THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE RISE AND FALL OF KOREAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION, 1945-2020: LOCAL MOTIVATIONS, GLOBAL TRAJECTORIES

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Patterns of International Student Mobility to the United States

International students now constitute approximately 5.5% of the total student population on American campuses, totaling over a million individuals (Institute of International Education 2019a). Despite occasional setbacks such as those stemming from the events of 9/11 and the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the influx of international students to the United States has shown substantial growth since the mid-20th century, with notable increases in recent decades (Figure 1). The inflow of Asian students, which was about 25% in 1949 and now accounts for approximately 70%, has driven continuous increase of international students in the United States (Figure 2). While the first round of increases in the 20th century was led by East Asian developmental states like Taiwan and Japan starting from the mid-1970s (Figure 3), the recent surge in the 21st century has been driven by India and China (Figure 4).

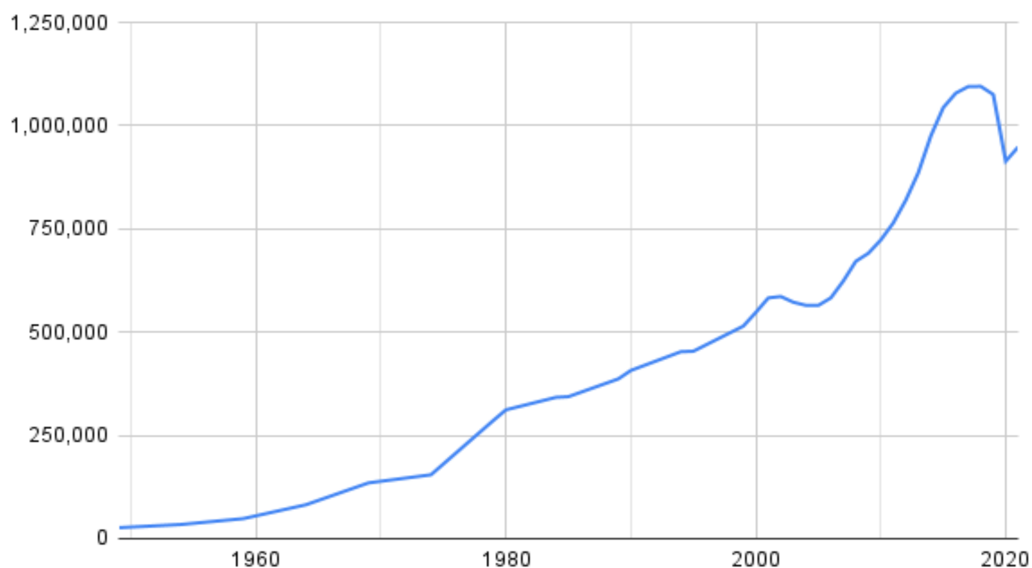

Figure 1: Number of International Students in the United States, 1949-2021.

SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

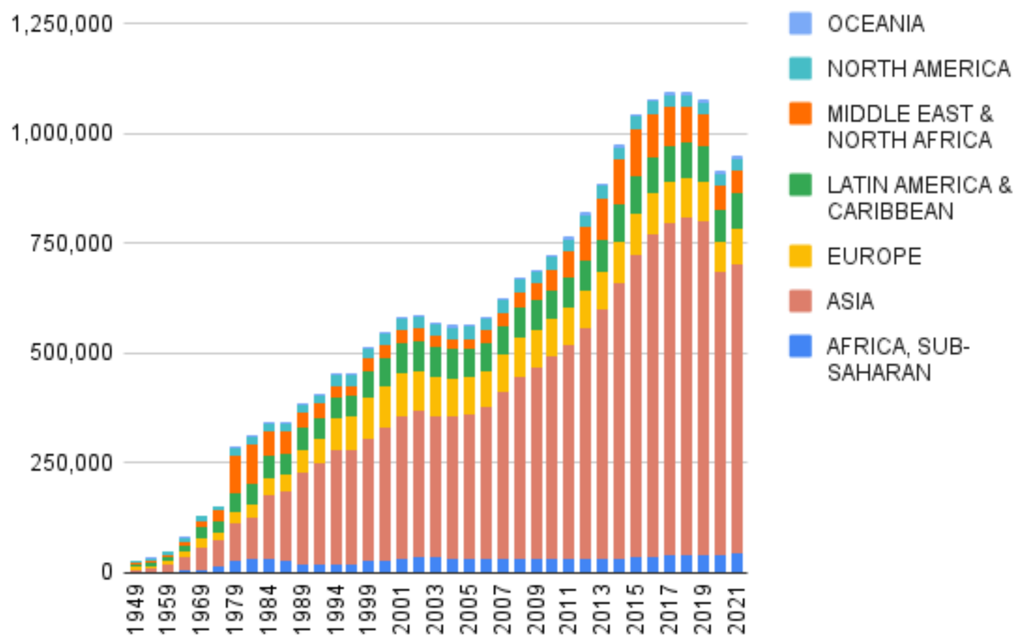

Figure 2: Number of International Students in the United States by Continent, 1949-2021.

SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

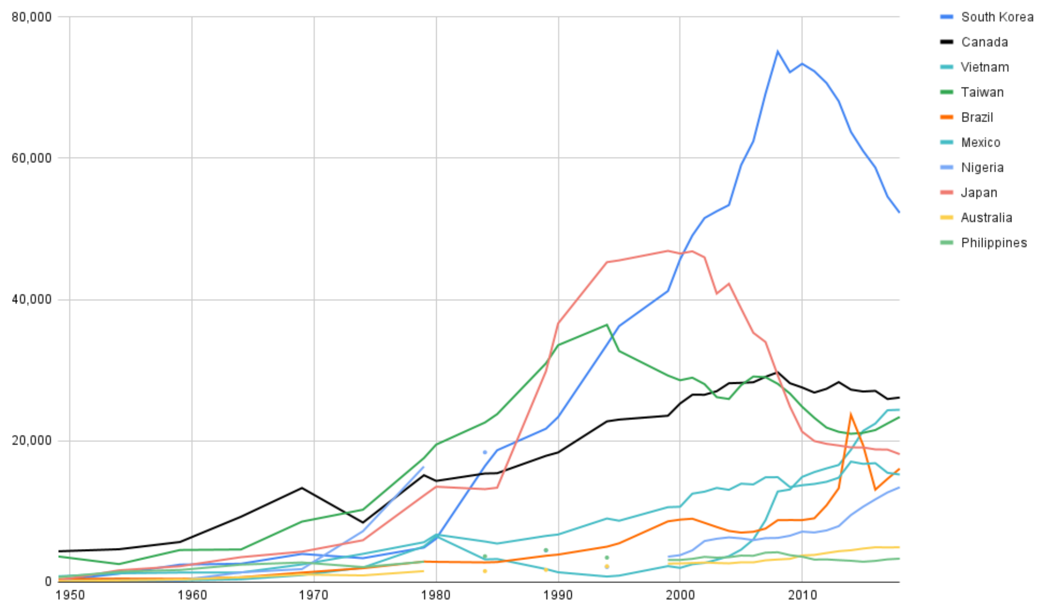

Figure 3: Top 10 Countries of Origins of International Students in the United States, 1949-2018 (excluding China, India, and Saudi Arabia).

SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

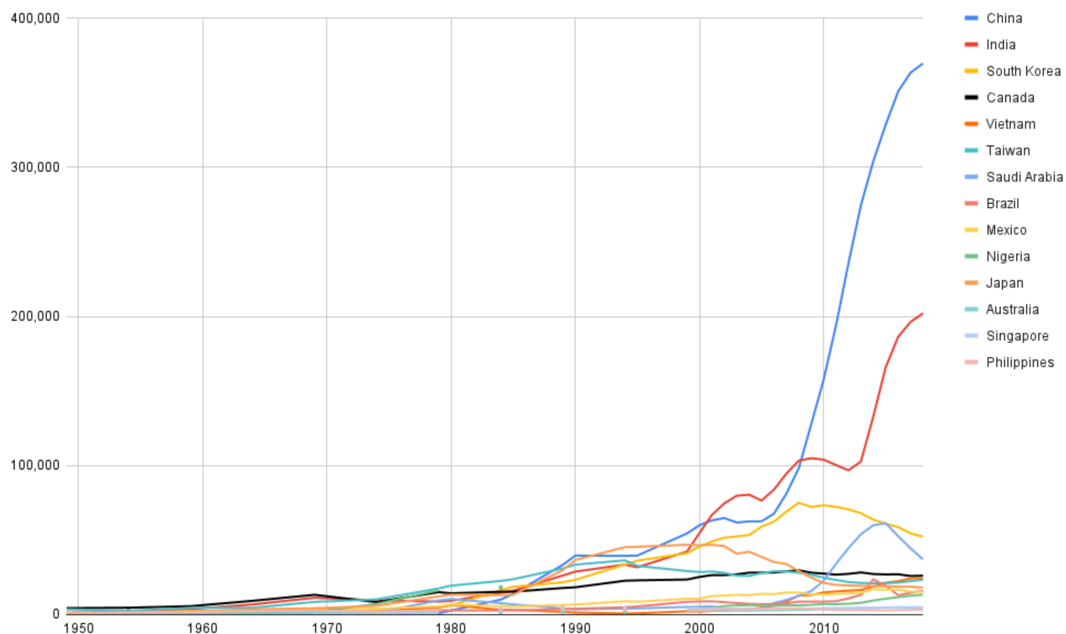

Figure 4: Top 14 Countries of Origins of International Students in the United States, 1949-2018. SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

The significant rise in the number of international students from India and China, in particular, has reshaped the landscape of higher education in the United States, coinciding with the recent rise of China as a potential threat to the United States. This underscores the importance of delving deeper into the motivations and implications of this diverse international student cohort.

The exponential increase in Asian international students on American college campuses has sparked three major academic interests: first, the financial contribution of Asian students to the American economy and higher education institutions, particularly amidst budgetary challenges faced by state universities since the onset of neoliberal policies in the early 1980s; second, the process of cultural adaptation and assimilation experienced by international students from diverse backgrounds within the American educational environment, and how institutions

facilitate this transition; third, particularly at the professional and graduate levels, the phenomenon of brain drain, gain, and circulation among elite international students, leading to their emergence as high-skilled migrants in coastal areas like Silicon Valley and Wall Street.

These diverse research interests have garnered attention across various academic disciplines, ranging from education to international migration. However, a noticeable gap persists in sociological research concerning the mobility of international students. Specifically, there is a lack of understanding regarding how their educational choices and strategies to navigate both domestic and international educational structures operate and what factors shape their trajectories. Despite the enduring interest in education's role in social mobility within the sociology of education, there has been relatively limited exploration of the expansion of international educational mobility. This expansion serves as an extension or variant of the educational mobility project, particularly among privileged elite families. Moreover, the significance of this exploration amplifies with the increasing involvement of mass families in international educational mobility, a consequence of the global proliferation of mass education during the latter half of the 20th century.

In essence, there has been insufficient examination of the expansion of international student mobility within the context of global higher education expansion and class mobility in a globalizing world. Instead, existing international education mobility studies often adopt two polarized perspectives: first, the human capital-based approach rooted in economics, focusing on individuals' cost-benefit analysis in educational decision-making, often extending existing theoretical frameworks from domestic settings; second, a structural perspective examining how push factors from students' home countries and pull factors from receiving countries, primarily the United States, interact to motivate international educational mobility.

While these approaches provide valuable insights into international student mobility, there is a lack of sociological understanding regarding how actors, such as students and their families, perceive international education and its consequences, and how actual geographical mobility occurs within social structures that may not always support free mobility. Therefore, this dissertation employs a Bourdieusian approach to examine the relationship between education and social mobility by extending its oversight to the evolving role of globalization and its dynamic changes.

Research Questions

This dissertation adopts a sociological perspective to investigate international student mobility and its historical transformations. It aims to understand the evolution of the following key aspects in a rapidly changing society:

1. The roles and meanings of education in socioeconomic mobility:
    A. The preference for international education over domestic options and how it is perceived by individuals.
    B. The experience of international education and its outcomes, as well as how individuals evaluate this process.
2. Individual geographic mobilities:
    A. The structural factors that regulate and facilitate individual mobilities.
    B. The evolution of geographic mobilities: circulatory returns, staying overseas, and unfinished mobility.

By addressing these research questions, this study seeks to expand upon Bourdieu's conceptual framework of diverse forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social) and their conversions

(Bourdieu 1986). Specifically, it explores how international education and its credential, as institutionalized cultural capital, mediate socioeconomic status attainment or reproduction within the context of national development, educational expansion, and globalization in developing countries. By adopting a historical lens, this dissertation illuminates how individual strategies and mobilities evolve within contexts, such as from taken-for-granted circulatory returns to diverse pathways with multi-faceted implications to halt in outgoing mobilities to realize the benefit of academic credentials.

While Bourdieu's approach has been pivotal in understanding social and cultural reproduction in France, its application to the global scale of international mobility remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to extend our understanding of social mobility and reproduction within the context of international student mobility amid globalization and national development.

Case of South Korea

To achieve these theoretical contributions, this dissertation focuses on the case of South Korea (hereafter Korea), a significant source of international students to the United States since its liberation from Japanese Imperialism in 1945. While initially intending a comparative perspective with China and India, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 prevented comparative fieldwork among these Asian countries.

Nevertheless, this shift in research focus offers the opportunity to examine the historical transformations of international student mobility in the context of Korea's national development and social changes. Spanning seven decades from 1945 to 2020, this research encompasses

various historical periods, including the Japanese Imperialist period, the US military government period, and Korea's transition from military regimes to liberalization and globalization.

Structural factors such as the geopolitical Cold War context of post-war Korea, the developmental state, and military regimes have influenced the patterns of international student mobility. By examining individual global mobilities within the backdrop of social changes, this study underscores the importance of social structures in shaping individual actions.

Moreover, Korea provides an ideal case to investigate these research interests. Seoul National University (SNU) of Korea, for instance, occupies the apex of the national educational system pyramid and has consistently produced the highest number of American PhD holders among institutions outside the United States. In engineering and science fields, SNU ranks as the world's fourth-largest producer of American doctoral degree holders, trailing only behind U.C. Berkeley, and surpassing institutions like Cornell and the University of Michigan Ann Arbor (Seoul National University 2008, 2009). Furthermore, while approximately 90% of Chinese and Indian doctorate degree holders aspire to remain in the United States and pursue migrant status, around one-third of newly minted Korean scholars with American doctorates express a desire to return to their home country (National Science Foundation 2017, 2021). Nevertheless, the insights gleaned from Korea are not exhaustive and may not fully encapsulate the experiences of other Asian countries such as Taiwan, Japan, China, and India in the realm of international student mobility.

Contributions

This dissertation contributes significantly to the fields of sociology of education, social change, social inequality and stratification, and sociology of development by delving into the

transformations of international student mobility. Specifically, it explores how these transformations are driven by the collective aspirations of Korean students and families seeking upward social mobility through American education within the context of state development and educational expansion influenced by American geopolitics.

Firstly, this study extends our current understanding of the benefits and mechanisms of educational attainment to the realm of international mobility. It goes beyond simply applying existing theoretical models to international students, offering a nuanced exploration of how the dynamics of international mobility create new pathways for education's role in social status.

Secondly, it contributes to the understanding of social change by examining how individual mobilities, initially rooted in macro-level social changes and the context of state development, evolve into individual projects within changing social landscapes.

Thirdly, this research advances the field of social inequality and stratification by showcasing how students and their families actively engage in educational mobilities to improve their social status through educational credentials and career opportunities. This adds an additional layer to our understanding of how international mobility influences the formation and reproduction of social stratification under the guise of meritocracy.

Lastly, it sheds light on the issue of national development and human resources by investigating the rise of international education among elites in developing countries, which is crucial for national development as human capital. By spanning a historical spectrum, it demonstrates how the expansion of international education intersects with the context of the developmental state.

Overview

Following this introduction, the dissertation unfolds with two theoretical background chapters that explore the intricate relationship between education, social class, and mobilities. First, I explore diverse perspectives on social mobility and education to identify the most suitable theoretical approach for examining international student mobility. By choosing the Bourdieusian approach and its forms of capital perspective, this dissertation examines the expanding pursuit of academic credentials on a global scale and evaluates how the perception of credential acquisition evolves with social changes. Second, it delves into the expanding phenomenon of international student mobility, examining it through the multifaceted lenses of mobility, class, and gender.

A subsequent chapter offers historical context on the initiation of international student mobility from Korea to the United States, tracing its roots back to the Japanese Imperialist Rule. After considering the role of the Cold War context in Korean students' international mobility, the study examines the impact of the developmental state and its demise. This chapter then introduces the expansion of Korean higher education and its gendered contest mobility system.

After a methods chapter discussing data collection and research sample, three empirical chapters follow. The first examines the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, when access to both domestic and international higher education was limited to elites. It demonstrates how gendered social structures influenced the circulatory international mobility of elite Korean students within the context of a nascent elitist academia under military dictatorship.

The following chapter explores the period from the 1980s to the 2000s, characterized by democratization and educational expansion that opened the doors to international mobility for the masses. It illustrates how the logic of the previous period evolved amid changing global

dynamics, suggesting the erosion of the traditional reproduction mechanisms. The final empirical chapter examines the sudden decrease in the number of Korean international students in the 2010s, focusing on the disillusionment with American undergraduate education within the context of changes in the Korean higher education system.

In conclusion, based on a thorough investigation of changes in Korean society and education and the resulting actions and understandings of individuals, this dissertation argues that locally motivated global trajectories propel the pursuit of international education. It contends that among the diverse motivations for seeking American education, the overarching goal of achieving elite status in Korea through American educational credentials via various global pathways lies at the core. This desire not only leads to the rapid expansion of international educational mobilities but also breaks the outgoing mobility following its limit and corresponding domestic changes.

In essence, the local aspiration of Asian middle-class families stands as a cornerstone in the ongoing expansion of global education, including the pursuit of American education. These families endeavor to secure a brighter future for their children, often aiming to uplift or sustain their current socioeconomic status via education. This aspiration and mobility project, shaped by multi-layered contexts such as the Cold War, global capitalism, the developmental state, social inequality, and educational expansion, produce a multitude of pathways aimed at elevating individuals' status in their home societies.

Chapter 2. Education, Social Class, and Mobility

Introduction

The multifaceted dynamics of education, social class, and mobility demand a robust theoretical framework to encapsulate their complexities. Pierre Bourdieu's perspective offers a comprehensive lens to examine how education serves both as a mechanism for social mobility and as a means of reproducing social inequalities. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and various forms of capital (cultural, social, economic) provide a nuanced understanding of the structural and individual factors that influence educational outcomes and social mobility. This Bourdieusian approach is particularly pertinent when examining international student mobility, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of how global educational trajectories are influenced by local social structures and global contexts.

By grounding our theoretical review in Bourdieu's framework, we can better understand how international students navigate their educational journeys in pursuit of social mobility and reproduction. This approach highlights the strategic accumulation of educational credentials by individuals and how these credentials are valued and legitimized within different social fields. Moreover, Bourdieu's emphasis on the interplay between structure and agency provides a critical perspective on how educational systems perpetuate social hierarchies and how students from various backgrounds engage with these systems to enhance their social status. Thus, beginning with Bourdieu offers a foundational understanding that bridges the gap between individual aspirations and structural constraints, making it an ideal starting point for analyzing international student mobility in the context of education and social mobility.

Perspectives on Education and Inequality

The role of education in both facilitating and reproducing inequality has been a significant research focus among social scientists. Various perspectives on social mobility, education, and social class, including Bourdieu's, have examined the issue of education and social inequality with diverse approaches to illuminate individuals' motivations, mechanisms, and the social contexts regulating these processes. This section reviews these approaches to highlight their achievements and limitations.

Since Schultz (1961) laid the groundwork for understanding human capital as an investment in education, human capital theory has emphasized the economic benefits of education, portraying individuals as investors maximizing returns. Family investments in education, particularly early childhood education, yield substantial returns in productivity and earnings (G. S. Becker and Tomes 1986; Cunha and Heckman 2010). Structural reforms improving education quality lead to long-term higher earnings for graduates (Arteaga 2018). The dynamic relationship between education and technological advancement necessitates educational systems' adaptation to enhance human capital and reduce wage inequality (Goldin and Katz 2007).

Rational choice theorists approach individual decision-making processes from a different angle, suggesting that individuals (and their families) make rational educational decisions to avoid downward social mobility and maintain their current social status (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Breen 1999). They assess risks associated with educational decisions, which vary by social class. Upper-class individuals are more willing to take risks by investing in higher education to maintain their status across generations (Breen and Yaish 2006; Stocké 2007), while working-class individuals tend to be more risk-averse and opt for safer, less ambitious vocational paths

(R. Becker and Hecken 2008). Relative risk aversion influences educational choices even in egalitarian societies like Sweden (Hällsten 2010), and time discounting preferences exacerbate risk aversion in educational decisions (Breen, van de Werfhorst, and Jæger 2014).

Some scholars argue that education functions as a signal of productivity (Spence 1973) and a means of revealing individual abilities (Arcidiacono, Bayer, and Hizmo 2008). Employers use educational credentials as a screening tool, making more informed hiring decisions (Stiglitz 1975). These signaling mechanisms help explain why individuals invest in education and how credentials influence hiring practices and income distribution.

Credentialism focuses on the increasing social importance of educational credentials in the labor market and their inflation, which perpetuates social stratification and limits social mobility, irrespective of the actual skills or knowledge represented (Rosenbaum and Binder 1997). Educational credentials become essential to access jobs and opportunities, serving as markers of social status and employment eligibility (D. Brown 2001; R. Collins 1979). For instance, elite firms use credentials from prestigious institutions as proxies for cultural fit (Rivera 2012, 2016). Over time, credential inflation requires higher levels of education for jobs that previously did not need them (R. Collins 1979).

The Maximally Maintained Inequality (MMI) hypothesis posits that educational inequalities persist until educational opportunities are fully saturated (Raftery and Hout 1993). Higher socioeconomic groups benefit the most from initial expansions, maintaining their advantage (Hout, Raftery, and Bell 1993; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). Inequality decreases only when educational expansion reaches saturation, providing equal access to all social groups. Institutional and structural factors play a crucial role in maintaining these inequalities (Pfeffer 2008). Economic crises can exacerbate inequalities, highlighting the need for targeted policies

(Torche 2010). However, evidence from some European countries suggests that effective policy interventions can reduce inequalities, challenging the inevitability of MMI (Breen 2010; Breen et al. 2009).

The Effectively Maintained Inequality (EMI) hypothesis suggests that despite more widespread access to different levels of education, socioeconomic inequalities are maintained through qualitative differences within those levels, such as the prestige of institutions (Lucas 2001). Higher socioeconomic groups maintain their advantages through superior educational opportunities and outcomes (Arum, Gamoran, and Shavit 2007; Triventi et al. 2016). Students from less privileged backgrounds face significant barriers in higher education, such as attending less prestigious institutions and lacking access to high-quality resources (Bastedo and Jaquette 2011; Marteleto et al. 2012). Compensatory sponsorship and merit-based admissions policies often fall short of fully addressing these inequalities (Alon and Tienda 2007; Grodsky 2007).

Despite these theoretical advancements, the aforementioned approaches are insufficient to address the complexities of international student mobility. Individual-focused models like human capital theory and relative risk aversion theory are limited in scope when examining the structural factors regulating individual choices. Signaling theory and credentialism, though extending to consider the importance of academic credentials and social exclusion, are confined within labor market contexts and fall short of explaining societal-level educational inequality often linked to social class. While MMI and EMI theories highlight how educational inequalities persist despite educational expansion and policy interventions, their class-based analytic approach is limited in understanding how individuals navigate their educational realities for social mobility.

Therefore, I propose the Bourdieusian reproduction perspective as a comprehensive analytic approach to understand how individuals engage in education to pursue social status and evolve within changing social contexts, such as educational expansion. This approach allows us to understand how mobility pursuits evolve into reproduction purposes as the surrounding social environment changes, such as national development. In the next section, I will introduce the Bourdieusian perspective on education and social class to lay the foundation for my argument on international education as a locally motivated global trajectory.

Education, Class, and Capital: Bourdieu's Perspective

Bourdieu's theory of practice has been widely utilized in sociology of education to elucidate the intricate processes and dynamic interplay between social structures and individual agency in decision-making by integrating cultural, social, and economic dimensions of education. This theory examines how social structures shape the valuation of different forms of capital and how students negotiate these structures to accumulate multiple forms of capital (Mulvey 2022). The habitus and various forms of capital are defined within "fields," hierarchical social spaces where individuals occupy positions of dominance or subordination based on their capital holdings (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Martin 2003). These structural considerations go beyond the reductionist assumptions of 'rational individual' models in human capital theory and relative risk aversion theory, highlighting how social structures, including educational systems, influence educational decisions and perpetuate social hierarchies through the transmission and legitimation of dominant group's cultural capital.

Bourdieu's work illustrates that high-background students strategically acquire prestigious educational credentials to safeguard their advantageous social position, aligning with the education system's logic for successful adaptation (Bourdieu 1973; Netz and Finger 2016).

This approach goes beyond signaling theory's narrow focus on the labor market value of education. Education serves to reproduce social status, reinforcing social hierarchies and legitimizing the status of dominant groups.

For the middle class, who have access to various economic, cultural, and social resources, education strategically accumulates and reproduces institutionalized cultural capital, such as academic qualifications. This strategic accumulation serves to perpetuate their advantage. Social class significantly influences the practices and success of accumulation, inevitably linked to the purpose of social reproduction of privilege (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Philip Brown 1995; Findlay et al. 2012; J. Waters 2005).

Since their habitus aligns with the education system's logic, privileged social groups enjoy educational success and are led into 'legitimate' social and cultural reproduction (Bodovski and Farkas 2008; Bourdieu 1973; DiMaggio 1982; Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau 2002, 2011). Higher education is governed by the habitus of academically educated groups, enabling them to adapt successfully to the implicit rules of higher education (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb 2010; Netz and Finger 2016). This framework extends credentialism's emphasis on education-mediated social exclusion by demonstrating how cultural capital and habitus contribute to the value of credentials. Educational credentials reflect and reinforce the cultural capital of higher social classes, beyond signifying qualifications (E. M. Lee and Kramer 2013).

The substantial growth of higher education throughout the twentieth century has profoundly reshaped the significance of academic degrees (Schofer and Meyer 2005). Bourdieu explores how the diminishing scarcity value of higher education credentials prompts privileged groups to adopt more exclusive educational methods to safeguard and perpetuate their social

status, leveraging the symbolic value associated with elite education (Bourdieu 1984; Netz and Finger 2016). Conversely, the middle class not only utilizes education to protect their socioeconomic status but also seeks upward social mobility by accessing exclusive educational pathways, sometimes through "meritocratic" means. This response to educational expansion encompasses both vertical and horizontal differentiation strategies. Privileged students pursue higher formal rank credentials, opt for prestigious fields of study, and enroll in elite institutions at home and abroad (Karen 2002; Lucas 2001; Netz and Finger 2016; Reimer and Pollak 2010). In other words, the Bourdieusian approach aligns with both the MMI and EMI hypotheses: it elucidates how cultural reproduction maintains inequality even as educational access expands; it demonstrates how individual strategies maintain inequalities effectively within the same educational levels through qualitative differences; and it highlights how significant upward mobility becomes available for some within the context of modernization and educational expansion.

While sociologists have illuminated the role of social class in educational achievement, the evaluation of socioeconomic outcomes of credential acquisition remains underexplored. Economic sociologists and geographers have examined issues such as "deskilling" and segmented labor markets, yet little dialogue exists between these perspectives, obscuring the relationship between credential acquisition and subsequent socioeconomic exchange. J. Waters (2009) explicates the mechanisms through which academic credentials are valorized in a trans-local context, shedding light on the circumstances and processes of credential conversion.

Forms of Capital and Their Transformations

Bourdieu's seminal paper on the "Forms of Capital" elucidates his theoretical framework, integrating Marxian and Weberian perspectives to establish a general science of the economy of

practice (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu's concept of capital extends beyond economic capital to include cultural and social capital, each with distinct forms and mechanisms of exchange. These capitals often function in fields where they present in three fundamental forms: 1) economic capital – transformable to money directly and institutionalized as property rights; 2) cultural capital – transformable to economic capital under certain conditions, institutionalized as educational qualifications; and 3) social capital – composed of social obligations and connections, transformable to economic capital under certain conditions, and institutionalized as noble aristocratic titles.[1] The various forms of capital and their modes of exchange are often considered "non-economic and disinterested" in mainstream economics, contrasting with the exchange of economic capital in commercial transactions. However, transforming economic capital into cultural or social capital is far from disinterested; it is a strategic practice that generates profit and ensures the reproduction of capital, even if the returns are realized over a long period.

Cultural capital exists in three states: 1) embodied state – state of disposition in mind and body; 2) objectified state – state of cultural products, such as photography, monographs, musical instruments, etc.; and 3) institutionalized state – state of authentic meritorious qualifications, such as academic credentials. Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital is transmitted within a family at the meso-level, such as family cultural capital, and micro-level, such as habitus. A family with accumulated cultural capital can not only equip their children with sophisticated "tastes" but also buy them time to receive further formal schooling and inherit more cultural capital at home. These processes are more implicit than those of economic capital.

[1] Therefore, since the Bourdieusian practice economy examines the symbolically represented relation of knowledge and (mis)recognition, symbolic capital presupposes the intervention of habitus which is a socially instituted cognitive capacity.

Not everyone possesses the same amount of economic and cultural means to extend their children's education, resulting in cultural capital providing different benefits to different classes and their fractions.[2] Compared to economic capital, which is more visible and direct, the transmission of cultural capital and its benefits within families is more socially concealed and admired. For example, competitive recruitment examinations (concours), the official arbiters of contest mobility, sharply, absolutely, and durably separate the last successful candidate from the first unsuccessful one, even when they are on a continuum of competence with infinitesimal differences. This separation institutionalizes the essential difference between the qualified and the unqualified, demonstrating the performative magic of coercing recognition through institutionalization (Bourdieu 1986). The small difference at the moment of concours evaluation, such as college admission, becomes magnified through institutionalization, with the larger masses sanctifying the perceived significant difference between the last successful candidate and the first unsuccessful one.

Therefore, the possession of institutionalized cultural capital in the form of academic achievements and scholastic credentials exerts the effect of (mis)recognition, making such achievements be seen as scarce and legitimate competence. In other words, the institutionalization of cultural capital as educational qualifications represents a significant aspect of social reproduction, influencing the further distribution of power and privilege (Bourdieu 1986; J. Waters 2006b).

Convertibility between different forms of capital is a strategic basis of reproduction of capital and social positions. Institutionalized educational qualifications, as a form of cultural

[2] Embodied cultural capital does not function as means of acquiring exclusive profit in a relatively less differentiated society where the access to cultural heritage is evenly distributed.

capital, undergo conversion processes wherein economic capital is transformed into cultural or social capital. Educational qualifications often become the legitimate condition to access dominant positions with official guarantees, suggesting a new distribution criterion of power and privilege. The profits, both material and symbolic, of educational qualifications come from their scarcity.

The transformation strategy aims to minimize the inherent loss in the conversion process and maintain social positions. However, educational qualifications are not perfect currency. They are not transferable like nobility titles or stocks and are vulnerable to educational expansion and economic downturns, which may lower anticipated investment profitability due to uncertainties and risks inherent in the process (Bourdieu 1986; J. Waters 2006b).

Critique and Further Exploration

Despite widespread usage of Bourdieu's concept of capital, its application needs critical examination, particularly regarding its depiction in the United States.[3] Cultural capital is often oversimplified as an input variable in input-output models, such as years of schooling and the number of books at home. This reductionism overlooks the cultural and social dimensions of cultural capital and Bourdieu's emphasis on capital reproduction dynamics. Recent research has shifted towards qualitative approaches, focusing on the activation and evaluation of cultural capital in reproduction processes (Calarco 2011, 2014; Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau 2002, 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003; J. Waters 2009).[4]

[3] The secularized usage comes from the argument's own abstrusity and its schematic formalness. See Bourdieu. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." P. 17. Endnote 4.
[4] In quantitative research, there are still diverse conceptualizations of cultural capital. While some of them are very innovative, the others still remain at the simple model which considers cultural capital as one of input factors.

Insufficient consideration of institutionalized cultural capital also arises from the social dynamics of Bourdieu's work and American applications. In the French and American contexts, secondary and higher education systems are often practically tracked due to their original designs and social segregations. Therefore, the significance of educational credentials from elite institutions and their social implications have received limited consideration. However, in other social contexts where educational expansion rapidly progressed as part of national development, the significance of institutionalized cultural capital becomes widely important.

Education is the most important form of cultural capital in modern "schooled society" (Baker 2014). The pre-modern noble "title" loses significance in societies where pre-modern caste and status systems are abolished, seeking a new social order principle for integration. Such societies require a merit-based integration principle enabling social mobility for all while camouflaging reproduction mechanisms available to those with more resources and capital. As the modern formal schooling system develops, merit and credential-based social distribution becomes more socially legitimate. However, this importance of institutionalized cultural capital in new societies has not been fully considered yet.

Furthermore, despite Bourdieu's emphasis on unexpected time lag or failure in transforming social capital into economic capital, the issue of inconvertibility has not been sufficiently studied. Also, the conditions of capital conversion and activation have been insufficiently examined in input models. In reality, not every capital conversion succeeds, especially when changes come to the fields. The entrance of new comers and the encounter of different fields, such as global convergence, change capital transmission, conversion, and activation mechanisms. Unprecedented challenges increase the odds of failure in the capital functionality processes.

These considerations are not mere supplementations of the Bourdieusian theory but an attempt to expand our understanding of the relationship between education and reproduction. We need to understand how different education-mediated reproductions, as well as transformations, happen in the blind spots of Bourdieu's approach, which examined reproduction dynamics in capitalist society without considering other important structures, such as gender ideology, the Cold War, and globalization.

Educational expansion provides additional food for thought regarding the achievements and limitations of the Bourdieusian approach. Educational expansion has enabled massive upward mobility among the masses and eroded the previous function of higher education degrees as status guarantees for the upper and middle classes. Students from privileged classes start confronting the potential for downward mobility (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Netz and Finger 2016). Brown (2015) extends this risk aversion argument, pointing out that Bourdieusian theory exaggerates reproduction's inevitability, especially in contexts where perceived risks associated with economic restructuring, unemployment, and educational changes since the mid-1970s have heightened parental awareness of uncertainties and consequences of failure (J. Waters 2009).

The convergence of education, class, and capital presents a multifaceted terrain for exploration, demanding nuanced analysis and theoretical refinement to comprehend the intricate dynamics of reproduction and mobility in modern societies. As part of globalization, educational fields of diverse nation-states, with their dynamics of education and social mobility, have gradually intersected since the late 20th century. Bourdieu's scholarship, developed within the context of single nation-state, has not fully examined this aspect. Therefore, this dissertation extends the Bourdieusian approach to international education, where students from diverse

countries move across different educational fields to convert their institutionalized cultural capital to practical benefits.

Mobility Extended

Horizontal Mobility vs. Vertical Mobility

The international environment introduces new contexts for horizontal and vertical differentiation in education. The new dimensions of horizontal and vertical mobility emerge because different countries' educational fields form a new vertical hierarchy. While the domestic hierarchy often arises from differences in education level, the international hierarchy reflects the symbolic status of each national educational field, often reflecting each nation's status in the world system.

Horizontal mobility occurs when students move between countries that have roughly the same symbolic status. For instance, the mobility of European students within the ERASMUS framework fosters intercultural understanding among Europeans by offering study abroad exchange opportunities. Much of undergraduate study abroad within intra-European and transatlantic mobilities, from the United States to European nations, emphasizes experiential benefits from short-term credit mobility (Baláž and Williams 2004; Findlay et al. 2017; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; Teichler and Maiworm 1997).

In some cases, horizontal mobility offers a second chance to students. For example, Brooks and Waters (2009b) find that elite British students who fail to secure access to elite UK institutions look for a second chance at similarly ranked elite American universities, such as the Ivy League, instead of shifting downwards to less prestigious institutions at home. The second chance works as honorable substitutes for the most prestigious qualifications (Bourdieu 1996).

Vertical mobility involves students seeking more prestigious forms of education, often characterized by east-to-west movement (Brooks and Waters 2009a; Rivza and Teichler 2007). Vertical mobilities presuppose different symbolic statuses between sending and receiving countries. Students from lower-rank fields head to higher-rank educational fields to obtain advantages, ranging from knowledge and technologies to credentials and symbolic status. Transpacific mobilities of international students, which comprise more than two-thirds of global educational mobilities, primarily compose vertical mobility.

Even within credit mobilities, their implications differ: while physical mobility of students from developed countries to other regions, regardless of the destination's development level, often aims to foster cultural experience as cosmopolitans with authentic experiences and easy credits, the same program participation from developing countries to developed countries implies participants' aspiration to obtain highly valued institutionalized cultural capital from the host nation or institution's prestige, such as elite US universities. In other words, much of credit mobility is asymmetrical, with the volume of vertical mobility much larger than horizontal mobility, leading to more severe competition. However, vertical mobility can evolve into horizontal mobility with the worldwide expansion of higher education and the fast-following catch-up of prestigious Western institutions in global ranking systems.

Degree Mobility: A Critical Perspective

Diverse degree mobilities, the pursuit of entire degrees outside one's country of residence, arise as new mobilities in the 21st century, often encompassing post-education migration (Findlay et al. 2012; Guruz 2011; Johnson and Regets 1998; Szelényi 2006). This demonstrates how international student mobility unfolds within macro frameworks such as globalization, pedagogy,

and society (Brooks and Waters 2011; Findlay et al. 2012), and contributes to intensifying social differences within the global higher education system (Marginson and Rhoades 2002).

As the global higher education system is standardized, degree mobility becomes increasingly critical because the degree serves as a medium of both human capital and institutionalized cultural capital. A legitimate degree from an advanced educational field benefits the bearer's socioeconomic standing through practical advancedness and symbolic credential significance. However, it may not promise superior outcomes compared to domestic credentials due to potential inconvertibility of the foreign credential.

Examining international degree mobility as a project to pursue internationally institutionalized cultural capital extends the analytic capability of Bourdieusian research on education and social mobility. It delves into the complex dynamics of education and its implications for social stratification by expanding the analytic boundary from domestic to international contexts. This shift elucidates how physical expansion complicates education-mediated social mobility and reproduction. This exploration not only extends Bourdieusian theory but also complements diverse perspectives on education and social mobility by analyzing what motivates individuals to engage in education-mediated social mobility and reproduction projects to improve their lives amid macro social changes, such as educational expansion and globalization.

First, this research specifically addresses how the strategy of studying abroad was utilized by elites and subsequently by the middle class who learned from them in pursuit of symbolic class status. This is examined not in an abstract context, such as broadly similar nation-states or from East to West, but in the concrete context of South Korea. South Korea transitioned from a peripheral post-civil war state under the Cold War American umbrella to a semi-peripheral

developmental state and eventually to one of the leading figures in the globalized world. This context makes the study valuable for evaluating the efficacy of the Bourdieusian approach in examining the implications of international student mobility and social mobility.

Second, unlike existing cross-sectional studies that only consider status differences between nations and fields, this study examines how this relationship dynamically changes over historical contexts and how such dynamic changes impact individuals' pathways. This research goes beyond individuals using education solely to maintain or elevate their status. It explores how international education, amid the field-changing educational expansions, is pursued as a qualitatively different strategy implying vertical differentiation. This approach evolves according to environmental changes, maintaining overall field-level inequality. In the next chapter, the issues of international student mobility and their implications for social mobility will be discussed.

Chapter 3. International Students and their Mobility

Introduction

International education has emerged as a dynamic and evolving field, especially since the mid-20th century, profoundly influenced by global socio-economic changes and cultural exchanges. As students traverse international boundaries, they navigate complex educational structures and systems, seeking to acquire valuable knowledge, skills, and credentials. International student mobility (ISM) encompasses a complex array of motivators, processes, and consequences, shaped by various drivers and inhibiting factors.

Scholars have examined ISM through various lenses, including human capital enhancement, which involves improving language skills and accessing foreign work experience (Findlay et al. 2006; Teichler and Maiworm 1997). Another perspective focuses on improving career prospects through the enhancement of social and cultural capital (Findlay et al. 2006; Findlay et al. 2017; Jong-young Kim 2011, 2016; Mulvey 2022; J. Waters 2008; P. Yang 2018). ISM is also associated with significant rewards that exceed the advantages of obtaining a local or domestic university degree (Ong 1999; J. Waters 2006b, 2008; J. Waters and Leung 2013b, 2013a; Xiang and Shen 2009). Additionally, ISM is viewed as a mechanism for class reproduction (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2011; Findlay et al. 2012; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; Ong 1999; J. Waters 2006b, 2006a; M. C. Waters and Jiménez 2005; Xiang and Shen 2009), racialization (Abelmann 2009; Matthews and Sidhu 2005), cosmopolitanism (Matthews and Sidhu 2005; Mitchell 2003), and transnationalism (Gargano 2009; Ong 1999).

This chapter highlights the social selectivity in international student mobility and examines its significance in people's mobility and reproduction projects through a Bourdieusian lens. It also addresses how gender and family are often overlooked in ISM studies.

Motivations, Processes, and Consequences

Social practices of higher education at home and globally influence individual mobility decisions. Various contexts, such as the internationalization of the education system (Findlay et al. 2012; Teichler 2004; J. Waters and Leung 2013a, 2013b), rising economic competition for global talent (Kuptsch 2006), geographies of cultural capital (Murphy-Lejeune 2003; Ong 1999; J. Waters 2006b), "mobility culture" (Findlay et al. 2006), and infrastructure (Brooks and Waters 2009a), influence perceptions of a socially differentiated and stratified global educational system. Some universities are perceived as having higher social and academic standing, making international education a valuable source of cultural capital. This expectation on cultural capital extends its impact beyond the labor market, influencing social status and family life (Baláž and Williams 2004; Brooks and Waters 2009a; Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Huang and Yeoh 2005; Ong 1999; Rizvi 2000).

Integrating International Mobility into Life Course Aspirations

Many education studies isolate the educational experience as a singular "event," rather than recognizing its integral role in life-course formulation. Understanding study abroad within the broader life-course of students unveils a richer narrative, highlighting how international mobility adds another cultural layer to individuals' lives, distinct from domestic education trajectories. The pursuit of advantage through international mobility extends beyond transnational study opportunities, permeating various stages of the education system. For instance, enrolling children

in international schools or elite private institutions for secondary education shapes their educational experiences and contributes to the accumulation of "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1996, 79; Bunnell 2007; Findlay et al. 2012).

Student migration literature often presents a misleading binary of labor migration versus other forms of mobility (King 2002). Some students engage in "life planning," embedding their mobility decisions within broader life-course aspirations and long-term mobility plans. Thus, student mobility emerges as part of a broader spectrum of mobility cultures intertwined with individuals' outlook on their entire life course (Brooks and Everett 2008).

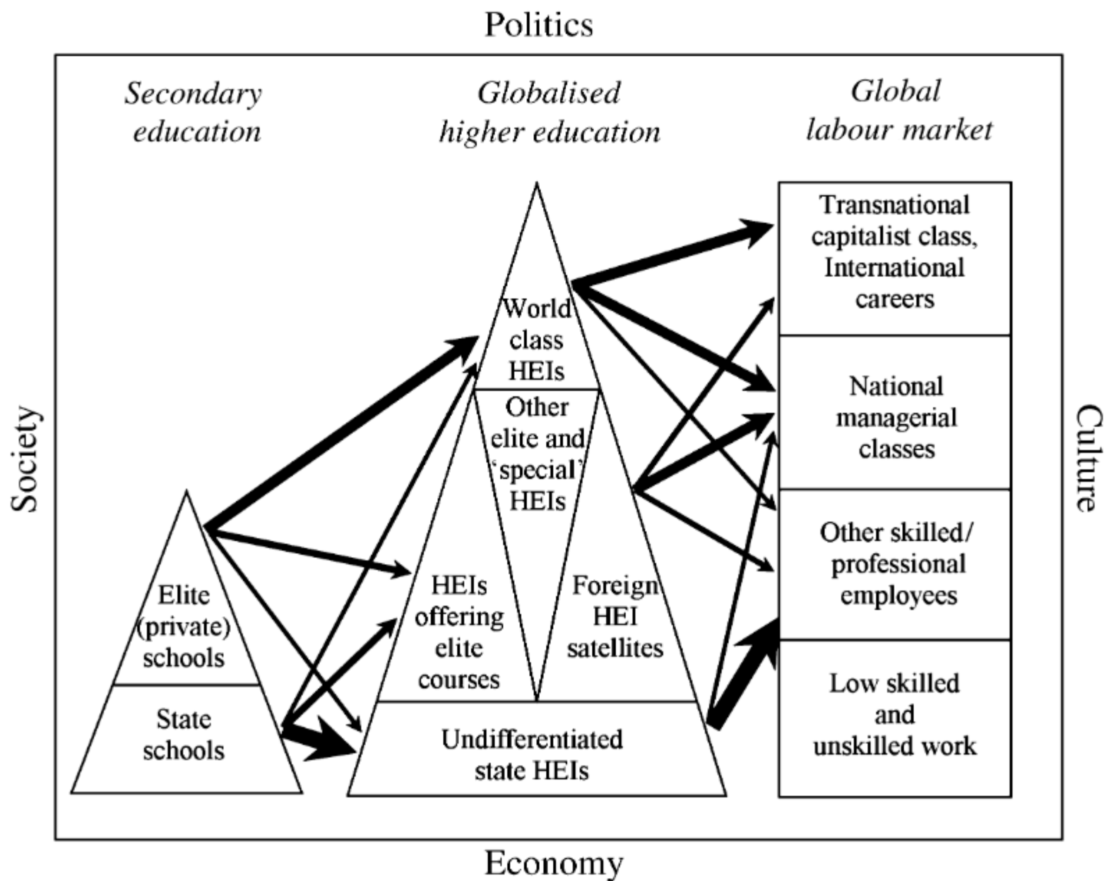

Figure 5: Transnational and National Student Flows in relation to the Differentiation of Higher Education and the Global Labor Market.

SOURCE: Findlay et al. 2012. Figure 1.

Findlay et al. (2012) underscore how differentiation within the education system perpetuates a stratified labor market in a globalizing world, illustrating diverse trajectories and mechanisms (Figure 5). However, not every instance of international mobility is meticulously planned among the privileged. Every mobility is contextualized by social surroundings.

Motivations for Studying Abroad

A multitude of factors, including (inter)national contexts, social changes, and institutional frameworks, influence study abroad decisions (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2011; Szelényi 2006; J. Waters 2006b, 2008). Host nations view incoming international students through diverse lenses, ranging from public diplomacy tools to potential labor migrants (Lomer 2017; Mulvey 2022; Mulvey and Lo 2021; Robertson 2013). Sending nations also vary in their views, from concerns about "brain drains" to seeing students as "grassroots ambassadors" expanding the home country's global influence (Liu 2022).

Individual-level factors, such as family background, socioeconomic status, social connections, personal aspirations, and perceived advantages of international education, also affect students' choice of international education (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2011; Szelenyi 2006; J. Waters 2006, 2008). Family ties and socioeconomic privilege often play significant roles in motivating students to study abroad. Pre-existing familial links overseas and prior travel experiences instill confidence in students regarding their ability to adapt to life and study in another country (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2009b).

Family decision-making processes significantly impact students' choices regarding educational trajectories and spatial strategies (J. Waters 2006b). Despite assumptions of individualistic decision-making models, parental influence and financial support play pivotal

roles in shaping students' study abroad aspirations. Gender dynamics also shape international student mobility, with vertical mobility patterns often favoring males, highlighting gender disparities in migration experiences (Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Mulvey 2022). Family dynamics often exert critical influence, especially on the mobility of female students, evolving with changes in social norms.

Educational Migration

Early scholarship predominantly framed international student movements as a form of migration, especially for long-distance relocations for entire degree programs. International students often traverse similar pathways as other migrants from their home countries, influenced by factors like geographic proximity, colonial ties, and cultural affinity (Gurak and Caces 1992, 233). Over their education, these students find themselves in a pseudo (or pre)-migratory environment, often taking on laboring roles as part of scholarship programs. This experience serves as an incubator for long-term settlement (Szelényi 2006) and often ends with "brain drain" (Findlay et al. 2006).

Highly Skilled Student Migration

Although not often finely differentiated, graduate students and their international mobility as highly skilled individuals are distinct from those of undergraduate students (Lowell and Findlay 2001; Szelényi 2006, 66). Their educational migration mobility often ends with finding a job in the host country. The widespread use of terms such as "brain drain," "brain circulation," and "brain exchange" suggests the ability of human capital to travel unproblematically over and through space (J. Waters 2009).

The discourse surrounding highly skilled student migration has evolved significantly since the 1960s (Szelényi 2006). Initially, the focus was on "brain drain," predominantly from

developing countries to the industrialized world, seen as detrimental to the economic and educational development of the countries of origin (Bhagwati and Dellalfar 1973; Bhagwati and Hamada 1974; Carrington and Detragiache 1998; Haque and Kim 1995). However, not every country experiences significant brain drain. For instance, in Korea, less than 3% of the highly educated population emigrates, despite a high outgoing international student ratio.

The discussion has since shifted towards "brain circulation" and "return migration," emphasizing the dynamic flow of human capital across borders. Return migration is recognized for its potential to replenish the pool of highly educated individuals in sending countries, thereby contributing to enhanced productivity (Baláž and Williams 2004; Lowell and Findlay 2001; Salt 1988, 1997; Salt and Findlay 1989; Szelényi 2006). Scholars have highlighted the "temporality" of student migrations, emphasizing the transient nature of educational pursuits as "brain training" and the fluid conception of national boundaries regarding future settlements (Balaz and Williams 2004; Szelenyi 2006).

Diverse Post-Study Trajectories and Complex Decision-Making

The varied intentions and outcomes associated with international student mobility make it hard to equate student mobility with migration. While some students aim for permanent labor migration through their degree programs (Li et al. 1996), others seek cultural enrichment and personal growth (Teichler and Maiworm 1997). Recent research underscores the diverse post-study trajectories of international students, complicating traditional binary categorizations of "staying" versus "returning" (Bijwaard and Wang 2016; Van Mol and Timmerman 2014; Wu and Wilkes 2017). For instance, opportunity for professional training or work experience may prompt students to delay their predetermined return plans (Johnson and Regets 1998). Some

students leverage their experiences in the destination country as springboards for further migration (Mulvey 2022; Tan and Hugo 2017).

Factors influencing international students' trajectories extend beyond predetermined determinants, encompassing familial, social, and institutional influences (Mulvey 2022). Settlement or return aspirations vary significantly based on students' countries of origin. Some students from certain regions intend to remain in destination countries, while others plan to return home (Johnson and Regets 1998; Szelényi 2006). For instance, a very small proportion of African and Latin American students wish to remain permanently, in contrast to many Asian students, particularly those from developed countries, who plan to stay in the host country (Das 1969). However, these intentions are subject to change over time, influenced by evolving economic, political, and social factors.

A study of foreign-born science and engineering graduate students earning doctoral degrees between 1988 and 1996 found that 63% of all students had plans to remain in the US. Of these, 39 percent had firm plans to stay, including offers for postdoctoral research, employment, or R&D positions (Johnson and Regets 1998; Szelényi 2006).

Stay rates of foreign nationals with US doctorates have steadily increased, from 55% in 1995 to 75% in 2015, while return-to-home rates have decreased from 36% to 19%. Intent to stay rates differ by country of origin: about 90% of doctorate recipients from Iran, India, and China wish to stay in the US, whereas stay rates for other top countries range from 50% to 65%. Additionally, stay rates are higher among STEM doctorates compared to those in the humanities and social sciences (National Science Foundation 2017, 2021).

Not all students enjoy equal movement opportunities. Structural factors, such as differentiated status and rights assignments along nationality and racial identity lines, play a significant role as “regimes of mobility” (Mulvey 2022). These factors stratify migration movements, influencing access to legal border crossings and employment opportunities in destination countries (F. L. Collins 2021; Erel and Ryan 2019). Migrants from the Global South employ various strategies, leveraging social networks and accumulating capital through international education (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013).

Understanding the complexities of highly skilled student migration is crucial for policymakers and researchers (Agarwal and Winkler 1985; Bratsberg 1995, 381). Future research should continue to explore the multifaceted nature of student migrations, adopting more human-centric approaches to capture the intricacies of decision-making processes (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Zweig 1997; Szelényi 2006).

Social Selectivity in International Education

Many ISM studies focus on privilege and the mechanisms driving this mobility (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2011; Findlay et al. 2012; Lörz, Netz, and Quast 2016; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; J. Waters 2009; Xiang and Shen 2009). These students often come from backgrounds where higher education and international mobility are highly valued. Early exposure to international experiences and foreign languages creates a socially selective habitus where travel and studying abroad are normalized (Brooks and Waters 2011; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; Netz and Finger 2016).

The social selectivity of studying abroad varies across secondary education systems. In countries with tracking systems like Germany, scholastic pathways often diverge based on class backgrounds, structurally limiting the spectrum of students who choose studying abroad.

Conversely, in late-developing countries with less emphasis on tracking, a larger fraction of students have the option of studying abroad (Netz and Finger 2016).

However, even in societies where a larger group of students enjoys wider educational opportunities, international education often comes with challenges. Longer stays abroad, with higher costs and delayed entry into the labor market, are often exclusive to middle class students (Bourdieu 1984; 1986; Netz and Finger 2016; Waters and Leung 2013b; Weber 1978). International mobility may inadvertently put marginalized groups from welfare states, which offer stable pay-offs at home, into risky situations (Szelenyi 2006). Additionally, "international" degree programs at home may be perceived as inferior secondary choices, such as "immobile" international students in Hong Kong (Netz and Finger 2016; Waters and Leung 2013b).

Social class mediates students' expectations, with privileged students having broader life-course trajectories compared to their less privileged counterparts. On the one hand, the "field of the possibles" (Bourdieu 1984) is often smaller for those from less privileged backgrounds, who perceive returning home as the only option. On the other hand, greater financial and cultural resources often enable onward migration with previous life experiences, broadening the "field of the possibles" of the relatively privileged students within the middle class. In other words, pre-mobility access to forms of capital plays a role in mediating students' expectations (Mulvey 2022).

Mobility Capital

The concept of mobility capital underscores the experiential aspects of international student mobility, positioning it as a valuable form of capital that intersects with social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). Preferences for international education stem from mobility cultures and

the geographies of consumption (Mansvelt 2005), emphasizing the experiential goals of "going abroad" (Murphy-Lejeune 2003). These preferences prioritize experiences over traditional migration factors like finding a job and accessing higher income. The mobility capital, a sub-component of human capital, enables its possessor to enhance his or her skill because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad (Murphy-Lejeune 2003; J. Waters and Leung 2013b) over the subsequent life course for personal, social or career enhancement (Li et al. 1998; Findlay et al. 2006).

Mobility capital distinguishes a "migratory elite" characterized by linguistic proficiency, a cosmopolitan outlook, and willingness to move in pursuit of personal, social, and career enhancement (Findlay et al. 2006; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; J. Waters 2006; J. Waters and Leung 2013b). This capital is cumulative, with mobile students more likely to choose subsequent mobility, building up mobility capital over time (Findlay et al. 2006).

The migratory elites often intersect with other elite groups in a globalizing society, such as the "transnational capitalist class" (Sklair 2012) and "cosmopolitans" (Hannerz 1996). They are often referred to as the "new class, equipped with special knowledge" with credentials of decontextualized cultural capital which they can leave and take it with them without devaluing it (Hannerz 1996; J. Waters 2009). They often concern themselves with issues of global relevance rather than those of their native countries (Szelenyi 2006).

International Education as Institutionalized Cultural Capital

For middle-class families, international education options offer legitimate opportunities to reproduce their class status amid the expansion of higher education. As traditional avenues for vertical distinction diminish with higher education expansion, international educational mobility

is seen as a means of horizontal distinction, with foreign degrees and their credentials as rare and prestigious institutionalized cultural capital.

The desire to safeguard privilege and acquire “qualitatively different” qualifications as a medium of superior value often motivates the choice to study abroad (Lörz, Netz, and Quast 2016; Netz and Finger 2016; Reimer and Pollak 2010). Deploying global cultural capital through transnational social fields reproduces the class advantage of the middle class (Holloway, O’Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012).

Although it is still debated whether academic qualification is human capital and the definition of human capital and cultural capital varies by scholars, it is critical that the purpose of the students’ international mobility is the conversion and activation of their obtained capital, not the capital itself. Particularly for middle-class students pursuing education abroad, the institutionalized cultural capital of international qualifications holds symbolic value in addition to new knowledge and skills, especially when the domestic education system is influenced by international standards (Findlay et al. 2012).

Vertical mobility of international students is driven by the desire to acquire symbolic capital, which extends beyond specific competencies to “guarantee” a range of embodied characteristics which distinguish its bearer from non-possessors (J. Waters 2006b). These characteristics include both practical human capital and more symbolic cultural capital: from English language proficiency, (a North American) accent, to sense of humor, comportment, confidence, and creativity in the workplace and international settings (J. Waters and Leung 2013b).

English proficiency serves as a primary motivator for vertical mobility, functioning as a marker of (classed) difference (J. Waters and Leung 2013b). Despite the costs associated with studying abroad, students and their families are drawn to the potential human capital gains, particularly language fluency. Mastery of foreign languages, especially English, is highly valued, along with other competencies like self-confidence and flexibility. This emphasis on English acquisition often prompts Asian families to relocate to English-speaking countries (Chew 2010), albeit with implications that some scholars liken to neo-colonialism (Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015; J. Park and Bae 2009; J. Waters and Leung 2013b).

