

From Corruption in Education to a Corrupting Education*: The Ascendancy of Private Tutoring in South Korea

부패적인 교육: 한국에서 사교육의 권세와 영향

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국문초록

이 논문은 한국의 사교육의 논쟁적인 역할을 분석하는 것이다. 1945년 일본으로부터 해방 후에, 교육담당 정부 당국자들은 국민들에게 기회의 평등을 마련하는 현대교육시스템을 설립하기 위해 사교육의 기능과 역할의 제한을 추진하였다. 여러 가지 평등화와 균일화 정책들과의 관계에서 사적 가정교사의 증가적인 요구가 있어 왔다. 이 논문은 세계화의 과정에서 시장자유주의의 출현과 권위주의 정권의 붕괴에 따른 사교육의 변천과정을 고찰하였다. 1980년대와 1990년대의 시장자유주의와 함께 사교육은 불법적인 교육시장의 현상에서 양성화의 과정을 경험하였다. 이 과정에서 사교육의 사업의 증가는 영어교육의 역할을 강조하였고, 영어의 숙련 화와 능숙화는 세계화의 시대에서 성공의 중요한 요소로써 인식되었다. 사교육 사업을 구성하는 여러 가지 실재들은 부패적인 교육의 조달업자의 기능을 수행하였고 공인된 시험들에 대한 공교육의 시스템을 훼손시키고 있다고 분석될 수 있다.

주제어 : 교육부패, 사교육, 가정교사, 공교육

Since liberation from the Japanese in 1945 education policy has been a source of intense social conflict and public consternation in South Korea

And since the democratic transition of the late 1980s, the many social problems associated with education have steadily increased. Indeed dissatisfaction with national educational policy –and the tremendous influence of the private education industry– has become widespread; debates about proper forms of childhood, motherhood, and the family dominate the editorial pages of the national press (See Abelmann and Kang 2013; Park and Abelmann 2004). These conflicts and debates among Koreans, however, seem to have been lost upon many observers from the West. As European and North American educational systems continue to decline, many commentators look at the Korean education system with rose-tinted glasses and see it as an admirable example of the way in which the private sector has supported and enhanced public education. Such

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a favorable view was exemplified by United States President Barack Obama during his 2012 visit to Korea. He lauded Koreans for their “academic zeal” and called on Americans to follow suit by adopting longer school days and after school programs: “Our children – listen to this – our children spend over a month less in school than children in Korea every year... That's no way to prepare them for a 21st-century economy.”¹⁾

Such ignorance of the realities of Korean education seems to be derived from simplistic readings of data from standardized tests. Without a doubt Korean students regularly lead international rankings in math and science exams. Yet beneath the fetishization of exam scores lay intractable problems associated with a competitive system that centers upon private tutoring and cram schools that operate outside the normal hours of mainstream education. The heart of this educational regime is a many educational practices that have woven internecine competition among students and corruption into a learning regimen that has left a path of destruction. In addition to high test scores, Korea boasts the highest suicide rates among school-aged students in the OECD, not to mention mountains of household debt related to private education (Card 2005; Lee, Hong, and Espelage 2010).

Harmful social trends associated with education boil down to the perennial competition for limited numbers of spaces in the top universities. The pathway to power and prestige in Korean society is largely regulation by a small number of universities in Seoul. Battling for these prized positions in the upper echelons of society has inspired Koreans to adopt an exaggeratedly instrumental view of education that reduces the idea of education to intense competition in terms of standardized exams. Such a focus on exams has resulted in a perspective about educational accomplishment that muddles the line between corruption and hard-nosed competition. Accordingly institutions and employers contribute to these dynamics by narrowly focusing their evaluations of human capital on standardized exams in ways that leave little room for students to develop intellectually outside of the parameters of test scores.

