade her mother even sent her to live in Malaysia to study English for one year because she had a distant relative living there. With all of these methods of getting ahead, her educational life was composed of a variety of strategies outside of publically provided education. However, despite her mother’s insistence Na-rae wanted to follow her passions: writing and music.

Lee Na-rae found her passion for music in high school, and wanted to make a career out of it. When she told her parents that she wanted to study music in college they were so outraged that her mother locked her in her room and nailed her door shut under the threat that Na-rae could not leave until she had changed her mind. Eventually she had to give up her dream to study music. “I think that in their minds, if I had chosen music then there would be no way for me to succeed,”^v she said about it. “If my mother hadn’t disagreed with me, I think I would have chosen music for my job.”^{vi} Her mother was more understanding with her passion for writing and allowed her to apply to college to study Korean language and literature. But throughout this period, private education continued to play a large role in Na-rae’s life.

Since she started going to *hagwon* when she was 5, she attended a number of private academies to make her more competitive for her college applications. *Hagwon* exist for every subject from SAT subjects like math and writing to music and art. As Na-rae began to prepare to attend college as a literature major, she began attending a writing *hagwon* as well as the usual English and test preparation schools. For her, life before college was a blend of school work and private academies, inside of which her social and familial relations were framed. Though the Korean government attempts to provide high quality education in schools to alleviate the educational burden of individual families, Lee Na-rae’s case shows that in a country as

competitive as Korea, public education is minimally relied upon as parents attempt to give their children a competitive edge in college admissions.

This is not a new phenomenon. Korea's drive towards education dates back to its Confucian period. Since then, education and successful test taking provided the only way to climb up the aristocracy's social hierarchy and win prestige for one's family. Then, as now, poor test results could do more than just prevent someone from getting a job; it could also bring shame onto one's family. Though the door to social advancement through education and test taking has been opened to everyone since the establishment of the Republic of Korea, the stress and pressure of test taking has done nothing but increase. In fact, this shame has been taken to almost unimaginable lengths in recent times. In 2004 a father drove out to his son's school in Gongju and lit himself, his wife, and his daughter on fire due to the disgrace he suffered from his honor roll son's poor grades (Card, 2005). With such heat around educational performance, it is no wonder parents are determined to do what it takes to get their children ahead. As such, *hagwon* play an important role in the education of Korean children and are seen as a way of getting a "leg up" on the competition through extra lessons, special teachers, and classes for different subjects.

Since the beginning of the Republic of Korea, the size of the *hagwon* industry has continuously increased despite bans on *hagwon* use that existed to various degrees between 1980 and 2000. Figures 4 and 5 provide general pictures of how supplementary education has expanded in Korea. Since 1970, the number of institutions in Korea has increased by almost 50 times as of 2007. This growth shows that it is not simply the legalization of these institutions beginning in the late 1980s that has led to this increase, but a nation-wide trend toward the use of private education. Figure 5 reinforces this statistic as the use of supplementary education at

every educational level has increased in Korea. This is reflected most alarmingly in elementary levels of education in which participation has increased from just over 10% to over 80% in 30 years. Of course, participation levels vary, but the OCED found in 2011 that 77% of Korean students attended private education lessons in the afternoon or evening after school for at least 10 hours every week. Moreover, according to Jin Lee (2011), other studies show that as of 2009, 95.5% of K-12 students in Korea had experienced some form of supplementary education. Therefore, it is clear that *hagwon* play a substantial role in the education of Korean youth.

Of course, supplementary education has imposed serious costs on Korean households. Official records of private education spending are displayed in Figure 6. These estimates of private education spending are generally seen as conservative and do not reflect the expenses of private tutors or tuition paid off of the books.

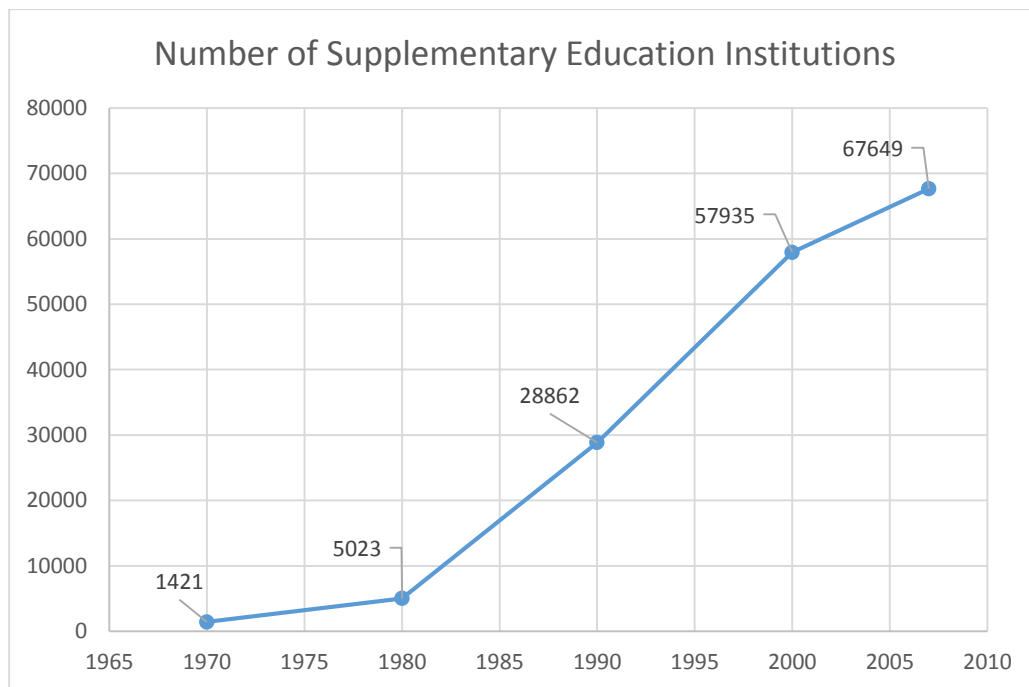


Figure 4: Number of Supplementary Educational Institutions (Lee, 2011)

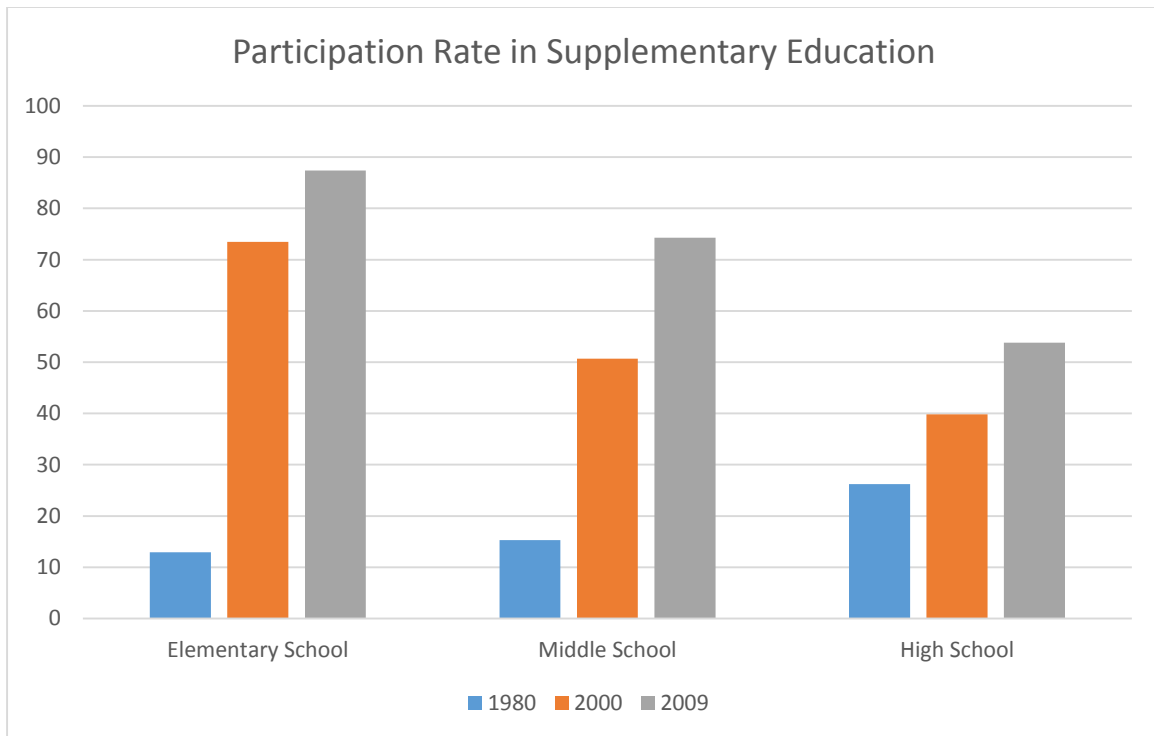


Figure 5: Participation in Supplementary Education (Lee, 2011)

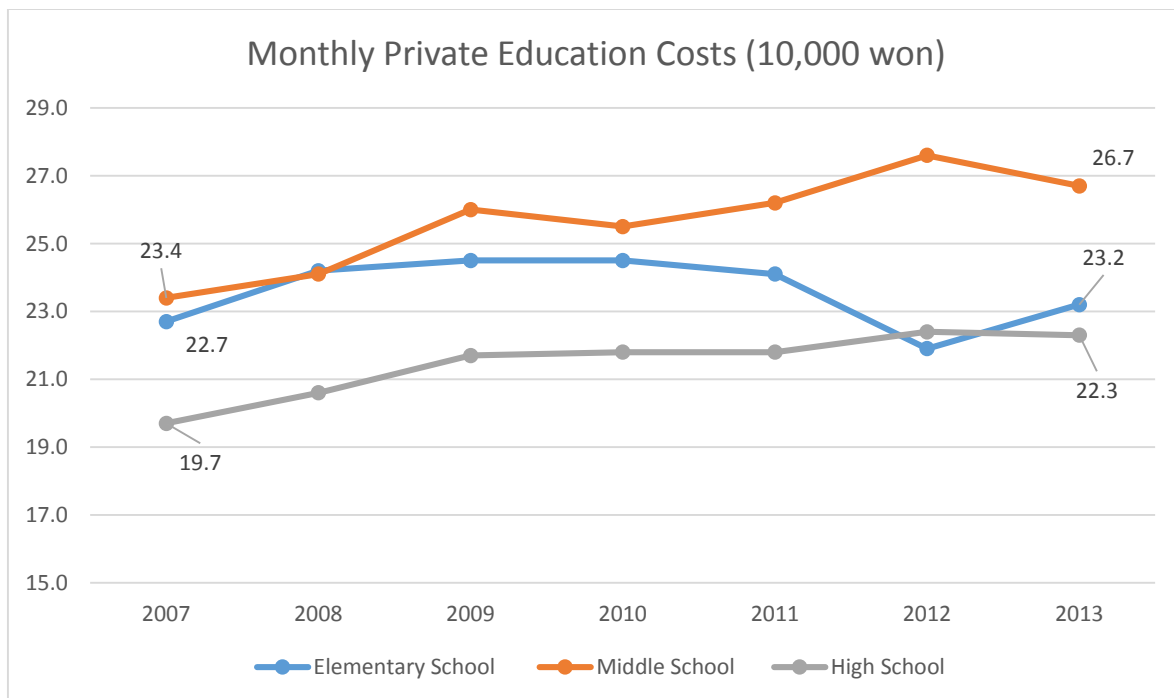


Figure 6: Monthly Private Education Costs by School Level (KOSIS)

However, these numbers still indicate a telling story. Private education expenses increased on average by 20,100W a month between 2007 and 2013, near a 10% increase in 6 years.

Should we take other stories into account, the picture is far more severe. Card (2005) estimates that an average middle class household in Korea spends an average of \$700 to \$1,000 a month on tutoring and cram schools; 15-30% of its monthly budget (based on OECD disposable income numbers. The Korean government official numbers place this number at around 5%). Lee (2011) also places private education costs substantially higher. Looking at a non-profit study of average education expenditures per student in 2010, Lee finds that Koreans spend 386,000W a month per student as opposed to the government average of 240,000W. Additionally, income gap differences have been appearing in a large way. Households that had a household income of more than 50,000USD spent 2.5 times more on private education than households earning less than 30,000USD a year. Government numbers place this difference at about 1.43 times based on data from 2010 and 1.63 times based on data from 2013 (KOSIS, 2014).

These numbers paint a shocking picture since large household expenditures on supplementary education deplete income from going to other expenses such as clothes, food, etc. It also demonstrates both a lack of faith in the adequacy of government provided education and an insecurity about the ability of one's child to keep up with others. Accordingly, Lee (2011) finds that 38% of parents site government policy regarding university examinations as their reason for using supplementary education. However, over 30% of parents site other families' use of supplementary education or parental involvement in children's education as their motivations for using such services. Thus there is a sense of "keeping up with the Jones" in Korean society. As supplementary education has become increasingly common in Korean

education, many parents see it as educational suicide for their children not to take advantage of such services.

Thus, educational attainment has become a consumable item in Korean society, and institutions of supplementary education its marketplace. Generally, the more money spent on this education, the more secure parents feel in their children's ability to compete. We bear witness to this in how educational expenditures rise with income and how supplementary education has become normalized. In fact, almost every student from a top-tier school interviewed during this study mentioned their use of supplementary education and their parents' commitment to continue to support their educational achievement to any end. At the same time, many students from low-tier schools experienced their parents apologizing to them about their parents' inability to continuously support supplementary education during their college preparation years or even now as they prepared to apply for jobs. Therefore, education in Korea is as closely related to ideas of consumption and investment than purely scholastic ability. Also, the cost of supplementary education shows its close connection to social class and its role as a class reproducer since wealthy households can afford services that others cannot. Due to these things, private education and its consumption cannot be separated from larger ideas of capitalism in Korean society. Education is not, it seems, an equally accessible good despite government efforts to increase the quality of public education.

Jung Hui-soo knows this reality well. She comes from a disadvantaged background in more than one way. Born to a working class family, she grew up in Incheon, one of Korea's largest cities located on the West coast of the peninsula. However, her parents divorced when she was in fifth grade, causing her to move to Wonju with her father, a small city in the least populated province on the Korean peninsula with about 10% of the population of Incheon. Her

father, a daily hired worker (the most disadvantaged class of worker in Korea) faced serious financial hardship throughout her middle and high school life and could not afford to send her to supplementary education. Therefore, her educational success depended largely on her effort throughout these formative years. However, in high school she studied hard and got into the school's elite education class.

This class, called *simhwabang*, provides extra math, English, and SAT writing classes for a small number of students after school for an hour or two every day. It is commonly found in Korean high schools and provides a host of other benefits to these student elite as well. In many Korean high schools students are forced to stay in the school and study until dinner time or later. However, instead of studying in cramped, hot classrooms without air conditioning surrounded by students of varying levels and motivations, students enrolled in the *simhwabang* get to study in larger, more comfortable desks in the temperature controlled (and quieter) library, sometimes even with a personal tutor.

Therefore, Hui-soo enjoyed some benefits as part of the school's special program. However, despite her status as a top ranking student and her hard work, she only received entrance to a university that she thought inadequate. So much so that she believed paying 5 million Korean won a semester (around \$4,500) would be a waste of money. From this disappointment, she gave up her plans to go to college altogether. However, within a year she set her sights back on applying to college. Fortunately, her mother who had recently remarried agreed to support her attendance for one year at a special *hagwon* designed just to prepare students to retake the Korean SAT. After a full year of study and preparation at this private academy, she successfully retook the SAT and got accepted to Inha University, a mid-tier, top 20 Korean university.

As Hui-soo's example shows, there is a difference between what one can achieve with hard work alone and with the kind of education that only money can buy. Another example of this is Choi Jung-min. Jung-min is a junior from Seoul studying fine arts at Ewha Woman's University, a prestigious Seoul university. According to her, studying fine arts in Korea has always been very competitive because of the limited number of fine arts spots available at colleges and the large number of students who have interest in studying it. Hence, Jung-min participated in extensive training in college to prepare for her college application.

She decided on her major in elementary school and has been practicing her painting and studying fine art ever since. As early as middle school her parents supported her as she prepared to gain admissions into a high school specialized in fine art in Seoul. Unfortunately, she failed to get in. Therefore, from her freshman year of high school she began attending painting *hagwon* 2-3 times a week in a different part of the city. This continued until the summer, during which she attended the academy 5 times a week from 1pm to 10pm. She took a break from this routine her second year of high school when her parents took the entire family to Canada to learn English for 1 year. She recalls this period as a blissful part of her life where she could play and learn English at the same time and where her grades did not matter. However, upon coming back to Korea she continued to attend her fine arts academy 3 times a week during the school year and 5 times a week in the summer.

When college admissions finally arrived, she found herself disappointed. She received a full scholarship to a college in Seoul, but not the fine arts college she had dreamed about. Moreover, to her, the full scholarship signaled that she had fallen short of a school at her level. Finally, when she entered the college as an industry design major (*saneob dijain*), she found that they did not practice painting but computer design, cementing her dissatisfaction.

Originally the first college that I went to, I majored in industry design. And I entered the school as the top student. The school was at a lower level than my expectations so I didn't like it and originally I liked painting so I went to an art college but in that department they just did computer design. I wanted to paint so I didn't like the school and I didn't like the department.^{vii}

Thus, she felt that she entered a school below her level and felt that she would not be able to practice her painting. After enduring this school for a year, she decided to leave and attempt to get into a better university with support from her parents. "My parents also liked that I decided to take a year off to retake the SAT. Compared to my GPA I had chosen a lower tier school so they expected me to go to a better school. At the same time I wasn't satisfied and so they liked that I decided to retake it."^{viii} With this decision, Choi Jung-min embarked on a journey to one of Korea's most rigorous types of *hagwon*, a *gisug* (dormitory) *hagwon*.

Gisug hagwon are academies that cater to students who take a year off to study and apply again to college and desire a completely isolated environment in which to prepare. Many of them such as the one that Choi Jung-min went to are military style dormitory academies in which students undergo intense curriculums that allow them to increase their test scores as much as possible in a short time. This type of academy truly deserves the name "cram school." Jung-min spent one year in the halls of one of these academies in the outskirts of Seoul and vividly described her life there:

When I took off a year to retake the SAT, I studied at a dormitory *hagwon*. I studied there all day... it is just like the military for studying. Since I couldn't go home, I couldn't see my parents you know? We needed to line up to make a phone call. Parents could come to visit just once a month...

I woke up at 7am and studied until 11 pm. I only had meals in between. Except for meal times, we just studied, doing self-studying... we just constantly studied and nothing else. The dormitory room is for 2 people and unlike other big dormitory *hagwon* it was not very crowded and the food was good...

It was illegal for girls and guys to talk in the school. Putting extra effort into your appearance, like hair dye and make up, was banned. Those were the biggest things. You couldn't use cell phones or MP3 players at all. You can use internet only to take internet courses in the internet room. If you were caught doing something else then you were scolded...^{ix}

In this academy she says that she focused all of her energy to make sure that her time didn't go to waste. Toward the end of her time there she spent three months just painting until 9 or 10 pm

every day. Thus, in complete isolation from society, Choi Jung-min refined her skill set as much as she could while preparing to retake the SAT.

Eventually all of her hard work paid off. Jung-min received acceptance to her current, top tier school and could not be happier. Describing her new school, she fumbled over the reasons why her new school was better than the first one. “I just thought it was a good school. First of all, the history of the school is long... and the college of fine art has a long history, and there are many alumni. Meanwhile, my first school was smaller. This school has many departments... what can I say? I just like it?”^x Interestingly, we can see that Jung-min’s educational success up to this point relies largely her parent’s ability to fund her education. Without a large amount of private capital, living abroad, going to up to 40 hours of *hagwon* during her high school summers, and attending private academies continuously during the school year would be impossible. Moreover, on top of normal college preparation fees, her parents’ funding supported an entire year in a special academy (according to her the school cost \$1,800 each month) to support her entrance to a school where she would receive no scholarship. Thus, clearly private capital and the supplementary education it purchases can do much more than give some students a leg up, it can entirely change a student’s educational fortunes for the right price.

In this example private academies also made the difference between admission into the field that Choi Jung-min cared about most at a top school or having to give up both university reputation and her interest. Both Hui-soo and Jung-min’s ability to take a year off and attend private academies designed to increase their test scores allowed them to move from a college that they felt unsatisfied with to schools that have national and even international recognition. These examples illustrate why rates of private education use are so high in Korea and why the regulation of these services has been such a hot issue in recent Korean history. In fact, the story

of *hagwon* regulation is similar to economic competition. As illustrated in the previous chapter, as neoliberal logic on free competition became increasingly accepted in Korean society, regulation on *hagwon* as private corporations slowly disappeared until the Supreme Court eventually found it unconstitutional in 2000. Today, just as the neoliberal logic of competition has removed the government from economic affairs beyond regulation, so too as it removed the government's hand from direct intervention in private education.

In the same way, the ideas and modes of “proper” economic competition resembles the ways that students are encouraged to study. For example think about these words from an advertisement put up by Korea's largest *hagwon*, MegaStudy, which came to be known as the “friendship destruction ad:”

*Now the new term has begun
you will start spending
more time with your friends
it seems reasonable to want to build friendships.*

*But every time you do that
the study you had planned to do
will be postponed little by little
But what to do...
you can't postpone the College Entrance Exams.*

*Don't start wavering now,
your friends cannot study for you.^{xi}*

This advertisement brings out almost all of the characteristics of Korea's study culture. It emphasizes that proper studying is an individual exercise. Students must study for their own achievement in the world of educational competition. In this world, friends are hindrances at best and competitors and enemies at worst. At the same time, students' ultimate success or failure revolves around their own effort, preparation and sacrifice more than any other factor. Thus, here we see both the encouragement of intense competition among students as well as an

emphasis on self-management which reassigns agency and responsibility to the individual. This self-management, of course, represents a primary neoliberal characteristic in society (Abelmann et al., 2009). To further explore these issues, we now turn to the center of the Korean educational system: high school and the college application process.

High School and the SAT as Drivers of Neoliberal Personhood

As mentioned in the previous chapter, college entrance procedures have greatly changed since the Korean government first introduced the national history exam in 1954 as a way to determine college admission. However, though the college application procedure may have varied greatly over time, the stress surrounding it has only increased. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the commotion surrounding the day of the Korean SAT. On the day of the national exam every year, the entire country accommodates the test takers as best as possible. Police ask motorists to not honk their horns, the stock market opens late and closes early to keep the roads more open, and special police units manage traffic to keep roads clean near the exam sites. Even the United States and Korean militaries halt training drills and inbound flights for Gimpo Airport in Seoul are suspended to allow students a quieter atmosphere in which to take their exams. Around Korea parents and grandparents visit temples and churches, hold prayer services, and wait outside of exam centers to ensure their relatives' success. This commotion shows the central importance of college applications in the lives of young people in Korea.

However, the college application process and the frenzy surrounding it has led to a number of problems in the Korean educational system as students and schools do whatever it takes to gain admission to top colleges. As far back as the early nineties, Kang et al. (1990, 1991) and Han (1992) note that due to the college admission system, many high school students

spend more than half of their day in school in order to take supplementary classes and do independent study (which many schools today have made mandatory). Additionally, they found that schools lack support for extracurricular activities due to a singular focus on university entrance exams. Third, the emphasis on college admissions throughout high school life means that students never learn about their individual passions or skills and lack guidance in developing career paths. Rather than evaluating potential careers, students evaluate which colleges they might best succeed in; leading students to choose higher education over job training despite job opportunities. Finally, the system remains a rich get richer system which rewards students who attend private academies, receive private tutoring, or simply engage in unhealthy practices such as sleeping less than 5 hours to fit in extra studying time.