These competencies are instrumental in students' pursuit of international education, often tailored to their intended labor market destinations. However, contrary to human capital theory's anticipations, students often report their studying abroad motivations as mixed with cultural aspirations, such as extending life experience, often dominating economic motives (Baláž and Williams 2004; Findlay et al. 2006, 2012).

The pursuit of "distinction" and "world-class" education are often confused. Some students seek to study somewhere "different" to distinguish themselves from "stay-at-home" students. "Internationalness" lies at the core of these students who aspire to perform international living with international education. "Difference" is a necessary but not sufficient condition for international mobility. For those seeking a "world-class" university, the institution must be "recognized." The "elite list," or global rankings, is a key strategic tool for students regarding educational "value" and "difference" (Findlay et al. 2012). The pursuit of world-class education is intertwined with a mobility culture aspiring toward international career trajectories, the hallmark of the transnational capitalist class (Sklair 2012).

The pursuit of international education is further fueled by hierarchical differentiation among foreign degrees, prompting increased investment in elite "international" primary and secondary education (Xiang and Shen 2009). This investment reflects a prolonged route of conversion between financial and cultural capital, shaping students' educational trajectories and future prospects (J. Waters and Leung 2013b).

While symbolic capital holds significant allure for international students (Findlay et al. 2012), its translation into tangible outcomes remains uncertain. The discrepancy between expectations and reality underscores the complexity of international education motivations and outcomes, challenging positivist assumptions that overlook this gap.

Challenges of Convertibility

While much attention has been given to motivators and processes of ISM, post-graduation plans and trajectories remain relatively under-explored (Mulvey 2022). Bourdieu's theory of practice sheds light on the complexities of capital exchange across transnational fields post-graduation. The exchange of capital across transnational fields is neither automatic nor straightforward, but situated in governmental, economic, and social connections (F. Collins et al. 2017).

While students anticipate the portability of their cultural capital upon return, its valuation varies spatially and is shaped by entrenched structures of global inequality. How capital is evaluated within a social field depends on the "common sense" and rule of that particular field, and if an agent changes fields, their social position is likely to shift, as the "common sense" of the value of capital is usually nationally bounded (Bourdieu 2000). Therefore, the international students have to negotiate with the structures to convert their capital into profits (Mulvey 2022; I. L. Sin 2013; J. Waters 2009; P. Yang 2018).

For instance, the nature of the sending country's embeddedness within the global political economy shapes how capital is (de)valued across transnational fields (Mulvey 2022). Post-study capital accumulation and exchange are closely related to the process of capital valuation and revaluation across transnational spaces mediated by the labor mobility regime that privileges some racial markers and nationalities over others. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and nationality add complexity to the valuation and exchange of capital (I. L. Sin 2013).

Contrary to human capital theory's assumptions of the innate value of certain capital and its spatial transferability, academic credentials' symbolic potency varies geographically, necessitating a geographically sensitive account of cultural capital. The valuation of overseas degrees is nuanced, influenced by local contexts and labor market dynamics (J. Waters 2006b, 2009).

Importance of Social Capital

Social capital plays a pivotal role in converting cultural capital into economic capital, facilitating students' transition into local labor markets. International students often have class privileges, including parental social networks, leading to profitable career opportunities. The cultural capital obtained from studying abroad can amplify the impact of their social network and induce new types of social capital.

"Institutional social capital" (Brinton 2001) cultivated within universities serves as a vital resource for students as a ticket to join a cultural status group and their networks (or "social fields") (J. Waters 2006). Access to placement offices, professors, and alumni networks enhances students' opportunities, particularly in job placement, to capitalize on their international qualifications (J. Waters 2009; J. Waters and Leung 2013a). This focus on the location of social

capital clarifies and extends the literature on social capital's role in "status attainment" (Coleman 1988; Lin 2002; J. Waters and Leung 2013a).

The "corps, a social group that the school produces apparently *ex nihilo*, … take[s] the place of the family and family ties, … taking over the role played by nepotism and marital ties." The value of its social capital rests on the "real solidarity among the members of the group. … [W]henever a member of the group is nominated to a prestigious position, the social and symbolic capital of all the others is enhanced" (Bourdieu 1996, 285–86). The corps effect is more certain in highly ranked universities, fortified by recent developments in network technology (S. Lee and Brinton 1996; Hall 2011).

Gender and Family as Blindspots

While predominant focus has been on class dynamics and social reproduction mechanisms among the middle class through international education, the significance of gender and family dynamics has often been overshadowed in ISM studies (Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012). Gendered environments, which often disadvantage female students in terms of family formations, are often absent in discussions of international students' mobility and pathway choices.

For instance, middle-class students from Kazakhstan studying in the UK exhibited varying career preferences influenced by cultural norms, particularly the dominance of males and the expectation of heterosexual marriage. Consequently, the majority of students expressed a preference for the domestic labor market, where their acquired cultural capital from the UK could confer a positional advantage, while only a minority, mainly female students, aspired to international employment opportunities.

Domestic labor market preference is often found among those who can pivotally benefit from social capital. Privileged students rely on parental connections to secure positions domestically, while those lacking such networks, such as females and less privileged students, seek opportunities in multinational corporations and organizations that prioritize cultural capital over personal connections (Ono and Piper 2004). Their aim is to project culturally relevant signals to a broader audience beyond their immediate social circles, echoing findings from Rivera (2012; 2016).

Gender dynamics also influence career choices, with female students often strategically avoiding male-dominated sectors such as science and technology to secure future success. This divergent emphasis on employment search strategies underscores the necessity of moving beyond gender-neutral, class-based analyses of cultural capital conversion in international student mobility.

Furthermore, the locally contingent forms of heterosexuality reinforce distinct gender roles, making gender-neutral assessments of cultural capital impractical for female students. These women recognize that converting cultural capital into class advantage requires more than transnational social networks; it necessitates finding a suitable husband—a stark realization distinct from the experiences of their male counterparts.

The unequal gender distribution among international students (Findlay 2011) the gendered dynamics of academic mobility (Jöns 2011) are not just peculiar to this case. Studies on Japanese women undertaking MBAs in the US to avoid discrimination in their national labor market (Ono and Piper 2004) and the influence of gender discrimination on Chinese women's decision to study abroad (Xiang and Shen 2009) underscore the complexity of gender dynamics in international student mobility.

In conclusion, understanding the nuanced interplay between gender, cultural capital, and career aspirations is essential for a comprehensive analysis of international student mobility, as it sheds light on the diverse experiences and strategies employed by students navigating global educational landscapes.

Research Questions

Based on the literature review, this dissertation poses the following research questions:

1) How is international education institutionally formulated as a superior alternative to domestic options?
2) How do political, policy, and economic changes transform the opportunity structures for international students?
3) How do students strategize their educational choices and navigate the structures of domestic and international education?
4) What role do American education and its credential as institutionalized cultural capital play in shaping students' educational mobility and outcomes?
5) In what ways does international education offer new opportunities for social mobility and reproduction, particularly in a gendered environment?

By addressing these research questions, this dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex interplay between international education and social mobility, utilizing a Bourdieusian framework. By examining the empirical trends of student mobility and the factors influencing their strategies, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how international education serves as a medium for acquiring superior cultural capital and navigating changing opportunity structures. The project aspires to highlight the nuanced ways in which

international education impacts students' social mobility, particularly focusing on the gendered dimensions of this process. Through this exploration, the dissertation intends to bridge the gap in sociological research on international student mobility, offering new insights into the broader implications of globalization on education and social stratification

Chapter 4. Higher Education in Korea: Succession of Constraints and Opportunities

[This will require some work at the very front end – perhaps three or four substantial paragraphs – that connect that theoretical discussion of education and mobilities to the developmental state. This will clarify why it is important to consider the longer history of higher education in Korea within its shifting international/geopolitical context. If you do this, then the discussions of non-return/brain drain, gender differences, and the expansion of domestic higher education will make more sense to a reader.]

Environments Around Education

During Japanese Imperialist Rule: 1900 - 1945

Under Japanese Imperialist rule, the educational landscape in Korea was marked by profound disparities in access and opportunity. Primary education was the highest attainable level for most Koreans during this period, with even secondary education severely restricted for Koreans.

Primary and Secondary Education

Japan treated Korea (Chosŏn before its liberation in 1945) as a "colony" rather than extending the "homeland" policy applied to Taiwan. This distinction led to significant changes in the educational system. Following the Japan-Korea Protocol of August 1904, Japan attempted to reshape Chosŏn's modern education system to align with Japanese interests. Primary (普通學校; pot'ong hakkyo) or secondary education (高等普通學校; kodŭng bot'ong hakkyo) was designated as the terminal point of education for Koreans, contrasting with the Japanese educational system, which organized education as a means of social mobility. The Chosŏn

Education Law of August 1911 extended educational provision to secondary level to equip individuals for office and technical work. However, the policy heavily emphasized vocational training over academic pursuits, with no counterpart to the comprehensive Japanese system that culminated in the Imperial University (Takeshi 2008).

The traditional ruling classes, known as *yangban* (兩班)[1], resisted the Japanese modern education system, leading to low enrollment rates in public schools until the early 1920s. Enrollment rates began to rise gradually after the enactment of the Second Chosŏn Education Law in 1922. Unlike in Taiwan, where the decline of traditional schools coincided with the rise of modern education facilitated by cooperative elites, Korea's traditional education system—comprising mainly local village and private schools—endured due to the non-cooperative stance of the *yangban* class and the widespread anti-Japanese sentiment. Some of the non-cooperative traditional elites transformed local village schools into private institutions, often with assistance from Christian missionaries. This cohort later formed the vanguard of the patriotic enlightenment movement (愛國啓蒙運動; aeguk kyemong undong) (Takeshi 2008).

In February 1910, of the 2,397 modern schools in Chosŏn, only 156 were public schools, with the rest being private institutions, approximately one-third of which were operated by Christian missionaries. Consequently, the public school enrollment rate in Chosŏn remained

[1] The *Yangban* class dominated the Chosŏn (1392-1987) period as the Confucian aristocratic status group of Korean society. As a hereditary class, the *yangban* comprised the officialdom that ruled society by passing the state-administered examination, which served as a social selection mechanism by testing applicants' knowledge of Confucian classics. The *yangban* reigned over intellectual life and were the principal landowners who controlled the economy. While largely a closed caste, the values of the *yangban*—who saw themselves as scholars and moral leaders—gradually permeated throughout society. The *yangban* ideal of a refined, elite individual or family, whose virtue, moral excellence, and right to privilege were periodically reaffirmed through educational achievement, would remain a model for aspiring middle- and even lower-class Koreans (Seth 2002:12).

meager, standing at just 3.7% until 1920. However, by the early 1920s, this figure began to climb, reaching 13.0% in 1925 and further rising to 14.5% by 1930. While the establishment of the Second Chosŏn Education Law in 1922 led to a decline in local village schools, over 12,000 such institutions still existed in 1932, underscoring their continued influence. Many public schools predominantly catered to children from impoverished families (Takeshi 2008).

The implementation of the Second Chosŏn Education Law in 1922 marked a notable departure in Japan's approach, seeking to foster a more cooperative integration of Korea into its social fabric while introducing limited avenues for education-driven social mobility among the Chosŏn populace. Consequently, there was a significant uptick in enrollment rates among male students, soaring from 6.5% in 1920 to 22.1% by 1925. However, despite these adjustments, access to education remained heavily influenced by socioeconomic status, with progression to higher educational tiers largely reflecting class backgrounds (Takeshi 2008).

Higher Education System

During Japanese colonial rule, Keijo Imperial University (京城帝國大學; Kyŏngsŏng Jeguk Taehak) was the sole "university" in colonial Chosŏn, accompanied by several colleges, mirroring the Japanese mainland system on a smaller scale (J. Sin 2012). Established in 1926, Keijo Imperial University adhered to the College Law and the Imperial College Law of the Japanese mainland, aligning with the revised Chosŏn Education Law of 1921. Its primary purpose was to serve the Japanese residents in the Chosŏn peninsula, providing preferential treatment to Japanese descendants and granting them easier access to secondary and higher education. This resulted in a significant disparity in student composition, with Japanese students outnumbering Koreans and Taiwanese by more than 10:1 in secondary education and 20-30:1 in

higher education. Despite their overall lower academic achievements, Japanese students held elite positions in colonial Chosŏn society, while high-achieving Chosŏn students were excluded from these roles. This unfairness evoked both pride and resentment among Chosŏn students (O 2018, 192–200).

The Government-General implemented a dual higher education system, following the Japanese model: nurturing academic elites in the Imperial University while providing technical training in colleges. This system was inherently discriminatory and hierarchical, relegating all native-established higher education institutions to the status of colleges. Prestigious private institutions like Chosŏn Christian College and Ewha Womans College faced significant challenges in transitioning to university status, even after the enactment of the Imperial College Law in 1918.

This discriminatory and hierarchical structure persisted until 1945, when the Japanese state apparatus withdrew to the mainland after defeat, leaving a lasting impact on the higher education system in South Korea. Seoul National University (SNU), the direct successor of Keijo Imperial University, established its central status in the newly independent country, while other private universities remained at the periphery of the status hierarchy.

Before 1945, Chosŏn had 22 higher education institutions, with Keijo Imperial University at the forefront, hosting 1,600 faculty members and 8,000 students[2]. Despite these numbers, colonized Chosŏn's educational landscape remained dwarfed by that of the colonizer, Japan,

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[2] However, Pak (2011) presents an alternative number on the higher education landscape around liberation. He suggests that there were 19 higher education institutions, comprising 1,490 faculty members and 7,819 students. Around the establishment of the Korean government after USAMGIK in 1948, the educational landscape underwent a significant expansion, with the number of institutions increasing to 31. This expansion also saw a rise in the number of faculty members, totaling 1,265. Additionally, the student population surged to 24,000.

which by 1941 had a hierarchical higher education system composed of 7 Imperial Universities, 42 universities, and 220 colleges (Jung 2013).

Studying Abroad in Mainland Japan

The discriminatory educational environment on the Korean peninsula stimulated its peoples' aspiration to study abroad on the Japanese mainland. To Chosŏn people, Japan was not only the interpreter of the Western modern civilization, but also it was very hard to obtain a passport under the colonial rule, making Japan as the only realistic option (O 2018, 226-7). While Chosŏn state-sponsored student dispatch program continued on and off the years before the annexation in 1910, Chosŏn people continuously aspired to study in Japan. Before the Japanese Government-General of Chosŏn alleviated its student outflow policy in 1920 after the 1919 March 1st movement, the total number of incoming Chosŏn students were limited to 500 to 600 in the 1910s (O 2018, 230-2). Studying abroad to Japan was very popular in the 1930s that the total number of Chosŏn students in Japan was about 1/5 of Chosŏn students in Korea in its peak of 1939, implying the elitist nature of the higher education abroad.

Gendered Educational Opportunity

Educational opportunities for females were significantly more limited, a situation rooted in the Japanese education system. The Japanese Meiji Restoration government initiated modern education for females but did not extend it beyond primary schooling. Until the early Meiji period, educating daughters instead of arranging marriages was considered a disgrace. Female students attending normal schools were often associated with flaws such as being unattractive or poor. Consequently, Western missionaries led the development of female secondary education.

Newly established secondary education institutions for girls differed markedly from boys' middle schools, placing less emphasis on academic achievements. By naming these institutions girls' "high" schools (きゅうせいこうとうじょがっこう; 舊制高等女學校), the government signaled that this was the highest level of common education for girls, rather than a step toward higher education. The curriculum was discriminatory: girls' high schools offered only two-thirds of the lesson hours of boys' middle schools. "Housekeeping" and "sewing" were the second and third largest subjects after "Japanese" in the curriculum. Examinations were absent because, according to contemporary beliefs, "the period requires high caution for the physical and mental development" of females, who were deemed mentally weak and prone to fear, anxiety, vanity, and jealousy (O 2018, 158-166).

"The female students (じょがくせい; 女学生)", referring to students of girls' high schools and junior colleges, were socially constructed as a distinct group. The title implied both an affluent household background and superb intelligence, evoking both pride and admiration. Furthermore, the title signified "educated readers." These students were expected to become potential "good wives and wise mothers (けんぼりょうさい; 賢母良妻)" with modern knowledge of rational housekeeping, familiar with literature, theater, and music, unlike other women with only primary education, and "maidens" with romantic sensibility. This multifaceted image of the "female student" emerged around 1910 and became prominent in the 1920s and 1930s (O 2018, 166-7).

In the "female student culture," unlike their male counterparts in the "Old School (ゆうせいこうこう; 舊制高校; elite high school) culture," there was no emphasis on "hardworking"

for a “successful career” or a sense of identity as elites. Instead of the elitism of the Old School culture, the female student culture focused on an upper-class consumption culture. The ideal type was an “educated potential bride” with “modern education (e.g., piano lessons)” and “traditional hobbies (e.g., flower arrangement).” This ideal was ambivalent: on one hand, it was envied by peers who could not access secondary education; on the other hand, it was disparaged as superficial refinement intended only for marriage, unlike the “cultivated refinement” of Old School students. Thus, the term “literature maiden (ぶんがくしょうじょ; 文学少女)” often carried a contemptuous implication of superficiality and vanity (O 2018, 171-6).

In colonial Chosŏn, this gendered educational environment from mainland Japan led to inferior educational opportunities for females. The enrollment rate of indigenous Korean female students was very low. The primary level female education enrollment ratio was only 1% in 1919 and 6.1% in 1929. In 1920, there were 15 female middle schools educating about 3,000 female students, accounting for only 0.03% of the female population. Consequently, educated “modern girls” were exceptionally rare among the largely uneducated female population (E. Yoon 2020).

Postwar and Cold War: 1945-1979

USAMGIK: 1945-1948

Attempt to Nurture Korean Elites: Educational Aid Plan

After Japanese Imperialism retreated to the mainland as a consequence of the Second World War, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) assumed governance until 1948 and laid the groundwork for Korean students’ educational mobility to the United States. Despite the official split between North and South Korea in 1948 and the subsequent Korean War (1950-53), elite Korean students continued to pursue education in the US. This US-

focused outgoing mobility helped shape the structure of Korean academia within the Cold War context.

After Lieutenant General John R. Hodge assumed the role of military governor of South Korea immediately after securing the surrender of all Japanese forces south of the 38th parallel in August 15, 1945, the USAMGIK initially faced the need to nurture Korean elites to establish effective governance. Faced with a shortage of personnel to fill administrative roles of the gigantic status apparatus, Hodge sought to recruit Korean bureaucrats, including those who had served under Japanese rule. However, recognizing the need for a more robust cadre of leaders to serve for both USAMGIK and the emerging South Korean government, Hodge devised a plan to foster Korean elites through American education (J. Yoon 2012).

The initiative to educate Korean elites gained traction swiftly, with collaboration between American military officers, political advisers, and Korean intellectuals working in the Military Government. Their proposal for an Educational Aid Plan outlined various measures, including sending Korean students to study in the United States and inviting American technical experts and teachers. Especially, from the beginning, about half of the dispatch was planned to nurture Korean students with American education in long-term programs, rather than just reeducating them in American way for a short-term (Table 1). (J. Yoon 2012).

Table 1: Korean Student Dispatch Plan of USAMGIK.

	Planned Dispatch Numbers (Purpose)		
Government Bureau	**Long-Term (Education)**	**Short-Term (Training/Reeducation)**	**Total**
Academic Affairs	289	100	389
Health and Human Services	66	32	98
Agriculture and Commerce	16~26	-	0
Mining and Manufacturing	20	10	30
Treasury	15	12	27
Foreign Affairs	10	3	13
Personnel Administration	10	3	13
Total	**426~436**	**160**	**586~596**

SOURCE: J. Yoon. 2012. pp. 188-196.

The Struggle for Funding: “There’s no U.S. Government fund for Korean students.”

The USAMGIK aimed to reeducate the Korean population to foster democratic governance within the framework of the “Reeducation and Reorientation in Occupied Areas” policy established at the Potsdam Conference in 1945. However, budgetary constraints and bureaucratic complexities within the US government posed formidable challenges. Both the US Department of War and the State Department hesitated to allocate funds for this purpose, wary of perceptions of overt interference in Korean affairs. Consequently, for example, the dispatch of Korean doctors for training in the United States in October 1945 relied on financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation’s Health Committee rather than direct US government funding (J. Yoon 2012; Chang 2016).

The urgency to compete with the Soviet Union’s educational initiatives, including active exchange of university students and teachers, in North Korea further underscored the importance of securing funding for educational exchanges. Warning from President Truman’s special ambassador, Edwin W. Pauley, to counter potential Soviet influence with expanded educational

and technical aid made Truman revise US policy toward Korea. Funds from Government and Relief in Occupied Areas Appropriations budget were eventually allocated in 1948, but these funds were primarily used to invite American experts to Korea, and no Korean students or teachers were dispatched to the United States with US government funding during the 1948 fiscal year.

Facilitating Self-Funded Korean Students' Aspirations

In the absence of government-funded study abroad programs, the USAMGIK officially permitted privately-funded study abroad for Korean students starting in January 1947. Despite the lack of direct American government funding, the USAMGIK exerted significant control over the self-funded study abroad program. Requirements included securing admission to an American university, demonstrating financial stability, maintaining "ideological health," and abstaining from using US government funds. These stipulations were enforced through background checks and visa issuance procedures. Consequently, the USAMGIK's educational policies helped to create a new pro-American Christian elite, primarily drawn from the pro-Japanese colonial establishment, rather than fostering genuine democratization in the occupied territories.

Recognizing the challenges faced by self-funded Korean students, the USAMGIK established the Committee on Education and Training in the United States in April 1948 to streamline the fragmented study abroad preparation process. The committee provided guidance, English proficiency testing, academic assessments, and connections with American universities. For instance, the English Language School run by the USAMGIK played a vital role in enhancing English proficiency among Korean students. Over 2,600 students graduated from the institute, many of whom pursued further studies in the United States. During the USAMGIK administration, approximately 123 Korean students crossed the Pacific Ocean to study in the

United States, with the number soon reaching approximately 250 to 400 by Autumn 1949 (Chang 2016, 2021; J. Yoon 2013).

Establishment of Korean Academia: From Japanese Legacies to American Influence

The Evolution of Higher Education System

Higher education grew rapidly in the newly established nation of South Korea. Despite the disruption of the Korean War (1950-53), universities proliferated in Seoul and other urban areas. By 1954, the number of faculty members had surged to 3,965, instructing a student body of 62,388 across 51 institutions. Nationwide interest in higher education was driven by students seeking to avoid military conscription by attending colleges and private entrepreneurs establishing new universities to generate tuition revenues. This rapid expansion led to social concerns, often referred to disparagingly as a "national malady." However, the new Korean government lacked proactive higher education policies until the establishment of the University Establishment Standards in 1955, and American aid in higher education had not yet fully materialized (M. Kang 2013).

Beginning during the period of USAMGIK governance, the Korean state aimed to nurture science disciplines rather than liberal arts. However, the establishment of the "College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (文理科大學; Mulli Kwa Taehak)" at Seoul University (later becoming Seoul National University)[3], symbolized the rise of liberal arts education in the new

[3] The significance of liberal arts education traces back to the preparatory courses offered for Chosŏn students at Keijo Imperial University. Within the discriminatory Japanese education system, Chosŏn lacked equivalents to Japanese Old Schools—elite high schools offering college preparatory courses—having only High Public Schools (高等普通學校; kodŭng pot'ong hakkyo), which did not provide such preparatory pathways. Consequently, Keijo Imperial University, though a degraded Imperial University within the colonial hierarchy, offered preparatory courses for admitted Chosŏn students before they commenced their major studies. In contrast to Tokyo Imperial University, which had maintained separate Colleges of Literature and (Natural) Science since 1897, Keijo Imperial University only had a College of Law and Literature and a College of Medicine, aimed at producing elites for state

nation-state. This new college embodied the aspirations of Korean academic elites for post-colonial higher education, yet it remained tethered to the colonial system and imagination due to their Japanese higher education background (Jung 2013; K. Pak 2011).

The limited capacity to build a new academia originated from the scarcity of elites in both the state and academia. Scholars often assumed dual roles as both bureaucrats and academics. For instance, economists played pivotal roles in research branches of the Bank of Korea and Korea Development Bank, while doctors established the Department of Health and designed hygiene policies for the postwar country. This fluidity not only cemented their elite status but also empowered them to actively shape governance through their specialized knowledge, which they acquired in Japan and the United States (J. Chung 2015; J. Hong 2018; Dongwon Lee 2020b).

Concurrent academic position holding was also prevalent because higher education institutions rapidly expanded to accommodate the growing student population. Many academics, often low paid, taught across multiple institutions simultaneously, a practice that alleviated staffing constraints of a nascent academia. However, it eventually raised concerns regarding teaching quality, sparking discontent among students and fueling protests throughout the 1950s (J. Chung 2015).

Japanese Legacies in Academia

The evolution of Korean academia during the 1950s witnessed a complex interplay between continuity and rupture with the Japanese knowledge system. The transition from Japanese to

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governance rather than cultivating professional scholars as in mainland Japan, in addition to the college preparatory courses. Consequently, following liberation in 1945, Seoul University established the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences as a bastion of liberal arts education (Jung 2013).

American influence profoundly reshaped Korean academia. The embrace of the American academic model was driven not only by perceptions of American excellence but also by pragmatic considerations to establish a new knowledge-producing framework in the burgeoning nation (I. Kim 2018; J. Chung 2015; J. Park 2013).

This transformative shift underscored significant challenges within the Korean intellectual landscape. For instance, Korean intellectuals trained in the Japanese system not only possessed fluency in Japanese but also struggled with the transition to using Korean as the medium of instruction (J. Chung 2015). This linguistic barrier hindered their ability to effectively produce, process, and analyze data about Korean society. Moreover, the newborn educational system grappled with numerous limitations, including the dearth of qualified higher education institutions, faculty personnel, and operational infrastructure (I. Kim 2018).

Despite these hurdles, the nation's fervent pursuit of education led to the adoption of familiar Japanese academic evaluation systems, perpetuating a culture of rote memorization and knowledge regurgitation. Even prestigious institutions like SNU, renowned for its composition of national elites, relied heavily on traditional teaching methods, with faculty delivering lectures via chalkboards and students dictating notes directly from the board (J. Hong 2018). This mirrored the pre-modern state examination system, which distributed official positions based on applicants' knowledge of Confucian classics. Similarly, in the new modern education system, students' scores in admission tests were critical for achieving upward mobility.

Shifting Paradigms about Studying Abroad in the United States

The embrace of American academic credentials, epitomized by the Ph.D., surged in Korea. This preference for American higher education marks a stark departure from earlier times. During the

Japanese Imperial period, Korean students seeking education in the United States were frequently dismissed as "ignorant and incompetent people" (J. Chung 2015; Sonpyo Hong 2001). However, the abrupt end of Japanese Imperialism and the swift transition to USAMGIK ushered in a significant power shift, favoring American-educated Koreans.

This preference for American education mirrored societal views of American culture as progressive and advanced, cultivating a strong inclination towards studying abroad. Pursuing American degrees became synonymous with academic advancement. Therefore, domestic university education was sometimes regarded merely as a stepping stone towards graduate studies in the United States. This trend reached its zenith in the late 1960s, coinciding with discussions on reinvigorating Korean graduate education and the gradual phase-out of the Old Doctorate (舊制博士; Kujebaksa) system (Min 2001).

The introduction of the American knowledge system was not just symbolic, but also practical in education and research methodologies. Minnesota Project recipients leveraged their newly acquired knowledge and notably departed from traditional approaches. For instance, first empirical social survey of rural families, needed by foreign aid agencies, was conducted in 1958 by a group of sociologists trained in the American academia, departing from abstract and conceptual theoretical Japanese-style discussions (I. Kim 2018; Shim 2018).

The nationwide popularity of the American education also influenced existing academics. Some faculty members with Japanese educational backgrounds, for example, sought short-term training through American government's Smith-Mundt Programs. Over time, they came to be regarded as equals to those with American degrees. Leveraging their educational experiences,

they actively engaged in international exchanges with American faculties and even assumed leadership roles in alumni associations of American institutions in Korea (Shin 1983).

Navigating Aid and Influence: Postwar Korean Academic Development

The Korean academic landscape further developed against the backdrop of the Cold War, especially in the wake of the Korean War and the following aid competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.[4] South Korea, in addition to military assistance, received approximately 2.55 billion dollars of economic aid from 1945 to 1959, constituting about 28.8% of Asian economic aid provided by the United States, the largest share among Asian countries (Sung-yoo Hong 1965). This assistance served dual purposes: maintaining defense capabilities and stabilizing the economy to ensure regime stability. The South Korean economy heavily relied on American aid, with assistance comprising 13-14% of the GNP from 1957 to 1961 (Sung-yoo Hong 1965) and over 40% of the Korean government's annual income structure in the 1950s (Table 2) (B. Lee 2015).

[4] During the early Cold War, Korea's strategic importance as the front line between the US and the Soviet Union was unexpectedly highlighted through the translation of George Orwell's "Animal Farm." Originally published in the UK in 1945, "Animal Farm" was translated for the first time globally in October 1948 by a public relations officer under the US military government in South Korea. This translated version omitted Orwell's critique of Soviet totalitarianism from a democratic socialist perspective, instead transforming the original text into a critique of Soviet and North Korean communism. This political appropriation of Orwell's work is known to have been promoted by US intelligence agencies and the State Department. For more details, see Chang (2011) and Ahn (2012).

Table 2: Trends in the Structure of Revenue Sources of the South Korean Government and the Amount of Foreign Aid.

Type (%)	1953	1954	1955	1957	1958	1959	1960	Average
Tax	44.1	40.8	33.8	27.9	31.5	48.1	52.4	39.8%
Sales Profit	8.6	4.6	3.1	3.9	4.7	5.1	4.8	5.0%
Administrative Income	1.6	1.8	0.2	-	-	-	-	1.2%
Other Income	13.5	4.4	6.1	3.3	3.9	3.1	5.1	5.6%
National Bonds	15.1	12.9	10.3	10.8	5.8	1.6	2.5	8.4%
Provisional funds (Aid to Korea)	17.1	35.5	46.5	54.1	54	42.1	35.2	40.6%
in Million Dollars	*194*	*154*	*237*	*383*	*321*	*222*	*245*	250.9

SOURCE: Kong. 2017.

To neutralize the economic aid's militaristic undertone, American governmental aid was strategically deployed to private foundations to culturally integrate South Korea to the "democratic" side. Consequently, several foundations, including the Asia Foundation, Korea-America Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation, participated in aid efforts, each attempting to carve out specialized roles within the aid landscape despite overlaps in their spheres of influence (B. Lee 2015).

While the educational aid constituted only about 1-2% of the overall assistance, it held considerable importance in the context of the devastation wrought by the Korean War (Brazinsky 2007; C. Kim 2003; I. Kong 2017). Among the $35 million allocated for educational assistance, approximately one-third was dedicated to universities, underscoring their significance in the broader developmental agenda. SNU received around 60% of this assistance, while other national institutions also benefited from the remaining funds (J. Chung 2015; C. Kim 2003).

Diverse Study Abroad Initiatives: Pathways to Pro-American Elites

The United States pursued multiple avenues to cultivate pro-American elites in Korea as strong ties between the two nations. These pathways included state programs like the International

Cooperation Administration (ICA) Technical Assistance Program, academic exchanges such as the Smith-Mundt Program and Fulbright Program, and civil society fostering facilitated by the US Information System and private foundations (K. Kim 2017). While the educational exchange programs focused on individual training and degree programs, the ICA-funded initiatives aimed at university-level enhancements, such as the Washington Project and the Minnesota Project. Also, while the Smith-Mundt Program, overseen by the US Information Agency, emphasized humanities and social sciences, the ICA primarily focused on technical fields such as sciences, engineering, technology, and management.

Educational aid programs prioritized practical training to address specific needs in the recipient country. For instance, during the USAMGIK era, agricultural education received considerable emphasis, with students sent to American state universities known for their agricultural expertise. Similarly, the USAMGIK facilitated the training of Korean doctors in public health graduate schools in the United States, addressing critical health challenges in the fledgling nation (Dongwon Lee 2020b). Also, the Minnesota Project concentrated on disciplines like agriculture, veterinary science, engineering, medicine, and public administration, providing tailored education to address pressing societal needs[5] (I. Kong 2017).

ICA-Led Projects

The ICA Technical Aid Program worked along with Truman administration's Point Four project, in which the US Department of State aimed at achieving "low modernization"[6] in

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[5] Agriculture was specialized in state universities with the tradition of the land-grant university in the United States (Jung 2013).
[6] For example, as illustrated in Garlitz (2008), the United States sought to achieve "low modernization" in countries like Iran and Turkey through its Point Four project, which focused on providing education and technical support. "High modernization," on the other hand, entails projects and industries that require large-scale capital investment over a period of 5 to 7 years. For further details, refer to Garlitz (2008) and Han (2019).

underdeveloped countries, focusing on sectors like agriculture, health hygiene, and basic education, partnering with entities such as UN agencies, private foundations, philanthropic institutions like CARE, and universities (Han 2019). Despite the continuing criticism of its inefficiency, the contracts with private entities to achieve low modernization in underdeveloped countries operated until the 1970s.

American aid in Northeastern Asia followed a form of "regional division of labor/industry." American universities contracted with Japanese counterparts for productivity and labor-management relations improvements and provided technical support to agriculture and manufacturing sectors in Taiwan. In contrast, Korea's focus was on education and public administration, receiving the least support in terms of economic development (P. Lee 2013). The ICA arranged direct contracts between American universities and Korean government to train new personnel and retrain existing professionals instead of direct involvement to save their budgets (Han 2019). For instance, between 1955 and 1961, over eight thousand individuals received training in areas such as mining, manufacturing, public administration, agriculture, and education through the ICA Program (Sung-yoo Hong 1965). Additionally, the United States Operations Mission (USOM) sent numerous Korean economic bureaucrats to the United States for specialized training to pave the way for Korea's economic development (B. Lee 2015).

ICA also implanted the American university system by retraining incumbent Korean faculty. For instance, the Minnesota Project, spanning from 1955 to 1961, dispatched 225 faculty members from SNU to study at the University of Minnesota's graduate program and return to enhance the overall education system (Myoungjin Kim 2010; Seung-eun Kim 2019). The university-level contracts were repeated in cases such as Peabody College at Vanderbilt University to train teachers and professors in discipline of education (Ji-yeon Kim 2012) and

University of Washington to establish Department of Business Management in Yonsei University and Korea University (J. Chung 2015; J. Lee 2020).[7]

However, as evidenced by the University of Oregon's case, the interests of the United States as the assisting authority and Korea as the recipient diverged. While Korea sought diverse advanced knowledge and technology for rapid economic recovery and development, the United States guided Korea's development within its own low modernization parameters (Han 2019). Such differences in goals recurred in other US-Korea collaborations throughout the 1950s, such as the "Korea-US nuclear agreement" (Dongwon Lee 2020a).

Educational Exchange Programs

The Smith-Mundt Program: A Cold War Educational Exchange of the 1950s

Amid the onset of the Cold War, the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 (PL 402) served as the cornerstone of America's educational aid to various nations, including South Korea, throughout the 1950s. Despite its noble aim of fostering mutual understanding between nations, the educational exchange was not as systematic or extensive and its underlying purpose was intertwined with the American government's foreign policy objectives (Chang 2022a; Heo 2017).

[7] In Yonsei, a Korean professor assisted the dispatched American faculty's class as a translator. Upon the American professor's departure, the Korean professor took over the class, integrating the knowledge gained from translation. This process resulted in the creation of translated materials, which were subsequently compiled and published as textbooks (J. Chung 2015).

Table 3: 1950-1960 Smith-Mundt Exchange Visitors between South Korea and the United States.

	Student		**Teacher**		**Lecturer/Researcher**		**Leader**		**Specialist**		**Total**
	Korea	**US**	**Korea**	**US**	**Korea**	**US**	**Korea**	**US**	**Korea**	**US**	
1950	11		13		7		4		2	6	43
1951	1										1
1952					8		10		6		24
1953					12		13				25
1954	14				3	1	6		7	4	35
1955	22		2		9	1	23		38		95
1956	14				2		11		14		41
1957	21		3		3	2	26		14	3	72
1958	19						12		20		51
1959	31						28				59
1960	20				2	1	11		10	2	46
Total	**153**	**0**	**18**	**0**	**46**	**5**	**144**	**0**	**111**	**15**	**492**

SOURCE: Chang 2022a.

Despite original plan of dispatching 500 Korean participants from April 1949, only 33 individuals were selected after rigorous ideological screening by both the State Department and the Korean government. The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 further impeded the program's progress, with only 176 Koreans being dispatched to the US during the war (Chang 2022a). Over the next decade, approximately 500 Koreans and Americans participated in the Smith-Mundt Program (Table 3), primarily funded and supported by the American government.[8] The Smith-Mundt participants, mainly composed of elite students, political figures, and media reporters, differed from self-funded Korean international students and ICA training program participants in many ways, such as their occupations, affiliations with American institutions, and their status and influence upon returning to Korea. The status difference further amplified with generous financial and administrative support from the US government.

[8] As delineated in (Heo 2003), the American Information Service and its Embassy pursued equitable development across provinces, a stance not necessarily shared by the Korean government or civil society, including intellectuals. This debate resurfaced within the Fulbright Commission during the 1960s and 1970s. However, Korean delegates, predominantly from Seoul National University, opposed American proposals, citing reasons such as the importance of "choice" and "concentration."

Its Scholar Program sent Korean students and young scholars to American universities for graduate studies to later replace senior scholars trained in the Japanese academic system. Its Non-Academic Programs also sent congresspersons (as leaders) and newspaper reporters (as specialists) to cultivate pro-American sentiments, influence governmental policies, and amplify its propaganda efforts within the Korean media (Cha 2014, 2018). However, the Smith-Mundt program was often unstable due to budgetary constraints and shifts in US national priorities (Chang 2022a).

The Fulbright Program of the 1960s and 1970s

The Fulbright Agreement stood as another cornerstone of the US's educational exchange policy during the Cold War. Despite the initial agreement ratification on April 28th, 1950, the disagreement over funding, which required Korean government's contribution, delayed the agreement's execution until President Rhee's resignation following the 4.19 civil revolution in April 1960 (Chang 2022a; Heo 2017). The Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961 integrated Fulbright and Smith-Mundt programs into a cohesive framework, reflecting Kennedy administration policies to encompass economic development, political democracy, anti-communism, and mutual understanding, with a malleable focus aligned with US foreign policy and Korean circumstances (Chang 2022a). Unlike the Smith-Mundt Program of the 1950s, which emphasized leadership and specialist exchanges, the Fulbright Program prioritized scholarly exchanges in higher education.

Hence, the program strategically focused on engaging university students and young intellectuals, recognizing their growing political influence post the 1960 civil revolution that led to the ousting of President Rhee. The objective was to cultivate acceptance of American policies

and ideals among this demographic, thereby mitigating the potential for radicalization stemming from dissatisfaction with the existing regime. The selection criteria for Fulbrighters were rigorous, encompassing stringent financial assurances and English proficiency. As a result, current university faculty were preferred in the selection process because of their likelihood of returning to their home institutions and reduced risk of non-compliance (Chang 2022b).

Despite facing financial crises in the early 1970s[9] and encountering diminishing global trends in Fulbright programs (Figure 6), the Fulbright Program remained highly effective throughout the 1960s and 1970s, leaving a profound impact on Korean academia and society (Figure 7). For instance, by the mid-1960s, American-educated faculty members in elite Korean universities accounted for significant proportions in prestigious institutions such as Seoul National University (25%), Korea University (41%), Yonsei University (45%), and Ewha Womans University (38%) (Chang 2022b). Two decades later, in 1983, Korean professors holding American doctoral degrees constituted 21.9% of all professors nationwide, with even higher proportions of 38.3% and 36.4% in humanities and social sciences, respectively (Chang 2022a).

[9] While the Korean government had not contributed to operating the program, apart from the PL 480 counterpart fund, it began allocating a small sum from the early 1970s when the program faced financial crisis. This reluctance to prioritize the social science-focused Fulbright program reflects the regime's emphasis on fostering scientific technologies for economic development (Chang 2022b).

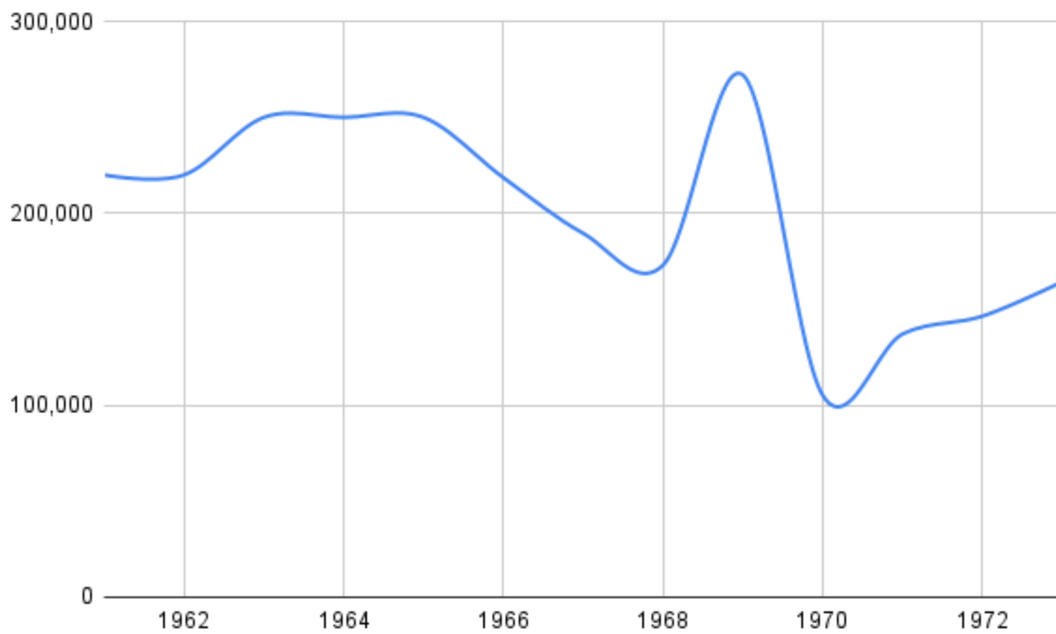


Figure 6: United States Governmental Budget on Fulbright Program, 1961-1973. SOURCE: Chang 2022b.

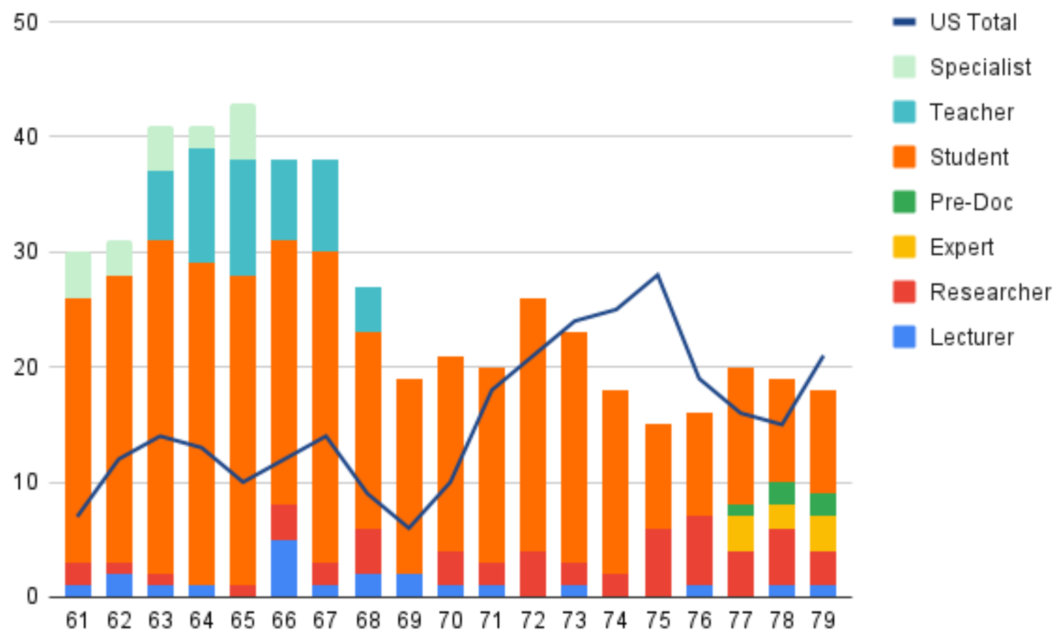


Figure 7: The Number of Fulbright Recipients in Korea and the United States, 1961-1979. SOURCE: Chang 2022b.

Note: The US Total (Blue Line) represents the total number of Americans who came to Korea through the Fulbright program. Other categories, such as Specialist, represent the number of Korean recipients in those specific Fulbright categories. The bar represents the total number of Korean Fulbrighters each year.

Table 4: Korean Fulbright Recipients by Field, 1961-1979.

Field	Number
Social Sciences	129
Natural Sciences	78
Education	59
Humanities	57
Engineering	19
Arts	12
Medical Sciences	5
Agriculture	2
Total	**361**

SOURCE: Chang 2022b.

The impact and significance of educational exchange programs, such as the Fulbright Program and the Smith-Mundt Program, experienced a decline from the 1980s onward, influenced by various factors. For instance, significant changes occurred with the revision of study abroad-related laws in 1981, including the abolishment of state-administered overseas study qualification examinations. Moreover, South Korea underwent substantial economic development during this period, and the signing of the R.O.K.-US Cultural Exchange Agreement further reshaped the landscape.

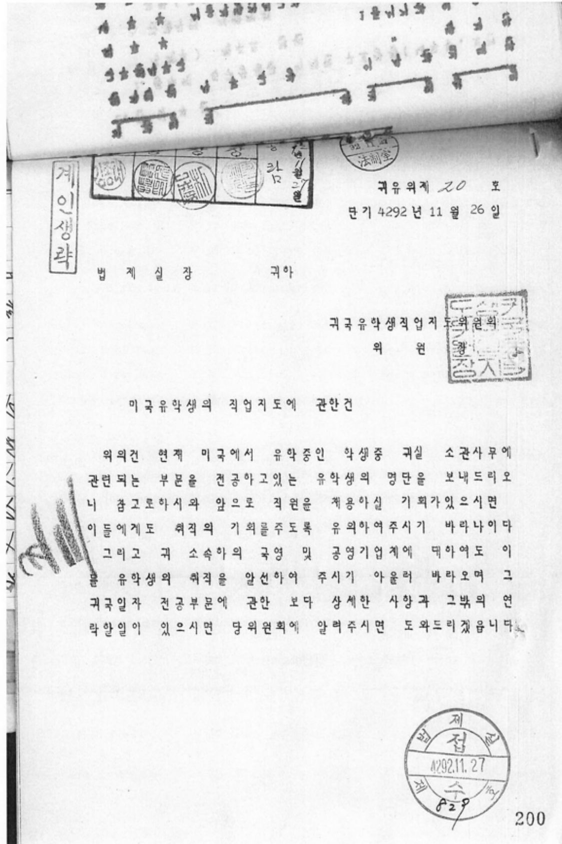
The Problem of Non-Return

From 1947 to 1960, approximately 5,000 Korean students ventured to the United States for higher education. However, roughly 1,800 individuals did not return to Korea upon completing their studies. This phenomenon of non-return was multifaceted, influenced by factors such as

extended academic pursuits, evasion of military service, and the better job prospects in the United States amidst economic uncertainties in nascent Korea (Chang 2021).

Although both Korean and American authorities tried to facilitate repatriation, the challenge persisted. For example, when the Korean government ordered its first cohort of 35 government-funded students to return in 1951, 21 defied this directive, and less than 10% returned voluntarily. US Department of State targeted two, who also received grant from the State Department, among them to send back to Korea, but they absconded to evade repatriation and subsequently established residence in the United States (Chang 2021).

Handling privately-funded students' non-return was even more challenging. Their motivations often diverged from those of state-sponsored or selected international students, who typically exhibited a clear intention to return home. Their reliance on private funding implied that, despite their class privileges enabling their mobility to the US, they would obtain less prestigious academic credentials. These credentials would not be as beneficial as those of the state-sponsored group upon their return to Korea, which was still grappling with impoverished economic conditions and a lack of sufficient opportunities. Such different anticipations about the "practical" returns from their "physical" returns led them to avoid economic assistance from the US government which would later mandate return to Korea. Even free return itineraries offer from the American government did not change their intent to stay to achieve their "American Dream" (Chang 2021).



계인생략

귀유위제 20 호

단기 4292 년 11 월 26 일

법 제 실 장 귀하

귀국유학생직업지도위원회

위 원 장

미국유학생의 직업지도에 관한건

위의건 현재 미국에서 유학중인 학생중 귀실 소관사무에 관련되는 부문을 전공하고있는 유학생의 명단을 보내드리오니 참고로하시와 앞으로 직원을 채용하실 기회가있으시면 이들에게도 취직의 기회를주도록 유의하여주시기 바라나이다

그리고 귀 소속하의 국영 및 공영기업체에 대하여도 이들 유학생의 취직을 알선하여 주시기 아울러 바라오며 그 귀국일자 전공부문에 관한 보다 상세한 사항과 그밖의 연락할일이 있으시면 당위원회에 알려주시면 도와드리겠읍니다

No. 20

November 26th, 1958

To: Director of Legislative Affairs

From: Director of Committee for Career Guidance of Returning Overseas Students

Regarding Career Guidance for Students Studying in the United States

We are sending you a list of students currently studying in the United States who are majoring in fields related to the responsibilities of your office. Please refer to this list and, if you have any opportunities to hire staff in the future, consider offering these students employment opportunities. Additionally, we kindly ask for your assistance in facilitating employment for these students within the state-owned and public enterprises affiliated with your organization. If you need more detailed information about their return dates, major fields of study, or if you have any other matters to discuss, please inform our committee, and we will be happy to assist you.

Received by Office of Legislative Affairs

November 27th, 1958

No. 829

Figure 8: Korean Government's Employment Service to Returning Students (left).

Figure 9: Translation of Korean Government's Employment Service to Returning Students (right).

SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1958. DA0853061

Government

Name	Sex	Age	School	Address
Cha,	M	36	Claremont Grad. School	
Chang,	M	32	Ohio State Univ.	154 W. 8th Ave., Columbus, Ohio
Chi,	M	25	Fordham Univ.	Grad. Schl. of Arts & Sci., N. Y. C.
Chu,	F	26	Univ. of Texas	Austin, Tex.
Chugn,	M	28	Miami Univ.	Oxford, Ohio
Han,	M	22	Franklin & Marshall Col.	Buchanan Hall, Lancaster, Pa.
Hong	M	22	Indiana Central Col.	Indianapolis, Ind.
Huh,	M	26	Boston Univ.	866 Beacon St., Boston, [illegible]
Kim,	M	22	Miami Univ.	310 W. High, Oxford, Ohio
Kim,	M	28	New York Univ.	225 W. 255th St., New York 71, N. Y.
Kim,	M	22	Boston Univ.	131 Sumner St., Newton Center, Mass.
Kim,	M	22	Boston Univ.	108 Jersey St., Boston 15, Mass.
Kim,	M	34	New York Univ.	International house, Riv-verside Drive, N. Y., N.Y.
Kim,	M	26	Trinity Univ.	San Antonil, Tex.
Ko,	M	27	Harpur College	Endicott, N. Y.
Kwun,	M	36	No. Texas state Col.	Denton, Tex.
Min,	M	22	Southern Ill. Univ.	303 Thompson Point #3, Carbondale, Ill. (G)

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Secretary

Name	Sex	Age	School	Address
Chen,	F	25	D. C. Teachers Col.	1507 Irving St. Nw, Washington, D. C.
Chun,	F	39	Armstrong College	Berkeley, Calif.
Hyun,	M	23	Pan American School	1103 W. Frankling St., Richmond, Va.
In,	F	28	Healds Business Col.	
Kim,	F	24	Flora MacDonald Col. North Carolina	3612 N. Racine Ave., Chicago 13, Ill.
Kim,	F	33	Healds Business College	
Kim,	F	24	Bethany Nazarene	Bethany, Okla.
Lee,	F	23	Southern State Teachers College	Springfield, S. C.
Lee,	F	29	San Francisco State Col.	San Francisco, Calif.
Suh,	F	22	Southern State Teacher's College	Springfield, S. D.

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Figure 10: List of Korean Government's Employment Service to Returning Students 1 (left).
Figure 11: List of Korean Government's Employment Service to Returning Students 2 (right).
SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1958. DA0853061

The absence of stringent tracking mechanisms by both Korean and American government, even in the case of Smith-Mundt Program participants, allowed many Korean students to settle as immigrants. For instance, after the Second World War, American hospitals often facilitated the acquisition of green cards and citizenship for Korean doctors to retain their services, with minimal intervention from the US Department of State. Furthermore, the enactment of new immigration laws in December 1965 further facilitated the settlement of non-returnees as official immigrants. Despite the brain drain concerns, Korean state efforts to address employment

challenges upon return (Figures 8-11) yielded limited success[10], particularly for those lacking prestigious credentials. The Korean government could only “request” non-returnees’ return or invalidate their passports and visas (Chang 2021).

American Engagement in Korean Elites

The US influence on South Korea in the mid-20th century extended beyond direct support for overseas study as part of its Cold War cultural strategy. US Information Service (USIS) was the cornerstone of American influence, coordinating the state interest with civil society support. As a core strategy of the global cultural Cold War, USIS propaganda aimed to showcase American superiority over the Soviet Union, emphasizing advancements in science, technology, and education (Kook 2023; I. Chung 2003; Heo 2003).

Originating from the USAMGIK era, there was always some tension between the US interest to support consecutive military dictatorships in Korea to maintain its “democratic” alliance, including Japan, against the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea and the American project of supporting democratization and modernization of Korea with its civil society. The tension between USIS and the Korean government gradually evolved amidst a backdrop of dependence on American governmental and private entities to address economic imperatives.[11] Beyond instilling a pro-American cultural perception among the masses, USIS’s cultural engagement aimed to cultivate an additional 5,000 pro-American opinion leaders in higher education, including professors and student leaders (Heo 2017).

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[10] With the employment rate among domestic college graduates already languishing below 30%, the governmental efforts to secure employment for returnees with “better credentials” faced considerable challenges (Chang 2021).
[11] For instance, the tension between USIS and the Korean government initially stemmed from strong nationalism, anti-communism, and the authoritarian rule of President Rhee. These dynamics underwent significant transformations in the 1960s with the rise of the military regime, which was originally unfriendly toward the United States (An 2019).

The engagement started with supporting native elites to realize their "American Dream." A group of intellectuals, led by the "student soldier generation,"[12] gathered around a magazine like The New Yorker, *Sasanggye (Field of Thoughts)*, to spearhead discussions on modernization and democracy in civil society in the 1950s and 1960s. The "student soldier generation", predominantly hailing from the Northwest region of North Korea and rooted in Christianity, developed a unique elite consciousness, backed by their unique resistance and education experiences, distinguishing them from those pro-Japanese figures in Seoul. In stark contrast to the authoritarian regime group, mostly composed of army officers with collaboration pasts, the "student soldier generation" legitimately epitomized the values of the Korean Right with their anti-communist nationalism. Therefore, with a unique amalgamation of anti-Japanese and anti-communist sentiment and pro-American aspirations, they actively utilized their influence to shape the trajectory of Korean politics and society and aspired to emulate the American modernization model (Hwang 2017; K. Kim 2017).

While not schooled in the American educational system, their legitimacy and social standing positioned them as pivotal allies in the American endeavors. Therefore, the USIS bolstered the *Sasanggye* group by providing crucial material resources for publication to disseminate American values and ideologies throughout Korean society. For instance, Jun-yop Kim, a leading figure of the group, could develop the Asia Institute at Korea University with the support and networks with American private foundations (M. Chung 2014).

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[12] Coined by (K. Kim 2017), the term "student soldier generation" delineates a significant cohort of elite intellectuals in mid-20th-century Korea. Notably, they were the first Korean cohort to complete their modern higher education during the waning years of Japanese Imperialism. At that time, approximately 5,000 Korean students were enrolled in higher education institutions, including professional colleges. As emphasized by (Hwang 2017), of these students, 4,385 were conscripted as student soldiers by Japan towards the end of its rule, compelled to participate in World War II.

At the same time, USIS provided crucial information about American education and universities, addressing a pressing need among international students of the era. This unintended consequence positioned the USIS as a valuable resource, offering official brochures and insights into American colleges, thereby aiding aspirants in their pursuit of educational opportunities abroad.

Private foundations, such as the Asia Foundation, Korea-America Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation, also played pivotal roles in nurturing intellectual elites and civil society leaders (M. Chung 2014; B. Lee 2016; Soonjin Lee 2016; Shim 2018; Steinberg 2017). In addition to diverse financial supports, spanning from anti-communist cultural events (J. Jeong 2016b; B. Lee 2015) to accommodating leading figures' visit to the US (Y. Kong 2016; Y. Park 2016), the private foundations also supported academic projects, such as Korea-America Foundation establishing a new Social Work department in Seoul National University by dispatching a group of elite Korean students in an American grad school (I. Kong 2017), like the government-funded Washington Project, and Asia Foundation establishing a research center in Seoul (J. Jeong 2016a).

Institutional Environments of International Student Mobility

The overall institutional environments of international mobility of Korean students, a mixture of global geopolitical landscapes and local nation- and academic-building contexts, not only gradually evolved to provide more outgoing opportunities for the aspiring students but also still entailed several obstacles, some intentionally imposed by the state for regulation, which hindered the rapid expansion of outgoing mobility. Compared to the widening domestic and international higher education opportunities introduced by the New Military Regime (Shin'gunbu) in the 1980s, the Korean state policies surrounding the Korean international students were not fully

articulated until the late 1970s. This was not much different between the democratic regime in the 1950s and the Park Chung Hee military regime in the 1960s and the 1970s. The state imposed several administrative steps, from academic qualifications to ideological compliance, to regulate the outgoing mobility of its academic elite students.

