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The Irony of the Unchecked Growth of Higher Education in South Korea: Crystallization of Class Cleavages and Intensifying Status Competition*

Doo Hwan Kim | Duksung Women's University
Yool Choi** | Hanyang University

This study raises questions about the discrepancy between the praise for Korean education by international organizations and Koreans' dissatisfaction with their education. First, the study identifies the main reason for the discrepancy as inequality at the level of higher education. To track down the formation of the current problem of educational inequality and excessive competition for status, the study evaluates the historical changes in South Korea's education system in the past several decades, focusing on the unchecked expansion of higher education. In doing so, the study shows how the aggregate decisions made by individuals and families, and the political dynamics of the past five decades have affected broad policy regarding educational stratification in South Korea. In the last section, the study presents what has been an empirical pattern of educational stratification in Korea reflecting all these social changes during the past five decades in Korea.

Keywords: *inequality in higher education, higher education expansion, politicization of education, deregulation, educational stratification*

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**Direct all correspondence to Yool Choi, The Commission for SSK Multi-Cultural Research, College of social sciences, Hanyang University, 222 Wangsibri-ro, Seondong-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea [E-mail: cyoolc@gmail.com].

Introduction

In September 2015, the World Economic Forum (WEF) published a report titled, "Inclusive Growth and Development Report 2015" and commented on South Korea's performance in education:

> The Republic of Korea has a particularly strong and inclusive education system, with excellent quality and highly equitable outcomes – it has the lowest gaps in reading and math scores between students from different income levels. (Samans et al. 2015, p. 41)

Yonhap News in South Korea headlined its article on South Korea's overall performance in the report "South Korea's Economy, Top in Education, Low in Others among Advanced Economies."[1] This headline can give an impression that at least South Koreans should be proud of or happy about their education system today. However, they are not. One must then wonder why South Koreans are not happy with their education system today. In order to answer the question, first we need to identify the thorniest problem of the current education system in South Korea.

South Korea's education system today has been summarized as equal at secondary level but unequal at postsecondary level (Kim 2007, p. 192). Following this observation, the general dissatisfaction of South Koreans with their education system, even if praised by others outside of South Korea, is closely connected with inequality in the postsecondary education system. In addition, Kim points out that South Korea's education system, equalized up to secondary level since 1974, returned to a hierarchical ranking system toward the end of 2000s. The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the historical change in South Korea's education system over the past several decades, focusing on the expansion of higher education and to discuss its implications for intergenerational mobility through investment in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

In many economically advanced western societies, higher education has been

[1] http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2015/09/09/0200000000AKR20150909132100009.HTML

transformed from an elite system to a mass system (Trow 1972). As Shavit et al. (2007) phrase it, "[T]he key question about educational expansion is whether it reduces inequality by providing more opportunities for persons from disadvantaged strata, or magnifies privileged" (1). In the case of higher education, the expansion has been mostly examined in terms of whether or not this transition brings about more equity in access to higher education. There has been a clear premium placed on a college degree and a greater return for more education, as numerous studies show in other social contexts. Since the 1980s, a college degree has widened the earnings gap between persons with a college education and those with only a high school education in the US (Mare 1995; Morris and Western 1999; Autor 2014), but the opposite is true in South Korea for college graduates who received their degree in the recent expansion period (Chang 2010). The value of a college degree may have decreased as the number of persons with college degrees increased because the rate of occupational upgrading has not met the continuous and universal expansion of higher education.

In the situation we witness in South Korea, we consider the position of Brint and Karabel (1989, qtd. in Arum, Gamoran and Shavit 2007, p. 5) as more relevant. They view expansion of higher education as *a process of diversion*, which reserves higher-status opportunities for the elite by channeling children of the working class to low-status post-secondary opportunities (2 year programs, newly established, without accumulated institutional human/social capital). In this case, expanding opportunities to higher education may maintain, rather than reduce, broad social inequalities. In a very critical review on school expansion in historical perspective, Pamela Walters (2000) writes:

> The enormous expansion of education, the most important school reform of the 20th century (p. 256) has allowed school officials and elites to accommodate pressures for greater access to education by disadvantaged groups and to satisfy social demands for equity, for fairness, and for greater social mobility via education without fundamentally jeopardizing the benefits that the educational system has conferred on more advantaged social groups. (p. 242)

Considering school expansion with regard to social inequality of education, she argues that we must consider both "political decisions made about the way that educational opportunities are distributed" and "decisions made by individuals and by families about whether to send their children to school."

(Walters 2000, p. 251) Thus, Shavit et al. (2007) argued that specific socio-political processes may have led to different systems of higher education, such as "diversified systems," as in South Korea, for example. This means that the engagement of corporate actors with political orientation (e.g. Ministry of Education under a particular political regime) in educational policy raises questions about the politicization of education. Because of the centrality of education to the continuity of socio-political orders, a specific political regime (e.g. authoritarian or democratic) is closely connected to their educational policies. People in a modern and industrialized society place significant pressure on educational policies implemented by their polities as well as on the capacity of educational systems to support the ideals of their systems. Accordingly, transformations in socio-political situations affect education domains. Specific political orders are closely connected to their diverse educational practices. The study is to investigate, first, socio-political dynamics and historical experiences that accelerated the growth of higher education in South Korea over the past several decades. Then we will show accompanying contests among different social groups to institutionalize rules for education competition and counteracting family strategies used by the upper-middle and middle class in South Korea to cope with this social change. In doing so, we hope to show how the aggregate of the decisions made by individuals and families has formed the historical change in broad policy regarding educational stratification in South Korea. In the last section, we will look at what has been an empirical pattern reflecting all these social changes during the past several decades in Korea and discuss what is happening in the Korean system of stratification.