Debates about corruption and fairness in education invariably lead to the topics of private tutoring (*kwaoe*), private academies (*hagwons*), and cram schools. This educational competition requires many hours of cramming after normal hours and this supplementary education comes at a high price that puts poor and working class students at a distinct disadvantage. These thorny problems of class inequality,

1) Korea Times, “Obama Lauds Korean education, It,” 2012 March 27

corruption, and private education recently came to light in May of 2013 when several famous *hagwons* in Seoul leaked Scholastic Aptitude Test(SAT) answers, which led the *College Board*, the American-based company that owns and develops the college entrance exam, to take the unprecedented action of canceling this year's test in Korea.²⁾

This type of corruption is not new. Indeed the Korean government has sought endlessly to regulate and control private education in ways that limit illicit behavior. Since Syngman Rhee's administration (1948-1960), the department of education has searched for ways to limit the influence of private tutoring – and its debilitating effects on domestic finances and children's mental health – through a general set of guidelines that have come to be known as “equalization policies.” The quest for equalizing educational opportunity led to countless attempts to ensure “equal opportunity” in education, which has included the closing of elite schools, regulations on private education, and the development of “objective” exam systems. With the intent of producing a modern education system, the efforts of the government has largely focused on limiting, regulating, and sometimes to outlawing private tutoring.

Equalization policies, though widely popular with many Koreans, have always met strong resistance from the major players in the private education industry and from affluent classes seeking advantage for their children in the educational rat-race. Despite government planners' warnings about the corrosive effects of private tutoring on the broader project of establishing a national educational system, the demand for private education has grown unceasingly in ways that highlight important contradictions in the political order: namely the tension between the ideal of egalitarianism and competitive zeal for social mobility (Seth 2002). In this way, the concept of corruption should not be taken in absolute terms of a Manichaeian struggle between “good” and “evil.” Instead corruption is a social and political ideal that involves the use of an ideal type of morality within social conflicts among deeply entrenched political interests (Pardo 2004). In Korea, corruption in education operates at many levels of society and includes socially and morally diverse members of society. Private tutoring highlights these types of practices, many of which have not been strictly illegal. Yet even legal forms of private tutoring garner social criticism about the relationship between morality and power. Most significant to these debates has been the manner in which both corruption and competition in private education has worked to the advantage of elite

2) Wall Street Journal, “SAT Scandal Shines Harsh Light on South Korean Academics,” 2013 May 9.

and wealthy Koreans in ways that consolidate relations of inequality.

Following from this conception of corrupt educational practices, this paper will examine the ways in which private tutoring has represented a form of corruption in education. I will describe some of the ways that the private education industry has reacted to reform in order to trace some of the twists and turns that have resulted in the private education industry's dominant role in shaping Korean education policy. I will emphasize the manner private education, with market liberalization of the 1980s and 1990s, moved from the shadows of the illicit education market into this leading role. Thus the various entities that comprise the private education industry have become purveyors of a corrupting education that has systematically denigrated public education by reducing education to preparing students for standardized exams.

Liberation and Hope: Reconstruction of Colonial Education

Following liberation from Japan the new leaders of Korea sought to build a modern and democratic educational system. President Syngman Rhee's newly formed administration had a formidable challenge in transforming the system of public education left behind in the flotsam and jetsam of Japan's colonial experiment. Certainly the colonial administrators introduced the idea of public and compulsory education in order to abolish the private Chinese schools that formed the heart of Choson society and its *Sadae* relations with the Chinese empire.³⁾ In contrast to the ideals of neo-Confucianism, the colonial government modeled its education system on the European ideal of compulsory and universal education. Yet in the Korean context the education system was primarily concerned with racially subordinating and assimilating Koreans (Caprio 2009). What emerged from the confluence of racialization and modern education was a dual system of education that equipped more than 40 percent of Koreans with primary education yet provided little opportunity for higher education (Tsurumi 1984; Dore 2010).

With the collapse of the empire, Japanese civil servants, teachers, and officials fled the peninsula and left a gaping hole in Korean institutions in terms of competent personnel necessary to manage Korea's society, economy, and teetering educational

3) Indeed the Meiji interest in education, and western forms of science and technology, had important precedents in Tokugawa Japan (Dore 2010).

system. At the time the Korean illiteracy rate was at 78 percent; in addition there was an acute shortage of teachers (Sorensen 1994: 16).

