

# Class and Cosmopolitan Striving: Mothers' Management of English Education in South Korea

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## Abstract

*This article considers the practical and symbolic value of English in South Korea. We argue that English works as an index of South Korea's and South Koreans' cosmopolitan striving in the global order. We assert, however, that the values of English diverge across the class spectrum. We thus examine the life of English and cosmopolitanism through the narratives of three mothers with distinct class positions on their management of their children's English after-school education. We consider the mothers' interest in and commitment to their children's—and in some cases their own—English education as an inter-generational gendered project. We examine the ways in which mothers' management of this after-school English education speaks to their own class mobility (or maintenance) and cosmopolitan strivings. The article asserts that English works simultaneously as both a local and global sign, and that nationalism and cosmopolitanism are not contradictory. [South Korea, class, mobility, English language, education, cosmopolitanism]*

English has long been a class marker in South Korea: namely, knowledge of and comfort with English has been a sign of educational opportunity, and for some of the experience of travel or study abroad and of contact with foreigners in South Korea. Echoing many scholars, we appreciate “English” as an “ideological vehicle” because it has value that exceeds its practical use (Francis and Ryan 1998:27; see also Kachru 1982 and Olivio 2003). This said, however, the practical mastery of English is an increasingly valuable commodity throughout the world. As David Crystal (2003:4, 6) and others have powerfully asserted, it is arguably the world’s first “global language,” a language used by more people than any other language and one with a “special role that is recognized in every country.” South Korea offers a case of the ascendance of English not as a first language (e.g., the United States, India), but as a powerful foreign language.<sup>1</sup> Indeed in South Korea today there is a veritable English language mania.<sup>2</sup> The size of the English education market in South Korea, for example, is estimated at over 4 trillion won per year (about \$3,333 million) and the expenditures on English study abroad adds an additional trillion won (about \$833 million).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, by 1997 already 70% of children in Seoul were participating in the English education market.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper we consider the practical and symbolic value of English in South Korea. We are particularly interested in its symbolic value as an index of South Korea’s and South Koreans’ cosmopolitan striving in the global order. We call particular attention to English as a sign and site of cosmopolitan yearning because this aspect of “English” can be obscured by the more obvious instrumentalities of English learning and mastery. By cosmopolitan striving, we refer to the desire to become “citizen[s] capable of living at home in the world.” (Anagnost 2000:412). Thus the project of English in South Korea today speaks simultaneously to the escalating global power of English; to its class value (i.e., mobility); and to cosmopolitan striving. We examine these projects through the narratives of three mothers on their management of their children’s English after-school education.

The ethnographic data in this article is drawn from Park’s two years of ethnographic research on mothers’ management of their elementary school children’s participation in South Korea’s burgeoning private after-school education market (*sakyoyuk sijang*). The English private after-school education market (*yōngŏ sakyoyuk sijang*) for young children has been booming since the mid-1990s, especially after it was announced in 1995 that English would become an elementary school subject. This English after-school market for children offers a highly stratified and diversified menu in terms of both format and price. English

after-school programs include private and group tutoring (*kwaoe*) with Korean tutors or native English speakers; specialized English institutes (*yōngŏ chōnmun hagwōn*); worksheets (*haksūpchi*)<sup>5</sup> that teachers visit the home to distribute, collect, and grade; and internet lessons. We focus on mothers because they are the primary managers of their children's education, especially in the after-school education market. This is particularly the case for the elementary after-school market; for these young students, mothers can still remain optimistic that supplemental education will make a difference.<sup>6</sup> In this vein, this article considers mothers' interest in and commitment to their children's—and in some cases their own—English education as an inter-generational gendered project (Reay 1998; Abelman 1997, 2003; Steedman 1986). Indeed most women recalled their own educational histories when they spoke about their education-related decisions for their children (cf. Reay 1998). We thus argue that diverse projects converge in mothers' desires to foster their children's mastery of and comfort with English. We stress that the values of English diverge across the class spectrum, and we hope to shed light on the ways in which mothers' management of English after-school education for their children speak to their own class mobility (or maintenance) and cosmopolitan strivings.

In conceptualizing these mothers' cosmopolitan striving in relation to English education, we take inspiration from those scholars who refer to “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” in order to wrest cosmopolitanism from its classical Western philosophical articulation (Clifford 1992; Ong 1998; Robbins 1998; Schein 1998). The classical construct refers to the humanist idea of universalistic identifications, what Amanda Anderson calls “cultivated detachment from restrictive forms of identity” (1998:266; see also Robbins 1998). A number of scholars interested in retaining the term today challenge two implications of this classical definition: first, that nationalism precludes cosmopolitan striving or identity; and second, that cosmopolitan strivings are necessarily lofty or disinterested. Entailed in this critique is an appreciation of diverse, and specifically non-elite, modes of cosmopolitan striving (see Besnier 2004). As James Clifford argues, “the notion that certain classes of people are cosmopolitan (travelers) while the rest are local (natives) appears as the ideology of one (very powerful) traveling culture” (1992:108). With Clifford and others we are interested then in the cosmopolitan strivings of seemingly resolutely “local” people and even of “nationalistic” rhetorical regimes themselves, such as South Korea's recent globalization policies (*sekyehwa chōngch'aek*). Quite simply, we suggest that the escalating global value of English should not mask appreciation of people's desires to be ‘at home’ in the world.