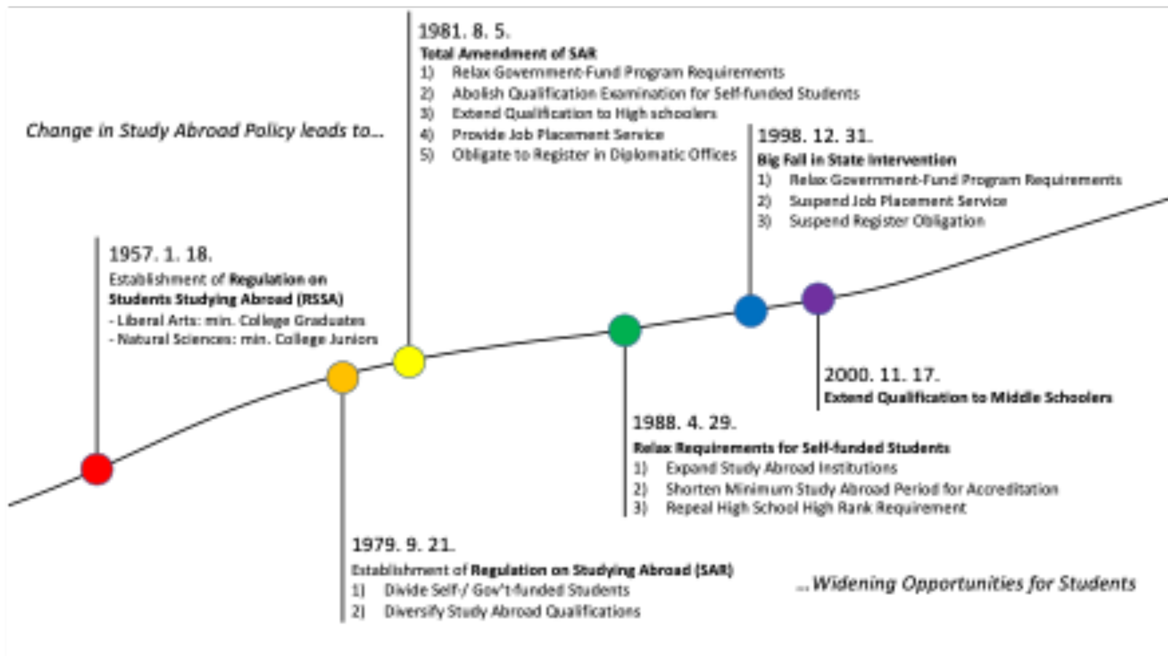


Figure 12: Timeline of Major Policy Changes regarding Korean Students Abroad. SOURCE: Korean Law Information Center. https://www.law.go.kr

Policy Changes

The Korean government's initial efforts to regulate the international mobility of its students began in July 1949 with President Syngman Rhee's interest. The government publicly set the qualification criteria for studying abroad to select highly qualified candidates with at least a middle school education, proficiency in English, financial stability, and good conduct, implying a certain class background to assume the international education. Especially, sons of wealthy families preferred studying abroad to the US as it became legal escape from military conscription. Considering the limited capacity and non-return problem of the earlier generation of Korean students who headed to the US during the USAMGIK, President Rhee wanted the outgoing Korean students to represent Korea with high academic qualification with "sound" ideological orientation. The ongoing political conflicts with North Korea, militarized as the Korean War, made the South Korean government highly sensitive to its students' anti-government activities in the United States. This intent was led into stipulating the purpose of the studying abroad not for individual advancement but for revival and reconstruction of South Korea in the legislation. Students also had to obtain permit from the South Korean government to study abroad and must return promptly after completing their studies.

In January 1957, the first official regulation on Korean students' international education was established as the "Regulations on Overseas Students Studying Abroad" (ROSSA; Haeoe Yuhak Saeng E Kwanhan Kyujŏng), representing a comprehensive improvement over previous directives, orders, and regulations. The regulation restricted eligibility of international education to college graduates[13] to enhance the quality of overseas students and address governmental

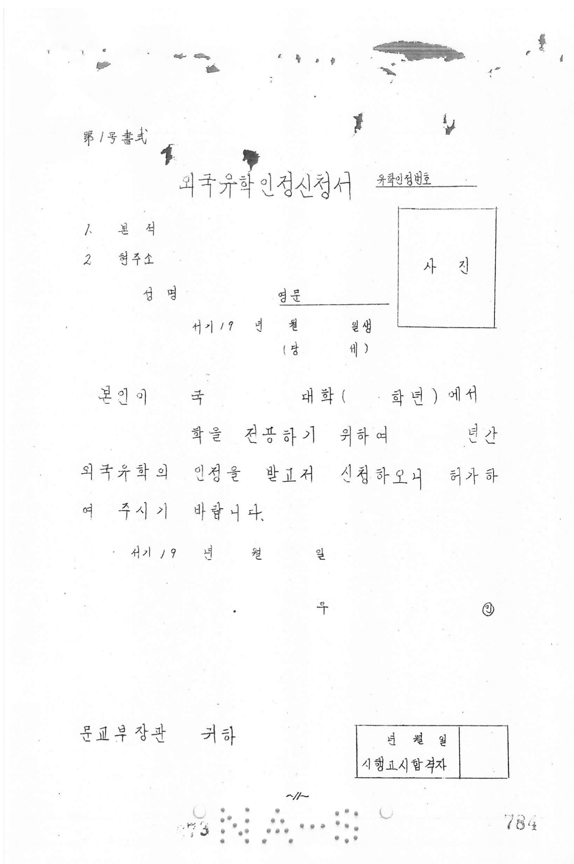
[13] Applicants were restricted to college graduates for humanities studies, college students who had completed at least two years for sciences due to lack of laboratory facilities in domestic universities, and high school graduates who were currently serving in the army.

foreign currency concerns. In the enactment of ROSSA, academic achievement became pivotal in determining students' eligibility. For example, the government reinforced its oversight the following year, aimed at strengthening qualifications for the Overseas Study Qualification Examination (OSQE). Notably, a GPA requirement was introduced, necessitating applicants to maintain a minimum grade of B (80 out of 100) in their college majors.

The Park Chung Hee coup of 1961 disrupted the mobility of Korean elite students to the US until 1963 (Korean Embassy in the United States 1970, 14). However, as the military regime stabilized, a comprehensive amendment was introduced to the ROSSA on November 1964 by facilitating easier access to the OSQE, extending application eligibility to graduates from Junior Colleges and Natural Sciences Vocational Schools.

Overseas Study Qualification Examination

The state-administered Overseas Study Qualification Examination (OSQE) was mandatory for anyone seeking to study abroad. Academically qualified students, mostly college graduates, had to pass the exam to apply for passports with state accreditation (Figures 13-16). The exam assessed applicants' knowledge of Korean history and English to ensure their academic preparedness. Additionally, several documents were required, including an application form, resume, and statement of purpose (Figures 17-18). Exemption from the exam necessitated additional documents, such as a university diploma, official transcript, and letter of workplace recommendation (Figures 19-22). Like the admissions process for SNU and the Higher Civil Service Examination, the successful candidate list was physically posted in front of the central government building in downtown Seoul. Students who failed the test had to repeat it annually to obtain their passports.



第1号書式

외국유학인정신청서 유학인정번호

1. 본적
2. 현주소

성명 영문

서기19 년 월 일생

(방 세)

사진

본인이 국 대학(학년)에서 학을 전공하기 위하여 년간 외국유학의 인정을 받고저 신청하오니 허가하여 주시기 바랍니다.

서기19 년 월 일

우 ㊞

문교부장관 귀하

년 월 일 시행고시합격자	

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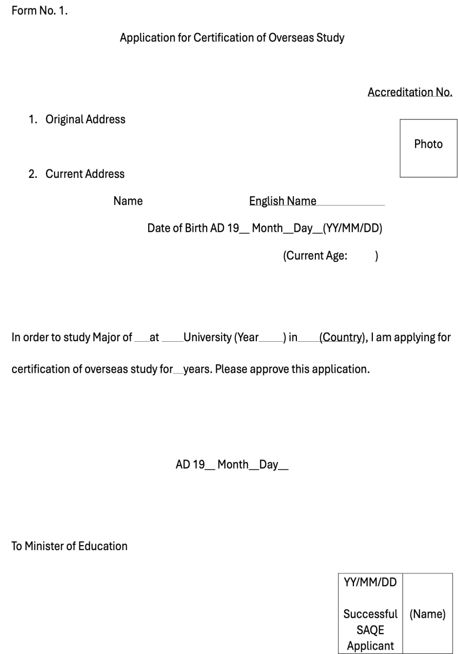

Form No. 1.

Application for Certification of Overseas Study

Accreditation No.

1. Original Address
2. Current Address

Photo

Name English Name

Date of Birth AD 19__ Month__Day__(YY/MM/DD)

(Current Age:)

In order to study Major of ___at ____University (Year____) in____(Country), I am applying for certification of overseas study for__years. Please approve this application.

AD 19__ Month__Day__

To Minister of Education

YY/MM/DD Successful SAQE Applicant	(Name)

Figure 13: Application for Certification of Overseas Study 1 (left).
Figure 14: Translation of Application for Certification of Overseas Study 1 (right).
SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1964. DA0067035.

-12-

이 력 사 항

년 월 일	이 력 사 항

연 구 계 획

연구부문		연구사항		소요기일

785

Career Details

YY/MM/DD	Career Details

Research Plan

Research Topic		Research Details		Duration

Figure 15: Application for Certification of Overseas Study 2 (left).

Figure 16: Translation of Application for Certification of Overseas Study 2 (right).

SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1964. DA0067035.

第2號書式

NO ________

응 시 원 서

사 진 (풀로부치고 추천자 계인을 찍을것)	본 적 : 주 소 : 성 명 : 남·여 생년월일 : 서기19 년 월 일생 유학희망국명 국 응시할외국어 어 전공학과목 학과

금번 해외 유학생(선발) 자격고시에 응시코저 별지 서류를 구비하여 지원하나이다

서기196 년 월 일

지원자 : ㊞

해외유학생전형위원회 위원장 귀하.

이 력 서

1. 서기19 년 월 일 : 고등학교졸업
1. 서기19 년 월 일 : 대학교 대학 학과입학
1. 서기19 년 월 일 : 대학교 대학 과 년재학(졸업)
1. 서기19 년 월 일 :
1. 서기19 년 월 일 :

응 시 표

번호 ( )

성명 :

생년월일 : 서기19 년 월 일

사진 첨부

※서기19 년 월 일 시행 해외유학생자격(선발) 고시에서 국사, 외국어 과목을 합격하였음

응시수험번호 ( )

※ 본란은 학교 당국에서 기재할것

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Form No. 2.

Examination Application Form

No.

Photo (with Personal Seal)	1. Original Address 2. Current Address Name Gender Male/Female Date of Birth AD 19__ Month__Day__(YY/MM/DD) Country of Study: Foreign Language: Major:

I hereby apply for the overseas student (selection) qualification examination this time, with the attached documents.

AD 19__ Month__Day__(YY/MM/DD)

Applicant:

To Chairman of the Overseas Student Selection Committee

Career Information

1. AD 19__ Month__Day__(YY/MM/DD) : Graduated from __ High School
2. AD 19__ Month__Day__(YY/MM/DD) : Matriculated to __ University
3. AD 19__ Month__Day__(YY/MM/DD) : Enrolled in (Graduated from) __ University __ Department

Examination Ticket

No:

Name:

Date of Birth: AD 19__ Month__Day__(YY/MM/DD)

Passed the subjects of National History and Foreign Language in the overseas student qualification (selection) examination held on [Year] [Month] [Day].

Examination No.: ______

- This section is to be filled out by the school authorities.

Figure 17: Application Documents for Overseas Study Qualification Examination (left).

Figure 18: Translation of Application Documents for Overseas Study Qualification Examination (right).

SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1964. DA0067035.

-14-

추 천 서

성 명 : (서기19 년 월 일생)
본 적 :
주 소 :

상기인은 대학교 대학 과 학년 졸업(재학)생으로써 품행이 방정하고 사상이 온건하고 연구심이 강하므로 해외 유학생으로 최적임자임을 인정하여 추천하나이다.

서기 19 년 월 일

추천자 성명 :
추천자 주소 :
추천자 직명 :

해외유학생 전형 위원회 위원장 귀하.

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Recommendation Letter

Name: (Date of Birth: AD 19__ Month __ Day __)

Original Address:

Current Address:

The above individual is a graduate (current student) of [__ University] [__ Department/Major] [Year __] and has displayed commendable conduct, moderate ideology, and a strong commitment to studies. Therefore, I hereby recommend this individual as an overseas student.

Date: Year (AD) 19__ Month __ Day __

Recommender's Name:

Recommender's Address:

Recommender's Occupation:

To Chairman of the Overseas Student Selection Committee

Figure 19: Recommendation Letter for Overseas Student Qualification Examination (left).

Figure 20: Translation of Recommendation Letter for Overseas Student Qualification Examination (right).

SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1964. DA0067035.

第3号書式

해외유학생자격고시면제원서

본 적

현주소 (전화 번)

성 명 (한 문) 남여

생년월일 서기19 년 월 일생

사진

본인은 국 대학 과

학년에 유학하고저 별첨과 같이 서류를 갖추어 고시과목면제 (전과목 국사, 외국어)를 신청하오니 심의하여주시기 바랍니다.

기

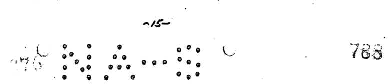
면제요청과목

서기196 년 월 일

청 인 ㊞

문교부장관 귀하

-15-



788

Form No. 3.

Overseas Student Qualification Examination Exemption Application Form

Original Address:

Current Address: (Phone Number)

Name: (In Chinese Characters) Male / Female

Date of Birth: Year (AD) 19__ Month __ Day __

This individual wishes to study in [country] [university] [department/major].
The applicant has completed the necessary documentation and requests exemption from the qualification examination in the specified subjects (entire subject list, national language, foreign language).

Requested Subjects for Exemption

Year (AD) 19__ Month __ Day __

Applicant:

To Minister of Education

Figure 21: Overseas Student Qualification Examination Exemption Application Form (left).

Figure 22: Translation of Overseas Student Qualification Examination Exemption Application Form (right).

SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1964. DA0067035.

Eligibility for the OSQE became more stringent with the introduction of an "anti-communist orientation." After North Korea's failed attempt to assassinate Park Chung Hee in 1968, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) added the anti-communist orientation as a required part of the OSQE application process. This was justified "due to the numerous instances where overseas students have damaged the nation's prestige due to their weak sense of patriotism and anti-communism" (National Archives of Korea 1968). The three-day orientation included one day at the Ministry of Education, covering the basics of overseas education, and two days of anti-communist training at the KCIA's center in its Namsan Office, which was notorious for torture.

This "national security training" continued until the early 1990s, although its administration eventually shifted to a non-violent state apparatus.

Economic Constraints

The outflow of dollars from private individuals studying abroad had a direct impact on the foreign currency reserves of the Korean government and the overall national economy, particularly during a time when postwar economic rehabilitation heavily relied on American assistance. Consequently, the government implemented strict regulations on the amount of remittance permitted for tuition and living expenses, initially capping it at $60 per month[14]. These stringent regulations on official foreign currency exchange forced outgoing students to resort to acquiring dollars through the black market in Seoul.

The combination of exchange restrictions and soaring tuition fees, which often ranged between $1,000 to $2,000, placed considerable financial strain on international students. To make ends meet, many resorted to precarious and low-paying illegal part-time jobs, despite limitations imposed by their student visas in the United States (Chang 2021).

The Developmental State and Its Demise: 1980-2023

Study abroad policy started to change significantly towards the end of the Park Chung Hee regime. On September 1979, the Regulation on Overseas Study (ROS; Kugoe Yuhag E Kwanhan Kyujŏng) replaced the ROSSA, following the establishment of the government-funded study abroad program in 1977. The ROS officially introduced distinctions between self- and

[14] Over time, this limit saw gradual increases to $100, $140, and eventually $200, yet remained under governmental control. This cap was relatively modest for the 1950s, especially when compared to the benefits offered by the GI Bill signed by President FDR in 1944. Under the GI Bill, recipients received $500 annually for tuition along with a monthly living stipend ranging from $65 to $90 (Khan Academy, n.d.).

government-funded study abroad programs, continuously relaxing the qualifications for self-sponsored students.

The ROS underwent a comprehensive amendment to align with the government's policy shift towards broadening opportunities for overseas education in 1981 (Ministry of Justice 1981). Self-funded students were now exempted from governmental qualification examinations and eligibility was expanded to high-achieving high school graduates. This separation was led into substantial growth of self-funded Korean students.[15] And the government stipulated job placement services for returning students.

Job Placement Service

The governmental job placement service operated within a bureaucratic structure to facilitate employment for returning students. For example, Mr. Kim, a political science ABD from USC, was recommended by the Korean consul general in LA (Figures 23-24). His request was forwarded by the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Culture and Public Information and the Ministry of Unification, according to his preference. His first preference for hiring as a public information officer was realized with the Ministry's offer to hire him as an Expert Advisor, a position that would transition to a higher official role upon the completion of his doctoral degree (National Archives of Korea 1975).

[15] Since its inception, the ratio of government-funded Korean students to self-funded Korean students has never exceeded 1.6%, reaching its peak in 1979. However, since 1992, this ratio has consistently remained below 0.1%.

추 천 서

1. 성 명 : 김
   성 별 : 남
   생년월일 : 1945.
2. 유학기관 : 남가주 대학 (이력서 참조)
3. 전공분야 : 정치학
   학 위 : 박사과정 수료
   분 야 : 국가정책 분석 외교 및 군사전략
4. 희망기관, 또는 분야
   가. 문공부 (공보관)
   나. 국토 통일원
   다. 중앙정보부
   라. 기타 정부기관 및 학교
5. 유학 체재 기간 : 1973. 3 - 현재까지 (4년간)
6. 현 주 소 : 916 S. Normandie Ave. #10 L. A. Ca. 90006
7. 국내연락자 : 김 (부)
   주소 : 서울 성동구 금호동 4가 1210번지 (55-2995)

상기 김 는 별첨 이력서에 나타난것과 마찬가지로 현재 U.S.C 에서 (남가주 대학) 박사과정을 밟고 있으며 멀지 않은 장래에 과정을 끝마치고 귀국하여 조국을 위해 봉사할것이라 하며, 특히 전공분야인 국가정책 분석과 외교 군사 전략을 공부하였기 때문에 정부 기관에서 일하고 싶다하니 적절한 관계부처에 취업알선토록 조치해 주시기 바라며, 적극 추천하는 바입니다.

주라성 총영사

Recommendation Letter

1. Name: Kim ( )

   Gender: Male

   Date of Birth: 1945. ( ). ( ).
2. Overseas Education Institution: USC (refer to resume)
3. Major: Political Science

   Academic Degree: All Bur Dissertation

   Research Area: Analysis of national policy and military strategy
4. Desired Organization or Field:
   a. Ministry of Culture and Public Information
   b. Ministry of National Unification
   c. Central Intelligence Agency
   d. Other government agencies and schools
5. Duration of Overseas Education: March 1973 - Present (4 years)
6. Current Address: 916 S. Normandie Ave. #10, L.A. CA 90006
7. Domestic Contact: Kim ( ) (Father)
   - Address: 1210-4 Geumho-dong 4-ga, Seongdong-gu, Seoul (55-2995)

The above person, Kim ( ), has been studying in the doctoral program at USC, and he has demonstrated strong dedication and academic performance. Particularly due to his study in national policy analysis and military strategy, please consider offering employment to this individual in relevant government agencies or related institutions, as their qualifications and dedication make them a strong candidate.

Consul General in LA

Figure 23: Recommendation Letter for Governmental Job Placement Service (left).

Figure 24: Translation of Recommendation Letter for Governmental Job Placement Service (right).

SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1975. DA1043973

However, not all returning students secured government-placed jobs on their first try. The government would then recirculate the list of returning Korean students to various agencies, including governmental ministries, national and private universities, research institutes, and private companies (Figures 25-26). If a specific agency rejected the recommendation, the hiring service ended without further assistance (National Archives of Korea 1976).

해외유학생 국내취업희망자중 미취업자 명단

1977. 10. 10 현재

Unemployed Overseas Students Who Intend to Return to Korea

As of 1977. 10. 10

Name	Country of Education	Field	Credential	Intended Employment Organization	Official Document No.
Kang ( )	Japan	Chemistry	Ph.D.	SNU	
Oh ( )	USA	Law	MA	Court, SNU, Nat'l Universities	
Moon ( )	Sweden	Sociology	Ph.D.	SNU, Yonsei, Korea, Ewha, Chungang, SKK, ...	
Hong ( )	USA	Business	MA	Private Firm	
Seo ( )	USA	Business	MA	Financial Firm; Trading Company; Gov't Agency	
...	...	...	...	...	...
Cheong ( )	USA	Accounting	MA	Economic Planning Board, Ministry of Finance, Commerce, Agricultural	
...	...	...	...	...	...
Kang ( )	Japan	Physics	ABD	In Progress	
Kim ( )	USA	Public Administration	Ph.D.	SNU, Dongkuk, Korea, Yonsei, ... , MoF, MoC, MoA, ...	
...	...	...	...	...	...
...	...	...	...	...	...
Lee ( )	Japan	Marine	Ph.D.	SNU, ... (Nat'l Univs.); Yonsei, Korea, ... (Private Univs.); Marine Gov't Agencies	
Kim ( )	USA	Policy Analysis	ABD	Gov't Agencies; SNU, ... (Nat'l Univs.); Yonsei, Korea, ... (Private Univs.);	

Figure 25: Unemployed Overseas Students Who Intent to Return to Korea (left).

Figure 26: Translation of Unemployed Overseas Students Who Intent to Return to Korea (right).

SOURCE: National Archives of Korea. 1975. DA1043973.

The expansion of international study opportunities coincided with a reduction in regulations on citizens' international mobility, starting in 1983 and culminating in their repeal in 1989. Democratization in 1987 led to significant relaxation of regulations for self-funded students in 1988 (Ministry of Justice 1988). For instance, the academic achievement criteria for eligibility for self-funded study abroad were finally repealed. The relaxation continued into the 1990s, and by the 21st century, eligibility for self-sponsorship extended to middle schoolers, reflecting the prevalence of early overseas education among middle-class families.

Government Sponsorship on its Elite Students

The Korean government's financial support for its overseas students began somewhat late, starting in the late 1970s. Initially, Korean-government-funded students predominantly pursued studies in the United States, focusing mainly on science and technology fields, particularly evident around the late 1980s (Figure 27; orange line).[16] However, since then, the gap between the total number of Korean-government-funded students (dark blue line) and those studying in the United States has noticeably widened compared to earlier cohorts.

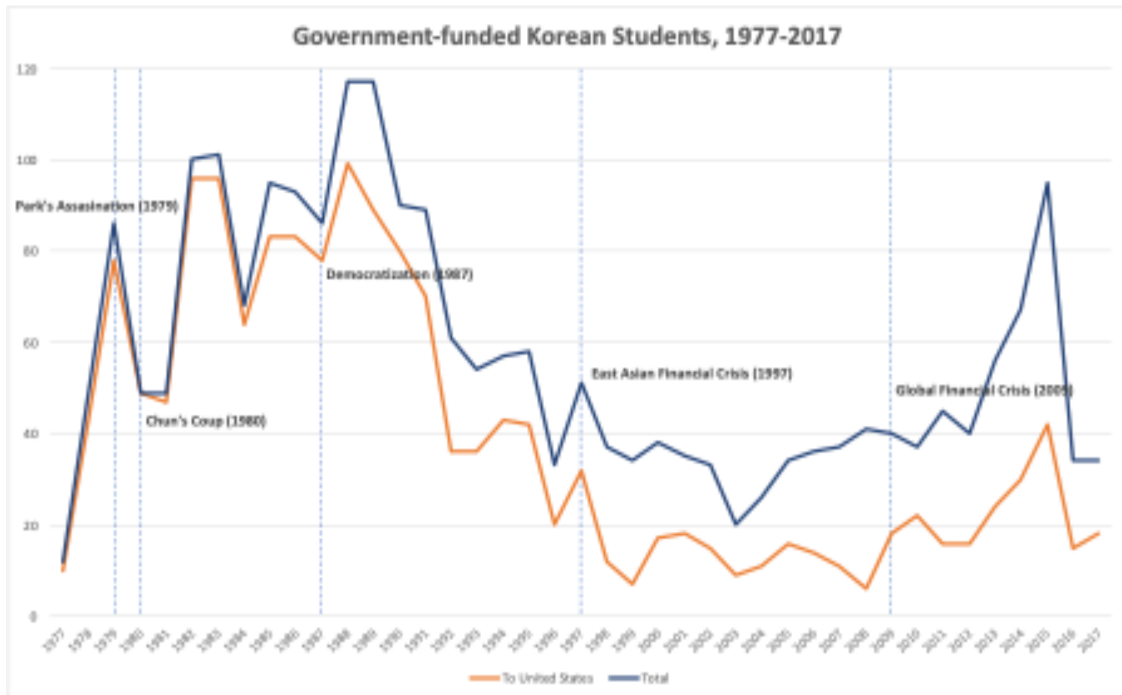


Figure 27: Government-funded Korean Students, 1977-2017.

SOURCE: The Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars.
https://kagsguest.wordpress.com

[16] Major political events, such as Park Chung Hee's assassination in 1979, and economic events, like the East Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, are highlighted for reference in Figure 27. However, it is important to note that these events are not necessarily causally linked to the fluctuating number of Korean-government-funded students.

Concurrently, government control on state-sponsored students continuously relaxed. For instance, military service completion and GPA maintenance duty were repealed in the 1980s. The final cessation of state's elite training with international education came with relaxing compulsory service duty for government scholarship in 1997 and repealing altogether in 2007 (Ministry of Justice 1997).[17] In December 1997, the Korean Ministry of Education officially transferred its management authority of government sponsorship to a government-affiliated organization. The state further stepped back from policing students abroad in 1999 by repealing age eligibility limit of 30 for the government scholarship and confiscation clause for non-returnees and halting its job placement obligations for returnees.

Rise of Korean Higher Education and its Gendered Contest System, 1945-2023

The fluctuations in student enrollment ratios in Korea over the years (Figure 28) illustrate the country's contest mobility system. Korea underwent a sequence of gradual educational expansions, starting with primary education in the 1950s, followed by secondary education in the 1960s and 1970s, and culminating in higher education in the 1980s. Educational opportunities expanded within a system that sorted individuals at the gate of every educational level. International education, strategically placed at the pinnacle of higher education by the state, served as the final guarantor of a winner's superior capability. This system ensured that individuals not only triumphed in repeated admission contests but also acquired credentials from prestigious institutions. In this section, I will briefly examine the rise of Korean education in

[17] Article 30: The Minister of Education can require the Korean Government Scholarship Program for Study Overseas recipients serve for a designated institution for the period of study overseas after his/her return. (July 23rd, 1994) -> The Minister of Education can require the Korean Government Scholarship Program for Study Overseas recipients serve for a designated institution for the period of study overseas after the end of the period of study overseas. (March 27th, 1997)

terms of the development of its contest mobility system and its impact on Korean students' educational mobility (in a gendered way).

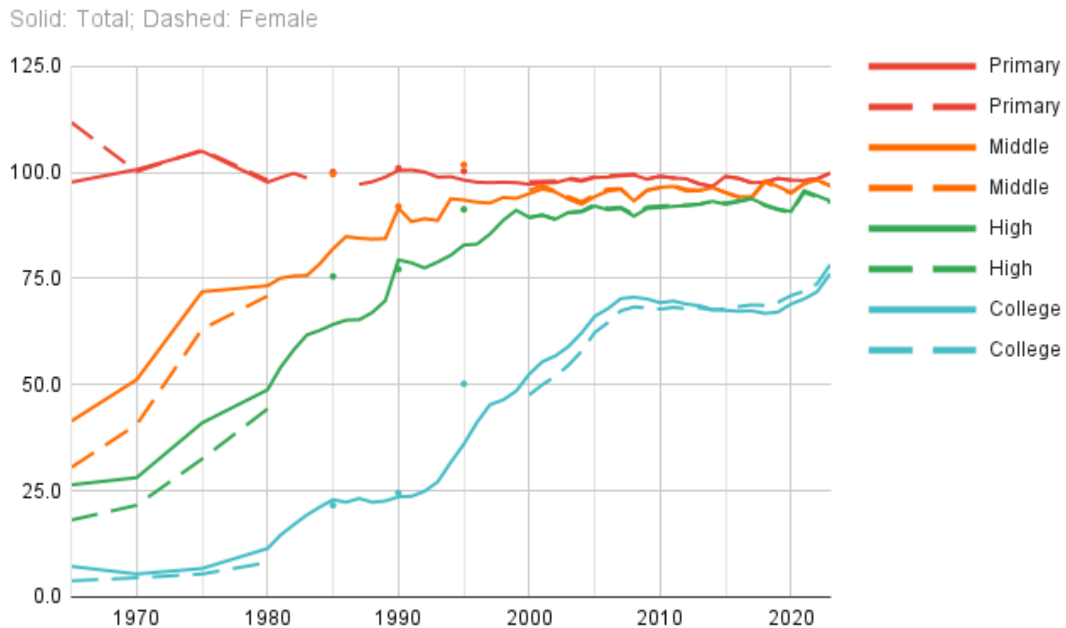


Figure 28: Total Enrollment Ratio of Students in Korea, 1965-2023.
SOURCE: Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea, 1962-2023.

Education as a Contest Mobility System

The contest mobility system for secondary education began to take shape in the late 1950s once primary education became universalized, reflecting the convergence of social pressures and economic constraints. Once firmly established, this system became the prevailing norm in Korea beyond secondary education, dictating the path to higher levels of education for students across the nation.

The societal pressure generated by the influx of baby boomers (born between 1955 and 1963) seeking higher levels of education intensified competition for admission to elite secondary schools in the 1960s. Elite high schools were tiered based on the number of students they sent to

SNU each year. This nation- and region-wide tiering of educational institutions reflected the Japanese origins of the Korean educational system. For instance, several elite high schools in Seoul, known for their production of SNU students, were often referred to as "the five public highs" and "the five private highs." Outside of Seoul, elite high schools in city centers, established during the Japanese Imperial era, also became known as local flagships for sending their graduates to SNU. Consequently, competition for admission to these high schools became intense. Despite several consecutive adjustments to the examination system, societal educational fervor did not wane (H. Lee 2012, 229). To alleviate this pressure and legitimize the regime, the Park Chung Hee junta abolished middle school entrance exams in 1969 and high school entrance exams in 1974.

Gender Disparities in Education: Shaping Educational Trajectories

Despite consistent expansion, the educational contest mobility system in Korea exhibited notable gender disparities. Until the late 1950s, primary schooling was the terminal education for the majority of women, while men had the option to pursue higher levels of education. Consequently, there was a persistent imbalance in educational enrollment, with more men than women at all levels of educational institutions. Households exhibited a clear preference for educating sons over daughters,[18] influenced by patriarchal ideologies and financial constraints on their children's education (I. Lee 2003).[19]

The landscape of "education fever" (Seth 2002) remained consistent throughout the 1960s. During this period, secondary education for women was associated with a certain level of

[18] Refer to the survey reported in Lee (2003:307), revealing the discriminatory gender preferences among the most liberal residents of Seoul.
[19] Subsequently, self-financing has become a cornerstone of Korean education, despite the nation's enduring thirst for formal education. Additional insights on this are provided by Kim (2022).

privilege. Female students in middle and high school were often referred to as "female pupils (여학생; yŏhaksaeng)[20]," marking a notable departure from the majority of elementary-educated young women who were predominantly engaged in labor-intensive roles in rural fields and urban sweatshops (M. Jeong 2019).

The 1970s witnessed a rapid rise in the number of women attaining secondary education, accompanied by a decrease in the proportion of women without formal education (Figure 29). While the male trajectories implied meritocratic competition within the contest mobility system, the educational pathways for females were often understood as reflections of their class backgrounds, enabling their arrival at high school with less academic emphasis rather than joining the workforce. Consequently, female students' educational trajectories were polarized (M. Jeong 2019, 144). For instance, between 1970 and 1980, while the proportion of women with secondary education doubled (from 14% to 29.7%), women with only primary education still constituted the majority (39.4%), with a significantly large group of uneducated women (26.9%) (Figure 29).

[20] The social construction of "female pupil" in contemporary Korea bears a resemblance to the early 20th-century Japanese concept of the same term, "じょがくせい (女學生)".

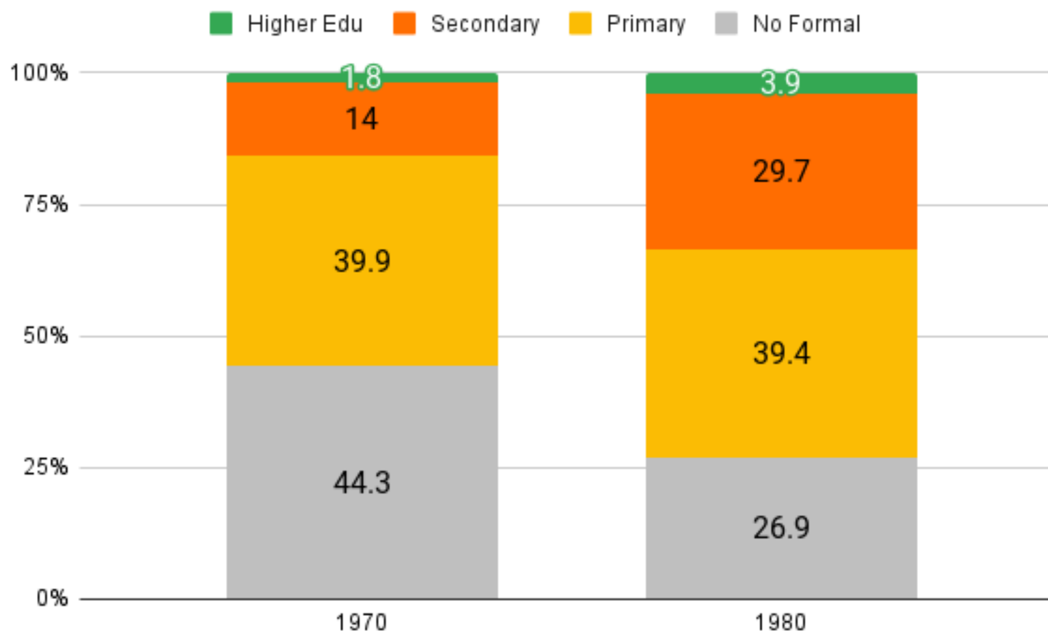


Figure 29: Composition of Female Education in Korea, 1970 and 1980. SOURCE: Yoon. 2020, 7.

Like male high schools, female high schools had their own elite "public highs" and "private highs," but the implications of the pathways to these elite high schools were different. Elite middle and high schools for female students functioned as pseudo-elevator schools, historically rooted in the Japanese educational system. Due to their rarity, attending prominent girls' schools was often equated with studying abroad or pursuing graduate studies, frequently described as "studying abroad in urban cities" (Y. Lee 2002, 166–67).

Furthermore, male and female students were not only separated in their schools but also received different curricula. For example, secondary and higher education in the 1970s were predominantly geared towards producing male engineers, aligning with the government's national mission of "building the nation with science and technology" to bolster the heavy chemical industry (E. Yoon 2020). In contrast, female students were steered towards segregated

“female courses,” such as sewing and cosmetics, which were perceived as useful for domestic responsibilities and provided a source of inexpensive labor for light industries. Even at the college level, female students were directed to major in arts, education, and literature, leading them to a disadvantage in the labor market until the 1970s (H. Lee 2012, 234).

Until the 1970s, high school was predominantly the terminal education for female students, even among well-off families (Figure 29). These families socially pressured female students to perform traditional gender roles as “wise mothers and good wives” instead of joining the workforce. Labor participation implied a humble family background that necessitated self-support (I. Lee 2003; Y. Lee 2004; Jae-in Kim et al. 2001; M. Jeong 2019; E. Yoon 2020).

Higher Education and Gendered Contest Mobility

Higher education in Korea, which started with only 1.0% of males and a mere 0.1% of females after liberation from Japanese rule, continuously grew through the late 20th century (Jae-in Kim et al. 2001). However, it remained a privilege of the elite until the 1970s. The Korean government tightly regulated college admissions quotas, specifying the number of seats for each department in each university. Consequently, starting with colleges of law and medicine at SNU, universities and their departments formed a pyramid of prestige, annually verified by state-administered national college admission tests. In other words, the name of one’s college and major became guarantors of the bearer’s pseudo-status as an elite who had succeeded in the repeated contest mobility system.

Before the 1980s, higher education was much more gendered than secondary education. For instance, more than three-quarters of college students were male (Figure 30). Only a few female students who completed high school chose to enter college, reflecting not only their

socioeconomic status but also a culturally supportive family environment for their education (Y. Lee 2002, 156–58). Consequently, the female higher education enrollment rate averaged just 3.4% in the 1970s.

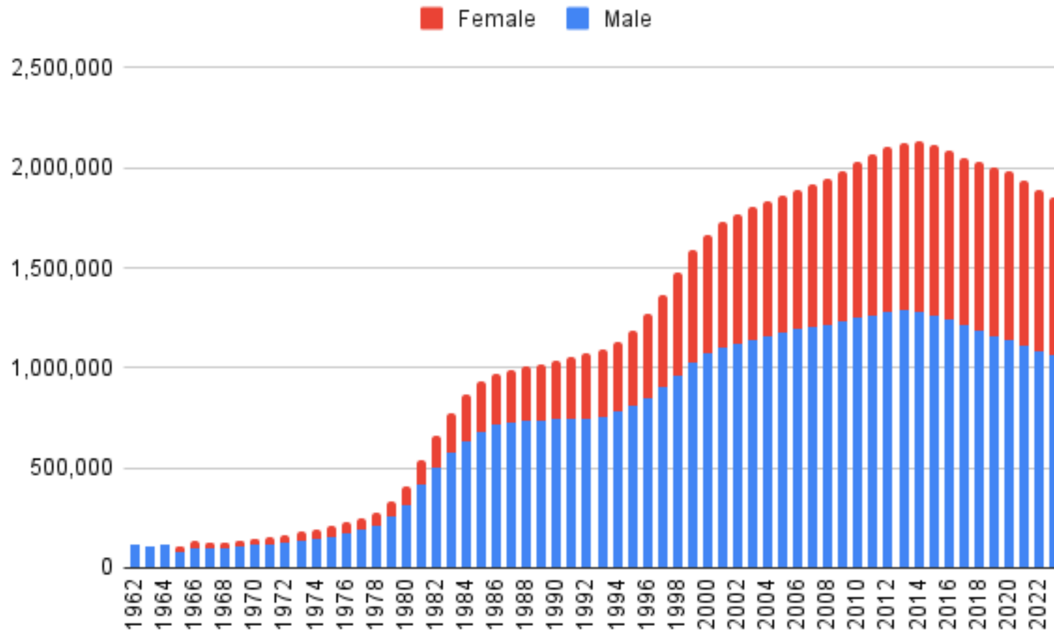


Figure 30: Higher Education Student Gender Composition in Korea, 1962-2023. SOURCE: Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea, 1962-2023.

The contest mobility system was inherently gendered. Female elites' contest mobility was intertwined with their families' class reproduction. They were often raised within a homogeneous group, starting from middle school, and acquired the coveted diplomas of "top" schools—a rare form of institutionalized cultural capital—as they navigated through the academic selection process from secondary education onward since the early 1960s. Familiar with the contest mobility system, they viewed college entrance as an inevitable milestone. However, women were not placed on equal footing with their male counterparts, especially in

elite universities. For example, only about 14% of SNU students were female, less than half the national proportion of female students in higher education (H. Lee 2012, 229–33).

College for Marriage

The perception of college education for women gradually transformed over time. Initially, during the 1950s and 1960s, a college degree from esteemed institutions like Ewha Womans University was primarily regarded as a means to improve “female pupils’” marriage prospects. This degree served as institutionalized cultural capital to foster educational homogamy and hypergamy for upward social mobility (Y. Lee 2002; H. Lee 2012, 257). The educational decisions of young women were intricately linked to familial strategies for social advancement, rather than the women’s career aspirations, often prioritizing adherence to traditional gender norms.

Familial attitudes toward female education starkly contrasted with those toward male education. While families often directed their daughters to “female” institutions and majors to secure favorable marriage prospects and adhere to traditional gender norms (Y. Lee 2002, 158–60), sons were encouraged to pursue education and career paths for professional success. Male preference was sometimes displayed by prioritizing funding the education of male relatives over daughters. Females were often considered “overeducated” to marry college-educated men (H. Lee 2012, 244).

In the 1970s, while marriage did not necessitate a college degree, higher education held cultural significance, symbolizing academic achievement and societal validation within evolving gender dynamics (Y. Lee 2002, 159–60). A new discourse emerged equating the absence of college education with social inferiority or downward mobility, fostering resentment among less educated women responsible for family support. Amid rapid industrialization, societal ideals

coalesced around the middle-class nuclear family, where women were expected to embody roles of nurturing "wise mothers" and supportive "good wives" for the family's male breadwinner (Lee 2002, 160-2). Conversely, women entering the workforce faced societal pushback, with their participation perceived as imbuing masculine attributes and detracting from femininity (H. Lee 2012, 239).

In addition to cultural reasons, practical considerations pushed females out of the labor market. While male college graduates enjoyed a "wage premium" of over 200% compared to high school graduates until the late 1980s, the wage premium of a college degree for females was much lower than that of a middle school diploma. Employers preferred single, less-educated, low-skilled workers to "overeducated" females for light manufacturing and service sectors (Y. Lee 2002, 149–53).

Nevertheless, some female graduates began to link their education to self-achievement rather than just a path to marriage. This shift, driven by economic growth and changing social discourses, reflected a desire for socioeconomic advancement and a departure from the traditional gender roles of their mothers and grandmothers (Y. Lee 2002; H. Lee 2012, 240–41). Lacking guidance or role models, these outliers gravitated toward professional career paths, such as teaching, nursing, or academia. In particular, "female professors" emerged as prominent role models for elite female students, prompting some educated women to intentionally enroll in women's universities instead of coed institutions (N. Lee, Kwak, and Lee 2000; Y. Lee 2002, 162–66). Consequently, the academic expansion in Korea started to offer more career opportunities to female academic elites.

Academic Expansion

Korean higher education continuously expanded, especially from the 1980s, in terms of institutions, departments, and student enrollments (Figure 30). The number of faculty members also rapidly increased to accommodate the growing demand (Figure 31). While the gender disparity in student enrollment started to improve from the late 1990s, a pronounced gender disparity in faculty remains.

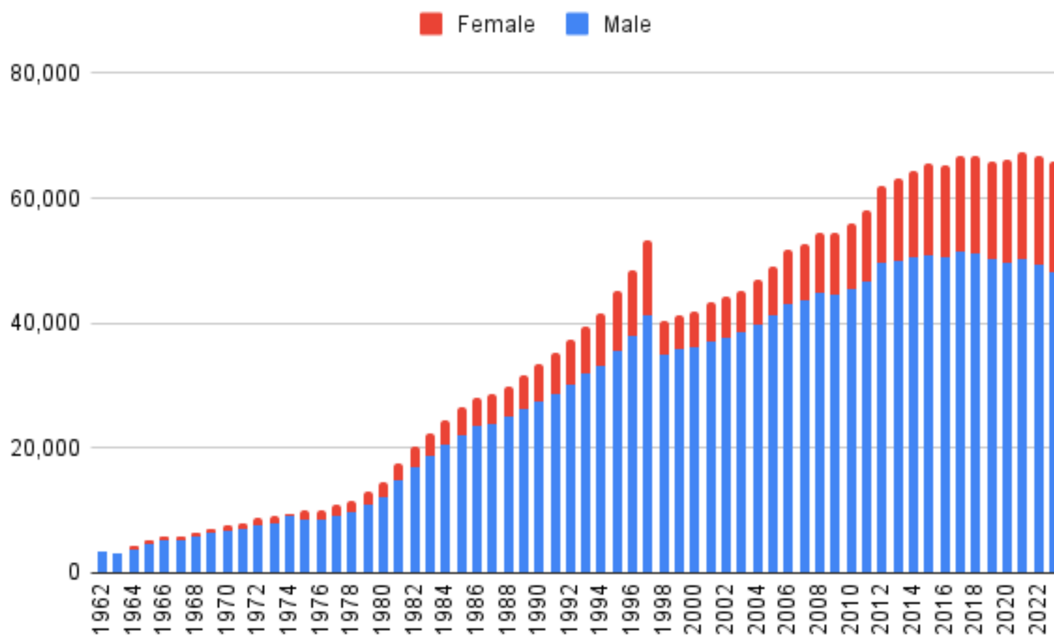


Figure 31: Higher Education Faculty Gender Composition in Korea, 1962-2023. SOURCE: Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea, 1962-2023.

As part of this higher education expansion, the number of domestic Ph.D. holders began to rapidly increase from the 1980s, with new career prospects emerging for doctoral degree holders in academia. This notable increase in doctoral graduates may stem from a crucial legal amendment in 1975, which mandated that only those who completed a comprehensive doctoral program could be conferred with a Ph.D. degree, thereby recognizing their eligibility to serve as

faculty in higher education institutions. SNU has maintained its primary role as a Ph.D. producer in Korea, followed by Yonsei University and Korea University (Figure 32). While SNU no longer produces more than half of new Ph.D.s as it did in the mid-1960s, it still yields approximately 10% of new Ph.D.s every year. Although national universities, such as Pusan National, Chonnam National, and Kyungpook National, were the leading figures in domestic Ph.D. production initially, prestigious private universities like Yonsei and Korea have since surpassed the national universities, reflecting the changed cultural prestige of these institutions.

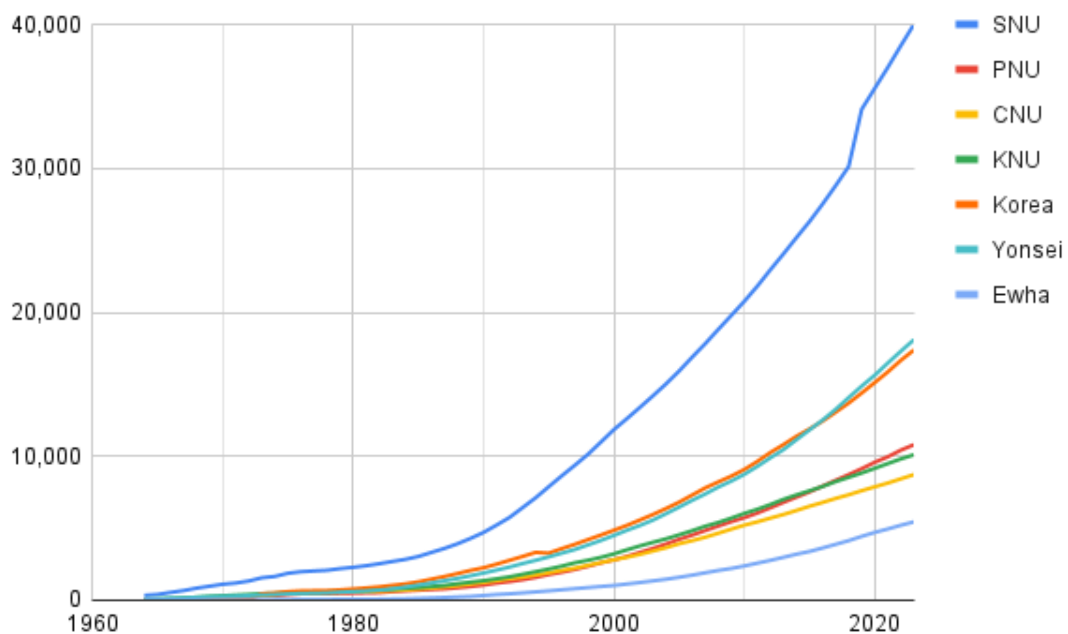


Figure 32: Total Number of Domestic Ph.D.s by Institution, 1964-2023.
SOURCE: Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea, 1962-2023.

The evolution of doctoral degree disciplines mirrors shifting academic trends, notably transitioning from medicine to engineering and natural sciences over time. Initially, domestic Ph.D. production encompassed five major disciplines—literature, science, engineering, agriculture, and medicine—accounting for about 75% of total doctoral degrees (Figure 33). Until

the late 1980s, medicine stood as the primary source of doctoral degrees, while natural sciences and engineering did not hold central prominence. However, starting from the 1990s, engineering gradually supplanted other primary disciplines, and natural sciences began to surpass medicine in prominence from the late 1990s.

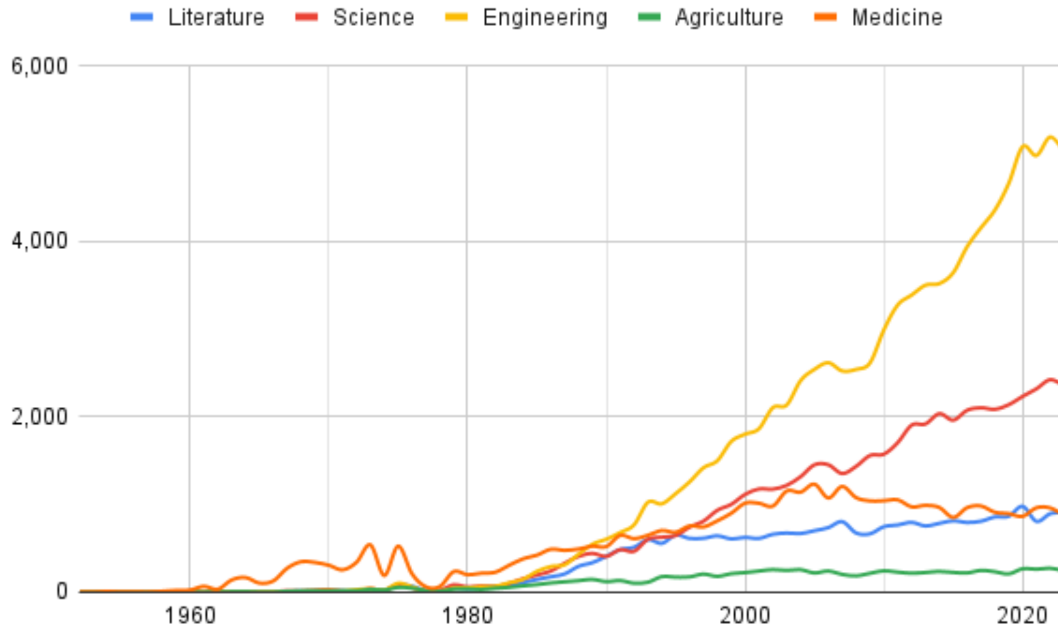


Figure 33: Majors of Domestic Ph.D.s, 1952-2023.
SOURCE: Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea, 1962-2023.

From the mid-1970s until the late 1990s, there were consistently more faculty positions available in Korean academia than the total number of domestic Ph.D. graduates (Figure 34). This opportunity structure was advantageous for Koreans with American Ph.D.s, given the prevailing preference for these returnees over their counterparts with Korean Ph.D.s. Consequently, it became common for top-tier students with academic aspirations from leading universities to pursue doctoral degrees in American institutions and subsequently return to Korean academia for

academic roles. Especially for Korean male Ph.D.s, this circulatory movement was attractive not only for appropriate job opportunities but also for finding suitable marriage partners.

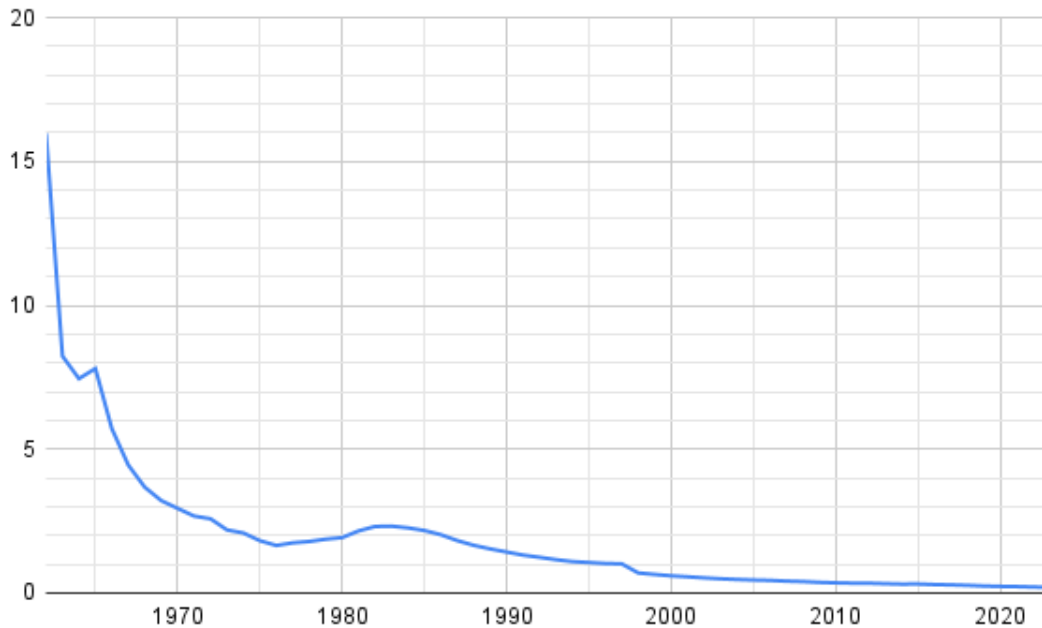


Figure 34: Relative Number of Faculty Positions to Number of Domestic Ph.D.s in Korea, 1962-2023.
SOURCE: Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea, 1962-2023.

Conclusion

In summary, the evolution of higher education and international educational mobility for Korean students has been shaped by various opportunities and constraints. The transition from Japanese Imperialism to American influence within the global Cold War framework to the developmental state, coupled with internal upheavals such as the Korean War and multiple coups, shaped the landscape of educational mobility as an elitist pursuit. Well-off families could reproduce their socioeconomic status legitimately through the prestige of domestic higher education and American academic credentials.

The Korean education system also evolved into a contest mobility system, constituting a structured set of opportunities for individuals. The repeated admission competitions at every educational stage introduced new academic high-achievers to the fields of higher education and international educational mobility as legitimate elites. At the same time, the system was highly gendered, allowing only highly privileged "female pupils" to progress beyond primary education, often preparing them for hypergamy rather than professional careers.

Against this backdrop, the landscape of international education in Korea has gone through three stages: initially exclusive to elites, international education options expanded to a wider group from the 1980s, in parallel with the rapid expansion of domestic higher education. Social changes, such as democratization and globalization, facilitated broader participation in international education, and social perceptions, such as English as a dominant language, led to the "Ivy League boom" and the emergence of diverse mobility patterns. However, post-2010 witnessed a rationalized evaluation of overseas education, particularly in light of labor market outcomes. The decline in the appeal of American undergraduate education and the advancement of Korean academic institutions led to a shift in preferences toward global destinations beyond the United States.

In the subsequent chapters, I will delve deeper into the rise and fall of Korean international student mobility in three distinct periods, each reflecting evolving social, economic, and educational dynamics. By examining these shifts, I aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between Korean students and their pursuit of education in the United States.

Chapter 5. Research Methods

Korean International Students, 1948-2022

Why do students pursue international education instead of domestic education? How does their preference evolve as their local and global social surroundings change? How does international student mobility conclude? To answer these questions, this study examines Korean international students who pursued degrees in the United States from the late 1940s to the 2020s. Since the first 123 students headed to the United States in 1948, the changes in the number of Korean students studying in America from the 1940s to the present can be classified into three periods: 1) the elitist rising period before 1980 (Chapter 6); 2) the skyrocketing take-off period until 2010 (Chapter 7); and 3) the falling period after 2010 (Chapter 8). The trends depicted in Figure 35 illustrate significant shifts in the number of Korean international students (KIS) studying in the United States across these three main phases.

Firstly, during the rising phase from the late 1940s to the late 1970s (Chapter 6), the number of Korean students steadily climbed from 258 in 1949 to 4,890 in 1979.[1] This period was marked by the increasing prestige of international education as an elite pursuit, reflecting broader social and economic changes within Korea.

[1] Although data from the 1970s is limited from the International Institute of Education, data from Korean Ministry of Education on its accredited international students indicates a rapid increase in Korean international students in the late 1970s.