Ironically, all of these themes still exist more than 20 years later and appear consistently when examining interviews from three different students from three different tiers of colleges. Interestingly, modes and attitudes towards success in college admissions vary based on school tier and economic background. From the stories of these students, it is clear that the competition and stress from university admission is as intense as it is amorphous. From young ages Korean youth are physically and psychologically impacted as they prepare for this event. What might be most interesting is that though students emerge from this time in their life disenchanted with the educational system of Korea, they also emerge as refined neoliberal individuals who embrace attitudes of self-management and deservingness, whatever the outcome. Though this holds more true for students at top-tier schools, it none the less provides evidence that instilling a neoliberal identity in students is an active side project of the educational institution as it attempts to create self-motivated learners committed to winning the education game.

A View from the Top

Park Soo-na, a senior at Ewha Woman's University, prestigious university in Seoul, is a hero from her town. She comes from a small, remote coastal city on the East coast of Korea. The city, like many in rural regions of the country, has a declining population of 94,000 in 2013, down from 103,000 in 2001. The city's economy revolves around local factories and natural tourism, with people coming to visit its nearby beaches and valleys. The city expected a boom around the turn of the century with warming relations toward North Korea, and its port facilities were renovated in order to facilitate trade with the North. But as the dream of a new peace between the two countries slowly faded, so did the city's dream of a boom. Today the port is mainly used only by local fisherman bringing in hauls to the local fish markets. A quick search of the city on the internet yields an encyclopedia entry warning potential visitors about the lack of interesting things to do there. This bleak picture of a small, shrinking city was echoed by Park Soo-na when she described her education there.

"I am from a *really* country town," she starts off by saying. "In my home town, it is rare that people go to Seoul like me."^{xii} In her town there were just one or two high schools, and it was not uncommon if people did not go to college at all. Her high school had just 150 students and only three of them got in to any schools in Seoul her senior year. But whatever bad results the school had were not for the school's lack of trying. In her senior year of high school all students had to study from 8 am to 12 pm during the week and from 9 am to 6 pm on the weekends. This lasted for 360 days a year. Even in education obsessed South Korea these numbers are far from normal and left literally no time for athletic or extracurricular activity.

Throughout her life, Soo-na stood out among her peers as the best student, but she does not place her success on intellect alone. Soo-na consistently practiced the Korean saying "sleep

5 hours and fail, sleep 4 hours and pass.” When most other students were heading home at midnight, Park Soo-na went to get private tutoring lessons locally. Since there were no *hagwon* in her town, she felt that she needed to attend private lessons until 2 am every day to stay ahead. This was rare in the town since only a few other students participated in any kind of private tutoring. However, since Soo-na insisted on attending extra classes, her parents supported her.

During the school day, she felt that her school was stricter than the schools in Seoul. She was placed in a special class of the top 30 students for class every day and whenever they took a test the teachers would announce the results and the names of the top 5 students by rank. This pressure pushed everyone to study harder because of the system’s transparency and the concentration of top students in one class. This especially placed pressure on, Park Soo-na, the school’s top student. After Soo-na studied with the other top 30 students in an entirely separate building on campus from the rest of the students. There, not only did they receive higher quality chairs than the other students, but the chairs were assigned in order from the top student to the 30th student, with different quality seats based on rank. All of these things placed immense pressure on the students, especially Soo-na, who felt she could not slip even one spot.

She felt this the most in her first year of high school when her math scores started to slip with the accelerated pace of the classes. Her “low” math scores started causing problems with her parents, but not the kind usually reported in Korea. Soo-na became convinced that her math scores were too low and were threatening her top ranking and her future. Meanwhile her parents thought she was doing just fine. To them, their daughter was performing admirably, but to Park Soo-na she was on the verge of becoming a failure.

The pressure to stay on top was so intense that Park Soo-na developed anorexia and could barely eat for over 6 months. Her parents just couldn’t understand how her math scores could

cause so much stress and decided that they needed to bring her to a psychologist to fix her. This was a difficult decision for her parents because in Korea going to a psychologist is a last resort since mental illnesses and depression are usually assigned to personal weakness. Soo-na fought going, saying that the stress from her scores was the only problem. Eventually it seems her ability to raise her math scores helped solve the problem without a doctor's intervention, but the pressure she feels to succeed remains.

Park Soo-na is now a senior at Ewha Woman's University double majoring in English language and literature and psychology. However, despite her pedigree and double major she has already delayed her graduation a semester because she has not gotten a satisfactory job. At this point looking back at her college years she only feels regret. During her first years of college she worked many part time jobs, enjoyed diverse extracurricular activities, traveled around Korea, went to numerous play and concerts, and generally broadened her horizons beyond her academic life. However, now, she wishes that she studied English more diligently, had studied abroad, had spent more time in school, and had studied a major like business which she thinks is more marketable. She has an interest in performance and art and enjoyed doing related activities when she was a college freshman, but now she is trying to polish her resume with generalizable skills such as Microsoft Office Certificates and TOEIC scores.

When describing her role model, she talked about an upperclassman who got a job in a broadcasting company through a skills based alternative application process. The most significant thing about this girl to Soo-na is that she succeeded to get a job in her dream field "through her own strength." However, Park Soo-na has given up on her interest in performance and is pursuing any job at a big company that comes with a relatively high salary because she believes that this kind of job would be respectable.

Park Soo-na's experiences living both a life entirely devoted to studying, driven by fierce competition and a life of considerable more leisure with a focus on personal development has left a deep impression on her. Far from finding value in her own self-development, she looks back on the time that she took to enjoy her own hobbies as a waste. In the crunch to find a job, she feels that she frivolously enjoyed time that could have been used to refine her resume and build her set of generalizable skills. Though it seems that she suffered quite intensely under the stress of trying to be the top student in high school, she now wishes she had continued that lifestyle throughout her college years. Thus, Soo-na is at the end of her college career only more fully committed to compete in the neoliberal educational/economic system.

Soo-na's experience largely represents the experience of students at top tier schools in general. During the interviews, these students talked about studying and the pursuit of test scores and certificates as natural activities that everyone should do. Though each student faced their own difficulties and stress, no student questioned that this was the 'proper' path. This shows that despite the hardships that the winners of the educational game in Korea face, they learn to embrace the values of competition and neoliberal personhood through their experience in the educational system.

The Competitive Middle

Shin Hee-jung pushed herself hard to get where she is. She comes from one of the largest cities in Korea, a near Southern Suburb of Seoul, whose population has been growing steadily over the last 25 years. Her city has tens of high schools and thousands of high school students. Hee-jung's case is interesting because she essentially experienced two different high school lives and compares them in her memory. Based on new regulations during her high school years, she not only changed high schools from an old, established private high school to a newly founded

public high school, she also experienced two different high school settings: one where faculty dutifully enforced after school self-studying and one where this practice became illegal.

In her first year of high school she attended an old, all-girls private high school. Here, “teachers were all from prestigious universities and had worked in schools for decades. So their classes were qualified and they focused on SAT.”^{xiii} At the same time she found that the atmosphere of the school was very academic and focused. However, after her first year she randomly was assigned to a different high school nearby due to new regulation. This school, a public school, came as a great disappointment to her. The city had just built this school the year before and so it had very few established rules and policies. Moreover, the government employed the teachers there and moved them every 4-5 years which she felt lessened their personal responsibility to producing high achieving students. These teachers focused on teaching a national curriculum as opposed to teaching to the college entrance exam.

Looking back on her second school, she felt upset because the school placed excessive stress on students regarding their grades and focused its teaching on the national curriculum instead of teaching to the college entrance exam, the approach of her first school. For her, much of the stress of this new school lay in the *simhwabang*. These 30 students, placed in a special classroom and arranged by rank, were fiercely competitive with each other despite a lack of competitive zeal generally throughout her school. Each student wanted to gain the mark of being in the top 1% or top 10% of the school, but based on the size of this new school that was impossible. As opposed to Hee-jung’s first school with 480 students, this new school had but 200. This meant that only 20 of the 30 members of the elite class could stick in the top 10% at any given time. This placed pressure on each student not just to remain in the elite class, but also to beat out their friends and classmates every day for the coveted mark.

Moreover, Shin Hee-jung witnessed injustices in the grading system regularly. In many schools in Korea, schools attract students by demonstrating strong track records. For example, a school might advertise itself based on the number of students it sends to Seoul colleges every year, a premier mark of success of any high school. Hence, just like schools use the *simhwabang* to concentrate their resources on top students and get them into top colleges, the school concentrated top grades on students who already stood at the top. On numerous occasions she saw lower ranked students get the same objective score on tests as top ranked students, but receive a lower curved grade so that the top students could preserve their near perfect record and hopefully get into a top school. This system essentially kept well-performing students at the top.

This excessive competition to stay on top led Shin Hee-jung to stop studying for the SAT altogether. When we asked her why, she answered, “I think this is all because of the difference in the teachers. I mean because of the school system or the will of the teachers.”^{xiv} She means specifically, the fact that the school chose to focus more on national curriculum than teaching to the college entrance exams. She felt disadvantaged because while in her first high school she only had to study for class and that would give her good results for both the SAT and her high school record, in the new school students had to sacrifice SAT study to maintain their record and top standing at the school. Inevitably, the school made up for this by concentrating top grades among a select few students who were predestined for college application success.

Though Hee-jung declined to mention if she ever got special treatment from the school’s slanted grading policy, she did feel disadvantaged in the new system. “When I was in the first high school I got good scores from the PSAT, but when the environment changed I just gave up studying for the SAT and only focused on textbooks.”^{xv} Though she mentioned other reasons why the private school was better (the teachers were older, had a longer history of teaching, were

more strict), she made it clear that in her opinion the school policy regarding how schools incorporate test preparation into their curriculum was the single biggest factor impacting her personal performance. Interestingly, by doing this she implies that success on the college entrance exams has little to do with how smart students are, but with the atmosphere of each school and whether teachers focus on potential test questions and attitude subjects (like mathematics) or on subject areas of the national curriculum.

Shin Hee-jung is now a junior at Inha University, a 2nd tier school in a large city near Seoul, and aspires to meet two goals: follow her passion and make money doing it. Looking back at her high school life she feels that her high school life gave her and her classmates too much stress for the college entrance results of her year: just 10 out 200 students got accepted to Seoul or near Seoul schools; a poor mark for a high school in a large city in Korea. Regardless, when asked what she would tell other high school students should she have the chance to offer them some inspiring words she said, “If people study harder, then they can pursue their dream. I mean, it isn’t more than three years, you know? At the time it seems like a long time, but looking back there were people who regret not studying hard enough for those three years so people should do whatever it takes during that time in order to do what they want for the rest of their lives.”^{xvi} It seems that despite her grievances, more than ever she stands by the virtues of hard work and fierce competition and their role in getting students ahead.

Thus, Shin Hee-jung also emerged from the educational system not just committed to the virtues of competition, but also willing to encourage other students to push themselves beyond their current limits in search of future success. In a similar way, many mid-tier students who had competed well in high school but missed getting into top-tier universities believed that the key to

success lay in hard work. Possibly, their near success in getting into a top-tier university has only wet their desire to compete and belief in the value of hard work.

The Third Tier

Lee Myeong-ho is a unique student with a unique perspective on life, but even he believes in the idea that students' efforts play the largest role in their college admissions. He chose to go to a low-tier national college outside of Seoul with a lower reputation than many Seoul schools because he felt that it would give him more resources to succeed compared to any of the better thought of private universities in Seoul that he could attend. Unlike many other students who see hobbies as ways to build their resumes, or as something to talk about during job interviews to appear more interesting, Lee Myeong-ho's hobbies define him. He has a passion for languages and music and spends his free time working a part time job to buy time in a recording studio where he believes he can speak to the world. He dreams about working internationally while continuing to develop his rap music with themes of social justice and morality.

Lee Myeong-ho grew up as the only child of a working class family in Seoul. His father works as a city bus driver and his mother works in a restaurant. Though they have never worked in high paying jobs they have always taken care of him well and supported him. In fact, they helped support his English education by sending him to a private language academy until he was 16. However, they only supported education in areas that would help support his college application. When he developed an interest in music and sculpture early on in his life they strongly dissuaded him from pursuing it, encouraging him to focus himself on his school work, especially mathematics. Luckily for him, his parent's house was well located and he was able to attend the local private high school which he described as "elite."

In this school he followed the Korean educational tradition of night classes from his first year. With these classes, every week day from 7 am until 10 pm he remained trapped in school. It was not uncommon for restless students to attempt to break out from their prison, he says, and teachers would go as far as to block the doors of the classroom with objects to keep the students inside the rooms. Of course, nonetheless, students, including Myeong-ho, would occasionally be able to escape the faculty guard.

A fellow rule breaker with Myeong-ho was the school's top student. These two students often made their way out of the school and into Korea's famous computer cafes called P.C. *bang* in which students could rent time on state-of-the-art computers to play a variety of online games. Of course this practice, not uncommon among game crazed high schoolers, ended up getting in the way of studying. However, though Myeong-ho's test scores suffered reasonably due to this exercise, the top student, who Myeong-ho reports went to such gaming cafes more than him, was still able to receive perfect scores on all 12 major exams in three years of high school. Based on this alone, Myeong-ho's friend went to the number one department of the number one college in Korea, Seoul National University's Medical Sciences Department. Meanwhile, Myeong-ho went to college outside of Seoul.

This disproportionate outcome begged some answers, and so we turned to the topic of internet cafes and college entrance success:

Me: Did that affect you, going to P.C. bang?

LMH: But even my friend who went to Seoul National University, he went more than me and other friends. But his brain is just good I think. It just depends on the person.

Me: Do you think it is success based on people's skill?

LMH: People's effort I think

Me: But he went to the P.C. bang more than you...

LMH: Yeah, some people just have a better brain

Me: So sometimes it is brain, but usually it is just effort

LMH: Yeah, effort. I think so.

Me: Do you think there are any other circumstances that make someone successful at least for college entrance?

LMH: For good college entrance... usually if you want to go to a top university here, that is decided by the SAT or school exams.

From this it is clear that individual effort lies at the center of a successful individual in Myeong-ho's mind. This is interesting because he acknowledges that natural intelligence matters, but not as much as effort. Additionally, in the interview he brought up the existence of educational inequality in Korea (*gyoyugbulpyeongdeung*), in which gaps in educational achievement can result from economic gaps. He says, "Rich people in Gangnam or elsewhere can invest more in their kid's education. They can use a better teacher, a better education system, and better *hagwon*. Some teachers have better ways of teaching so that students can learn more in the same time, and that can lead to a higher scores." But neither money nor natural intellect ranked as highly in his mind as pure hard work. At the end of the day he perceives the foundation of education competition and achievement in Korea as a person's effort.

Related to this Myeong-ho mentioned another impressive statistic: from his school, 10 students out of 200 made it into Seoul National University. He said that this made his high school a top ten high school in Korea, though it seems that those statistics might even make it the number 1 high school. This begs the question of whether the students at his school simply worked their way to the top and whether their concentration in an elite, classic, high school in Seoul is a coincidence or whether there are other significant factors at work. All reason would point to the existence of other factors which help increase the chance of student admission to top universities from this high school. However, Myeong-ho's perspective that hard work is the main factor of success in society reflects the mainstream narrative of Korean economic and

educational competition in today's neoliberal world. Hence, Myeong-ho displays a set of common neoliberal subjectivities among today's youth.

At the end of the day regardless of the facts there is a significance to Myeong-ho's thought process. He, like most students, sees the message that the Korean education system is designed to transmit: if you work hard and dedicate yourself to your studies, then you too can go to Seoul National University. After all, this is how this ultra-competitive system can maintain its image of being "fair." Of course, who actually ends up achieving means a great deal especially when the college you attend signals someone's "mark" for the rest of their life. In the words of Myeong-ho: "In Korea, university name is the first thing that you see on a paper when you apply for a company... if you are in a school below a certain level, even if you are a top student you can't apply and get into a good company."

Thus, again with Myeong-ho we see a steadfast belief in the educational system's function as a meritocracy. Though he clearly prioritizes human development and following one's passion over pursuing a school just for its name brand or blindly subscribing to endless competition, he still displays the same neoliberal perspective as students at other tiers, embracing the logic that hard work leads to success. However, we did often find that students at low tier schools often ended up disadvantaged one way or another during their college application process. Most commonly, this hindrance came in the form of financial difficulty.

One extreme example of this is Min Han-bit. Min Han-bit worked from the time he was in middle school to support his family because of the difficulty they faced after the financial crisis. He often heard his parents apologize for their failure to raise him well, saying, "You could have been born into a better family. I am sorry that you have parents like this." This shame, of course, refers directly to his parents' inability to care for him financially. Not only did

he have to work instead of studying and could not afford to attend *hagwon*, but his family had so little money that they could not buy a computer good enough to use online *hagwon* from home either. This reality prevented Han-bit, a national champion in the Korean martial art *geomdo*, from being able to go to a middle or upper tier school.

Though many cases were not as extreme, many students at low tier schools mentioned that money was an issue in their family and had prevented them from being able to pursue their interests or attend *hagwon* when they were in high school. While the discussion of money could be seen as a way to rationalize the low-tier student's status, we cannot deny that it also plays a role in the ability of students to compete. After all, this study has already examined how intensive college prep *hagwon* designed to help student change their university cost over \$20,000 a year. Thus, it seems that the universal belief in the meritocratic element of the educational system relies much more on the acceptance of the logic of competition than on lived experience. Interestingly, though many low-tier students mentioned their economic hardship, none said that their college result was unfair.

English Education and its Importance in Maintaining the Status Quo

As mentioned in both previous sections, the ultracompetitive nature of Korean society requires that competition inside of the country appear fair and unbiased. This way, each student appears to have as much of an equal chance as possible. With this system, the “winners” of the top jobs are supposed to be those who are best prepared for them; evidenced by ‘objective measures.’ The most objective of these measures comes in the form of standardized testing. Standardized testing has the intention of giving students a chance to show what they know compared to others. However, since tests regarding what students know seemed too connected

to cram schools, supplementary education, and unhealthy learning practices, standardized tests have taken on the character of aptitude testing over the last 20 years in Korea, as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, even with aptitude testing designed to find harder to instill characteristics such as potential, there exists an idea that students can study for these tests to help improve their scores. Hence, hard work and studiousness have grown to become associated not just with knowledge, but with natural ability as well.

In this new perspective, each student's natural academic ability is produced or created from a bedrock of hard work and solid character. Thus, as people move through the ranks of Korean society in a system that stresses aptitude, their rise is usually supported by narratives of worthiness revolving around their hard work and character. Of course, this narrative has a circular impact: the status that one achieves justifies continual status achievement since achievement signals natural ability, which is the requirement for achievement. For example, Koh Seung-duk won nationwide praise and admiration for his character and person due to passing the law, diplomacy and public administration exams early in his life.

In few places do the narratives of success and personal attributes become so mixed as in the realm for foreign language education, particularly English. Korea is famous for its frenzy around learning English. From massive English academies such as YBM or Wall Street English to entire subway walls near universities covered in English academy advertisements, to the large market for private English tutoring by native speakers (any native English speaker who posts advertisements on Naver for private tutoring or speaking practice will gain at least a few response for prices around \$20 an hour), the English education craze can be seen almost anywhere in Korea. In fact, unique strategies for learning English have developed such as Korea's fabled "wild geese families" (in which fathers stay behind and work to support their

wife and children's life abroad so that they may master English) and extensive amounts of short academic programs to the United States or Europe meant to immerse students in English. However, despite the large commotion over learning English, the end of the English education drive cannot be seen. This paper views the endless drive for English education as critical component of the neoliberal labor market and society of South Korea as it has reoriented the attitudes of language learners toward continual self-improvement while justifying continuing inequality in Korea.

Park (2011) notes that English language education in Korea has become strongly associated with social mobility through its ability to deliver to the English speaker high paying, secure, and respectable employment. For anyone who has been in a Korean workplace, this might strike them as odd since even international divisions of Korean transnational corporations shy away from speaking English in the office (even among foreigners) except when necessary. However, one value of English proficiency is its status as a tool for the modern professional in Korea, one he or she might deploy anytime and which cannot become outdated. It has followed the lines of neoliberal economic policies in which workers are valued as a collection of various skills (Urciuoli, 2008). In fact, this new-found emphasis on workers as individual collections of skills has coincided with the neoliberal shift toward valuing workers for their flexibility, teamwork, and critical thinking skills, a perspective now embraced by many large employers in Korea.

These characteristics now constitute the foundation of the new successful worker in South Korea. Of course university background still plays a large role in determining access to top jobs in Korea, however, these two qualifications have never stood much at odds since top universities have been some of the largest advocates of increasing Korea's level of English

education. In fact, many top universities have instituted TOEIC requirements on their students for graduation and many elite colleges require a certain level of English in order to gain acceptance in the first place. So it seems that English now stands at the center of the university and job application process. However, this begs the question “why English?”

English’s rise to prominence in Korea has resulted due to a number of oft cited practical reasons: the prominence of English as a global language, Korea’s close ties with the United States, the need to use English when conducting business abroad. This study acknowledges that these reasons may explain why some jobs in Korea require the use of English, but argues that it cannot explain why it has become so central to Korean life, schooling, and the job market. Instead, to understand English’s centrality, one must examine ideas surrounding language education in particular.

Joseph Park (2010) sees English as an index in Korean society which gives clues to much more than simply speaking ability. Rather, similar to the writings of Bourdieu on cultural capital, English has become a social market. Park identifies a link between successful learners of English and ideas of neoliberal personhood. The news media has had a large role in shaping this image. In the media, people’s images are constructed into a digestible narrative which represents reality in a creative medium (Agha, 2007). In this way, media representations do not objectively investigate who truly practices “good English,” but instead act as spheres within which ideas and images of who has mastery over English, their personal characteristics, and the social meaning of English mastery are negotiated.

In reporting about English learners, representations and stereotypes usually separate skill from social identifiers such as class, location, and gender while connecting it strongly to positive work ethics and competency. Therefore, English and English learning has become an individual

pursuit reflecting the characteristics of the individual more than their social situation. Thus, “anyone who has managed to gain good competence in a language such as English should be praised for her entrepreneurial spirit and self-actualization, rather than be seen as profiteering from any privilege she might have accrued from class based positions” (Park, 2010). Moreover, the vast majority of Koreans can never achieve English fluency and full naturalization while living in Korea, making the pursuit of English a never ending venture, reminiscent of the life-long struggle for self-improvement that the neoliberal laborer should pursue. Therefore, English represents more than a skill to be used, but it acts as a marker of competency and successful neoliberal personhood in what Park calls the “naturalization of competence.”