Syngman Rhee's administration attempted to address these shortcomings by implementing the *Basic Education Law*, which began the long and arduous process of establishing a unified school system. One of the most significant problems for the new education system was to sweep away the multi-tiered Japanese system and replace it with a universal and compulsory system based on equality of opportunity. Indeed the colonial experience, and the changing forms of class divisions among Koreans – and the inevitable finger pointing at “collaborators” – led to distrust about the idea of vocational education as a separate tier, apart from general education. The majority of Koreans were skeptical as they feared that a vocational tract would further bury them at the bottom of the emerging social hierarchy.

In an attempt to project an image of equality of opportunity, the Syngman Rhee administration configured the education system as six years of compulsory education beginning at age 7, which was followed by three years of non-compulsory middle-school, then three years of non-compulsory high school, and finally four years of university. The rapid expansion of public education was characterized by intransigent problems associated with competition and class conflict. Indeed paltry state resources hindered the development of national educational institutions and required that the department of education rely upon private foundations(*chaedan*) and semi-compulsory teacher associations to meet expanding demand for education. Such private bodies introduced opportunities for bribery and corruption that definitely compromised the idea of a “free and state supported education”(Sorensen: 16-17). Wealthy and prominent families used their private wealth and social connections to ensure their children would have opportunities to study at beyond the primary level of education.

Class Inequality and Exam Hell

Class inequality and limited spaces in quality schools combined to produce an intensely competitive environment that forced the government to search for standards and procedures to produce an even playing field. To be sure, there was much social antagonism toward wealthy Koreans as most people believed that they enjoyed unfair advantages in terms of entering the best schools as well as performing in the class

room. Social criticism of these advantages enjoyed by well-heeled Koreans revolved around bribery and private tutoring. These two distinct practices became intertwined and were viewed to be part of the general problem of corruption that generally worked against the chances of lower and working class Koreans.

To allay this deepening sense of conflict among citizens about fairness in education, the Syngman Rhee administration implemented an entrance exam system in 1953. Entrance exams were designed to contribute to the establishment of national standards in ways that would set up objective criteria that would militate against local and regional systems of power and prestige. The idea was to create meritocratic criteria to ensure that those “who received the limited secondary education were the most qualified” (Sorensen: 16-17). In this way, entrance to both public and private schools were subject to the unified national curriculum that created “fact-based” exams that sought to eliminate any type of subjective factors in evaluating exams.

With such an emphasis on tests the new system created many additional problems that actually worsened class conflict, which gave way to what some observers have called a “testocracy” (Song 2011). Teachers felt intense pressures to assure that their students performed well on middle school entrance exams. Teachers joined parents in criticizing the ways that entrance exams, and their vaunted “objectivity,” neither curtailed competition nor eased the sense of unfairness associated with academic success. Instead of displacing competition and corrupt behaviors, these new government regulations quickly became entangled with informal ranking systems that distinguished the best schools from the worst. The rankings reflected the reputations of the schools in terms of academic success, which ultimately rested on entrance into a prestigious university. Educational hierarchy was a legacy of the Japanese colonial education system and the entrance exam came to represent the pathway for social mobility. And the prize of this struggle led – and still leads – to Seoul National(formerly Keijo Imperial University), Yonsei, and Korea Universities.

With such high-stakes weighing in the balance, entrance exams morphed into an all-or-nothing competition that would have a major determining effect on the students’ future well-being. Accordingly, the entrance exam became a grueling and anxiety producing rite of passage that is well expressed in the common saying *samdang sarak*(pass with three [hours of sleep], fail with four)(Seth2002:144). The most troubling aspect of this social ordeal lay in the fact that it subjected primary students, gunning for precious few spots in middle school, to this harsh regime of competition. With the

specter of failing the middle school exam, which effectively meant the termination of one's education, students as young as six years old began preparing for the impending middle school entrance exam. Middle school exams became unpopular among parents and teachers who feared that such pressure at a young age was psychologically damaging, a process that came to be known as "exam hell" (*sihom chiok*) (Seth 2002).