Before 1980s: School Expansion and Explosion of Demand for Higher Education

In looking at the educational policy of South Korea and Taiwan up to 1980s, Cheng (1992) summarized that South Korea followed a path to educational reform divergent from Taiwan in pursuit of similar ambitious economic development, though both had similar historical experiences and developmental agendas. Being freed from Japanese colonialism after World War II, and experiencing the catastrophic Korean War and land reform, most Koreans living in South Korea had become both equal and poor by the end of 1950s. As a result, the structure of South Korean society was very fluid and highly mobile. There was "no upper class that could claim inborn superiority

and privilege." This unique historical experience made South Korea "a society with an exceptional degree of egalitarian ethic and intense desire for social mobility (Koo 2007c, p. 41)." People in South Korea would no longer be fixed in a rural community. Industrialization caused urbanization, migration to urban areas and social mobility, which resulted in the emergence of the urban middle class, which accumulated wealth in the process. In sum, before the 1980s, South Korea experienced an exceptional degree of egalitarianism and a highly mobile and fluid social and economic status differentiation.

Like other East Asian countries, Korea is well known to have a long tradition of Confucian culture that emphasizes the value of education. With this social base nestled deep in Korea, South Koreans generally consider education as a means of social mobility and status attainment (Seth 2002; Lett 1998). Soon after liberation from Japanese colonialism (1910-1945), South Korea achieved an impressive participation rate in basic education, which had been suppressed during the colonial period. By 1960, primary school education became universal and social demand for secondary education was soaring (Seth 2002; Park 2010). With the takeoff of economic development in the early 1960s, education in South Korea has been mainly a response to the need for more disciplined and well-trained workers for expanding capitalist industrialization. To compete with their Communist counterpart in the north and enhance the political legitimacy, the Park Chung-hee regime (1961-1979)[2] focused on South Korea's economy by pursuing an export-oriented industrialization from the 1960s onwards. In the process, Park's regime was faced with the problem of expanding and improving the educational system in order to sustain economic development toward the end of 1960s. However, particular political dynamics in South Korea, rather than economic considerations, accounts for educational policies, including those for higher education.

While the social demand for secondary education rose rapidly in the 1960s, middle school and high school enrollment rates reached only 36.6% and 20.3% by 1970.[3] In addition, a rigidly-established ranking system among

[2] Park took power in 1961 in a military coup and his regime ended with his assassination by the head of the South Korean CIA in 1979.

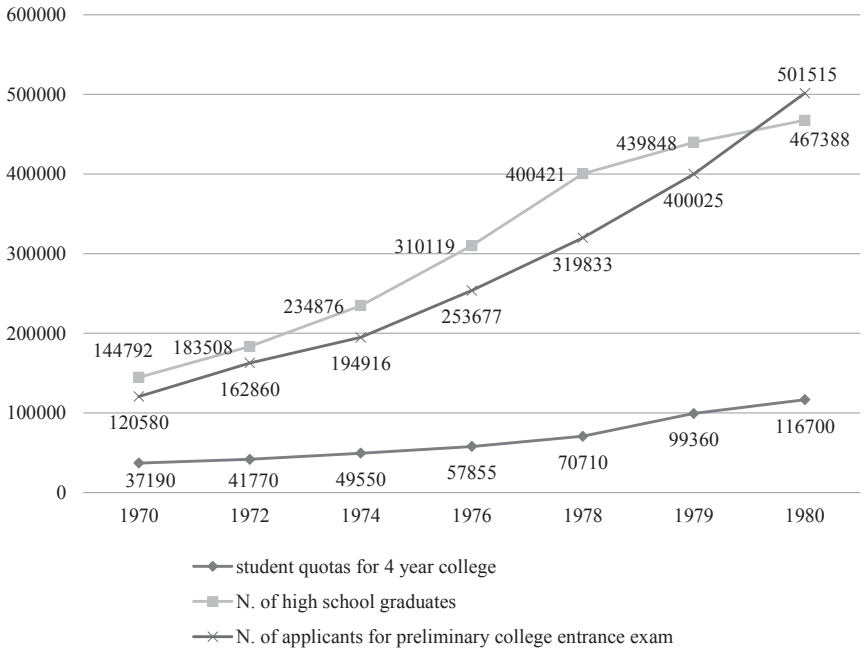
[3] Reader's caution is required for the numbers. Before 2003, South Korean education statistics used the "gross enrollment rate" which refers to the total number of students enrolled in each stage of schooling regardless of age. From 2003, following "Education at a Glance: OECD Indicator," South Korea has adopted the "net enrollment rate" which uses the number of students enrolled specifically aged for each stage of schooling as numerator and the number of population specifically aged for each stage of schooling as denominator. This study reports the net enrollment rate.

secondary schools at that time drove the whole society into deadly competition to enter the first-tier elite middle schools and successively one of elite high schools. Before the middle school enrollment rate expanded, it was usually expected that the top primary school graduates would advance to a good middle school on the basis of their entrance examination results. However, because many more primary school graduates wanted to progress to middle school and then to high school during the country's rapid economic development in the 1960s and 1970s, the competition to enter a prestigious middle and high school was highly intense and led many to take advantage of private tutoring. This family-level resource mobilization to win the race for educational credentials created a number of educational and social problems. In response, the Park Chung-hee regime adopted the Middle School Equalization Policy (MSEP) in 1968 and the High School Equalization Policy (HSEP) in 1974 (Park 2010, pp. 581-3).

The main purpose of both policies was to stem excessive educational competition. As a result, middle school and high school enrollment rates doubled in South Korea (73.3% for middle school and 48.8% for high school) by 1980. In the meantime, Park's regime strongly controlled the number of student quotas for higher education "through the presidential decree on College and University Student Quotas (1965) and enforced the registration of bachelor's and master's degree holders in 1966" (Park 2007, p. 90). During the 1970s when wage gaps between college graduates and others widened, and competition for higher education proliferated, the government first needed to enforce the HSEP to maintain political and social stability. The successive military regime of General Chun Doo-hwan[4] additionally instituted a nationwide ban on private tutoring in 1980. Through these measures, the developmental state prohibited both elite schools and private tutoring. They saw the fierce competition in education as intolerably troubling to a family's financial means and producing detrimental inequalities in education.

Previous literature on educational policy for college admission quotas usually "distinguishes three periods in the development of South Korean higher education: before 1980, the 1990s, and the 1990s" (Park 2007, p. 90). However there was a 39% increase in college student quotas from 1978 to 1979 in the last year of Park's regime. This included a quota of 28,650 students for 4-year colleges, 19,450 for 2-year college and 2,120 for teacher's colleges for elementary-schools, and the total number was 49,450 (Lee 1992,

[4] Chun Doo-hwan seized power through another military coup in 1979.