While the three mothers in this paper share cosmopolitan strivings, we emphasize the class specificities of these strivings. We feature these three women because of their distinctive economic and educational backgrounds. In turn, we highlight differences in the nature of their striving and in their confidence in their ability to realize these desires. We will not, however, assert that any person is more or less “truly” cosmopolitan. Rather, we take these strivings to be “real” independent of their “interested” (i.e., strategic) or nationalistic hues (see Crapanzano 1980:7 on “reality”). Before proceeding with the three mother’s English stories, we turn to the South Korean state as an active proponent of English in many policy arenas.

### **English, Equality, and the IMF Crisis**

With hindsight, the 1990s can be appreciated as a fascinating decade in the history of South Korean education. From an education perspective, the 1980-1987 Chun Doo Hwan regime offers a vexed legacy. In 1980, in the name of “equality of educational opportunity,” the Chun regime announced “the July 30 educational Reform” (“7.30 *kyoyuk kaehyŏk choch’i*”), with stringent prohibitions against all kinds of private after-school education<sup>7</sup> and with significant changes in the college entrance exam system. The higher education market then expanded at unprecedented rates in part on account of the relaxation of longstanding governmental controls that had attempted to curb the social demand for the expansion of that market. Many have appreciated these contradictory policies in carrot and stick terms: namely, the Chun regime liberalized the tertiary sector in order to appease the discontent of the South Korean middle classes with the military regime. As for the control of after-school education services, the Chun regime was managing a longstanding balancing act in contemporary education history: between the social mobility desires of the South Korean population and both state and popular equalitarian ideologies (Seth 2002). On the one hand, Chun’s regime is remembered for its political repression, but on the other hand the decade featured the ascendance of a robust South Korean middle class with new levels of consumption and material desire (Baek 1994; Lett 1998; Nelson 2000).

Before the 1997 IMF Crisis, the 1990s are distinguished for the burgeoning of a post-authoritarian civil sphere, the increasing ascendance of the middle class, rising consumerism, and correspondingly the liberalization of after-school education services and programs (Nelson 2000). The longstanding tension between mobility and equality, however, persisted. Nonetheless, from the

perspective of the present we can think of the 1990s as a decade of neo-liberal education reform. In April 2000, the Constitutional Court finally decided that the state regulations which had technically prohibited private educational institutes since 1980 were in violation of the South Korean Constitution, which guarantees parents rights for their children's education and the freedom to choose employment. Therefore, in the new millennium, market principles and the consumer demand for education triumphed over state regulation. To wit, by the end of the decade, South Korea boasted one of the world's most vibrant private after-school educational markets, with few limits in the name of equality. The story of elementary English education in public school, private school, and the private after-school education market is a case in point.

In the mid-1990s early years of the Kim Young Sam regime, it was announced that English education would be extended to elementary school (grades 1-6).<sup>8</sup> This measure was part of Kim's *segzehwa* (globalization) project—what we might call South Korea's cosmopolitan striving (see S. Kim 2000).<sup>9</sup> The promise of English in elementary school converged both with the globalization discourse of the day and with the ascendance of the purchasing power of the middle classes to foster and support the rapid emergence of private after-school English education programs (i.e., for young children, beginning as early as pre-school). Moreover, with the boom in “early English education” (*yōngō chogi kyoyuk*), newspapers reported on increases in “early study abroad (*chogi yuhak*)”<sup>10</sup> (i.e., of young children) and the “(short term) English study abroad (*tan'gi yōngō yōnsu*)” of students of all ages. Interestingly, on the eve of the adoption of English in elementary school in 1997 (this was scheduled to begin only in the third grade and thereafter to be extended one year at a time), private after-school education faced an ironic juncture: namely, the Ministry of Education announced (on March 2, 1997) that in keeping with existing laws prohibiting elementary private after-school programs (*hagwōn*) for school subjects (e.g., math, science, Korean language etc.), private after-school English programs would become illegal. Not surprisingly, South Korean citizens and the private after-school industry were furious: these prohibitions demanded a roll-back of existing after-school education programs—unthinkable in South Korea's ever-burgeoning liberal educational climate of the time. This incident reveals that the state could no longer curb this diverse cosmopolitan striving, of which English is a saturated sign. Important to note is that the state—whose practices themselves are not of course monolithic at all—plays an important role in support of its citizenry's cosmopolitan striving.

This moment of state-civil society tension over consumer demands for private after-school education preceded a critical contemporary juncture: The IMF Crisis (since the end of 1997). As Jesook Song (2003) has argued, The IMF Crisis would prove a gateway to the amplification of neoliberal social policies, among them education (B. K. Kim 2000). Indeed, with the IMF Crisis, policy debates over private after-school elementary education virtually disappeared. In April 2000, as we pointed out earlier, state regulations of the market were formally lifted. Interestingly, formal regulations aside, in the final years of the decade, the after-school market only intensified. This fact is somewhat surprising—not because the programs were illegal but rather because of the enormous economic difficulties of the middle class at that moment in time. Indeed, surveys reveal that the numbers of South Koreans who counted themselves in the middle classes dropped 20% to 30% over only 2 years (Shin and Chang 2000, 88).<sup>11</sup> We suggest that the English after-school market (and the after-school market more generally) managed to survive this fragile economy because English took on particular value at this historical juncture.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, by the early years of the millennium, English would become one of the most popular subjects across the diverse forms of private after-school education (at all levels, including adults).