Private Tutoring as Class Struggle

The emerging public education system offered lower class Koreans new opportunities for social advancement as hard work and successful entrance exams opened the door to prestigious universities and social mobility. Yet affluent families had a definite advantage in the process and Korean motherhood changed in relationship to these new opportunities in education as mothers became "managers" of their children's education (See Nelson 2000; Abelman and Park 2004; Abelman and Kang 2013). By devoting large amounts of money and energy, mothers sought to find ways to ensure their children's scholarly success. Increasingly expressions of parental involvement came in the form of private tutoring. Demand for private tutoring steadily increased as parents and students searched for every advantage in cracking entrance exams that stood at the major gateways of social mobility: middle school, high school, and university entrance exams.

Parents seeking supplemental help from private tutors, who were often off-hours school teachers, made private tutoring a hot commodity. This search for ancillary education became part of the way affluent Koreans criticized public and mainstream education. They viewed the state education system as inadequate for the needs of a dynamic middle and elite class. Certainly many of these complaints referred to problems associated with the many limitations stemming from the challenges of transforming the rudimentary educational system with paltry levels of public funding. Students at public schools had to contend with large class sizes and a dearth of well-trained teachers. This situation led prosperous parents to pay teachers extra – often in the form of an enveloped stuffed with cash – to ensure that their child would receive more attention and a better seat in class (Nelson 2000: 153-155).

Private tutoring became such a significant institution in and of itself – no matter how controversial – that it is referred to as a "shadow education system" (Bray 1999,

2006; Yoo 2002). Working in the “shadows” of the government mandated educational system, private tutors and businesses provided guidance for the intensive study of academic subjects outside of the normal hours of mainstream formal education that are intended to supplement and support the mainstream curriculum. In time, participation in this shadow education system came to be necessary in order for students to excel and make the big jump from primary school to middle school.

By the 1960s, Korea’s rapidly expanding shadow education system was taking a huge toll on many families as the cost of private tutoring had become an enormous financial liability. Despite such financial hardship, the arms race in private tutoring showed no signs of abating. Demand for supplemental education steadily grew to the point where private tutoring gained priority over mainstream education in the eyes of competitive students and their vigilant parents. Students began to see after school programs and private tutors as the arena where the most crucial information was to be attained and it was in this forum that diligent study would separate the wheat from the chaff.

It became well understood that wealthy Koreans could much better absorb the financial weight of high quality tutoring. As a result the children of the wealthy outperformed their lower class peers at alarming rates that ran counter to the dominant ideals of egalitarianism. Thus, tutoring became a highly debated issue as large numbers of parents protested the fairness of the emerging shadow education system in what became the movement for equality in education. This dialectic of competition and resistance to class privileges calls attention to the peculiar way the cultural category of “egalitarianism” functioned in post-war Korea.

Following the coup d’état that brought Park Chung Hee to power in 1961, the new government attempted to distance itself from the corruption of Syngman Rhee’s regime. In this way the department of education appealed to the ideal of egalitarianism as it sought to deal with many of the ills associated with the exam system. The ideal of “equality of condition” became central to the way Park Chung Hee’s regime sought to inculcate citizens with of a strong sense of nationalism through education. Accordingly social inequality came to be viewed as an obstacle to economic development and nation building. President Park embellished his vision of a modern Korea, and his battle with corruption, by contrasting it against the Choson legacy of a spoiled, corrupt, and lazy elite that was the cause of the country’s woes.

Following the principle of egalitarianism as the basis of a truly nationalist

education, the department of education opened schools to all Koreans and established uniformity in educational content and standards. Openness of education was based upon procedures that were “fairly open to all” and once again the entrance exam became a lightning-rod. The department of education formulated “equalization of education” policies to allay the negative features of competition. Accordingly, President Park’s administration set out to jettison the middle school exam as a way to control the run-away growth of private tutoring. To be sure, these reforms were influenced by the widespread movement among parents and teachers against middle school exams mentioned above.