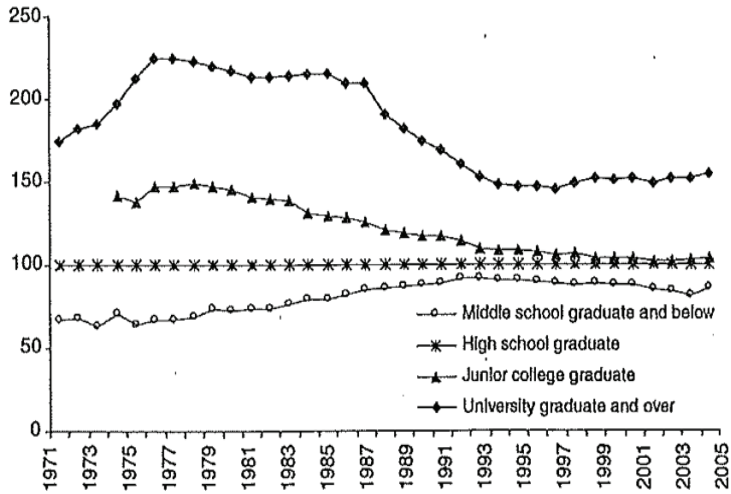
Source: Lee 1992, p. 143 and p. 163.

Fig. 1.—Student quotas for 4-year college and demand for higher education, 1970-1980

p. 155; Figure 1).

The success of heavy and chemical industrialization since 1973 was behind this remarkable increase in higher education quotas. From 1972 to 1979, the real growth rate of GNP was 10% on average annually (Amsden 1989, p. 55). In the process, the rapidly expanding South Korean economy experienced transformation of its industrial and occupational structure, requiring more highly-educated people to assume managerial and professional white collar office work. Thus, the mounting demand for higher education came from not only aspirants for higher education witnessing the notable wage increase of college graduates, but also the suffering of the industry from rising labor cost for white collar workers (cf. Figure 2). This situation forced Park's regime to change its policy on college student quotas.

The rapid economic growth in 1960s and 1970s gave people in South Korea access to upward mobility through investment, particularly in higher education, and created a sizable middle class (Kim 1990; Koo 2007c; Park



Source: Chang 2010, p. 47

Fig. 2.—Relative wages by educational attainment, 1971-2005 (high school grad. = 100)

2010). The speedy expansion of the industrial working class was also an outcome of industrialization; for instance, wage earners increased sharply from 31.5 percent in 1963 to 54.2 percent in 1985. The increase of wage earners in the manufacturing industry in the same period was over sevenfold and in the commercial and service sectors more than threefold (Koo 2001, p. 35). The working class experienced an increase in standards of living from the economic growth, but they remained at the bottom of the social stratum.

1980s – Early 1990s: From Elite to Massive Higher Education System

Figure 1 shows the rapid expansion of high school enrollment since the implementation of the HSEP in 1974 and comparable increase in the demand for higher education. The figure also explains that there were more applicants for preliminary college entrance exams than high school graduates in 1980, an increase which resulted from those who graduated from high school in the past years and wanted to retry the college entrance exam. Because of this accelerating demand for higher education and the rising cost of private tutoring, General Chun Doo-hwan announced the 7.30 Education Reform in

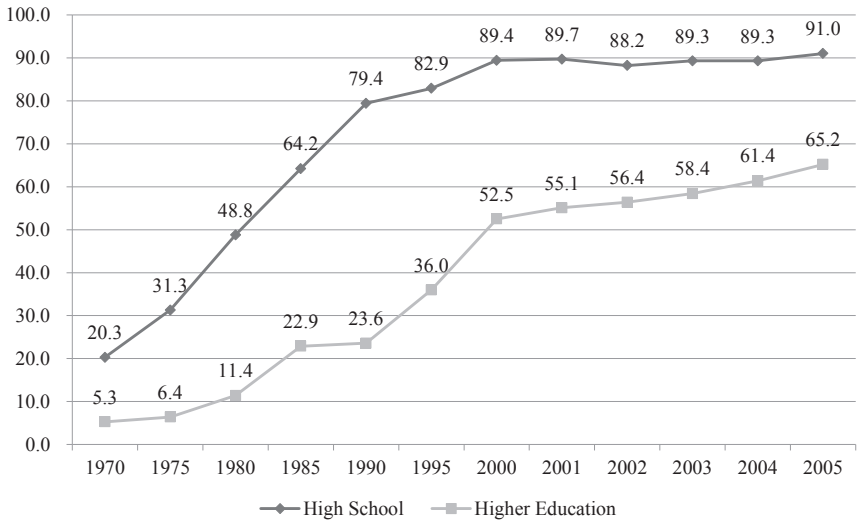


Fig. 3.—High school and higher education enrolment rates, 1970-2005

1980 which included a complete ban on private tutoring and changes in student quotas for higher education, from admission to graduation (Park 2007; Park 2010). The government allowed 30% more students for admission than for graduation. Though the graduation quota was abolished in 1987 due to implementation problems (Park 2007), this government policy moved the Korean higher education system closer to the initial stage of mass higher education according to Trow (1972). The enrollment rates in high school and higher education from 1970 to 2005 appear in Figure 3. In 1980, the enrollment rate for higher education was only 11.4% but this number more than tripled in 1995 to 36.0%. Though the rate of advancement to higher education was already 27.2% in 1980, the enrollment rate for high school was only 48.8%. Since the enrollment rate for high school reached closer to 90% in 2000, enrollment rates rather than advancement rates are useful for us to gauge the 'social crowding'[5] trend in higher education in Korea. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the relative wage returns of university graduates compared to high school graduates began to diminish around 1987. In fact it was about the time when those who entered universities with the onset of graduation quotas joined the labor market. While the reducing wage returns of

[5] Here we define social crowding as overpopulation with certain social characteristics. More specifically, social crowding in higher education is to mean overpopulation with those who attained higher education over and beyond the demand of the labor market.

university education did not mean an excess of social crowding in higher education yet, the wage premium of junior college graduates in comparison with high school graduates quickly withered by the middle of 1990s (see Figure 2).