English as a sign of deservingness both stands in the way of social mobility and reinforces current class structures. As much as the news media has associated English with individual competencies, it remains something that often can be purchased. The various strategies employed by Korean families to teach their children English demonstrate this. Strategies sending kids abroad to learn English (like in the case of Choi Jung-min who went to Canada for a year with her family) demand either enough money to move at least part of the family aboard or a connection to relatives living in a different country. Additionally, many Koreans aiming for high levels of education attempt to have their children before or during their Ph.D. study in the United States or other English speaking countries in order to raise them in English speaking environments. Finally, another method of teaching one’s children naturalized English lies in expensive *hagwon* with native English instructors in Korea. However, clearly all of these strategies require a certain amount of capital and economic freedom to pursue. As such, the best English speakers generally come from families with good social standing while families that do not have the resources simply cannot compete.

However, the link between English and personal competence manages to sustain this system of inequality. The naturalization of competence means that the success of good English speakers becomes tied to their inherent moral goodness and hard work, indicating the entitlement they have to the privilege and status they receive. This helps to discredit old socially based unrest related to class privilege and gender and geographical discrimination since the new debate reframes achievement in regards to hard work. The assignment of positive characteristics to successful learners of English also helps justify outstanding inequalities in society by reducing them to issues of personal success and failings rather than structurally based factors.

This logic is similar to a common Korean greeting practice. When two people meet for the first time and introduce themselves, one of the first pieces of information shared is their college. If one person's college clearly lies in the 3rd tier and the other person is considerably older, it would not be uncommon for them to reply "Oh my, you should have studied harder" (*aigo gongbu jom deo yeolsimhihaji geulaessni?*). This same logic operates in the English industry and the education industry as a whole. First, English "indexes individuality and mobility, some of the very essences that define the ideal person imagined according to the neoliberal world view, one who seeks autonomy and independence from traditional structures and surpasses their constraints through a life full of mobility and vitality" (Park, 2013: 297). But at the same time through an "indexical inversion" (Park, 2010) it also acts as the evidence of the fairness of the system and the deservingness of good speakers of English.

Going back to the question of "why English?" it seems clear how English as an educational paradigm supports and reinforces the neoliberal order. It behaves both as a class barrier and an instrument of class reproduction through its cost and justifies inequalities by individualizing the education experience and internalizing the factors that support and hinder

language acquisition. Therefore, the development of English as a central component of the Korean educational system seems to be no accident. After all, in the words of Krais, “Recognition of skills... is mediated by power relations” (167-168).

English’s Role in Defining Neoliberal Subjects

Throughout the interviews in this study, English language education stood out as a consistent theme. All of the interview subjects mentioned the importance of English and almost all were actively involved in trying to study for English tests. However, this energy differed by school tier. All but one top tier student mentioned improving their English skill as a current goal to make themselves more competitive in job applications. Only Lee Young-sik had little interest in studying for TOEIC or TOEFL. He said the he would study English except that at this point it seemed impossible to compete with others on the field of English language because he could not compete with students who had lived overseas for multiple years, and hence he elected to spend his time on other skills.

At the same time every student from the mid-tier schools was actively studying English and working to achieve better scores on their TOEIC exams. Interestingly, one student found that her university used English as a gatekeeper, using it to regulate the flow of students inside the school. Baek Ha-yoon is a student at Inha University in Incheon. At her university students spend one year studying before finally deciding on their major. After this, they can choose their major based on their ranking among their classmates, determined by their GPA. Though Baek Ha-yoon wanted to study English or German Literature during her time in college, her GPA fell below the mark of the foreign language and literature departments and so she accepted going into the department of her 3rd choice: Korean Language and Literature. In her mind, English literature would provide the dual goals of English education and leaning literature, while also

putting English skills on her resume for her job application. However, though overall GPA originally determined one's major, in order to change majors the school makes students take a qualifying exam where the only subject is TOEIC and TOEFL style English regardless of a student's desired major. When Ha-yoon's friend decided to change her major, she spent months with private tutors at over \$500 a month before she finally succeeded in changing. Thus, Ha-yoon felt that changing majors would be impossible despite her interest. Now as a senior, Ha-yoon is worrying about getting a job from her major and is continuing to improve her English as she can. This example illustrates the importance of English as both an enabler and a barrier in the Korean educational sphere; English acts to both grant and restrict access to educational opportunities based on one's worthiness. However, this is often more related to one's willingness to spend money than to a student's true scholastic ability.

Interestingly, despite the critical role of English in Korean society, only half of the students from low tier colleges displayed interest in preparing English test scores or continuing their English education. For many of them, they have already identified a career path where studying English yields no obvious benefits (such as becoming a police officer, a writer, or a public health worker). Other students whose career paths remain more ambiguous placed a higher value on English education as a mark that they can place on their resume (such as working internationally in design or environmental economics). Therefore, the value that an individual places on English seems to lie directly on its perceived benefits for someone in their desired career path. However, this career path is more ambiguous at students at higher tier schools, and the less certain a student's career path, the more valuable English becomes as a skill which a student can advertise in their toolbox. This makes higher tier students more invested in their English education than lower tier students with defined career paths.

Interestingly, English education and high school education seem to impact students differently. While successful high school learners emerge more competitive and committed to the system, often English learners grow dissatisfied with the system. It seems that this has to do with the migration of individuals during their English study and their exposure to alternative kinds of education and competition. While students that remain in Korea grow accustomed to a certain lifestyle during their educational years and buy into it more as they experience success, students that travel abroad to study English feel disenchanting with the Korean educational system (though not with the hierarchy of English that privileges them upon their return).

The story of Kim Yoo-sun, a student in the Department of Foreign Studies at Ewha Woman's University, has all of the themes discussed in this chapter so far. Kim Yoo-sun grew up in Seoul to middle class parents. She started learning English at 9 years old by attending a few private academies in her area. Her interest in American TV shows and pop music quickly made English her favorite subject and she accelerated quickly with classes both in and out of school. Before long, English became her best subject.

Her high school life closely resembled most top high school students. She took classes from 8 am until around 4 pm, and then had special classes every day after school in English, mathematics, and Korean writing as part of the elite course, *simhwabang*. This class was composed of the school's top 20 students and they received special seats in the air conditioned library to study after school. After eating dinner at school she continued to study with the top 20 students in the school library until 10 o'clock, followed by optional study time until midnight. Should she go home at 10pm, often she kept working until she fell asleep.

Though the school remade the list of students in the *simhwabang* every semester, only 20% of the students ever really changed. The school had especially strict policies toward these

students since they represented the student body's best hope of top-tier college admission. While other students might have been able to sneak out to enjoy computer cafes, the school kept a watchful eye over the top students. What was worse to Yoo-sun, an enormous pressure sat on the shoulders of these students to say in the *simhwabang* since if one student stopped coming to the class one semester, everyone else would know that he or she could not cut it.

For Yoo-sun, none of this would have bothered her except that her path for college application did not require the SAT because of the specialized program she wanted to attend. Therefore, she did not need the strict, regimented classes on SAT subjects that the school offered. Yoo-sun wanted to apply for an international studies department rather than to general admission, which had an entirely different application process. For this application process she needed high TOEFL scores, awards, classes or activities related to English during high school, and an interview in English administered by the university on subjects related to international studies. Because of these alternative entrance requirements, Yoo-sun planned to leave the *simhwabang* for alternative lessons at private academies.

When the school found out about this they could not understand why she would not take the special classes. In fact, they even went as far as to blackmail her about her continued attendance. Yoo-sun had been attending her high school on a scholarship, but when she asked to take lessons outside of the school and voluntarily leave the *simhwabang* they informed her that if she chose that route, she might stop receiving her scholarship money. After she insisted that for her college admission she would need to go to an alternative program regardless of the school's decision on the scholarship, they proceeded to call her parents to report her misbehavior. Of course her parents supported her decision.

Soon afterwards, she spent her afternoons studying intensively at a specialized academy to prepare for TOFEL and for her interview. This academy was specially designed just to prepare students for admissions to international studies programs at Korea's elite universities. It attracted many students from relatively wealthy families who had lived abroad for a significant part of their life. It taught specialized TOEFL classes, gave interview lessons, and taught classes on international studies related issues; the same topics that Kim Yoo-sun would later learn about in college. The academy even incorporated time for debate in which students practiced and were graded on their ability to voice their opinion and make strong points, a difficult exercise for Yoo-sun since so many students had spent significant time overseas. While attending this academy, Yoo-sun also spent a significant amount of time individually preparing for and taking TOEIC tests. She recalls that she took the test many times and her parents spent a lot of money on it.

All of the hard work paid off when she finally gained admission to Ewha's prestigious international studies program in Seoul. Now, her thoughts are filled with ideas about job interviews, internships, and continuing her education. But looking back on her high school years it seems that she has a lot of regret. Though she sometimes wishes she had attended a foreign language high school which might have better prepared her in school for her college admissions and understood her situation better, the real regret comes from misgivings about the Korean system itself. This regret comes from her year studying in Australia.

During her first year of high school she received a scholarship to travel and study in Melbourne for one year. There, her entire life changed. She found that life in Australian high schools were totally different than in Korea. Instead of studying in school all day until midnight, she found that they would finish their homework and then do what they loved. "They were free," she said. Moreover, for the first time in her life she had time for hobbies. In Australia she

was able to start learning the violin and after just 6 months her orchestra professor invited her to play in the school's performance. Yoo-sun summarized getting up on stage and being able to perform and demonstrate a new skill that she never thought she could learn in one word: fantastic.

Comparing the quality of her life in Korea and in Australia she found no comparison. Since students in Australia and Korea both go on to lead similarly productive lives, Yoo-sun cannot understand why the Korean system gives students so much stress.

They are still high school students. They were doing all of these kind of various experiences but even when they graduate they are just the same as us [in Korea]. They live happily ever after just the same as us. Whether they go through, like hardships in finding jobs or whatever it is still the same as Korean students. Then why Korean students should do like this? The result would be just the same so... if I have children in the future I'm never going to let them study in Korea but I'm just going to take them to other countries.

Despite her success in the Korean education system, she feels that the stress and anxiety of Korean students amounts to nothing since all students throughout the developed world end up being able to find employment in their country even though the educational pressure in Korea is on a different scale. Compared to Shin Hee-jung's statement that students should study harder so that they can do what they want, Kim Yoo-sun has a different stance: study outside of Korea. Her experience abroad learning English has hence changed her attitude to reject the notion of endless competition, though to the end she does not question the hierarchy of education that English is closely tied to and which has given her this privileged view.

Conclusion

Kim Yoo-sun's story encompasses all of the themes discussed so far, and thus we will conclude by summing up this chapter's main points while reviewing Yoo-sun's experiences. First, we see that the educational system has changed to take on characteristics of the economy,

with students as corporations and knowledge acquisition as the goal. Just as companies vie to remain adaptable and flexible while developing core competencies in the new economy (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990), students in Korea strive to develop their aptitudes, generalizable skills such as mathematics and language, while majoring in a specific field to remain flexible. Kim Yoo-sun, for example, is majoring in business administration while continuing to improve her English and study Chinese (despite having no interest in actually going to China). Hence, she is trying to assemble a number of independent, generalizable skills with which to market herself while applying for a job.

Additionally, education has become commoditized and subject to globalization like portions of the real economy. Just as production lines have become transnational as a result of comparative advantage, we can see how education has become internationalized as education for skills such as learning English have become outsourced through international migration such as Yoo-sun's study in Australia. Meanwhile, students such as Lee Young-sik who don't have the opportunity to expand internationally specialize to survive.

Finally, it is clear that education in Korea has turned into a specialized, flexible free market with students contracting certain educational services beyond their middle and high schools through *hagwon*. In the same way that companies rely more and more heavily on contracted workers for specialized functions, Korean children go to special *hagwon* for everything from math and science, to an assortment of language skills and even art and SAT scores. In this way, Kim Yoo-sun left her high school classes to attend a private school specialized in teaching her all of the skills that she would need to apply to her program.

The rhetoric surrounding education also follows the same course as that on social status and economic competition. Rhetoric such as "he or she with the highest test scores deserve

admission” in the school advancement system works much in the same way that “the most efficient producer deserves to produce” works in the economic system. Administrators of the system justify its operation through “objective” and “fair” measures such as test scores or efficiency, making it harder to find guilt in the system for growing inequalities. Of course, we see through Yoo-sun’s example that the competition can never be fair since the strategies that people can pursue to get ahead are not equally accessible. Kim Yoo-sun already had an advantage due to learning English at private academies from the time she was 9 years old and her opportunity to live and study abroad for 1 year in Australia, but still even she felt disadvantaged to students who had spent a large portion of their life overseas. Though TOEFL scores and an interview to test English ability may seem objective, it seems they end up measuring situational factors more than student ability.

On top of this, the educational system supports the deservingness of the individual in the same way that large market capitalizations reflect the goodness of companies. Of course, the large market value of Apple or Google does not mean people think that they can go start an equally successful company. However, the education system is justified in such a way. High English scores, high SAT scores, or numerous certificates and awards symbolizes a person’s deservingness to enter a top university because these scores represent their ability and potential. Moreover, these objective achievements seemingly represent the ability of any student to gain such marks since all students start learning from the same place. This supports the notion that if a student works harder to develop themselves and their scores then they too could attend an elite university; just like if they had simply founded Microsoft then they could be Bill Gates. However, such logic does not take into account the different methods of learning and the

different qualifications that students with access to more resources have access to. Inevitably, the game of education remains as unfair and biased as that of economic competition.

The logic that hard work is the lynchpin of success breaks down in the face of the *hagwon* industry. The existence of private academies relies on the logic that scores can be bought, or at least that private academies can compensate for natural failings. Of course everyone in Korea recognizes this, but ironically the logic plays out the same in *hagwon* attendance as it does for educational success. Just as some students from our low tier colleges wish they had studied harder in hindsight, their parents apologize to them for being unable to support their education in a *hagwon*. Parents see it as their failing to receive a higher salary which prevents their children from attending *hagwon* and therefore going to Seoul National University. Though this logic train seems extreme, we heard similar stories more than once in our interviews with students at low tier colleges such as Min Han-bit. Internalizing success and failure in this way keeps both the education system and the social class system afloat in Korea. As Kim Yoo-sun pointed out, she could not have gotten acceptance to her program without numerous TOEFL tests and attendance at a private academy, all things that require significant capital to do.

Finally, the educational system exists as a place in which to train children to embrace neoliberal values not just for their own success but as an institutional project. As mentioned earlier, many Korean schools rely on successful track records of sending students to top schools in order to sustain their funding and student levels. Hence, schools push students to compete with one another as well as with the unknown students around the country in order to support the school as much or more than to support the student. Lee Na-rae made this point very strongly during her interview:

The truth is that Korea is a really hard country for high school students. There are many students who get ridiculously stressed out. Parents' expectations, education policy, and teachers who deliver wrong ideologies such as "you can succeed only if you go to college" ... We still have those kind of teachers a lot... saying "if you just make it into college, you can be successful." Because for the teachers, if they have students who go to good school, that is good for them. There are only teachers who think about themselves nowadays. There are not many teachers who sincerely care about students.^{xvii}

As she points out, schools' drive to push students to compete and send them to college persists regardless of student interest, real ability, or chance of success. The goal of the school lies in simply encouraging students to embrace competition and the drive to further their education as much as possible for the school's benefit.

When personal motivation to make students compete in school defined "proper" ways fails, schools are willing to use other methods to control students. We see this in the case of Kim Yoo-sun whose teacher threatened her to take away her scholarship should she move off of the beaten path. Moreover, other interviewees faced physical punishment or verbal abuse from the schools when they failed to meet the school's expectation. Baek Ha-yoon, for example, often found herself on the receiving end of school punishment for her lack of effort in studying for college.

And when I was in high school I got hit a lot even though it was a girl's high school. If I dozed off for a short time I was hit on my palms... The teachers always said the same things when they hit students like "you think you can go to college" or "you will get a bad score." Everything they said was related to college. They only considered the name value of colleges... they said that students should apply for competitive schools in non-competitive departments. I cried a lot. If I dozed off for a short time teachers would say "how can you go to college?" Sometimes I heard bad words like swear words, "idiot", etc. It depends on the teachers but there was a teacher that had a dirty mouth.^{xviii}

Though punishment in Korean schools is not new, this kind of punishment seems to have a different face. Far from trying to create students who will become upstanding citizens full of discipline and vigor for work, this discipline focuses simply on increasing the studiousness of students for their eventual college admission. At the same time as 'working to help the students,' schools aim to inspire in students internally a desire to compete in succeed, turning them into

effective self-managers. Hence, the school's frenzy to push students to compete has the simultaneous motivation of internalizing inside of them a new, neoliberal ethos.

Thus it is clear that the education system aims to produce neoliberal subjects while internally recreating the same inequalities that exist in the economic system under the same mechanisms and logics. Moreover, graduates of the educational system emerge having internalized the values and perspectives of the educational system. Testimonies to the ability of people to succeed with hard work and a proper mentality from number students such as Shin Hee-jung and Lee Myeong-ho demonstrate that people largely ignore or downplay the role of socio-economic class, capital, and geography while overemphasizing the role the individuals personal characteristics and effort when evaluating a person's success. The next chapter will examine how the educational system and students' university standing have shaped their aspirations about and modes of preparing for future careers. At the same time I will examine the real changes in the Korean labor market to assess the possibility of achieving such dreams.

CHAPTER 4: SUCCESS AND EMBEDDED NEOLIBERAL THOUGHT

In this chapter we explore the ways in which students aspire to join the labor force while preparing themselves for vague or often unforeseen futures. In this preparation, students embrace various levels of self-management based on their personal experiences and positions in Korea's social structure. Since the economy provides the foundation of social life and defines proper ways and modes of being in the neoliberal economy, we survey how students at various tiers of schools and with various class backgrounds have chosen their future and conceptualize the market's role in their life. This, in turn, reveals their perspective on their role in the economic and necessary modes of survival.

As opposed to the world under Fordism, where jobs exist in the bordered realm defined as “the economy” and structure social life but do not define it, in the new economic paradigm the economic and the social blend together such that neither is distinct. People exist as *homo economicus*, responsible for their effectiveness and continual employment in the marketplace. As mentioned in the introduction, this demands continuous self-improvement and the development of new and various skill sets with which the individual can market themselves. Hence, the economy values flexibility, mobility, generalizability, and when possible, simultaneous specialization and diversification. Since responsibility now falls on the individual to develop such skills, modes of preparation to enter the economy and the ownership of personal responsibility stand as metrics to measure the extent of neoliberal identities among college students at the same time as providing metrics to compare across tier and class.

This chapter finds that while all of our participants display characteristics of neoliberal identities, the extent to which these ideologies are incorporated into the world view of our

participants differs by one's success in the education system and one's starting position in the social structure. Students from top and mid-tier schools displayed much stronger neoliberal perspectives. They display a stronger sense of independence based on their past achievement and believe that no virtually no obstacles to social mobility in a person's life cannot be overcome with hard work. Finally, they value measurable, material possessions such as income or property and place their career at the center of their lives.

Low-tier students show almost opposite tendencies. They are much more likely to look for advice from friends and family and value the advice of their parents. Though they believe in the value of hard work, low-tier students often expressed that other factors such as luck were also important. Finally, low tier students framed success in terms of intangible or personal achievements. This includes happiness and pursuing one's hobbies. Rather than making career the center of one's life, low tier students tended to value careers in as much as they allowed students to follow their passion.

This chapter will first review the life stories of six students, focusing on their ideas of success and modes of preparation for the future. I examine two students from each tier, one male and one female, to provide a broad sample of students and their characteristics. The review of each student finishes with a small conclusion discussing the outstanding trends from each interview. Finally, this chapter concludes by comparing students across school tier and social class to identify trends among the students' values and world views. Specifically, this analysis looks at how parents shape students' aspirations, how students view the value of hard work, differing interests in government work, and how students value monetary compensation.

Two Students from Elite Colleges

Kim Hyun-a dreams of being a professor at a university. Now that she is in her last semester at Yonsei University in Seoul, she has finally settled on a plan for the next few years: going to graduate school to continue her English language and literature major. For her, nothing seems more natural but to keep studying what she likes. Hence, instead of looking for a job, preparing certificates, or doing internships, she has her eye fixed on continuing her studies. Her personality, she admitted, was introverted for such a job, but none the less she feels that this is a natural course for her.

The idea of things being “natural” filled Kim Hyun-a’s account of her life and pursuits. Kim hyun-a comes from a very wealthy family just outside of Seoul. Her father’s company has kept her and her sister well supported throughout their life, and since her older sister has now agreed to work in her father’s company as his successor, Hyun-a has been free to pursue her passion. This passion has always been English. Thus, as the end of middle school approached she began studying to enter a special purpose foreign language high school in Seoul.

This, she said, was the most competitive part of her life. Even at the tender age of 12 years old, Kim Hyun-a pushed herself to attend *hagwon* every day until 2 am. In her mind this early preparation and competition was normal. Different than most students though, she did not see her experiences in middle and high school as cut throat competitions. Studying under 2 am and applying to a special high school came the “natural” progression in her education:

Hyun-a: It was just like that in middle school. If you study well then of course you start preparing for a special school. I mean, all top students were preparing for special schools so I naturally I thought I should prepare as well.

Me: [So how well did you study?]

Hyun-a: I was the best... ”xix

Though Hyun-a studied with an intense work ethic that likely surpassed most students, this seems to be her dutiful following of the expectations place upon her as opposed to an intense drive to compete that overburdened her.

In high school as well, Hyun-a sees her behavior as nothing exceptional despite her continued top tier performance in her elite magnet school. “Everyone is supposed to study hard in high school... so I just studied a little bit harder.”^{xx} This may come across as tongue in cheek on first read, but in the interview her intention behind these words was clear. To her, her effort and performance stood at a level that just anyone can do. With a hint of bashfulness she meant to deny that she had done anything outstanding in middle school and high school though she remained the top student for 6 years throughout middle school and high school.

Still, at the time that she entered college her plans for the future remained unformed. When contemplating her major she consulted her parents who gave her unwavering support to follow her passion. “My parents are a bit different than other peoples’ parents. They say, ‘do *anything* you want. We support you. If you fail in the future, then figure it out at that point.’ They say this kind of thing because I will do what they approve of...”^{xxi} Perhaps because of their already well established position in society and their daughter’s educational success up until this point, the nuances of her career no longer mattered. Her “mark” was already exceptional with her educational pedigree and so her immediate job prospects did not worry her family.

With her background in a foreign language high school, her English major in college seemed predetermined. However, she explained that though she had applied to the English department, she decided on it more because it was in her general interest than because of a preexisting plan. Truthfully, she says, she had no idea at that time if she would like it. “It’s just that when I was a kid I liked reading books so it seemed like I should go towards a [literature]

major... and I went to a foreign language high school so naturally I thought about English literature. And when I started majoring in English literature in college I actually found that it was a lot of fun.”^{xxii} Again we see the theme of her following the ‘natural’ course throughout her education. Without deciding solidly in advance, Hyun-a discovered her interest as she went.

With this attitude her dream of continuing her studies slowly formed throughout her college life. The lack of pressure from her parents to choose meant that she never developed a concrete plan; she just continued to move along with the flow: taking classes and excelling academically.