This history reveals the roots and tenacity of the South Korean demand for both curricular and extra-curricular English education. What this history does not, however, teach us is how South Korean people inhabit these English language desires. Certainly, as English has become a formal subject in elementary education, its significance has intensified. With the increased call for globalization, however, English has come to exceed its local meaning as a subject on the college entrance examination (see McVeigh 2002:167-68 on “examination English” in Japan). We suggest that the idea of what it means to be South Korean is transforming: increasingly, to be South Korean means to be South Korean “in the world”—a prospect that calls for the mastery of English as an index of cosmopolitan striving.<sup>13</sup> The escalating after-school private English market serves to make English widely accessible, but in a highly stratified manner. We examine this stratification through the case of three mothers below.

### **Mothers' Management of English Education**

As we have argued, English is a saturated sign: never simply one thing or another. At the very same moment, it can refer to class capital independent of educational achievement, to local educational calculation, to cosmopolitan

yearnings, and even to the possibility of emigration. We turn now to the particular configuration of these meanings in the case of three mothers occupying distinct class positions. Again, while we appreciate their shared cosmopolitan striving, we underscore their differences.

### ***A “Working-Class” Mother: Hun’s Mother<sup>14</sup>***

Hun’s Mother, who until quite recently continued to work as a laborer in an electronics factory more than ten years after her high-school graduation, lives in a rented multiple-household dwelling.<sup>15</sup> Her rented quarters consist of two small bedrooms, a bathroom, and a small kitchen. Her husband, who had long been a factory worker, opened a very small factory before the IMF Crisis, employing one other person. After meeting with Park several times, Hun’s Mother briefly mentioned her family’s economic difficulty both because of her husband’s unsuccessful business and because she recently quit her job because of health problems. One day while chatting with her friends and Park, she abruptly mentioned her class position, muttering as if to herself, “I used to think that I belonged to the *middle* at least, if we divide people according to an upper, middle, and lower strata. But nowadays, this doesn’t seem to be true any more. I belong to the lower strata.” At the end of Park’s field research in summer 2003, Hun’s Mother was trying to pursue job-oriented informal education in order to get a job in the private after-school market, while her husband closed his factory and became an employee in her relative’s butcher shop. These contours of Hun’s Mother’s and her husband’s economic and work life go far to contextualize her education management.

We introduce Hun’s Mother to illustrate the manner in which her English desires for her children speak both to her interest in their education success in South Korea and in the possibility of her children’s embrace of a “wider world” (i.e., cosmopolitan striving). Hun’s Mother’s mobility desires and decisions are complex: while her desires are born of her contact with the middle class as a young woman, she is also keenly aware of her financial limitations when it comes to her children’s after-school education. Similarly while a “wider world” presents itself as an alternative future for her children, Hun’s Mother is also aware that neither time abroad nor emigration will promise them an easy future. Nonetheless, these instrumental calculations aside, Hun’s Mother’s cosmopolitan striving is very important to her own sense of self—as it is for all the women in this article.

As a factory worker and labor activist in the 1980s, Hun’s Mother came in contact with college-educated activists who were working in the industrial sec-

tor in order to foster political activism. Having maintained her ties with some of the former activists, Hun's Mother is unique among her friends for her personal comfort with women with higher education and class backgrounds. We suggest that these ties and affinities must be considered when examining her management of her children's after-school education generally, and of their English education in particular.

Hun's Mother's children were in first and second grade in a public elementary school in 2002. In her circle of friends with similar educational and work backgrounds (i.e., no post-secondary education and factory work) and current economic ability, Hun's Mother was distinguished for her active participation in the after-school education sector. Hun and his younger sister participated in both math and English worksheet programs; additionally, they both took swimming lessons. In contrast, when Park began her research in 2000, most of the children of the members of Hun's Mother's cohort were participating in only one non-academic after-school activity (e.g., music or sports). For those children who were taking an academic subject, it was most often math. Indeed, the women in Hun's Mother's circle had dubbed her an "overly ambitious mother (*küksöng sŭröun ömma*).” Interestingly by 2002, a number of mothers in Hun's Mother's cohort had begun English worksheet lessons for their children; likely, Hun's Mother had hastened these women's participation in this growing industry.

In thinking about why Hun's Mother occupied the English language frontier for women of her standing and affinity, we return to her personal history as a union activist and to her comfortable contact with more highly educated women from more privileged backgrounds. During the first individual interview (after several informal group meetings with her friends) with Park, Hun's Mother posed many queries about English and the United States. Knowing that Park was a graduate student abroad, Hun's Mother asked, "When people first go to the United States how long does it take before they can really be able to speak English (*malmun i t'üida*)?" Following Park's halting answer to this unexpected question, Hun's Mother next asked, "Is it really true that if a child is born in the United States he/she can get United States citizenship?" to which Park answered, "Yes. The baby will get it, but not the mother." Hun's Mother then quickly followed with another question: "Why then did you choose to give birth to your baby here (i.e., in South Korea) rather than in the United States?" Hun's Mother admitted that she had asked this question because she and her friends had been wondering about Park's decision having heard that these days many women intentionally arrange to give birth in

the United States so as to secure United States citizenship for their children.<sup>16</sup> United States citizenship in this conversation signals both the ease of obtaining English (and other) education abroad (as well as American or international education in South Korea) and the possibility of emigration—coveted goods for Hun’s Mother and her friends.