In order to understand excessive educational fervor and competition, foreign observers usually emphasize the role of family in Korea. One such observer writes, "familial and societal values have supported participation in higher education to the degree that families are prepared to make considerable sacrifice to pay their children's education costs at this level" (Hayhoe 1995, p. 304). Even in the 1990s, "Middle-class families and those aspiring to become middle class make great sacrifices in trying to give their children what is necessary to qualify them for and provide them with a college education" (Lett 1998, p. 45). This phenomenon may share aspects of the effect found in Western societies of family backgrounds on educational outcomes. However, its distinctive character can be ascertained by surveying Korea's condensed modern social development, as Kim (1990) argues. According to him, familism in contemporary South Korea is an invention of rapid industrialization period rather than inertia from traditional Korean history. He describes modern Korean familism as different from traditional Korean familism in two ways, while sharing the priority of family interests. First are the interactions with economic and instrumental objectives and second, the pronounced reduction in the perceived range of family membership. Thus, modern familism in Korea resembles the image of 'amoral familism' in Banfield's study (1958, qtd. in Kim 1990, p. 415) because Korea's egoistic familists are fervent in pursuing their material and short-term interests. They do further their private interests even at the expense of others' or of the public good since they assume that others will do the same (Kim 1990, p. 416).

According to Kim (1990), this amoral familism emerged from the process of industrialization, accompanied by urbanization and social mobility, which produced the urban middle class. The middle class was an economic beneficiary of industrialization. But being a beneficiary of industrialization was not an adequate explanation for their egoistic and competitive behavior. It was industrialization that caused economic inequalities. Such industrialization occurred by adopting a policy of unbalanced economic development that skewed rewards distribution in the process. This skewed distribution of benefits produced relative frustration among non-beneficiaries. However, the relative frustration ironically induced non-beneficiaries to more active participation in industrialization since social

mobility was still possible if they attained higher education credentials, the most effective weapon for social mobility. The policy of unbalanced economic development would bring faster and more conspicuous results of economic development and was more advantageous to the interests of military regimes. Why? Political elites of military regimes desperately needed to realize their economic promise to the ordinary people to gain political support to legitimate their power (pp. 416-9).

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the Korean developmental state has implemented a series of educational policies to alleviate aggravating social problems coming from a pathological degree of educational competition. Though these policy makings were also to promote political legitimacy of military regimes (Kim 1990; Lee 1992), it is important to note that these policies were welcomed by the general public in Korea. It was the upper segment of the Korean middle class that was not happy about the developmental state's educational policy shifts toward egalitarianism. However, it was important for the developmental state to maintain connections with the general population in order to push rapid economic growth (Park 2010).

Since the 1990s, though, the discourse on a competitive Korea began to identify South Korea's equalized education system as a burden to South Korea's global competitiveness, and began to restore the legalization of elite schools and private tutoring (Park 2010). In the next section, we will explore the process in relation to the democratization of Korea in 1987.

1990s and After: The Recent Explosion of Higher Education in South Korea

The working class people, in any event, experienced an improvement in living standards in the process of Korea's rapid industrialization. However, they stayed relatively low in the hierarchy of Korean society. Accordingly, they generally supported egalitarian educational policies owing to their strong desire for social mobility. On the contrary, people in the upper middle class expressed some degree of opposition to the government's educational policies, which they saw as repressive. They had experienced upward mobility during the country's rapid economic growth and had become disjointed from the mainstream middle class by the early 1980s. Class differentiation within the middle class occurred during the 1980s and 1990s (Koo 2007b). The more affluent upper middle class contested the egalitarian

policies and constantly called for the alteration of the rules. Some began to voice their displeasure about the allegedly "downward equalization effects" of the HSEP on students' academic achievement. The democratization of Korea in 1987 not only empowered working-class people demanding the redress of deepening social and economic inequality but also encouraged the middle class pursuit of status advancement (Koo 2007a).

The neo-liberal turn toward the end of the 1990s crystallized differentiated class structure that replaced once fluid and highly mobile social structure in Korea. The affluent and upper middle class became big supporters of neoliberal reforms that would dismiss the egalitarian education policies in Korea's 1970s and 1980s. They wanted elite secondary schools and were ready to spend accumulated private assets for their children's education (Park, Byun, and Kim 2010).

However, because individuals and families from all classes shared an exceptional degree of egalitarianism due to the changes in class structure after liberation from Japan, the Korean state after 1987 democratization had to satisfy both the desire of the middle class to pursue status and the demand of working class to counteract deepening social and economic inequality (Koo 2007c). In this regard, the enormous expansion of higher education may have been anticipated in the process of the 1980s democratization movement. Since the success of democratization in 1987, the state in South Korea began to reduce its control over education by introducing marketization and deregulation. In fact, the economic liberalization and deregulation already underway by authoritarian regimes before 1987 was succeeded by the democratic regimes in South Korea (Kong 2005). In this socio-political context, deregulation was the most important political means for both the long-time ruling party and opposition party to win popular support and also build their political legitimacy. Accordingly, privatization policies were introduced for various sectors. The higher education policy was not an exception since education is regarded as the mechanism of social mobility by all class groups (Kim and Woo 2009; Chae and Hong 2009). Overall, higher education institutions transited from centralized government control to a more market-oriented model. As the role of the South Korean government in higher education changed from "regulator" to "facilitator," a large proportion of institutions established or upgraded in this period were supported by the private sector.

Some recent studies on higher education expansion in South Korea argue that over-privatization has been the primary mechanism of the saturated expansion of higher education in South Korea (Kim and Woo 2009;

Chae and Hong 2009). These studies identified that the inducing forces of extensive private sector participation were Korean parents' zeal and their willingness to financially support their children's studies.