In college when people asked what I wanted to do in the future I just had a vague idea of going to graduate school. And my parents said ‘do whatever you want’ so... For now, I will go to graduate school as I have already decided but ...in my 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of college, when I thought about what I should do in the future I just vaguely thought I might go to graduate school but I wasn’t sure.”^{xxiii}

In this way Hyun-a slowly formulated her career based on her interests, not concerned about salary, status, or familial pressure. As long as she studied well it seems that those pressures were non-existent. Though she has a clear direction, she has no direct confidence in its ability to come to fulfillment. However, she also has the financial security to not be greatly concerned about it. “The best thing about going to graduate school is that I can study what I like (literature). However, there is nothing else good... I am not sure I can get a job if I continue to study English literature and it may be unstable.”^{xxiv} Concerns about getting a job and job stability were the main causes of stress for our other interviewees, but Hyun-a does not feel it is a great concern.

Interestingly, despite her uncertainty about getting a job and her job stability, she has a clear idea of where she wants to be in 10/20 years. “First of all, I should have gotten married by then. Also, I live in a large home (apartment or house), and every morning I leave home to give a lecture or do research. A cleaning lady comes twice a week at least. I have one daughter and one son; both of whom are good at studying and my husband earns a lot of money.”^{xxv} This

image relies on financial stability from her husband in the same way that her parents support her now. It also embellishes the ideal in the neoliberal society: productive and competent children who can ensure class reproduction. Finally, she sees her career as her central commitment which occupies her and confers on her title and social status.

In Kim Hyun-a's narrative a number of themes stand out. First, she sees rigorous study and academic success as a natural part of her identity. When other students pushed themselves to the limit, she saw it as natural to work just a little harder. Second, her upper or upper-middle class background allows her to think whimsically about her career and her future, relieving her of the burden of making immediate plans for employment. Third, her parents give her the leeway to choose her own path without interfering or trying to guide her. Fourth, she bases her idea of success around measurable, material things with her career planted at the center of her adult life. Thus, various trends appear throughout this narrative, which we will explore in more depth later.

A Second Perspective

The next student, Lee Young-sik, we met in the previous chapter. Lee Young-sik is also a student at the prestigious Yonsei University in Seoul. His life has forged him into a fierce competitor driven by the desire to move into the top ranks of society through intensive self-management. We left off before talking about the difference that he saw between his high school and middle school friends. These two schools, located in different parts of town, contained different quality students. His middle school friends came from poorer backgrounds and generally didn't take their studies seriously. Meanwhile, his high school was located in the richer part of town and contained students who embraced notions of how they "should" manage themselves. These students believed that as students their job was to study diligently, and so they did. Based on his observations these two students now lead very different lives, with the

poor, less studious students attending low level colleges or working part time jobs and the richer, studious students attending good universities and preparing for “good” lives.

Lee Young-sik himself is an exceptional student. Unlike many other interviewees, he attended high school each day from 8 am to 4 pm and then went home. His school had no mandatory study period, so he studied on average for about an hour and a half each day at home and then played video games for the rest of the day. He never went to *hagwon* or spent time in school on the weekend. Young-sik knew that he worked much less than other students, but found that despite this he outperformed every other student at his school. Since he had easily remained the number one student throughout high school, he applied to Seoul National University his senior year with the expectation that he would easily gain entrance. However, he failed.

The failure to get into Seoul National University on his first try set Young-sik on a new path. Determined to gain entrance the next year, Young-sik took one year off to study in an elite *hagwon* in Gangnam. This academy has the same purpose as Lee Na-rae’s academy: students take one year off and devote themselves to preparing for the SAT in order to improve their college prospects. After one year of study in this academy he reapplied to college. However, at the last minute he applied early admission to Yonsei just in case he failed to get into Seoul National again and mistakenly passed the test. This meant that Young-sik could not attend Seoul National University after all, but instead found himself at Yonsei with a full scholarship (to his disappointment).

While studying at this *hagwon* in Gangnam, Young-sik encountered a new level of society, what he describes as people from the “elite” course. Whereas the students from his high school came from families where the parents worked at big or public companies, the *hagwon*

students' parents were high ranking public officials or high ranking businessmen. These students lived extravagant lives. They went to eat at expensive buffets in upscale hotels costing around \$70 regularly for dinner. They gathered often to spend time together in activities that cost a lot of money and enjoyed spending money with little problem. Moreover, the amount of money that students collected to buy other students presents for their birthdays stood several times higher than the amount of money that Lee Young-sik had seen for similar activities in his high school. From these students he heard many times that their parents told them that if they get into law school then their parents will get them top positions at their firms after graduation. Often, these students spent a lot of time bragging about their father's occupation or salary.

These experiences have given Lee Young-sik very set views on how to succeed. He first set his mind on studying for Korea's prestigious senior civil service exam because this was the trend among his friends on the elite course. This difficult test can save up to 25 years of working one's way up through the Korean government bureaucracy by allowing direct entrance to high ranking positions. From before the time he finished high school he began studying for this test. For over three years while attending high school and college he devoted his energy to this test; going to private academies regularly and sacrificing his school and social life to pass. However, shortly before this interview he found out that he had failed the exam and has since given up on this pursuit.

When I received admission from Yonsei, *haengsi* (one of the public exams to become a high ranking public official 5 or higher) was the best way [to succeed] among humanities students because the number of students being admitted from the law exam (*sasi*) was being reduced. Among the *haengsi*, the Ministry of Finance test (*jaegyongjig*) was the best. After high school, I was studying to get into college at a private academy in Gangnam where most students were from rich families. The tuition fee for this academy was expensive... Related fees too were expensive... However, when those students talked about what they heard from their parents, when they were asked what they will do after college, they always say "*gosi*." So when they go to college they just play and then take *gosi*... That was the atmosphere. In other words, the parents of all of the students going to academies in Gangnam told their kids to take *gosi*.^{xxvi}

These days he has a new goal: he has determined that for him, there is no better alternative to joining a large company as a lawyer. He feels this is the only job which can earn him a high salary as humanities major.

There are only three choices for humanities majors. It seems like there is no choice but to work in a big company, take *gosi*, or go to law school. Sometimes there are good foreign companies but since I am not as fluent as native speakers I can't apply and therefore I am not thinking about it. Meanwhile, big companies are very volatile. Now, even with *gosi* it seems like you can't earn money. Meanwhile, through law school there are many openings for judges and prosecutors and you can earn a lot of money even if you just go to a medium sized firm.^{xxvii}

As a lawyer he sees himself able to earn high wages despite the ups and downs of large corporations. He carefully pointed out that many people could not foresee the changing fortunes of Hyundai Motors as it grew over the last few years or the sudden collapse of STX. This means that working as a regular worker in a large company has become unstable. However, he thinks that lawyers have more flexible job options than general employees. Moreover, though he thinks that government work could be prestigious, he thinks that the service exam is not worth the stress and energy. "Today is not the day when people can gain financial advantage through *gosi*... I love my country but I don't think I have to sacrifice my life for that."^{xxviii} Therefore, discounting working in a foreign company, he believes that law offers him the only solution for good employment.

To this end he is now attending a new *hagwon* to prepare for the Korean LSAT, the LEET (an abbreviation which may or may not be chosen for its similarity to the word "elite," the word that Lee Young-sik used to describe the people on this course). Interestingly, his parents continue to hope for him to become a public official. About their urges he said, "Since my parents are older than average [being in their 50s] they can't understand how society has changed and just keep telling me to be a public official. They still think that public officials have some kind of power."^{xxix} He dismisses their advice with his staunch belief that far from being

productive, government service is a waste of talent since employees have little power in an age when the real players are large corporations.

Due to his tremendous success so far despite his humble beginnings at a poor middle school, Young-sik strongly believes that hard work can bring anyone from the bottom of the social ladder into the middle class regardless of structural barriers. When thinking about the ability of people to succeed in society he states, “Even if people have nothing, if they really try hard then even if they are low class then they can move into the middle class. And if they just get a little support then they can move into the upper class.”^{xxx} Any discussion about class differences or the impact of external factors is superfluous. In his mind, there are no excuses to not reaching the middle class if someone truly has a drive to succeed.

These days EBS is really good. So saying that you can't study because you don't have money is a lie... In college the national scholarship system is good or you can get a merit scholarship, and there are also a lot of a government student loans you can receive... so when you are young, study with EBS and in college study with support from the government and if you get into a big company you can get into the middle class.^{xxxi}

Thus, in his mind publicly available resources have rendered the lack of education in society the fault of the learner who did not pursue that knowledge that all learners should know is good for him or her. He sees the reflection of this in the difference between his high school and middle school classmates: while his studious high school classmates are preparing to live good lives, his trouble making middle school classmates study in bad universities or work part time jobs.

Many themes stand out among Young-sik's interview. First, he clearly has a strong natural gift for learning that has helped him achieve monumental success. Second, he has very strong opinions about “proper” ways to succeed and manages himself accordingly. Third, his own ideas about how to prepare his career supersede his parents' intervention, which he dismisses as faulty because they are too out of touch. Fourth, Young-sik now strongly prefers a career in the private sector over working in the private sector. Finally, Young-sik strongly

believes that hard work can lead to success with no room for excuses based on structural obstacles due to his own ability to come from a poor neighborhood and gain entrance to Yonsei.

Interestingly, in Young-sik's analysis of the benefit of hard work, he does not take into account how his own natural intelligence played a large role in his success. While other top high school students like Kim Hyun-a got to the top by studying until 2 am every day with private tutors, Lee Young-sik studied for just an hour and a half after school and never attended any private academies. At the same time, the academy which helped get him into Yonsei after high school required extensive amounts of money, around \$1,000 a month according to the academy's website. This means that Young-sik needed a certain amount of capital and free time to be able to study and apply successfully to top universities. Finally, of course, the process of getting a middle class job in Korea is not as easy today as simply going to college, as this paper will address in more detail later. All in all, Young-sik's belief in social mobility and its ease seems due much more to his personal success and a neoliberal bias than social reality.

The Competitive Middle

Next we turn to looking at two students from Inha University, a prestigious mid-tier university in Incheon, near Seoul. Throughout our interviews we discovered that often students at our middle tier schools displayed weaker neoliberal attitudes than top-tier students, but still exhibited neoliberal perspectives (particularly in their belief in the value of hard work). In an interesting division, though almost all of the mid-tier students hoped to work in a big company and earn large salaries, half of the interviewees mentioned only career related objectives when talking about success while the other half included familial values and pursuing personal interests among their criteria for success.

Yoon Seung-tae lies among the later of the two groups. Yoon Seung-tae is currently a junior studying economics at Inha University. He grew up in Seoul where teachers pushed the students very hard to improve their grades and test scores. Often, he would see students and teachers fight during his senior year of high school as students struggled to prepare themselves for the college entrance exams. He attributes the conflict between students and educators to the teachers' greater concern for the school's ranking in Seoul than for the students and their passion and personal growth. He thinks that for this reason, teachers often encourage students to get into a good college first and think about major later, a theme that we saw throughout our interviews.

This happened throughout his high school education. He felt this particularly strongly since his teachers thought that among his classmates he had the best chance to go to a good college. However, Seung-tae wanted to think about more than just the status of his school and had already planned out in his mind what he wanted to do:

When I was a senior in high school, since the school needed to have students that went to a good college, I had many conversations with teachers. I think that I was the one that my homeroom teacher expected [to go to a good school]. I thought seriously about which major I should choose. Actually there are more people who don't know what to do in the future. Students generally just think about going to college and then major is just a secondary or future consideration... and they can change their major in college. So students generally consider college first, but I was planning apply to a department based on aptitude so I considered major as well.^{xxxii}

However, at the end of the day, this spark of individuality died in the presence of his teachers' insistence. In fact, his history teacher's insistence ended up pushing him away from pursuing his passion. "The truth is that I wanted to major in history. My homeroom teacher in my junior year was a history teacher and so I conversed a lot with him. But he said, 'don't major in history.' Well... in the job market, job openings are limited so anyway I applied for economics in half of my applications and history in the other half."^{xxxiii} Since the highest ranking college that Seung-tae got into was Inha University where he had applied for the economics department, his teachers encouraged him to go to Inha and he did. Though this might seem benevolent of the teacher in

some ways, it still raises questions about the role of teachers in high schools and whether they should develop passion or train students to follow the money.

Now that he is studying at Inha University, Seung-tae is diligently preparing for his career in a variety of ways. He has his sights set on a career in finance, though he recognizes that that is simply his goal for now. To this end he is working to get his TESAT certificate, a certificate regarding economics, logic, and prediction, and looking into other certificates to pursue. At the same time, he wants to do an internship overseas at an insurance company in New York through connections that his school has established through its alumni network. He stressed that he felt he needed a mastery of his field and needed to develop a strong social network in the future.

However, for Seung-tae these things are mainly a means to an end. He has no intention of spending his life working or trying to move one more step on the later. He wants to get a job where he can finish at a regular time and never has work on the weekend so that he can spend time with his family. Moreover, he says that he only needs enough money to pay back his loans and retire, “whatever money that is, that is enough money.”^{xxxiv} This view point stands apart from our other interviews so far. As opposed to searching for which career pays the most money, Seung-tae’s focus lies outside of his job and career.

However, he does think that the possibility to change classes exists for those who are willing to work to achieve it. Though the level of effort that one must put in changes depending on their original status, he thinks that people do have the freedom of choice:

I don’t think social mobility is impossible. Everyone has opportunities. Of course still how much effort you put in is important because there are people who are already on the top and people from the bottom need to give 2 or 3 times the effort if they want to move up. In the past, we say “*jasuseongga*” [being successful by yourself] or “*gaecheoneseo yongnanda*” [a successful person from a poor family]. But now it is harder to do this. There are some private tutors for a few thousand dollars... meanwhile there are people who live in the country and have a hard time even just going to school.^{xxxv}

Therefore he recognizes that total social mobility does not exist while still placing value on hard work. On the one hand he recognizes that many of the educational services that can get students ahead remain far out of reach for the rural poor. However, at the same time he believes that by redoubling one's effort, someone can compensate for his or her starting position.

Thus, Seung-tae still exhibits neoliberal perspectives although it seems he does not display a fully neoliberal identity. He believes that hard work leads to success, though he acknowledges structural difficulties in social advancement. At the same time, he values a career that pays a large salary, but he sees this career as one of the many important components of his life rather than its center. Third, Seung-tae strongly believes in the concept of self-management and is preparing himself far in advance to gain the certificates and credentials necessary for success. Finally, we see that though he ended up following his teacher's advice and mainly considered school standing when applying for college, he somewhat regrets this decision now. This blend of neoliberal characteristics is in line with the notion that students at higher tier schools more fully embrace neoliberal perspectives and identities while students in lower-tier schools demonstrate more skepticism toward the system and fewer neoliberal values.

A Second Perspective

Next, we focus on another familiar character, Jung Hui-soo. Hui-soo comes from a difficult, working class background and successfully gained entrance into a middle tier college after taking one year off to study in a *jaesu hagwon*. Hui-soo's future revolves around her career. She wants to continually advance to get a job that fulfills her two requirements for success: status through one's occupation and status through one's finances. To this end she pins her ideal future salary around \$50,000 a year in a job while she works at a large company as a brand manager.

To her, the most important part of this dream is working at a large company. She wants to work in Amore Pacific, a large Korean cosmetics company, or in LG cosmetics, where she believes her work could relate in some way to her interest in makeup while getting all of the perks of working at a large firm. Even if she failed to get a job at either of these companies, she would be satisfied with a job at other large, make-up related companies such as Skinfood because such companies still have a recognizable brand name. Essentially, she said, if her company is big enough for her parents to recognize the name, then that would be success for her.

Her criteria for her husband places his career equally as the most important part of his life. He should be “capable and stable in his field.” One of the reasons that career takes center stage it seems is her desire to not have kids, who would just grow up in Korea’s difficult system. As a replacement for growing a family, Hui-soo has reassigned value onto her status and possessions and has developed an elaborate picture of her future life. She plans to live in the center of Seoul and dreams of living in a house (a rare and expensive type of residence in Seoul) where she shares a bedroom with her husband but has a separate dressing room and study. Her house should be in a quiet, residential area. Her dream area is Seoraemaek, the famous French district in Seoul, though at the time of the interview she struggled to remember its name. Of course, this district often appears on TV, is home to many celebrities, and has houses that sell for millions of dollars. Thus, again the idea of having a recognizable brand name, even regarding the name of one’s neighborhood, stands out as an important theme.

Through these goals it is clear that Hui-soo’s ideal future revolves around her career in a large corporation and the income associated with this. However, her parents have a different dream for her future. Her mother, who still lives in economic hardship, dreams of her becoming a high ranking public official who can earn a consistent salary, receive a pension when she

retires, and get food coupons. Her mother mentions this to her so often that she equated it to “nagging,” rejecting this career because of the uncertainty of getting the job and its low salary.

My mother really wants me to be a public official, so I was thinking about going down that road. I bought textbooks for the exam and I registered for *hagwon* courses but I found out that I really hated it. I didn’t even want to give it a second look because that ended up not being what I wanted... so after just a few days I sold all the textbooks, cancelled all of the courses and said, “I won’t do that.”

My mom said that her dream is that I am working in city hall in Seoul wearing an I.D. card and having relaxed time for coffee every day. She also wished that I could get a benefit card for public officials that I could then give to her. And she wants to see me get a pension. She said, “It couldn’t be better than if you become a public official.” However, I am not confident in preparing for the exam for 2 years and I don’t think that I will be happy even if I pass it.

First of all, it has a low salary and I don’t want to spend two years studying when it is not guaranteed that I can pass and I am interested in beauty and cosmetics... but there is nothing like that in the government of course.^{xxxvi}

Her mother paints a nice picture of her future working in the government. However, despite the easy life that government employees enjoy in terms of lifestyle and working hours compared to the private sector, Hui-soo rejects it on the belief that she can more reliably get a job in a big company and she would enjoy it more there. Regardless of the government’s benefits, Hui-soo has her eyes set on the private sector despite lacking experience in both

Her belief in the ability to enter a high paying job is not simply grounded on her belief in her own potential. She strongly believes that anyone can work hard and come to succeed and earn a high income in the private sector in the same way. In fact, she believes that people from any class could move up into the higher ranks of society through their own hard work.

There are many people who have succeeded in entrepreneurial work so anyone who workers successfully can become more successful; even people from the bottom. Well they can succeed with their singing talent. And if they don’t want to go up to the real upper-class, I think that people can earn \$50,000 a year, as I said, with their hard work... but only if they have will power.^{xxxvii}

To Hui-soo, will power and hard work alone define the limits of someone’s ability to climb the social ladder. Moreover, she frames that movement from one class to another as a choice, where someone could choose that they would prefer to transform themselves to the upper middle class as opposed to the upper class, in which case they could settle for \$50,000 a year.

This applies to herself as well. When talking about her current anxieties she mentioned that her greatest fear was her losing her will power and drive to keep going. Interestingly, her other worry lay in her finances. During the time of the interview she was taking a year off in order to work and save up for study abroad. She was worried that her financial situation would prevent her from being able to take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad. Though she is working now to make ends meet and make the most of her education, she fails to reconcile her own financial difficulties with her belief that hard work and will-power provides the answer for overcoming life's obstacles and lead to a successful career, a high salary, and class mobility. After all, if she faces these difficulties other students likely face it too. However, inevitably, it seems that if Hui-soo successfully completes her semester abroad, it will serve as further evidence to her that all students can overcome financial difficulty with enough will power and hard work. In her mind, her own experience taking time off from school to save up for a semester abroad will serve as the answer for how other students can overcome obstacles in their lives.

Hui-soo displays a much stronger neoliberal identity than Seung-tae in a number of ways. She firmly believes that no barriers exist that can prevent someone who is determined from climbing the social ladder. Additionally, she stakes out her independence very strongly, both rejecting her mother's advice, rejecting government service, and committing herself to following her own dreams. On top of this, she places her career as the sole most important thing in her future and frames her success in the future based on measurable standards (generally standards related to money). She has no desire to have children and has no strong interest other than her work. She even envisions her husband having work as his main priority. Her success so far in the educational system has likely helped reinforce this neoliberal character, and, like Young-sik,

her disadvantaged background has probably led her to have a more uncompromising perspective than Seung-tae since she serves as her own example of how someone can succeed.

From the Third Tier

Next we turn to exploring the attitudes and perspectives of students from students at low tier schools. These students were noticeably different than the other students we interviewed. They had noticeably more energy, were more lively, and had more passion when discussing every aspect of their life from school to their future career. Generally, these students focused very little on salary and company size and had a much larger focus on their specific role or profession. They also mentioned alternative priorities in their lives outside of preparing to join a large company including club activities, social relationships, and making new friends. One of the clearest examples of this is the first student we will review, Kang Young-min.

Kang Young-min is a man with many passions and experiences. A senior at a not well known university in a small city near Seoul, he stands about six feet tall with a muscular build that makes him look like a body builder. He came to the interview in an Abercrombie shirt and fitted jeans which clearly accented his build. We learned that he had originally planned to enter college on an athletic scholarship to become a professional athlete. Unfortunately, an injury in high school had prevented him from following that path. These days, he has fully recovered and competes in mixed martial arts while working out regularly. His passion for exercise and commitment to his extracurricular activities are just a few of the things that made Kang Young-min stand out from our other interviewees.

Kang Young-min's breadth of experience also set him apart from others. Because he aimed to enter college on an athletic scholarship, his high school days differed entirely from his

peers. Rather than studying in a classroom all day, he only stayed in school for one period, from 8:30 to around 9:30 am, and then he was supposed to exercise and train for his sport. However, Young-min used this freedom to leave school and work various part time jobs in town. Usually, he worked until 2 pm before returning to school to exercise from around 4 pm until 10 at night. He never mentioned studying. What is bizarre about Young-min is that he reports never needing any money from his part time jobs, he just liked gaining different experiences and trying new things. Getting some money for this was just a bonus to him.

Suddenly, his whole life changed his senior year of high school. A sudden injury prevented him from applying to colleges for athletics and so he had to find a new major. Since his town only had three *hagwon* (one each for Taekwondo, fine arts, and piano), he began studying fine art for a loss of alternatives. After one month of studying he received acceptance to a fine art college before transferring to his current university. However, at his new school he found himself without a purpose and depressed as he struggled to find out what job he wanted to have in the future.

During university as well he worked many different part time jobs in order to build his experience and make money. Though he declined to list all of the jobs that he worked because some of them were illegal, he said that he worked in a *hagwon*, in the dormitory, in a bar, as a bartender, as a server in a restaurant, as a bouncer, and as a personal body guard for hire to celebrities. Unfortunately, from these jobs he found many bad experiences and many jobs that wasted his time. However, he learned that the most important thing for him to do is find his passion while avoiding seeking only money through his work:

When I was in college I experienced many different part time jobs because I wanted to do something for myself and I didn't want to be a burden for my parents. I hope that other students also experience good part time jobs. I hope that they aren't just seduced by money. I did "bad" part time jobs and I saw many bad things, but I just kept going and focused on the money. I suggest part time jobs which include aspects that people want to develop in themselves. For

example, working in a convenience store or a bar is hard and you can only learn things related to that field. So if you don't consider your future career and just work part time jobs for money, then your devotion for school life will be reduced and you will only get information not related to your major.^{xxxviii}

He reported that this time when he began searching for his passion was the most stressful part of his life. With no ideas about what to do in the future and his graduation nearing, he traveled to Europe to meet his father. His father, a hiring lead at Samsung's European office, helped influence him dramatically. Though his father had always encouraged him to work at a big company throughout his whole life, he had changed since going to work in Europe. This time, far from pushing him to join a big company, his father told him to stay away from working in big firms as much as he could help it. His experiences with the rapid hiring and firing of large firms made him encourage his son to use big companies as a last resort.