Being a source of ill will and anxiety, the government saw that abolishment of middle school exams could be best accomplished by expanding compulsory education through the middle school level. This equalization policy replaced the separate entrance exams with a random system whereby students were matriculated according to a lottery, as long as the student passes the national qualifying exam. “In order to suppress the parents’ desire to send their children to more prestigious schools by moving to the school district in which they are located, many prestigious schools were eliminated” (Kim and Lee 2001: 5). Sweeping changes were supported by large segments of society who welcomed a diminution of competition. What helped to further legitimate Park Chung Hee’s equalization policies was the way that these changes coincided with notable improvements in the standard of living as well as education of ordinary Koreans.

Certainly the robust regulations of Park Chung Hee’s reign eliminated most of the competition among secondary schools. However, this equalization drew higher numbers of students to the private educational market as they increasingly viewed public schooling as inadequate for the challenges of higher education and that left students ill prepared for the university entrance exams (Kim and Lee 2001). Private tutoring became more popular and the market widened in the face of government regulations that sought to limit it.

Private tutors and education companies were crafty in discovering new ways to persist amid tightening regulations. Massive expansion of the private tutoring industry continued to exacerbate the persistent problems associated with inequality and education. Chun Doo Hwan, after coming to power in a coup d’état in 1980, took a rather dramatic measure. In the name of “Equality educational opportunity,” he implemented the “July 30th Educational Reform.” This law banned most forms of private after

school education and revised the college entrance exam system. The ban against private tutoring proved to be difficult to enforce and demand for private education continued to grow at a dizzying pace.

Private Education and the Rhetoric of Democracy

With the faltering of Chun Doo Hwan's dictatorship the forces for liberalizing the education sector and dismantling equalization policies gained strength. Proponents of education reform placed their arguments in terms of the liberal ideals of the democracy movement and its call for increased freedom from the state and its collectivist policies. Members representing the private tutoring industry found the language of democracy a powerful rhetoric to push for the liberalization of the education market. Middle class and affluent parents appealed for more opportunities to supplement their children's education. With the passing of dictatorship and the rise of neoliberal arguments about global free trade, proponents of private education made their arguments in terms of the trope of a "changing world" that required students to cultivate their "individual" talents (Abelmann and Kang 2013: 3-4). This new push for reform was presented in terms of "School collapse" (or "classroom collapse") as opponents of state education policies focused on the behavior of teachers presenting them as having lost pride, a sense of passion, and the ability to control students (J. Kim 2004).

Market-based criticism of the education system was boosted by the administration of Kim Young Sam, the first democratically elected president of Korea. President Kim's administration developed a comprehensive policy framework in terms of the concept of "Segyehwa"(SeeS. Kim 2000). Segyehwa, the Korean term for globalization, came to be the signature of Kim's administration. State agencies used the concept of globalization to connect democratic reform with liberalization of markets. Kim's administration used various ideas of globalization for dramatic affect in order to present the contemporary period of post-dictatorship Korea as if it were a novel moment in history characterized by massive movements of capital, commodities, and labor across national borders. In the face of these new economic forces, the government proposed that new social forms were necessary if Korea was to "survive" in this "new age of globalization" (S. Kim 2000). Education reform played a central role in President Sam's project of *Segyehwa*. This emerging policy framework incorporated market-based terms of education that

stressed “open education,” “consumer needs,” “diverse and specialized education,” and the terms of “accountability and outcomes” (T. Kim 2004: 127).

Private education markets benefited from this new orientation in the Blue House that prioritized consumer preference. One of the new preferences came to be English education. Korea’s deeper involvement in the globalized world, according to this view, required greater proficiency in English. English was presented as the key to Korea’s quest to become a “world class” and would be crucial to national competitiveness in this age of globalization (Shin 2001). To meet these needs, English was introduced as a mandatory subject to the third grade – four years earlier than previously (Jung and Norton; Park 2004). Moreover, curriculum for middle and high school students was transformed in terms of communication and language fluency (Shin 2007), with the hopes of transforming the traditional bias toward grammar and translation (Kwon 2000).