However, because deregulation has been responsible for the privatization of higher education, we need to pay critical attention to deregulation in the broader context of socio-political development in South Korea. In the transition from authoritarian regimes to political democratization, deregulation was adopted as a political means to win popular support in South Korea. In particular, the Kim Young Sam administration (1993-1998) in South Korea, the first civilian regime since the 1961 military coup, adopted deregulation as a major policy objective to distinguish itself from the long lasted military regimes before. Regarding higher education, Kim's government lifted regulations on establishing a new university and liberalized student quotas for higher education institutions outside of the capital city region by the 5.31 Education Reform. As a result, the number of universities in South Korea increased from 118 in 1990 to 186 in 2007 (Choi 2007; Kim and Lee 2006) and higher education enrollment rate increased from 23.6% in 1990 to 65.2% in 2005,[6] the year Korean government reintroduced regulations on university establishment. Unfortunately, however, the unfettered expansion of higher education failed to meet the expectation of alleviating educational inequality. Both human capital theory and the functional theory of stratification assume that reward conferral is the natural corollary to educational attainment. Whether or not the governments' policy objective is reducing the impact of family background by expanding the higher educational system, expanded opportunities in higher education naturally accompany expectations of occupational upgrade. However, the rate of occupational upgrade did not meet the continuous expansion of educational attainment in Korea toward the end of 1990s. This is mainly because Korea's neo-liberal globalization toward the end of the 1990s unfortunately "followed the financial crisis of 1997-98 and totally transformed the structure of the labor market, generating massive numbers of contingent workers who are vulnerable to economic insecurity and social risks" (Shin 2010, p. 211).

[6] The highest enrollment rate (70.5%) was recorded in 2008 and it was 68.7% in 2013. Advancement rate to higher education reached a peak of 77.8% in 2009 and lowered to 70.7% in 2013.

Intensifying Status Competition: Strategies Circumventing the Limit of Growth

Today, the Korean higher education is universal, according to Trow's classification (1972). However, "What matters in the educational competition is not absolute level of attainment, but relative attainment" (Walters 2000, p. 257). This process probably entails "status ascription" rather than "status achievement" due to a lack of expansion of high-status occupations commensurate with the growth of higher education (Grusky 1983). Resources available for families of high socio-economic backgrounds enable them to express ascriptive forces as achieved status through acts such as buying homes in high-status residential areas with good-quality public schools or sending their children to private schools (Goldthorpe 2000, p. 249). The family-specific actions that parents take to manage their child's school career are expressed in the relationship between socio-economic status and academic achievement (Baker and Stevenson 1986).

Existing literature on higher education expansion in Korea appreciates its contribution to educational equality and economic development. The expansion of higher education in Korea after 1995, on the other hand, strengthened the hierarchy of universities, which makes social mobility more fixed than before. Deciphering this puzzling situation calls for attending to both contests at the institutional level and competition at the family level. At the institutional level, problems include demanding more private or elite secondary schools, narrowly defining merit by test scores, making admission processes more complicated, and allowing certain universities to hold their own entrance examinations to recruit preferred students.

Regarding competition at family level, affluent or upper middle-class parents, who were earlier restrained under the authoritarian state's egalitarian educational policy, have begun to spend excessive amounts of money to help their children enter an elite secondary school with the hope that they will inherit the class status and success they themselves have achieved (Kim and Kim 2013). With more and more families' private investment in their children's education, the situation in Korea is creating intense competition for entrance to more prestigious institutions. In the process, the Korean public has debated issues such as the financial burden of higher education (e.g. tuition increase), the definition of merit for admission criteria, the flight of upper middle and middle class students to overseas education, school choice at secondary level, and the burden of private finance for education. In 2010,

the average households of Korea used 7.9% of their disposable income for outside-of-school education only for one child (Jones and Urasawa 2012, p. 24-25). In this way, education joined the wage inequality, flexible employment and bias towards competitive individualism that dismantled the egalitarian social contract once the developmental state arrived in Korean education (Park 2010).

Trends of Educational Stratification and Its Consequences from Empirical Findings

In this section, we conduct several analyses to empirically examine how educational stratification and its consequences on the labor market have changed during the last 40 years. Among various research questions on this issue, we mainly focus on the accessibility and effects of postsecondary education. In particular, we consider the strong hierarchy of tertiary education in Korea using more segmented categories of postsecondary education: high school graduation, 2-year college, 4-year college, and elite 4-year college. Two key research questions are as follows: 1) How does family background affect college destination, and 2) how do college credentials affect wages and occupational status of the first job. We examine these two questions for the four birth cohorts from 1943 to 1986.

Data

For this study, we used the Education and Social Mobility Survey (ESM). ESM is conducted by Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), a government agency. The ESM collected information on four birth cohorts through four years (2008-2011), which include those who were born in 1943-1955 (ESM 2008), 1956-1965 (ESM 2009), 1966-1975 (ESM 2010), and 1976-1986 (ESM 2011) by using a proportional stratified sampling method.[7] The ESM is a nationally representative sample for each birth cohort with extensive information about the respondents' family backgrounds, education histories and job trajectories. It is a particularly useful dataset to compare educational structure and social mobility in Korea among those four birth cohorts. Table 1 shows birth year, age of the respondents in 2015, number of observations,

[7] The enumeration district based on Population and Housing Census (PHC) was used as the key stratification variable.

Table 1
Birth Year, Age, Number of Respondent and College Years by Cohorts

	Birth Year	Age	N	College years
Group 1	1943-1955	61-73	1526	1963-1975
Group 2	1956-1965	51-60	2038	1976-1985
Group 3	1966-1975	41-50	2034	1986-1995
Group 4	1976-1986	30-40	2013	1996-2006

and college years by four birth cohorts.

Measurements

Table 2 shows measurements of variables. First, two key independent variables are parents' education and occupational status (continuous variables). For both variables, we used the highest values of years of education and socio-economic index among father and mother. Four control variables are gender of the respondents (male=0), region at age 14 (metro = 1), number of siblings (continuous variable) and family composition at age 14 (living with both parents = 1). We used three dependent variables. The first variable is college destination given high school completion. This variable has four mutually exclusive categories (1: leave school (high school graduation), 2: 2-year college, 3: 4-year college, 4: elite 4-year college (top 30)). To examine the effect of family background on educational attainment, we used multinomial regression with college destination as a dependent variable. The reference category is those who do not go to college. Two other dependent variables are wage and occupational status of the first job after the respondents' final level of education. Wages are inflation-adjusted in 2010 Korean won and log-transformed. For occupational status, we used Ganzeboom's socio-economic index. To see how educational attainment of the respondents affects labor market outcomes, we utilized OLS regression.