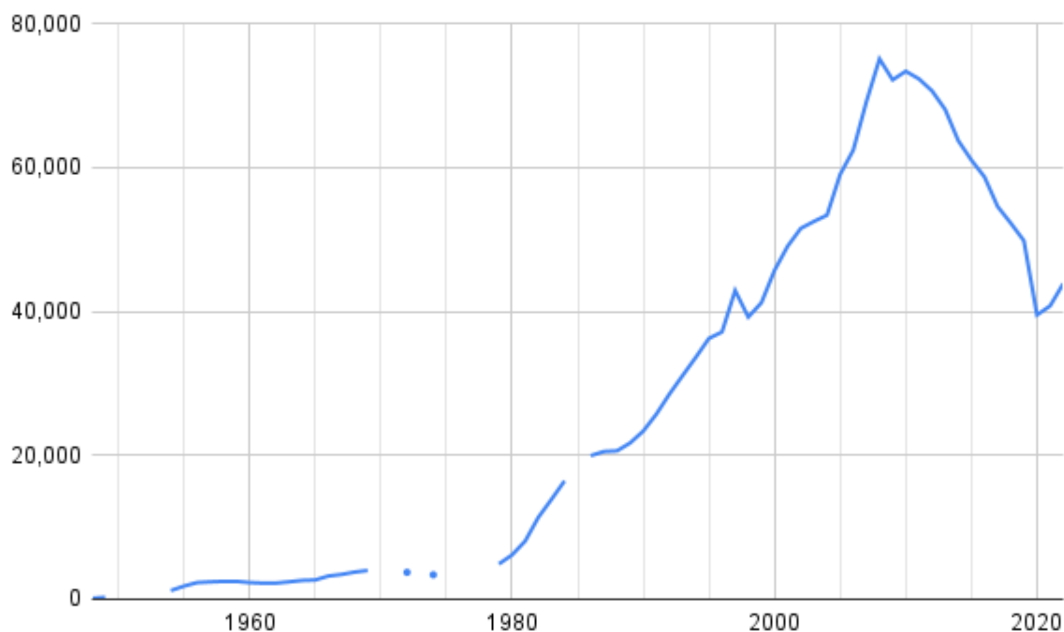


Figure 35: Korean Students in the United States, 1948-2022.

SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

Secondly, the take-off phase spans from the 1980s to the late 2000s (Chapter 7). Beginning at 6,150 in 1980, the number of Korean students continued to rise, reaching 23,360 in 1990, spurred by the relaxation of governmental mobility regulations during the 1980s (Institute of International Education 2019b). The numbers soared to a peak of 75,065 by 2008. Over these three decades, there was an average annual increase of approximately 10.28%. Notably, the early 1980s saw particularly rapid growth, with a peak increase of 40.77% between 1981 and 1982. Although there was a slight decline in 1998 following the East Asian financial crisis, recovery was swift, with a growth rate of 5.08% in 1999. The upward trajectory continued until the late 2000s.

Thirdly, the falling phase commenced around 2009, marked by a decline in the total number of Korean students studying in the United States (Chapter 8). From 72,153 in 2009, the

number dropped to 39,491 in 2020. On average, there was a decrease of 5.53% annually since 2008, effectively bringing the total number back to levels seen in 1998 (39,199).

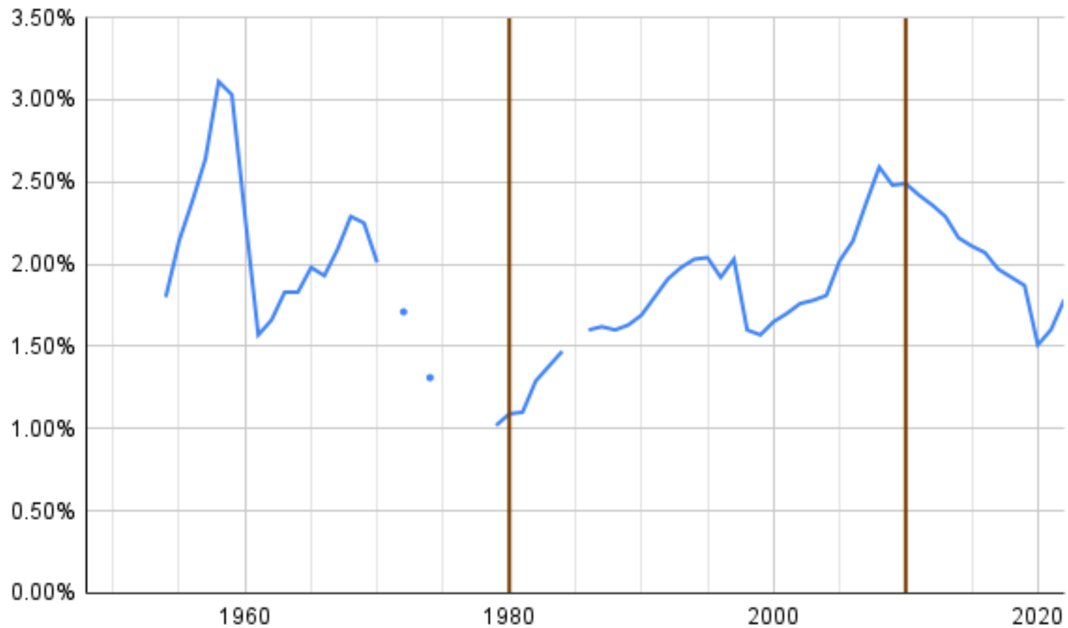


Figure 36: Ratio of Korean Students in the United States (KoUS) to Domestic Higher Education (KoKo), 1950-2022.

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1962-2022. Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea.; Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1979. Overseas Student Survey.

Transitioning to a relative perspective, we consider the ratio of Korean students in the United States (KoUS) to domestic higher education (KoKo). In Figure 36, we observe three distinct trends in the ratio of KoUS to KoKo. Firstly, during the rising phase, the "scarcity" (or relative prestige) of international education peaked in the late 1950s. Prior to the 1980s, higher education in Korea was elitist in nature, with less than 10% of the population aged 18 to 21 enrolling (Institute 2003). Study abroad was even more selective within this elite population, with its proportion only about 3% (peaking at 3.11% in 1958) within the higher education population (or

less than 0.3% of the age 18–21 population). Despite a continuous increase in the ratio during the subsequent period of significant growth (1980s-2010s), the peak of the late 1950s remained unrivaled.

This elite group and their transnational trajectories illustrate how education-induced capital conversion affects social mobility in a local society in a more dramatic manner. They not only show how (both domestic and foreign) educational credentials mediate social mobility in their home as expected but also reveal how even an academic elite enamored with prestigious foreign educational credentials suffers from unexpected inconvertibility. The authoritarian military regime of Korea, with its underdeveloped higher education system, adds more nuance to the capital conversion process because rapid economic development and higher education expansion create more favorable capital conversion environments.

Until the late 1980s, the Korean developmental state imposed stringent academic criteria, such as ranking within the top 10% in high school and holding a bachelor's degree, to sanction the pursuit of studies abroad. Despite legal changes aimed at expanding outward mobility for undergraduate students in the 1980s, studying abroad in the United States remained primarily associated with graduate-level pursuits among Korean students. Even during the early 1980s, when the number of outgoing Korean international students surged by approximately 28% annually, a significant majority—over 75%—were enrolled in US graduate programs (Institute of International Education 2019b; Korean Ministry of Education 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985).

Amidst rapid expansion in national higher education, many of Korea's academic elite regarded domestic education as their undergraduate foundation, with American education viewed as a subsequent step for graduate studies. While some Korean students "escaped" the competitive Korean college admission system to attain American undergraduate academic credentials, only a

minority of them leveraged these credentials for upward social mobility. Consequently, the primary focus for the first period lies on Korean international students who pursued American graduate programs following their Korean undergraduate education. This initial period is crucial, serving as both the genesis of study abroad to the US as a locally driven global strategy and as a testament to the constrained efficacy of cultural capital in facilitating social mobility.

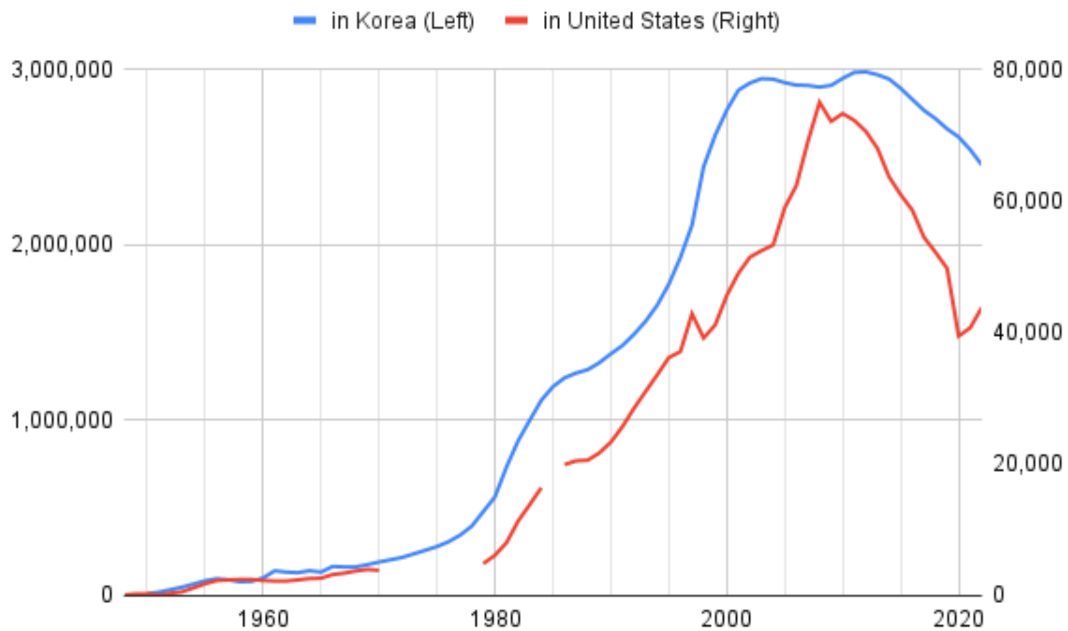


Figure 37: Changes in Number of Korean Students, 1948-2022.
SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1962-2022. Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea.; Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1979. Overseas Student Survey.

Secondly, during the take-off phase, there was a consistent rise in the KoUS/KoKo ratio. Although there was a brief decline in 1998, followed by two years of stagnation, the ratio resumed its upward trajectory from 2000 onwards. This steady increase aligned with a continuous surge in KoUS numbers until 2008, despite a plateau in KoKo figures from 2002 onwards until the early 2010s (as depicted in Figure 37). This indicates the enduring prestige and

popularity of pursuing an American education throughout the 2000s, despite the cessation of population expansion or a decline in the overall popularity of domestic higher education.

While the scale of international mobility increased about 12 times, the scale of domestic higher education enrollment also rapidly expanded by about 5.23 times (Figure 37). While outward mobility initially focused on the graduate level, it transitioned to include more undergraduate students after 2005 (Figure 38). Notably, economic factors like the college wage premium, which remained around 30-60% (T. Kim 2023), cannot fully explain this rapid international mobility expansion, as the proportion of outgoing Korean students never surpassed 2.6% of students enrolled in domestic higher education.

Finally, in the falling phase, the ratio of KoUS/KoKo declined from its peak of 2.59% in 2008 to 1.51% in 2020. This decline might rebound in the 2020s due to an expected rapid decline in KoKo numbers.

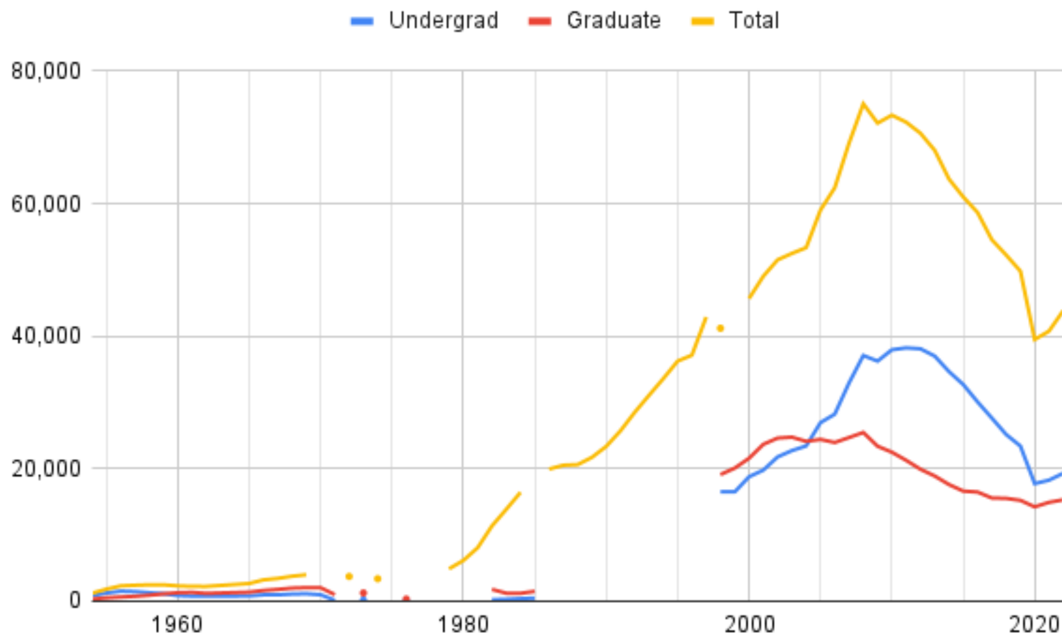


Figure 38: Korean International Students by Educational Level, 1954-2022.

SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.; Korean Ministry of Education. 1962-2022. Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea.

Despite limited composition data from the 1970s to the 1990s, we can observe overall compositional changes among Korean international students coming to the United States after the Korean War (Figure 38). During the initial phase until the late 1970s, characterized by elitism in international mobility and state regulation, the dominance of undergraduates in the 1950s was swiftly replaced by graduates in the 1960s. This graduate dominance persisted in the subsequent decades until the mid-2000s. Subsequently, despite a reversal in the trend from the mid-2010s, undergraduate students still constitute the majority among Korean international students in the United States.

Data Collection

This dissertation examines three different types of data sources to draw a comprehensive picture of study abroad to the United States: first, legal and institutional changes surrounding the study abroad; second, various registry data from the late 1960s to mid-1980s containing specific demographic data of Korean international students; third, self-collected interview data of 164 people (181 interviews in total) engaged in international educational mobility. This mixed-method approach enables a triangulating perspective to understand the multi-faceted aspects of study abroad as elite mobilities of a rapidly developing country.

The mixed-method approach is essential due to Korea's successive authoritarian regimes during the period, which overlapped with its heyday as a developmental state. As a nascent developmental state, the Korean government actively engaged in utilizing Korean students with foreign education experience as human resources for national economic development from the late 1960s. The initiative began with investigating the demographic information of returnees and lasted until the mid-1980s to keep Korean international students abroad within reach.

The archival documents were gathered from multiple institutions, including Korea's National Archive, National Library, National Assembly Library, and Seoul National University library, spanning from July 2020 to August 2022. This extensive archival research revealed two key findings: firstly, it identified 19,107 first-generation Korean international students from the 1960s to the 1980s, and secondly, it uncovered 1,439 government-funded Korean international students from the 1970s to the 2010s through government-collected overseas student registers.[2]

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[2] There is a possibility of double-counting Korean international students in the registers, stemming from the temporal overlap between two sets of records (registers of the first generation and government-funded student registers), exacerbated by the limited administrative capacity of the Korean government in the 1970s. To enhance the integrity of archival registry data, I intend to cross-reference individuals across different registries to identify and rectify such duplications in the near future.

By delving into the records of approximately 20,000 individual students, this analysis not only sheds light on environmental shifts but also provides a nuanced understanding of how these individuals navigated international education amidst structural constraints while exercising their agency.

Various government agencies, including the Ministry of Education, National Assembly Library, Korean Embassy in the United States, and Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars, published the registers. These registers include demographic information at the individual level, including gender, age, enrolled institutions, and majors, as well as domestic residency (1976) and educational backgrounds (1982–1985). Additionally, the post-education domestic occupations of returning graduates are listed. Despite their inability to support multi-variable statistical analyses, the registers provide a wealth of information for determining who the first elite Korean international students were and where their education led them in their home countries. However, the register surveys were not conducted according to a long-term strategy, so not all data was provided annually. The complete inventory of registers is provided in Table 5.

Table 5: List of Korean Student Registers, 1967-2011.

No.	Title (English)	Published in	Korean International Students in the US	n	Publisher (English)
1	List of Korean Ph.Ds. Conferred in the US	1967	with US Doctorates	620	National Assembly Library
2	Report on the Status of Korean Students Studying in the United States 1968	1968	Current	2,643	Korean Embassy in US
3	Korean Scholars and Students in the US: 1969-1970	1970		3,035	
4	Korean Students Abroad Survey (KSAS) (Enlarged Edition) 1971	1972	Returnees from US	1,449	Ministry of Education
5	KSAS (Enlarged Edition) 1973	1974		1,891	
6	KSAS 1976	1976	1) Returnees from and 2) Current in US	345	
7	Korean Students Abroad Registry (KSAR) 1982	1982	Current	2,487	
8	KSAR 1983	1983		1,848	
9	KSAR 1984	1984		2,056	
10	KSAR 1985	1985		2,733	
11	List of Government-Funded Korean Students (GFKS) 1977-79	2011	with Korean Government Sponsorship	131	Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars
12	GFKS 1980-82	2011		198	
13	GFKS 1983-85	2011		264	
14	GFKS 1986-88	2011		296	
15	GFKS 1989-91	2011		297	
16	GFKS 1992-94	2011		172	
17	GFKS 1995-97	2011		142	
18	GFKS 1998-2000	2011		110	
19	GFKS 2001-03	2011		88	
20	GFKS 2004-06	2011		96	
21	GFKS 2007-10	2011		155	
22	GFKS 2011	2011		45	

To elicit rich and detailed narratives from study participants, an anonymized semi-structured in-depth interview method was used as the main method of data collection (Lofland and Lofland 2005). In total, 164 individuals shared their life and educational histories for this dissertation in 181 interviews. As Table 6 demonstrates, there were more men than women participants in the interviews due to the highly gendered nature of international educational mobility among Korean students, especially among the earlier cohorts. To balance this bias, I intentionally collected more voices from female participants. Also, narratives from older generations who not only experienced longer educational stages but also navigated through post-education career trajectories usually lasted longer than those from younger generations.

The interview data collection was composed of two parts. First, the interview data collection started with recent generations to answer the research questions of Chapter 8, the

sudden collapse of incoming Korean international students to American colleges. Second, after collecting registries of Korean overseas students, a more systematic approach was employed to recruit and collect narratives from earlier generations of KIS who headed to the United States under the authoritarian developmental state. Detailed research sample selection rationale will be discussed in the next section.

Table 6: Total Interview Participants.

Period	# of Interviews	Men	Women	Undergrad	Graduate	Recording Length (Hrs:Mins)		
						Mean (SD)	Median	Range [Min, Max]
1960s	4	2	2	3	1	3:15 (0:49)	3:26	[2:12, 3:57]
1970s	11	9	2	0	11	2:57 (0:56)	2:25	[1:48, 4:18]
1980s	14	11	3	1	13	2:49 (1:02)	2:46	[1:07, 5:11]
1990s	10	3	7	2	8	2:01 (0:17)	2:05	[1:23, 2:20]
2000s	34	17	17	20	14	2:20 (0:48)	2:21	[0:46, 4:32]
2010s	72	35	37	58	14	2:06 (1:06)	1:49	[0:46, 6:34]
2020s	2	2	0	1	1	1:37 (0:01)	1:37	[1:36, 1:38]
Etc.	17	14	3	0	17	1:02 (0:20)	1:04	[0:18, 1:25]
Total	**164**	**93**	**71**	**85**	**79**	**2:10 (1:03)**	**2:03**	**[0:18, 6:34]**

Note: "Etc." denotes the group of teachers and administrators who serve Korean students entering American higher education. Only some of them were educated in the United States.

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' motivations, aspirations, experiences, and career trajectories. Online pre-interview questionnaires provided contextual information for semi-structured interview guides. For the first two phases, interviews lasted approximately 3 hours each and were conducted between December 2021 and September 2022 (26 via Zoom due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic). All interviews in these two periods were in Korean and were recorded and transcribed.

The interviews for the last phase, which took one to three hours, were conducted in Korean and English between Summer 2018 and Fall 2019. Since most of them were current college students or recent graduates, much of the discussions focused on college admission, including its importance and value, desired college characteristics (such as name and location),

college selection criteria (such as major and acceptance), and individual evaluations of higher education. All names of persons, disciplines, and institutions of all periods are anonymized or replaced to avoid identification.

Research Sample

To utilize the heterogeneity in terms of both period and environments, this research employs diverse sampling approaches to recruit participants for the in-depth interviews. First, for the period when student registry is available, random sampling is used to recruit students with diverse backgrounds, such as their study abroad period, major, and institutions. Second, theoretical sampling is used to balance the composition of the sampled group, such as unselected minor majors, less selective institutions, and gender (for example, an arts major female from a non-flagship state university). Especially after identifying the highly gendered nature of the Korean students' international mobility and its implications on social mobility, balance in gender composition was pursued to uncover richer narratives about gender inequality. Third, snowball sampling is used to collect voices from recent generations because not only were student registries unavailable from the 1990s, but also personal introductions were critical to recruiting interview participants due to the classed nature of international educational mobility and the participants' reserved stance to share their life trajectories. Especially, the personal introduction was very effective for achieving "studying up" by enabling access to hard-to-reach groups, such as former prime ministers and chaebol family members.

Specifically, the three periods were composed of different sets of interview participants. First, among the 8,223 Korean students who studied in the United States during the elitist rising period, 200 individuals were randomly sampled. I contacted 94 of them whose post-education careers and contacts are traceable. First-round interviews were conducted with 16 men and 4

women who responded to the interview invitation (21% response rate). I concluded each interview by asking interviewees to introduce me to their Korean friends, families, and colleagues who had experienced American higher education before the 1990s, particularly females, to balance the gender ratio, so that I could meet nine additional respondents. While all 29 interviewees completed their American graduate education, four of them also completed their American undergraduate education, as indicated in parentheses in Table 7.

Table 7: Phase 1 Interview Participants.

Period	Male	Female	Total
1950s	-	1 (1)	1 (1)
1960s	2 (2)	1	3 (2)
1970s	9	2	11
1980s	11 (1)	3	14 (1)
Total	22 (3)	7 (1)	29 (4)

For the second take-off period, the same random sampling, followed by theoretical and snowball sampling, was executed among the pool of 10,432 students in the registries. With traceable careers and contacts, 42 individuals were approached, resulting in 10 initial interviews (8 men, 2 women; 24% response rate). To ensure balanced representation, participants were encouraged to suggest peers from diverse disciplines and genders. Based on emerging themes and the need for gender balance, further recruitment prioritized female students. This led to a final sample of 44 participants, with the gender breakdown as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Phase 2 Interview Participants.

Period	Male	Female	Total
1980s	11 (1)	3	14 (1)
1990s	3 (1)	6 (1)	9 (2)
2000s	8 (5)	13 (4)	21 (9)
Total	22 (7)	22 (5)	44 (12)

The last falling period focuses on an elite Korean high school with a reputation since the late 1990s for leading the study-abroad boom with its Ivy League admissions. This selection was to better understand the evolving reasons why students from developing nations choose to study abroad in the United States. The Korean Minjok Leadership Academy (KMLA; Minjok Sagwan Godung Hakkyo), established in 1996, is a private boarding school that represents the aspirations of the newly affluent middle-class Koreans to raise their children as cosmopolitan elites in an egalitarian society. KMLA started as a highly selective high school for admittance to domestic colleges, such as SNU, but quickly shifted its aim to Ivy League universities. The school was a pioneer with great success and served as a role model for other elite Korean high schools,[3] sparking the 2000s study-abroad boom. Elite American colleges' explosive popularity, however, started to wane in the 2010s in both KMLA and Korea. This study investigates the KMLA case to see how elite international student mobility has changed over time.

Around 2,000 students graduated from KMLA between 1998 and 2017. About 42.6% chose to attend universities abroad, while the remaining 57.4% chose to attend Korean universities; 90.9% of graduates who went to study overseas chose American institutions. This

[3] In this dissertation, I categorize elite (Korean) high schools to include autonomous private high schools (*chayulhyeong saripgo*) and special-purpose high schools (*ttuksu mokjeokgo*). Although special-purpose high schools (*ttukmokgo*) is commonly used as a category for both types of high schools that provide an advanced academic curriculum and produce better college admission outcomes, I refer to the two distinct but related types of high schools as elite high schools for analysis purposes.

large number of "international" graduates distinguishes KMLA from other elite Korean high schools.[4] I recruited 42 graduates (15 from the domestic and 27 from the international program) through the KMLA Alumni Association for an in-depth qualitative analysis of KMLA graduates and their college selections. To talk about the school, its admissions preparations, and student population trends over the previous 20 years, I also met with 17 KMLA teachers and administrators[5] and two parents. I divided the 20 cohorts of students into three categories based on changes in the demand for international admission: beginning, 1998–2005 (8 years); peak, 2006–11 (6 years); and declining, 2012–17 (6 years; Table 9).

Triangulation was carried out using two additional sets of published materials for the last phase. First, to mark its 10th and 20th anniversaries, the school formally released two volumes. These volumes include an extensive history of the school as well as a variety of memoirs from the founder, headmaster, and teachers of the institution to early graduates, present students, and their parents. Second, numerous KMLA "families" have published books about their memories and experiences with the organization, demonstrating the school's unique symbolic status.[6]

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[4] In the case of Daewon Foreign Language High School, a rival high school of KMLA like Yale is to Harvard, for example, even at the height of its capacity to provide preparation programs for international college admissions, less than one-third of its students applied to colleges abroad. In contrast, more than half of KMLA students applied to institutions abroad during its peak from 2006 to 2011.

[5] The teachers and administrators at KMLA ranged from those who started out at the school from the beginning to those who just joined after teaching at a rival school.

[6] First, in 2004, the founder, who dedicated his resources and time in founding the institution, published his autobiography (Myŏng-jae 2004). Second, both current and retired teachers have authored books regarding their experiences at KMLA (Donhŭi Lee 2007; Ŏm 2007; W. Pak 2001; Hasik Park 2006, 2013; Jŏngil Yoon 2013). Third, many books have been published about the lives of both present students (Cho 2012; S. Kim 2008; Na 2011; Yang 2010) and alumni (Kang et al. 2007; Koo 2008; W. Park 2004) of KMLA, as well as how they got into KMLA and universities, especially in America. Additionally, parents of KMLA students have written a number of books about how they raised their children to enroll in KMLA and colleges (Ch'oe 2005; Misuk et al. Kim 2008; Minjokkosaranghoe 2005; K.-hŭi. Yi 2004; Ka-hŭi Yi 2005, 2006).

Table 9: Phase 3 Interview Participants.

Class of	Phase	Number (Proportion)	
		Total (%)	Interview (%)
1998–2005	Beginning	338 (17)	11 (26)
2006–2011	Peak	787 (40)	12 (29)
2012–2017	Declining	862 (43)	19 (45)
1998–2017	Total	1,987 (100)	42 (100)

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the research. Interview transcripts, archived materials, and field notes were regularly reviewed and used to generate analytic memos (Emerson and Fretz 2011). These memos served to identify recurring themes, connections to existing research, and inform revisions to interview guides. MAXQDA software was then utilized to code the various data sources based on an initial coding scheme developed from the thematic insights gathered through the memos.

The data collected for this dissertation are to address the central theoretical questions concerning the motivations behind Korean students' pursuit of international education, the evolution of these preferences over time, and the long-term outcomes of such mobility. By examining Korean international students in the United States from 1945 to 2020, the study will uncover the dynamics of educational mobility and its implications on social mobility within the context of a rapidly developing nation.

The research data, encompassing legal and institutional changes, demographic registries, and extensive interviews, provide a multifaceted understanding of the factors driving international education choices. The archival documents, for instance, offer historical insights into the regulatory environment and government strategies aimed at leveraging foreign-educated

individuals for national development. The registry data, detailing the demographic and educational backgrounds of students, allows for an analysis of the profiles and trajectories of Korean students who studied abroad. This data helps identify patterns in educational attainment and subsequent career paths, offering a lens into how international education influenced social mobility and the conversion of American academic credential as institutionalized cultural capital.

The interviews add a qualitative depth to the analysis, capturing the personal narratives and experiences of individuals across different periods. These interviews reveal the motivations, aspirations, and challenges faced by Korean students in their pursuit of American education. By integrating these narratives with quantitative data, the study will illustrate how international education served as a strategy for social mobility, influenced by both local and global contexts. This mixed-method approach, combining historical records, statistical data, and personal stories, provides a comprehensive view of the changing landscape of Korean international education and its broader social implications.

Overall, the data will be used to explore the intersection of geographic educational mobility and social mobility, examining how international education has been perceived, pursued, and experienced by different generations of Korean students. It will address key theoretical questions on the role of education in social stratification, the impact of global educational opportunities on local social structures, and the long-term outcomes of international student mobility. This approach not only contributes to the academic discourse on international education and social mobility but also offers policy insights for managing educational mobility in the context of globalization.

Chapter 6. “Men’s Circle”: Gendered Cultural Capital Conversion in Elite International Student Mobility

Introduction

Many people pursue education as a means to achieve a higher social class. Pierre Bourdieu elucidated the process of education-mediated class mobility and reproduction by demonstrating how individuals iteratively convert their capital into various forms (Bourdieu 1973, 1986, 1996). However, it remains unclear why some groups succeed in converting and activating their capital for status while making their success appear universal, whereas others encounter unexpected challenges and inconvertibility during the same process. Cultural capital scholars often view capital conversion as an implicit process wherein class advantage facilitates seamless conversion, resulting in higher class status. This perspective, however, leaves the agency and struggle involved in capital conversion unexplored.

This study investigates the convertibility of institutionalized cultural capital into other forms of capital that propel individuals to a higher-class status, specifically within the context of international higher education. It examines how elite international students from a developing nation actively pursue graduate education abroad, utilize their degree credentials, and face unexpected challenges along their credential pathways. Archival research and in-depth interviews with elite international students from Korea are employed to address these questions.

Korea serves as a representative “developmental state” (Amsden 1992), having rapidly expanded its higher education alongside economic development while also sending a significant number of students to the United States (the “magnet”; (Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008). When Korea began its development in the late 20th century, higher education was accessible

only to a small group of elite students who were either winners of contest mobility or children of affluent families. These students became the first generation of elite Korean international students (KIS) to attend American graduate schools. This research involves archival studies to identify their institutional environments for overseas education and in-depth interviews to explore their motivations, trajectories, and outcomes.

Male elites, in particular, benefited from the American credential's practical and symbolic superiority, seamlessly converting cultural capital into academic positions and completing the "men's circle" among academic elites. However, several impediments hampered this mobility and reproduction. Prior to democratization in 1987, authoritarian military regimes imposed a bottleneck on students' international mobility based on "academic achievement" and recruited personnel primarily from military and bureaucratic groups rather than academia. Consequently, Korean academia became the primary destination for the first generation of KIS upon their return. Additionally, even if top students surpassed the academic bar, marriage barriers hindered women from pursuing post-college education opportunities. This gender barrier not only prevented academic elite women from initiating the international education circuit but also resurfaced when they attempted to return to Korean academia as professionals with their graduate degrees. These gendered impediments demonstrate that, even with ascribed class privileges, capital convertibility is not always guaranteed.

This research has significant implications. Firstly, it clarifies Bourdieusian capital conversion models by demonstrating that capital convertibility and status acquisition are neither implicit nor automatic; education-mediated capital conversion requires active efforts, even from elite class members. Secondly, it advances our understanding of how capital conversion patterns are heavily conditioned by the state, educational system, and societal values. Thirdly, it shows

that social reproduction mechanisms can be better understood by examining divergent pathways in education-mediated capital conversion and linking these processes to their payoffs and limits in reality.

The Significance of Credentials: Capital Conversion in Social Mobility

Scholars have approached education-mediated social mobility from various perspectives, and this chapter contributes by examining it through the lens of capital conversion, encompassing economic, social, and cultural capital in diverse states (Bourdieu 1986). Traditionally, parental arrangements and achievements within the modern education system have played pivotal roles in acquiring new social and cultural capital, thereby legitimizing an individual's elevated socioeconomic position. Class-based economic capital often transitions into social capital, providing access to better opportunities, while education-related cultural capital serves as a means of signaling status and meritocratic qualification (Lamont and Lareau 1988). Successful capital conversions can affirm one's upper-class status, whether acquired through personal achievements or inherited from family backgrounds.

Academic accomplishment, encompassing both academic achievement and educational attainment, holds a central position in this capital conversion framework. It facilitates the transition to a higher socioeconomic status while also legitimizing the achieved position. This underscores the significance of formal education in social mobility and reproduction, particularly in societies with universal educational access.

The introduction of credentials adds another layer to this mechanism. Graduating from academic institutions or obtaining professional qualifications symbolizes institutionalized cultural capital. Credentials confer prestige upon their bearers, distinguishing them from those

without such qualifications, a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1986). Unlike other forms of capital, credentials are not always essential for the capital conversion process, especially in societies where other forms of capital are sufficient to legitimize one's socioeconomic status through symbolic violence.

However, as societies progress and credentialization becomes increasingly widespread, the significance of credentials in legitimizing socioeconomic status as meritocratic gains prominence. Competitive recruitment examinations shape the dynamics of social competition by transforming minor infinitesimal distinctions into significant divergences (Bourdieu 1986). The compensations given to the winners encourage greater participation among the masses in the status game, extending the significance of credentials beyond their role as mere educational accomplishments. Moreover, the global convergence of higher education among schooled societies (Baker 2014; Hazelkorn 2011) further accelerates the education race.

The *Credential Pathway* emerges as a prominent route characterized by the navigation of academic accomplishments and social opportunities to obtain educational credentials, often obscuring the role of one's class background in accessing the academic track. This pathway encompasses various trajectories, from privilege-based inheritance (*Privilege Pathway*) to self-made success stories (*Achievement Pathway*), all converging toward the attainment of educational credentials as a marker of status.

Research on cultural capital has traditionally centered on examining how inherited cultural capital influences students' academic achievement and its valuation within specific educational settings (Calarco 2011, 2014; Jæger 2009, 2011; Lamont and Lareau 1988). This body of work underscores the role of parental advantages in facilitating their children's academic success, particularly among middle- and upper-class students who benefit from superior

educational environments inherited from their families (Lareau 2011; McDonough 1997; Roksa and Potter 2011). Affluent parents effectively "hoard" opportunities and "purchase" meritocracy for their children (Buchmann, Condron, and Roscigno 2010; Mullen 2009; Reeves 2018), enabling their middle-class children to navigate educational institutions well with a sense of belonging (Jack 2016; Khan 2011). Furthermore, a college diploma often solidifies the bearer's occupational and status attainment, wielding symbolic power as institutionalized cultural capital (Binder, Davis, and Bloom 2016; Binder and Abel 2019; D. Brown 2001; Rivera 2012, 2016). Some "cultural mobility" toward upper-class status is attainable for students from diverse backgrounds (DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Khan 2012; Walpole 2003).

However, these insights often fall short of providing a comprehensive examination of the capital conversion process, neglecting the internal iterations within it. The iterative nature of capital conversion, often overlooked, enables individuals to undergo multiple rounds of transformation with diverse strategies, driven by factors such as the incapacity to convert existing capital or the aspiration for greater returns, like heightened socioeconomic status. Yet, this iteration, like betting, may entail the risk of wagering current capital. For instance, studying abroad for a degree, often perceived as an elitist option compared to domestic education in many societies, heralds a new phase of capital conversion that may cost the convertibility of domestic educational credentials as opportunity costs.

Similarly, cultural capital research frequently neglects to address inconvertibility and the existence of distinct cultural transmission pathways. While recent studies have delved into the strategic nature of education-mediated mobility trajectories, the emergence of diverse pathways alongside successful transmission remains ambiguous (Calarco 2014; Reeves 2018). Particularly within the presumed supremacy of social class, there is a notable absence of consideration for

unforeseen challenges posed by other factors, such as gender, and how individuals confront these challenges. Although prior research has explored how cultural capital perpetuates the overall social hierarchy (Igarashi and Saito 2014), our understanding of how cultural capital is transformed into other forms of capital within the broader conversion process, and how unexpected inconvertibility shapes divergent pathways, remains limited.

Migration studies have opened a new avenue to examine the complexities of capital conversion. Migrants navigate new capital conversions during the migration processes, shaping their life chances post-migration (Jaeeun Kim 2018; Paul 2015; Van Hear 2014). Some skilled migrants find their cultural capital convertible, facilitating integration into new societies, despite "visa mills'" exploitation of migrants seeking shortcuts to convert tuition fees into visas (Jaeeun Kim 2018; Neilson 2009). However, international education, which often encompasses returning students, induces unexpected challenges in their circulatory mobilities and attempts to leverage their international education credentials in domestic settings.

Contrary to expectations, scholars often observe that an American degree, the most popular institutionalized global cultural capital, does not necessarily translate into benefits for Asian students, who constitute the majority of international students. Cultural capital often operates within the confines of the bearer's existing social capital, such as transnational networks, or fails to integrate into their domestic social relations (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Iijima 2009; J. Waters 2006b, 2009). Moreover, foreign-educated returnees encounter complexities in their conversion process as they struggle to fit and reintegrate into their home country's local business contexts due to a lack of sufficient local cultural capital (Jarvis 2020). In this chapter, I delve into these issues using data from archival research and interviews conducted with elite

students from a developmental state that has sent a significant number of its students to its sponsor country, the United States, since its inception.

Results

State Approach on International Student Mobility

Starting from 1948, overseas education among Koreans predominantly meant enrollment in American institutions. From 1953 to 1976, approximately 86.4% (11,961 out of 13,851) of Korean students who studied abroad with official government accreditation did so in the United States (Korean Ministry of Education 1976, 3). According to US government reports, the actual number of Korean students in the United States was much larger than the official count reported by the Korean government (Figure 39). While the American count included every Korean student entering the United States, the official Korean count only included those who passed the government-administered qualification exam, a system abolished in August 1981. This disparity in counting methods suggests a larger presence of Korean students in the United States beyond the academically elite KIS group, likely driven by non-academic factors such as migration.[1]

[1] For a comprehensive exploration of non-returnees and individuals who evaded state surveillance in both Korea and the United States, see Chang (2021).

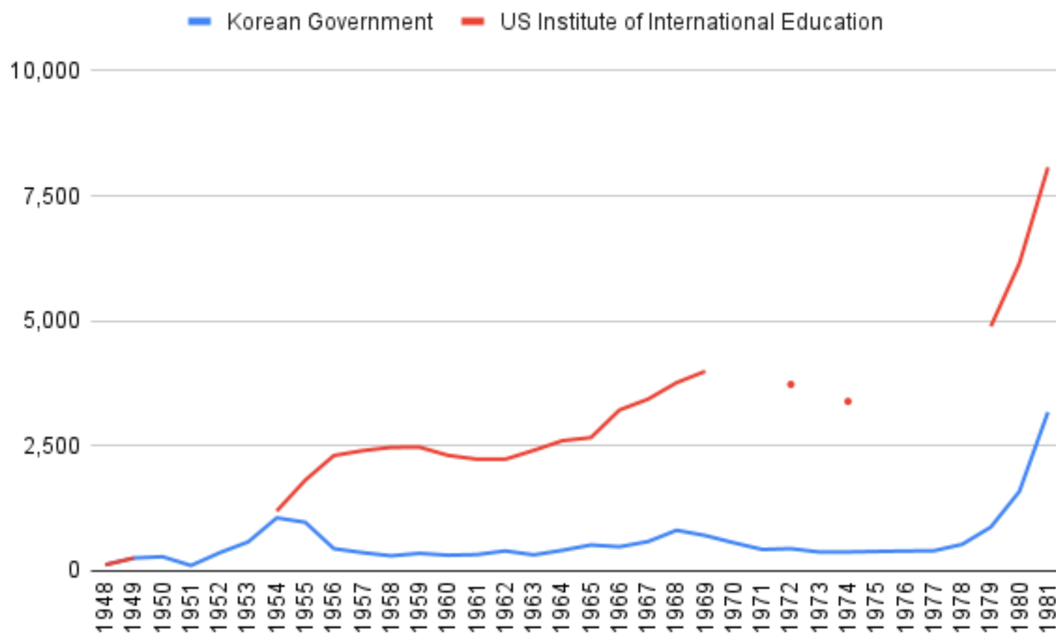

Figure 39: Counted Number of Korean Students in the U.S., 1948-1981.

SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.; Korean Ministry of Education. 1962-1982. Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea

Understanding the role of international education in social mobility necessitates a contextual examination of domestic society, where the relatively rare experience of international education can significantly enhance an individual's post-education social status. Therefore, this chapter primarily delves into the educational mobility project within a framework of circulatory mobility, rather than viewing international education solely as a migration strategy. However, upward social mobility as a consequence of circulatory international educational mobility was only partly realized. Despite the superior symbolic value of American educational credentials, the gender norms of late 20th-century Korean society hindered female elites from converting their institutionalized cultural capital into tangible benefits.

Despite political upheavals, such as Park Chung Hee's coup in 1961 and subsequent periods of stagnation, the framework governing KIS remained largely consistent throughout the 1960s and 1970s. As an early developmental state, the Korean government needed to formulate a comprehensive "human resource plan" to support its economic development initiatives and mitigate "brain drain" starting from the late 1960s. Despite these efforts, only a small fraction (12%) of academically accredited professionals returned to Korea after completing their studies abroad (Korean Embassy in the United States 1968, 5–6). To address this issue, the Korean government-initiated surveys aimed at compiling data on its overseas students, with the objective of connecting them to various local agencies, "businesses, educational institutions, and research organizations" (ibid., p. 6).

However, the Korean state of the 1960s, which relied on light manufacturing, such as assembling wigs, had limited capacity to implement its stated mission of managing its "human resources" abroad. For instance, the Korean Ministry of Education could only initiate its first survey of its overseas students with funding from the Korean American Foundation (Korean Ministry of Education 1968). Despite concerns about brain drain dating back to 1945, a comprehensive understanding and effective management of student mobility remained elusive until the mid-1980s.

The data collection process also revealed the limited state capacity. Its rudimentary data collection process relied on individual cooperation and resulted in inherent selection bias. The survey commenced with the Korean embassy's outreach to American colleges and universities, soliciting information regarding their Korean international students, including personal details, fields of study, and addresses. Subsequently, the Korean embassy sent survey forms to each

Korean individual via mail (Figure 40), achieving a response rate of approximately 50% (ibid., p. 8).

EMBASSY OF THE
REPUBLIC OF KOREA
WASHINGTON, D. C.

STATEMENT OF PARTICULARS

1. Name in Full (Please print in block letter) — Korean / English / Sex
2. Date and Place of Birth — Place of Birth / Date of Birth / Year / Mon. / Day
3. Married or Single — Married / Nationality of Spouse / Single
4. Permanent Address in Korea
5. Father's Name, Address and Occupation
6. Name and Address of Guardian in Korea who should be notified in case of emergency
7. Number, date of issue of Passport / Number and valid date of Visa — Number / Date of issue / Number / Valid date
8. Date of Leaving Korea and Date of Arrival in U. S. A. — Date of leaving / Date of arrival in U. S. A.
9. Educational Qualifications in Korea and elsewhere
10. Present or most recent Occupation or employment held in Korea

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11. Subject and course of studies proposed to be pursued in the U. S. A.
12. Name of institutions enrolled since arrival in U. S. A.
13. Name of institution where enrolled
14. Date of joining Institution
15. Probable duration of your stay in the U. S. A.
16. Indicate financial resources: Where entirely on private funds or Scholarships from Institution
17. Recommendations to the Government

Name
Address — Street / City / State / Zip Code
Please give address to which postal communication may be addressed to you.
Date 196__

- 30 -

Figure 40: Korean International Student Survey Form.

Towards the end of the Park Chung Hee regime, significant policy shifts occurred regarding study abroad. In 1979, the Regulations on Overseas Study (ROS) replaced the Regulations on Overseas Students Studying Abroad (ROSSA), coinciding with the inauguration of a government-funded study abroad program in 1977 to nurture academic faculty. The ROS introduced a differentiation between government-funded and self-funded overseas study, with reduced requirements for the latter group. The 1980s witnessed further liberalization: self-funded

students were exempted from government examinations, academic requirements were relaxed, and provisions for employment placement assistance upon return to Korea were established.

As part of its broader higher education expansion aimed at addressing social discontent following the coup in 1979, the New Military Regime (신군부; shin'gunbu) completely revised the ROS on August 5, 1981. The Korean government articulated a policy shift towards expanding access to overseas opportunities, announcing its intention to transform regulatory and closed study abroad institutions into active and open ones. This transformation aimed to expedite the training of high-quality human resources and enhance the global competitiveness of Korean academia. Simultaneously, the government sought to build a domestic higher education system that could accommodate returning KIS and provide additional "matching" services to link them with positions in government and, occasionally, private industry.

The Dynamics of Higher Education Access and Gender: Diverse Pathways and Obstacles

Before the comprehensive expansion of domestic higher education by the New Military Regime in the 1980s, college education and its credentials served as guarantors of elite social status, constituting a "positional good" due to its scarcity in Korea (Lett 1998). The educational system was not static but in flux, so both educational access and the consequent returns to cultural capital were constantly changing. Students hailed from various origins, ranging from the Privilege Pathway to the Achievement Pathway.

<u>Male elites: Variegated seamless pathways.</u>

In the initial phase, both class background and personal accomplishment facilitated men's entry into the academic elite through academic contest mobility. Inherited socioeconomic status

provided access to higher education. Affluent (upper-)middle-class parents in Seoul[2], whose own parents and/or grandparents may have studied in Japan, often ran successful businesses and worked as professors. Consequently, they could provide their children with substantial educational support, allowing them to focus on their studies without the need to earn a living (Weber 1978). This support included rare private shadow education in the 1950s and 1960s, leading these privileged sons to enroll in prestigious domestic colleges in Seoul, a path known as the Privilege Pathway.

In contrast, students from the countryside had to navigate multiple obstacles to arrive at the same elite domestic universities, constituting the Achievement Pathway. Typically, a son, often the first or brightest, would be the only sibling to receive a high level of education, while his parents were uneducated and worked on rural farms. Less privileged families mobilized their limited resources to support their sons in winning the education race because they believed in education's potential for upward mobility. Given the underdeveloped system of higher education, even a bit more education and the accompanying credentials could translate into better opportunities.

> **Author:** Did all [six brothers and two sisters] do well in school, or did some of you perform particularly well?
> **Hoonjae:** Since we lived in the countryside, my brothers attended agricultural high school, and my sisters only completed elementary school. Only two of my brothers and I managed to go to university. My brother, who is just older than me, became famous [in town] when he got into SNU law college after graduating from the agricultural high school. Despite my father only being able to read Chinese characters, he was deeply committed to our education. While other farmers took pride in buying land, my father sold his to educate us.

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[2] For instance, many fathers from upper-class families graduated from colleges in Japan during the Imperialist Rule period and went on to work as professionals, high-ranking bureaucrats, and entrepreneurs. While not all mothers received similar levels of education, many were high school-educated "female pupils" from well-off families.

While privileged pathways, characterized by parental "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2011) and following the academic path of elder siblings, are common among the privileged group, self-earned academic mobility is central to the narratives of self-achievers. When a family cannot afford to pay for education, a self-motivated individual, such as Sunwoo, may work as a live-in tutor for wealthy local households starting from middle school. This self-sufficient group climbs the K-12 and higher education academic ladders through their own efforts.

> **Author:** You said you were the best student from a young age until you graduated college, correct? You didn't receive any private education or anything similar?
> **Sunwoo:** I didn't attend any cram school, but I did teach students.
> **Author:** During your high school years?
> **Sunwoo:** Yes, in high school. I worked as a live-in tutor for middle school students to cover my tuition and living expenses.
> **Author:** That's quite impressive. It sounds like something from a drama.
> **Sunwoo:** [In the 1970s,] I wasn't the only one in that situation. There were quite a few of us.

Regardless of their social backgrounds, both categories of male elite students excelled in their K-12 education, culminating in matriculation at prestigious high schools (with some older informants starting from middle school admissions in the 1960s). Their academic achievements led them to enroll in top domestic universities, predominantly Seoul National University (SNU). Consequently, various pathways—privilege-based, achievement-based, and credential-based—frequently intersected in this initial phase, gradually converging on the credential route at elite domestic universities. This convergence highlights the complex interplay between inherited privilege and personal effort in a country with a nationwide belief in the power of education for social mobility.

However, domestic higher education often fell short of expectations, even at the most prestigious institutions. Despite their excellent reputations and the fierce competition required for admission, these universities were limited in many ways, ranging from the quality of education

to the overall environment. For instance, some students perceived their faculty as structurally incompetent, which further fueled the desire for international education as a means to attain academic excellence and superior credentials.

> **Minho:** To be honest, [in the early 1960s,] no one had ever studied [my major], so although professors were given administrative duties at the university, they were not true professors. My major, technical education had never been offered in Korea before. So how could the professors learn and teach it?

The political climate surrounding the campus further exacerbated the educational environment. Prior to the nation's democratization in 1987, prominent domestic universities were hotbeds of anti-government student movements. Consequently, many informants recall their college days as being marked by frequent school closures (mandated by the Korean government to prevent student assemblies) and sporadic lectures.

> **Author:** What was education like at SNU back then?
> **Sunwoo:** Daily demonstrations [in the early 1970s]. The government deployed police and fired tear gas. Tanks were stationed in front of the main gate to contain [the students]. If the government found the demonstrations excessive, the school was closed indefinitely. A month, two months, three months, or even four months could pass without classes. As a result, only one of the eight semesters in four years [was completed]. We couldn't attend lectures, and it was a total disaster.
> **Junho:** I attended for four years. My freshman year in 1968 was peaceful, but during my second, third, and fourth years, classes were not adequately conducted. There were likely no classes for more than two months per year, excluding vacations. Education was substandard, and lectures were not properly delivered. Every day, students threw rocks and engaged in skirmishes with tanks.

Pre-study abroad.

Despite low student satisfaction, the college credential premium remained high. For instance, the college premium–the monetary and career benefits associated with a college degree compared to high school credentials–varied between 180% to 230% in the 1970s and 1980s, peaking at 2.3 times in 1979 (Korean Employment and Labor Administration 1980). This substantial college premium motivated the majority of male college students to leverage their credentials into elite

jobs and careers in Korea. However, a select few who excelled in their prestigious undergraduate programs viewed academic careers as the next step.

If their goal was a professorship, American Ph.D. was not the necessity it is today. Before 1975, a doctoral degree was not a prerequisite for professorships in Korea due to the nation's underdeveloped graduate education system. Moreover, the Korean academic system inherited elements from the Japanese system, where doctorates were conferred upon only a select few. Consequently, many Korean graduate students could secure faculty positions at universities with just their master's degrees.

However, for the highest academic elites aspiring to professorships at elite domestic universities, studying abroad was deemed essential for their academic careers. They viewed overseas education not solely in terms of credentials but also as an opportunity for superior education. Compared to domestic higher education, American education both practically and symbolically represented a notion of "superiority." Within this symbolic gap, students could benefit simply from the experience of American education, even without obtaining a degree. For instance, Minho secured a professorship at his alma mater's new department after just one year of training in the United States, without having completed a degree.

> **Minho:** In 1963, SNU teacher's colleges established new departments for training teachers in agriculture, industry, commerce, home economics, health, and marine education. However, there were no professors available to teach these subjects, so the Ministry of Education launched a one-year training program overseas. [In the late 1960s,] I was sent to Michigan State [University]. Following that, I was hired as a paid teaching assistant in the new SNU department, with a 99.9% probability of becoming a professor. Without a doctorate, I became an instructor and shortly thereafter a professor. Approximately a decade later, while teaching at SNU, I was accepted to the [University of] Minnesota for a Ph.D. training.

As Korean higher education became more institutionalized, instances like Minho's became increasingly uncommon. The importance of American education and its credential, specifically the doctoral degree, grew significantly among elite Korean students pursuing academic careers. Their return to Korea, often resulting in a professorship at a prestigious university, was anticipated as if they were progressing seamlessly along a conveyor belt toward the next stage of capital conversion.

Within this circulatory pathway for academic elite students, the issue of "return" that had previously motivated many to stay in the United States after their education in the 1950s and 1960s became much less of a concern. Returning to Korean academia with an American doctoral degree during this era meant leveraging the scarcity of such credentials within the expanding Korean academic landscape. While the production of new domestically-earned Ph.D.s stagnated until the early 1980s, the number of overall faculty positions continued to grow (Figure 41).

Therefore, returning as an American Ph.D. holder to Korean academia after the 1975 legislative change, which required a doctoral degree to become a professor, carried dual advantages: representing the pinnacle of educational attainment and the highest assumed quality of credentials. Consequently, compared to earlier cohorts from the 1950s and 1960s, the expansion of Korean academia began to sufficiently address the former challenge of "return" by providing more post-education career opportunities at home. This shift started to alleviate the concern of finding suitable positions for returning scholars, making the transition back to Korea more attractive and feasible.

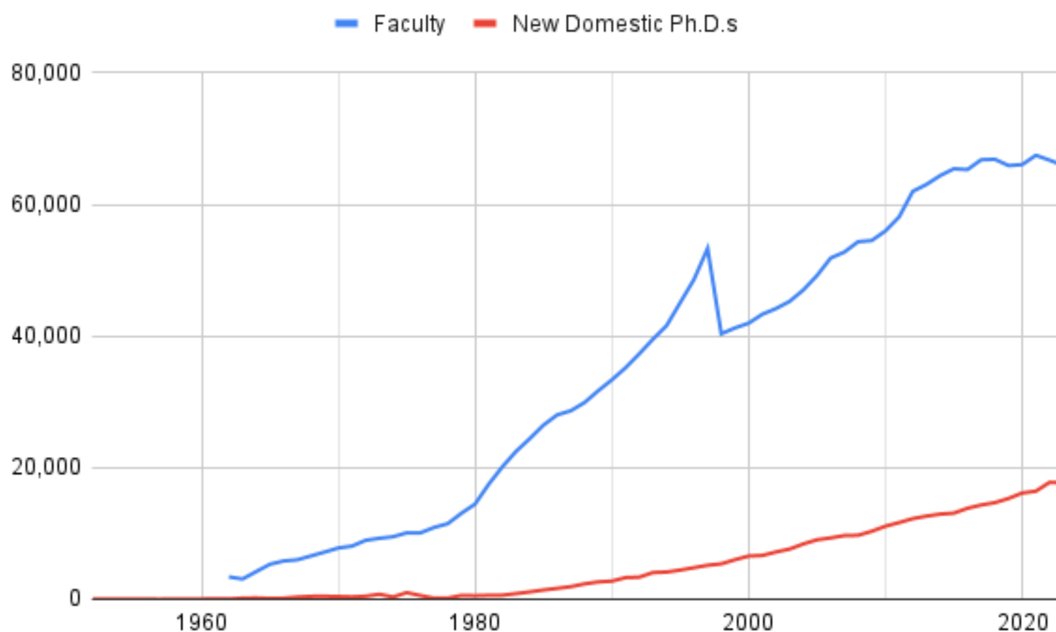

Figure 41: Number of Higher Education Faculty and New Domestic Ph.D.s in Korea, 1952-2023.
SOURCE: Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea, 1962-2023.

According to state regulations governing international student mobility, studying overseas in the United States was primarily associated with higher education until the mid-1980s. From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, the vast majority of KIS pursued graduate-level studies (Figure 42). Among those who reported their domestic educational backgrounds[3], only about 5.5% transitioned directly from K-12 education to American institutions. Approximately 74.5% entered American higher education with Korean undergraduate credentials. Of these, 75.3% pursued graduate-level programs, evenly split between master's and doctoral degrees, while only 15.7% enrolled in American undergraduate programs. Among those KIS with a Korean graduate education background (about 16.6%), approximately two-thirds enrolled in American

[3] Compared to their current educational level in the United States, only about half of them reported their educational background from Korea. This suggests potential selection bias among those who disclosed their Korean educational backgrounds, indicating they may be less hesitant to reveal such information.

Ph.D. programs. Consequently, the prevailing trajectory for KIS can be characterized as the "Korean Undergraduate-American Graduate" path (Korean Ministry of Education 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985).

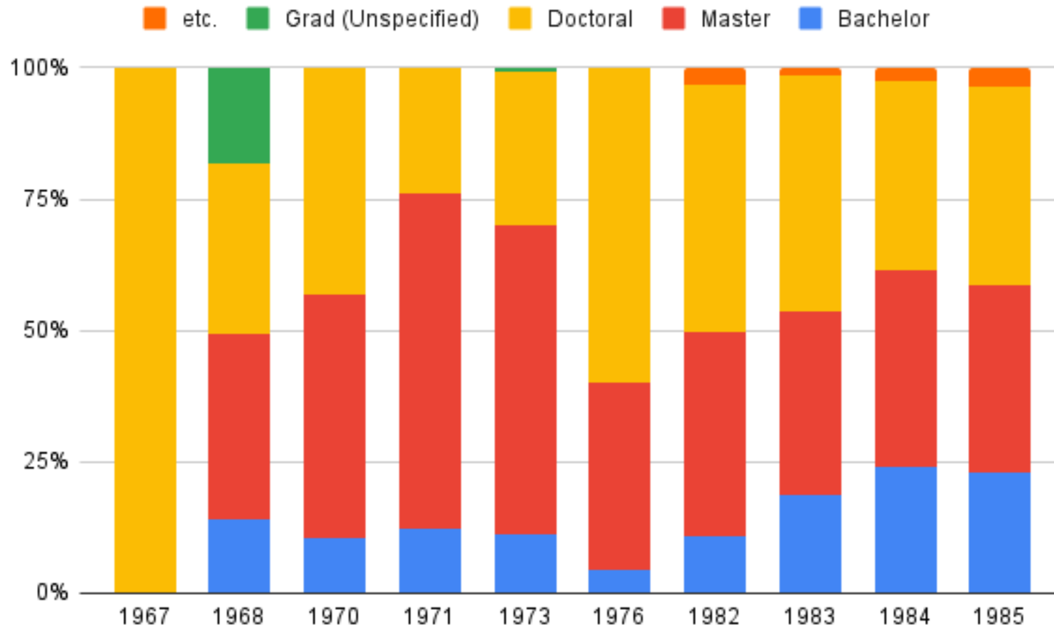

Figure 42: Educational Level of Korean International Students in the United States, 1967-1985. SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.