With the election of Kim Dae Jung and the 1997 financial crisis, these market-based theories of education took on a greater role. Internal pressures for greater liberalization of education met with the external demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). With the economic debacle of the Asian economic crisis, the IMF created a \$55 billion bailout package that demanded further reforms. The IMF’s bailout brought the nascent neoliberal economic policies within Segyehwa to full bloom. The English education industry came to work within this context.

The private education industry was an active force in these transformations of the education system and had used the discourse of “classroom collapse” to further create demand for its services. Using this rhetoric of classroom collapse they led steady opposition against the ban on private tutoring and any regulations against “freedom of choice” when it came to education. Throughout the 1990s, proponents of private tutoring and the deregulation of the educational industry registered several successes in relaxing the ban. First in terms of high school students and by 2000 the ban was fully overturned when the constitutional court declared the ban on private tutoring unconstitutional because it “infringes upon the basic rights of the people to educate their children.”

English language education along with globalization discourse and the increasing purchasing power of the middle classes lead to the rapid development of private after-school English programs (Nelson 2000; Park and Abelmann 2004). No longer part of the illegal sphere, these businesses exploded. In 1980 there were merely 380 private academies in Korea with about twenty percent of students using their services. By 2003

Koreans were spending around \$12.4 billion on private education as private expenditure reached almost half the government's budget for national education (Koo 2007). In 2008, the number of hagwons had surpassed 70,000 and Korean families were spending almost 21trillion won (around \$17 billion) on private education.⁴⁾ As regulations were lifted, the private education industry – especially private tutoring and cram schools – came out of the shadows of illegality to become a major force in directing educational policy and leading the calls for changing kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade education (Abelmann and Kang 2013: 4). Indeed, the *hagwon* industry is one of the fastest growing industries (Seth 2002: 185-186; Park2007).

Privatizing the New State Ideological Project

The escalation of private lessons has become nearly universal and has corrupted the Korean education system by reducing the goal of education to coaching students to excel on standardized tests. The private tutoring industry – with its array of *hagwons*, testing materials, and learning aids – has influenced the system of education in ways that run counter to its argument of the proponents of *seggyehwa* that the Korean education should be more open and creative. With great ferocity these companies, and the many smaller ones that fill out the market-place, have expanded their products and services that are simultaneously offering a pathway to meritocratic rewards and professing to hold the key to dealing with the brave new world of globalization. Marketing campaigns play upon the fears and anxieties that many Koreans have about their future job prospects in a world in which high-paying jobs with benefits are vanishing.

Most ironic to these so-called education reforms has been the ways that the nationalist mandate of *seggyehwa* has been largely tethered to the American-based *Educational Testing Services*(ETS) exams – the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL). Instead of following a set of criteria that represents the educational needs of Korea, the TOFEL and TOEIC exams – highly profitable commodities – are treated as if they are objective tools that most accurately measure proficiency. Rather than learning to

4) Moon Gwang-lip, "Statistics Paint Korean Picture," *Joongang Daily*, 2009 December 15; "Lee Seeks to Cut Educational Costs," *Korea Herald*, 2009 August 14.

speak English or use the language in a practical way, *hagwons* and other providers of English education coach students with the sole agenda of achieving high test scores. Such an approach quickly devolves into teaching tricks and other strategies for test taking – as opposed to practical use of the language as a main priority.

By focusing attention on standardized tests – including the College Scholastic Aptitude Test (CSAT) – the private industry has not offered an alternative to the state education system but rather has actively undermined it. By teaching students how to defeat the various standardized exams, they influence them to disregard mainstream education and their regular teachers as insufficient. However, efficiency is understood in terms of standardized test scores and this has brought much international scrutiny to South Korea's education system. Taking the CSAT, TOEIC, and TOFEL exams as the proper measurement of academic ability, forces in the private industry market have expanded upon the old trope of "classroom collapse." It is important to keep in mind that the contemporary private education industry has not created distrust in schools. Indeed, as discussed above, affluent classes in Korea have harbored a deep distrust of public education since the very beginning of the Korean public education system during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Yet now "blaming the 'ineffectiveness' of public schools compared to private academies with regard to 'higher achievement'" has become the most important education issue.