Results

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for variables used in the analysis by four birth cohorts. Several key variables increase or decrease monotonically as birth cohort changes from group 1 to group 4. These changing patterns indicate how structural distribution of education and occupation in Korean society has changed for both parents and children during the given time

TABLE 2
Measurement of Variables (N=6,927)

Variables	Description	Mean	Standard deviation
Independent variables			
Parents' education	Years of education (continuous): Highest years of education among parents	7.815	4.888
Parents' occupation (SEI)	Ganzeboom's socio-economic index (Continuous): Highest SEI among parents at respondents' age at 14	34.091	13.437
Control variables			
Male	Male = 1, Female = 0	.506	
Metro	Metro city = 1 (Seoul, Pusan, Daegue, Gwangju, Inchon, Ulsan); Other = 0	.369	
Number of siblings	Continuous	4.206	1.886
Family composition	Living with both biological parents at age 14, 1 = yes, 0 = no	.917	
Dependent variables			
Transition to college 2	Transition to college given high school completion (1: Leave school, 2: 2-year college 3: 4-year college 4: Elite college (top 30))	1: 48.76 (%) 2: 15.29 3: 23.64 4: 12.30	
Wage of first job (N=5268)	Inflation adjusted log wage (in 2010 won)	4.678	.913
Occupational status (SEI) of First Job (N=6336)	Ganzeboom's socio-economic index (Continuous)	41.932	12.497

periods. For example, two key independent variables, parents' education and occupation, monotonically increase from group 1 to group 4. While occupational status gently increases, parents' education rapidly rises from 3.953 in group 1 to 11.227 in group 4. The increasing pattern of parents' education and occupational status coincides with children's educational

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics by Cohorts

	Group1 (1943-1955)	Group2 (1956-1965)	Group3 (1966-1975)	Group4 (1976-1986)
Independent variables				
Parents' education	3.953 (4.646)[a]	6.383 (4.804)	8.751 (3.962)	11.227 (3.188)
Parents' occupation (SEI)	29.871 (12.387)	33.017 (13.708)	34.307 (12.994)	38.082 (13.226)
Control variables				
Male	.487	.515	.503	.514
Metro	.234	.329	.388	.488
Number of siblings	5.458 (1.848)	5.035 (1.715)	3.968 (1.539)	2.680 (1.115)
Family composition	.909	.919	.906	.933
Dependent variables				
College destination given high School completion[b]	1:74.17(%) 2: 6.98 3: 9.25 4: 9.60	1: 58.568(%) 2: 12.46 3: 19.05 4: 9.93	1: 52.09(%) 2: 14.91 3: 20.99 4: 12.00	1: 29.53(%) 2: 20.58 3: 34.50 4: 15.39
(log)Wage of first job[c]	3.934 (1.215) *(N=677)*	4.205 (.953) (N=1347)	5.011 (.685) (N=1642)	5.048 (.445) (N=1602)
Occupational status of first job	36.141 (12.424) *(N=1231)*	41.462 (12.562) (N=1755)	43.862 (11.914) (N=1721)	44.777 (11.550) (N=1629)
N	1359	1867	1862	1839

Note.—[a] Numbers in parentheses are standard deviation. [b] College destination = 1: Leave school, 2: 2-year College 3: 4-year college 4: Elite college (top 30); [c] Inflation adjusted log wage (in 2010 won)

destination in postsecondary education and labor market outcomes. For example, the proportion of tertiary education in group 1 is only 25.83%, but it dramatically increases to about 70.47%. If we consider only four-year college, the proportion of four-year college in group 1 is about 19%, but that of group 4 is about 50%. Children's wage and occupational status also monotonically

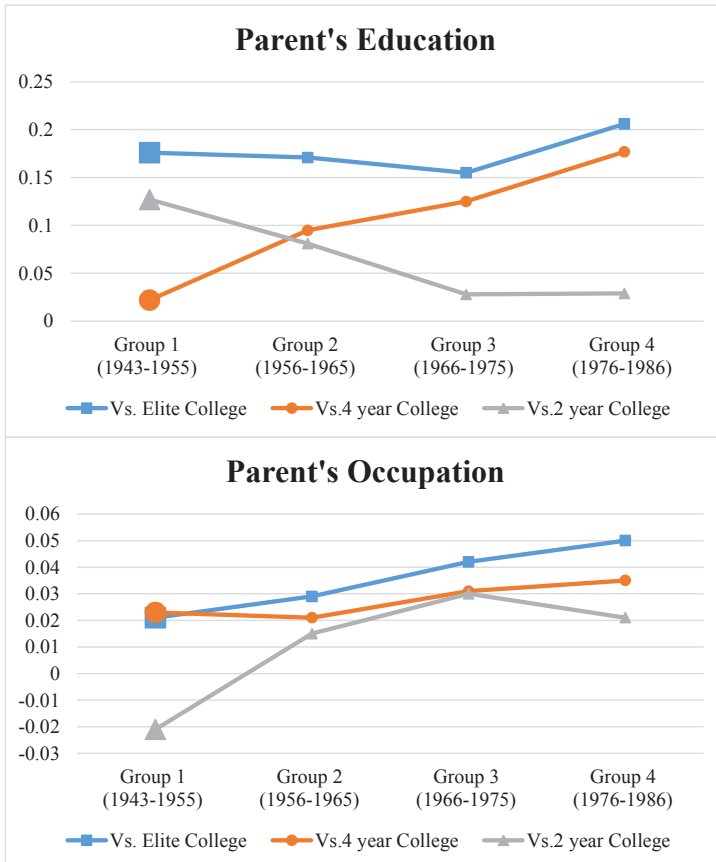


Fig. 4.—Parameter estimates of parents' education and parents' occupation for log odds of transition to college by birth cohorts in ESM 08-11 (Baseline category = Do not go to college)

increase from group 1 to group 4. In sum, these overall trends confirmed two structural changes in Korea for the last 40 years: educational expansion and transformation of occupational structure.