Even though my father is working for a big company that everyone knows, he doesn't suggest [working at] a big company. He has worked abroad for 5 years and says that it is really hard. He has gotten a lot of support [like money, benefits, etc.] but he also needs to devote himself entirely to his work. He said, 'If you really want to work for a big company, just work for 3 to 5 years and then go out.' He said, 'big companies won't be worthwhile in the future, so just do whatever you want because people don't know when they will be fired in a big company. If big companies get in trouble suddenly, they lay off people or people need to move into new positions.' Because of these things it seems like he has also had a hard time.^{xxxix}

This and Young-min's time in Europe changed his life. He felt that the people in Europe were so free to pursue their passion and had so many diverse interests. In Korea, he felt, "I was just a frog stuck in a well."^{xl} That is to say, looking back he felt that Korea was such a small society with little knowledge about the bigger world and how people live. He came to the realization that "Korean college students think that success is wealth and reputation"^{xli} and care too much about other people's evaluation. Meanwhile, he found that foreign students view enjoying life and achieving happiness as success. Therefore, while Koreans were busying themselves preparing for their future, he found that young people in Europe enjoy their lives through traveling and having fun.

He came back from Europe determined to pursue his passion. After hearing a lecture about visual directing shortly after returning, he decided that he had found it. He now dreams of being a ‘star maker,’ designing the look and appearance of famous Korean celebrities. This job has no direct path to success. In fact, in his own words he needs to find a way to develop both reputation and trust through “50% social networking and 50% competence.”^{xlii} Now Young-min is working on building his resume through design competitions while building his competency in the field and developing “diversified strengths” (*chabyeolhwa*) while becoming a “global person.” He is not concerned with money since he believes that when he loves what he does the money will follow saying: “if you pursue your own enjoyment and excitement, then success will follow. So I suggest pursuing your interest, not money.”^{xliii} Thus, Young-min lives his life and sets his goals very differently than our other interviewees. Though the center of his life is his career, that career is based on his passion, not its salary or reputation.

Kang Young-min displays a very post-materialist mentality rather than a neoliberal perspective. First, he believes that pursuing money for its own sake is a grave mistake; he sees no value associated simply with a high salary. At the same time, he places his passion at the center of his life and his career comes from this passion. For this reason he has no interest in choosing a company just for its size or reputation. Moreover, though Young-min is independent and focused on his own goals, he cares about the advice of his father and listens carefully to him. Finally, Young-min’s revelations during his trip in Europe have led him to place value on enjoying life over endlessly competing. All of these things make Young-min decidedly less in tune with the competitive system than his peers.

A Second Perspective

Lee Na-rae has many similar perspectives to Kang Young-min, though not as extreme. As introduced in the last chapter, Lee Na-rae is a sophomore at a low tier university studying Korean language and literature in the hope of becoming a writer. She grew up with a mother who had “education fever” for her children and locked Na-rae in her room by nailing her door shut when Na-rae was in high school and began having an interest in studying music as her major. Despite their differences, Na-rae recognizes her mother’s practicality on many issues. For example, her mother cares more about practical matters than love in Na-rae’s relationships. “My mom cares about realistic things a lot. Sometimes I feel like she is too much, but if I think about it seriously it seems like this is not totally wrong. For example, if I dated someone, my mother considers his major, job, and says “stop dating him” something like this.”^{xliv} For this reason, she and her mother were on the same page when Na-rae talked about changing her major.

Na-rae now plans to transfer into the Department of Gerontal Health and Welfare, better known in the United States as geriatrics, and study social work. She wanted to transfer into this major because of the difficulty surviving as a writer in Korea. Even though she had originally thought that she could be successful by following her passion, now she is not sure because of the instability of earning money as a writer. This uncertainty has caused her to start worrying about being able to take care of her parents since her father will soon retire. She almost decided to stay in her department with the new goal of getting a stable job as a Korean teacher since her department had been talking about expanding the number of Korean teaching certificates they distributed to their students. However, the change excludes Na-rae’s year. Whereas in the future, every student in her major will receive a Korean teaching certificate, in her year only the top 4% of students can receive the certificate, making it nearly impossible for her to get a certificate and

go on to teach Korean due to her current class standing. She thought about teaching Korean in a developed country abroad without a certificate, but realized that the vast majority of Korean teachers teach in Korea or developing countries, leaving only 10% in countries she wanted to teach in. Therefore, she made up her mind to change her major with her mother's support.

Though her parents supported her change for a number of economic reasons, Na-rae has other reasons for changing into this major that are much more personal. Her parents think that the field is appropriate for women and can provide stable pay over a long period of time. At the same time they think it will help her become independent after graduation from college. Meanwhile, Lee Na-rae feels like she could excel in this field with her previous experience. In the past she has volunteered at social welfare organizations and therefore has experienced such work before. At the same time, she thinks that after studying social work she could use her degree as a counselor, a job that she already does in her free time to help high school students who feel excessive amounts of stress.

Finally, the most important reason that she decided to change her major to social work, however, is that she believes she will have a lot of spare time due to the lack of overtime done in her job. She envisions this time giving her the ability to practice her passions: writing and music. In addition to her original aspiration to study music, Na-rae currently participates in the school band and spends a lot of time practicing for her performances and socializing with her bandmates. Thus, music and her writing have always been her two favorite parts of college. Instead of having to give up her passion for writing and music altogether or struggling to survive as a writer, she sees social work as an avenue through which she can work and still do what she loves, giving her life higher levels of satisfaction.

Na-rae has a mentality similar to Kang Young-min, who warned about the danger of pursuing only money and values pursuing his passion over anything else. Rather than center her life on the pursuit of money through her career, Na-rae centers her life on her interests that make her happy and has chosen a career path that allows her to take care of her responsibilities while she pursues it. At the same time, she prioritizes her job preferences by their stability and their ability to facilitate her interests rather than by salary. Finally, Na-rae has a close relationship with her mother. Unlike students at top tier schools, rather than dismiss her mother when they disagree, Na-rae attempts to find ways to understand and even respect her mother's logic. Therefore, in Na-rae we see a filial daughter who values her passions and her relationships over competing to gain a higher salary and places these things first in her life.

Comparing Students across Levels and Across Classes

To varying extents but without exception, all of the students discussed in this paper display evidence of a neoliberal character among the South Korea youth. Strong notions of self-management and developing marketable skills with which to pursue their economic survival characterize each student. Meanwhile, each student displays faith in the goodness of competition and the belief that through hard work anyone can change their social status. Though the students from low-tier schools often gave more qualifications for the necessary foundation that a person would need to climb the social ladder or introduce other factors such as luck, we can appreciate that each student felt that competition yielded the best results in society and that people are responsible for their own situation, good or bad.

Only Kang Young-min and Kim Yoo-sun offered criticism any toward the Korean system. Though Kang Young-min, whose father worked at Samsung and aspired to be a visual

director, thought badly of the monetary orientation of Korean youth (a neoliberal characteristics in which compensation defines the “good” jobs and the “bad” jobs) he left alone any discussion of the competitive job or education market. Kim Yoo-sun’s criticism of the schooling system after her experience in Australia reflects some resentment at the pure level of competition in the country, but not at the idea of the competition itself. Hence, we can safely say that each student to some degree buys into the Korean system and its neoliberal program with criticism coming only from students with extensive experience outside of Korea.

At the same time, the students examined in this section all demonstrate different levels of competition, value orientations, and modes of self-management. Based on the range of interviews we conducted, I have drawn some general trends about the ways in which students from schools of different levels and from different class backgrounds frame their ideas of success, negotiate these ideas with those around them, and value the economic portions of their lives including their jobs and salaries. Though these trends do not intend to draw definitive lines between different groups of students, it is interesting to note that in the interviews that we conducted these patterns generally held. While I discuss these trends, I will attempt to tie in the neoliberalization of the labor market and Korean economy in order to demonstrate both that the Korean economy has impacted the aspirations and behaviors of Korean youth by adjusting compensation structures while those who reside in privileged positions in the system or have been most successful inside of it have more severe views and stronger material orientations.

The Old vs. the New

One of the common themes discussed by many of my participants was the influence of their parents in their career path. For example, Lee Young-sik’s parents wanted him to take the civil service exam, Jung Hui-soo’s mother wanted nothing better than for her to work in city hall,

Kang Young-min's father urged him to stay away from large companies, and Lee Na-rae's mother nailed her door shut in an attempt to keep her on the path to becoming a doctor or lawyer. Certainly the involvement of Korean parents in their children's lives is widely known. After all, in a country with the third lowest birthrate in the world, often parents only have one chance to raise their child and "get it right." Moreover, in many parts of Korea children take care of their parents when they get old. "Successful" children have the ability to take care of their parents well while "unsuccessful" children struggle to do so, simply neglect their parents, or are simply unable to. Since success in this sense relies on money, orienting one's children's education and career seems natural and pressure exists both on parents to point their children in the right direction and on children to meet their parents' expectations. However, the ways in which parents intervene and their success in intervening seems to depend on both social class and students' success in the educational system.

In regards to class, we can see that parent's direct intervention in choosing a child's career path increases with lower class standing. Lee Na-rae, who had the most extreme incidence of parental involvement in her life, comes from a low class family where only the father worked and was employed as a manual laborer for many years. Her mother's drive to get her children into good schools with good majors reflects her aspiration for her children as well as the difficulty that the family was facing. Another example of this would be Jung Hui-soo. Jung Hui-soo comes from a similar situation with her father being a manual laborer. Her mother greatly tried to influence Hui-soo's direction in life, encouraging her to study for the national service exam and work in city hall and saying that there is nothing that could make her happier.

At the same time, students from a wealthier background have much less pressure from their parents. These students' parents generally support their children's passions within

acceptable limits and encourage them whenever they can. We see this most obviously in the case of Kim Hyun-a. Her parents encouraged her to do *anything* that she wants and told her that they would support anything. With this in mind, Kim Hyun-a has plans to continue her education without solid plans for employment or any sense of job security. We see a similar trend with Kang Young-min, the son of a high ranking Samsung man working overseas. His father supported his passion to become a visual designer wholeheartedly and without question.

Of course, this observation does not mean that parents have less interest in their child's future or do less for their children as social classes increase. In fact, many accounts on Korean life would say that the opposite is true. However, it seems that continuing direct manipulation regarding career choice decreases along these lines, possibly because of the correlation between class and success in the educational/competition system. Just as Young-sik observes about his middle and high school classmates, the students from middle or middle-upper class backgrounds internalized the importance of studying and identities as students. In the same way they may have conformed to their parents' expectations from an early age and may not need continuing intervention to meet such standards. This explanation admits differences in parental intervention while also recognizes the wide-spread idea that South Korean youth today are extremely dependent on their parents.

At the same time, we see that students who have competed successfully in the educational system and have gotten into top schools are the most likely to refuse their parents' advice. Both Lee Young-sik and Jung Hui-soo completely reject their parents' intervention into their life. Lee Young-sik says that his parents are too old and hence do not comprehend what is happening in society. Meanwhile, Jung Hui-soo rejects her mother's suggestion, critical of the low pay and the low chance of passing a government exam. In both these situations, students

feel that they are more in touch with the economic climate than their parents probably due to their success in the system so far which they perceive as an indicator of their personal ability.

On the other hand, we see that students in low-tier universities often listen to their parents as close confidantes. Lee Na-rae resents her mother's controlling nature, her refusal to let her make her own decisions, and her mother's efforts at preventing her from following her passion. However, despite this we can nonetheless see that she has respect for her mother, tries to understand the value of her mother's perspectives, and even tries to listen to her advice on things such as dating. At the same time, Kang Young-min has dutifully followed his father's advice. In the past he considered applying for a large corporation when his father encouraged his application to a large company and now he is steadfastly searching to find his own path.

These differences demonstrate differing levels of neoliberal personhood between the first and third tier students. Students at top tier schools demonstrate more independence and an increased reluctance to rely on the counsel of their families. This rejection of Confucian thought in favor of modern, neoliberal notions of individuality is based on an indexical inversion in a similar fashion to the way this term is used by Inoue (2004). In the neoliberal economy, success goes hand in hand with ideas about deservingness. In an indexical inversion, other positive characteristics become conveyed onto the status holder which gives the status holder a moral worthiness. In this case, it seems that top tier students recognize their own success and see their own intelligence, hard work, perseverance and moral virtue. Thus, high achieving students have reason to think that he or she possess some kind of refined knowledge about how the system works and are apt to succeed inside of it. In this way, we see how the neoliberal logics upholding the system can change the willingness of competitive students to take advice from

those around them, including their parents, due to a feeling of validation in their individual achievement and a belief in their own individual ability.

The Impact of Hard Work

One of the major themes that came out over the course of the interviews was the idea that “hard work leads to success.” This section seeks to examine how different tiers of students and different classes of students embrace this neoliberal principle and mold it to their individual situation. This section does not intend to argue that the idea that hard work leads to success is incorrect or that a lack of hard work could ever directly lead to success. It simply views the causal logic of hard work and success as largely fabricated. Hard work certainly stands as a prominent characteristic of many successful individuals, but it by no means *makes* them successful.

As Stephen Levitt points out in the global best seller, *Freakonomics*, the most important determiner of who is wealthy is the country in which a person is born, something that people have no control over. In society as well, if someone’s father is a billionaire then they too will become rich. Now, this example may seem outlandish because of the relatively small number of billionaires worldwide (there are around 1,826). However, neoliberal camps champion people like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates and evidence that anyone can become filthy rich with a little hard work. However, the world sees many more children born to millionaire parents every year than new, up and coming Bill Gates.

The problem with the work hard and get rich mentality lies not in the idea itself, but in how it is used to justify ultra-competitive systems of advancement in like Korea. It creates a system where every person measures themselves against every other person and tries to go one step further in order to outpace the competition lest they fail and fall into the ranks of the

economic destitute (or simply find themselves unable to buy the same new model car as everyone else in the office). This ultra-competitiveness is apparent among the interviewees in this study through their excessively long hours with tutors or the kinds of threats that teachers made against students to encourage them to study. Of course, despite people in Korea working harder than ever to get ahead, Korean society today stands more broadly unequal than at any time since before Korea's land distribution. With household debt rates skyrocketing (Jun, 2015) and the feeling of being an economic burden leading Korea to have the world's highest rates of elderly suicide (Kim, 2014; Hun, 2013, Harlan, 2014), we are obliged to recognize that there is a problem and that adding more study time each week cannot be the solution.

At the same time, the idea that hard work leads to success in itself is not new. However, there is a neoliberal character to the modern notion that hard work leads to success in Korea. Whereas before this concept meant that with hard work one could overcome the disadvantages of one's starting position, the modern idea that hard work leads to success operates inside of a meta-structure seemingly designed to catapult those who work hard into the forefront of society. The new structure does not portray social mobility as a rare but possible phenomenon, but as a characteristic of modern life solely dependent upon one's willingness to work. It also portrays the pursuit of mobility through hard work as common sense, with the measure of class measured almost solely in monetary amounts as opposed to culture or family background. Thus, this study characterizes the belief that hard work provides a common path for social mobility as a fundamental neoliberal logic and evidence of neoliberal subjectivity.

While every student believed that hard work could lead to success, the top and mid-tier students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds stood out as being particularly strong believers that reaching the middle or upper class depended on basic effort. Lee Young-sik stands

out among the top and mid-tier students for his particularly bold statement that with hard work anyone among even the poorest members of Korean society can make their way into a large company and the middle class. In the same vein, Jung Hui-soo boldly stated that people from the bottom who work hard consistently can make it into the upper class, or can choose to stop short at the middle class. This of course shows another aspect of neoliberalism, the belief that those who do not succeed have somehow failed personally and have in some way chosen to fail.

These are two extreme examples show how neoliberal perspectives on competition, especially related to the benefits of hard work, can go to the extreme. To such individuals who have won the educational game, success and social mobility appear “natural” or simply “common sense.” Far from recognizing the many limitations and road blocks that people from different backgrounds face in their pursuit of economic stability, the neoliberal ideology reduces social differentiation to a mere lack of effort. Tellingly, these are embodied in the individuals who have successfully competed and are looking forward to further capitalizing on those advantages. Meanwhile, students like Lee Na-rae gives equal importance to luck and hard work, looking back on her father’s ability to get a scholarship from the government and move from a blue collar job into a white collar one. Inevitably, the purely neoliberal ideology fails to reconcile not only reality, but also the fact that there are not nearly enough spots in the Korean economy to accommodate all the people who slave away to get a better life. However, the fracture between rhetoric and reality seems only apparent to a minority of students toward the bottom of the educational hierarchy.

Public vs. Private

In Korea there is an ongoing debate between the benefits and disadvantages of government jobs, as well as how to open access to those jobs. This system has changed as

neoliberalization has progressed in Korea. Though in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in Korea the majority of the middle class lie in well supported government jobs with high barriers to entry. The government's dismantling of the wage control system caused the location of the capital/power nexus to move away from the government and military into the private sector. The decreasing size of the Korean government and its diminishing pay relative to the private sector has caused a decline in the prestige of government jobs. Despite the security that government jobs offer, they have become more and more of a fall back option in Korea, especially because of the country's incredibly competitive service exams.

South Korea has historically offered three levels of service exams: grade 5, grade 7, and grade 9 in law, the Civil Service, and the Foreign Service. These grades reflect one's position in the government's hierarchy, with grade 1 at the top. Passing the test for grade 5 is a highly coveted prize that many top students aim for. Passing the government test to gain admission at grade 5 saves students the 25 to 30 years of work it would take to reach that rank from entering at grade 9. Therefore, many students spend years preparing to pass higher levels of the test. Once someone works for the government, they enjoy complete job security, good working hours, and a reasonable pension; making government employment favorable to many other forms of labor.

Historically the government has had a closed system in which government employees may only enter through the service exam system and then must work their way up the system internally. Of course, at the same time the exams were open to anyone. This meant that regardless of someone's formal education or family background, strong performance on the government test can lead to a government job. However, this is slowly changing. The Korean government has been in the process of reducing the number of people hired at grade 5 through

the national service exams in order to reduce the cronyism from young, high-ranking government officials' favorable treatment of corporations they plan to join after retirement and the pack mentality of test passers of the same year. Therefore, the government law exam will be eliminated in 2016 while the Foreign Service Exam has already been closed and the Civil Service Exam has reduced the number of passers. In place of this system, the government is implementing a new lateral hiring system at this level, meaning that students' ability to pass the government exams at the highest levels and get a job has drastically decreased (Lee, 2014).

The reduction of grade 5 test positions has increased competition for government entrance at grade 7 and 9 across the country while reducing the number of elite students aspiring to work in the government. Throughout history, students at top schools have famously dominated the grade 5 government exams. In 2010, over 70% of grade 5 passers were from Korea's top 3 universities: Seoul National University, Yonsei University, and Korean University. Over 85% of grade 5 passers came from Korea's top seven universities: the top three, Ewha Woman's University, Sungkyunkwan University, Hanyang University, and the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. Hence, students at top schools continually aspire to pass the grade 5 exam, while students at less prestigious schools turn toward the lower level exams (Lee, 2010). As the number of grade 5 positions decreases, students at top tier schools have to reconcile applying for a lower tier entrance if they decide to apply at all. This matters because of the stigma associated with different levels of the test.

The dominance of top tier universities has historically led schools like Seoul National, Ewha, and Yonsei to hang placards celebrating the names of students who pass the grade 5 exams without giving mention to those who passed the level 7 or 9 exams. Meanwhile, lower tier schools celebrate their grade 7 and grade 9 passers for lack of such an elite history. This has

led to a stigma that students who pass tests below grade 5 demean the names of top universities. In fact, a few years ago, a girl from one of Seoul's prestigious private schools asked on the school's private online message board if she would shame the school for preparing for the grade 9 exam.

We saw this polarization of test taking among our interviewees. Lee Young-sik prepared himself for 3 years to pass the grade 5 national service exam and Park Soo-na felt pressure from her family to apply for the grade 5 tests. Both of these students come from top-tier schools in Seoul. Meanwhile, Jung Hui-soo who studied at a mid-tier school in a large city near Seoul bought all of the preparation material for the grade 7 exam before deciding against it. Finally, two students at low-tiers schools mentioned taking the government exam, but for grade 9. Significantly, there was no cross over between school tier and test grade during our interviews.

At the same time, I found divisions between school tier and willingness to work in public jobs. Students at top and mid-tier schools steadfastly rejected the possibility of going into government work. Lee Young-sik explicitly mentioned the changing number of government openings from the national exam as his reason for quitting his study, indicating that it was not worth the effort for so few positions available at grade 5. Park Soo-na decided that passing the grade 5 exam would be too difficult despite her parents' insistence that she try. Jung Hui-soo mentioned the uncertainty of being able to pass after two years of studying, reflecting her understanding that the tests were becoming increasingly competitive as test takers for grade 5 begin readjusting their sights on grade 7 and during this troubled time in the Korean economy. Interestingly, no top-tier students expressed any willingness to lower their standard and take the grade 7 or 9 test instead and all the mid and top-tier students eventually rejected the idea of government service.

Only one student at the time of the interview had set his mind on working for the government. This was Min Han-bit, the *geomdo* player. From a low-tier university, he set his sights on passing the grade 9 exam and becoming a police officer. Coming from a difficult background financially, Han-bit had witnessed his parents and their siblings constantly fight over money and inheritance. From this he learned that “money is scary” (*doni museobguna*) and only desires a consistent, stable salary. Thus, we see that while government exams appealed to all students, the level at which students would consider taking the exam lies closely correlated with their school. Moreover, taking the government exam was ultimately incompatible with the goals of top and mid-tier students who judged their life’s success by their income.

This seems strange since clearly the quality of life of government officials is high even if the pay is relatively lower than the wages at a private company. Government Officials work fixed, regular hours for a long, respectable career before retiring and receiving a pension. If Jung Hui-soo’s mother is right, they also enjoy regular coffee breaks and have nice badges. However, in the neoliberal mode of thought, through another indexical inversion, high salaries mark the most prestigious jobs in the economy. In an economy where “money talks,” the job that pays 10% more is essentially seen as that much more valuable. In Korea where salaries are openly discussed between friends and new acquaintances, salary and the name brand of your job has become all important in determining a job’s worthiness.

Interestingly, when pay differences stand as the ultimate judgment of a job they obscure other metrics. For example, higher yearly salary does not equal higher hourly salary. At the same time, pay as a unit of stress or quality of life cannot be measured if people do not consider such factors important. Hence, the focus on salary as a criteria of success rather than job quality indicate a neoliberal perspective which views salaries as the most important measure of an

occupation. While more neoliberal, top and mid-tier students focus on pay as the primary criteria for an acceptable job, low tier students stake out a job or position in the economy that they value and “adequate” pay foots the bill. At the same time, the commitment to working in the private sector because of the faith that such work will provide a better life and much better salary (Lee Young-sik’s “I don’t have to sacrifice my life for [government work]”) demonstrates an increasingly unshakeable faith in the corporation, and hence, in the market. Thus, clear lines are drawn between schools tiers in neoliberal attitudes and ideas regarding “proper” work.