The majority of Korean international students were graduates of SNU. As depicted in Figure 43, approximately 60% of surveyed KIS in the 1980s with a graduate-level domestic educational background had attended SNU. Yonsei University, another prestigious domestic institution, was the second-largest sending institution, accounting for only 9.8% of graduate students. Consequently, SNU's status as the primary academic dispatching hub remained unchanged in the early 1980s.

At the undergraduate level, SNU's dominance waned slightly, but it still maintained its status as the nation's leading dispatching institution compared to other domestic universities. Approximately 32.5% of KIS with a domestic university background attended SNU, while only 10.3% attended Yonsei. On average, about 70% of graduate-level students and 44% of undergraduate-level students came from these two universities out of the 104 higher education institutions in Korea. In essence, studying abroad was a "very selective academic elite thing" for those who had ascended to the peak of the domestic education pyramid and aspired to return to their alma mater as professors.

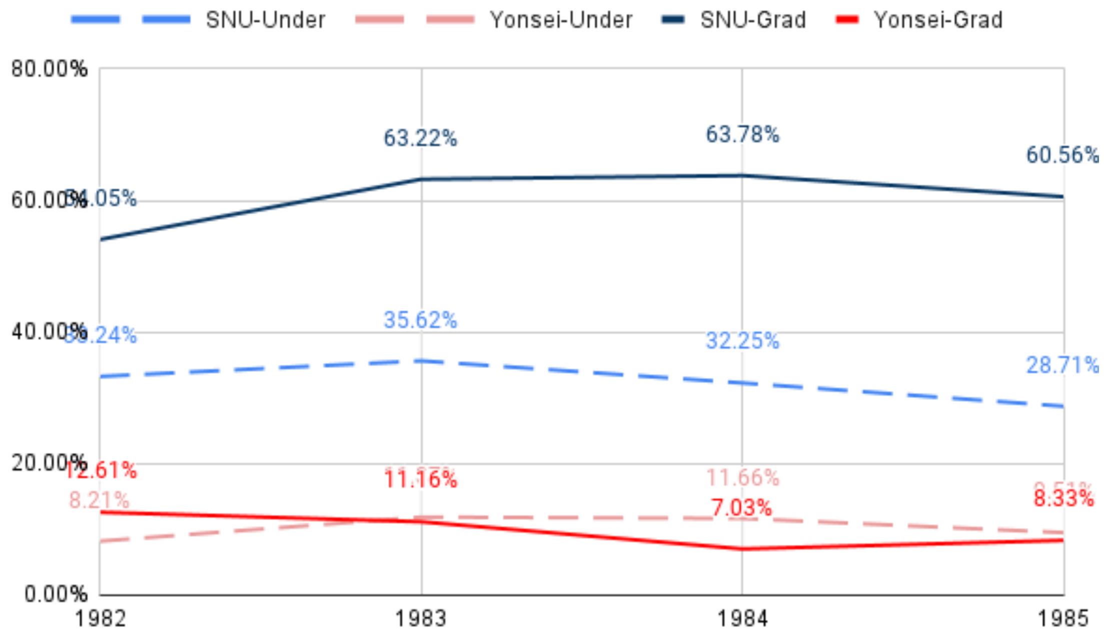

Figure 43: Top Domestic Backgrounds, 1982-1985.
SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1982-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.

> **Author:** When did you first consider studying abroad?
> **Joon:** [In the 1970s,] the atmosphere in our department [at SNU] was heavily focused on studying abroad. No one seemed to be securing jobs. Initially, some female students took the bold step of pursuing further education abroad. This created a prevailing sentiment towards studying abroad. Although I hadn't initially planned on it, after hearing about everyone else's plans, I decided to follow suit.

Particularly for self-achieving male academic elites like Joon, enrollment at a top domestic university served as a pathway to entering the existing elite network that aspired to study abroad. Even if it was not their original plan, studying abroad often became a primary next step toward attaining the highest level of academic prestige, leveraging the cultural and social capital acquired at their elite domestic university. For academic male elites from privileged backgrounds, pursuing graduate studies in the US offered a valid means to reproduce their parental elite status, such as professorships, both economically and culturally, through the consecration of credentials.

During this period, whether or not a person had an American Ph.D. mattered more than the specific institution from which the Ph.D. was obtained within the status hierarchy of US institutions. In other words, the Ph.D. credential as institutionalized cultural capital was valued primarily for being American, regardless of the granting institution. This binary valuation reflects how the American credential was symbolically esteemed in Korean society, similar to the symbolic benefit of higher education, which "maximally maintains inequality" (Raftery and Hout 1993) even amid educational expansion.

In the societal hierarchy of Korea, academic occupations, especially within the professoriate, hold a distinctive position as meritocratic elites. The system of academic contest mobility inherited from Japanese imperialism bolstered the symbolic elite status of professors. Other elites with academic competence include high-ranking state officials, such as judges and prosecutors, and professional medical doctors. However, professors often garner additional cultural prestige beyond their expertise in a particular field because academic elites have long been revered as the intellectual guides of the nation and society since the pre-modern Chosŏn dynasty.

Rooted in Confucian ideals, the image of the humble teacher serving society has evolved over time. Academic elites have not only spearheaded patriotic movements under Japanese imperialism but have also served as mentors to student protesters during periods of military dictatorship. Their struggles, including being fired from universities for protecting student protestors, have elevated them to the status of public intellectuals. Despite the fact that only a few intellectuals actually fulfill such roles, the professoriate has acquired a distinct status with the symbolic significance of a Confucian scholar in modern Korean society.

Moreover, it was generally assumed that they would return to Korean academia after completing graduate school in the United States. As shown in Figure 44 - Figure 46, the likelihood of a degree bearer working in academia increased with the education level of the degree holder. While the destinations of Korean returnees with a bachelor's degree were more diverse (Figure 44), an average of 78.5% of Korean doctoral degree holders obtained academic positions (Figure 46). Many army officers and high public officials received master-level short-term training in the United States and returned to government positions in the early 1970s (Figure 45 and Figure 47). The private commercial sector was a rare destination for KIS after completing their higher education in the United States.

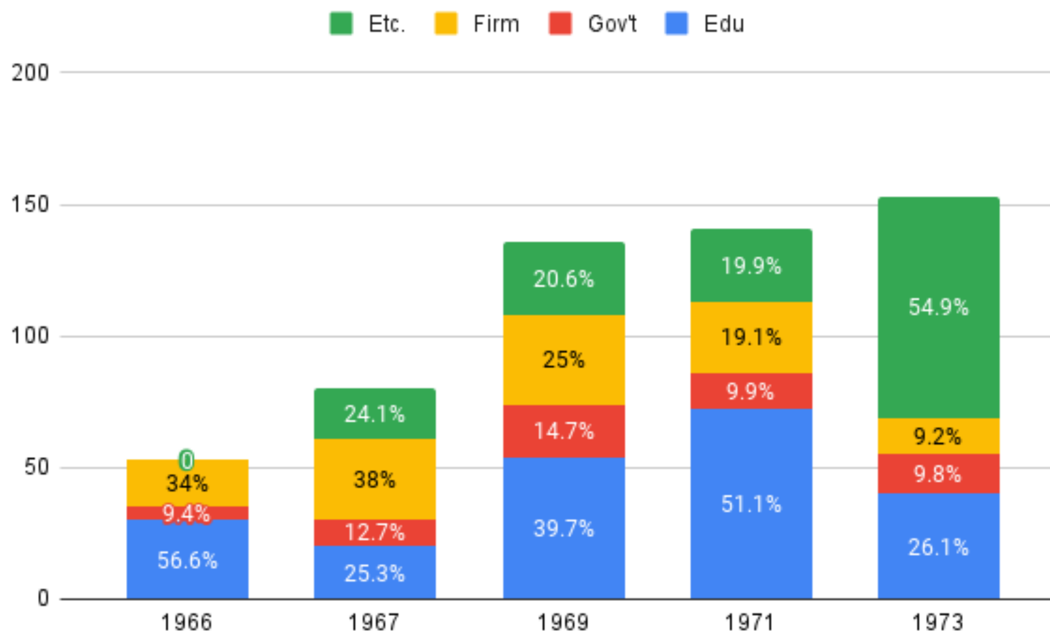

Figure 44: US Bachelor Returnees x Occupation, 1966-1973.

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1968-1976. Registry of Korean International Students.

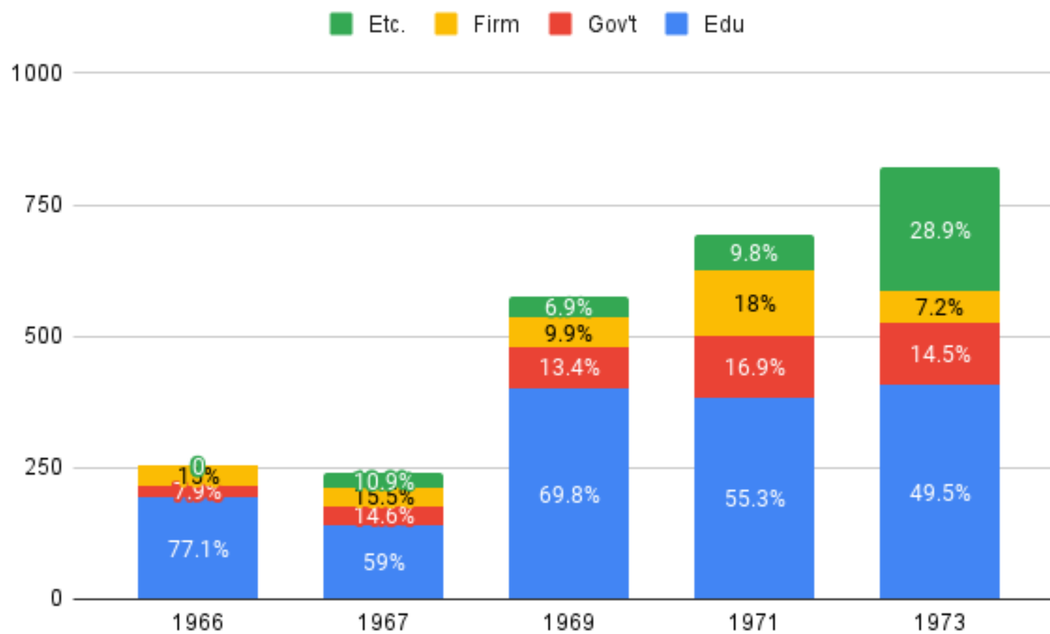

Figure 45: US Master Returnees x Occupation, 1966-1973.

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1968-1976. Registry of Korean International Students.

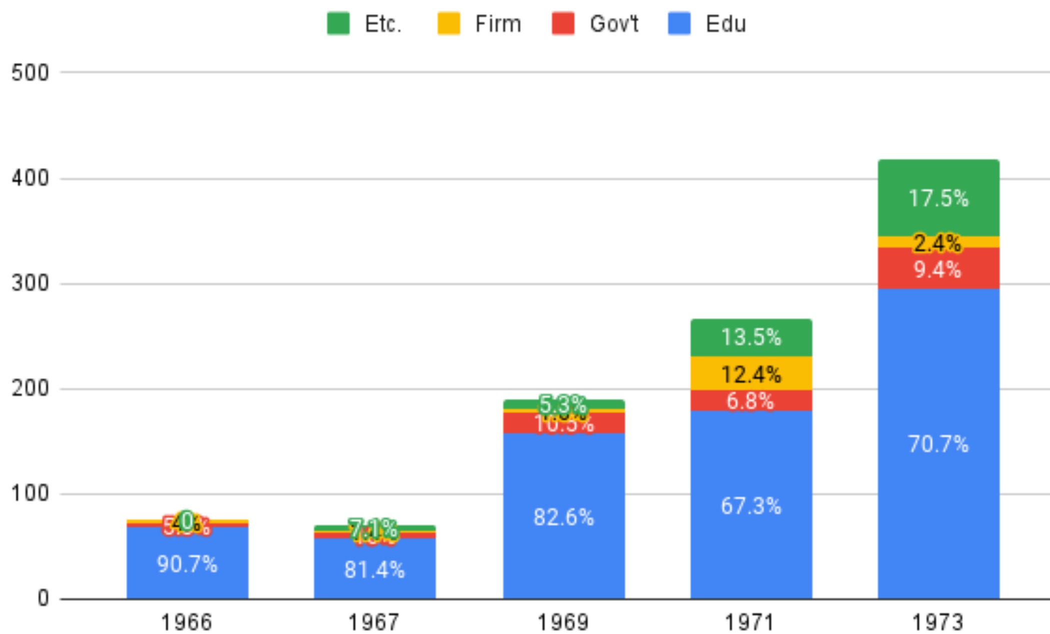

Figure 46: US Doctoral Returnees x Occupation, 1966-1973.

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1968-1976. Registry of Korean International Students.

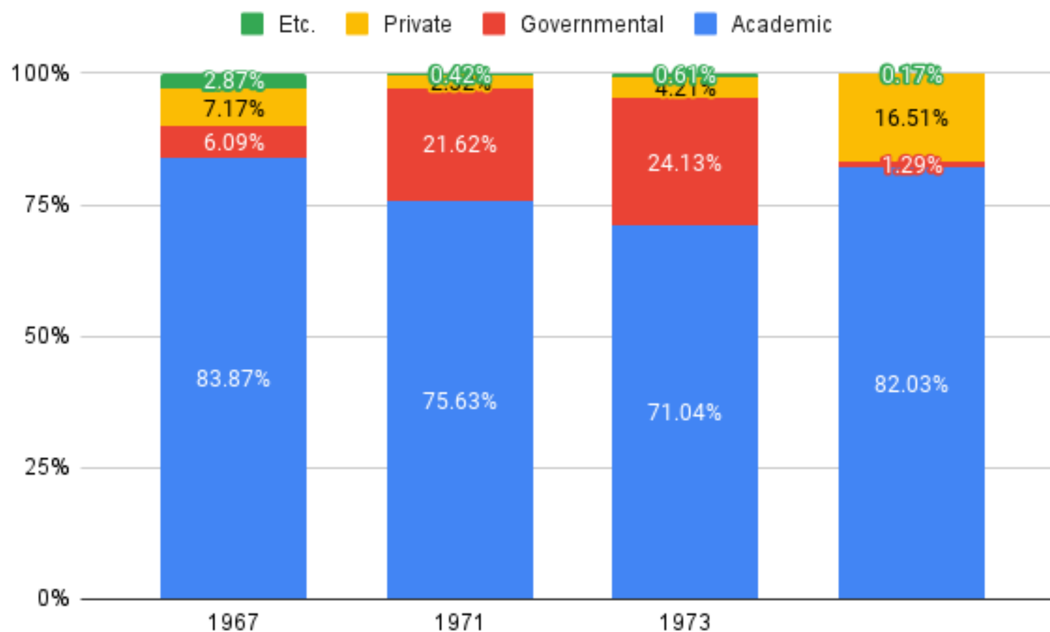

Figure 47: Post-Education Career.

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1973. Registry of Korean International Students.; Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars. 2011. List of Government-Funded Korean Students.

Over 78% of Korean international students returned to academia in their home country, assuming roles as professors and lecturers (Figure 47). The teaching styles of these new professors, shaped by their American education, diverged significantly from those of their older counterparts who were trained within the Japanese higher education system or who lacked professional training altogether. This contrast in teaching approaches was perceived as a form of "superiority" by elite Korean undergraduate students, further fueling their aspirations to pursue studies in the United States.

During Study Abroad.

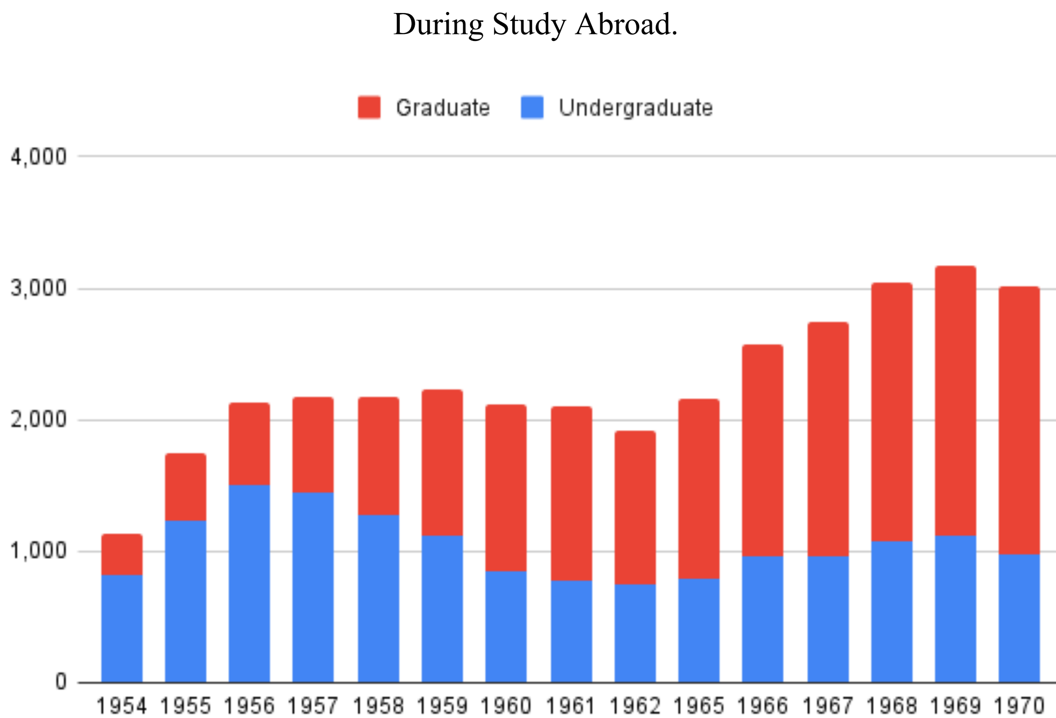

Figure 48: Korean International Students by Education Level, 1954-1970.
SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

As depicted in Figure 48, after the cessation of the Korean War in 1953, Korean students began studying in the United States as undergraduates. However, by the late 1950s, this trend shifted predominantly towards graduate-level studies, which continued to grow steadily thereafter.

Governmental survey data confirm this graduate prevalence, showing that the proportion of undergraduates has never exceeded 25 percent of respondents, with a high of 24.1% in 1984 (Korean Ministry of Education 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985).

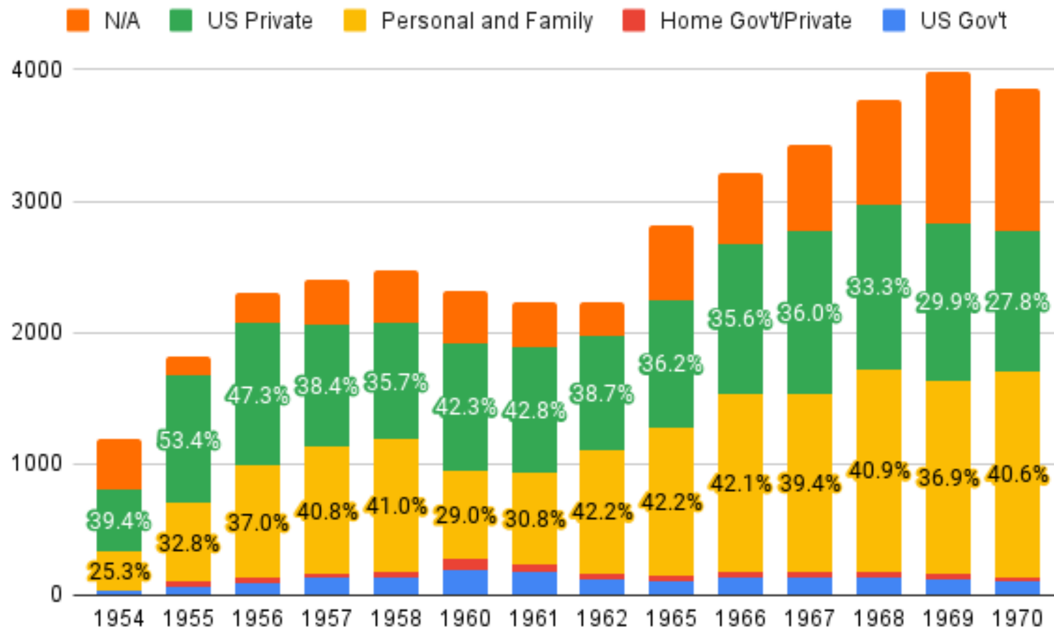

Figure 49: Financial Support of Korean Students, 1954-1970.
SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.

As represented in Figure 49, the financial support data of Korean students from 1954 to 1970 indicate significant trends. Firstly, US private sponsors (green), mostly colleges and universities, provided the largest funding for KIS in the earlier period, with an average of 38.3 percent. The number of self-funded students, including those supported by family and private sponsors (yellow), followed closely with an average of 37.2 percent. Considering that Korea's per capita GDP in the 1960s was only 3.3% of that of the United States (KOSIS 2024), the self-funded group of the first generation likely originated from the upper class. In comparison, the average support from the American government (blue; 4.6%) and the Korean government (red; 1.6%)

was quite small. Despite their prominence in society and research, the scale of the Smith-Mundt program and Fulbright scholarship was not critical. Thus, the preponderance of early KIS was either self-funded or funded by US educational institutions, supporting the hypothesis that early study abroad students were a blend of privileged individuals and self-starters.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, KIS were concentrated in a limited number of institutions. Approximately 37% of KIS attended just 10 educational institutions. Additionally, over half of the students were enrolled in 20 institutions, and around two-thirds were enrolled in 30 institutions (Korean Ministry of Education 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985).

Firstly, the institutional assistance program had a significant impact on graduates, as evidenced by Table 10. For example, in 1971 and 1973, institutions such as the University of Minnesota, the University of Hawaii, Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, and Harvard University, which provided (re)training for Korean faculty members as part of American aid programs, were among the top 10 institutions. Secondly, the majority of students were enrolled in flagship state universities, with a few exceptions, including USC, Columbia University, and NYU. This suggests there was no clear preference for Ivy League institutions at the graduate level during this period. Lastly, focusing on the top 10 institution list of Korean government-funded students (as shown in the last column of Table 10), which represents the academically elite group, reveals the presence of several Ivy League schools alongside other large state universities renowned for their science and engineering programs.

Table 10: Top 10 Institution Concentration, 1967-1985.

Year	1967	1968	1970	1971	1973	1976	1982	1983	1984	1985	Gov't (1978-2011)
Student	**Graduates**	**Current**	**Current**	**Graduates**	**Graduates**	**Mixed**	**Current**	**Current**	**Current**	**Current**	**Returnees**
Total Number	**620**	**2613**	**2983**	**1447**	**1864**	**345**	**2476**	**1774**	**2983**	**2569**	**1439**
Missing Rate	**0.97%**	**1.14%**	**1.71%**	**0.14%**	**1.43%**	**0.00%**	**0.44%**	**4.00%**	**1.71%**	**6.00%**	**0.00%**
Top 10%	**31.76%**	**27.43%**	**25.98%**	**34.10%**	**32.10%**	**55.10%**	**42.28%**	**36.30%**	**25.98%**	**27.64%**	**46.06%**
1	Wisconsin	USC	USC	Minnesota	Minnesota	Ohio State	Michigan	George Washing	USC	George Washing	MIT
2	Minnesota	UCLA	UCLA	Hawaii	Hawaii	Hawaii	USC	Iowa	UCLA	NC State	Stanford
3	Michigan	Columbia	Minnesota	Peabody Colleg	Harvard	Illinois	Indiana	Wisconsin-Madi	Minnesota	Louisiana State	UC Berkeley
4	USC	Washington	Hawaii	Columbia	Columbia	Michigan	Stanford	Northwestern	Hawaii	USC	UT Austin
5	Columbia	Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Harvard	NYU	Iowa State	Iowa	Michigan	Wisconsin	Texas Tech	Michigan-Ann Arbor
6	Ohio State	UC Berkeley	UC Berkeley	Michigan	Michigan	Minnesota	UCLA	Virginia	UC Berkeley	Hawaii	UIUC
7	Yale	NYU	Washington	NYU	Peabody Colleg	Michigan State	Wisconsin-Madi	Virginia Tech	Washington	Georgia	Wisconsin-Madison
8	Harvard	UPenn	NYU	UC	UC	Wisconsin	George Washing	Detroit	NYU	UCLA	Purdue
9	NYU	Maryland	Illinois	Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Kansas State	Pacific States	Oklahoma State	Illinois	American U.	Cornell
10	UC Berkeley	Oregon	Michigan	Indiana	Indiana	Wisconsin-Madi	Maryland-Colleg	Texas Tech	Michigan	MIT	Michigan
10				Purdue						Georgia State	

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.; Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars. 2011. List of Government-Funded Korean Students.

Note: "University" is omitted from the names of each institution, and well-known abbreviations are used for interpretation. USC refers to the University of Southern California, while Columbia refers to Columbia University.

The majors chosen by KIS from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s were more concentrated than the institutions they attended (Table 11). Approximately 49% of KIS were concentrated in the top 10 majors, 65% were in the top 20 majors, and roughly 75% chose the top 30 majors (Korean Ministry of Education 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985). For government-funded students, the corresponding percentages were 55%, 76%, and 88%, respectively (Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e, 2011f, 2011g, 2011h, 2011i, 2011j, 2011k, 2011l).

Table 11: Top 10 Major Concentration, 1967-1985.

Year	1967	1968	1970	1971	1973	1976	1982	1983	1984	1985	Gov't (1978-2011)
Student	Graduates	Current	Current	Graduates	Graduates	Mixed	Current	Current	Current	Current	Returnees
Total Number	620	2163	2689	1443	1891	345	2399	1507	1745	2116	1439
Missing Rate	2.28%	18.16%	11.40%	0.41%	0.00%	0.00%	3.54%	18.45%	15.13%	22.58%	0.00%
Top 10%	61.72%	37.40%	42.47%	39.50%	40.45%	50.14%	49.31%	58.99%	52.66%	49.20%	55.04%
1	Chemistry	Business Admini	Business Admini	Economics	Economics	Business Admini	Business Admini	Business Admini	Business Admini	Business Admini	Mechanical Engineering
2	Physics	Economics	Electrical Engine	Poliitcal Science	Business Admini	Economics	Economics	Computer Scien	Computer Scien	Computer Scien	Electrical Engineering
3	Economics	Electrical Engine	Economics	Business Admini	Political Science	Food and Nutriti	Mechanical Engi	Mechanical Engi	Electrical Engine	Economics	Chemical Engineering
4	Political Science	Chemistry	Chemical Engine	English Literatur	English Literatur	Political Science	Computer Scien	Economics	Mechanical Engi	Electrical Engine	Material Engineering
5	Medicine	Mathematics	Mathematics	Education	Education	Mechanical Engi	English	Chemistry	Economics	Mechanical Engi	Physics
6	Agriculture	Chemical Engine	Chemistry	Religion	Religion	Chemistry	Chemical Engine	Electrical Engine	Chemistry	Physics	Bioengineering
7	Education	Mechanical Engi	Mechanical Engi	Public Admnistra	Law	Math	Physics	Chemical Engine	Chemical Engine	Management	Computer Engineering
8	Chemical Engine	Political Science	Political Science	English	Public Administr	Education	Electrical Engine	Political Science	Accounting	Chemistry	Agriculture
9	Math	Physics	Physics	Medicine	Medicine	Elecctrical Engin	Chemistry	Education	Political Science	Political Science	Chemistry
10	Religion	Engineering	Music	Physics	Physics	Agriculture	Political Science	Industrial Engine	Physics	Chemical Engine	Math

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.; Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars. 2011. List of Government-Funded Korean Students.

The breakdown of specific majors by field level (Figure 50) indicates that three areas—social sciences, engineering, and natural sciences—accounted for most of the KIS in the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s. In the early years, from 1953 to 1955, medical sciences were the most popular division, but this quickly changed. While humanities and literature maintained respectable enrollment figures, they never surpassed those of the top three divisions. This trend contrasts with the pre-1945 period, when Korea was annexed by Japan, during which most Korean Ph.D.s from US universities came from medical sciences, social sciences, and humanities (National Assembly Library of Korea 1967).

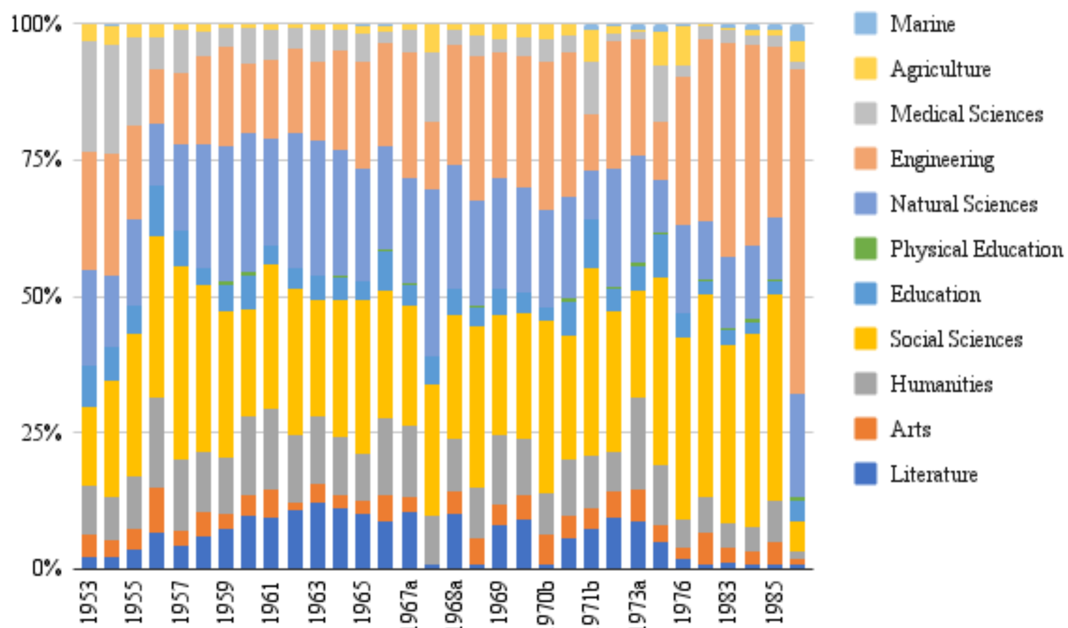

Figure 50: Field of Major Comparison, 1953-1985 & Government-Funded. SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.; Korea Academy of Government-supported Scholars. 2011. List of Government-Funded Korean Students.

The social sciences remained the most popular field of study for KIS for decades, led by the prominence of business administration (9%) and economics (7%). These self-sponsored individual mobilities somewhat diverged from state directives. As indicated by the Korean government's hesitance to support the Fulbright Program, social sciences did not hold primary importance for the Korean government during this period (Chang 2022b).[4] For instance, only about one percent of government-funded KIS majored in commercial disciplines.

In contrast, the Korean government was more focused on nurturing engineers. From the mid-1960s, engineering emerged as the second most popular area, surpassing the natural

[4] The government's reluctance to fund programs like the Fulbright Program, which primarily focus on social sciences, is interpreted as indicative of its hesitancy towards prioritizing social sciences. For further details, see Chang (2022b).

sciences. In the late 1970s, under the administration of Park Chung Hee, a newly established government scholarship for outstanding students aimed to enhance the future science and engineering faculties of domestic higher education institutions, accounting for approximately 60% of the scholarships, to drive national development. Natural science majors such as chemistry, physics, and mathematics, traditionally popular in the Japanese academic system, remained favored among KIS. However, they ranked second in Korean government sponsorship and third among self-funded Korean students.

The number of students majoring in medical sciences, education, and agriculture decreased significantly relative to the other three fields. This decline is attributable to the initial study abroad generations in those disciplines being supported by American assistance programs, such as the Minnesota Project and the Peabody program, which aimed to establish inaugural faculties in higher education institutions. After these programs ended in the 1960s, and as the Korean economy transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial economy under the developmental state, the popularity of these three disciplines sharply declined.

Post-US Education.

Korean academic male elites held returning to their homeland after earning Ph.D.s from US institutions in as high esteem as the American Ph.D. education itself, viewing it as a prerequisite for becoming professors. A few members of the first generation who remained in the United States after completing their doctoral programs saw their extended stay as a temporary buffer before returning to Korea, with no intention of establishing permanent residency or altering their academic careers. They seized every opportunity to return to Korea without hesitation.

> **Author:** Was it somewhat anticipated [around 1980] that you would return home after receiving your Ph.D.?
> **Junho:** Certainly. I didn't intend to stay permanently, but I thought I could work and live there temporarily if the opportunity arose. I had the chance to teach at a branch of the University of Kansas, but after SNU made their decision, I had to apologize to Kansas. Additionally, a Catholic university considered me a viable candidate, but after hearing from SNU, I decided to join them.

Until the late 1960s, there were two categories of "Brain Drain": 1) not returning to Korea after studying abroad, and 2) returning to the United States after establishing themselves in Korea. The majority of the first cohorts of KIS chose to remain in the United States following their doctoral studies. KIS viewed the United States as offering superior job opportunities and working conditions, such as better compensation and research facilities (Korean Embassy in the United States 1968, 15-7). This was indicative of Korea's general underdevelopment at the time; in 1967, Korea's GDP per capita was only about 3.3% of that of the United States (KOSIS 2024). As a result, the majority of Korean doctorates remained in the United States as faculty instead of returning home. Only about 11% (782 individuals) of accredited KIS returned from the United States between 1953 and 1967 (*ibid.*).

In contrast, approximately 96% of Korean government-funded KIS from the late 1970s to the 2000s returned to Korea, with over 80% working in academia. This demonstrates that the return duty was strictly adhered to and that government funding for Korean higher education faculties was successful as intended. However, approximately 17% of government-funded students made their careers in the private sector, indicating the Korean government's less stringent post-education control over its funded students.

When seeking employment in Korea, these students actively utilized their social capital from previous domestic academic networks. In contrast to their American networks, they had developed robust domestic social relations during their elite secondary and higher education in

Korea. Their newly acquired American graduate degrees and publication records further supplemented their employment prospects.

Spending their summer in Korea a year prior to graduation was common among male doctorates. This was often their first homecoming since they left for the United States due to the significant economic burden of international travel. They met with their previous Korean advisors and other faculty members to inform them about their willingness to return to Korea, their research topics, and their academic credentials, including their Ph.D. institutions.

Some secured their dream professorships on their first visits to Korea, while others were less fortunate but still found academic positions upon their return. The combination of existing social capital and newly acquired institutionalized cultural capital was not exclusive to SNU graduates. When a graduate was the first American Ph.D. holder of their home department, some private universities welcomed them with a faculty position as "(the first) alumni professor."

Even if they lacked explicit personal connections, their credentials often led them to new professor positions in Korea.

> **Author:** During your time in the United States, you considered becoming a researcher at a Korean research institute, correct? Was there any discussion about the position before you left?
> **Hoonjae:** Yes, if you teach science education, you must become a university professor or work at a research institute. Although I wanted to join a university, I didn't know anyone there, so I wrote to the director of the Education Development Institute's research center. He couldn't provide a definitive answer but said the likelihood was high and instructed me to visit him upon my return. [Before meeting him in Korea,] I reported my return from a government-funded study abroad to the Ministry of Education, and they [surprisingly] offered me a position as a professor at a brand-new national university.

In this ideal type of meritocratic upward social mobility, the valorization of American credentials did not rely on qualitative differentiation but on quantitative differentiation—whether the person

graduated from a US institution or not. In a nutshell, during the first elite phase of the KIS, studying overseas in the United States was typically understood and executed as a step curve: a male academic elite would attend SNU, complete his bachelor's or master's degree, then pursue doctoral studies at an American graduate school before returning to Korea as a professor. Regardless of whether their prior trajectories were privileged or marked by self-achievement, once they entered top domestic universities and pursued overseas education, they followed the same academic credential pathway that led to successful academic positions in Korea. Due to the absence of comparable credentials in Korean society, the capital conversion of first-generation male elite students was successful the majority of the time. This was not the case, however, for female elites.

Female elites: Diverse and challenging trajectories.

Throughout the first several decades, male Korean students dominated study abroad in the United States (Figure 51). This gender ratio was comparable to that of domestic higher education institutions during the same period. While the hyper-male dominance might be influenced by overrepresentation of men in self-reported surveys, selection bias alone would not reverse the male dominance in higher education abroad.

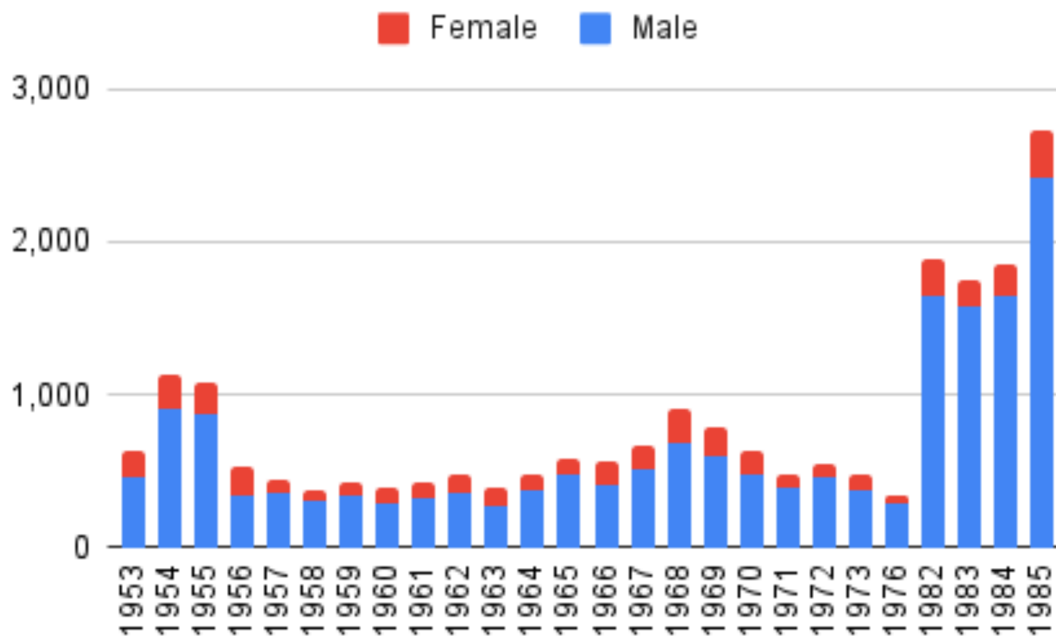

Figure 51: Gender Composition, 1953-1985.

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1967-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.

Gender disparities in study abroad became increasingly apparent when considering educational levels (Figures 52-54). The gender asymmetry was particularly pronounced at higher levels of education. Despite a surge in the number of Korean international students during the 1980s, gender disparities among students worsened, especially at the master's level.[5] Furthermore, the gender asymmetry was much more extreme among returnees who completed their degrees, indicating that female students faced more significant challenges overseas.

[5] The 1976 survey, conducted under the name "Korean Students Abroad Survey," was the last survey conducted before the initiation of government-funded scholarships for study abroad in 1977. Moreover, it was conducted three years after the 1973 survey. The number of individuals surveyed this year was particularly small, and there is no explanation provided in the data. The comprehensive list of overseas students resumed six years later with the new name of "Korean Students Abroad Registry," after the regime transitioned to a new military dictatorship. Given these circumstances, it is conjectured that governmental interest in overseas students began to decline as early as the mid-1970s, with a shift in focus towards selecting government-funded scholarship recipients.

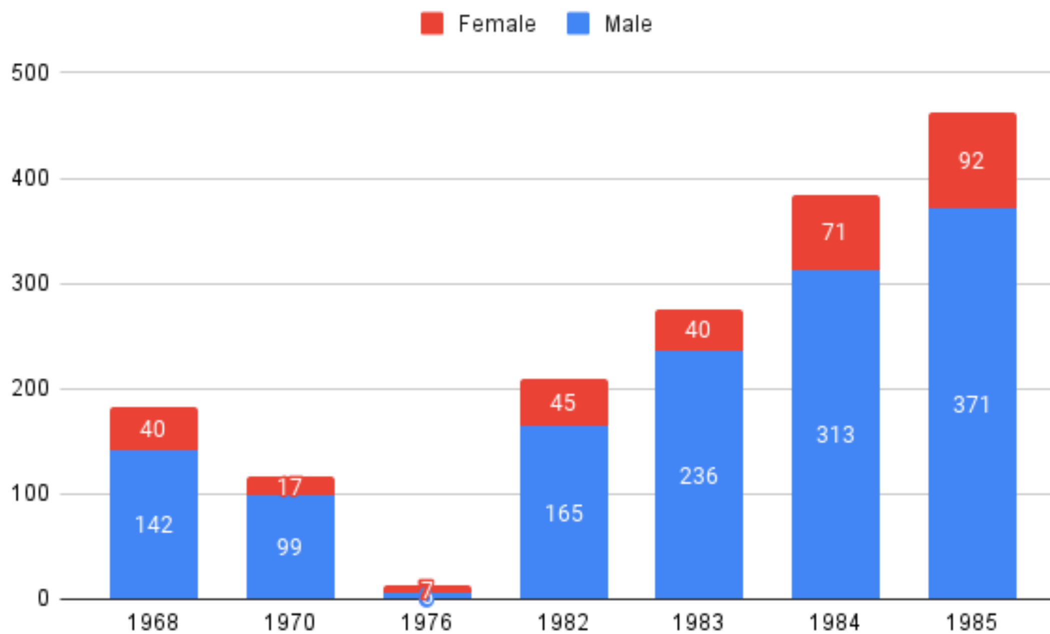

Figure 52: US Bachelor Students x Gender, 1968-1985.
SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1968-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.

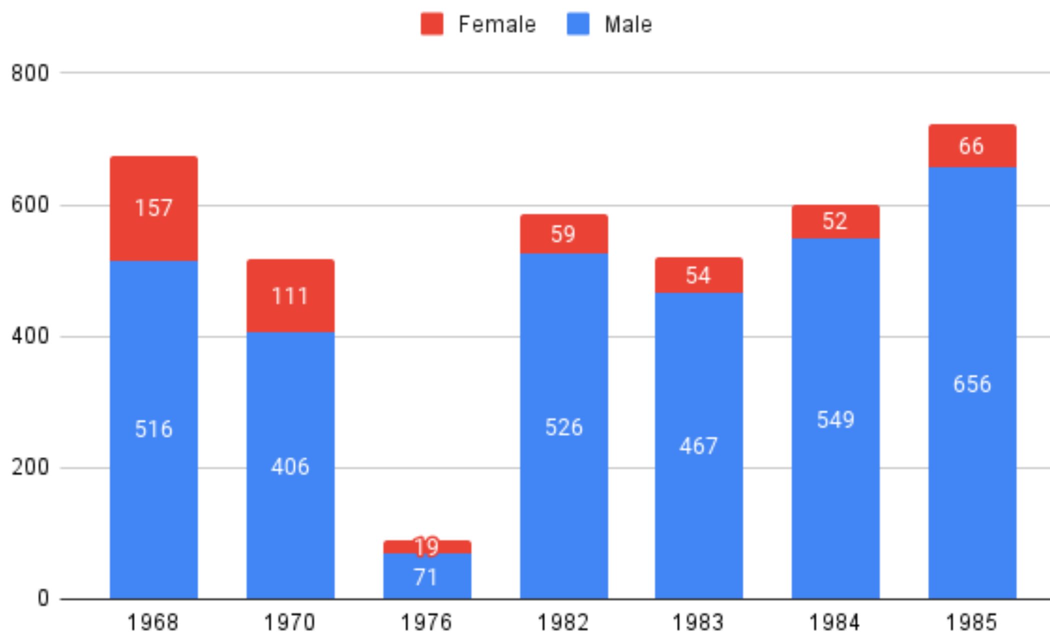

Figure 53: US Master Students x Gender, 1968-1985.
SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1968-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.

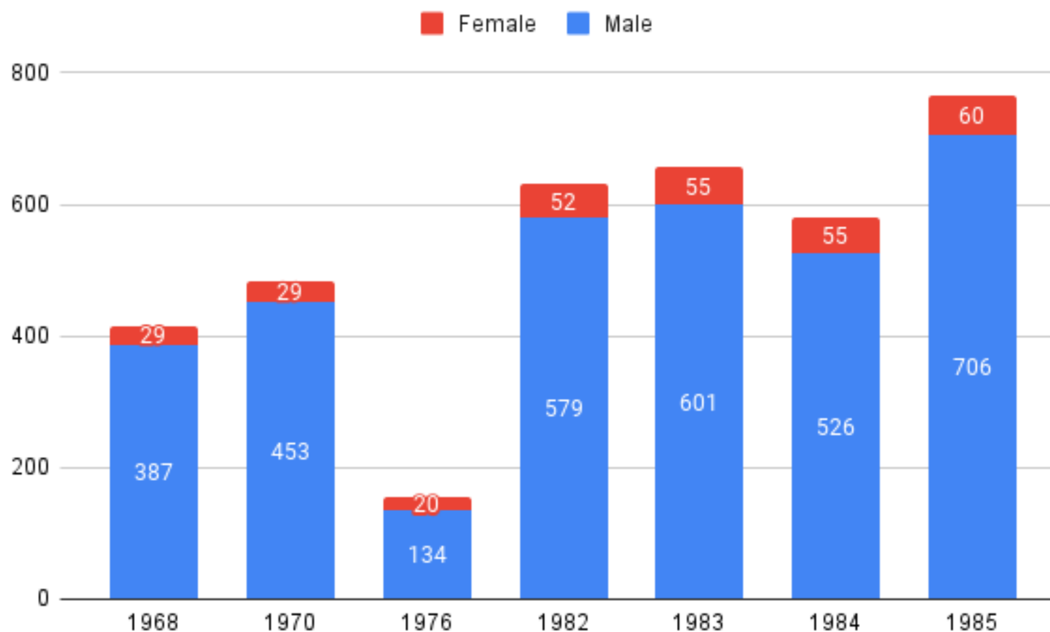

Figure 54: US Doctoral Students x Gender, 1968-1985.
SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Education. 1968-1985. Registry of Korean International Students.

In the meantime, the severe gender imbalance led to current male students' discontent with the Korean government's inactive posture on the "marriage" of male students abroad (Korean Embassy in the United States 1968, 24). When the Korean government surveyed the current students, some male students explicitly requested "privileges for female students so that the gender ratio is at least 3:1" in order to prevent "international marriage and subsequent renunciation of return to Korea" (Korean Embassy in the United States 1970, 23).

Studying abroad during this time was highly gendered in particular ways as a social reproduction system. The layered gender barriers, often surrounding the issue of marriage and family formation, caused a number of (already small number of) women to fail to complete their international educational mobility circuits, even with the assistance of her class background. Her enrollment in American educational institutions implied that she has already leaped over layered

obstacles, such as admission to domestic higher education and the decision to study abroad. Their family backgrounds enabled them to pursue higher education via a variety of pathways and capital convertibility, which was uncommon for women in the early phases of economic development. For instance, in 1980, only about 8.1% of female population in applicable age were enrolled in higher education while 15.9% of same age male population were in the higher education (Korean Education Development Institute 2002). As shown in Table 12 of interviewed individuals, higher education frequently indicated upper-class status during this era, especially for women.

Table 12: Class Composition by Gender, Phase 1.

Class	Male	Female	Total
Upper-	10 (1)	6 (1)	16 (2)
Middle- and Working-	12 (2)	1	13 (2)
Total	22 (3)	7 (1)	29 (4)

Note: The number in parenthesis represents those who began their undergraduate education in the United States. Others have only attended graduate programs in the United States.

However, when upper-class female elites attempted to convert their academic credentials, unequal gender norms frequently obstructed their paths at multiple conversion points, unlike the diverse and seamless pathways available to male elites. Even the wealthiest women faced limited post-college opportunities due to societal expectations that female education should produce “wise mothers and good wives.” Unlike their male counterparts, for whom education often led to prestigious careers, marriage was the most common end for women’s institutionalized cultural capital. This effectively concluded their cycle of capital convertibility, limiting their professional and academic advancement.

Detoured to get married.

Entering (American) graduate schools to build their future careers was the solution for the few elite women who wanted to overcome the inconvertibility of their domestic undergraduate credentials, choosing this path over marriage.

> **Hyejin:** [In the late 1970s,] Gyeonggi and Ewha were the top high schools for academically successful females, and many of my friends from these schools attended Ewha Womans University. Most of my Ewha friends either got married immediately after graduating or pursued uncommon paths like working or studying abroad. However, few managed to balance work and family, as these were seen as mutually exclusive. There were far more housewives than working women.
> I was more interested in becoming a professional than in getting married. I wanted to continue my education [in the United States] and become a specialist in my field, rather than just getting married. My goal was to return to Korea as a career woman. I didn't initially plan to pursue a Ph.D., but after earning my master's degree abroad, I intended to apply for a position [in Korea].

This motivation propelled them to initiate a new round of international graduate credential acquisition in addition to their domestic undergraduate education. However, unlike their elite education in Korea, which allowed them to complete their college degrees, they discovered that converting their credentials to the international graduate stage was often dysfunctional. Gender-related cultural barriers affected both high achievers and privileged groups, limiting their opportunities despite their accomplishments and backgrounds.

> **Jieun:** [In the early 1970s,] 40 distinguished college men were invited to Ewha Womans University for folk dances, including the waltz, blues, and cha-cha, at the president's residence. However, my advisor prevented me from attending, having seen many outstanding graduates fail to study abroad after marriage.
> My father always [encouraged me to study], but as I got older, he changed his stance. Studying in the United States would take over five years, making it harder to meet men. So, he told me he would support studying abroad after marriage, but never before.

> **Author:** In the 1960s, Gyeonggi Middle and High Schools for Girls were the most prestigious institutions. Did your older sisters also attend, and did any study abroad?
>
> **Jimin:** Just me. My eldest sister was supposed to study in France. She was exceptionally gifted, unlike me. The top student in Gyeonggi, she could have entered medical school but got married instead. (Ah) Her partner obstructed her path. She was indispensable when I decided to study abroad. My father knew I had a wonderful host family in the United States but was cautious. He was uncertain if a woman could travel and study alone. My elder sisters begged him to let me pursue my own path. [Decades later,] they said my choice made their lives a bit better, allowing them to breathe more comfortably.

Before the 1970s, even high school was out of reach for most Korean women. However, some liberal fathers initially supported their daughters' pursuit of domestic higher education. This paternal support enabled privileged females to enroll in college, navigating denser cultural barriers than their male counterparts. Yet, these same fathers often began to block their daughters' pursuit of (overseas) graduate education, believing that "overeducation" would diminish their daughters' marriage prospects.

> **Jieun:** [In the late 1970s,] I convinced my father to let me spend a year at the East-West Center in Hawaii. In 1979, after six months of struggle, I went as the only selected person from Asia-Pacific. When I returned to Korea after a year, my father took away my passport and said, "Since you promised me a year, you must marry first. You can go abroad again after getting married [and with your husband]."
> I had to obtain a new passport, which took another six months. My father, who relocated to Seoul for my college education, used to travel to Busan on weekends to care for his hospital. I used his weekend trips to Busan to escape to Hawaii. I wrote him a letter requesting his forgiveness, saying I was responsible for my own life. It didn't mean I disregarded his wishes, but I fled to pursue my education.

In essence, while converting academic credentials into new jobs and socioeconomic status was an expected trajectory for male elites, unimpeded by cultural barriers, this path was deliberately obstructed for privileged females of this generation, irrespective of their level of education, in favor of promoting the marriage pathway. Within this marriage-centric trajectory, the original credential pathway (from original class to credential to new class) is diverted, with academic credentials serving as a mediator to facilitate opportunities for a "good marriage" (from original class to credential to marriage to new class), rather than directly translating into new class status

as observed among male peers. This “detoured credential pathway” represents a modernized version of the traditional privilege pathway (from original class to opportunity to new class).

For male elites, irrespective of their background, academic credentials facilitated the formation of diverse social networks within the academic environment, ultimately leading them to secure domestic academic positions. However, despite possessing the same academic credentials as institutionalized cultural capital, female elites were restricted from utilizing their credentials in the same way; instead, they were limited to engaging in homo- or hypergamy with their college credentials. Parents, particularly fathers, supported their daughters’ pursuit of domestic college education as a signal of personal competence and family background, essential for navigating the marriage circuit effectively. However, they were skeptical of graduate education, which they perceived as offering limited opportunities within the marriage market. The second round of the credential pathway involving American graduate education is omitted in this female-only trajectory because the risk of “overeducation” could jeopardize the actor’s and her family’s ability to leverage these credentials for marriage opportunities.

Blocked from converting degree.

Despite the marriage barrier, a small number of Korean elite women attended American graduate institutions. For the first generation of female elites, marrying an elite man who pursued the same American graduate education (or sometimes temporarily detaching from the family as a single woman) was a viable way to circumvent this obstacle.

The fathers’ concerns regarding the marriage prospects of their “overeducated” daughters were not unfounded. While all male respondents married before or during their overseas education, half of the female respondents remained unmarried upon their return to Korea.

> **Eunhye:** When I graduated from college [in the early 1980s], I had many arranged marriage proposals. However, these offers disappeared when I enrolled in and completed graduate school. At that time, people believed men should have higher education than women, so higher education was seen as a flaw for women.
> **Author:** Did you receive comparable proposals after earning your master's degree?
> **Eunhye:** There weren't many proposals. [After graduate education,] you must date someone you love. I was considered overqualified, as it was inconceivable for women to graduate from graduate school. My father's friend tried to "buy" me, and my mother was tempted by promises of an apartment and a car. However, my father never considered this. I gave up marriage to pursue my career in the arts, believing I couldn't do both.
> **Author:** You had to choose between getting married or pursuing the arts.
> **Eunhye:** Was there any other choice at the time? In all honesty, getting married was the only option. If a woman completed college and got married, that was the end of her life. I left for the United States in 1984 but returned to Korea in 1985 due to homesickness. My mother constantly nagged me to get married, saying, "Just come back after your master's degree." Therefore, I did not return until 1991 [to escape her].

Women who attended women's universities, where half of the faculty members were unmarried, felt less pressure to marry as they pursued professorships. These institutions provided an environment that supported their academic ambitions without the same societal expectations to marry.

> **Author:** (unknowing about Sooyeon's marital status) How's your husband and children?
> **Sooyeon:** To be honest, I live by myself. I have not married and have worked at the university. While employed as a professor, I didn't consider marriage. Many colleagues at Ewha Womans University also did not marry. I lived with my mother until she passed away 3.5 years ago, which made it feasible for me to remain single. My father approved because I have many [female pupils as] "daughters."

Upon getting married and starting their graduate studies, female elites encountered a second gender barrier. Although both partners might pursue graduate studies abroad, cultural expectations dictated that the husband's career path would take precedence to ensure family security. Despite assurances from their spouses and families, many female elites were discouraged from completing their graduate degrees to the same extent as their husbands. They were also prevented from converting their degrees into academic jobs. As a result, many female "survivors" of the "marriage sieve" were unable to activate their institutionalized cultural capital,

despite holding graduate degrees. Even the most privileged women, such as Jihyun, the daughter of a chaebol president, were not exempt from these marriage constraints.

> **Jihyun:** When I attended Missouri State University [as an undergraduate in the late 1950s], American women came to campus primarily to get married. Dating was everything to them, which I found odd. Marrying a Westerner was on my never-to-do list, and there were no Koreans around me.
> **Author:** So, your marriage to your spouse was arranged. Had you met him before?
> **Jihyun:** Absolutely not. I met him when I went to Columbia [University for my master's degree]. I knew his mother, a passionate advocate for children's education, because I attended the same SNU lab school as his younger sister. My in-laws were elites, both highly educated, and met in Tokyo. During the Korean War, my mother-in-law sent her son to the United States on a ship. Can you imagine that?
> **Author:** Oh wow. So the marriage was arranged by the two families? And after you got married, were you working on your Ph.D.?
> **Jihyun:** Yes and no, in a sense. After we got married in Boston, we continued to live there. My spouse was pursuing a doctorate at Harvard, not me. I raised our kids.

Jihyun did not dare consider pursuing her Ph.D. after getting married, accepting "being a mother" as her primary role despite her elite American academic credentials. She stayed at home to support her husband's Ph.D. studies until he decided to return to Korea. After their return, and following a few years as a lecturer, she finally began pursuing her doctorate in Korea.

Dysfunctional convertibility of degree.

Even after effectively completing graduate education, female elites discovered that their postgraduate pathways were not on par with those of their male counterparts, indicating yet another unforeseen obstacle and dysfunction in degree convertibility. While the majority of first-generation male KIS returned to Korean academia as professors, none of the female respondents did; they returned as lecturers instead. Despite having the same American doctorates, women were often unable to convert their academic credentials into professor positions at their alma maters and attain new upper-class status, as their male counterparts did.

Even highly educated women without familial or cultural barriers to credential conversion faced new challenges in translating their institutionalized cultural capital into professional jobs. The existing gender disparity in the Korean academic community made it difficult for female elites to conduct network-based job searches like their male peers, further hindering their career advancement.

> **Author:** When you returned to Korea [in the 1970s], did your American MFA afford you many opportunities? Or were you limited because you were a woman or had lost some professional networks due to your study abroad?
> **Jimin:** I had few connections. I applied for [a faculty position at] SNU, but nothing happened. No Western Art departments admit women, and it still doesn't exist today. There are female [faculty members] in theory [field], but none in practice for over seventy years. My colleagues and I are the only two female instructors in the Craft department. None in Painting, Sculpture, or Design.
> **Author:** Is the Korean art community somewhat discriminatory towards women? When we think of "art student," we typically envision a female. However, you now assert that all faculty members are male.
> **Jimin:** Almost no opportunities existed for women.
> **Author:** Even if you had the necessary skills and credentials, opportunities were not readily available.
> **Jimin:** We have temporary [instructor] positions, but no more than that.