First, we estimated the effect of family background on the educational destination of the respondents in postsecondary education. Figure 4 shows parameter estimates of parents' education and occupation for log odds of transition to college (Every coefficient and standard error of multinomial regression is presented in appendix table A). We used a multinomial regression and presented separate trend line of estimates over four birth cohorts by each transition type. First, the effect of parents' education on

probability of attending postsecondary education differs by types of transition. For example, while the effect of parents' education on attending 2-year college compared to high school graduation decreases from group 1 to group 4, it continuously increases for probability of attending 4-year college. For elite college, the effect of parents' education slightly decreases from group 1 to 3, but it rapidly increases for group 4. While parents' education shows somewhat mixed patterns, the effect of parents' occupation on attending postsecondary education yields similar trends for the three transition types. That is, the effect of parents' occupation continuously increases from group 1 to group 4 except for those attending 2-year college in group 4.

Since parents' education and occupation show different patterns, it is difficult to simply summarize how family backgrounds differently affect the probability of attending the three types of postsecondary education. However, figure 4 suggests several important implications of the relations between family background and educational attainment over the four birth cohorts. First, both the effects of parents' education and occupation increase from group 1 to group 4 for the probability of attending 4-year college compared to high school graduation alone. Considering that this type of transition comprises the majority of transitions from high school to postsecondary education, this result indicates that the impact of family background on postsecondary education has not weakened during the last 40 years even if there was a dramatic expansion in the postsecondary education in Korea. Second, the effects of parents' education and occupation show opposite patterns for the probability of attending elite college compared to high school graduation from group 1 to group 3. However, one notable trend is that both effects increase from group 3 to group 4. The opposite patterns of parents' education and occupation may offset each other and maintain relatively stable effects of family background in groups 1 to 3. However, uniformly increasing trends of both effects in group 4 indicate that the impact of family background on attending an elite college rapidly increases in recent years. Furthermore, it is also notable that the effects of family background are greatest for elite college attendance among all types of transition. Third, in contrast to elite college, the impact of both parents' education and occupation on the probability of attending 2 year college decreases in group 4 while they show opposite trends from group 1 to group 3. It is noteworthy that the decreasing impact of family background on attending 2- year college in group 4 is opposite to the trends of both 4-year college and elite 4-year college and this suggests complicated patterns of educational stratification by types of postsecondary transition in recent birth cohorts.

TABLE 4
Results from OLS Regression Models Predicting Respondent's Log Wage and Socio-economic Index of First Job by Cohorts[a]

	Total (1943-1986)	Group 1 (1943-1955)	Group 2 (1956-1965)	Group 3 (1966-1975)	Group 4 (1976-1986)
Log wage[b]					
Parents' education	.036***[c] (.003)[d]	.022[†] (011)	-.001 (.006)	.014** (.005)	.005 (.004)
Parents' occupation	-.004*** (.001)	-.002 (.004)	-.001 (.002)	.001 (.002)	.003* (.001)
Education					
2-Year	.333*** (.035)	.182 (.235)	.458*** (.082)	.148** (.047)	.079** (.030)
4-Year	.401*** (.032)	.270 (.220)	.736*** (.071)	.259*** (.043)	.068* (.029)
Elite	.473*** (.042)	-.218 (.221)	.831*** (.097)	.373*** (.056)	.282*** (.036)
N	5268	677	1347	1642	1602
R^2	.184	.019	.156	.130	.084
SEI					
Parents' education	.378*** (.037)	.443*** (.077)	.280*** (.067)	.309*** (.081)	.222* (.105)
Parents' occupation	.062*** (.013)	.096** (.030)	.113*** (.023)	.020 (.025)	.060* (.025)
Education					
2-Year	6.381*** (.434)	11.923*** (1.785)	6.853*** (.887)	6.321*** (.761)	4.271*** (.734)
4-Year	9.219*** (.394)	14.174*** (1.575)	10.856*** (.767)	8.040*** (.693)	7.819*** (.696)
Elite	12.438*** (.510)	12.577*** (1.640)	12.856*** (1.030)	13.778*** (.896)	10.646*** (.870)
N	6336	1231	1755	1721	1629
R^2	.252	.246	.265	.221	.186

Note.—[a] Each model includes all control variables but not shown. [b] Inflation-adjusted log monthly wage of the first job (in 2010 won); [c] [†]p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 ; [d] Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4 presents results from OLS regression predicting respondents' log wages and occupational status (socio-economic index) of the first job. Theses analyses aim to understand how respondents' educational attainment affects their labor market outcomes over the four birth cohorts. We divided educational levels for four categories by high school graduation (reference category), 2-year college, 4-year college and elite 4-year college (top 30 schools). The overall trend is similar for both outcome variables, wages and socio-economic index, which is that the premium of postsecondary education decreases from group 1 to group 4. However, detailed patterns of returns to education show somewhat different trends by outcome variables (wages and SEI) and types of postsecondary education (2-year, 4- year, and elite 4-year). Since the group 1 has too many missing values for both outcomes, we mainly interpreted the result for group 2, 3, and 4.

First, for both wages and SEI, while the premium of 2-year college and 4-year college drastically decreases from group 2 to 4, returns to elite 4-year college show a relatively smaller decrease. For example, the coefficients of wage premiums of 2-year college and 4-year colleges compared to high school graduation decreases from .458 to .079 and from .736 to .068, respectively. However, that of elite 4-year college decreases from .831 to .282. For the SEI, while the estimates of 2-year college and 4-year college compared to high school graduation decrease from 6.853 to 4.271 and from 10.856 to 7.819 respectively, the effects of elite 4-year college decrease from 12.856 to 10.646. These results suggest that the dramatic educational expansion during the last 40 years decreases the overall premium of postsecondary education. However, this pattern is mainly driven by decreasing returns to 2-year and 4-year college.

Second, when we compare wages and SEI, the decreasing effects of postsecondary education from group 2 to group 4 are much greater in wages than SEI. This result suggests that the variation of wages within occupation is much greater in the recent cohort than previous cohorts. Therefore, educational attainment still seems to be an important factor to decide one's occupational status. However, it does not guarantee a similar wage level to that of previous birth cohorts.