In addition, when teachers confront the nationwide achievement test based on the 'major' (and therefore 'irreversible' and 'irresistible') trend of the world toward the intensification of standards in school education, they cannot have confidence that they should be free from standardized tests" (J. Kim 2004: 136). Teachers complain about this situation in two ways. On one level, their authority is eroded. Students come to class exhausted from late nights at *hagwons* and see school as a place to rest as they feel the most important lessons are covered at the *hagwons*. Therefore, there is a decreased enthusiasm as most of the material will be covered by tutors. Students who have the resources to use the private shadow system look at daytime schooling as a way station, or a place to rest and get ready for the real education to be had in the private sector.

Second, their job has been reduced to preparing students for the exams – and the pattern establish by private tutors and *hagwons*. With all of the talk about globalization and the need for Koreans to further expand their perspective, these forces of reform have actually narrowed the focus of education. *Hagwons* and private

education firms have had a major role in this corrupting influence upon the educational system. Instead of teaching English proficiency, in terms of the practical application of English, the aim has been to coach students to achieve a high score on the proficiency exam – bringing to life the fears that public teachers have had about the curriculum bending to the narrow confines of test taking. Sociologist Hagen Koo has summed up the problem thus: “the crux of the matter is that the system is too competitive, too exam-oriented with the single preoccupation to prepare students for college entrance exams” (Koo 2007:11).

In addition to these changes, the massive growth of education has increased the burden upon families as it has been paid for mostly by parents in the private market. The financial costs have been massive as the economic burden of private tutoring has wreaked havoc in the economic lives of ordinary citizens. Kwaoe has become the “greatest single factor in the escalating prices of schooling, placing a huge financial burden on Korean families and seriously undermining the policy of egalitarian access to education (Seth 2002: 185). It is estimated that each Korean student, on average, spends more than 15,000 hours learning English. The costs of such hours in hagwons in 2006 reached 20 trillion won (\$20 Billion US).⁵⁾ Indeed families spend about the same amount of money on private education as the government does on the entire public school system, what is estimated to be 2 percent of Korea’s GDP. Indeed, Koreans spend more on education than most countries in the world, about “69 percent of the total price, making South Korea “possibly the world's costliest educational system” (Seth 2002: 172; 187). These costs have clearly spiraled out of control as Koreans spend three times as much as Japanese do on English Education. Yet TOFEL scores for South Koreans tank 93rdoutof147(Park2009:51). The high cost, low benefits of English language has become a hot button issue in Korea (Chun and Choi 2006). Low competence in English has become a concern for government and industry who are supposed to benefit from the educational push.

5) C.S Park, 2007. *Hankyoreh*, “Fast increasing cost in private education” 2007 February 5.

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ABSTRACT

**From Corruption in Education to a Corrupting Education:
The Ascendancy of Private Tutoring in South Korea**

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This paper examines the controversial role of private education in Korea. Since liberation from Japan in 1945, government leaders and educational planners have sought to limit the role of private education in order to build a modern educational system that provided equality of opportunity to all Koreans. This paper examines the ways in which the demand for private tutoring expanded in relationship to various equalization policies.

The paper will be primarily concerned with the transmutation of private tutoring following the collapse of the dictatorship and the rise of market liberalism in terms of the rhetoric of *seggyehwa*(globalization). I will emphasize the manner in which private education, with market liberalization of the 1980s and 1990s, moved from the shadows of the illicit education market into a dominant position. In this way private education transformed themselves from purveyors of corruption to leaders in education. This explosion of the private education industry has coincided with the expansion of English education. In this way proficiency in English has been presented as the key to Korea's success in the new age of globalization. Thus the various entities that comprise the private education industry have become purveyors of a corrupting education that has systematically denigrated public education in terms of standardized exams like TOEIC and TOFEL.

Key words: Corrupting education, Private education, Private tutoring, Public education