Although Hun’s Mother was on the after-school education frontier in terms of English, she was in fact keenly aware that she was not affording her children the best available after-school English education. While it was in part Hun’s Mother’s keen sense of her own education and class exclusion that spurred her decision to participate in an English worksheet program for her children, this participation itself served only to underscore the classed contours of this particular after-school option. Hun’s Mother was very aware that worksheet English is at the very bottom of the highly stratified market. She knew, for example, that “women who live in apartments” (see footnote 15) sent their children to English language institutes (some even with native English speakers) or at an even greater cost employed individual tutors who came to the home. Furthermore, Hun’s Mother was ill at ease because she realized that she was entirely unequipped to judge the quality of the worksheet instruction.

It seems that I simply need to trust them [i.e., worksheet teachers]. If I were a college-graduate and knew more it would be different—then I might be prepared to interfere, but since that’s not the case, it seems that I’d better just depend on and believe in them.... But the truth is I’m not so sure about how well the English worksheets really work. The worksheet teacher always says that they are O.K., but whenever I ask my kids what they’ve learned from English worksheets, they answer that they don’t remember anything. You know, I don’t know any English either.... Sometimes I worry whether I’m just wasting my money on the worksheets, but the teacher reassures me that it is worth it.... But anyway I can’t afford the English institutes in which foreigners teach. I’ve heard they cost 100,000 to 200,000 won (\$83-167) per month.... So that’s why I settle for this [i.e., English worksheets]....

Although Hun’s Mother was not sure of her ability to judge the quality of the worksheet program—a lack of confidence that she attributes to not having a college degree—and furthermore learned little from her children about the instruction, it was in part her close contact with class others that prompt-

ed her to support her children's English education. She was certain that into the future English would matter. Hun's Mother talked about one of her high-school classmates who had immigrated to Canada for her children's education and who was now offering "home-stays" for South Korean children for English improvement (i.e., without their parents). For a time, Hun's Mother had exchanged e-mails with this classmate about the possibility for Hun, but in the final analysis Hun's Mother gave up because of her economic circumstances. She also talked about one of her college-graduate friends from her labor activist years, a woman who was about to study abroad (in the United States) with her doctor husband and three daughters; and about another woman who was planning to travel to China with her children in the coming summer.<sup>17</sup> She offered these stories as evidence of the various ways in which women with greater resources were securing their children's foreign language education. Hun's Mother remarked that the world has certainly changed for the likes of her to have friends with such plans for travel and study abroad. As she put it, "the word '*sekyehwa*' (globalization) seems closer and closer to my life." And she continued, "You know, there are times when we compare ourselves to other people in our life. But I have come to think about all of it differently [i.e., the stories of other mothers who sent their children to expensive extracurricular institutes or even emigrated to Canada for their children's education]: when it comes to your kids' education, you just *do what you can*." With this comment, Hun's Mother both justified her own ambition and made note of her economic limitations.

Later in the conversation, Hun's Mother mentioned that sometimes she dreams that her children might someday live abroad in a "bigger world"—"even if they have to live abroad as beggars (*kōji*)." With this comment, we take Hun's Mother to be keenly aware that not all become rich abroad—a perception that was heightened in South Korea after the Los Angeles Riots in 1992. We understand her mention of "beggars" as a metaphorical index of this reality. Here we observe the way in which Hun's Mother's cosmopolitan strivings are classed. Although life abroad—"even as a beggar"—presents itself as a cosmopolitan alternative to failed class mobility in South Korea, Hun's Mother's aside reveals her sense that emigration offers (the likes of her children) no easy promise of upward mobility. There is a part of Hun's Mother that wants to imagine her children on a broader stage, despite their likely lower status abroad. Hun's Mother exemplifies the ambivalent calculations of English education. On the one hand, there are instrumental calculations: the importance of English education in domestic schooling and the possible tick-

et to economic life abroad. We have seen, however, that both of these instrumental calculations are significantly colored for Hun's Mother by the realities of her class marginality. On the other hand, however, alongside these calculations or their mitigating realities, are Hun's Mother's cosmopolitan strivings, her desires for her children to transcend the local, and perhaps as well her desires for the middle-class membership entailed by such strivings. Hun's Mother's calculations and practices surrounding English education are thus variously inscribed: they hark back to the cross-class interaction of her activist days; they speak to her sense of class exclusion (and they continue to speak to it even in the present); and they answer to a vague sense of the transformed world of her children's future. We turn now to Min's Mother whose residence abroad and more privileged social standing offer a very different story.