The Influence of Money

The end of the last section already explored in some detail how the pursuit of income as the primary motivation for employment choice indicates a neoliberal bias. This section intends to go slightly further, demonstrating why Korean college students at top and middle tier universities are focused entirely on getting jobs at big companies. This obsession rests on the extensive benefit distributions between large and small companies, validating big companies as the “proper” locations for respectable work. However, this section also seeks to show that the desire to work for large companies and gain their “brand” is not a logical exercise, but stressful exercise encouraged by the system itself which bases itself on increasingly high stakes. While college students scramble to gain entrance to large companies, these companies use the same neoliberal logic to justify their reduction in hiring. Hence, though every elite college student may dream of working in a big company and may do whatever it takes, study however long it takes, to gain entrance, this frenzy leaves many failed and disenchanted members of society while allowing companies throughout the economy to gain higher educated, better prepared workers without paying any more. This system, far from being a system which empowers people to achieve, allows capital to gain easy access to high quality labor while providing low

(though relatively high domestically) levels of compensation on the grounds that there is a person waiting in line for every job at the company.

Throughout our interviews, two themes consistently appeared when speaking about success, both economic, both grounded in neoliberal thought: high income, big company. These criteria stood out among top and mid-tier students while being virtually non-existent among low-tier students. While all but three of our interviewees at the top and mid-level schools (more than 75%) mentioned working at a large company and all but one (over 90%) envisioned a high income future with income as the primary condition for success, not one of the low tier students mentioned either working at a large company or receiving a high income as their picture of success. Summarizing trends which appeared in more than one third of the sample, low tier students valued happiness, leisure time, and competence in their field. Moreover, as opposed to the top and mid-tier students who viewed their career as the central focus of their life (see Kim-Hyun-a or Jung Hui-soo), the low-tier students viewed their career as a means to an end as opposed to a means in itself (see Kang Young-min or Lee Na-rae).

What does this mean? Certainly one response might be that the inability of low-tier students to gain access to Korea's most prestigious companies or gain high income likely has reoriented their aspirations and definitions of success accordingly. Another response might be that though top and mid-tier students may not only care about big companies and high incomes, the discourse in their school and the expectation placed upon them as leaders in the Korean education system has made these two things a natural part of their new notion of success, while the discourse at low-tier schools focuses more on getting a stable job than getting a top tier job. In this way, these students' responses might not actually reflect their personal views, but just internalized discourses absorbed through their environment.

These points are difficult to contend with since notions of success are highly personal, internally and externally negotiated, and largely externally influenced. However, in response I would point out that answers regarding success among the different tier groups differed not simply in scale, but also in terms of how they might be measured and their economic/non-economic nature. While top and mid-tier students consistently rested their objectives on concrete, measurable aspects of life such as the size and location of one's house (Jung Hui-soo), the number of times their house cleaner comes over (Kim Hyun-a), or passing through ever higher levels of education (Lee Young-sik), low-tier students framed their lives on immeasurable things: happiness (Kang Young-min), time to explore passions (Lee Na-rae), and expression and art (Lee Myeong-ho). Moreover, subjective differences in measures of success become more closely aligned when we take into consideration that all students believed that social mobility is possible in Korean society. This belief in social mobility should at least partially negate the scale impacts of different tier levels. Despite disagreements, the best solution for explaining the students' differing perspective on success lie in differing levels of neoliberal identities. This is supported by all three previous sections: the way in which high achieving students act independently, believe in the ultimate power of the self to achieve, and disregard working in the government due to its incompatibility with their goals.

However, as mentioned before, the drive to earn a high salary and work at one of Korea's large corporations is much more of a fable than a reality for most students. Nonetheless, this belief sustains the system in which students compete for top jobs while justifying the system by showing that job recipients have the proper credentials and have competed worthily to occupy these positions. The problem with this narrative over the last two decades lies in the unending drive of Korean companies to reduce costs and increase profits. One of the ways that large

Korean companies have restructured to take advantage of cheap labor is by decreasing the number of regular workers they employ. In order to avoid the cost of using labor internally (the price of which heavily depended on their labor unions) large companies have outsourced production, subcontracted, or hired non-regular workers for non-essential work. The statistics on the number of regular employees at large corporations illustrates this trend. The percentage of workers employed at corporations with over 500 employees dropped from 15.4 percent in 1996 to 9.9 percent by 2001 (You et al., 2004: 32). Meanwhile, the number of employees at large manufacturing firms dropped from 30.7 percent of employees in 1997 to 20.6 percent in 2002. Additionally, the percentage of employees employed at firms with 300 employees or more decreased from 26.5 percent of all employees in 1997 to 13.5 percent in 2004 (Pirie, 2008: 183). Moreover, the irregularization of labor has occurred in every part of the Korean economy. Restructuring to reduce employment and rationalize management occurred in 66 percent of Korean companies after the crisis (Park & Roh, 2001). Meanwhile, 74 percent of all companies spun off parts of their business and 57.6 percent outsourced part of their production in an attempt to use cheaper, non-standard labor to replace internal, regular work (Park & Roh, 2001). All of these efforts have decreased the number of employees in large companies with stable jobs.

Though this data centers around the time of the financial crisis, this trend began from the early 1990s when Korean companies began to rationalize their business for international competition and meet new, neoliberal norms. The percentage of regular workers at firms with 500 or more employees dropped from 17.2 percent to 15.4 percent between 1993 and 1996 (You et al., 2004: 37). Moreover, since 1989 temporary work had been growing faster than regular work (Koo, 2001: 207). This demonstrates that the move away from regular employment began well before the financial crisis as a strategy to decrease high labor costs since the three lows era.

Overall, the move away from employing regular workers in large, well-paying companies has been astonishing. Between 1993 and 2005, the number of employees employed at corporations with 500 employees or more declined from 2.1 million to 1.3 million (a 38 percent reduction). This corresponds to a drop from 17.2 percent of the total workforce in 1993 to just 8.7 percent of the workforce in 2005, a 51 percent reduction (Kim, 2005).

Figure 7 demonstrates that this trend continues into the modern day. Between the first half of 2009 and the end of 2014, the gap in the number of workers at large companies with over 100 employees and small companies with less than 100 employees increased by 1.3 million jobs from 2.3 million to 3.6 million, a 62% increase. Clearly the movement away from regular employment at large companies was not a short term movement or a growth with a peak. It seems that despite belief in the payoff of hard work, entry into large companies has only become more difficult.

Interestingly, these numbers also reveal the fact that new jobs are increasingly open only in small and medium sized enterprises as opposed to the large companies with strong unions, good benefits, and good pay. The 38 percent reduction in the number of employees at large corporations has led to a drop of more than 50 percent in the composition of total labor these workers make up. These numbers demonstrate the movement away from regular, well-paying work in Korea in favor of cheaper, non-regular work since the additional reduction in the percent of total employees means that large corporations are hiring fewer laborers than the rest of the market (Chang, 2002: 29).

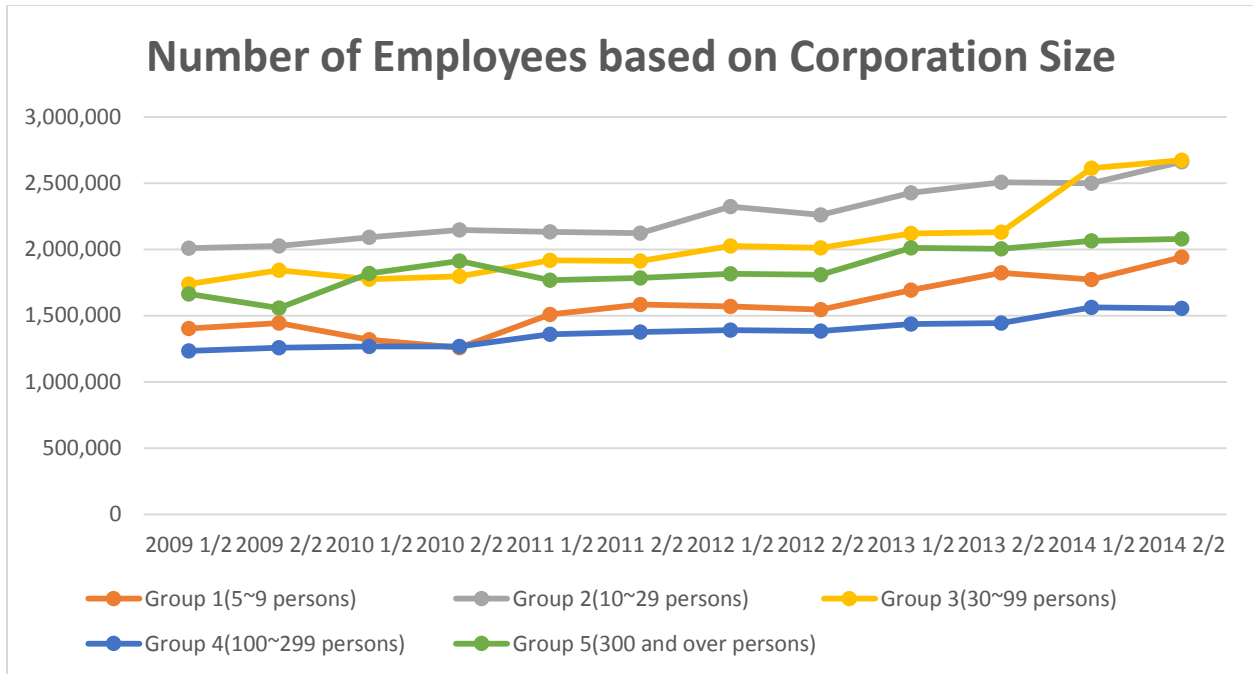


Figure 7: Number of Employees Employed at Companies based on Company Size

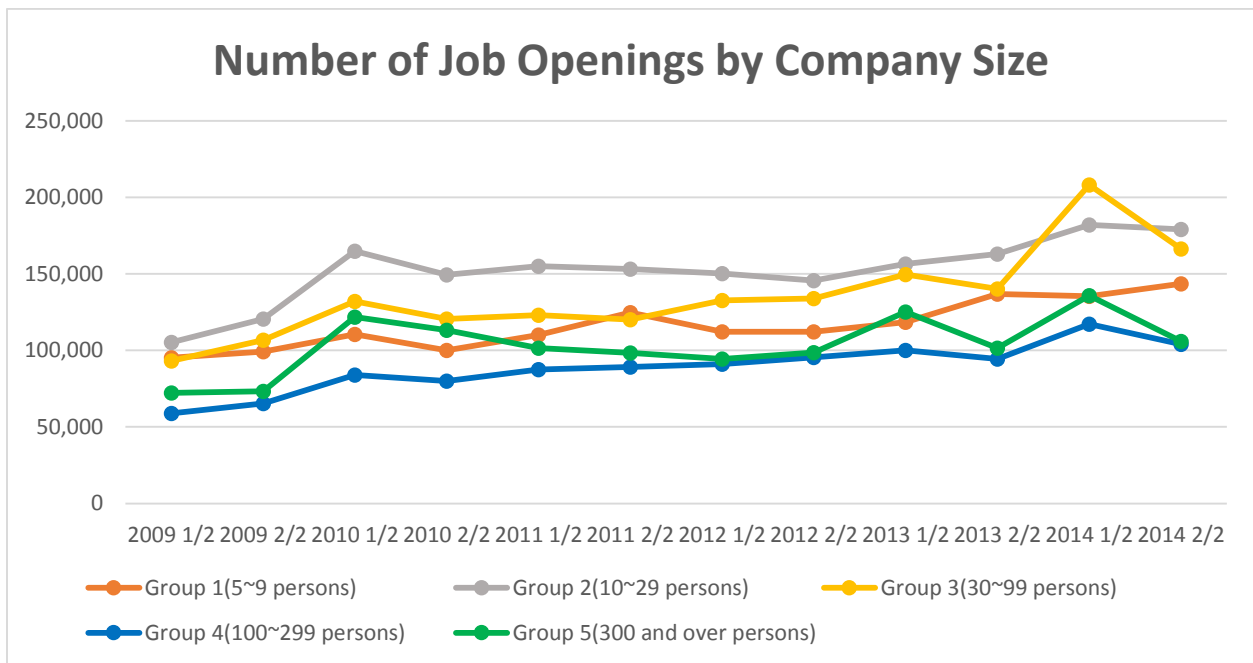


Figure 8: Number of Job Openings Available by Company Size

This trend has only continued over the last 15 years, as demonstrated by government data. Figure 8 shows that the number of job openings between these large (>100 employees) and small (<100 employees) firms has increased as well. Between 2009 and the end of 2014, the gap in job openings increased from 163 thousand to 279 thousand, a 72% increase. Significantly, job opening numbers lead employment difference numbers over this 6 year period. This indicates that the gap in the number of workers working at small and regular firms will continue to increase. Finally, Figure 9 shows that this increase holds in relative terms as well. Whereas 1.7 jobs existed at small and medium size firms for every 1 job at a large firm in 2010, over 2 jobs now exist for every 1 job today. These changes are in line with the new, neoliberal economic ideology that has taken hold Korea, in which flexibility and cheap subcontracting have become a panacea to the Korean economy while providing evidence against the work-success relationship.

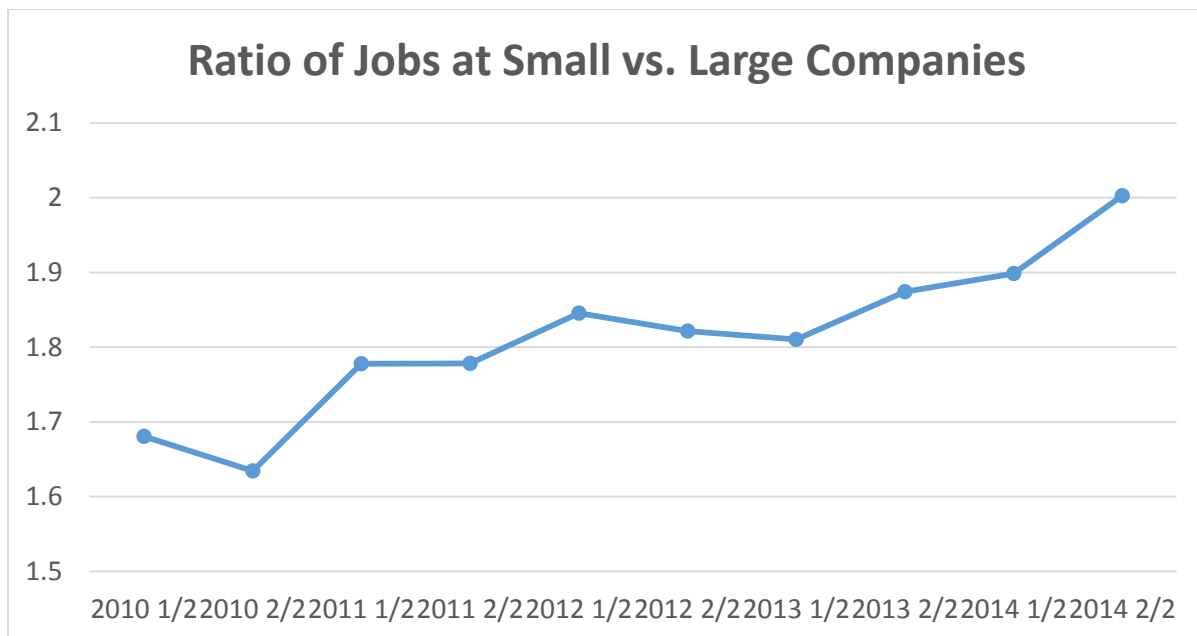


Figure 9: Ratio of the Numbers of Employees at Small vs. Large Companies (KLI)

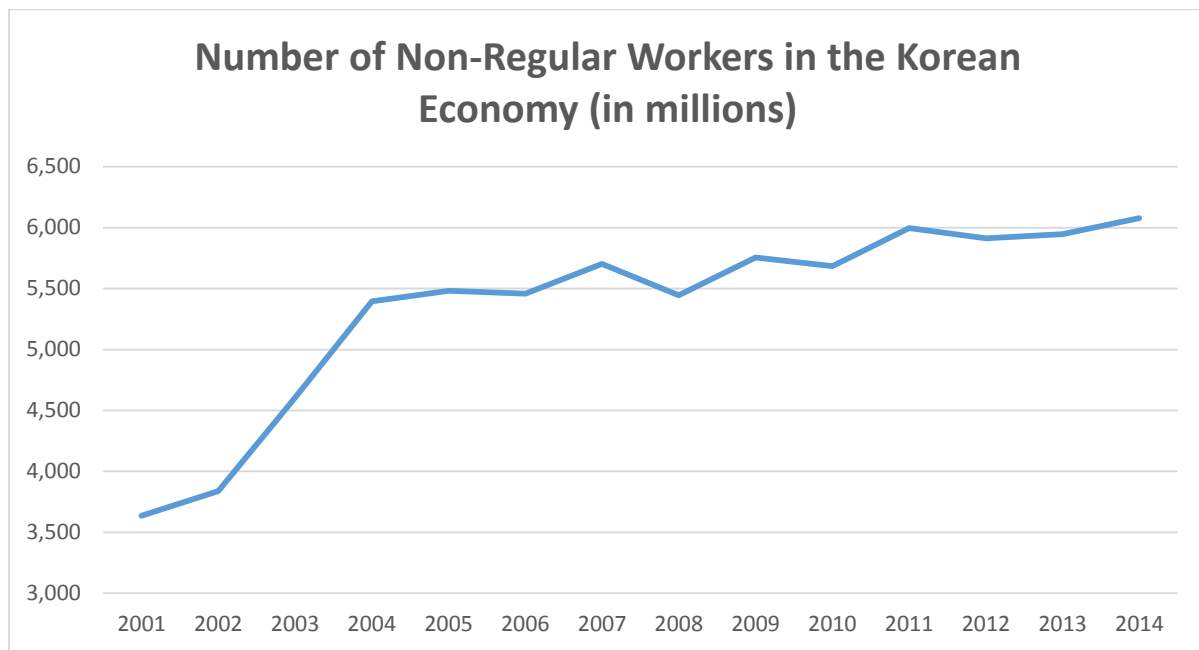


Figure 10: Number of Non-regular workers in the Korean Economy (in millions)

When examining the trend in the regular/non-regular divide as well, a strong, 13 year trend appears (see Figure 10). In fact, the number of non-regular workers in the Korean economy has increased from 3,635,000 in 2001 to 6,077,000 in 2014, the largest number of non-regular workers ever employed in the Korean economy. Moreover, the percentage of non-regular workers has increased from 26.8 percent in 2001 to 32.4 percent in 2014. Though the Korean government has preferred to look on the bright side since there was a reduction in the percentage of non-regular workers between 2013 and 2014; this good news rings rather hollow when we consider that the increase in labor has come from older sections of the population who are coming out of retirement due to financial necessity (The Korea Times, 2014). Inevitably, we will witness a sharp increase in the percentage of non-regular workers when this elderly population returns to retirement. Therefore, it seems clear that in the long term, the process of

decreasing regular workers has continued to the present day. This has profound impacts for many of our top and mid-tier students who have sacrificed for so many years under the promise of gaining secure, high paying jobs.

The research on neoliberal economic progression does not paint much hope for bringing more secure, high paying jobs in Korea despite the increasingly competitive system. Due to increasing returns to capital and investment, research has found that inequality increases both among countries globally and inside of countries. Specifically in Korea, almost all academic research on the impacts of neoliberalism on Korean society has concluded that the gap in Korean society continues to grow. Shin (2012) argues that neoliberalism has led to an increase in precarious employment, and hence inequality. Additionally, Lee (2011) has found that neoliberalization has led to increasing wage gaps. Moreover, Chang (2002) found that the neoliberal project in Korea led to the increasing “irregularization” of employment in which regular work has become increasingly atypical. Finally, Song (2012) concludes that neoliberalization has led to market dualism and increased inequality among workers. We see this both in the wage differences between employees at large firms vs. small firms and between regular workers and non-regular workers.

Among the causes of increasing inequality in Korea, no reason may be as convincing as the difference in pay between employees and small corporations. As shown in Figure 11, wages in Korea vary greatly in Korea with the difference in wages between companies employing 5 to 9 people and companies employing over 300 people increasing by about \$5,400 a year between the first quarter of 2008 and the third quarter of 2014. This is a whopping 25% increase. Moreover, if we consider the first quarter of 2014 instead (since first quarters compare best with first

quarters due to annual wage cycles) this number increases to a \$8,500 difference on an annualized basis, a massive 40% wage gap increase in 6 years.