Concluding Remarks

This study examined the historical changes in South Korea's education system over the past several decades, focusing on higher education expansion, and

discussed its implication for the social stratification of Korean society. In doing so, we showed the irony of the fact that higher education expansion, which was expected to lesson inequality, actually intensified educational competition and deepened inequality in South Korea. Because the expansion of higher education by the 1980s was driven by the market demand for the highly educated, it could meet the expectation of those who invested in higher education by providing decent jobs for those who attained higher education. However, educational reform including the unchecked expansion of higher education in 1990s, did not meet the heightened expectations of those who acquired higher education, and only resulted in despair for those from the lower classes who participated in higher education with limited resources. This was because the labor market, totally transformed after 1997 financial crisis, produced large numbers of workers who were exposed to precarious, insecure social and economic situations. In addition, those who became upper-middle class and accumulated their wealth began to spend massive amounts of money and to change institutional rules imposed by authoritarian regimes in order to ensure their children inherited what they achieved.

In order to confirm these changes that occurred over the past several decades, we analyzed empirical data of 4 different age cohorts from 1943-1986 to find out historical trends of 1) associations between family background and educational attainment as measured by college destination and 2) associations between 3 types of different college attainment and wages and occupational status of the first job. We limit our analyses to the first job because we want to compare 4 different age cohorts in terms of return to educational attainment in the changing opportunity structure of higher education.

Two notable findings from empirical analyses on associations between family backgrounds and educational attainment are (1) associations between the probability of attending an elite college and family background, measured with parents' education and occupation, increases in group 4, and (2) associations between the probability of attending a 2-year college and both parents' education and occupation decreases in group 4, while they show opposite trends from group 1 to group 3. In terms of returns to college attainment, our analyses show there were overall decreases in returns to college attainment but decreases in returns to attainment of elite college was much less than returns to a 2-year or 4-year college attainment.

According to OECD's Education at a Glance 2015, those who attained 4-year college education in Korea receive 150% of high school graduates'

wages, but this wage premium kept decreasing in Korea. Since OECD statistics do not consider age groups, we need caution in understanding this number. In fact, OECD reports that Koreans' higher education (2-year and 4-year college together) attainment rate among 25-34 olds is 68% while the corresponding proportion among 55-64 olds is only 17% (OECD 2015). Because a significant proportion of members from the old age cohort is still active in the labor market, the wage premium for those who attained 4-year college education from the young age cohort should be much lower than 150%. However, the issue is not a diminishing return to higher education but a polarizing return. Regarding return to 4-year college education, Oh's (2015) study reports, the wage of the first job for a graduate from a 4-year college ranked at the top is almost 160% of that for a graduate from a 4-year college ranked at the bottom among colleges located in the capital city region of Korea. Another study reports that as of 2010 in Korea, 23% of 4-year college graduates among 34 years old or younger earn less than the mean wage of high school graduates (Lee, Jeong and Hong 2014).

Lucas' (2001) theory of 'effectively maintained inequality' postulates that those in a high socio-economic status leverage their privileges "to secure quantitatively similar but qualitatively better education" (p. 1652). And Alon (2009) shows that class inequality in U.S. higher education has intensified through the joint of two mechanisms: "class-based polarization in test scores (adaptation) and . . . a greater emphasis on test scores in admission (exclusion)" (p. 737). Relying on these two studies, Kim and Kim's qualitative research on graduates from a type of elite secondary school argues that "attending an elite university is in itself no longer the end of the game" in Korea because today's privileged groups in Korea "with the aim of effectively maintaining their status have begun to invest private resources in qualitatively distinguishing their children from others as early as possible, even prior to secondary school in many cases" (2013, p. 43). Demanding for tracking, or founding elite secondary schools, is one strategy to achieve the aim of effectively maintaining their status, which can make possible the working of Weber's social closure and the accumulation of social capital (Burris 2004). Thus Kim and Kim see "What they have in mind is not educational arithmetic (ensuring their children learn more quickly and effectively), but rather social arithmetic (a status reproduction strategy)" (p. 43). Along with the heightened role of the college ranking system, a restored elite secondary school system (Kim 2007) separates students by social class and test-taking ability, increases the effects of parents' SES on educational/occupational standing, and causes diastrophism under the surface of the

Korean stratification system.

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DOO HWAN KIM is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Duksung Women's University. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago. He has published studies on educational inequality in *Social Forces, Sociological Spectrum, International Journal of Educational Development, Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking, Social Indicators Research, Asia-Pacific Education Researcher* and others. *Address:* Department of Sociology, Duksung Women's University, Seoul 01369, South Korea. [*E-mail:* dhkim@duksung.ac.kr]

YOOL CHOI is postdoctoral researcher in Commission for SSK Multi-Cultural Research at Hanyang University. He received his PhD in sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2015. His areas of interest include social stratification, social demography, and sociology of education, health, and aging. His recent publications appeared in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility,* and *Korean Journal of Sociology. Address:* The Commission for SSK Multi-Cultural Research, College of social sciences, Hanyang University, 222 Wangsibri-ro, Seondong-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea. [*E-mail:* cyoolc@gmail.com]

APPENDIX A
Results from Multinomial Logistic Regression Models Predicting Transition to College Given High School Completion by Cohorts (Baseline category = Do not go to college)

	Total (1943-1986)	Group 1 (1943-1955)	Group 2 (1956-1965)	Group 3 (1966-1975)	Group 4[a] (1976-1986)
Vs. Elite college					
Parents' education	.188*** (.015)	.176*** (.037)	.171*** (.027)	.155*** (.029)	.206*** (.035)
Parents' occupation	.034*** (.004)	.021* (.010)	.029*** (.007)	.042*** (.007)	.050*** (.008)
Vs.4 year college					
Parents' education	.143*** (.011)	.022 (.034)	.095*** (.019)	.125*** (.022)	.177*** (.027)
Parents' occupation	.022*** (.003)	.023** (.010)	.021** (.006)	.031*** (.006)	.035*** (.007)
Vs.2 year college					
Parents' education	.085*** (.012)	.127** (.040)	.081*** (.022)	.028 (.023)	.029 (.027)
Parents' occupation	.011** (.004)	-.021 (.015)	.015* (.007)	.030*** (.007)	.021** (.007)
N	5697	573	1501	1791	1832
LR chi2	1393.50	98.13	282.07	372.28	450.66
Prob > chi2	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Pseudo R^2	.099	.100	.084	.086	.092

Note.—[a] Each model includes all control variables but not shown. [b] †p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001; standard errors in parentheses.