### ***A "Middle-Class" Mother: Min's Mother***

Min's Mother lives in a three-bedroom-apartment very near her 6th grade son's public elementary school, the same school Hun attends. It was Min's teacher who introduced Min's Mother to Park at a PTA meeting, suggesting that because of Min's Mother's three years in Scandinavia she would be able to offer an interesting comparative perspective on children's schooling. Unlike Hun's Mother who was matter of fact about her own work history, when Park first asked Min's Mother about her work history, she quickly answered that she is "just a housewife." Later on, however, she revealed that she was a part-time private tutor for children's Math and English. She quickly added though, that she seldom tells people about this work. She acknowledged later, however, that earnings from her tutoring had been as important as her husband's wages for purchasing their first owned apartment (in which now they are living) many years after their marriage. She also pointed out that her parents-in-law had been unable to help them to buy an apartment after their marriage, "unlike other parents who often do or even buy an apartment for their newly-wed offspring nowadays." Although Min's Mother has been afforded time abroad and resulting work opportunities, her family is squarely middle class. On several occasions, Min's Mother contrasted her own neighborhood with the more prosperous Kangnam area (i.e., South of the Han River in Seoul). She remarked particularly about having heard that in the Kangnam area one or two students from each classroom each semester leave for study abroad. She took the time to tell Park that even if she wanted to move to the Kangnam area, she could not because of the exorbitant apartment prices. We will argue that Min's Mother's approach to after school education and to English in particular reveal Min's Mother's class anxieties.

At the time when Park talked to Min's Mother, Min's after-school classes were only piano and violin—a very sparse menu for a child from a family of his economic level (e.g., his can be contrasted with Hun's extensive after-school menu in spite of his family's less prosperous economic circumstances). Indeed, in Min's middle-class apartment complex, most 6th graders have packed afternoons that include school subject extra-curricular classes, above all math and English. Actually, Min's Mother had even hesitated about his doing two instruments, offering that a 6th grader does not really have time for two music lessons. Min's sparse after-school menu speaks to his mother's ambivalence about after school education and furthermore about South Korean education at large. On the matter of English, Min's Mother was particularly outspoken.

In a coffee shop on the outskirts of her neighborhood, Min's Mother began her first private talk with Park by suggesting that as a woman without strong opinions (*chugwan*) she would have little to offer about South Korean education. This caveat aside, Min's Mother went on to share a very careful vision for her children's education. Min's Mother and her family had lived in Scandinavia for three years (1998-2000) because of Min's father's job at an international branch of his company, and Min had attended an English-speaking school there. When Park asked Min's Mother about the challenges of living in Scandinavia, she admitted that she had in fact been very nervous about English in spite of having been an English teacher in South Korea in the past. She explained that when she looks back on it she realizes how problem-ridden her earlier teaching had been, both her English pronunciation and grammar. After returning to South Korea, her friends asked her to teach their children, knowing that she had spent three years using English abroad. Although she remained uncertain about her abilities, she felt obliged to tutor them. But she only tutored on a limited basis so as to reserve time for Min, her only son.

We argue here that Min's Mother is ambivalent about English: both about the quality of South Korean English education; and about the imperative to master English. In her management of her child's after-school education, Min's Mother has wavered between her desire for her child to “live happily, like other regular people (*pyŏngbŏm han saram*)” and her understanding that in South Korea a person needs an elite education to live well (or happily). With regard to English, Min's Mother's ambivalence was more specific. Having recently spent three years abroad in English-language circles, and herself an after-school English teacher, Min's Mother had a great deal to say about both the naiveté and the misguided approach of South Koreans' after-school education.

On the matter of their naiveté, Min's Mother detailed that emigration or study abroad was hardly a simple guarantee of the good life (at home or abroad). As for a misguided approach to English education, Min's Mother yearned for a more creative and holistic pedagogy. These reservations aside, Min's Mother also appreciated that her own experience abroad was the very capital that enabled her lucrative work as an after-school English teacher. Thus, on the one hand, Min's Mother called for English education that would *really* lead to language mastery, but on the other hand she realized that "English" was indeed much more than the language itself on account of its symbolic value. Similarly, while she was aware that escape abroad is not a panacea, she also recognized that time abroad itself affords a certain capital that produces value in South Korea—such was her own case for being able to earn good money teaching in the private after-school market on account of having lived abroad.

Clearly she had made a self-conscious decision to "home-after-school" Min. Min's Mother explained that because Min had been out of the country for a long time, she had decided that she would manage his progress in math and other subjects. Min's Mother was most worried that a dependency on private after-school education would destroy Min's ability to study alone, to be a so-called "self-learner." Min's Mother is certain that over the long-term, this ability will be critical to academic and personal success. Thus in the case of Min's Mother, the decision to opt against private after-school English education in no way signals the abandonment of class privilege or the rejection of English. Rather, Min's Mother's classed and cosmopolitan experience made for her decision to manage Min's after-school English education on her own.

This said, however, there were moments in which Min's Mother wanted to reject South Korean English education in both formal and after-schooling. Park learned that Min's father, however, wanted Min to attend an English institute so as not to forget the English he learned in Scandinavia. Min's Mother found her husband's new-found education zeal ironic:

Before going to Scandinavia, my husband did not show much interest in Min's education. However, after coming back to South Korea, he suddenly became very interested. It might be that his expectations have risen because Min is an only son. It seems that when Min was younger, I was the one with more ambition for him. But since his father has become more ambitious these days, I find myself holding back.... Funny, when I wanted Min to learn piano and violin in Scandinavia, Min's father argued against it, saying that it was too early to learn this or that....