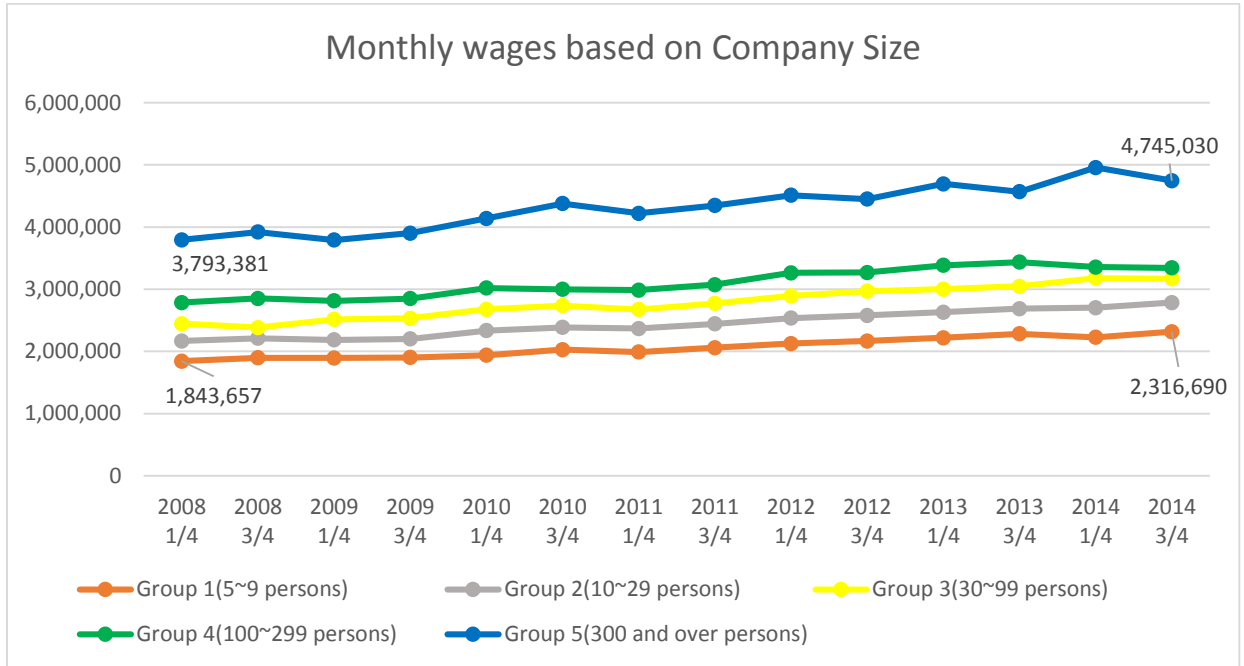


Figure 11: Monthly Wages Relative to Company Size (Won)

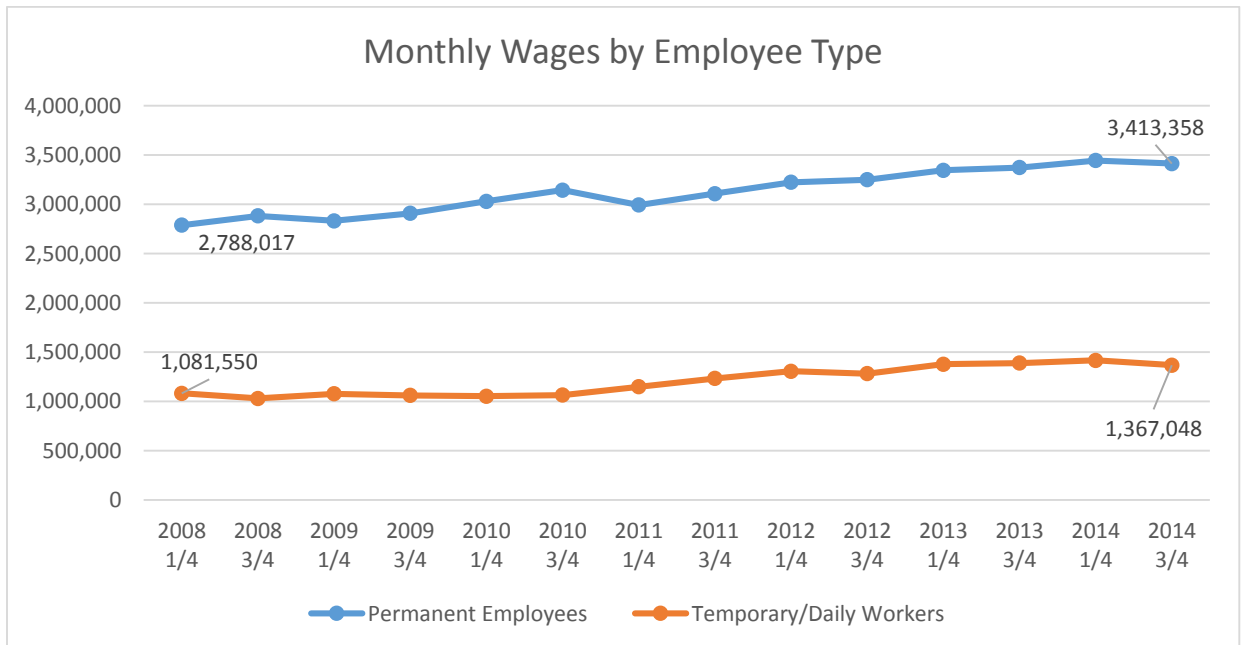


Figure 12: The Wages of Non-regular Workers vs. Permanent Employees

Moreover, high and mid-tier college students assume their ability to gain employment as regular workers, but a danger always remains that they may have to work as a non-regular worker for two years or more as a preliminary screening period before they get hired as regular workers. This practice is actually rather common these days at many large corporations. Based on Figure 12, regular status workers clearly enjoy massive compensation benefits over non-regular workers, with the wage difference between these groups widening by about \$4,750 on an annualized scale over the last 5 years, a 20% increase.

Hence, it is apparent that despite the belief that social mobility exists for those who work hard, the opportunities available to realize that mobility in the form of high paying jobs is gradually decreasing. Despite the higher standards for SAT, TOEFL, TOEIC, national exams, etc. today than 15 years ago, the opportunities that exist are much fewer. On the other hand, as shown through Figure 11, those who do manage to get a job at Korea's largest companies will continue to benefit from above average pay increases over time. This means that the competitive game at Korea continues to have higher and higher stakes. At the same time that opportunities for high paying jobs are decreasing, the compensation of those high paying jobs is growing faster than the national average. This justifies even more intense competition among workers to increase their skill set while companies benefit from receiving more highly qualified workers at little extra cost.

Hence, I argue that the income and large company orientation of the high and mid-tier college students reflects a neoliberal subjectivity that, far from being simply a "logical" position, forces these students to go through incredible difficulty and stress to compete for jobs that are becoming increasingly scarce and often require excessively long hours. The focus on salary as a

signaler of success demonstrates the inverse ideality of wages, which confer upon the worker a kind of power or prestige due to his or her salary. Students from low-tier schools have a much smaller focus on income level, and hence frame their understanding of success through a less neoliberal approach by not defining their personal objectives solely through an economic lens. Hence, this section has attempted to show that the desire for a high salary and to work at a large company are as much neoliberal as they might be logical.

Closing Thoughts

In exploring the aspirations and modes of preparation of Korean college students, this chapter has identified a clear divide in the attitudes of students at various tiers of schools and who come from different backgrounds. First and foremost, students at top and mid-tier schools demonstrate much stronger neoliberal attitudes than their peers. These students establish and protect their independence while continuing to compete. They view hard work as the key to success and see few or no insurmountable barriers in a person's way. They focus their goals on achieving employment at large companies and mainly measure success by economic means: their income or physical possessions. Finally, they place their career as the focal point of their lives, using it as the measuring stick of their personal accomplishments.

On the other hand, the students at our low tier school acted much more communally and valued socialization. These students listened to the advice of their parents and, even if they disagreed, attempted to listen to their parents. They also valued extracurricular activities and socializing much more than their peers. One Yonsei student that we interviewed mentioned that she was planning to join an extracurricular activity because she needed something to talk about in a job interview. Meanwhile, students such as Lee Na-rae spend a significant amount of time

just enjoying their hobbies and extracurricular activities while making new friends. Finally, students at low-tier universities envision success through less quantifiable, personal measurements such as happiness, leisure time, and freedom to follow one's interest. Rather than making their career the center of their life, they saw their career as a way to pursue their passions. Either they picked their career because it was their passion or they picked their career because they envisioned it would allow them to pursue their passion another way.

This paints a difficult picture. Despite the lifelong hard work and dedication that top college students put into preparing themselves for the job market, their chance of success is far from guaranteed. If they cannot succeed, they will likely feel personally guilty for their failings and search their lives for things that they might fix so they can work harder to meet their idea of success (Bertelsen, 2005). If they do succeed, they may see their success as the validation of both their own hard work, the system's effectiveness, and a reflection of the attitudes and behaviors necessary to rise to the top: endless preparation and studying to climb a ladder that only a few can fit on. This kind of logic demonstrates the power of the neoliberal system and its pervasiveness throughout global society.

CONCLUSION

Almost daily, journals, newspapers, and websites publish new stories concerning the intensifying state of competition in Korean society and its effects on youth in Korea. In April, 2015, for example, NPR published a report on the “all work no play culture of Korean education.” This story outlined the rigorous educational environment well known to those living in Korea, which led to high school girls to jump to their death leaving a note that says, “We hate school.” The pressure from schools themselves and from parents hoping their child can attend a top tier university is unbearable for many students. The culture of endless work and study for youth in Korea has led to a government enforced curfew regarding studying at private academies in which government officials raid such institutes to prevent what Amanda Ripley describes as “educational masochism” (2011). What’s worse, parents’ desire for their children to participate in such institutions has led to the growth of an \$18.2 billion dollar private education industry (as of 2012) which costs parents an average of \$2,889 dollars a year per child. This number is alarming high. It is over 10% of the national per capita GDP and does not include the costs of university or post-graduate education. However, despite the cost, this private education industry continued to grow by 20.5% per annum from 2005 to 2009 (Kim, 2013).

This unequaled competition in the education industry is not the only troubling sign about Korea’s future. According to a recent report by the OECD, Korea has the second lowest job security rating among all OECD countries with 24% of employees having a contract for 6 months or less (OECD Better Life Index: Korea, 2013). Additionally, Korea’s life satisfaction rating falls below the OECD average (OECD, 2014). This is compounded by the varying reports of Korea’s suicide rate. Despite having the lowest unemployment rate of all OECD countries (almost 6% lower than the average), the OECD reported that Korea’s suicide rate is the highest

among all OECD countries at 33 in 100,000 (OECD, 2014). According to other OECD reports, this is about 4 times larger than that of the United States (OECDiLibrary, 2013). Andrew Salmon (2013) and Young-Ha Kim (2014) point out that this makes suicide the number one killer of Koreans under 30, and possibly under 40. In addition to this, at 1.24 South Korea has the lowest fertility rate of all OECD countries (OECD, 2014) and has the third lowest fertility rate in the world (The World Factbook, 2014).

However, these statistics are relatively new developments. President Chun Doo-Hwan banned *hagwon* in the 1980s, a restriction that remained in place into the 1990s. Only since then has the *hagwon* industry expanded to its present size (Card, 2005). Additionally, job security declined since as recently as 2002. Since then, non-regular workers have increased from 27.4% to 34.2% of the population (Shin, 2013), a 25% increase. Korea's suicide rate also used to be much lower. Despite having the 3rd highest suicide rate in the world today according to the World Health Organization (2013), this number is almost 500% greater than in 1982 (Park & Lester, 2008) and a 219% increase over 2000 (Kim, 2014). Finally, Korean fertility rates have declined to 44% of what they were in 1980, and 80% of what they were in 1997, the year of the financial crisis (The World Bank, 2014). What is causing these changes throughout Korean society?

Recent explanations tell a complicated narrative. Though they point to the Korean financial crisis as a historical turning point in the restructuring of Korean society, they examine both the financial crisis and the reformation of society since as an extension of the neoliberal transition that began before Kim Young-Sam's globalization drive. Within the context of this growing neoliberal project, they examine society as a fluid object which has been affected, but has also reacted to and continued to shape the reformed political and economic structure after the

crisis through the creation of coping strategies and new societal norms. These include the drive for English education, the increasing reliance on private education, emigration to English speaking countries, the development of international families, the growth of study abroad programs, and the formation of new systems of self-management (Lim & Jang, 2007; Park 2013; Seo, 2011; Shin, 2011; Shin, 2012; Yang, 2000; Yang, 2006; Lee & Koo, 2006; Koo, 2014). This has been accompanied by new cultural norms and the adoption of neo-liberal values such as individuality and materialism (Anderson & Kohler, 2012; Yang, 2003).

As neoliberalism continues to shape Korean society, little research has been done about how embedded these practices and ideas have become in the most impressionable portion of this population: Korean youth who have grown up inside of this changing system. For this reason, this study has attempted to show that the progression of neoliberalism has had a distinct impact on shaping the identities of Korean youth toward conforming to neoliberal standards. It has explored the progression of neoliberalism in Korea and demonstrated that Korea has become an unambiguously neoliberal state. This has shaped the corporate, institutional and social logic of the country and inevitably changed Korea's very social order, causing a rift from Korea's Confucian history. Neoliberalism as a social and political ethos has transformed the way that people live, think, and view the world in Korea as well as globally. This paper has found evidence that students across educational and social tiers have come to adopt new, related perspectives to varying degrees.

The students with outlooks and life values most similar to the neoliberal ideal were the students at top-tier universities and students at mid-tier universities who had advanced to their current position from a disadvantaged background. These students in particular showed a thirst for competition, fierce independence, and a value orientation toward the measurable, material

things of life. From this they framed their successful future based on salaries and occupations, which would confer upon them both respect and self-esteem from their parents and their peers. Some students from mid-tier schools showed ambivalent values while students at low-tier schools displayed views and aspirations very different than the neoliberal ideal. This differentiated outcome suggests that the ideology of neoliberalism does have strong power and is particularly attractive to students who have benefited from the system.

The differentiation in neoliberal identities seems to implicate experience inside of the educational system as a likely causal factor in the successful creation of the neoliberal person. This educational system is fueled by peer to peer competition and instigated by both parents who desire a well-paying job for their children and by teachers whose reputation depends on their ability to send students to top schools. In this system, generalizable skills such as mathematics and English hold a special place of importance. Because they are generalizable skills, their mastery demonstrates a student's potential, aptitude, and worldliness (Park, J., 2010). These hard to master skills uphold the system's inequalities by both acting as an indicator of success and globality and through associating the individual with other, often superfluous, characteristics. At the same time, supplementary education acts as another means of competition with the goal of turning students into stronger competitors to boost profits. These institutions support "proper" modes of competition which line up perfectly with the individualistic, self-oriented, economic values of neoliberalism.

Though I have done my best to present a clear and compelling case in this study, it faces a number of shortcomings. First, far from providing a nation-wide perspective, this study only includes students from 6 universities. These universities lie only in 2 Korean provinces and 2 special administrative regions. Hence, this study may have biases due to this. Though I

intentionally selected students from these universities so that a wide range of geographic backgrounds would be present in this study, this as well might have led to a sample bias while still not achieving the representation of every province. In the future, increasing the number of schools and students included in this study would provide a more holistic picture.

Another shortcoming of this research lies in its short timeline and the lack of follow-up interviews with every participant. Though good anthropological research continues its investigation over long periods of time to observe trends and changes, this study has so far taken place over just six months and conducted follow up interviews with just three students. This limits the ability of this paper to test its conclusions or gain insight into the changing views of participants. In the future as I continue to follow up with students, I will be able to refine my conclusions and add more data to that already assembled.

There are also various research shortcomings that I would like to address which I have not had time nor space to do so far. This includes further research into the business-education nexus and the connection between economic demand and educational supply, the history of Korean educational instructions, their structure, and the policy surrounding them, and the historical progression of power and prestige from business to government. Specifically I would like to answer the following questions: How has the purpose and content of education changed in Korea and how has this been due to business demand? How has education policy changed with the development of neoliberalism? How have incentive structures changed such that teachers might have changed their method of teaching or their content? Has neoliberalism really been to blame for the decline in the prestige of working for the government? These questions are somewhat related to three other transformations in Korean society whose investigation would

also yield further light on this study: Korean business culture, labor-capital relations in Korea, transnational capital movements in and around the Korean peninsula.

Before this paper draws to an end I should declare that in spite of writing this paper I am not opposed to the capitalist movement or the rise of neoliberalism. In fact, the lack of viable alternatives to capitalism highlight its strength and vitality. However, an honest evaluation of the system and its consequences also cannot be ignored. The increasing social/class divide in Korea and around the world cannot be viewed as a temporary movement in a system that uses insecurity as a tool to keep cost low for the profit of shareholders. The system and its associated logics can only lead to a more distraught society in Korea as competition for top jobs continues to increase. This means that at the same time as new, more strenuous strategies are employed by Korea's already stressed youth, the opportunities for their success may continue to dwindle. This begs the question of, "If this trend continues, what will happen next?" Though this study does not have the answer to such questions and does not know what the future of neoliberalism will bring, it would bring up a quote from one of Neoliberalism's staunchest supporters. "Inequality is undoubtedly more readily borne, and affects the dignity of the person much less, if it is determined by impersonal forces than when it is due to design" (Hayek, 1994: 117). If this is true, then perhaps the system can hold.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide:

Introduction

1. Introduce myself and my research project again including my research question
2. Review the consent form and confidentiality agreement
3. Ask if there are any questions before we start

Topic 1: Success

1. Until now what do you think have been your greatest successes? ...why?
2. What do you want to do after you graduate? Why?
 - a. What are the greatest obstacles?
 - b. How will you know if you have been successful?
3. Who comes to mind when you think of people who are successful and why?
4. What are the skills and characteristics of successful people? Why?
5. How did your family help influence you in how to approach your education and your aspirations?

Topic 2: World View and Society

1. How have you experienced competition in Korean society?
2. What are the strategies for being successful?
3. How do you think the Korean job market and economy are different today than in your parents' or grandparents' generation? Has this affected you?
4. What are your thoughts about working abroad or for a non-Korean company in the future?
5. How did your family prepare you for your future and your career?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else you would like to say about any of the topics we have talked about?

QUOTE INDEX

ⁱ 중학교 때와 고등학교 때 친구들 수준이 달랐어요. 애들이 지금 뭐 하는지도 고등학교 때 친구들이랑 중학교 때 친구들이 확실히 달라요. 객관적으로 사람의 삶을 평가할 수는 없지만 누구의 삶을 더 살고 싶냐는 생각은 할 수 있잖아요.. 학벌이라든지 지금 뭐 하는지를 보면 중학교 때 애들이랑 고등학교 애들이랑 달라요... 중학교 애들이랑 고등학교 애들이랑 (지금도) 확실히 차이가 나요. 우선 학벌이 달라요. (중략) 중학교 때 애들은 좀 많이 놀아요. 아르바이트를 해서 모으지 않고 다 쓰는거죠. (중략) 고등학교 애들은 일단 미래를 준비하죠. 돈을 모아서 뭘 하겠다는 것도 있고... 학벌이 다르다 보니까 중학교 애들은 공장 생산직, 노가다 이런 것도 괜찮다 하는 애들도 있는데 고등학교 애들은 전혀 그렇지 않죠.

My friends from middle school and my friends from high school are at different levels. Their lifestyles are now totally different. We can't judge other people's lives but you can wish that you lived someone else's life, you know? If you saw their schools and what they are doing now they are very different... My friends from middle school just play a lot. They earn money by doing part time jobs, but then they spend it all... They don't know how to save money. Meanwhile my friends from high school are preparing for their future. They have a plan for how to use their money as well. My middle school friends are not reluctant to work in manual labor or in physical work in construction sites. My friends from high school, they are not like that at all.

ⁱⁱ 중학교 때 애들은 고등학교 가도 딱히 뭐 공부할 필요가 있냐... 그리고 돈 번다고 하면서 이상한 소리나 하고 있고.. 그 당시에 폰팔이 한다고 하고, 조폭한다고 하는 그런 분위기 였는데. 고등학교 와서 보니 1학년 입학식 날인데도 불구하고 애들이 공부하는 거예요....(중략) 고등학교 애들이 막 공부를 미친듯이 하는 건 아닌데 딱 그 분위기 자체가 있잖아요. 노는 거 외에도 당연히 공부는 해야한다는 분위기로.

My friends from middle school said, "Why should we study?" Or they said ridiculous things like there were going to earn money selling things on the street or through joining the mafia; that was how everything was. However, on the first day of high school, kids were already studying... of course they weren't studying overly seriously all of the time, but there was a generally studious atmosphere. It was just like it was natural to study. Except during times meant to play, the atmosphere was like, "of course we need to study."

ⁱⁱⁱ 공부만이 살 길이다

Studying is the only way to survive.

^{iv} 엄마가 되게 (자식들에 대한) 학구열이 넘치시는 분이세요. 흔히 말하는 치마바람이 심하신 분이셔서 제가 첫째인데.. 저를 어떻게든 공부 쪽으로 밀어넣으려고 하셨는데...

My mom has education fever for her kids. Since she has a strong desire to control her and as I was the first kid, she tried hard to make me study a lot.

^v 부모님 생각에는 제가 음악을 하면 성공의 길이 없을 거라고 생각해서 그랬던 거겠죠.

I think that in their minds, if I had chosen music then there would be no way to succeed.

^{vi} 아마 엄마 반대가 없었더라면 직업적으로 음악을 하지 않았을까 싶어요.

If my mom hadn't disagreed with me, I think I would have chosen music for my job.

^{vii} 원래 전에 다닌 학교에서 산업디자인학과였어요. 그런데 수석으로 입학했는데 원래 가려던 학교보다 좀 낮춰서 갔기 때문에 학교도 맘에 안 들었지만 제가 원래 미술을 좋아해서 미대에 갔는데 너무 컴퓨터 프로그램만 다루는 거예요. 전 그림을 그리고 싶은데... 그래서 학교도 마음에 안 들고 학과도 마음에 안 들어서 다시 수능 (준비를) 시작하게 됐어요.

Originally the first college that I went to, I majored in industry design. And I entered the school as the top student. The school was at a lower level than my expectations so I didn't like it and originally I liked painting so I went to an art college but in that department they just did computer design. I wanted to paint... so I didn't like the school and I didn't like the department so I started preparing to take the SAT again.

^{viii} 부모님도 제가 반수 하겠다고 결정했더니 좋아하셨어요. 부모님도 제가 평소 성적에 비해 하향지원을 했으니까.. 더 좋은 학교에 가기를 기대하셨는데 마침 저도 만족을 못하고 다시 한다고 하니깐 좋아하셨어요”

My parents also liked that I decided to take a year off to retake the SAT. Compared to my GPA I had chosen a lower tier school so they expected me to go to a better school. At the same time I wasn't satisfied and so they liked that I decided to retake it.

^{ix} 제가 재수하는 동안 기숙학원을 다녔었거든요. 근데 거기서 하루종일 공부하고..되게 공부만 하는 군대 같은 생활을 했어요 (중략) 집에 못 가니까 부모님을 잘 만날 수가 없잖아요. 전화도 줄 서서 기다려서 하고.. 부모님은 한 달에 한 번 면회오고 하시니까...

When I took off a year to retake the SAT, I studied at a dormitory *hagwon*. I studied there all day... it is just like the military for studying. Since I couldn't go home, I couldn't see my parents you know? We needed to line up to make a phone call. Parents could come to visit just once a month.

아침 7 시쯤 일어나서 밤 11 시까지 공부하는데 중간중간에 식사하고 식사 시간 외에는 그냥 다 공부하거나 자습하거나... 계속 공부만 했어요. 2 인 1 실이었고 (다른 기숙학원들과 다르게) 사람도 적고 밥도 맛있었어요.

I woke up at 7am and studied until 11 pm. I only had meals in between Except for meal times, we just studied, doing self-studying... we just constantly studied and nothing else. The dormitory room is for 2 people and unlike other big dormitory *hagwon* it was not very crowded and the food was good.

남녀 대화 금지, 단장하는 거 염색이나 화장 금지.. 그게 젤 컸던 것 같아요. 핸드폰, MP3 전혀 안 되고, 인터넷은 인터넷 강의 듣는 교실에서만 됐어요. 강의 말로 다른 거 하다 걸리면 혼나요.

It was illegal for girls and guys to talk in the school. Putting extra effort into your appearance, like hair dye and make up, was banned. They were the biggest things. You couldn't use cell phones or MP3 players at all. You can use internet only to take internet courses in the internet room. If you were caught doing something else then you were scolded.

*그냥 (이) 학교가 더 좋다고 생각했어요. 일단 학교 역사도 오래됐고 그러다보니 미대 역사도 오래됐고 선배도 많고... 성신여대는 규모가 작아요. 이대는 학과도 많고... 어떻게 말해야하지? 그냥 좋아서...

I just thought it was a good school. First of all, the history of the school is long... and the college of fine art has a long history, and there are many alumni. Meanwhile, my first school was smaller. Ewha has many departments... what can I say? I just like it?

xi

새 학기가 시작되었으니
넌 우정이라는 그럴듯한 명분으로
친구들과 어울리는
시간이 많아질 거야

그럴 때마다
네가 계획한 공부는
하루 하루 뒤로 임리겠지
근대 어찌지?
수능 날짜는 뒤로 밀리지 않아

벌써부터 흔들리지만
친구는 너의 공부를 대신해주지 않아

*Now the new term has begun
you will start spending
more time with your friends
it seems reasonable to want to build friendships.*

*But every time you do that
the study you had planned to do
will be postponed little by little
But what to do...
you can't postpone the College Entrance Exams.*

*Don't start wavering now,
your friends cannot study for you*

^{xii} 우선 저는 많이 지방인 지역(시골) 출신이라...시골에서 저처럼 대학온 게 희귀한 케이스여서요.

I am from a *really* country town ...In my home town, it is rare that people go to Seoul like me.

^{xiii} 사립학교 선생님들은 다 명문대 출신에 몇십년 동안 학교에 있었던 분들이라 수업 퀄리티도 훨씬 높고 수능 중심이었어요.