Some women had advantageous opportunities at their alma maters as the first doctoral degree holders, similar to their male colleagues. For instance, Jieun frequently expressed her faith and confidence during our over 5-hour interview, revealing that she was groomed to be the president of her alma mater from her undergraduate years. However, when she described how she became an alumna professor there, she attributed her hiring to her existing social capital. This contrasts with Seungjin, who also became his alma mater's first alumni professor but emphasized his merit rather than social capital as the key factor in his hiring.

> **Jieun:** After 32 years, Ewha Womans University selected me as an alumna professor. It was assumed that all applicants had studied abroad. … This was the first time Ewha selected alumni professors, so those who had previously taught as instructors and were well-known to the students, or had done significant work for the department, were confident and competitive.

> I taught part-time at SNU, Yonsei, Ewha, and Sogang, so I didn't have as many activities as longer-tenured seniors. After I became a professor, some senior colleagues talked behind my back. Because I represented the department as a student, old faculty members knew me. Some new male faculty may not have known me well but likely believed I was supported by university leadership. My relationships with alumni were generally positive, and the absence of adversaries may have been advantageous. Consequently, I became a third party in an invisible competition among colleagues, and perhaps senior professors chose me to avoid conflicts.

The majority of female elites lacked such opportunities and had to start their careers as lecturers. This process often required several years of repeated applications before they could be appointed as tenured professors.

> **Author:** You returned to Korea in 1979, correct? Were you promptly hired through SNU's open recruitment system, or did you teach elsewhere?
> **Nayoung:** No, I wasn't. When I returned to Korea in 1979, I worked as a part-time lecturer at SNU, Ewha, and Yonsei. In 1980, I applied and was accepted through SNU's open recruitment.
> **Author:** When you returned to Korea [in 1980], did you have a job or career situation in mind?
> **Sooyeon:** I first returned home and began teaching at Ewha Womans University. I was then invited to teach at other universities. There weren't many people with my expertise. A friend from Ewha Womans High School, the daughter of Hanyang University's president, invited me to teach at her [father's] school, so I did. I intended to teach at my alma mater, but the conditions weren't ideal, so I ended up teaching at Hanyang University for two years.
> **Eunhye:** I returned to Korea in June 1991 and began lecturing on the arts in September. I worked as a part-time lecturer from 1992 to 1995 at several institutions. After applying for various faculty positions for years, I was hired at a National University in 1996.
> **Author:** So, you worked as an instructor for approximately four to five years before obtaining a faculty position?
> **Eunhye:** I limited it to ten years. [If I couldn't get a faculty position within ten years,] I planned to establish a private institute [as a backup]. I knew I would excel at it. So I considered establishing a private institute.

The dysfunction in the activation of cultural capital for female elites is often obscured by the success stories of male elites who seamlessly convert their degrees into academic positions. However, the academic playing field was not level for female elites with doctorates.

“Men’s Circle”: Differentiated Academic Circuit Process

Various factors influenced the capital conversion mechanism for the first cohort of elite Korean international students. As the academic elite of a developing country governed by an authoritarian military regime with an underdeveloped higher education system, they saw American graduate education as essential. It provided both practical professional knowledge and the symbolic prestige of the United States. In other words, graduate education in the United States and the associated global trajectory were not ends in themselves but means to achieving academic elite status at home. The combination of domestic social networks and American educational credentials allowed them to succeed. However, these ostensibly identical pathways were not seamless for their female colleagues: women faced detours and frequent blockages in their conversion passages due to gender.

Figure 55: “Men’s Circle”.

Consequently, the “men’s circle” (Figure 55) summarizes the gendered international educational pathways of elite students. Elite men navigated the credential stage in their second (international) round of credential pathways relatively smoothly (blue arrow 1), regardless of whether they entered via privileged or achievement pathways. After completing their graduate education abroad, they returned to Korea, converted their credentials into academic employment, and completed their transnational academic circuit (blue arrow 4). In contrast, elite females struggled to enter foreign educational institutions (yellow dotted arrow 2), and the “survivors” faced additional barriers when returning to Korean academic institutions (yellow dotted arrow 4). Thus, the academic circuit of this period is referred to as the “men’s circle.”

By the end of the 1970s, with the establishment of the men’s circle, contemporary Korean academia and its institutions had taken shape. Since a doctoral degree became legally required for faculty positions from 1975, many academic jobs in Korea, especially at elite universities in Seoul, were filled by Koreans with American doctorates. Consequently, the Korean academic system gradually emulated the American system, led by returning Korean doctorates with “superior” American Ph.D.s. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Four, Korean academia rapidly expanded in the 1980s, in tandem with the state’s lift on mobility bans. The number of outgoing KIS raised in the domestic system began to skyrocket from the 1980s.

Academic elite students raised in Korean academia naturally expected to return to domestic academia with their American credentials, reproducing the inclination to become academic elites with circulatory mobility. At the same time, the widening access to elite higher education, in terms of educational backgrounds and gender, nurtured a new group of KIS in the 1990s who aspired to different pathways from their professors. This evolution is similar to what happens in expanding domestic education: quantitative vertical differentiation (absence or

presence of American Ph.D.s) evolves into qualitative horizontal differentiation (institutional prestige of the degree).

Chapter 7. Beyond the "Golden Ticket": Evolving Motivations and Gendered Experiences of Korean Elite Students in the US, 1980s-2000s

Introduction

International student mobility is often associated with young students seeking prestigious education abroad, either for academic advancement or as members of an internationally privileged class (Ong 1999; Sklair 2012). While valuable, these narratives tend to overlook how these mobilities are perpetuated and their broader societal impacts, as well as the hidden challenges embedded within this "international" social reproduction mechanism. This chapter investigates the factors that construct the perceived "excellence" and "benefit" of foreign credentials, focusing on student mobility from a relatively developed nation (South Korea) to an even more developed one (the United States). By examining elite Korean graduate students, I explore their motivations for prioritizing US graduate education despite having access to an established domestic system. Additionally, I analyze how they navigate academia abroad and how their experiences reshape their perspectives, including encounters with hidden gender hurdles.

Through 44 in-depth interviews with these students, several trends emerge. First, their motivations have shifted from primarily economic benefits to encompass broader cultural aspirations and a globalized academic worldview, including opportunities for circulatory migration. Second, while traditional gender barriers in pursuing international education and careers have eased for female students, they now face new challenges balancing work and family during child-rearing stages. This highlights the continued, though evolving, nature of gendered experiences in international academic mobility. Additionally, the pursuit of American higher

education has expanded to undergraduate students as well, even without a strong academic focus, driven by the perceived positional advantage it offers.

This research has significant implications for both international education and highly skilled migration studies. It moves beyond Bourdieusian reproduction theory (Bourdieu 1973, 1986, 1996) by exploring how individual aspirations and the pursuit of globalized academic careers intersect, extending beyond the traditional expectation of immediate return to one's home academia. This highlights how motivations and experiences evolve over time, influencing the decisions of future generations. Additionally, it delves into the evolving nature of gender hurdles in education-mediated social mobility, demonstrating how female academics, within the context of changing gender expectations, continue to face unique challenges in balancing work, family, and international mobility aspirations.

Motivation

Scholars often view international student mobility as a strategy for social distinction in an increasingly globalized higher education landscape, with international credentials perceived as offering significant "positional advantages" over domestic ones in terms of human, cultural, and social capita (Huang and Yeoh 2005; Ong 1999; Rizvi 2000). As higher education expands, the need for qualitative horizontal distinction from other college graduates becomes more acute (Schofer and Meyer 2005), prompting privileged middle-class students to seek ways to avoid downward mobility (Brooks and Waters 2009a). This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and class reproduction (Bourdieu 1973, 1986, 1996), where pursuing international education is seen as a means to acquire "qualitatively different" prestigious credentials and legitimize one's advantageous social position in the labor market (Brooks and

Waters 2009a, 2009b; Lörz, Netz, and Quast 2016; Netz and Finger 2016; Reimer and Pollak 2010).

Empirical research supports this connection, highlighting the role of family background, social selectivity, and the transmission of preferences through familial habitus in shaping international student mobility (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2011; Findlay et al. 2012; Lörz, Netz, and Quast 2016; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; J. Waters 2009; Xiang and Shen 2009). Exposure to specific cultural values during socialization engenders a habitus in the children that incorporate these values (Bourdieu 1984).

However, research focusing solely on class distinction and habitus overlooks the influence of field-level conditions and historical processes on international student mobility. The existing quality and opportunities within a domestic higher education system can motivate or discourage international mobility. Additionally, the legacy of previous generations' international education experiences, including the consequent internationalization of domestic institutions, can play a significant role. How historical contingencies shape future mobility patterns remains understudied.

The existing literature also often simplifies the positional advantage of foreign credentials. First, the prestige is not always absolute and can differ based on the relative standing of the sending and receiving countries. For example, the advantage of attending an elite university in a colonial power might differ from the benefits gained from studying within a regional educational exchange program like Erasmus in the European Union. Second, as sending countries develop their educational systems and industries, the perceived gap between domestic and foreign credentials may narrow, leading to a phenomenon of "brain return," where educated individuals return home to contribute to the local system. This highlights the dynamic nature of

the perceived “supremacy” of foreign credentials. Third, the meaning and purpose of obtaining foreign credentials can differ between graduate and undergraduate students. Graduate students often return to become “professional apostles” of their received training, while undergraduate experiences might be more focused on cultural immersion and building social capital.

Furthermore, international student mobility often intersects with critical life stages beyond labor market entry, such as family formation, which has been sidelined in research. Women might face additional challenges in utilizing their acquired cultural capital due to societal gender norms and expectations, even with class privileges (Holloway, O’Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Ono and Piper 2004). Gendered knowledge of the experiences of previous generations can shape future generations’ aspirations and career preparation. Locally contingent forms of gender roles can lead female students to seek not “social networks” (J. Waters 2006b) but “a suitable husband” (Holloway, O’Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012) to convert their cultural capital into class advantage.

By addressing these limitations and incorporating a more nuanced understanding of motivation, this research provides a more comprehensive picture of what drives, amplifies, and perpetuates international student mobility.

Background

The trajectory of Korean students’ international mobility to the United States during the second phase, spanning from the early 1980s to the late 2000s, can be succinctly described as a “take-off.” Starting with a modest 6,150 students in 1980, this figure skyrocketed to 75,065 by 2008, showcasing both a quantitative surge and increased qualitative diversity in their educational pursuits. This chapter focuses on the ongoing transformation of capital forms, transitioning from

economic (family background) to cultural (educational attainment and achievement) and social capital (leading to enhanced opportunities). Through iterative cycles of capital conversion across various education levels and geographic locations (domestic and international), this chapter examines how these processes differ from previous generations' international mobility and how these differences have contributed to the skyrocketing popularity of American higher education among KIS.

Social transformations, including the liberalization of the developmental state, democratization, and globalization, coupled with concurrent expansions in higher education, propelled the surge in international mobility among Korean students. This expansion not only increased the number of Korean students venturing abroad but also fostered greater diversity among them. This diversity injected new dynamics into the functioning of social capital, distinguishing the contemporary cohort of Korean students from their predecessors in terms of motivations for pursuing international education, experiences in American academia, and subsequent career trajectories.

As a consequence, the gendered nature of mobility, prevalent among previous generations of Korean overseas students, underwent significant evolution. International education mobility, particularly among graduate-level students, increasingly became a pursuit embraced by academic couples, departing from the traditional "Ph.D.-winning husband and supporting housewife" model. However, this shift brought about new challenges in gender equality. The pursuit of dual degrees among couples introduced issues related to childbirth and caregiving, perpetuating gendered dynamics within these relationships.

Changes in Social Circumstances

Developmental State and its Liberalization before Democratization

Widening Institutional Opportunities

Amidst the rise of the New Military Government (Shin Kunbu) following the December 1979 coup, there was a notable expansion in cultural freedoms alongside the renowned 3S policy (Sports, Sex, and Screen). This liberalization extended to domestic education, notably marked by the establishment of quotas for college graduates (Chorŏp Chŏngwŏn Che), resulting in a roughly 30% annual increase in college student numbers during the early 1980s.

Opportunities for international study also burgeoned from the early 1980s, crystallized by the comprehensive revision of the Regulations on Overseas Study in 1981. This revision exempted self-funded students from government-administered qualification examinations, which had previously limited the number of Korean students going abroad, and expanded eligibility to high school graduates with outstanding academic achievements. Moreover, the government abolished several sponsorship requirements, such as GPA maintenance and military service completion, while promising job placement services upon students' return. The lowering of barriers to international mobility extended beyond students. Starting in 1983, international travel opportunities for Koreans began to widen, eventually becoming fully accessible by 1989. This liberalizing landscape for international mobility signaled broader opportunities and a more welcoming social atmosphere regarding international education mobility.

The significant legal relaxation in 1988 marked the pinnacle of opening institutional opportunities for Korean students to pursue international undergraduate education irrespective of academic achievement. Against the background of decades of restricted access, the removal of

academic prerequisites, such as being in the top 10% or 20% of high school graduates, officially provided a legitimate pathway for non-academic elites to study abroad from the 1990s onward.

Growing Anti-Government Student Protests

The 1980s witnessed a resurgence of radical student protests against the New Military Government. Firstly, the rapid expansion of college student numbers, increased by the new junta to make graduation more challenging, inadvertently fueled dissent. Secondly, the May 18 Gwangju People's Struggle of 1980 and the subsequent massacre by the New Military Government galvanized student protestors against the regime. Thirdly, the regime, instead of closing campuses, turned them into battlegrounds between students and police authorities, deploying plainclothes detectives and infiltrating collaborators among students.

Meanwhile, anti-Americanism emerged as a prominent theme within the student movement. The previously favorable stance toward the United States among student protesters, connected with anti-communism and Christianity groups, shifted to anti-Americanism in the 1980s. Disillusionment grew as students perceived the US not as a defender but as a bystander of democracy and human rights in Korea (T. Pak 2006). Marxist ideas and pro-North Korean inclinations, which had long been marginalized in the anti-communist social climate, arose among students, casting South Korea as a neo-colony under US neo-imperialism. Anti-government sentiments often manifested in acts of terrorism targeting branches of the United States Information Service in Seoul and local branches throughout the 1980s.

Changes in the Meaning of Overseas Education

The evolving landscape surrounding overseas education also transformed the perception of international student mobility among Korean college students. On one hand, a broader spectrum

of students could now access a wider array of opportunities and exposure due to the new legal environment, media spotlights, and college study abroad programs. Furthermore, following the 1975 legislative mandate requiring college professors to hold doctorate degrees, Korean universities increasingly recruited scholars returning from the United States with American doctorates. These new hires served as inspiration for students in less selective universities to pursue overseas education, viewing these returnees as role models.

On the other hand, the perception of studying abroad, especially in the United States, underwent a gradual evolution among students. In more selective universities, where student activism was prominent, opting for graduate education in the United States was occasionally seen as a betrayal by some fellow students. Pursuing American graduate education was interpreted as forsaking collective struggles in favor of personal career advancement in the "heart of darkness," akin to passing state examinations to become prosecutors or high officials for the military government.

Democratization and Globalization (Segye Hwa)

The overall landscape underwent significant transformation following the democratization of Korea in 1987 and the subsequent wave of globalization in the 1990s. State regulations on self-funded students were continuously relaxed throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Particularly during the 1990s and the subsequent "democratic" administrations, existing regulations on government-funded recipients, such as the compulsory return service duty for governmental agencies, were also finally repealed.

Globalization, known as "Segye Hwa," emerged as a central tenet under the leadership of President Kim Young Sam during the transition to democracy. Despite aligning with remnants of

the previous military regime to secure his presidency, President Kim sought to differentiate his governance by embracing global openness for Korea. This paradigm shift emphasized the need for Koreans to adapt to the increasingly interconnected global landscape, positioning education as a key avenue for success. Individuals were encouraged to bolster their English proficiency and pursue foreign education to excel in both domestic and international competition.[1]

While some academic-focused student organizations persisted among students in humanities and social sciences, overall student activism waned with the onset of the democratic regime. Additionally, the ongoing decline in the college premium—referring to the monetary and career benefits associated with a college degree—starting from the late 1980s and continuing through the mid-1990s with the expansion of higher education, coincided with the onset of the East Asian financial crisis in 1997. This crisis, coupled with neoliberal reforms that reshaped the economy, dealt a final blow to nationwide student movements. The decreasing returns to higher education added new momentum for individuals to seek horizontal differentiation among college graduates through global cultural capital, such as English proficiency and international attitudes.

[1] An illustrative example is the late 1990s, marking the inaugural surge of interest in American college education in Korea's history. This burgeoning curiosity blossomed into what became known as the "Ivy League" boom among elite Korean high school students in the 2000s. A more comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon will be presented in Chapter 8, which delves into the decline of Korean students' international mobility in the 2010s.

Results

Changes in Student Compositions

Diversifying Backgrounds

The composition of KIS in the United States changed significantly from the previous generation, as the inclination to pursue overseas education gradually permeated a broader spectrum of undergraduate students across diverse domestic colleges. This shift was influenced by changes in the domestic educational environment, students' experiences and perceptions, and the allure of American higher education as a counterpoint to the Korean educational system.

A new generation of students also emerged from families where fathers had been international students during the initial phase. As early as the early 1980s, students with international (mostly American) exposure during their formative years exhibited a reduced psychological barrier to seeking education abroad for their higher education. This generational shift broadened the demographic of students considering and pursuing overseas education, leading to a more diverse cohort of KIS.

Domestic Institutions

The expansion of higher education institutions, including an increase in the number of institutions, departments, and faculty, along with the Americanization of academia, broadened access to international education. Particularly noteworthy was the influx of young Korean professors returning with American Ph.D.s, whose influence significantly shaped the perceptions and aspirations of Korean college students.

The quantitative expansion of domestic institutions significantly altered their characteristics. As depicted in Figure 56, the surge in higher education institutions, initiated in

the late 1970s, was primarily driven by non-Seoul establishments. Although not all expanded student pools opted for education abroad, the widening pool of students legally eligible for or contemplating overseas studies in the 1980s signifies a growing heterogeneity. Thus, as higher education transitioned from an elitist pursuit to a mass phenomenon in the 1980s, it reshaped the significance of higher education, both domestically and abroad.

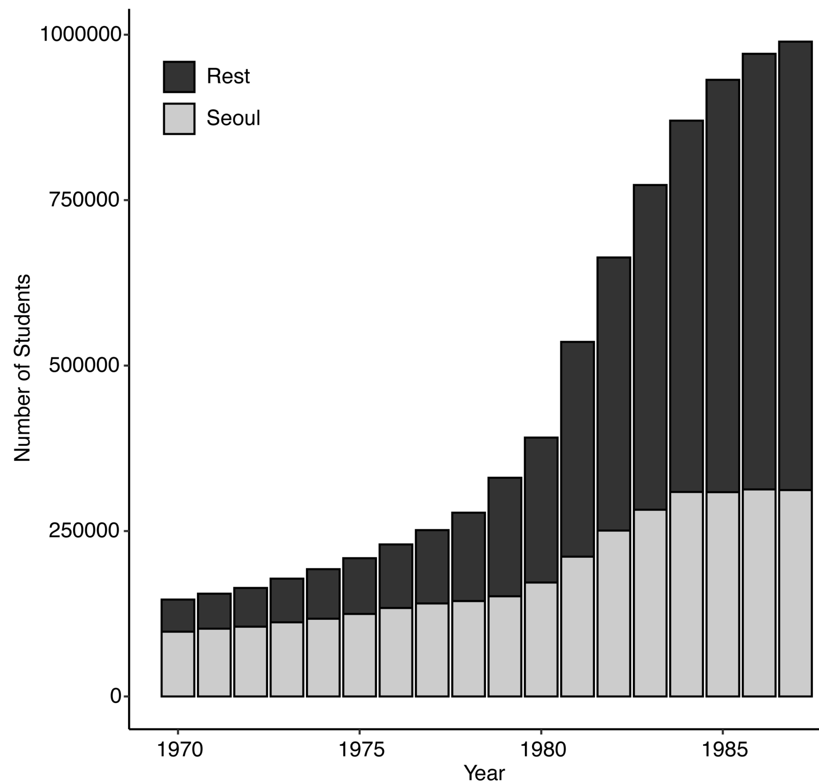

Figure 56: Number of College Students in Seoul vs. Rest of Republic of Korea, 1970-1987. SOURCE: Cho. 2024. Seeds of Mobilization: The Authoritarian Roots of South Korea's Democracy. Fig 4.4. Statistics are from the Korea Statistical Yearbook, 1971–88.

Evaluation of Domestic Education

In contrast to the previous generation, students of the 1980s and 1990s did not universally express highly negative evaluations of their undergraduate education in Korea. The practical education environment had shifted from pre-1980s conditions marked by government-directed

school closures and lax faculty engagement. Some individuals highlighted the positive influence of “new faculty who returned with American Ph.D.s.”

> **Minseo:** Since we were the first batch, there were no professors at first. Then, starting from the second semester, professors began to arrive one by one These professors had just completed their studies in the United States and joined us. I didn’t know much when I came, but I was very lucky. Professors who had just studied the latest statistics in the United States and were full of passion started teaching us, so they taught very well.

In certain cases, there were notably positive evaluations of domestic higher education experiences, particularly referencing the quality of education at SNU.

> **Yuna:** In my personal opinion, in our field, Sogang University might be better than Seoul National University. Those smart students who applied to Seoul National University would have benefited greatly from being educated at Sogang University when they went abroad for further studies. For four years, [all our classes were conducted in English], and we even wrote our master’s theses in English. Also, when graduating with a Ph.D., we wrote our dissertations in English as well. This was very helpful when teaching undergraduate students while studying abroad.

However, evaluations varied depending on the institution and discipline. Neutral or positive evaluations did not necessarily indicate an overall high quality of education or adequate laboratory facilities. For instance, Yena recalled her college’s lack of adequate laboratory facilities to conduct experiments. She only gained access to lab experiments upon entering a more selective domestic university for her master’s program. Despite achieving a stable position as a professor, she still found the facilities and budget for her lab at a Korean national university insufficient compared to her lab experiences in the United States.

> **Yena:** I realized that biotechnology was truly my calling, what I was meant to do, during the first semester of my master’s program. During our undergraduate studies, we hardly had any opportunities to experiment. In our lab classes, there would be ten people in a group, and it would end before any one person had a chance to really try anything. But when I started doing my own experiments in my master’s program, I felt it was a perfect fit for me.
> In Korea, it’s still a bit disappointing. Even now, although I’m at a national university, the students’ lab classes are too large, with about 30 to 40 students per class. They can’t

> all do hands-on experiments. Each group only gets to handle one sample. It's still like that now, and it makes me wonder how much worse it must have been in the past. When I did my Ph.D. in Microbiology at an Ivy League university, each student worked with a sample throughout the entire semester, analyzing it continuously. Even in a general microbiology class with over 100 students, the schedule was organized in such a way that everyone had the opportunity to conduct experiments. This systematic approach to education in the US ensured that all students could participate in hands-on experiments.
> But I don't know, maybe it's different at top universities like SNU or KAIST. From my experience, the situation hasn't changed much in 30 years.

Eunji, who attended a less selective university in Seoul, viewed professors' heavy reliance on narrating English textbooks in class, rather than engaging in their own teaching, as indicative of "poor university quality." Echoing Yena's journey, she pursued a master's program at a more selective domestic university. However, her aspirations were met with another setback when her advisor, a respected figure in the field, unexpectedly "threw her a Japanese textbook" to translate in his stead. Determined to meet her advisor's expectations, she enrolled in a cram school to learn Japanese.

> **Eunji:** For instance, the professor would suddenly bring a Japanese textbook and tell us to translate it, even though it was actually for his own publication. I hadn't learned Japanese, but he told me to translate it, so I enrolled in a Japanese class in Jongno.

Such disappointing experiences in domestic graduate schools resonated with others' narratives of feeling discouraged by the lack of learning opportunities, even upon matriculating into prestigious graduate programs in Korea.

> **Soojin:** During my graduate school interview, the professor said, "Why are you going through the trouble of coming to Seoul for graduate school when there's such a small difference between Daejeon and Seoul in our tiny country?" That was really shocking to me. I thought that to succeed as an artist, you had to go to a top university. [When I said that,] the professor smiled and told me that no matter where I worked hard, I would do well, so there was no need to worry so much. I was really shocked during the interview.
> **Author:** I can understand that.
> **Soojin:** That professor was a very famous and renowned figure in the Korean art world. After the interview, I was in shock because of what he said. [During my master's program,] he didn't teach us anything concrete, just philosophical statements. There were no specific guidelines or instructions on what to do, which was very disappointing. So,

> after a year, I decided I needed to study abroad. I thought I should go to the US, which is considered the best for contemporary art. That's how it happened.

Demise of Student Movements

Those interested in studying in the United States generally distanced themselves from the student activism of the 1980s. There was a pragmatic concern that engaging in anti-American activism could jeopardize their chances of studying abroad. Thus, while they shared similar sentiments toward student activism as previous elite generations, the symbolic meaning of studying abroad among this generation differed due to the evolving status of student activism on campus.

As overall participation in student activism declined in the 1990s, those who previously sought change through street protests turned to effecting change through academic pursuits. Many of these individuals hailed from the humanities and social sciences, disciplines that were both at the core of student activism with their academic frameworks. Retreating from street protests, student protesters found formal education in college classrooms disappointing but discovered learning and fulfillment in academic circles (sŏk'ŭl; hak'oe).

For instance, Haerin, who now teaches at an elite American university, repeatedly underscores the importance of academic circles in her scholarship. She reflects on how her exposure to former student protesters with academic inclinations motivated her to pursue graduate education abroad.

> **Haerin:** To be honest, there wasn't much I learned from the classes at college. Looking back, it was mostly things I could have learned on my own by reading books. What I value most from my university life were the activities with academic circles (*hak'oe*). I received a lot of intellectual stimulation from studying with senior and junior students and friends. That sense of community and collaborative atmosphere.

Striving for American Education

Childhood Experiences: Parental Influence

During the take-off phase of international student mobility, a distinct cohort of Korean international students emerged, marked by unique childhood experiences and parental influence. These students often received their K-12 or undergraduate education overseas, particularly in the United States, while accompanying their parents—usually fathers—who were either the first generation of overseas students, expatriates, or high-ranking officials. Although these experiences were brief, lasting only a few years, they left a profound imprint on the students, shaping their view of American higher education as not just a viable option but sometimes even as a "home to return" to.

For example, Jaehyun, the son of Hoonjae from the earlier period, experienced both American and Korean education during his childhood and undergraduate years while following his father's government-sponsored Ph.D. study in the United States. Hoonjae pursued his academic pathway to become a professor in Korea upon his return. Following in his father's footsteps, Jaehyun experienced a different educational "field" in America and decided to pursue further education and a career there. His family background imprinted him with a cosmopolitan habitus and expanded his "field of the possibles" (Bourdieu 1984).

> **Jaehyun:** My father was going to the United States on a sabbatical, so I decided to go along and stay there with him. Coincidentally, my aunt was living in Minnesota, so I thought it would be better to do something productive rather than just spending a year idly, so I planned to work as a technician at the University of Minnesota. I contacted a lab and arranged to work there as a lab technician. However, at the last minute, my parents ended up going to the UK because my father received research funding. So, I went to the US alone. I found lab work quite interesting and got my first taste of research. The lab I was working at then offered me a position [as a Ph.D. student], asking if I would like to join their program.

Yejin, a former student activist turned university professor, credits her academic networks (sŏk'ŭl) for developing her interest in academia and introducing her to her future husband. However, it was her family background that proved pivotal in channeling this interest towards a scholarly pursuit. Like Jaehyun, her formative K-12 years were split between the US and Korea, following her father's educational mobility. Her fascination with American education shaped her scholarly trajectory from an early age.

During her senior year in college, her father's sabbatical to an elite American university not only distanced her from student activism but also fueled her academic interest. Opting to audit classes at the American institution instead of completing her senior year in Korea, she found herself immersed in an environment that fostered her academic curiosity.

> **Yejin:** Even though course syllabi are all online now, back then they would stack them up in front of the university. If you picked one up, you could see which courses were being offered that semester. In the first semester of my senior year, I audited an anthropology theory class that I found really interesting [in the American university]. It was the first time in college that I felt like I was truly studying. That class was the only one that gave me that feeling. It sparked my interest in anthropology. At the same time, I was heavily involved in [the circle], reading books on social sciences and Marxism, discussing social formations, and so on.
> I attended courses I was interested in, mainly sociology courses, and many leftist-oriented subjects. I also took an anthropology course. To be honest, I didn't actively participate; I just sat in on the classes. There was a lot of reading required, so I spent my time in the library reading books and drinking coffee. That was how I spent that year.

Despite recognizing the disparities between her brief exposure to American undergraduate education and the reality of American graduate education during her master's studies, she considers her time in the US critical to her intellectual development and takes joy in its impact on her scholarly journey. These cases demonstrate how academia is naturally perpetuated through encounters with the American education system, as adult children actively engage in academic paths by utilizing available opportunities. This contrasts with early study abroad

attempts by parents who deliberately push their young children to "obtain English" during their K-12 years.

Material Affluence and Cultural Liberation

The new generation of KIS differed significantly from their predecessors in terms of material and cultural conditions. While there is still diversity among students interested in overseas education, they generally hail from more homogeneous, affluent, and liberal backgrounds. Unlike earlier generations, where gender and class differences played a more significant role, this cohort comes from financially stable families residing in affluent neighborhoods like Gangnam. Their fathers typically hold prestigious occupations in academia, government, or business, reflecting the economic prosperity of Korea in the 1980s and 1990s. These material advantages enable students to consider international education despite the financial burden it may impose on their families. Additionally, having relatives or family members with international education experience lowers the barrier for students to convince their parents, including female students.

Changes in Motivations and Expectations

This new generation was also different in their motivations and expectations regarding higher education in the United States. While academic advancement remained a predominant goal, the nature of this pursuit varied significantly among students. Some attending elite universities still pursued human capital enhancement, but the traditional aim of returning to Korea for academic careers waned, with a growing emphasis on the intrinsic value of learning itself.

Beyond academic pursuits, students were driven by a multitude of motivations. Some dreamed of advancing beyond Korean academia for their intellectual development. Others, notably women, saw American education as a pathway to self-empowerment and greater

agency[2], following the trail blazed by predecessors from earlier phases. Moreover, a new cultural narrative emerged among certain students who viewed their American education as an opportunity to expand their horizons and immerse themselves in a different social milieu.

These diverse motivations and expectations suggest shifting strategies among KIS of this generation in navigating their education-mediated mobility circuits. Unlike the relatively simple "men's circle" of previous decades, the division of pursuits implies the emergence of new circuits and the gradual erosion of the "men's circle." In these diversifying mobilities, social capital plays a critical role in shaping students' decisions and plans, with peers serving as both sources of inspiration and validation. Furthermore, the motivations of younger students pursuing American undergraduate education differed from those pursuing graduate studies, reflecting unique personal and academic goals.

Division of Pursuits

Academic Pursuits

Pursuit of New and Better Knowledge

Academic pursuits were a primary driver for Korean international students choosing American higher education during this phase. This was especially pronounced among those who had completed their undergraduate and/or master's degrees in Korea but aspired to acquire new and advanced knowledge in the United States through graduate programs, primarily Ph.D. education.

[2] The new generation's focus on self-agency contrasts sharply with the previous generation's sentiment. Despite a common theme of affluence and hospitality, the older generation's narration is filled with "shock" and "gratitude" toward American society and education, reflecting their perspective as indebted recipients from a postwar debris with a fledgling economy. In contrast, the new generation's narrative centers on how they, as active agents, navigated their domestic environments to reach a more advanced United States and how they "felt happiness" in the American educational environment. While the former group perceives structural differences more acutely, the latter articulates their experiences in a more personal and individualistic manner.

The arrival of Korean professors returning with American doctorates inspired many Korean college students to pursue prestigious American graduate programs. They saw these programs as gateways to cutting-edge knowledge and technology unavailable in Korea, such as DNA sequencing within the genome project, advancements in embryology, and the evolving realm of media economy in communication studies.

> **Jaehyun:** Back then, it was an exciting time because the human genome had just been fully sequenced, and there was a lot of hope that cancer would soon be conquered. This wasn't something you could learn from textbooks, as the sequences had just been discovered and we had only heard about it. When I went to the US, my professor was one of the people who had sequenced the mouse genome, which is essentially the same technology as for the human genome. These cutting-edge techniques, beyond what was in the textbooks, were very exciting to work with.

Even if the specifics of these opportunities were unclear, students from less selective undergraduate institutions believed that an "original" American education would provide access to resources and knowledge unavailable in Korea. The appeal lay in the promise of encountering novel pedagogical methods and engaging with cutting-edge research, igniting their academic passions and propelling their pursuit of knowledge. For instance, Haeun's quest for deeper self-understanding through the lens of gender and sexuality in the 1990s led her to organize academic reading (sŭt'ŏdi) groups with her domestic colleagues. However, she always strived to learn more "original" theories and concepts from the United States. (needs quote)

Changing Perspectives on Academic Careers in Korea

International education has shifted students' views on academic careers in Korea. They no longer harbor the same confidence in the direct translation of their American credentials into professorial positions within Korean academia. Instead, international education is now seen as more than just a means to a career end; it is viewed as a journey focused on personal growth and development. "Learning (kongbu)" often emerges as a defining motif of this generation's

narratives. Unlike their predecessors, many students of this generation frame their pursuit of American education as a journey driven by academic curiosity rather than just a strategic calculation of the career prospects associated with their American doctoral degrees.

This "cultural turn" reflects a transformation in the underlying rationale. Initially, the Bourdieusian notion of conversion between academic fields across nations, particularly between Korea and the United States, underpinned the mobility of elite students. However, in this subsequent period, this idea undergoes a metamorphosis. International students now approach their educational journeys with a more nuanced perspective, one that prioritizes self-identity and personal development over predetermined career trajectories. Consequently, the once taken-for-granted assumption of Korean academia as the inevitable next step following international education gradually dissipates. Instead, students focus on articulating how their choice of international education aligns with their evolving sense of self and their aspirations for growth and fulfillment.

Changes in Narratives

Focus on "Learning"

Yejin articulates her choice of American graduate schools as an extension of her intellectual passion, which started with her engagement in the Korean student movement's intellectual framework. For Yejin, after auditing anthropology courses at an elite American university, the decision to pursue American graduate education was not solely about career advancement; it was about embracing the joy of intellectual growth.

> **Yejin:** At that time, I had attended university up to the first semester of my senior year. It wasn't at some small rural institution but at a university in the metropolitan area. When I went there, I saw an education system completely different from what I had experienced. At that time, there was quite a bit of anti-American sentiment among university students.

> But on the other hand, I felt a bit envious and frustrated. I thought, “Is this how Yankees study?” I took a few undergraduate classes, and they were reading five books per semester and having discussions. I thought, “If this is what education and scholarship are like, it might be worth trying. I want to experience this.” That was the first time I seriously considered studying abroad.
> **Author:** So after returning, you decided that you definitely wanted to study abroad?
> **Yejin:** Yes, it was a major stimulus. It was a bit annoying, too.

Similarly, Minseo’s motivation to study abroad was fueled by a simple yet powerful desire to “study more.” Her passion for her chosen field blossomed during her college years, propelling her towards graduate education. Even after completing her master’s degree at her alma mater, her thirst for knowledge remained unquenched, prompting her decision to study abroad. While her ultimate career trajectory remained somewhat abstract, she was acutely aware of the prestige associated with American graduate schools, thanks to insights gleaned from her professors.

For Yena, there existed a tacit hierarchy in academia: USA-Japan-Korea. To her, America and its academic landscape represented a realm of “high-quality science,” unmediated by the constraints she perceived in Korea. However, this perspective does not imply naivety or ignorance regarding the dynamics of her field. While she recognized the importance of “academic publications (nonmun)” for acceptance into elite American institutions, her understanding of the field’s rules was not as nuanced as that of her colleagues from elite domestic institutions, like Seungmin and Jaehyun, who had specific targets for acquiring advanced knowledge and technology in their fields.

Furthermore, cultural perceptions of the superiority of American academia, coupled with peer influence, significantly shaped the aspirations of elite students like Jisoo, who had a STEM background and had been educated in a local city. He later matriculated to KAIST, a prestigious state-run institution modeled after CalTech and MIT. Surrounded by peers with aspirations of becoming scientists and engineers, he found himself immersed in an environment where

studying in the United States was regarded as a pinnacle achievement. Despite lacking any prior international exposure or personal aspirations for overseas study and harboring no doubts about his future as an engineer, the collective departure of his peers ignited in him a cultural curiosity that ultimately motivated his decision to pursue American education.

> **Jisoo:** After I graduated from my undergraduate program, I immediately enrolled in a combined bachelor's and master's program. However, during that time, I was contemplating my career path and eventually decided to leave the program to serve as an industrial technical personnel, known as "byungteuk" for the military service. Until then, studying abroad had never been an option for me.
> But many of my friends who were also serving as industrial technical personnel were preparing to study abroad. Additionally, I was dating my now-wife, who was also preparing to study abroad. I realized that once I completed my military service, I would be free to go abroad too. Seeing so many people around me preparing to go abroad made it feel like a natural choice.
> The first year of working as an industrial technical personnel was quite enjoyable, but after two to three years, the repetitive nature of the job made me feel burnt out. I felt the need to replenish myself and wanted to pursue further studies. With many friends preparing to study abroad, I decided to do the same.

Opting Out of Korean Academia

Persistent issues within Korean academia, such as rigid professor-student dynamics, gender discrimination, and challenging economic circumstances, frequently drive aspiring students to seek educational opportunities abroad for academic freedom and personal growth. Haerin, who undertook her master's program at her esteemed alma mater, recalls that the idea of pursuing graduate studies in the United States crossed her mind after she experienced a strained relationship with her advisor, despite having to commence her master's program anew.

> **Haerin:** [In Korean graduate schools], there were too many personal demands being made in the basic mentor-mentee relationship. When I entered graduate school, I heard too many behind-the-scenes stories about thesis evaluations, research papers, and even faculty appointments. Additionally, I became an assistant to a certain professor who would call me at all hours of the day and night for personal errands, which kept me up at

> night due to the stress. I actually dropped out after the first semester of my Ph.D. program and went abroad. Even though I had already entered a Ph.D. program, I felt I couldn't study happily within the Korean system. I wanted to enjoy my studies, but I found it impossible to do so in Korea. I thought, "I'll try studying abroad for a year, and if it doesn't work out, I'll just quit studying altogether." That's the mindset I had when I decided to go.

The lack of financial support is another significant issue. Unlike the American higher education system, where graduate students often receive tuition waivers and stipends for their work as teaching or research assistants, Korean graduate schools typically require substantial tuition fees. Furthermore, the cultural expectation that undergraduate education marks the end of parental financial support means many students face financial hurdles in graduate studies. For these students, the prospect of tuition-free education in the United States becomes an alluring option.

> **Yena:** For my Ph.D. education, I chose the place where I could excel in science and receive the most support. At that time, the U.S. was incomparable [to other places]. In my field, not only was tuition waived, but I also received a stipend of around $1800, which was a significant amount [in the early 2000s]. For me, that amount covered living expenses, and it was guaranteed for nine years. The school was very generous, so I was extremely grateful.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that "choosing" international education is not accessible to all Korean students. It demands a substantial investment in both time and finances, encompassing expenses for exams like the TOEFL and GRE, alongside hefty application fees. In other words, international education remains within reach only for a privileged minority who can afford to dedicate their time to another round of the educational conversion process rather than immediately entering the workforce.

Gender discrimination poses additional challenges for female students, particularly in STEM fields. For example, Jaehyun's wife, who completed her physics master's program at an elite domestic university, opted not to pursue further studies for her Ph.D. Instead, she accompanied her husband to the United States on an F2 visa. She cited the "military-like

suffocating atmosphere" in her academic environment. While male students who have completed military service may find this atmosphere more tolerable (N. Pak 2001), their female colleagues often find it disproportionately burdensome.

Moreover, within the already significant gender imbalance, female STEM students often face additional hurdles as minorities. Not only are they evaluated as graduate students, but they must also strive to be the first among their female peers to gain recognition as regular members in their labs, unlike male students.

Given these formidable obstacles, students like Seungmin intentionally seek out environments conducive to studying abroad. They opt for "labs that are supportive of international mobility and devoid of hierarchical structures," thereby facilitating a smoother transition to education abroad.

Pursuing Independence and Equality

International education provided new opportunities for some women to escape restrictive social reproduction circuits in Korea. Mirroring the journeys of earlier generations of female students who pursued graduate studies abroad, these women saw American educational credentials as a source of pragmatic autonomy to pursue independent lives. For example, Eunji decided to pursue graduate education in the United States to "compensate for" what she perceived as deficiencies in her unsatisfactory "backward" domestic educational background. Unfulfilled by her college background, she saw American credentials as a surefire way to elevate her status and achieve her dream of becoming a professor.

> **Eunji:** When I entered university, I was accepted in the later rounds. I wanted to go to pharmacy school, but I didn't get accepted into any. Despite doing well in school, I had my pride. I ended up going to a university, but I wasn't very satisfied with it. So, I

> decided that I would aim to get into a good graduate school [in Korea] and then study abroad. Around my third year of university, I started thinking about improving my academic background. If I had gotten into the pharmacy school I wanted in the early rounds, I might not have studied abroad.
> **Author:** Did you ever think about going abroad right away [after college]?
> **Eunji:** I didn't think about going abroad immediately. I thought I should at least get a master's degree, so I would have a fallback option in Korea. Professors don't really know undergraduates well, but getting a master's degree could provide a connection for the future.
> **Author:** When you were progressing from undergraduate to a master's program, were you already thinking about pursuing academia?
> **Eunji:** I wanted to become a professor. I was determined to be a professor, more than anything else.
> **Author:** When did you start dreaming of becoming a professor?
> **Eunji:** From the moment I decided to go to graduate school, I wanted to be a professor. More than anything else.

Eunji was not an outlier in viewing education as a means of attaining economic independence and mitigating the effects of less prestigious domestic credentials. Pursuing higher degrees in the United States, these women sought not just knowledge or technical skills, but the transformative power of an American credential to ensure economic stability. This pursuit led Eunji to obtain a master's and doctoral degree in the United States, further prompting her to complete a post-doc and secure a faculty position in Korea.

For some individuals, pursuing international education represented more than just academic advancement—it signified a quest for personal autonomy and self-determination. Despite the possibility of a "blue-collar life," Jiwon chose vocational training in the United States, driven by a desire to acquire skills unavailable in Korea. She viewed these skills as essential for attaining independence, rejecting the notion of marrying up or down and instead seeking a pathway that offered self-sufficiency and freedom from patriarchal social expectations in Korea.

In some cases, like Haeun, pursuing an American education provided a way to break free from marriage, which had shackled elite female students' international mobility for decades.

Disillusioned by a marriage built on false promises of "studying abroad together," Haeun "needed" studying abroad as her ticket to freedom, "breaking free from the confines of a suffocating relationship that imprisoned her with depression."

> **Haeun:** At that time, there was a significant stigma attached to a woman going abroad to study alone, regardless of whether she had the money or not. Looking at the previous generation, the older sisters who studied abroad in the 70s generally went with their husbands, getting married before going abroad. We were a bit of an ambiguous generation, so [my parents] told me to get married and then go abroad to study. They arranged marriage meetings for me, and on the fifth meeting, the man wasn't studying abroad. At first, my father introduced me to students who were studying abroad. So, after getting married, I was a full-time housewife for about 6-7 years.
> [At first, my husband] said to have children and then go abroad to study. But later, when I asked about it, he said, "All men say that before marriage, who takes it seriously?" So I said, "You promised before marriage, you have to keep it." They must have been very taken aback, but from my perspective, a promise is a promise.
> **Author:** You had made that a condition for marriage in the first place, but then they suddenly changed their mind.
> **Haeun:** So my mother-in-law flipped the dining table and said to her son that he had made all these strange promises. It was quite a commotion.

Different Circuits of Reproduction

Although the Korean higher education system was modeled after American departmental structures and used English textbooks, information about the American education system was often limited and varied greatly by institution. This led to the emergence of two distinct circuits of peer influence functioning as social capital. In elite domestic universities, studying abroad was taken for granted as the next step, while students from less selective universities only began to dream about it after arriving at elite universities' graduate programs.

Before the 1980s, studying abroad was predominantly pursued by elite students—both academically and financially—due to stringent legal regulations. There was a singular path for interested students: proceeding to American graduate programs after completing their elite

domestic college education. The culture of studying abroad and peer influence continued in selective higher education institutions. For instance, Seungmin, a graduate of SNU and now a professor there, recounts how studying abroad was prevalent within his cohort.

> **Author:** During your master's program, was there generally an atmosphere of preparing for Ph.D. studies abroad, or did it vary greatly depending on individual choices?
> **Seungmin:** To give you an example from my cohort, there were 20 of us who entered initially. Then, with transfers, we became 22. Out of those, about half earned Ph.D.s. The other half became private academy teachers, company employees, or returned to medical schools, such as medical, dental, or pharmacy schools. There were about four or five who switched fields because they felt they couldn't continue with their graduate studies. So, around 10 of us continued in graduate school. Of those who went to graduate school, half studied abroad and half stayed in Korea. The ones who stayed in Korea were mostly male students due to military service. Two of the male students who completed military service also studied abroad, along with a few female students. So, half were domestic and half were international students. Out of those, about five became professors. Among the 10 who pursued further studies, five became professors—four abroad and one in Korea.

Even in his late 40s, Seungmin meticulously recounts the academic trajectories and subsequent career paths of his elite college cohort friends, many of whom pursued graduate studies at SNU and beyond. This detailed account not only showcases the pervasive influence of peer dynamics within his cohort but also highlights its lasting significance. This resembles the peer influence observed among the first generation of Korean students who were nurtured in elite circles from childhood, a legacy that endured despite the tumultuous aftermath of the Korean War.

However, this pipeline of peer influence is notably absent in narratives originating from non-elite domestic schools. Unlike SNU and other elite institutions, which boast significantly higher rates of graduate students from the same department and school—approximately 45% in Seungmin's case—many other institutions have much lower rates of admission to their own graduate programs. Additionally, these institutions often lack their own graduate programs or offer them only at the master's level. Consequently, students interested in pursuing graduate education from less elite schools often seek admission to elite domestic institutions like SNU,

Korea University, and Yonsei University. For these students, enrolling in elite graduate programs opens up new pathways and opportunities that were previously unavailable to them during their undergraduate years.

> **Author:** So, after finishing your undergraduate studies, you entered the Korea University. Was there any special reason for choosing Korea University for your master's at that time?
> **Eunji:** At that time, I just disliked [my alma mater]. I wanted to "launder" my academic background. My advisor tried to persuade me to come back to my alma mater. But I insisted that I wouldn't go back. The professor, still being supportive, then suggested, "If that's the case, then go to Korea University. Just make sure you get in," and introduced me to another professor there, asking them to look after me. Honestly, I just didn't like [my alma mater] at that time. I arrogantly thought it wasn't the right place for me and decided to switch.

The lack of exposure led to personal struggles to gather information about studying abroad, often relying on private agencies (yuhagwŏn) in urban centers.

> **Author:** So, for the initial information about studying abroad, did you get it from the study abroad agency in Jongno that you mentioned earlier? You didn't have any senior network or anything like that?
> **Yena:** I didn't have anyone I knew directly in the US at that time. So, I am very grateful to the staff at the study abroad agency in Jongno. I think I was very lucky. They were very kind and provided a lot of information, which eased the preparation process.

In other words, even after many faculty members in Korean universities were replaced by fresh Ph.D.s returning from the US, peer influence and the culture of pursuing overseas education operated differently depending on students' affiliated institutions. Particularly before the widespread adoption of the Internet in the late 1990s, many students lacked detailed information or social connections related to American education. They heavily relied on the personal narratives of returnees and social relations within the Korean academic community as guiding lights for their future plans. These different distributions of peer influence and social capital in pursuing international education led to two distinct circuits of academic reproduction.

Experiencing American Education

The experiences of Korean students in American higher education were diverse. While many found it intellectually stimulating, others did not meet their expectations. Some, particularly female students, viewed the American environment not just as a place to acquire human capital but also as a space for personal growth and development. Unlike previous generations, these students were often versatile and strategically minded, blending human capital enhancements with cultural aspirations for self-realization.

Quest for Excellence

In contrast to earlier generations, some Korean graduate students, primarily from prestigious domestic institutions, came equipped with specific career objectives and sought to acquire human capital in cutting-edge fields like genetic engineering, which were not readily available in Korea. They found areas such as developmental biology and DNA sequencing still underdeveloped in Korean academia. These students pursued excellence in these fields, leveraging their American education to fill gaps in their home country's academic landscape and advance their career aspirations.

> **Seungmin:** I knew I had to go to the US for developmental biology. Handling mice without restrictions [in number] during research was eye-opening.

Even for students from less elite backgrounds, American graduate education provided opportunities to enhance their human capital, particularly in areas like statistics and lab experience. For example, Jiyeon shared, "Two years of coursework and lab experiments during my master's program equipped me with essential skills. This led to recognition and subsequent *happiness* during my Ph.D. program. It was *the first time* I received compliments on my

academic capability. This recognition ultimately resulted in a postdoctoral offer in the United States." (emphasis by author)

Beyond specific knowledge and skills, many students recounted their enriching experiences and the benefits of learning in an affluent environment that was unavailable in Korea. This exposure not only broadened their academic horizons but also provided them with a deeper appreciation of the diverse opportunities and resources that American education offered.

> **Yena:** [American Ph.D. program offered] An environment for experimentation without resource constraints and deep research inquiries. Learning wasn't entirely new, but genetic engineering was scarce in Korea. There were only two places. In Korea, I conducted experiments for the first time during my master's degree. This is still absent even after 20 years in the Korean university where I currently work.

Students' satisfaction with American education often extended beyond the acquisition of specific knowledge or techniques to encompass the holistic academic experience.

> **Haerin:** My master's program in the United States marked my first exposure to evidence-based academic writing, despite having completed a similar program at an elite Korean university.

Regardless of their preconceived notions of excellence, the students regarded their American educational experience as superior, vividly contrasting it with their experiences in Korean higher education.

> **Yejin:** After a year of college education in the US, I didn't anticipate what kind of excellence I'd encounter in grad school. Yet, studying in New York felt markedly distinct from my previous Korean academic journey, especially in terms of academic writing. So it made me decide to study in the US.

Not all Korean students perceived American education as overwhelmingly superior, particularly those attending state universities. While they appreciated the American education system, some were critical of its perceived limitations, noting it "was not as rigorous and had lower standards" (Jaejun). They often compared their institutions with elite private universities in the United

States, rather than using their Korean alma maters as a benchmark. An exception was Yuna, who highly valued her domestic college education, which was implemented in English by American faculty and modeled after the American academic system.

> **Author:** The quality of classes [at your alma mater in Korea] was generally difficult but somewhat satisfactory ….
> **Yuna:** The quality of the classes was extremely good. To boast a bit, even when I went to study abroad, I did better than them, better than the American students. This is because while they spoke well, when given a topic, they would write in a rambling manner. One day, the professor, perhaps out of frustration, used my work as a sample, telling them to do it like this—to clearly state what they wanted to say and then back it up with supporting evidence.

Some students found themselves ill-equipped for the competitive job market despite earning their doctoral degrees. A significant number shared this sentiment, feeling that the affluent yet relaxed environment did not adequately prepare them to become independent scholars capable of securing positions in American academia. Eunji, who pursued her Ph.D. in the same department and school where her husband was a faculty member, reflected on her realization of being underprepared for the academic job market as she neared the end of her doctoral studies.

> **Eunji:** I didn't realize I had to publish papers while pursuing my doctoral degree. [My husband, who was also a professor in the same department], he knew I had to publish papers. But he didn't tell me. I just thought I had to write my dissertation. So now I'm trying to do a postdoc, but now my advisor thought I was going to a company because I haven't published anything. I didn't even know I had to write. I didn't even want to go to a company.

Joy of Learning

The joy of learning often emerges in the narratives of interviewees, particularly among female participants who see American graduate education as a locus for professional growth. The articulation of this joy often takes on a gendered perspective. While male participants commonly view their American training period as necessary learning and experimentation to become scholars, female participants often recall it as a time of enjoying learning and experiencing liberation—something they desired but lacked in Korean education. In other words, the happiness and joy of learning expressed by female students often reflect their satisfaction in breaking away from the restrictive social reproduction circuits in Korea, which frequently obstruct elite females' pathways.

> **Haerin:** Mr. Jo. There were a few moments when I felt immense joy after I went abroad. One particular memory stands out. It was about a month into autumn, and I was walking alone from the department building to the library. As I walked, I thought, "I am so happy. I am so grateful to be studying what I love in such a wonderful environment." I still remember that feeling. I didn't have to fight for a spot in the library, and the air conditioning was great in those beautiful buildings, often with no one else around. I could study as much as I wanted, and no one bothered me. It was such an incredibly happy happy happy memory.
> The methodologies and study styles were completely different [from those in Korea], but I was lucky in a way. In Korea, I wrote my master's thesis in an interdisciplinary manner, which both departments disliked. However, when I came to the US, this approach became an advantage. My study style and methodology were a good fit there. Fortunately, everything worked out well for me, and I was very happy during my time studying abroad. For real.

For female students, the "joy of learning" was often a euphemism for a deep satisfaction with their lives, representing a departure from the path they might have taken in Korea. Even though pursuing international education created additional challenges, they gladly embraced these obstacles.

> **Yejin:** You know, I "raised" my husband, whom I met in student activism. When he came to the United States after me, he hadn't even finished his undergrad degree. So, I had to support him to restart from undergrad, all the way to his Ph.D. Academic English and part-time work to sustain our education together were challenging. But, you know what? My time was not wasted or painful at all. The joy of learning could compensate for all the hardships.

Trajectories amid the United States

A key feature that sets this generation apart from its predecessors is their diverse and multiple rounds of adaptation, signifying a dynamic approach to international educational mobility. While earlier phases often followed a static, pre-determined circuit toward securing faculty positions domestically, this subsequent phase saw Korean students from more varied backgrounds pursuing American higher education in a multifaceted manner. This included shifts in majors, schools, and overall trajectories. Such flexibility signified their integration with other students and scholars in American academia, rather than remaining as "outsiders" aiming solely to return to their home academia after completing their doctoral education.

During Education

This shifting reflects their enhanced understanding of the American higher education system and the consequent changes in motivations and expectations. Unlike previous generations, Korean students during this period possessed more detailed knowledge about their fields of study and educational institutions in the United States. This informed their decisions regarding applications and enrollment, which were rare in earlier phases, and drove them to continuously seek opportunities at institutions they may have initially been unable to access.

With a broader understanding of their fields and the hierarchical nature of American academia, some students began strategically considering their educational institutions for future

career and personal satisfaction. For instance, Yena, who initially had no plans to study abroad until she reached an elite domestic master's program, successfully transferred from a southern state university to an Ivy League institution after her first year of doctoral training. This move was driven by her career aspirations and the reputation of her desired school.

Changing institutions is not uncommon among this generation of KIS. For example, Hyein, who initially secured her preferred faculty advisor, later had to switch institutions due to a conflict with the advisor. She shares her motivations, experiences, and evaluations of her new doctoral institution, reflecting the adaptability and strategic planning characteristic of her cohort.

> **Hyein:** The professor is quite famous in the field of [original major]. He came to our school during our coursework. At that time, all Korean students asked the professor for guidance. Many of my peers were from the 1980s cohort, so I was relatively younger. Ultimately, I couldn't agree with the professor on certain issues, and I think he sensed that. Changing your PhD advisor isn't easy, so I was contemplating what to do when some seniors who had settled in the US offered to write recommendation letters for me and suggested I transfer schools. So, I transferred, and it turned out well.
> **Author:** How long had you been working on your PhD when you decided to switch?
> **Hyein:** I had been at that school for about three years. Then I took a year off. It takes about a year to apply and wait for responses, so I took a break during that time. The seniors advised me that it would be difficult to graduate from that school, so I applied and went to Korea for about three or four months. After receiving the acceptance letter, I moved back in the summer.

In some cases, changes in direction included switching majors by reapplying to new graduate programs or transitioning from a Ph.D. to a master's level. For instance, Hana made such a transition, demonstrating adaptability and a commitment to finding the best fit for her academic and career goals.

> **Author:** So, in the first semester, when you were taking classes in [your initial major], was it significantly different from what you had studied before?
> **Hana:** It was very different, and one particularly hurtful experience stands out. There was this course that all first-year Ph.D. students in my major had to take, and I wrote a midterm paper for it. The professor gave me a C. It was a shock because I had never received such a low grade, not even during my undergraduate studies. That experience left a scar.

> **Author:** At that time, you might have considered reapplying to a different school for the same major or returning to Korea. What made you decide to change your major and continue your studies?
> **Hana:** I really wanted to continue studying. Looking back, I wanted to leverage my experiences in the new major. Those experiences were deeply ingrained in me, and I felt the need to explore them academically and engage in ongoing dialogue about them.
> **Author:** That's fortunate. So, when you decided to change your major, did you apply for a Ph.D. program as well, or just a master's program?
> **Hana:** By then, it was too late to apply for a Ph.D. program, but I still wanted to continue studying. Also, I realized that I didn't know much about [new major], so I applied to master's programs that were still accepting students.

The diverse shifting trajectories, including how students handle obstacles, reflect several key features: Firstly, the abundance of available information has significantly expanded. Unlike previous generations, who relied on limited channels such as word-of-mouth, the new generation accessed comprehensive information about the US educational environment through various sources like college professors, publications, and the internet (from the late 1990s). This broadened access to information not only informed their application decisions but also guided their choices during their American education.