In another interview with Min's Mother, she offered an interesting interpretation of this conflict with her husband over Min's after-school learning. She suggested that her husband's changed attitude reflected his own work experience in South Korea: with the idea and reality of a "lifetime employment" (i.e., for the same company) (*p'yōngsaeng chiktchang*) on the wane, and with more and more people with MBAs or other degrees from prestigious universities (at home and abroad), it has become harder and harder to compete in the labor market—or even to hold onto a good job. Here we have a window on the escalating class anxieties of the South Korean middle class in the midst of radical transformations of the labor market. This was the context, Min's Mother explained, in which her husband had come to have more educational ambition for Min. Min's Mother spoke matter-of-factly, "In any case, English is necessary for academic achievement (i.e. in South Korea)." She described the mothers in her midst, all of them wanting their sons to become medical doctors. For her part, she wants Min to do what he wants, but she admits that in order to "feel happy" (*haengbok hadago nūkkida*) in South Korea, a person needs to both feel good about themselves and "more importantly" garner the approval of outsiders (*nam ūi imok*). She offered this example: "Someone can own a small store and say that they are happy, but if outsiders wonder to themselves whether the person is in fact really happy (i.e., because of the low status of the job), then the person could become frustrated." In the final analysis, Min's Mother conceded that it is necessary to attend prestigious universities (*myōngmun-dae*) in order to join the mainstream, and furthermore that one needs English to do so.

Although Min's Mother was certain that English could make a difference in people's lives, foremost in achieving school success, and later in securing employment (see Kelsky 2001,100 on English in the Japanese work world), she was critical of South Korean families' recent yearnings to go abroad on account of their children's education. Based on her own experience of living abroad, she observed the unreality of some South Koreans' aim to raise their children to become elites abroad. She elaborated that when South Koreans reside abroad they have to overcome considerable cultural and linguistic barriers. She described that South Korean mothers abroad have to compete with the native mothers there who are equally zealous for their children's schooling and after-school activities. She did note, however, that in most countries it is only a subset of mothers who are committed to the extent that South Korean mothers typically are: "In South Korea it is *every* mother who is zealous!" We note the ambivalence of Min's Mother's cosmopolitanism because

here and elsewhere her inclusion in or exclusion from this group of “naïve mothers” is not entirely clear. Min’s Mother also criticized mothers’ tendency to depend on the private after-school education market. She explained that what has changed in South Korea is not really the curriculum (i.e., the new 7<sup>th</sup> national curriculum which was gradually enforced from 2000 with a new educational emphasis of “creativity”) but the parents.

Actually, the basic content of textbooks is unchanged.... What is changed, however, are the minds of mothers who want to get everything so quickly.... Mothers don’t understand the meaning of “creativity.”... Education is a slow process, but all they care about these days is results. They are only interested in news flashes about the “13 year-old boy with the perfect TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] score”<sup>18</sup> or the “young genius who is attending a university.” And they think about their own children in relation to these media sensations....

With these comments, Min’s Mother was again underscoring the hollow state of South Korean education. These criticisms of others aside, Min’s Mother was also communicating her own ambivalence about her own ambition (*yoksim*) for Min’s (English) education, an ambition that was not in fact so different from that of other mothers. She described that she had been particularly confused by the recent English education boom when her family returned to South Korea.

I have to admit that I felt a surge in my own ambition for Min when I discovered that there was a student in the first year of middle school with a perfect TOEFL score.... When I learned about it, I really didn’t know what to think. I knew that although Min had lived abroad for three years, it did not mean that his English was perfect. I mean he was able to stay caught up in school but.... I doubt very much that he would excel in exams like the TOEFL or TOEIC [Test of English for International Communication].... But there were some people who suggested that I have Min take those exams ‘since he spent three years abroad’....

Although Min’s Mother explained that she had decided to not succumb to the English mania (e.g., submitting her son to such exams), she confessed that she could not really completely resist the times: in the early days after their return from abroad, she agonized over whether Min should take the TOEFL or

whether she should at least send him to a private after-school program devoted to TOEFL preparation.

By the time of our second meeting, Min's Mother had visited three English-specialized institutes in the affluent Kangnam area of Seoul. She was very critical of what she saw there and was determined not to send Min. She mentioned their use of so-called "U.S. textbooks," wondering what exactly these textbooks were—knowing that the United States does not have a national curriculum in the way that South Korea does. Min's Mother was also upset by the attitude of a staff member at one of these private institutes: instead of politely answering her queries, he chided haughtily, "You know there are many other mothers waiting to send their children here [i.e., why are you bothering us]." This episode speaks to Min's Mother's criticism of South Korean English education—especially after-school education—but it also reveals her continuous anxiety about her self-conscious decision to "home-after-school" Min. She admitted that she keeps up with the recent trends and content of the private after-school teaching, especially in the Kangnam area, both for her own teaching and for Min's education.

Min's Mother is resigned to the symbolic value of English independent of any practical value. Although she entertains alternative visions and desires—to raise a creative child who could choose to be happy independent of conventional markers of success—she realizes that the path to happiness demands conventional academic achievement. Finally, in spite of her own privilege for having spent time abroad and for being able to market her own linguistic capital, Min's Mother resists the naïve embrace of English or emigration as a panacea. We suggest that for Min's Mother, it is in fact her relative class privilege that has both enabled her cosmopolitan capital and engendered her critique of many South Koreans' "naïve" cosmopolitan strivings. Similarly, it is her class standing (i.e., working hard to achieve the trappings of a middle class life and to secure a middle class future for Min) that affords both her critique of South Korean education and her own resignation to its educational demands—including English. As we suggested above, it is in large part Min's Mother's own considerable anxiety about Min's middle class future that colors her cynicism about the cosmopolitan strivings of others. But as we have also indicated, Min's Mother's cynical voice about the English efforts of others speaks at once to her own cosmopolitan capital precisely for having lived, for having been "at home," abroad.