In my private school teachers were all from prestigious universities and have worked in schools for decades. So their classes were qualified and they focused on SAT

^{xiv} 완전 백프로 선생님들 (차이)인 것 같아요. 체계나 선생님들 의지나 이런 게...

I think this is all because of the difference in the teachers. I mean because of the school system or the will of the teachers.

^{xv} 저도 원래 있던 고등학교에서는 수능(모의고사) 좀 높았는데 환경이 바뀌니까 수능 공부를 아예 놔버리고 내신 공부만 했어요.

So when I was in the first high school I got good scores from the PSAT, but when the environment changed I just gave up studying for the SAT and only focused on textbooks.

^{xvi} 공부를 더 열심히 하면 자기가 원하는 꿈을 선택할 수 있는 것 같아요. 그러니까 그 3년이라는 시간 밖에 안되잖아요. 그 때 생각해보면 긴 시간인데, 나중에 생각해보면 그 3년을 안 해서 후회하는 사람도 있으니까 그 때 주어진 시간에 열심히 해서 자기가 원하는 일을 할 수 있으면 좋겠어요.

If people study harder then they can choose to pursue their dream. I mean, it isn't more than 3 years you know? At the time it seems like a long time but looking back there were people who regret not studying hard enough for those three years so people should do whatever it takes during that time in order to do what they want [for the rest of their lives].

^{xvii} 우리나라는 정말 고등학생들이 살기 힘든나라예요. 고등학생들은 정말 스트레스를 엄청 받는 애들이 많아요. 부모님 기대, 우리나라 교육 정책, 그리고 잘못된 이념을 심어주는 선생님들, 예를 들어, ‘대학을 다녀야 성공을 한다’, 아직까지 이런 선생님들이 너무 많으세요. 무조건 좋은 대학을 가면 성공이다. 왜냐면 그 분들에게는 좋은 대학을 간 학생들이 그 분들 아래서 나오는 게 좋은거니까요. 그거 따지는 선생님들밖에 없어요 요즘은... 학생을 진실되게 대해주는 선생님이 거의 없어요.

The truth is that Korea is a really hard country for high school students. There are many students who get ridiculously stressed out. Parents' expectations, education policy, and teachers who deliver wrong ideologies such as "you can succeed only if you go to college" ...We still have those kind of teachers a lot... saying "if you just make it into college, you can be successful." Because for the teachers, if they have students who go to good school, that is good for them. There are only teachers who think about themselves nowadays. There are not many teachers who sincerely care about students.

^{xviii} 그리고 저는 학교 다닐 때도 여고인데도 많이 맞았거든요. (중략) 조금 좋아도 막 손바닥 때리고... 선생님들이 때리면서 하는 말이 다 똑같았어요. 너 지금 그렇게 좋아서 대학 가겠냐고... 성적 떨어진다...

And when I was in high school I got hit a lot even though it was a girl's high school. If I dozed off for a short time I was hit on my palms... The teachers always said the same things when they hit students like "you think you can go to college" or "you will get a bad score."

뭘 하든 무조건 대학과 관련된 이야기였어요. (중략) 대학도 무조건 네임밸류 보고... 전공을 무조건 낮은 과를 쓰고 높은 대학을 가라고 하고... 되게 많이 울었던 것 같아요. 조금만 줄거나 뭐만 좀 안 해와도 니가 이렇게 해서 대학 가겠냐... 좀 심한 말도 많이 들었어요. 욕설 섞인 말도 듣고... 꼴통(idiot) 이런 말도 듣고... 선생님 마다 다르긴 한데 좀 말을 험하게 하는 선생님도 계셨거든요."

Everything they said was related to college. They only considered the name value of colleges... they said that students should apply for competitive schools in non-competitive departments. I cried a lot. If I dozed off for a short time teachers would say "how can you go to college?" Sometimes I heard bad words like swear words, "idiot", etc. It depends on the teachers but there was a teacher that had a dirty mouth.

^{xix} 그냥 그 때는 그런 분위기였어요. (중학교에서) 공부를 잘 하면 당연히 특수한 고등학교에 가는 분위기. 그러니까 공부를 잘 하는 애들은 다 특수고등학교를 준비했기 때문에 저도 당연히 그냥 그렇게 한다고 생각했던 거 같아요. 중학교 때 (학교에서) 제일 잘 했어요.

So it was just like that in middle school. If you study well then of course you start preparing for a special school (science or foreign language high school). I mean, all top students were preparing for special schools so I naturally thought I needed to prepare for those schools. [How well did you study?] I was the best...

^{xx} 공부는 그냥 뭐 그 나이대에(고등학생 때) 다 열심히 하는 거니까 저도 그것보다 좀 더 열심히 한 거고...

Everyone is supposed to study hard in high school... so I just studied a little bit harder

^{xxi} Q: 집에서는 어떻게 생각하세요? (18:3)

우리 부모님은 좀 보통 부모님들과 다르게 네가 하고 싶은대로 하고... 그냥 니가 하고 싶은대로 마음껏.. 다 도와줄 테니까 니가 원하는대로 하고 안 되면... 뭐 니 알아서 잘 해봐라? 제가 막 터무니 없는 것을 하겠다는 건 아니고 그냥 받아들일 수 있는 선에서 하는거니까... (지원해주신대요)

My parents are a bit different than other peoples' parents. They say, "do *anything* you want. We support you. If you fail in the future, then figure it out at that point." They say this kind of thing because I already have plans for my life that they accept... [so they will support me].

^{xxii} 그냥 어렸을 때는 막연하게 책 읽는 거 좋아하니까 전공을 정하면 문학 쪽으로 가야겠다... 했다가... 또 제가 외국어 고등학교 나왔거든요..그러니까 영문과 가야겠다고 생각해서 갔는데 와보니 또 재미있다는 생각이들더라고요. (외고에서도 영어 전공, 그리고 대학원 진학 예정)

It's just that when I was a kid I liked reading books so it seemed like I should go towards a [literature] major... and I went to a foreign language high school so naturally I thought about English literature. And when I started majoring in English literature in college I actually found that it was a lot of fun

xxiii 대학교 들어갔을 때에도 앞으로 뭐 할거냐고 하면 저는 그냥 1,2,3 학년 때 그냥 두루뭉실하게 생각하고 있었으니까 그냥 대학원 가보면 어떨까 생각하고 있다가.. (부모님이) 하고싶은대로 하라고..그걸 하고 싶으면 그렇게 하라고...

In college when people asked what I wanted to do in the future I just had a vague idea of going to graduate school. And my parents said "do whatever you want," [so I decided to go].

일단 대학원을 정했으니까 대학원에 진학할 예정이긴 한데, 영문학을 외국인이 전공한다는 것이 다들 어려울라고 하더라구요. 1,2,3 학년 때는 앞으로 뭐하지 하면 그냥 대학원 가야지 하고 어렴풋이 생각하는 정도였어요.(15:14)

For now, I will to go to graduate school as I have already decided but ...in my 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of college, when I thought about what I should do in the future I just vaguely thought I might go to graduate school but I wasn't sure.

xxiv 제일 좋은 점은 제가 좋아하는 것을 할 수 있다는 점이고. (문학을) 안 좋은 점은 그 외에 모든 점? 계속 공부해서 제대로 직업을 가질 수 있을지 모르겠고 좀 불안정한 거...

The best thing about going to graduate school is that I can study what I like (literature). However, there is nothing else good... I am not sure I can get a job if I continue to study English literature and it may be unstable

xxv 일단 결혼을 해야 되겠죠. 그래서 넓은 집에 살고 아침마다 수업하러 가거나 연구하러 가고. 집에는 일주일에 두 번씩 청소하러 아줌마가 오고, 아들 딸 하나씩 있는데 둘 다 공부는 잘 해야겠죠. 그리고 남편도 돈 잘 벌고...

First of all, I should have gotten married by then. Also, I live in a large home (apartment or house), and every morning I leave home to give a lecture or do research. A cleaning lady comes twice a week at least. I have one daughter and one son; both of whom are good at studying and my husband earns a lot of money.

xxvi 그 당시(when he got admission from Yonsei)까지만 하더라도 문과에서 선택할 수 있는 진로 중에는 사시는 이미 없어지고 있었고, 문과 중에선 행시가 최고였어요. 그 중에서도 재경직이 (최고였어요). 재수할 때 신문 같은 거 보니까... 그리고 사실 제가 재수할 때 강남 대성(famous 재수 *hagwon* in Gangnam)을 다녔는데 거기에 보면 저만 좀 그렇지 대부분의 애들이 다 좀 잘 사는 애들이었어요. 학원비 자체가 비싸니깐... 한 달에 드는 비용이 비싸니까... 그런데 개네들이

자기네 부모님한테 들었다는 이야기를 할 때, 그러니까 나중에 대학가서 뭐할거냐 하는 이야기를 할 때마다 문과에서 항상 나오는 이야기가 ‘고시’였어요. 다들 대학 들어가면 조금 놀다가 고시한다... 이런 분위기였어요. 그러니까 강남 대성 다니는 애들의 부모님은 대부분 애들한테 고시를 권했어요.

When I received admission from Yonsei, *haengsi* (one of the public exams to become a top ranking public official 5 or higher) was the best way [to succeed] among humanities students because the number of students being admitted from the law exam (*sasi*) was being reduced. Among the *haengsi*, the Ministry of Finance test (*jaegyeongjig*) was the best. After high school, I was studying to get into college at a private academy in Gangnam where most students were from rich families. The tuition fee for this academy was expensive... Related fees too were expensive... However, when those students talked about what they heard from their parents, when they were asked what they will do after college, they always say “*gosi*.” So when they go to college they just play and then take *gosi*... That was the atmosphere. In other words, the parents of all of the students going to academies in Gangnam told their kids to take *gosi*.

xxvii 문과가 선택할 수 있는 길이 이제는 대기업, 고시, 로스쿨 밖에 없는 것 같아요. 가끔 (좋은) 외국계 기업도 있는데 제가 외국어를 원어민 처럼 하지 못하니까 빠고, 대기업은 부침이 심하잖아요. 고시는 이제 경제적인 걸 얻을 수는 없을 것 같아요(공무원 청렴법). 로스쿨은 이제 판검사도 많이 뽑고 중형로펌만 가도 돈도 괜찮게 벌 수 있고...

There are only three choices for humanities majors. It seems like there is no choice but to work in a big company, take *gosi*, or go to law school. Sometimes there are good foreign companies but since I am not as fluent as native speakers I can't apply and therefore I am not thinking about it. Meanwhile, big companies are very volatile. Now, even with *gosi* it seems like you can't earn money. Meanwhile, through law school there are many openings for judges and prosecutors and you can earn a lot of money even if you just go to a medium sized firm.

xxviii (중략) 고시는 이제 아예 경제적인 것을 누릴 수 있는 단계가 아닌 것 같고... 국가에 대한 애국심은 있는데 그걸 위해서 제 인생 자체를 희생할 필요는 없다고 생각했어요.

Today is not the day when people can gain financial advantage through *gosi*... I love my country (I have a patriotic heart) but I don't think I have to sacrifice my life for that.

xxix 저희 부모님이 50 대초중반 되시거든요. 고시가 무조건 옳고.. 부모님 세대만 하더라도 공무원부패가 당연히 여겨졌어요. 공무원 되면 부정부패 하고 낙하산에다 일가친척 끼워 넣고... (저희 부모님은) 지금도 그럴 줄 아시는 분들이라.. 사회 분위기가 바뀐 걸 모르시고 제가 고시 포기 한다니까 그 좋은 걸 왜 안하냐고...(중략) 설득하는 데 좀 그랬어요.

Since my parents are older than average [being in their 50s] they can't understand how society has changed and just keep telling me to be a public official. They still think that public officials have some kind of power.

xxx저는 아무것도 없이 해도 기본적인 노력만 하면 아무것도 없는 서민층이라도 중산층까지는 갈 수 있다고 생각하거든요. 그리고 조금만 지원을 더 받는다면 충분히 상류층까지 갈 수 있다고 생각해요.

Even if people have nothing, if they really try hard then even if they are low class then they can move into the middle class. And if they just get a little support then they can move into the upper class.

xxxi 요즘은 또 EBS 가 워낙 잘 되어있더라고요. 그래서 돈 없어서 공부 못한다는 말은 거짓말인 것고... 대학교에서 국가장학금도 잘 되어있고, 공부 열심히 해서 성적 장학금 받거나, 또 학자금 대출도 정부 주도로 많이 주니까... 어렸을 때 공부하고 EBS 들어서 대학 들어와서 정부 지원으로 공부하고 대기업만 들어가도 중산층은 될 수 있는 것 같아요.

These days EBS is really good. So saying that you can't study because you don't have money is a lie... In college the national scholarship system is good or you can get a merit scholarship, and there are also a lot of a government student loans you can receive... so when you are young, study with EBS and in college study with support from the government and if you get into a big company you can get into the middle class.

xxxii 고 3 때는 학교에서도 성과를 내야하니까 상담 많이 했죠. 제 생각에는 저도 고 3 담임이 기대했던 학생 중 한 명이었을 것 같은데.. 특히 어떤 과를 가야하나 그 생각을 많이 했어요. 그 때 사실 자기가 뭘 해야하는지 모르는 사람이 훨씬 많았으니까... (학생들이) 그냥 일단 대학 붙고 생각해보자.. 뭐 전과하면 되니까... 이런 생각을 많이 했어요. (중략) 아무래도 과보다는 대학을 먼저 생각했죠. 근데 저는 수시를 지원할 거여서 과도 많이 생각했죠.

When I was a Senior in high school, since the school needed to have students that went to a good college, I had many conversations with teachers. I think that I was the one that my homeroom teacher expected [to go to a good school]. I thought seriously about which major I should choose. Actually there are more people who don't know what to do in the future. Students generally just think about going to college and then major is just a secondary or future consideration... and they can change their major in college. So students generally consider college first, but I was planning to do sushi so I considered major as well.

xxxiii 사실 저는 사학과 가고 싶었거든요. 고 2 때 담임선생님이 세계사 선생님이셔서 이야기를 많이 해봤거든요. 그런데 그 선생님이 (사학과에) 가지 말라고... ㅎㅎ 아무래도 취업할 때 인문계 TO 가 잘 안 나니까... 어쨌든 그래서 경제학과에 지원했죠. 절반은 사학과 절반은 경제학과 지원했어요.

The truth is that I wanted to major in history. My homeroom teacher in my junior year was a history teacher and so I conversed a lot with him. But he said, "don't major in history." Well... in the job market, job openings are limited so anyway I applied for economics in half of my applications and history in the other half.

xxxiv 그냥 부족하지 않은 정도의 돈을 벌고 싶어요 (중략) 부족하지 않을 정도의 돈은 나중에 퇴직하기 전까지 대출 있으면 다 갚고 노후준비까지 할 정도..?

I want to earn just enough money...which means it is sufficient to pay back any loans I have and enough to save up for my retirement.

xxxv [사회계층 이동] 불가능하다고 생각하지는 않아요. 기회는 다 주어지는 거잖아요. 그런데 여전히 많이 노력을 해야겠죠. 왜냐하면 위에 있는 사람은 있기 마련이고 아래 있는 사람들은 뛰어 넘으려면 두 배 세 배 노력해야 하니까.. (중략) 옛날에는 자수성가했다, 개천에서 용난다 그런 이야기도 했는데 요즘은 더 어려워진 거 같아요. 사교육 받는 사람들은 비싸면 막 몇 백만원짜리 과외를 받고.. 그런거도 있더라구요... 그런데 막 벽오지(시골)에 사는 사람들은 학교도 제대로 다니는 게 힘든 사람도 있더라구요.

I don't think social mobility is impossible. Everyone has opportunities. Of course still how much effort you put in is important because there are people who are already on the top and people from the bottom need to give 2 or 3 times the effort if they want to move up. In the past, we say being successful by yourself or a successful person from a poor family. But now it is harder to do this. There are some private tutors for a few thousand dollars... meanwhile there are people who live in the country and have a hard time even just going to school.

xxxvi 엄마가 공무원을 너무너무 원하셔서 (공무원을) 할까도 생각했었어요. 그래서 책도 다 사고 강의까지 결제 했는데 너무 하기 싫은 거예요. 쳐다보기도 싫은 거예요. 어쨌든 제가 하고 싶은 일이 아니니까... 책도 며칠만에 다 팔고, 강의도 다 취소하고 안 한다고 했어요. (중략) 엄마 꿈은 니가 서울시청에서 사원증 같은 거 걸고서 점심 시간에 여유롭게 커피 한 잔 마시고 엄마한테 공무원 카드 주고 그리고 너 연금 받으면서 사는 게 엄마 꿈이다...이러시죠. 공무원만 되면 바랄 게 없다. 하세요. 그런데 전 2년 동안 시험 준비할 자신도 없고 (공무원) 해도 제가 별로 행복할 거 같지 않아요. 일단 돈 적게 받고, 확실하지 않는 것에 2년 동안 공부해야 하고, 뷰티코스메틱에 관심 있는데 관련도 없고...

My mother *really* wants me to be a public official, so I was thinking about going down that road. I bought textbooks for the exam and I registered for *hagwon* courses but I found out that I really hated it. I didn't even want to give it a second look because that ended up not being what I wanted... so after just a few days I sold all the textbooks, cancelled all of the courses and said, "I won't do that." My mom said that her dream is that I am working in city hall in Seoul wearing an I.D. card and having relaxed time for coffee every day. She also wished that I could get a benefit card for public officials that I could then give to her. And she wants to see me get a pension. She said, "It couldn't be better than if you become a public official." However, I am not confident in preparing for the exam for 2 years and I don't think that I will be happy even if I pass it. First of all, it has a low salary (oh much I wonder) and I don't want to spend two years studying when it is not guaranteed that I can pass and I am interested in beauty and cosmetics... but there is nothing like that in the government of course.

xxxvii 경제적으로는 가능하다고 생각해요. 창업해서 잘 되는 사람도 많고, 원래 잘 된 사람은 더 잘 될 수 있지만 바닥에 있는 사람도, 노래 잘 해서 뜰 수도 있고, 엄청 상위층을 원하는 것만 아니라면 제가 말했던 연봉 5000 만원은 자기가 노력해서 다 될 수 있다고 생각해요. 의지만 있다면...

There are many people who have succeeded in entrepreneurial work so anyone who workers successfully can become more successful; even people from the bottom. Well they can succeed

with their singing talent. And if they don't want to go up to the real upper-class, I think that people can earn \$50,000 a year, as I said, with their hard work... but only if they have will power.

xxxviii 대학 때 아르바이트 많이 하긴 했는데 집안에 부담 안 주고 제 스스로 뭐 해보고 싶어서... (중략) (다른 학생들은) 아르바이트도 나쁘지 않은 아르바이트를 했으면 좋겠어요. 돈에 현혹되서 안 좋은 아르바이트 하지 않았으면 좋겠어요. 저는 해봤는데 안 좋은 것도 많이 봤고 돈에 눈이 멀어버리더라구요.. 자기계발적인 요소가 있는 아르바이트를 (추천해요). (중략) 편의점이나 일반 술집 아르바이트는 힘들고, 배울 수 있는 게 그 업종에 관련된 것 뿐이지.. 본인이 진로에 대해 생각하지 않고 패이 때문에 그런 일을 하게 되면... 학업에 대한 비중이 많이 작아지고 정보도 전공 이외의 정보가 많이 생기기 때문에...

When I was in college I experienced many different part time jobs because I wanted to do something for myself and I didn't want to be a burden for my parents. I hope that other students also experience good part time jobs. I hope that they aren't just seduced by money. I did "bad" part time jobs and I saw many bad things but I just focused on the money. I suggest part time jobs which include aspects that people want to develop in themselves. For example, working in a convenience store or a bar is hard and you can only learn things related to that field. So if you don't consider your future career and just work part time jobs for money, then your devotion for school life will be reduced and you will only get information not related to your major.

xxxix 아버지 가 남들 다 아는 대기업에 계신데도 대기업을 추천 안 해주시더라구요. 지금 외국에 5년째 계신데.. 힘들다고... 지원을 받는 것도 많지만 업무적으로 쥐야할 것도 너무 많다고 힘들어 하시더라구요. 만약 니가 대기업에 들어오고 싶다면 3년-5년 있다가 나가라 하시더라구요. (중략) 아버지가 이제 대기업은 안 된다고.. 너 하고 싶은 거 하라고하시더라고요. (중략) 대기업이라는 거 자체가 이제 언제 찢릴 지 모르는 상황이기 때문에... 대기업도 갑자기 어려워지면 인사조정이 되거나 이동해다닐 수도 있다 보니까 그런 것 때문에 힘들어 하시는 것 같아요.

Even though my father is working for a big company that everyone knows, he doesn't suggest [working at] a big company. He has worked abroad for 5 years and says that it is really hard. He got a lot of support [like money, benefits, etc.] but he also needs to devote himself entirely to his work. He said, "If you really want to work for a big company, just work for 3 to 5 years and then go out." He said, "big companies won't be worthwhile in the future, so just do whatever you want because people don't know when they will be fired in a big company. If big companies get in trouble suddenly, they lay off people or people need to move into new positions." Because of these things it seems like he has also had a hard time.

^{xi} 한국 사회속은 우물안 개구리

In Korean society I was just a frog in a well.

^{xli} (한국의) 대학생들의 성공 목표는 부와 명예라고 볼 수 있겠지만 외국 대학생의 경우 그런 것과 반대로 인생을 즐길 수 있는 걸 성공이라고 바라보는 것 같더라구요. 제 생각엔... (중략) 한국사람들은 남들이

바라보는 시선이 항상 중요하잖아요. 그런데 유럽 학생들은 본인 위주로 본인지 좋으면 남들이 어떻게 바라보든 상관 없더라구요.

Korean college students think that success is wealth and fame but you know European students think the opposite, if you enjoy your life then that is success. I think... in Korea people always want to be seen as important by others. However, in Europe students have a good understanding of themselves and don't care what others think.

^{xliii} 일반적인 대기업은 공고를 통해서 가지만 이 분야(entertaining industries)는 신뢰를 보고 가기 때문에 (중략) 거의 50%는 인맥의 도움을 받고 나머지는 제 개인적인 작품이나 이력서로 해요.

General big companies hire people through job opening announcements, but in the entertaining industries, people value trust... and I go with about 50% social networking and 50% competence, like my personal work and resume

^{xliii} 재미를 따라가다보면 그만큼 자기 일에 대한 성공률도 높아지고 그만큼 페이도 따라오는 법이니까, 페이를 따라가지 말고 재미를 쫓아갔으면 좋겠어요

If you pursue your own enjoyment and excitement, then success will follow. So I suggest pursuing your interest, not money.

^{xliv} (중략) 엄마가 현실적인 것을 정말 많이 보세요. 너무한다 싶다가도 따져보면 틀린 말은 아닌데 싶기도 해요. (중략) 남자친구를 사귀더라도 그 남자의 학과를 보고, 직업을 보고, 애랑을 오래 끌지 말아라.. 이런 것도 있고..”

My mom cares about realistic things a lot. Sometimes I feel like she is too much, but if I think about it seriously it seems like it is not totally wrong. For example, if I dated someone, my mother considers his major, job, and says “stop dating him” something like this.

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