Secondly, there is a departure from the previous circuit of elite reproduction. Compared to the homogeneity of the previous phase, the demographic of the new generation represents a much wider group. Consequently, they feel less domestic peer pressure, especially those from less selective backgrounds, and pursue more fluid trajectories. These students absorb institutional logics in American academia, motivating and providing them with new resources to navigate their educational paths.

After Education: Pursuing Post-doctoral Positions in the United States

This generation widely pursues post-doctoral positions within American academia after completing their doctoral training. This choice not only extends their stay but also signifies a departure from the previous circuit of immediate post-education return to Korea. Instead, they

now align more with the global trend of highly educated “brains” opting for diverse post-education paths, influenced by their individual circumstances.

In essence, even if it was not initially part of their plans before embarking on their American education, post-doctoral training increasingly became a standard step for Korean doctoral degree holders, particularly those in STEM fields. This shift reflects the assimilation of Korean students’ aspirations for academic success with the realities of the American “publish or perish” culture, where securing a post-doc position became integral to advancing their academic careers. These additional years of training and research not only delay their entry into the faculty job market but also offer them a chance to establish themselves more firmly in the United States, a prospect that may have been out of reach with their doctoral degrees alone.

In considering post-doc opportunities, future viability has become an increasingly important criterion for Korean doctoral degree holders. They now approach their post-doctoral careers with long-term strategic planning in mind. The evolving strategies of Korean international scholars may stem from various factors such as their elite domestic backgrounds, gender dynamics, or the breadth of their social capital and associated knowledge regarding their future careers. For example, individuals like Seungmin and Jaehyun, who initially pursued American graduate education to acquire specific cutting-edge knowledge, intentionally shift their focus for post-doc positions to align with their future career goals.

> **Seungmin:** When searching for a post-doc position after receiving my Ph.D., I actively sought out labs that could fill in the gaps in my expertise, which I believed would be essential when establishing my own lab later on.

However, pursuing post-doctoral positions does not necessarily mean that every Korean doctoral degree holder actively manages their academic careers with the sole aim of professional success within their disciplines. For some, the post-doctoral experience often becomes a cornerstone of

their professional academic identities, sometimes even overshadowing their doctoral education. Eunji's experience underscores the profound influence of the post-doctoral phase in shaping academic identities and adjusting to the American academic model. She highly values her postdoc advisor, who effectively balanced encouragement and pressure. Throughout her interview, Eunji reflects on her postdoc experience as a critical lens through which she evaluates Korean education and academia.

> **Eunji:** For me, the [postdoc] advisor took care of me financially and materially. He said, 'Don't worry about anything under $5,000, just buy whatever you want without asking.' [But] mentally, it was taxing. Doctoral students in that lab already had five publications. And here I am, a postdoc with zero papers. Every lab meeting, he would ask, 'How many papers do you have?' It felt like he was constantly scrutinizing me. So, it's really damaging to the self-esteem, to someone who couldn't live without it. Now, I'm going crazy. Staying up all night, really going crazy.

Imbalanced Family Dynamics

Deferred Milestones: Parenthood and Parenting

One striking contrast between the current generation and the previous one lies in marital status. It has become increasingly common for couples to pursue graduate education together, encompassing marriage and parenthood. Family formation often occurs at pivotal points in their doctoral programs, such as after comprehensive examinations and dissertation proposal defenses. While not everyone pursued dual academic careers, this dual mobility notably addressed the gendered barriers that hindered female elites in the previous generation at various levels.

However, despite this progress, gendered milestones—previously encountered at different stages like pre-educational mobility, during graduate education, and upon returning to Korean academia—are now being postponed to the period of childbirth and childcare.

Heterosexual academic couples who have successfully navigated their academic journeys to the United States together begin to encounter gendered obstacles in their joint academic pursuits at the juncture of parenthood and subsequent childcare. These obstacles, rooted in traditional gender norms that dictate mothers assume primary caregiving responsibilities, gradually impact the professional trajectories of female partners while leaving those of male partners largely unchanged.

Balancing Act: Women Navigating Career and Family

The burden of balancing career ambitions with familial duties often fell on women, who strove to harmonize these aspects without sacrificing either. Faced with these trade-offs, women grappled with preserving their family commitments while pursuing their aspirations as academic professionals. Male partners often did not explicitly consider the potential impact on their female partners' future trajectories, while female interviewees frequently factored in their male partners' prospects.

Haerin faced significant challenges balancing ambitious career goals and a desire for a child. She became pregnant while navigating the academic job market. After her husband secured a faculty position in Korea first, she encountered criticism from Korean colleagues for considering her own academic career in the same country. This was deemed "greedy" given her husband's status. Her mother-in-law suggested she return to Korea to pursue a non-academic career, such as running a cram school. This was particularly challenging for Haerin, as she had initially encouraged her husband to study abroad.

Despite these pressures, Haerin prioritized seeking postdoctoral and faculty positions worldwide, aiming to advance her career while raising her son alone. Although her attempts at

securing spousal hiring were unsuccessful, she remained resilient. When offered an opportunity to move to an Ivy League institution, she strategically leveraged it to negotiate better terms for her family.

Currently, Haerin navigates the complexities of raising her son alone in the United States while actively pursuing her career, utilizing summer breaks and sabbaticals to maintain connections and pursue opportunities both in Korea and the United States. Her story exemplifies the challenges faced by female scholars in academic couples and the determination required to balance career aspirations with family responsibilities.

The tension between self-realization as a scholar and the formation of a family as a mother often necessitates international mobility. After getting married during her Ph.D. studies, Yena paused her career for two years to care for her child, allowing her husband to focus on his academic career. Later, she navigated several postdoctoral positions while raising her daughter across different institutions and regions. After facing several challenges in her non-tenured positions, she decided to pursue a tenure-track faculty position in Korea, which required leaving her "best friend" with her husband in the United States. Her international trajectory underscores the complex gendered trade-offs faced by academic couples.

Similarly, Eunji placed her husband's career above her own, assuming the primary caregiver role for their two children because "naturally, Mom has to take care of [kids]." After completing her master's program in Korea, she entered the industry to provide financial support for her husband's education abroad. Upon relocating to the United States, she continued to support her husband through his educational pursuits and job searches, eventually returning to Korea. This mindset guided her decision to embark on a postdoctoral journey alone in the US

and eventually return to Korea for a faculty position, though her achievement was significantly delayed compared to her husband's career progression.

However, the dynamics of academic couples do not always entail sacrifices from wives. In cases like Soojin and Jisoo, a settled-down couple in the United States, some male participants prioritized their female partner's situation over their own, emphasizing the significance of family considerations regardless of gender. Soojin and Jisoo faced the "two-body problem" prevalent in American academia. Their dual post-education faculty careers with two children led to their separation for several years. This separation was a result of prioritizing Soojin's faculty career, which necessitated Jisoo's job search in the United States. They made persistent efforts to balance their dual careers and family life, considering factors such as maternity leave and job locations.

Their journey was fraught with challenges, leading to Jisoo residing alone in upstate New York while the rest of the family lived in the Rocky Mountains. To be with his children while pursuing his career, Jisoo had to reenter the job market every year and travel frequently. Their perseverance eventually paid off when Jisoo obtained a new position at an institution that offered spousal hiring to Soojin. With the support of a research award from the National Science Foundation, he could secure a "scaled-down" job that allowed the entire family to reunite. Despite the challenges and sacrifices they endured, their story underscores the complexity of navigating family dynamics within academia as a dual-career couple.

Navigating Complex Academic Pathways

Female scholars often face more complex and multifaceted academic pathways compared to their male counterparts, marked by affiliations with a greater number of institutions before securing their current academic positions. This higher number of affiliations, including previous educational institutions, academic appointments, and their current institution, serves as a clear metric for gauging their struggles to establish themselves in academia.

In contrast, members of the preceding first generation typically traversed two to three institutions throughout their entire academic careers. This journey encompassed their higher education institutions in both Korea and the United States, often culminating in a primary faculty position that endured for over 30 years within a single institution in Korea.

However, the second generation of Korean female students in the United States, who later successfully secured academic positions, exhibit a wider range of institutional affiliations, spanning between six and eight distinct institutions. Their male counterparts tend to have affiliations with a smaller number of institutions, typically ranging between four and five, with longer contracts during postdoctoral appointments.

Take Yena, for instance, who currently holds a faculty position at a local national university in Korea. She navigated through two different domestic educational institutions, pursued doctoral education at two American institutions, and completed three postdoctoral positions at different American institutions before securing her current position—eight in total. Her journey was far from easy, originating from a rural background and gaining admission to less selective institutions, all while lacking the social capital that often paves the way for

smoother academic trajectories. Additionally, she experienced career discontinuity due to childbirth and childcare responsibilities.

Returning to Korea: A Shifting Paradigm

This generation of Korean international students, who have successfully obtained their doctorates from American institutions, exhibits a divergence in their post-education trajectories. Unlike their predecessors, some students are deviating from the once-taken-for-granted path of returning to Korea after completing their education. This shift in orientation often begins before their departure from Korea. However, their post-education migratory decisions frequently undergo unexpected changes due to factors such as family considerations and shifts in personal priorities. These fluctuations underscore their gradual integration into the influx of international students and scholars, who are increasingly recognized as valuable contributors to the American academic landscape—the "high brains."

Reevaluating Assumptions

Returning to Korea post-education has long been the default trajectory for Korean international students. Even among those who lack a clear blueprint for their post-education paths, the notion of returning home is deeply ingrained. Still, some interview participants exemplify this mindset, where the goal of securing a faculty position in Korea serves as a significant motivation for pursuing education in the United States.

For instance, Yuna expressed her intention to return as a professor even before embarking on her overseas studies.

> **Yuna:** I intended to become a professor. I planned to pursue my major and become a professor… That's the only thing I could do, what else could I do? … Unless you continued your studies or prepared separately for something like the bar exam or the civil

> service exam, there wasn't much you could do with a degree in English literature or similar fields.

Similarly, Jiyeon always envisioned returning to Korea as her "Plan A," viewing her American education as a means to compensate for her Korean academic credential. Despite navigating a diverse array of educational experiences and positions in both Korea and the United States, her determination to return home remained steadfast, and she continually adapted her approach to leverage opportunities as they arose.

> **Jiyeon:** Even before pursuing my master's degree, I always had Korea in mind as my ultimate destination. In fact, during the process, I frequently shuttled back and forth between the two countries.

Yet, a notable contingent holds a different perspective, leaving Korea with a sense of disillusionment and a firm decision not to return for their careers and scholarly pursuits. For instance, Haerin recognizes the hurdles associated with returning and appears inclined to explore opportunities abroad.

> **Haerin:** By the time I left, I had already seen too many of the irregularities in Korean graduate schools. I knew even then that the academic job market in Korea was extremely tough. So, when I left, I didn't really think that getting this degree would give me a significant advantage in the job market. [During that time,] a [Korean] professor came as a visiting professor [to another university], and even though I was just a student, I didn't entertain him lavishly enough. I overheard him saying, "Just wait until she comes back; I won't give her a lecturer position." This made the thought of returning to Korea very depressing. That year was really a tough one for me.

This inclination towards not returning is not entirely new, echoing historical trends where a significant portion of Korean scholars, approximately 80-85%, chose to remain abroad until the late 1960s (Chapter 6). Others, like Minseo, express no explicit intention to return, influenced by factors such as career prospects and personal fulfillment.

Evolving Plans

Family Considerations

Family considerations, particularly the health and well-being of aging parents, frequently emerge as primary factors prompting the sudden return of Korean international students to Korea. Many Korean students pursuing graduate education in the United States depart in their late twenties, following the completion of their domestic bachelor's and master's degrees, along with military service obligations (typically lasting 2 to 3 years for men). However, as these individuals progress in their American postgraduate journeys, news of their aging parents' health issues often arises during their early forties.

Although these scholars may anticipate potential discrimination in the Korean academic job market due to factors like age and their domestic academic backgrounds, concerns about their parents' health prompt them to reassess their career trajectories. As a result, they often reconsider their plans and look for positions in Korea to better balance work and family commitments.

> **Eunji:** While I initially envisioned becoming a professor, the destination was not clearly defined. However, as circumstances evolved, and considering [potential discriminations], including age and educational qualifications, I contemplated staying in the United States. Eventually, due to my mother's health issues, I made the decision to return to Korea.

Cultural factors also play a significant role. Born primarily between the 1950s and 1970s, these individuals often have siblings in Korea who share the responsibility of caring for their parents. However, the thought of leaving this responsibility unattended for over a decade often elicits strong feelings of guilt and obligation.

> **Minseo:** The responsibility of being the eldest daughter weighed heavily on me, particularly as my parents faced health issues. It was the first time in my life that I made a decision centered around my parents.

Yet, at the same time, family considerations can also serve as a convenient justification for their return to Korea.

Faculty Life in the United States: A Journey of Compromise and Priorities

"Scaling down" and settling at a rural institution, a decision aimed at prioritizing family cohesion above all else, did not fully resolve the challenges faced by Jisoo and Soojin's family. Following their relocation, individual interviews revealed a shift in their priorities, with Soojin acknowledging the compromises made for the sake of Jisoo's career and personal passions after their family was reunited.

Reflecting on her husband's "code changes" between Korea and the United States, Soojin emphasized the stark contrast in his demeanor and responsibilities in these different environments. In the United States, he assumes the nurturing role of a father at home, dedicating time to cooking and preserving Korean traditions for their children. However, during his visits to his Korean alma maters as a visiting professor during sabbatical periods, he transforms into a dedicated academic, investing relentless hours into teaching students and networking with his faculty colleagues, even on Sunday nights. The marked difference in his energy and passion, which is keenly felt as his absence at home by their children, leaves a profound impression on Soojin.

> **Author:** Since your family is all together now, you'll stay in the US.
> **Soojin:** I'm not sure because my husband really wants to return to Korea. He comes here every summer to give special lectures. He always says the students are smart, the research opportunities are excellent, and there's great collaboration with major corporations. He misses it a lot.
> **Author:** It's difficult to collaborate with big companies in the US, and being an international student and scholar means you often feel like an outsider.
> **Soojin:** Yes, we always feel like outsiders. My husband struggles with it more than I do. Since I graduated from a local university, I don't have that same feeling. But my husband went to a science high school and a prestigious university, so he has always been part of

the mainstream. He initially felt disappointed when he had to lower his expectations and work at a less prestigious institution. He still doesn't feel fulfilled. So, we're considering moving back to Korea, but it would mean sacrifices for me and the kids. My husband can't just tell us to sacrifice for his sake, so he's hesitating. But it's clear he would love to move back; he's very active and enjoys being here.
Author: It's different from life in the US.
Soojin: Very different. In the US, he finishes work at 4 PM, comes home, grills meat, and prepares dinner. The kids always see their dad at home after school. Here, he's never home in the evenings. The kids always ask where he is.
Author: It must be a tough decision.
Soojin: Yes, it's a constant dilemma for us. We've been unable to decide for 20 years now. We've spent 20 years just thinking about it. We always feel like we're drifting, unable to put down roots.

Through Soojin's perspective, Jisoo's heightened engagement with his alma mater reflects an underlying desire to reclaim a sense of belonging and recognition. While he may not overtly express a longing to return, his enthusiasm for teaching and interacting in Korea contrasts sharply with his experiences as a first-generation immigrant faculty member at a local state university in the United States. Following our interview in the summer of 2022, the family eventually decided to relocate to Korea, with Jisoo securing a faculty position at his alma mater, marking a significant milestone in their journey.

New Circuits of Capital Conversion

This transition period highlights the emergence of new circuits for converting capital among Koreans educated in the United States. These circuits manifest in several ways: Firstly, through the expansion of social capital networks stemming from domestic higher education, now extending to include less elite institutions; Secondly, through the growing importance of American academic credentials as institutionalized cultural capital, particularly with shifts and expansions in Korean academic fields; Thirdly, through the inherent benefits of an American education background, which opens up potential additional mobilities and opportunities.

Expanding Mediation of Social Capital

Social capital has long served as a crucial mediator for elite Korean students, enabling the conversion of their American educational credentials into faculty positions and other career opportunities upon returning to Korea. Towards the culmination of their American education, Korean students actively traversed the Pacific to reconnect with former domestic advisors and colleagues, updating them on their progress and expertise. For male elites, this network often led to new academic positions upon their return. However, female elites, both in minority numbers and lacking robust networks, faced challenges in formulating and leveraging academic networks as social capital.

The activation of social capital within academia began to expand in the 1980s, coinciding with the broader expansion and diversification of Korean higher education. Firstly, with the broadening scope of academia, the activation of social capital extended to encompass less elite universities, which began hiring their own graduates as faculty following their American graduate education. Secondly, Korean doctoral degree holders, at the crossroads of returning to Korea or remaining in American academia, found new opportunities to leverage their credentials as institutionalized cultural capital in securing positions within the Korean academic sphere, even without previous social capital networks.

From the late 1980s, less selective universities in Korea embarked on expanding their higher education by recruiting new faculty, including their own graduates with American Ph.D. education. This hiring practice held significance as these universities transitioned towards reproducing their own students as faculty, serving as role models for current students. This process mirrored the hiring practices of elite domestic universities, with the network between Korean students and their alma maters serving as the key to their recruitment and reproduction.

Author: After completing your master's, you were initially considering getting a job in the US or returning to Korea, but you decided to pursue a Ph.D. After finishing your Ph.D., your career plans must have changed somewhat.
Jeonghee: That's right. Even after completing my Ph.D., I was still contemplating my next steps. However, the situation in Korea had changed significantly after the 1988 Olympics. Many Korean professors started taking sabbaticals as exchange professors, so they were coming over frequently. I provided settlement services for them, starting from airport pickups to helping them get settled, and we became close. They would tell me, "This is great timing. In Korea, professors in your field are retiring in a few years…" I hadn't known that information, but they shared it with me, making me realize that pursuing this field could lead to a high chance of becoming a professor. These professors would return to Korea after their year abroad and speak highly of me to [my alma mater]. My professors knew I was doing well there because they heard positive things from these returning professors.
I also kept in touch with my professors by writing letters regularly, at least once a year, informing them of my progress. For instance, I would write, "I have entered the Ph.D. program, previously studied this field during my master's, and now I am focusing on this area for my Ph.D." This wasn't necessarily to secure future opportunities but because I was only the second person from our department to study at [Ph.D. institution]. Many textbooks used in our undergraduate classes were written by [Ph.D. institution] professors, and being there reminded me of my professors, so I kept them updated.
My professors even mentioned my progress in their classes, encouraging students to consider studying abroad at such prestigious institutions. Although I never dreamed of becoming a professor, I realized that an environment was being created where this could become a reality. My reputation was improving without me even knowing it. By the time I was about to finish my Ph.D., the most senior professor in my department called me from Korea and asked, "When are you finishing?" I replied, "I will be done soon." He then told me, "The school is waiting for you."
So, after my dissertation defense and before my graduation ceremony, I returned to Korea, greeted my professors, and gave a seminar. The seminar caused quite a buzz among the graduate students, who heard that I would be joining as a professor next semester. I had no idea about these rumors, but my professors were very supportive. They advised me to prepare well, stating that the school would make preparations too. They subtly suggested that I observe how universities are managed, how professors are hired, and how to supervise graduate students, in addition to focusing on my research.

In essence, for this group of Korean international students, returning to Korea was often regarded as a foregone conclusion, even before embarking on their studies abroad, as they were seen as "the first Doctorate (1ho paksa)" of their institution or department. Similar to experiences of previous generations in elite domestic institutions, this represented an extension of existing reproduction circuits, culminating in the conversion of their American doctoral credentials into faculty positions in Korea.

New Pathways for Cultural Capital Conversion

Liberalization and globalization from the 1990s transformed the landscape of Korean academia. The government encouraged elite universities to broaden their faculty base beyond traditional reproduction circuits, requiring them to diversify with candidates from non-elite undergraduate institutions, different departments, and female scholars.

Furthermore, the globalization drive pushed for the adoption of publication-based evaluation systems, echoing standards prevalent in American academia. This shift aimed at bolstering the global competitiveness of Korean academic institutions. These changes in evaluation criteria and hiring practices opened new avenues for Korean Ph.D. holders. Whether they contemplated returning to Korea or continuing their careers in American academia, they were already familiar with the American publication systems, allowing them to leverage their academic credentials within the growing diversity requirements of domestic institutions.

These opportunities, catalyzed by changes within the field, often appeared coincidental and contingent on candidates navigating both the Korean and American job markets. Unlike its American counterpart, the Korean academic job market lacks a predictable annual cycle, making strategic anticipation of job openings challenging for those without established social networks within the Korean academic community. However, the state-led higher education expansion provided new, diverse career opportunities.

For example, Yejin's return journey vividly illustrates the "strength of weak ties" (Granovetter 2019) in cultural capital conversion. The conversion of her academic credentials into new social capital became instrumental in her transition back to Korea, despite lacking a strategic approach to the process. A nudge from a Korean visiting professor sparked Yejin and

her husband's interest in the Korean academic landscape, ultimately prompting their swift return. This highlights how seemingly minor connections can profoundly impact career trajectories, showcasing the power of leveraging academic credentials within evolving social contexts.

> **Yejin:** I graduated in June, and the winter before that, a professor from [a local university in Korea], who was an alum, came to [our school on sabbatical]. I didn't know her, but she was very nice. She mentioned in passing, not directly to me but to [my husband,] that her university might be hiring a professor and that a job announcement might be coming out soon. It was just a casual comment that anyone could make to a graduating student, but it was the first time we seriously considered the possibility of becoming professors in Korea. I remember my husband and I talking, "Wouldn't it be amazing if even one of us could get a job in Korea?" "It feels like a dream to think about being a professor in Korea." I had never imagined it before because I didn't have any seniors to guide me, and my undergrad major was different from my Ph.D. major. I had no one to ask about the job market in Korea.
> At that time, there were some seniors and juniors I studied with who had graduated from Seoul National University. [My current position] was originally nudged to them through their network. The female candidate was my husband's classmate but was finishing a bit later. Her husband from SNU then suggested to me, "Why don't you give it a try?" I responded, "Bro, how could I dare to do that?" [But] then I thought, "Why not try?" It felt like a dream when I applied.
> **Author:** So, you applied, found a good fit, and got the position.
> **Yejin:** It felt almost like a miracle.
> **Author:** So, you didn't apply for any positions in the US?
> **Yejin:** Not at all.

The "strength of weak ties" extends beyond individuals with the same American educational background. The shifting landscape of Korean academia, driven by globalization and diversification efforts, has opened new avenues for converting academic credentials into job opportunities through expanded exchange platforms, such as international conferences.

Take Haeun's experience, for example. Despite facing personal challenges and spending a decade as a housewife after completing her undergraduate studies at a non-Seoul institution, she lacked even weak ties akin to Yejin's connections in her American institution. However, an encounter with a Korean scholar at an international conference in the United States unexpectedly paved her path back to Korea, aligning with her aspirations. This anecdote highlights how

academic credentials can facilitate "coincidental" pathway transitions within evolving academic landscapes, demonstrating the transformative potential of weak ties in academic and professional trajectories.

New pathways for institutionalized cultural capital conversion were not exclusive to academia. Individuals like Minseo, who were contemplating between returning to Korea and staying abroad, could secure positions in large Korean companies. As the Korean economy reached a developed stage, Chaebol affiliates increasingly sought qualified researchers with American Ph.D. credentials.

> **Minseo:** My parents' health was deteriorating significantly… I couldn't just selfishly decide to settle in the United States. Then, there was an interview opportunity with LG. A large-scale one. They were conducting interviews in New York, so all my friends were going. I went too, and they pretty much accepted everyone. Since there were places that wanted me, and my parents' situation was like that. Also, I received an offer from [a Korean broadcasting station] at that time, just when bioinformatics was starting. They were planning to start a research center there and were hiring more people.

In essence, these examples underscore how evolving social and institutional dynamics in Korea have created new pathways for converting academic credentials into job opportunities, reshaping career trajectories for Korean Ph.D. holders.

Delayed Returns

Some members of this generation of Korean students internalize the American "rules of the game" as a core aspect of their professional identity. This assimilation gradually reshapes the meritocratic criteria of Korean academia, motivating individuals—primarily from elite backgrounds—to postpone their return to Korea until an opportune moment arises. However, this delay does not entail constant monitoring of job openings in Korean academia; instead, it involves a pursuit of academic excellence within their current fields in the United States to bolster their qualifications, including publications in "top journals."

Seungmin offers a nuanced perspective on this narrative, describing his journey as a blend of strategic planning and adaptability to field dynamics. By strategically selecting his doctoral program and post-doctorate labs, he diligently built his research portfolio, striving for publications that could position him as a viable faculty candidate. This approach culminated in publications in the prestigious academic journals, such as *Cell*, *Nature*, and *Science*, ultimately facilitating his return to Korea and opening opportunities at his alma mater, Seoul National University.

> **Seungmin:** [When I started my postdoc,] I began working on Dry Lab tasks at Well Lab. It was a lab that mostly conducted experiments with minimal analysis, but as techniques for dry lab work were developed, my advisor recognized the need for new analytical skills and expertise in computational science. I joined the lab at this opportune time, despite having no prior experience with dry lab work. My advisor handed me a huge dataset, which was quite overwhelming for me. However, I found it very interesting and started teaching myself programming to analyze the data. I joined on July 1st, received the data in August, and by September, I had a meeting where I presented the analysis I had done after learning the necessary programming. My advisor was very impressed and told me to focus exclusively on computational work rather than pipetting. From then on, for the next five years, I focused solely on computational tasks. I continuously analyzed incoming datasets and played a key role in the lab, often considered the "ace" for my contributions.

These delayed returners differ from those who focus solely on returning to Korea. For them, professional success is not merely a means to return; rather, it is an end in itself, with potential pathways to Korea emerging as a byproduct. Even upon returning to Korea, they maintain a global perspective, leaving the door open for a potential "return" to the United States. The perceived limitations in resources and the overall academic environment in Korea prompt serious consideration of returning to the United States, underscoring the complexity of their decision-making process.

Jaehyun's perspective further underscores this dual identity. The assimilation of American academic norms expands their international mobility options, necessitating additional

rounds of capital conversion to solidify their career trajectories. This dual focus on achieving excellence within the American academic system while keeping future opportunities in Korea and the United States open illustrates the intricate balance these scholars maintain in navigating their professional paths.

Unsuccessful Transitions

Not everyone manages to leverage their American education as capital for their post-graduation lives, especially when attempting to settle in the United States. The absence of citizenship presents a significant obstacle, often unforeseen when they first embark on their educational journeys in America. Regardless of their original intentions, marriage to an American citizen frequently becomes a pragmatic solution to this issue, as seen in Yena's case.

However, not everyone finds a partner to marry, and many interview participants expressed disinterest in seeking an American spouse solely to address their legal status issues. Even for those pursuing employment in industry, which further exacerbates their legal status concerns, this option was not seriously considered. For Jiyeon, further education became her solution after failed attempts to secure employment.

> **Author:** So after completing your master's in the US, did you immediately pursue a Ph.D. in [Ph.D. institution]?
> **Jiyeon:** Actually, the reason I went for a Ph.D. was because I initially prepared to find a job in Korea. However, there wasn't much demand in Korean companies for a woman with a master's degree from the US. So, I found myself having qualifications that were practically useless. In the US, you need a green card to get a job, and I didn't have any special skills that would warrant a company sponsoring my green card. That's when I realized, "Things are not going to go my way." So, somewhat reluctantly, I applied for jobs and Ph.D. programs. I had no intention of continuing my studies, but I felt I needed to do something, so I applied. Even when I applied for the Ph.D., my ultimate goal was still to find a job. I thought that having a Ph.D. might make me more competitive in the industry.

Some individuals endeavored to remain in the United States by altering their academic pathways, recognizing the limited career prospects stemming from their non-elite domestic backgrounds. Unlike other female respondents who remained committed to academic paths, Jiwon made a conscious decision to join the workforce to acquire human capital for potential migration to the United States.

> **Jiwon:** [Planning to attend graduate school later,] I first went for English studies. My mindset changed while I was there. Playing an instrument can be challenging because it often breaks down, and repairs are very costly. I thought it would be great if I could fix it myself. I felt that learning this skill could be worthwhile. Even if I graduated from graduate school, [entering an orchestra] in Korean society is somewhat of a long shot. So, while studying English, I applied to [a violin repair school]. The school accepted me. So, what started as a plan to go to graduate school turned into attending a technical school. That's how I ended up going there.

Her efforts to obtain a green card ultimately faltered due to her employers' mistakes, leaving her with no choice but to return to Korea. Upon realizing that her existing human capital was insufficient to secure a new career in Korea, she spent the following decade in a state of uncertainty. She deliberately refrained from purchasing housing in Korea, always preparing for the possibility of departure. However, this plan ultimately proved unsuccessful.

Discussion: Beyond the "Golden Ticket"

This chapter highlights the dynamic nature of international student mobility and the evolving interplay between individual aspirations, social contexts, and gender dynamics. It reveals a stratified domestic path to international academic mobility, influenced by varying peer effects and discursive atmospheres across institutions. Despite diverse expectations, participants recognized the "professionalization" gained through American education, which gradually transformed them from domestic elites into highly skilled migrants increasingly drawn to building careers in the United States.

This study investigates the factors that construct the perceived "excellence" and "benefit" of foreign credentials, focusing on student mobility from a relatively developed nation (South Korea) to an even more developed one (the United States). Focusing on elite Korean graduate students, I examine their motivations for prioritizing US graduate education despite their access to an established domestic system. I explore how they navigate academia abroad and how their experiences reshape their perspectives, influencing future generations' mobility in complex ways, including encounters with hidden gender hurdles.

The findings demonstrate that the "international" educational mobilities have evolved beyond the "golden ticket." International educational credentials and their benefits used to be understood as a golden ticket. Initially, international mobility was horizontal on the surface but vertical in nature, effectively enabling existing elites' social reproduction through quantitative differentiation. However, the circuits attached to international mobility have now evolved into much more complex mechanisms, encompassing diverse transforming narratives and considerations.

It is now more important to examine international mobility as a life-course phenomenon influenced by factors beyond education, instead of a taken-for-granted circulatory movement to convert international credentials into domestic benefits. For instance, student trajectories shift from returning home to migrating to the host society, and academic couples face a new "two-body problem" in academic mobility, with an added international dimension. While gender hurdles are initially postponed, they resurface after childbirth. There are still many benefits from American education, but it does not always promise success.

While focused on a specific cohort, these findings offer insights relevant to various research areas, including academic mobility, work-family conflict, and highly skilled migration.

However, the study’s limitations lie in its focus on a specific group and direction of mobility (East to West). Further research is necessary to determine if these findings extend to other types of international student mobility, such as intra-European mobility or undergraduate studies abroad.

Chapter 8. "SKY" above Ivy League: How Elite Korean International Students Came to Prefer Home Universities to American Colleges

Introduction

While the majority of higher education decisions are still made within a national context, the number of students choosing to study abroad has climbed continuously, especially during the past 20 years. In 2019, over six million higher education students traveled across international borders to study, more than double the number in 2007 (OECD 2021). In the United States, more than one million international students enrolled in higher education since 2015, making up 5.5% of all students (Institute of International Education 2019a).

What accounts for this rise in the number of college students, particularly abroad? Much literature has focused on student and family motives in terms of the returns to education (G. S. Becker 1962, 2009; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Paulsen 1998). As with domestic educational options, it is anticipated that the expectation of increased economic benefits from international educational credentials will drive these increases in international enrollments. Recently, a new perspective has emphasized the aspirations of "cosmopolitan" education consumers who seek to acquire status through transnational educational experience (S. J. Park and Abelmann 2004, 646). These two perspectives, however, represent only part of a more complex process, which is the iterative transformation of economic capital into cultural capital and then back into economic returns (Bourdieu 1986, 1996). People often seek a mix of sociocultural capital from education that contributes to elevating their social status, rather than just pure economic benefits or cultural satisfaction.

American higher education has served as an example of the role of education in the status of elite international students. American universities have not only excelled academically but have also willingly backed foreign elites, through programs such as the Fulbright Program, to preserve America's global hegemony. Elite international students were thus able to translate their American education into perceived advantages of employment and prestige after they returned home (Brazinsky 2007; Jong-young.Kim 2011, 2015, 2016).

However, the panorama of American higher education and international students' perceptions has grown more complex. The overall numbers of entering international students have increased in the 21st century, especially Indian and Chinese students[1] (Institute of International Education 2019). By contrast, the number of students from East Asian developmental states like Japan and Taiwan, who were at the forefront of the late 20th-century American study abroad boom, started to fall in the middle of the 1990s, prior to the present international student mobility boom. These divergent trends pose a question of international college selection as opposed to a naive assumption that American higher education always produces superior returns for international students.

I propose revisiting Pierre Bourdieu's theory on forms of capital, specifically the convertibility of academic credentials (institutionalized cultural capital) to instrumental returns to education (economic capital and social capital), to comprehend this transition, which departs from the economic cost-benefit analysis model. I investigate the interplay of opportunities, perceptions of status orders, and expected returns in the field of international higher education by addressing the convertibility of cultural capital into other forms of capital as a question rather

[1] Only in the middle of the 2000s did the number of Chinese students begin to soar, and only in the middle of the 2010s did the number of Indian students, especially graduate students, start to soar.

than an assumption. Investigating how people perceive their education as cultural capital, how they anticipate and calculate its convertibility into profits, and how that knowledge drives their higher education decisions helps us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the imagined global convergence of higher education.

This study contends that selecting an international university is a locally motivated global project intended to elevate local status through global education, a strategy that assumes the convertibility of global education and its benefits at home. Some upper-class families start pursuing international educational opportunities to get a "head start" (Weenink 2008, 1092) in the intensifying competition for rewarding employment and occupational stability in domestic society (Abelmann, Newendorp, and Lee-Chung 2014; Phillip Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2010; Jong-young Kim 2011). And some of the newly affluent middle class[2] joins the transnational pathway. Their comprehension of the relationship between education and societal benefits forms the foundation of this global strategy. However, if (1) the anticipated convertibility does not

[2] I employ Koo's (2022) concept of the "newly affluent middle class" to describe the capacity and strategic nature of the class that chooses between global and local educational trajectories for their children's social status. In societies like Korea where the majority of adults have higher education, using college graduation to discern between classes (e.g., between middle and working class; see Lareau 2011) is too "large" and insufficient to discern internal subtle heterogeneity in the middle class. In Korea, while the wide ordinary middle class has been constrained (or at least stagnant) since the East Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, the newly affluent middle class has been divided from the ordinary middle class in terms of consumption, residential segregation, and education and has become the "privileged" upper middle class with their socioeconomic standing (about the top 10%) in Gangnam, the southern part of the country's capital, Seoul. They actively participate in the real estate speculation education complex in Gangnam to give themselves and their children a competitive edge in the nation's egalitarian system, including the college admissions process (Seth 2002). The area's renowned private shadow education industry and its continuing success fuel the neighborhood's further real estate speculation. This class is distinguished from the upper class by its strategic character. Upper-class families in the same area, for example, are excused from having to put forth as much effort to maintain or advance their families' social status. Instead, the newly affluent middle class, which alternates between the upper and squeezed middle classes, seeks the meritocratic reproduction of their socioeconomic status. Therefore, they deliberately appropriate the upper class's "escape strategy" of getting American academic credentials as part of their meritocratic achievement pathways. Some members of the ordinary middle class strive to follow global trajectories, although this often fails due to excessive risk and cost.

appear to operate effectively in practice and (2) more beneficial local pathways become available, the global strategy can revert to its original domestic version.

The decline of South Korea's Ivy League boom in the 2010s supports this argument. At the turn of the millennium, elite[3] Korean high school students and their families began to seriously consider attending prestigious American universities. The newly affluent middle class began to aspire for their children to become cosmopolitan elites who cross the Pacific, graduate from prestigious American universities, and are fluent in English. As many parents established their own socioeconomic standing with the assistance of their elite domestic higher education backgrounds, they shared a firm belief in the benefits conferred by credentials. Therefore, they projected similar strong cultural aspirations and expectations for providing their children with a more prestigious American higher education abroad.

In other words, this "international opt-out" from domestic higher education (Hannum et al. 2019, 631) was a more sophisticated and upscale version of the age-old effort to attain upper rank and status through education in Korean society, where post-World War II regimes have advanced strong egalitarian education policies (Seth 2002, 144). But as it became clearer in the 2010s that Korean international students did not derive the same degree of advantage from elite American universities as did their Korean classmates who studied at elite Korean universities, economic cost-benefit analysis quickly trumped cultural expectations of studying abroad. At the same time, prominent universities in Korea, including Seoul National University (SNU), changed admissions processes to welcome elite students more than ever before. The state-regulated

[3] I extend the definition of elites as "those who have vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource" (Khan 2012:362) to further include meritocratic implications, such as scholastic competence. The meritocratic superiority enables the elites' symbolic predominance over the masses. In other words, while the elites are frequently upper (middle) class, they are not bound by the notion of class because they can achieve elite status through merit.

admissions procedures, which were designed to provide students from all socioeconomic backgrounds with equal access, steadily became more advantageous for rich kids who could have chosen to pursue college education abroad. In other words, the shifting preferences for higher education of elite Korean students (and their families) demonstrate how actors perceive and respond dynamically to the trade-offs between cultural and economic capital in the context of globalization. Specifically, this argument extends the Bourdieusian framework to a global context in which the functioning of cultural capital and its relationship to economic capital becomes more complex. My findings regarding how economic and cultural capital jointly shape strategies of social reproduction and mobility have implications for research at the intersection of cultural capital–mediated social stratification and critical globalization studies, as well as intensifying elite status struggles.

Theoretical Framework

Pursuing Institutionalized Cultural Capital in the Era of Globalization

Cultural capital theory contends that elites' cultural capital, such as academic degrees, sanctifies their status as deserving and legitimizes their status reproduction (Bourdieu 1973, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; DiMaggio 1979; Lamont and Lareau 1988). According to Bourdieu, "the act of scholastic classification is always, but especially in this case, an act of ordination, in the double sense the word has in French. It institutes a social difference of rank, a permanent relation of order: the elect are marked, for their whole lives, by their affiliation. . . . This is why the separation achieved by school is also an act of ordination in the sense of consecration, enthronement in a sacred category, a nobility" (Bourdieu 1996:21). This symbolic power of academic titles affects not only the elites but also the populace.

Despite the long history of debate on education's role in social stratification, little attention has been given to how globalization, which has connected, overlapped, and decoupled various global fields and societies, has posed new challenges for the operation of education's role in social inequality and how people adjust their strategies to these problems (Igarashi and Saito 2014). I will therefore focus on two factors to help us better understand how cultural capital affects class strategy in a globalizing society.

First, the investigation of cultural capital has been largely confined to high-status cultural signals (e.g., knowledge of classical music and fine arts) and their role in the process of status attainment (Lamont and Lareau 1988:160). Despite Bourdieu's (1986) effort to distinguish between three states of cultural capital (embodied, objectified, and institutionalized) to convey the nuanced implications, most empirical applications of cultural capital have been confined to the first two types "in terms of prestigious, 'highbrow' aesthetic pursuits and attitudes" (Lareau and Weininger 2003, 575).

In contrast to embodied and objectified cultural capital and their focus on habitus, institutionalized cultural capital connects merit with the perceived "action" of its actors. People readily recognize the bearer's status as meritocratic and deserving because the credential's symbolic power connotes the bearer's effort to matriculate at the universities (A. Binder, Davis, and Bloom 2016; A. Binder and Abel 2019; Bourdieu 1996; Rivera 2012, 2016). Universities serve as "certifications of qualifications, formally independent of their bearer" (Bourdieu 1986; Jarvis 2020). The concept of "contest mobility" expresses how people view education as a just and meritocratic means of achieving mobility (Turner 1960).

Even though some researchers have taken into account the institutionalized aspect by operationalizing respondents' educational attainment (Kraaykamp and van Eijck 2010), moving

beyond examining inherited dispositions (embodied) and cultural possessions (objectified), they still fail to take into account the exclusionary connotation that people associate with academic credentials as well as how cultural meaning making legitimizes social inequality. As Bourdieu (1996) incisively argues, symbolic capital derived from academic credentials implies hierarchical differentials within the same level of education. The exclusionary character of the education race becomes more apparent in late industrializing societies, where "modernization" programs frequently include universalized educational access. As the masses meritoriously enter the education race under the guise of "contest mobility," the pursuit of academic credentials arises as a new battlefield of competitive advantage between the masses and elites who seek to legitimize the reproduction of themselves through credential-mediated means. Therefore, to understand the strategic character of education-mediated social stratification, we need to concentrate on the institutionalized component of cultural capital rather than on "'highbrow' aesthetic pursuits and attitudes" (Lareau and Weininger 2003:575).

Second, most studies of cultural capital have concentrated on domestic issues, such as the socioeconomic systems and mechanisms that affect how elites legitimize their reproduction (Bourdieu 1973, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) or how people use their cultural capital to achieve academically (Calarco 2011; DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Lareau 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003). The literature has successfully expanded to a variety of national contexts in order to demonstrate how cultural capital translates to educational performance (e.g., (Byun, Schofer, and Kim 2012; Yamamoto and Brinton 2010)). However, as useful as this approach has been, the emphasis on local contexts has caused scholars to overlook how and why people pursue cultural capital in a more nuanced way in a globalizing world.

In order to gain foreign academic credentials as "global cultural capital," international students are increasingly navigating the hierarchically structured global field of higher education (Jong-young Kim 2011, 2016; J. Waters 2006b, 2009). The emergence of global university rankings around 2000 has governed the development of the global higher education field, implying the merging (and occasionally decoupling) of domestic higher education fields around the world (Hazelkorn 2011; Igarashi and Saito 2014; Meyer et al. 2007; Schofer and Meyer 2005). Interested parents and students strategically pursue the "international opt-out" option (Hannum et al. 2019:631) to arm the students with "global" cultural capital, starting with English fluency (Brooks and Waters 2011; Jong-young Kim 2011) and a cosmopolitan lifestyle (Park and Abelmann 2004), to provide a competitive edge over their domestic peers who are educated in the developing societies' standardized schooling systems (Hyunjoon Park 2013; Hyunjoon Park, Byun, and Kim 2011; Hyunjoon Park et al. 2016). It is expected that occupational gatekeepers will recognize and acknowledge English fluency and global manners as competitive "traits and attributes" for international students (J. Waters 2009).

Global cultural capital, however, encounters unexpected issues, such as undervaluation when compared to local cultural capital. The returns to "global" cultural capital are only realized upon return to a student's home country. And in this "return," local cultural capital may play an unexpected role in the activation and appreciation of global cultural capital. For instance, the balance of global and local cultural capital is essential for the ability of returning international students to succeed in getting jobs and establishing career paths in the local occupational environment. The timing of studying abroad (e.g., "early exit" versus "late exit") influences the proportion of local and global cultural capital that students acquire. Early exiters who leave their country during their K–12 education may acquire more global cultural capital but lose out on the

opportunity to acquire local cultural capital during their higher education, which may have repercussions for their future opportunities in marriage and the job market (Jarvis 2020). Particularly, "cultural fit" (Rivera 2016) is frequently a problem in the underappreciation of returning international students with global cultural capital by local businesses with their own "evaluative criteria" (Calarco 2011; Lareau and Weininger 2003).

Globalization's acceleration has broadened the scope of status reproduction through education from national to global societies. And the convergence of global higher education frequently reflects the world system's hierarchical structure (Wallerstein 2011). Despite these shifting conditions, the Bourdieusian approach has not sufficiently accounted for the globalization of status reproduction, instead focusing on how elites are reproduced in a specific national society. In this study, I examine how domestic elite status is pursued through the procurement of local and global cultural capital, as well as how the strategy shifts in the face of capital inconvertibility that is a specific characteristic of the transnational field. In other words, because the structure of the transnational field shapes individual class strategies, those strategies may also reshape the field. This processual approach extends the Bourdieusian perspective to the global context and facilitates a deeper understanding of education's mediating function in social stratification and local-global articulation, that is, from the hegemony of global cultural capital to the resurgence of local cultural capital. This study illustrates how elite international students' narratives change as they weigh the pros and cons of studying abroad versus at home, as well as the structural factors that affect their strategic decisions. I therefore propose a theoretical framework for fusing the literature on cultural capital with critical globalization studies to better understand the complex strategic behaviors of elite international students and their families in a globalizing society.

Higher Education in the World and the Case of South Korea

The strong desire of international students to study abroad, especially in the United States, causes us to take for granted the convergence of international higher education fields. The newly established global university ranking system makes the convergence appear more hierarchical. Nevertheless, South Korea (henceforth, Korea) presents an intriguing theoretical and empirical challenge to the hierarchical convergence of international higher education fields. Table 13 demonstrates that Korea is the third-largest source of international students for the United States (after China and India), with the second-highest ratio of international students to the population (after Taiwan) (Institute of International Education 2022; D. Kim et al. 2018; National Science Foundation 2017). To comprehend why this high ratio poses a challenge to our current sociological knowledge, a brief description of the historical context is required.

Table 13: International Students in the United States in 2021/2022.

Rank	Place of Origin	Total International Students	International Undergrads	Total Population (thousands)	Total Ratio	Undergrad Ratio
1	China	290,086	109,492	1,425,893	0.2	0.08
2	India	199,182	27,545	1,407,564	0.14	0.02
3	South Korea	40,755	18,262	51,830	0.79	0.35
4	Canada	27,013	13,004	38,155	0.71	0.34
5	Vietnam	20,713	13,947	97,468	0.21	0.14
6	Taiwan	20,487	6,093	23,860	0.86	0.26
7	Saudi Arabia	18,206	8,649	35,950	0.51	0.24
8	Brazil	14,897	7,345	214,326	0.07	0.03
9	Mexico	14,500	7,738	126,705	0.11	0.06
10	Nigeria	14,438	4,529	213,401	0.07	0.02
	World TOTAL	**948,519**	**344,532**	**7,909,295**	**0.12**	**0.04**

Note: Total population is both sexes combined, as of July 1, 2021.

Sociocultural explanations, such as “education fever” (Seth 2002), have frequently been used to comprehend the historical importance of (higher) education access among Koreans. “Meritocratic ideals embodied in the examination-based systems that are so prominent in East

Asia today trace their roots to a Confucian philosophy that associated educational institutions and examinations with qualifications for highly prized civil service jobs" (Hannum et al. 2019:626). The notion prevailed throughout the premodern Yi dynasty and the Japanese colonial period. The "habit of mind" continued, so the post-war Korean government kept tinkering with egalitarian and universal access policies, such as expanding primary and secondary education in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively, and instituting state-sponsored annual college entrance examinations in 1969 for fairness. However, the education fever never subsided in the fierce meritocratic battleground for all.

During the 1970s, the Korean government began to develop Gangnam[4] as a new residential area to expand Seoul's outskirts. Education was a key to this strategy. Urban planners moved elite high schools from central Seoul to Gangnam in an effort to lure affluent and professional families away from old Seoul (Wiwŏnhoe 2012; Pangmulgwan 2018). This unusual use of schools as an incentive for expansion was so successful that the first upper- and middle-class settlers were able to send their children to prestigious domestic universities and amass wealth through real estate speculation (P. Pak and Hwang 2017). As the nationwide college entrance competition intensified and its procedures became complex midway through the 1990s, a new district of private cram (i.e., test-prep) schools known as Taech'i-Dong emerged in Gangnam that provided customized education, including supplementary classes, curriculum acceleration, and American Advanced Placement courses (C. Cho 2021; H. Koo 2022; Wiwŏnhoe 2012; Pangmulgwan 2018).

[4] In this study, the word Gangnam is used analytically to refer to the southern Seoul neighborhood where parents choose to raise their children in order to take advantage of a range of shadow schooling opportunities (Sŏul Yŏksa Pangmulgwan 2018). For ease of analysis, Mokdong, a smaller version of Gangnam in the western area of Seoul, and Bundang, a nearby wealthy suburb bedroom community, are simply referred to as Gangnam.

The societal belief in individual education-mediated success grew stronger with such development. In addition to providing opportunities for upward mobility, education also legitimized the meritorious "earned" status. Consequently, despite society's strong egalitarian ideals, the race for designating status and rank in education became more intense (Seth 2002). The state-sponsored college entrance exam system, which was accessible to all, annually reproduced the merit-based ranking of universities and disciplines, beginning with "SKY"—an acronym for Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University (Figure 57). In 1982, for instance, the top 0.24% of arts students and top 0.35% of science students, respectively, were expected to be admitted to SNU's undergraduate law and medical schools, which are first on the list. Similarly, the top 0.57% of students in the arts were predicted to be accepted into the SNU's College of Social Sciences or Business School, while the top 0.37% of students in the sciences were predicted to enroll in the College of Natural Sciences. The list expands to include lower tiers of test score ranges, such as those at Korea and Yonsei Universities and law and medical schools at other universities.

Each year, less than 2% of applicants are accepted into these three prestigious schools. "The rankings for other universities varied somewhat over time, but the first three institutions were securely at the pinnacle of the prestige hierarchy. In general, universities outside of Seoul were lower in prestige" (Seth 2002:143). Therefore, despite repeated attempts to make the admissions process fairer, the test score– and rank-based college entrance system remained for decades. The entire K–12 education system, including the public school curriculum, cram schools, and parental involvement, was therefore aimed at preparing students for the college entrance exam.

내 點数로 어느大學 갈수있나

(分析 11면)

大學入試社 작성

◇82학년도 大入 학력고사 성적분포(요약)

학력 고사 점수 인문	자연	지 원 가 능 대
∫ 293	∫ 293	◇서울大 법학 의예 0.24% 0.35%
292 ∫ 285	292	◇서울大 사회Ⅱ 경영 자연Ⅱ 0.44% 0.37%
284 ∫ 281	278	◇서울大 사회Ⅰ 인문Ⅰ 사회Ⅲ 공학계 치의예 자연Ⅰ 0.57% 1.05%
280 ∫ 279	277 ∫ 275	◇서울大 화학 인문Ⅱ ◇延大 의예 0.65% 1.26%
278 ∫ 270	274 ∫ 268	◇서울大 인문Ⅲ 교육Ⅱ 심리 약학 자연Ⅲ 교육Ⅲ ◇高大 법학 의예◇延大 경제 ◇가톨릭大 의예 1.09% 1.84%
269 ∫ 266	267 ∫ 263	◇서울大 자연Ⅳ 교육Ⅰ ◇延大 치의예 경영 전자공 ◇釜山大 의예◇慶北大 의예 1.36% 2.40%
265 ∫ 256 2.24%	262 ∫ 254 3.72%	◇서울大 농경제 지리 사회복지 가정관리 윤리교육 식품영양 ◇延大 영문 기계공 법학 응용 통계 정외 건축 행정 화공 ◇高大 경제 행정 경영계 영문 정외 기계화공계 전기계 ◇西江大 경제 경영 전자공◇梨大 의예 ◇中央大 의예 법학계◇漢陽大 의예 법학 ◇慶熙大 의예 한의예 법률 ◇成均館大 법학 ◇釜山大 약학 치의예 제약 ◇慶北大 치의예
255 ∫ 248 3.33%	253 ∫ 244 5.66%	◇釜山大 법학 전자공 건축공 ◇忠南大 의예 ◇全北大 의예 ◇全南大 의예 ◇慶北大 법학 ◇서울大 의류 농학계 ◇西江大 영문 사학 사회 전자계산 ◇高大 신방 사회 독문 불문 건설계 재료금속계 산업공 물리 화학 수학 통계 사학 국문 ◇延世大 불문 독문 국문 사학 사회 신방 물리 금속공 식품공 수학 화학 토목공 전기공 생화학 ◇慶熙大 약학 경상Ⅱ 행정 ◇成均館大 경제 경영계 행정 영문 정외 무역 약학 ◇梨大 약학계 ◇中央大 약학계 경영계 ◇漢陽大 정외 행정 경제
247 ∫ 241 4,60%	243 ∫ 234 8.35%	◇檀國大 법학 ◇高大 영어교육 철학 심리 농업경제 중문 노문 교육 생물 식품공계 수학교육 ◇建國大 정법계 ◇慶熙大 영문 경상Ⅰ 전자공 정치-신문 기계공 ◇東國大 법정계 ◇西江大 물리 화학 화공 정외 신방 독문 불문 국문 철학 수학 생물 ◇淑大 약학 제약 ◇成均館大 통계 불문 ◇梨大 영문 영어전공 전자계산 생물전공 ◇延大 교육 중문 도서관 생물 요업공◇中央大 법정계 경상계 ◇外大 영어 ◇漢陽大 경영 무역 공학계◇釜山大 경영 토목공 경제 행정영어교육 ◇仁荷大 기계공 전자공 ◇航空大 항공전자

← Range of Test Scores for Academic Admission

↑ Applicable University and Major

…아져 中位경쟁 치열

…점수의 最大活用을 위한 가이드

학교 進學지도 따르면 인…

市·道제한 철폐로 일부大學

先계열·後대학 결정…「눈치…

減點많은 2·3지망 기대…

욕심 내지말고 제1志望서 安全圈 택하라

Test Score (top %)		Applicable **University** and Major
Arts	Sciences	
300 ~ 293 (0.24)	300 ~ 293 (0.35)	**SNU** Law, Med
292 ~ 285 (0.44)	292 (0.37)	**SNU** Social Sci II, Business, Sci II
284 ~ 281 (0.57)	278 (1.05)	**SNU** Social Sci I, Hum I, Tech, Dental, Sci I
280 ~ 279 (0.65)	277 ~ 275 (1.26)	**SNU** Chem, Hum II, **Yonsei** Med
278 ~ 270 (1.09)	274 ~ 268 (1.84)	**SNU** Hum III, Edu II, Psych, Pharm, Sci III, Edu III, **Korea** Law, Med, **Yonsei** Econ**, Catholic** Med
269 ~ 266 (1.36)	267 ~ 263 (2.40)	**SNU** Sci IV, Edu I, **Yonsei** Dental, Busi, Elec Eng, **Busan** Med**, Kyungpook** Med
265 ~ 256 (2.24)	262 ~ 254 (3.72)	**SNU** Agri Econ, Geo, Soc Work, Home Man, Ethic Edu (2.24%), Food Nut, **Yonsei** English, Mech Eng, Law, Applied Stat, PoliSci, Archi, Public Admin, Chem Eng, **Korea** Econ, Public Admin, Busi, English, PoliSci, Mech/Chem Eng, Elec Eng, **Sogang** Econ, Busi, Elec Eng, **Ewha** Med, **Chung-Ang** Med, Law, **Hanyang** Med, Law, **Kyung Hee** Med, Oriental Med, Law, **Sungkyunkwan** Law**, Busan** Pharm, Dental, **Kyungpook** Dental
…	…	…

Figure 57: Range of Test Scores for Admissions to Academic Programs, 1982 (up) with Translation (down).

SOURCE: Choson Ilbo, 1981.

Note: Partially translated by author.

Up until the 1970s, with the exception of a few institutional aid cases to develop and train professors and technicians, such as the Minnesota Project and the Fulbright Program, the Korean government severely restricted its people's mobility to pursue higher education abroad (Seung-eun Kim 2019). As a result, particularly at the undergraduate level, there were very few Korean international students in the United States. Therefore, only limited information was available to the public, such as the Fulbright Center and US Information Agency in Seoul and a few personal

memoirs of upper-class students[5] who were able to overcome the stark economic differences between South Korea and the United States.[6] The limited information sources frequently emphasized the superiority of American (higher) education, and the successes of Korean academic elites with American PhDs in Korean academia and society, as well as the images of American popular culture and prosperity, contributed to the glorification of American education[7] (Brazinsky 2007; Chong-yŏng Kim 2015; Seung-eun Kim 2019). In this public acknowledgment of American educational superiority, Harvard University was seen as SNU's American counterpart rather than the other way around.

For upper-class Gangnam residents as well as all domestic college applicants, the 1980s marked a turning point. The "education reform" instituted by the new regime that was put in place after the military coup in 1980 led to a dramatic increase in the number of domestic college students, as shown in blue in Figure 58. As a result, college enrollment—which was once available only to the upper-class and high achievers—became a sign of urban middle-class status (Lett 1998). The enrollment at SNU also grew (Figure 59) but soon started to shrink again due to limited seats. Although the overall changes were beneficial to the Gangnam residents, they could

[5] Byeong-Guk Kim is an exemplary figure of this group. A grandson of Seong-su Kim, the second vice president of the Republic of Korea and founder of Korea University, Kim was "thrown" into the Fessenden School in Massachusetts with his younger brother by his parents in 1972 during a family trip when he was 13 years old. He eventually graduated from Phillips Academy Andover and matriculated at Harvard in 1978. In 1981, he published his memoir with other Korean students' study-abroad narratives as Scary Guys (Kim et al. 1981). The book continued to be published until 1996 owing to its great success. Kim's account of getting into Harvard University served as inspiration for Ryan Jungwook Hong, who achieved greater success 10 years later. He was born in Korea in 1970, moved to the United States in 1985, and graduated from Choate Rosemary Hall in 1989. After graduating from Harvard University in 1993, he published Seven Acts Seven Scenes (Hong 1993), a memoir of his time spent studying in the United States, which has so far sold over 1.3 million copies.
[6] For instance, in 1970, South Korea's GDP per capita ratio was less than 5% of that of the United States. It first touched 10% in 1977 and took another 11 years to reach 20%. It is now around 50% (KOSIS 2022).
[7] As Japan was the most desired and viable destination for Korean international students prior to 1945 (Sonpyo Hong 2001), after World War II, the United States became the most coveted destination. Although Europe was an important role model for modernization, most Korean students chose to study in countries that have a direct impact on their native country.

not necessarily ensure that their social standing would be mediated and reproduced through college entrance in the intensifying nationwide competition. Therefore, some wealthy Gangnam residents whose children were unable to get into renowned local universities began to look into a possible workaround by studying abroad when the long-standing ban on international travel was eased in the 1980s. This "bypass route" attracted jealous attention and was given the disparaging name of "escape" because studying abroad remained a rare, classed practice with symbolic significance and required multiple types of capital. In other words, the growth in international study beginning in the 1980s (Figure 58, orange) illustrates a case of "effectively maintained inequality" with its socioeconomic selectivity (Lucas 2001; Lucas and Byrne 2017; Netz and Finger 2016).