### **An “Upper Middle Class Mother”: Jinu’s Mother**

Today Jinu’s Mother lives in a spacious and luxurious apartment almost twice the size of that of Min’s family. Indeed, her family is considerably more prosperous than Min’s family. Jinu’s Mother’s is a case in which her parents-in-law bought her and her husband an apartment immediately after marriage; in contrast we can recall that it was Min’s Mother’s supplemental income as an English teacher that afforded the purchase of an apartment relatively late in the family cycle. Jinu’s father manages a large dental clinic and Jinu’s Mother described her husband’s achievements this way: “Although he couldn’t go to a dental college [which is very competitive in South Korea], now he hires dentists and earns even more money than they do.” Unlike Min’s Mother, Jinu’s Mother has never thought to work outside the home on behalf of the household economy. In fact, in spite of her college degree, Jinu’s Mother has never worked. As a housewife in a stable upper middle-class family, she offered that she does not hesitate to spend money on her two sons. She described, for example, “I spent a lot of money for my kids’ ski lessons when they were younger. If other parents knew how much I spent on them, they would say that I was crazy.”

We introduce Jinu’s Mother as yet another story of the articulation of class and cosmopolitanism. Distinct from Min’s Mother, Jinu’s Mother’s story offers the case of a woman whose cosmopolitan yearnings have been satisfactorily answered by her time abroad. Jinu’s Mother’s is certain that English will play a part in securing her children’s comfortable future, just as it has already enriched her own life. We suggest that her cosmopolitan celebration speaks in part to the prosperous economic and social circumstances that afforded her time abroad with her children and that secure her children’s futures. Jinu’s Mother does not suffer from the ambivalence experienced by Min’s Mother: neither does she hesitate about the quality or results of prestigious after-school education (as did Hun’s Mother for her less prestigious programs), nor does she worry about South Koreans’ abilities to survive abroad. We suggest that this difference reflects both the importance of Jinu’s Mother’s own enormously personally fulfilling experience abroad (ostensibly for her children’s English education) and her class standing.

Jinu’s Mother made the decision to take her children abroad because of a realization that local English education in South Korea was lacking. While hers is a rather naked case of the workings of class privilege (i.e., that she could afford to offer her children an English experience abroad), we consider that her time abroad afforded her something larger than simply her children’s

English success. The sojourn abroad offered her a sense of belonging that spoke both to her own past and to her children's futures.

When Park asked Jinu's Mother why/how she had decided to travel to New Zealand with her children (who were in 1st and 2nd grade at that time) for three months in summer 2001 without her husband, she spoke about an interesting experience at a specialized English institute in South Korea. A few months before going to New Zealand, she brought her two sons to an English institute managed by a prestigious university. As it turned out, her children were unable to enter that institute because they tested below the standard of the lowest level class. Jinu's Mother had been very upset, especially because her two sons had already taken some private English lessons (including worksheet programs, and participation in an English-specialized institute; her younger son had even attended an English language kindergarten for one year). Jinu's Mother described how this humiliating experience spurred her "competitive maternal spirit (*ōmma ūi ogi*).” It was at that time that she heard that the daughter of a friend of hers had gone to New Zealand to learn English. Jinu's Mother decided that this was an option for her own children. She was surprised when her husband agreed easily to the plan. After returning to South Korea, her children applied for that same specialized English institute again. Jinu's Mother bragged that this time both boys placed in the 3+ level (of 6 levels). She exclaimed, “Ah, how good I felt then!...”

At that time of Park's interview, Jinu and his brother were attending that institute three times a week, while also taking an English-specialized worksheet program. Jinu's Mother was confident about her ability to check their homework and to manage their English education. She emphasized the importance of memorizing English words, recalling that she and her two sons memorized 30 words a day in New Zealand. Jinu's Mother expressed little ambivalence as to whether she was doing right by her sons; she was certain of the necessity of English for their futures. She thought back to her own childhood, to the fact that her mother had given up on her music education so easily, and she described her resentment that her own mother had let her quit piano lessons.

I wonder why my mom didn't push me to continue to learn piano at that time. As I think back, I played the piano very well.... But you know, children sometimes can be lazy, and once I told my mom that I couldn't play because my fingers hurt. With that my mom just said, “Then quit.” To some extent this was because of the expense of piano lessons.

But later, I really regretted it. I had really wanted to learn the piano, and I took it up again in high-school, and again after marriage, but it never led anywhere.

It was in the light of these recollections that she quickly rationalized her own way of pushing her children to study irrespective of their own desires.