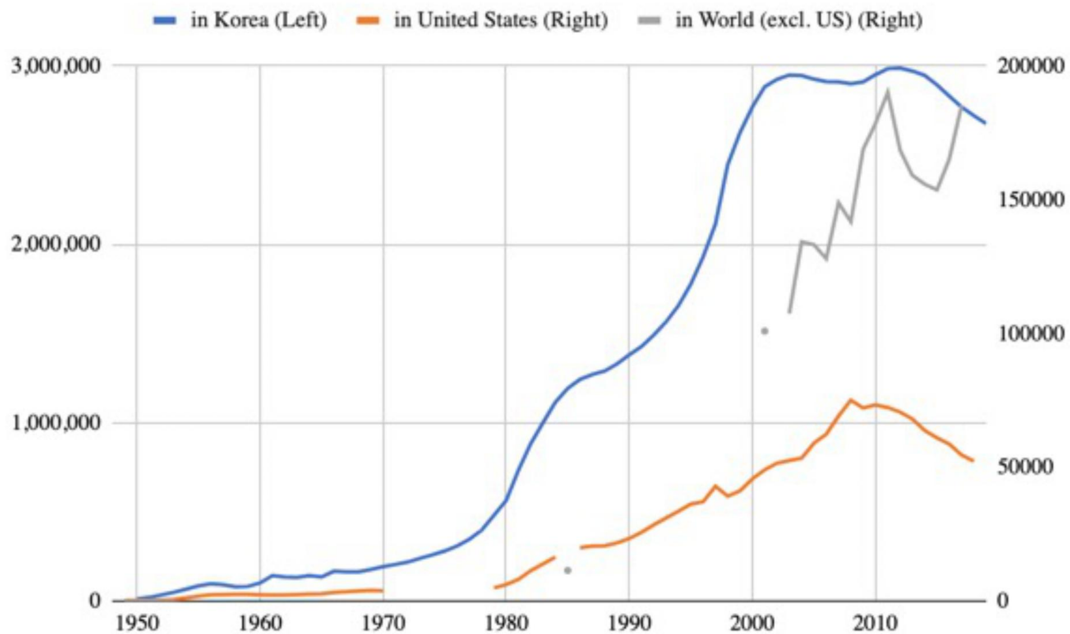

Figure 58: Changes in Number of Korean Students in Higher Education, 1948–2018.
SOURCE: Institute of International Education. "International Students by Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.; Korean Ministry of Education. 1948-2018. Statistical Yearbook of Education of Korea

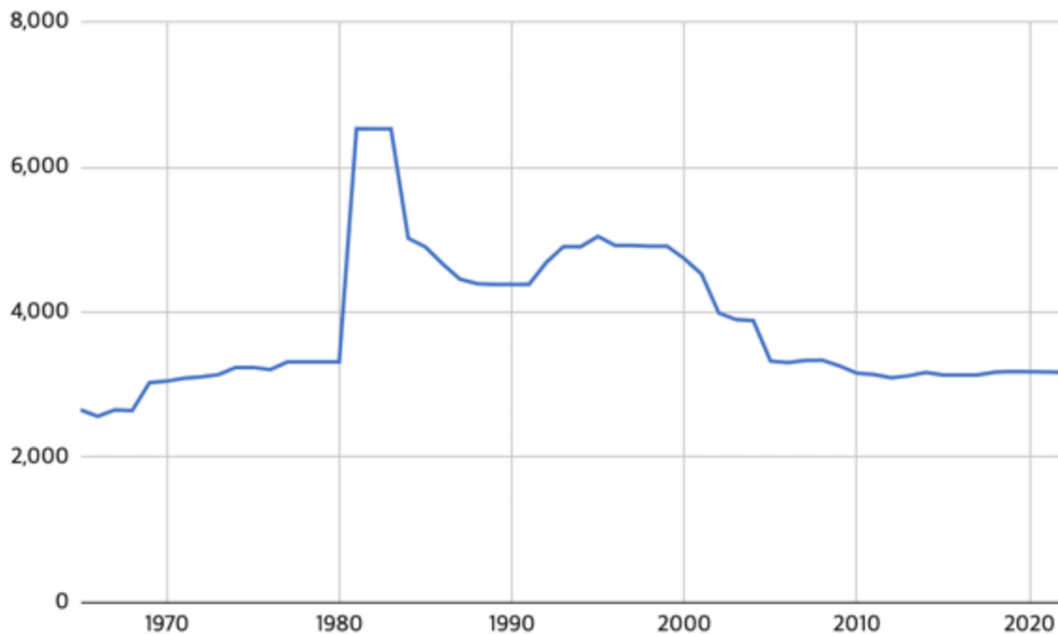

Figure 59: Seoul National University Admission Quota, 1965–2022.
SOURCE: Etoland. 2022.

A greater proportion of upper-middle-class Korean families started looking at their options for international education once the law restricting mobility was finally repealed in 1989. Their desires to explore the world started off small (for example, at first they just wanted to learn English) but swiftly evolved into a battle for admission to prestigious universities (C.-M. Kang 2011, 2014). They encountered overlapping pushing factors (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002): first, the new civilian Kim Young Sam government actively promoted "globalization" (segyehwa) as its main agenda to differentiate itself from previous military authoritarianism (S. S. Kim 2000a, 2000b); second, the rapid industrialization of the Korean economy in the late 20th century[8] enabled the newly affluent middle-class households to join the study-abroad game with the upper

[8] As an illustration, the ratio of GDP per capita of South Korea to that of the United States rapidly increased from 31.36% in 1991 to 44.71% in 1996. It took an additional 10 years after the East Asian financial crisis of 1997 for that ratio to return in 2006 with 46.93%. The ratio has been constant since, at roughly 40%–53% (KOSIS 2022).

strata; third, the continuing egalitarian obstacles, such as a limited number of seats and regulatory governmental rules, limited entrance to top-tier domestic universities for children from well-off families. Consequently, even if the total number of students enrolled in domestic higher education came to a standstill in the early 2000s, the number of Korean international students in the world (gray in Figure 58) and in the United States (orange in Figure 58) grew steadily until the late 2000s.

However, the soaring growth suddenly started to stall in the 2010s. While the total number of Korean international students around the world (gray in Figure 58) went back up to where it was before 2010, the number of Korean students coming to the United States (orange in Figure 58) continued to decline. Likewise, the trend of a declining South Korean student population in the United States contrasts with other nations that are sending more students to the United States, such as China and India. It is difficult to attribute this to the demise of the developmental state, which had occurred in other Asian developmental states 20 years earlier. As a result, this empirical conundrum makes the decreasing popularity of American education in Korea an intriguing case study given the widely held belief that higher education systems around the world are convergent. Therefore, in this study, I will examine how elite international students change their class strategies by weighing local and global institutionalized cultural capital and considering how these assets can be converted into advantages in their home societies using the case of Korea in the 2010s.[9]

[9] This study limits its focus to undergraduate education because it more clearly demonstrates the variety of factors influencing students' decisions on international education. Graduate students' choice to study abroad can be better explained by rational choice theory (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997) because they are more aware of tangible opportunities and rewards after their graduate education.

Findings

Inspired by the upper-class students' adventurous tales from elite American boarding schools in the 1970s and 1980s, the KMLA students and graduates of the 1990s and 2000s boasted about their Ivy League admission "accomplishments" with the rosy imaginary "global elite education." The dramatic memoirs encouraged prospective applicants and their families to envision their exciting, cosmopolitan lives at the esteemed American universities. For instance, Won Hee Park represents the Ivy League boom of the 2000s. Park rose to prominence after receiving admission offers from 10 American universities, mostly Ivy League universities, and ultimately choosing Harvard after only two years at KMLA. She wrote two best-selling books that chronicled her life of striving at KMLA and Harvard and inspired many K–12 students to aspire to the Ivy League. And her successors also published their own books as part of their portfolio for American college admissions. Such memoirs allow us to track how the discourse surrounding American college study abroad changes as the overall opportunity structure evolves. Additionally, in some cases, I was able to directly triangulate the published memoirs to the author's evaluation of her time in American higher education through interviewing.

In the 1990s, when studying abroad became legally available to anyone, Ivy League universities were not explicit goals; rather English fluency as a form of cultural capital was the practical goal among Korean students (Kang 2011). However, the following 10 years saw the rapid reputational peak of prominent American institutions, which, to wealthy and intelligent Koreans, symbolized excellence and high cultural recognition. Contrary to the predictions of rational choice theory, prior to the 2010s, economic considerations were not the primary determinant for the newly affluent middle-class Korean parents when it came to their children's overseas undergraduate education (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). Instead, the parents believed

that their kids would return to Korea with global cultural capital like degrees from American universities and English-language proficiency. Because American education has always held a promise of high reward in Korea, parents did not explicitly calculate the relationship between acquired cultural capital and its convertibility into other types of capital under the meritocratic justification (Brazinsky 2007; Jong-young Kim 2015). However, when more information about studying abroad and its implications became readily available in 2010 along with higher acceptance to SNU under the new Admission Officer System, cultural appreciation was swiftly replaced with explicit economic calculation.

Since the turn of the 21st century, Korean undergraduate international students (bright blue in Figure 60) have outnumbered Korean graduate international students (bright orange in Figure 60) with respect to studying abroad in the United States. In contrast to the overall number of overseas students for both undergraduate and graduate levels in the United States (pale lines in Figure 60), which began to rise sharply at about the same time, the number of Korean students at both levels began to fall around 2010. The decline at the undergraduate level is in line with the elite Korean high schools' decision to stop offering preparatory courses for overseas admission. Although the program has not been discontinued in KMLA, the first Korean high school to offer international college prep as its core curriculum starting in the late 1990s, its proportion of international applications has decreased from over two-thirds in 2007 to just over one-third as of today (Figure 61). Because KMLA has been at the forefront of Korea's study-abroad booms and busts for decades, I will briefly examine KMLA's history in the following section to demonstrate how structural problems contributed to the sharp decline in the popularity of American higher education.

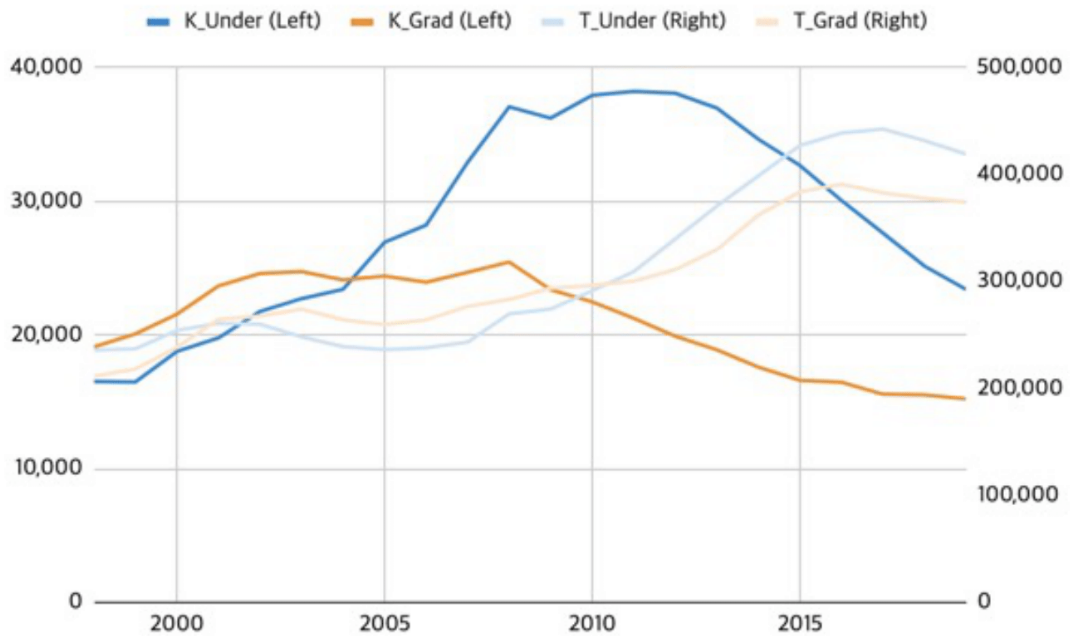

Figure 60: Changes in Number of International Students in US Higher Education, 1998–2019.

SOURCE: Institute of International Education. 2022. "International Students by Level of Education and Place of Origin." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange

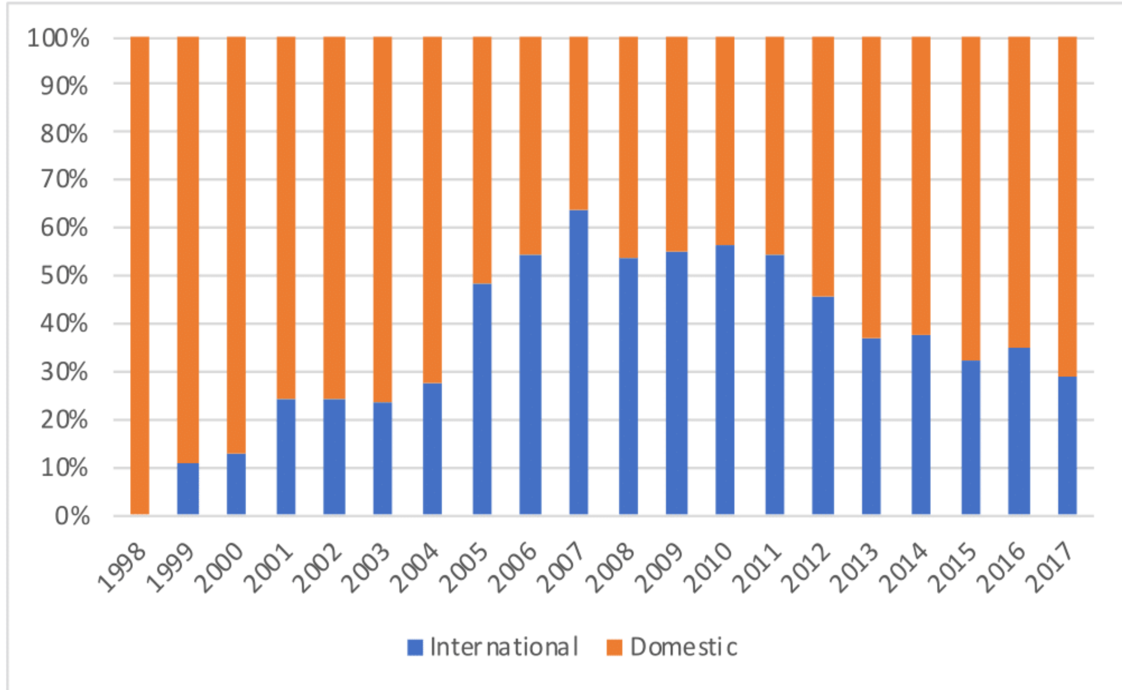

Figure 61: College Choices of KMLA Graduates, 1998–2017.

SOURCE: Minjok Sagwan Kodŭng Hakkyo 10-yŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe. 2006.; Minjok Sagwan Kodŭng Hakkyo 20-yŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe. 2015.

Before the 2010s: The Rise of KMLA and Its International College Prep Program

Domestic college entrance in Korea has long been a battleground between classes since elite university enrollment has been perceived as granting meritocratic privileged status in the egalitarian postwar society (Seth 2002). The Korean government's two main steering mechanisms to manage the truce have been the annual state-administered test, known as sunung, and class-rank assessments, known as naeshin (Kyŏng-suk Yi 2017). Both systems are regarded as the most egalitarian and merit based because standardized numerical evaluation criteria formally facilitate equitable access to higher education. Consequently, even though the 1995 neoliberal "education reform" began gradually replacing the number-based egalitarian education system with a more liberal and holistic system, maintaining a top high school naeshin or obtaining high scores on the sunung remained surefire ways to gain admission to prestigious colleges until the middle to late 2000s.

Within the number-based system, the 1996 debut of KMLA as a brand-new private boarding school eluded widespread media coverage. The institution and its founder declared that it would develop into a "Korean Eton College" with elitist characteristics to produce future leaders for the country. The characteristics include (1) highly selective admissions (30 students per cohort selected from the top 1% of middle school students nationwide and a nearly 1:1 teacher-to-student ratio for bespoke education); (2) high-quality teachers (graduate degree holders compensated at 300% the rate of comparable teachers with the same experience); (3) full scholarships (including full tuition and room and board); and (4) goals of national identity education and gifted education. The agenda's public appeal, particularly its Confucian goal of

developing the country's leaders, swiftly drew in young, intelligent students, the majority of whom came from the newly affluent middle-class families.[10]

The shared dream, however, was out of step with the reality of the situation because the Korean elite high schoolers had to compete with both their immediate high school peers in naeshin (class-rank) —a persistent problem in elite Korean high schools—and with the nationwide high school seniors and repeaters[11] in sunung (annual state-administered test) for the few spots available in selective college admissions—another persistent problem among the well-off families, such as in Gangnam. Sometimes, the intense competition for college admissions led elite high school students to leave their prestigious high schools. For instance, when the preferential treatment of their naeshin (i.e., advantageous comparative academic grade system[12]) was abolished in 1997, many academically gifted students in specialized high schools (ttukmokgo) left their schools and chose the GED-sunung track to matriculate into prestigious domestic institutions (Sinmun 1997). These elite school kids, especially those in Gangnam, aimed to achieve high sunung scores with the aid of Taech'i-Dong's private shadow schooling.

Despite its early national recognition as a new elite school, KMLA did not have a clear plan for sending its students to top universities and was instead heavily influenced by its founder.

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[10] People who had no connection to the new school bought products from Pasteur Milk, the school's parent firm, to help support the institution's nationalist education. Even Korean expatriates living abroad were persuaded to solicit funds for the struggling milk company during the East Asian financial crisis by the school's nationalist narrative (Ilbo 1998).

[11] In Korea, where college admission was a highly rewarding positional good in a low-credentialed society, repeated college admissions are common. Nonetheless, an increasing number of elite high school graduates, the majority of whom were Gangnam residents, opted to repeat sunung to supplement their class standings to enter elite domestic universities with family support (Weber 1978). As the private education district in the heart of Gangnam was established, this repetition grew in popularity.

[12] As a precursor of KMLA, the specialized high schools had the same high internal competition among high-achievers which resulted in overall low naeshin, so elite domestic universities compensated the elite applicants' naeshin scores. But the Korean government banned the special treatment from 1997 to maintain the fair college admission process.

For instance, Dae-sung, an SNU alumnus, recounts his time at KMLA around the year 2000, saying,

> Actually, there was no structured curriculum at the institution. Every time the founder put into place a new order, it was altered. He said that physical education received a lot of attention at Eton College and Phillips Academy Andover, so we spent several afternoons playing soccer and shooting arrows. Only in the morning did we study. But when he changes his mind, all of the PE classes are gone, and academic classes take their place.

Except for top-ranking students such as Dae-sung, who could succeed on the naeshin path, the majority of the initial cohort of KMLA students left the school out of fear of failing the sunung or naeshin required to enter SNU. After the first semester, 11 out of the original 30 students dropped out (Lee 2016:33). To pacify the initial cohort, the school implemented 22 curriculum changes in the first year, but the exodus resulted in eight more dropouts the next semester (Lee 2016:33). After the first year, only 11 of the inaugural 30 pupils stayed, placing the school in an existential crisis.

The Ivy League was chosen as the new destination to end the crisis. KMLA decided to reestablish its elite school image with international admission results from institutions like Cornell, Harvard, UPenn, and Princeton and market it as the symbol of excellence in the new segyehwa (globalization) era rather than assimilating to other elite domestic high schools to place its graduates at elite domestic universities. The "KMLA effect[13]" was coined to describe the outcomes, that is, the overall number of college admission offers and the illustrious names of the universities. The Ivy League prep class, or *aibi-ban*,[14] rapidly expanded as a result of its

[13] The first Ivy League class of students were frequently portrayed in the media as pure geniuses from rural areas who aspired to the prestigious American higher education. Most of the initial international cohorts, however, were in fact returnees from secondary schools in English-speaking countries (Pak et al. 2001), reflecting their affluent class background.

[14] The international college prep program's abbreviation later changed from *aibi-ban* (Ivy class) to a more general name of *kukje-ban* (international class) in the mid-2000s to reflect the reality that it is impossible to enroll every student in the Ivy League with the expanding cohort size.

initial success. The initial designation of the first cohorts as the Ivy class and its overt focus on the Ivy League shows how important the Ivy League's reputation was to the school's elite image and how the school made use of the symbolic capital.

The *aibi-ban* expansion, which peaked in the middle of the 2000s (Figure 61), signaled the school's full transformation into an exclusive international prep school as well as its progress toward the pinnacle of study abroad. Beginning with the class of 2006, the school's enrollment was increased to 150 pupils to handle the school sponsor company's bankruptcy. As a result, the average number of students in a cohort tripled during the school's heyday compared to its early years, with a focus on the *aibi-ban*, which, according to Mr. Lee, one of the school's teachers, reinforces the exclusive nature of the institution.

> **Lee:** The difference between the class of 2006 and 2005 is the tuition [up to $2,000/month]. Even while few low-income students attended KMLA up to 2005, things radically altered in 2006. Due to its financial barriers, I personally [agree] with the accusation that KMLA is an aristocratic organization. Two thousand dollars a month is equal to paying $20,000 annually. Parents should make at least $10,000 per month before taxes.
> **Author:** [Parents] would be unquestionably upper class if they had $10,000 before taxes.
> **Lee:** True. The majority of the parents today are doctors and professors.

While high school tuition is essentially free in Korea—with the exception of private education for elite high schoolers, who may pay over $10,000 per year—the KMLA parents' willingness to pay over $20,000 per year for their children's high school education demonstrates not only their economic standing but also their high motivation to invest more in their children's undergraduate education abroad. Despite such a formidable economic obstacle, the *aibi-ban*'s continued rapid expansion reflected the increasing cultural value of an American bachelor's degree. In fact, the majority of KMLA students came from two distinct groups of affluent families: (1) global parents who studied or worked abroad and (2) what I am calling "domestic families," who expected their children to follow the domestic professional occupation paths, such as those of

doctors and lawyers. The former is more homogeneous than the latter, with members coming from Gangnam and other similar newly developing neighborhoods around Seoul. Despite having graduate degrees from American universities and/or years of work experience in the United States, however, even the former *aibi-ban* elite parents had little familiarity with American higher education and its admissions process due to their upbringing in Korea; as a result, they heavily relied on the school's guidance for their children's college admissions (Lee 2016). The local institutions' hierarchical pecking order, such as SKY and In-Seoul[15], and the developing global university rankings circa 2000 were the parents' main cultural references (Hazelkorn 2011; Igarashi and Saito 2014; Meyer et al. 2007; Schofer and Meyer 2005). In these cultural associations, the Ivy League and the highest level of American higher education were imagined to be the equals of the highest level of Korean higher education, with the additional advantage of global cultural capital, that is, English proficiency. The subsequent Ivy League boom in the 2000s, which included the establishment of international college admission prep programs in other elite Korean high schools, was fueled by the symbolic status of American higher education. In this sudden popularity of American college education with its extraordinarily high symbolic value, explicit consideration or articulation of the economic value of the education had no place to gain a foothold.

Children's cultural aspirations to study abroad and parents' rank-based cultural expectations were aligned. The children of international parents, who had only limited exposure to American education and society during their early years, viewed higher education in the

[15] While the term *In-Seoul* refers to universities with a physical presence in Seoul, it also alludes to their symbolic ranking as "upper-middle tier" institutions in Korea. Situated between SKY universities and "out-Seoul" local universities in the national pecking order, they represent the lowest level of higher education as a stigma-free positional good. They account for 10 to 12 percent of higher education enrollment nationwide.

United States as a paradise (or their “home”), in contrast to Korea’s fiercely competitive college admissions process.

While the international program’s proportion of students continuously expanded (Figure 61), the domestic family, on the other hand, continued to send their children to KMLA with a desire to matriculate at elite institutions like SNU and the schools of medicine or law to reproduce domestic elite status, except for a few who chose to transfer to the international program, which was strictly controlled by the school. But the international success stories often concealed the unanticipated reality of its domestic program. During the early years of KMLA, the domestic program’s size fluctuated significantly. KMLA continued its “elite” education, such as the small enrollment of talented children from throughout the nation, the avoidance of sunung preparation in the curriculum, and the adoption of specialized courses like AP. These so-called elitenesses helped the students in the international programs but posed challenges for those in the domestic programs. Therefore, while the international prep course flourished and expanded, the unexpected course—matriculating at KMLA with high hopes of becoming elite but quickly deciding to leave the school upon the depressing realization of the possibility of failing domestic college admissions in both the sunung and naeshin routes—was repeated in the domestic program, like it was for the first KMLA cohorts and specialized high schools. The institutional obstacles to entry into SNU or other law/medical universities were only surmounted by a small number of top rankers and high achievers (the “geniuses”), such as gold medalists of the International Math Olympiad. Therefore, the bulk of the domestic class quit the school and enrolled in sunung cram schools in Gangnam[16] to get into SNU. Some of them returned to their

[16] While a majority of the dropouts targeted the SNU with high sunung scores, some of the group was more oriented toward elite career majors, such as the schools of medicine and law, as those schools of other domestic universities were also located at the top of the university placement list (Figure 57) and would lead them to promising life

neighborhood high schools, where they might be able to obtain strong naeshin. They might be able to enroll in other prestigious domestic colleges if they stay in KMLA, but they might have to forego their shot to earn degrees from SNU, law school, or medical school.

The 2010s: Emergence of "Return on Investment Thinking" and the Admission Officer System

Around 2010, as the domestic college admissions system changed, particularly with the implementation of the Admission Officer System (Iphak Sajeongwanje), the prestige and appeal of American higher education among the newly affluent middle-class Korean students and their families decreased. American academic credentials were meant to be a stepping stone to post-educational opportunities rather than a goal in and of itself. The American undergraduate degree, however, was not as easily converted into practical outcomes in Korea, such as career prospects and social capital, despite its long-standing cultural prestige. Because of this, in the 2010s, the return on investment (ROI) discourse has encroached on the popular valuation of an American academic credential. Simultaneously, the isomorphic adjustment of the Korean college admission process to that of the US process begins to "pull back" top Korean students' applications, particularly to SNU.

Unexpectedly Failing Outcomes: Emergence of ROI Thinking

Whether or not they were personally impacted, many KMLA research participants cite the 2008 global financial crisis and the accompanying worldwide economic downturn as the primary reasons for the diminishing popularity of American higher education. But why did China and India, the two main sources of international students to the United States, not suffer from the

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trajectories. Natural science students in the domestic program had an additional college admission option, KAIST, the national research and education institution for science and technology. Under the government policy to develop scientifically and technologically talented human resources, KMLA natural science students could skip their 12th year and instead matriculate at KAIST one year earlier, just like other elite students in science-specialized schools (kwahak go).

global financial crisis but Korea did? In this section, I introduce the concept of "return on investment (ROI) thinking" to show how actors' justifications changed from the sociocultural prestige of a degree to its economic value ("return") and how this shift explains the sudden decline in the number of Korean students traveling to the United States.

The Korean won to US dollar exchange rate (KRW/USD) can be used as a proxy to gauge the direct financial impact of economic crises on Korean international students and their families because it changes immediately when a crisis occurs and because the rate of change directly affects their study-abroad expenses. Interestingly, while the declining exchange rate (blue line in Figure 62) after the 1997 East Asian financial crisis may explain why there are more Korean students studying in the United States (orange line in Figure 62), the mild depreciation of the Korean won in the decade that followed the 2008 global financial crisis defies intuition.

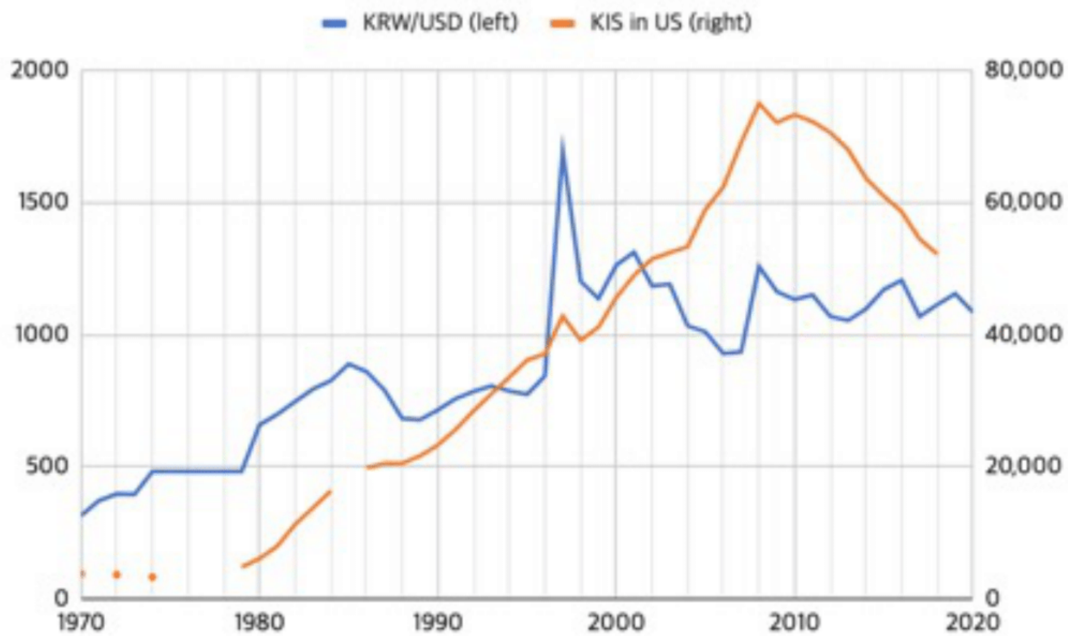

Figure 62: Changes in Exchange Rate (KRW/USD) and Number of Korean International Students in the United States, 1970–2020.

SOURCE: Korean Ministry of Economy and Finance.

This puzzle necessitates a detailed explanation for why elite Korean high schoolers suddenly lost interest in attending American universities. To solve the puzzle, I suggest a combination of the following elements: (1) increasing awareness of the unexpectedly unsatisfactory outcomes of American undergraduate degrees, even the most prestigious ones; and (2) widening access to top domestic colleges, especially SNU. When faced with such shifting opportunity structures, elite Korean students (and their families) become more strategic in their allocation of resources to achieve better and more predictable outcomes.

Interested Koreans learned that an elite American bachelor's degree was not as advantageous in Korea as had been assumed through nearly 10 years of the Ivy League boom in the 2000s. Even graduates from HYPS,[17] among the best universities in the United States, struggled to find satisfying careers and employment when they returned. Sung-Soo, a HYPS graduate who gained public attention after he was admitted to a HYPS university in the middle of the 2000s, claims that Korean society does not recognize HYPS degrees.

> **Sung-Soo:** Finding employment [in Korea with a HYPS BA] isn't really of much use if you're talking about regular firms, not shadow schooling. I applied for open recruitments for chaebol affiliates in 2012, but all but one of them failed. I don't know what I was missing, but the result seems to suggest that they don't believe I'm good enough.

The discouraging experiences of upperclassmen frequently lead lowerclassmen to give up on applying for Korean companies' open recruitments. They choose to work for "foreign firms"

[17] An acronym for Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford. It is noteworthy that the informants who choose to pursue their education in the United States in the 2010s frequently use HYPS as a point of reference. When they are accepted into KMLA, their dream is to matriculate at a HYPS. However, when their GPA and relative class rank become more apparent, they adjust their expectations and start looking for more "realistic" schools in the Ivy League. They start thinking about Ivy Plus universities – a handful of Ivy-like prestigious schools, such as MIT, the University of Chicago, and Duke – if they feel they are not suitable or qualified for Ivy League universities. However, they do not give state universities much thought because they do not offer financial benefits to Korean citizens and are not well known in Korean society, except the University of California universities and Michigan. Furthermore, many Korean applicants do not request financial aid in their applications, regardless of the university's need-based/blind policy, as they believe it will have a detrimental impact on their chances of admission.

(Hye) or “start-ups via referrals (Yun-seo)” instead, where their academic credentials would be valued.

Second, unanticipated challenges like their lack of US citizenship prevent many Korean students from settling in the United States once their study is complete. Ivy League graduate and returning employee Joo-Won claims, “I was fired from the internship on the first day when HR found out I didn’t have American citizenship.” The status situation did not improve even after their graduation.

> **Hye:** After failing to obtain the H-1B visa from the lottery two consecutive times, I decided to give up on staying in the United States, even though I didn’t want to return to Korea. I began working as a marketer at a Korean branch of an American company and continued my search for opportunities with foreign companies, aiming to leverage my fluency in English to my advantage.

Furthermore, a lot of elite Korean students who were interested in studying medicine in the United States find that “it is practically hard to get into American medical schools without at least green cards. The worst part is that they discovered this after beginning their undergraduate studies in the United States,” according to Ye-Jun, a recent graduate of a liberal arts college. Graduate school is frequently the only option available to these elite Korean undergraduate students to be able to stay in the United States. Their parents had never envisioned such a challenge because they had become accustomed to academic degrees being a guarantee of success. In Ye-Jun’s father’s words, “[The KMLA college counselors and the Gangnam private consultants] could have helped the students get into prestigious institutions, but they did not guide the students’ life in the United States.”

For these reasons, many people who ran into a brick wall in the labor markets of both countries turned to Korean professional schools, such as the law and medical schools, which saw an explosion in enrollment in the late 2000s. That was a win-win situation for all parties.

According to Seo-Jun, a graduate with both a HYPS BA and a PhD, returnees saw matriculating at elite Korean professional schools as a shortcut to catch up on "the social networks and hakbul [credential-originated symbolic power] of their friends with elite Korean diplomas."

Additionally, the professional schools "respected the returning students' American educational credentials and English fluency" (Sung-Jin, a Korean medical school graduate). The domestic professional schools paved the way[18] to activate and translate their cultural capital into profits. Returnees also find that their KMLA background benefits them even more than their Ivy League credentials. For instance, Jung, who had graduated from a non-HYPS Ivy League school and returned to matriculate at SNU medical school as a "college transfer" (haksa pyunip), finds his KMLA credential critical to joining the local elite network.

> **Jung:** Online trolls call the non-HYPS Ivy League Korean graduates "losers" and "cheaters." "How dare you try to transfer to a [SNU] BA program with [non-HYPS] degree," and so on. I don't care if it aggravates me. However, I don't think the SNU medical school has a positive opinion of [my alma mater institution]. Instead, the medical school values KMLA highly. In my cohort at the medical school, 32 of the 40 admitted students came from prestigious domestic universities, namely the SNU. Not shocking. Teukmokgo [special-purpose high schools] filled up six of the eight remaining seats. It was strange that they asked my high school in my transfer application considering that this is a graduate-level program. But throughout my interview, I learned the reason. The interviewers say, "[Your Alma Mater], well, you are from a fine American school, but KMLA? You were born into our family."

Jarvis's (2020) findings on the difference between "early exiters" and "late exiters" help us understand the experiences of the KMLA graduates. On the one hand, the "late exiters" from the

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[18] The following three career paths are frequently desired by elite Korean students: State exams come first, followed by chaebol affiliate companies like Samsung Electronics, and then professional occupations. The first two of the three were the most difficult for Koreans who had attended higher education in the United States since they required prior Korean education, such as knowledge of Korean history and Korean fluency. Although they attended a Korean high school, the Korean returnees were educated using an American curriculum; as a result, they perceived the bar as being significantly higher and many of them gave up before they even attempted. Additionally, they felt that the rigorous Korean organizations did not "fit" their individual personalities. The professional schools, on the other hand, which offer a similar high standing, welcomed the same returnees and gave preference to their foreign-based academic credentials.

previous generation serve as de facto reference points. After completing their undergraduate studies in Korea, the late exiters move to the United States for graduate school (and occasionally work experience), and then they return to Korea where they successfully activate and convert their global cultural capital, such as an American degree and English fluency, into profit in local settings, like better academic employment opportunities. Early exiters, on the other hand, usually start off with ambiguous career plans but with "cosmopolitan striving" (Park and Abelmann 2004), looking forward to living abroad. As a result, the early exiters obtain more global cultural capital than their former classmates in prominent Korean colleges. However, the early exiters find that, in contrast to local cultural capital and social capital, their global cultural capital does not "culturally fit" (Rivera 2016) with the Korean labor market when they return to Korea. Furthermore, in contrast to late exiters who successfully assimilated in the United States with their professional or graduate education, younger early exiters with only undergraduate degrees find it difficult to assimilate in the United States unless they have legal status or other forms of capital. With these factors in mind, attending a domestic professional school may be their predetermined path to utilizing their global cultural capital while avoiding the discrimination brought on by a lack of local cultural capital. Instead, as shown by Jung's example, their global cultural capital can predict synergy if they have prestigious local cultural capital.

The early exiters still greatly appreciate an American college degree as cultural capital, especially one from HYPS, but they do not believe it is "cost-effective" (in Korea) (Young-Gi, an Ivy League graduate). In other words, a new economic narrative has arisen that encourages people to actively evaluate cultural capital in terms of its explicit convertibility into economic capital. I refer to this narrative as "ROI thinking." This new justification is in line with rational

choice theory's assertion that people assess costs and benefits when deciding on an educational path (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997).

> **Young-Gi:** My buddies and I used to make fun of Colgate University back when we were in KMLA by referring to it as "Toothpaste University, the US 100th university!" We never thought of it as a destination. However, as you may be aware, even Colgate's output has a far lower ROI than SNU's. Even if I'm unable to matriculate at SNU, [if I were to pick one] I'd prefer to go to Yeongodae (Yonsei and Korea University) than Colgate for a higher ROI. (Boldface emphasis by author.)
> **Author:** ROI means return on investment?
> **Young-Gi:** Yes.
> **Author:** What about your alma mater, Bay Area (a renowned West Coast public university)?
> **Young-Gi:** Isn't it difficult to choose between SNU and the Bay Area? But if I had to select between Harvard, MIT, and SNU, I would unquestionably pick MIT and Harvard.

This conversation captures the dilemma that elite Korean students confront while deciding between American pathways and home trajectories. Many students in the declining phase still paint a rosy picture of the beginning and peak periods (for example, see (M. Cho 2012; Suji Kim 2008; J. et al. Koo 2008; Na 2011; W. Pak 2001; W. Park 2004; U. Yang 2010)) of achieving their cosmopolitan dreams at Ivy League and other prestigious American universities by acquiring a wealth of global cultural capital.[19] However, as opposed to past upperclassmen who were more oriented to cultural ambitions, more students and their parents are becoming concerned about their "investment" in education, its projected returns, and the overall "cost-effectiveness." This is made evident by Gyeong, who decided to pursue admittance to SNU in her eleventh year in KMLA after meeting a Gangnam private consultant.[20]

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[19] As of 2021, Korea had 18,262 undergraduate students, which is the third-highest number in American higher education after China (109,492) and India (27,545). While graduate students are the majority in the first two countries, among Korean international students there are more undergraduates than graduate students (14,915) (Institute of International Education 2022).
[20] Top-tier Gangnam private consultants charge about $2,500 for each consultation (Cho 2021:212).

> **Gyeong:** I turned to SNU because I was under financial pressure. I needed full funding to pursue my international studies. My first interaction with American colleges was on the KMLA field trip. Yale was so gorgeous, so I wanted it. The vibe on the Stanford campus is fantastic. I, therefore, put a lot of effort into maintaining a high GPA and taking part in extracurricular activities through the KMLA's international program. I could get there [the Ivy League], according to the private consultant [from Gangnam], but not with full funding. If I wanted to receive full support, I had to "step down" to UC universities. I felt betrayed. I, therefore, pondered the question, "Should I pay so much for American colleges?" That's how I discovered SNU.

This quotation demonstrates the cultural allure of elite American universities for young Korean students, but also how the student departs from the promise of cultural capital and develops into a sharp investor to assess the return on her (and her family's) investment.

Widening Opportunities: The Advent of the Admission Officer System.

The Korean government implemented the American-style Admission Officer System (Iphak Sajeongwanje) in 2008 to "diversify" the national college admissions system. And it was in fact a final liberal blow to the age-old egalitarian college admissions system, which had been gradually undermined by the 1995 liberal education reform. The holistic admission process, which is modeled after the selective American college admissions process, gave each university autonomy to evaluate various applicant qualities, such as potentials and talents, which are not represented simply by test scores and class ranks. The Korean government gave colleges financial incentives to switch from the old "score-oriented admission system" to the new "holistic performance-based admission system," and the new system quickly took hold at 88 universities, including SNU, within a year (K. Kim 2009:80).

SNU embraced the new approach as an opportunity to select more competent candidates with greater discretion by considering an applicant's potential, academic ability, passion, fitness, and drive rather than depending only on the sunung and naeshin numbers (SNU 2009, 2013). The implementation of the Admission Officer System in fact implied formalizing the university's

ongoing shift toward a more liberal admissions process rather than an equitable number-based one. For instance, while the overall admission quota and the number of seats allocated to early egalitarian applicants, that is, regional top naeshin rankers (Figure 63's red bar), remained steady for decades, about 80% of the remaining seats were moved from the regular egalitarian test score–based track (Figure 63's orange bar) to the liberal track for early decisions (Figure 63's blue bar) in SNU admissions within a decade. The early liberal decision track was designated for "special talents" such as international and national academic competition winners and applicants with high TOEFL scores. Prior to the Admission Officer System, however, even "special talents" had to pass the initial class-rank filtration in the egalitarian system to be placed on the early decisions track. The Admission Officer System finally loosened the egalitarian chokehold that existed in the name of autonomy and diversity. The new wealthy middle-class parents were thus able to provide their children in Gangnam high schools and special-purpose high schools with "diverse" qualities with the aid of the private education sector, thus opening the doors of the best domestic institutions.

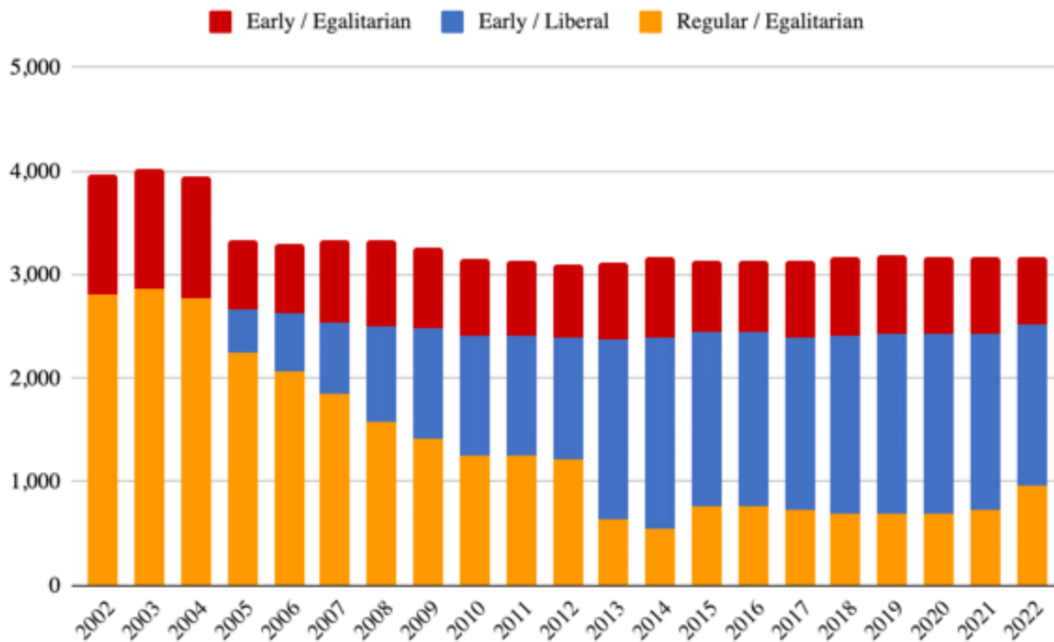

Figure 63: SNU Admission Quota, 2002–22.

SOURCE: Etoland. 2022.

KMLA was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the new holistic admission process because it turned the KMLA's earlier disadvantage for domestic admission into a benefit. For example, a distinctive curriculum, such as the deliberate avoidance of teaching sunung courses and of the teaching of AP courses in English to domestic applicants and the low enrollment of high-achieving students, only one-third to one-fourth of other competing elite high schools, now became a signal of excellence. In turn, this led to a sharp rise in the number of KMLA graduates accepted by SNU: in 2009, more than 10 graduates were admitted for the first time in KMLA history; five years later, in 2014, 54 of the 157 graduates were accepted to SNU.

The growing number of prospective SNU students was exchanged for the declining appeal of the international program. "In order to increase their prospects of admission to SNU,

the Gangnam[21] private consultants suggested that students in the *kukje-ban*[22] [international admissions prep class] transfer to domestic programs in their eleventh or twelfth year" (Min-Ji). Additionally, "younger Gangnam cohorts set up the 'transfer strategy' before their admittance to KMLA and implement the strategy after enjoying their tenth year in the less competitive *kukje-ban* with a better GPA" (Ji-Won, international program graduate). The unprecedented popularity of the domestic program is entirely due to SNU's higher admittance rate. Both Korea University and Yonsei University introduced a new "global" admission track for the class of 2006 that accepts the SAT and AP test scores as legitimate test scores to admit candidates who may have chosen to attend American universities. However, the KMLA students were not very interested in the new global track (gray and yellow lines in Figure 64). Instead, the potential international college candidates (green in Figure 64) were attracted by the higher possibility of getting into SNU (orange in Figure 64). And the wider SNU door opened to the KMLA students did not imply an increase in the total number of spots offered. The overall SNU admissions quota has declined from the mid-1990s and has been fairly constant since the mid-2000s, as shown in Figure 59. However, the makeup of the quota has drastically changed from 2005 to 2013 (Figure 63).

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[21] Due to its secrecy, it is unknown how large the private shadow education sector for top-tier institutions is overall or how it affects KMLA. However, it is possible to deduce the two-way interaction from (1) KMLA–shadow education: renowned shadow cram schools created a hierarchy of classes beginning with KMLA-prep (minsago ban), followed by other elite high school prep classes (ttukmokgo ban), and actively advertised its newly hired teachers from KMLA; (2) shadow education–KMLA: as a result, starting in the early 2000s, a small number of Gangnam cram schools, e.g., Ferma, Feynman, Youngjae Sagwan, took control of the KMLA-entrance market in a broad oligopoly, which reached its peak in 2010 when two-thirds of a KMLA cohort was filled.

[22] It is noteworthy that the international track's Korean name has changed from *aibi-ban* to *kukje-ban*. The broader moniker of *kukje* denotes that the objective has expanded to other international universities, in contrast to the old nickname of *aibi*, which meant primarily targeting the most elite American colleges, i.e., the Ivy League.

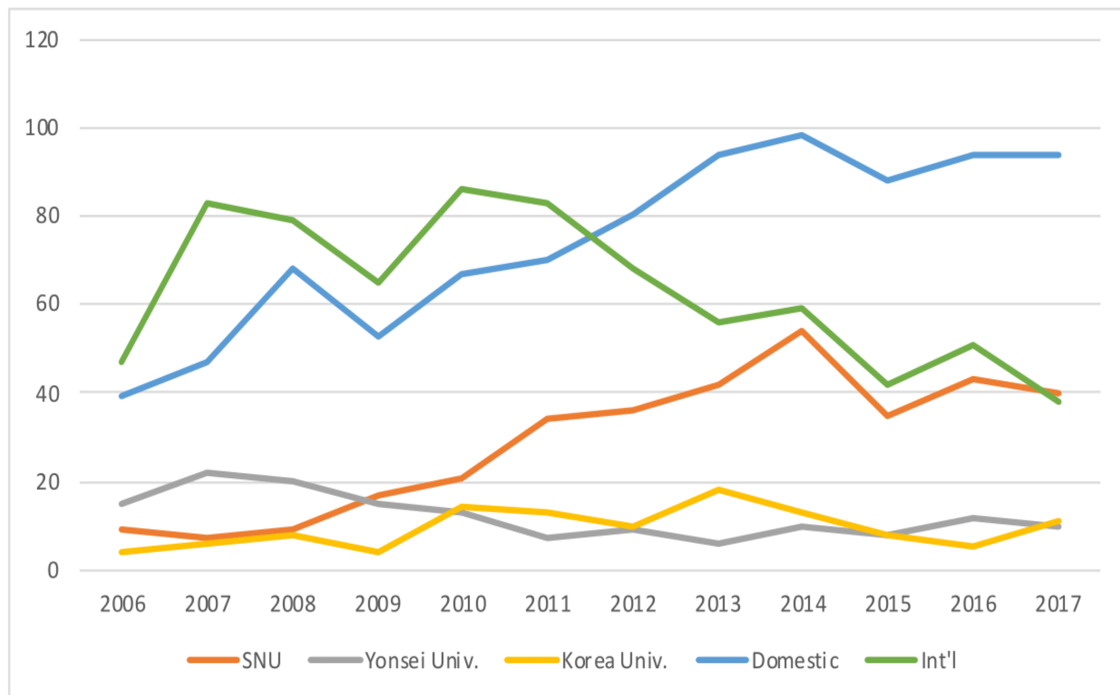

Figure 64: KMLA Graduates' University Selections, 2006-17.

SOURCE: Minjok Sagwan Kodŭng Hakkyo 10-yŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe. 2006.; Minjok Sagwan Kodŭng Hakkyo 20-yŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe. 2015.

As a result, the newly affluent middle-class KMLA students prefer SNU to highly regarded, world-renowned Ivy League universities as the best convertible institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). On the one hand, it is anticipated that an education from SNU will provide a much higher ROI, as the undergraduate degree is considerably less expensive (about $5,000/year) and is likely to lead to other respectable career paths in Korea, such as medical school admissions and medical licenses. The opposite is also true: elite American college education is still highly valued as global cultural capital, but it is also substantially more expensive (at least $45,000 per year, excluding room and board) and produces uncertain outcomes, particularly in local contexts. A bachelor's degree from a respected American university, for instance, does not guarantee visa sponsorship in the United States or provide an

advantage when applying for jobs with Korean corporations. In other words, enrolling at SNU as opposed to an Ivy League university is unquestionably more "cost-effective" in terms of ROI.

Therefore, I argue that a strategy shift among the newly affluent middle-class families in KMLA and other similar elite high schools contributed to the declining popularity of US higher education among elite Korean students (Koo 2022). Within the KMLA's elite strata, the newly affluent middle-class, such as highly educated Gangnam parents with high occupational status, stimulated the shift from SNU to the Ivy League in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, in the 2010s, they reversed their strategies and retargeted SNU as their destination due to the Ivy League diploma's unexpectedly low convertibility into career trajectories in both Korea and the United States.

The sudden shifts in KMLA graduates' university choices not only reflect a trend among international students weighing domestic and international options, but they also provide a new lens through which to examine how the newly affluent middle-class employs the "adaptation" (Alon 2009) strategy in higher education. In other words, the elite strata of Korean international students and their families in KMLA rethink how to adapt to the changing domestic college admission system, such as the expanding holistic performance-based admission system, when faced with the unexpectedly low (or failing) convertibility of global cultural capital (Jong-young Kim 2015), that is, an American BA/BS diploma, into tangible capital, that is, income and social networks. Alternatively, the KMLA example demonstrates how dynamically involved stakeholders adapt to a changing admissions system (Alon 2009). As individual domestic universities gain more autonomy in selecting new students, such as with the expansion of the Admission Officer System to Comprehensive School Report Admission (Haksaengbu Chonghap Cheonhyung) in the 2010s, elite applicants and their families face a growing opportunity

structure to matriculate at colleges at a higher rank of the college pecking order. The systematic change is often praised for its the excellence and autonomy in recruiting applicants who are "educated in diverse and creative learning environments and possessing strong will with scholastic potentials" (Cheongie Kim 2019), but it frequently only benefits those wealthy and well-supported elite students from Gangnam who can adapt to the new holistic admission procedure better than middle- and lower-class competitors (C. Cho 2021; ChangHwan Kim and Shin 2020; Koo 2022; Moon and Choi 2019).

Discussion

This study's findings raise additional concerns regarding higher education and socioeconomic inequality. First, the mechanism of class reproduction is becoming increasingly transnational and sophisticated as international student mobility and global higher education expand (Meyer et al. 2007; Schofer and Meyer 2005). The rise in foreign enrollment at elite American universities shows how these schools' historical function as breeding grounds for social elites is increasingly evolving to attract elite international students (Stevens et al. 2008). As demonstrated by the KMLA case, the scope of global status reproduction extends beyond "transnational elites" (Sassen 2007) with "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999) to include upper-middle-class individuals who consider their domestic and international options for their standings.

The global establishment of the hierarchical university ranking system strengthens the role of American universities as a global magnet (Hazelkorn 2011; Stevens et al. 2008). Concurrently, however, the development of a hierarchically structured global field of higher education is becoming more permeable and considered more as a path that players with flexible strategies can readily enter and exit rather than as a predetermined path. As globalization progresses, the potential risk of cultural capital's insufficient convertibility into other forms of

capital is becoming more widely recognized, and the overall value of studying abroad is being reviewed. Capital is only useful as a resource if it can be "activated." Unless activated, the global prestige of elite higher education overseas is merely *illusio* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). However, local academic credentials can be more easily and practically converted into other valuable forms of capital in students' post educational lives as institutionalized cultural capital.

The KMLA case qualifies the "cosmopolitan striving" (Park and Abelmann 2004) argument's explanation of study-abroad expansion and illustrates the advent of an overtly calculative approach ("ROI thinking") in international higher education choices. Elite students are increasingly choosing safer domestic class reproduction pathways over uncertain foreign trajectories, contrary to early globalization theorists' observations of cosmopolitan aspiration. Even students who enrolled in KMLA with the intention of attending Ivy League universities change their minds and pursue the domestic road of becoming doctors and lawyers at SNU, following in the "elite" footsteps of their parents' generation. Even the newly affluent middle-class students (and families) are not immune to "survivalism" in the neoliberal era, as shown by the emergence of ROI thinking (H. Kim 2015).

In short, because their choice of an international institution is a locally motivated global project aimed at elevating status, wealthy families can revert to their original domestic reproduction path from the global trajectory. In this process, the global/local cultural capital serves as a tool, not as its own aim. The meaning of the nuanced strategic moves made by elite international students and their families, as well as how the changing conditions in source and destination nations are not isolated but rather dynamically intertwined, is made clear to us by this globalization paradox (Altbach 1998; Chen 2007; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002).

Chapter 9. Discussion and Conclusion

Education is often regarded as the most meritocratic mechanism for social mobility and reproduction. People are motivated to pursue long educational trajectories to improve their lives. However, education can be seen as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it allows students to climb the social ladder through their own efforts and achievements. On the other hand, not everyone starts from the same position. Many parents support their children's ascent by providing them with nutrition and rest to grow (economic capital), knowledge and skills to navigate the system (cultural capital), and social connections to aid their progress (social capital). The list of extracurricular benefits accompanying education-mediated social mobility is extensive. Bourdieu's approach to understanding the role of education in social reproduction and mobility has highlighted these diverse dimensions over the past decades.

Moreover, additional support can come from forming new families through marriage. Individuals often seek to enhance their children's lives through good education. While Bourdieu pioneered the exploration of family benefits and their relationship with education, the critical dimensions of gender, marriage, and family have been relatively understudied. The life trajectories mediated by education are often gendered, and sometimes even class privilege cannot overcome pervasive gender inequalities.

The opportunity structures within which individuals pursue social reproduction and mobility are dynamic. As educational environments evolve, they shape both motivations and trajectories. The society-wide expansion of education, particularly higher education, increases the number of individuals participating in the educational race. This expansion is especially significant in developmental states, common among late-developing countries of the late 20th

century. In these contexts, education holds greater importance than in Western developed countries because it is not only beneficial to individuals but also essential for the state to recruit personnel, ensure continued development, and maintain legitimacy. Consequently, the educational race rapidly intensifies.

Alongside the development of national educational systems, international education often emerges as a superior alternative to domestic systems, prompting some individuals to pursue global educational trajectories. However, as national development outpaces the expansion of the international education system, the perceived benefits of international education, once regarded as superior to prestigious domestic education, begin to erode. Despite its global prestige and technical superiority, international educational trajectories do not always appeal to the majority. This is because many educational motivations are deeply rooted in local contexts, making international education primarily attractive to a select few "cosmopolitans."

The opportunity structure of higher education, both domestic and international, is not immediately visible to parents and students. Thus, shared narratives and the distribution of "authoritative sources" play a crucial role in shaping the choices people make about investing their time, resources, and emotions. This information structure leads to the gradual rise and fall of participation in higher education.

Despite analyzing the rise and fall of the developmental state, international education, and education's role in social mobility and reproduction, some questions remain unanswered. For instance, with the broad expansion of education, traditional gender norms gradually erode, leading to increased coordination challenges across these dimensions. Individuals now have greater freedom to navigate the world compared to previous generations, resulting in an unintended reproduction crisis with heightened coordination challenges. Simultaneously, as

people increasingly abandon unsuccessful international mobility trajectories, they revert more strongly to traditional domestic reproduction pathways. What awaits us at the end of this intensified educational race?

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