When asked about her life in New Zealand, Jinu's Mother answered that she really enjoyed her time there and that she hopes to visit there again some-time soon.<sup>19</sup> She primarily traveled there in order to improve her children's English ability, but she emphasized to Park that she also studied English arduously there. She enrolled in the same English institute that her children attended, taking English lessons every weekday. When Park asked, "What did you like most there?" she answered:

I met many people there—here I just meet the same mothers who say the same sort of thing every day. But there I met college students, an old Chinese man and of course some Koreans.... There are so many things I never experienced living in South Korea! I felt "English is really fantastic." Although I had been interested in English before, it was really just the grammar and memorizing some words, but I couldn't even say "hi." The way I lived before was so silly.... Although my conversations with foreigners [i.e., in New Zealand] were short, how stupendous to be able to communicate with them—even in my clumsy English. It was such a fantastic experience for me—The world is so big! I began to think that it is better to deal with the larger world even if it means giving up the comfort of home—these are the sorts of thoughts that occurred to me while living in New Zealand.... I was so proud of myself there: I worked hard, kept very busy, and wasted no time. And I didn't feel at all apologetic to my husband [i.e., who was living alone in Seoul] because I did my best to live there well.

As this narrative reveals, Jinu's Mother's experience abroad was about more than her two children's English education. While studying English herself, she experienced her own cosmopolitan belonging beyond the boundaries of South Korea, despite having traveled abroad before. Her description of the willingness to give up the "comfort of home" for the opportunity to face the "larger world" speaks to the value she accords the cosmopolitan striving that we have been describing in this paper. It is in this vein that she spoke of the

power of English for allowing her to make connections with different worlds and people. She also reflected on her own English education in South Korea, in that she had learned nothing about speaking and communicating. Finally, she considered that she and her children learned how to really “live” English.

Her sojourn, however, was also about more than her own English. If we listen carefully we can observe her continuous emphasis on the fact that she managed everything there alone (i.e., without her husband).<sup>20</sup> She studied English hard, supervised her children’s study, and overcame many difficulties, including significant language barriers. Thus she was proud of her accomplishments, especially in contrast with her former days in South Korea. Before Jinu’s Mother traveled to New Zealand with her sons, she thought of herself as a regular *ajumma* or matron who often gathered and chatted with other mothers in her apartment complex about their children’s education, husbands, and in-laws. When she returned, however, she found it very hard to take up her daily life: she felt depressed and secluded herself from the social world. Gradually, however, she was able to overcome the depression, and resume her daily life. Today Jinu’s Mother has a packed schedule (especially when her children are in school) and she expressed that she hardly has time to “waste” chatting with her neighbors: she plays golf with her husband in the early morning, sends her two children off to school, takes English lessons at a private institute specializing in English (three times a week), and exercises daily. She works hard to complete her own tasks before her children come home from school so that she can then tend solely to their private after-school education and their study at home. She explained, “I am always short for time—if I waste any time during the day everything is ruined.” Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that Jinu’s Mother’s experience living abroad was life-transforming.

We can see that for Jinu’s Mother, education strategies (e.g., securing her children a place in the best English after-school), goals for English communication (i.e., achieving the ability to *really* communicate in English), and cosmopolitan striving (i.e., the desire to feel at home in the larger world), are inextricable from one another. Jinu’s Mother’s case demonstrates eloquently the ways in which mothers’ activities for their children and their own classed projects are again entirely intertwined. We assert here that to conclude that Jinu’s Mother derives her satisfaction from the futures that she is busily securing for her children would be to ignore her own independent satisfaction, in this case through time abroad and English mastery. Furthermore, we have seen that her cosmopolitan achievement is integrally gendered: time abroad afforded Jinu’s Mother the chance to live with what she describes as greater vitality and auton-

omy than ever before. Indeed, Jinu's Mother's descriptions of her life "at home" after having been "abroad" offer a rich window on the multiple ways in which she recognized her local life as transformed on account of realizing what we have called here her cosmopolitan strivings: a life at once more purposive, efficient, and joyous. Here we could simplify our description of this transformed life by simply referring to it as the full realization of upper middle class life in Seoul, but we think this would again do it an injustice. Rather we argue that it is important to appreciate her cosmopolitan achievements—her sense of that larger world, and of even her comfort in it—in their own right, beyond the instrumentalities of her children's education or her own class standing.

We have argued that because of the diverse meanings that converge on English, mothers are balancing multiple projects as they make micro-decisions concerning their children's English education. It is critical to not conflate these multiple projects under any single rubric: just as it would, for example, be too easy to argue that English desires are all about cosmopolitan strivings, it would likewise be problematic to assert that English is nothing other than an educational attribute or again a class marker in South Korea. We have also demonstrated that mothers' educational decisions and management must be considered in their inter-generational crucible: English has had a particular life in parents' own class and education memories, and in their own local, national, and cosmopolitan belonging.

The three women introduced in this article each offer an instance of a mother's management of her children's English education, and in each case an example of the multiple and sometimes contradictory projects enacted via English. We have focused here on the articulation of class and cosmopolitan striving. We highlight that cosmopolitan striving and achievement reveal mobility desires and are themselves classed attributes. We have, across these cases, asserted that the narration of cosmopolitan striving is entirely classed (i.e., Hun's Mother's sense of failure in that regard, Min's Mother's ambivalent and cynical view on the matter, and Jinu's Mother's quite self-satisfied narration), but with an appreciation of "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" we assert the importance of taking each case of cosmopolitan striving seriously in its own right.

With these claims in mind, we return in brief to each of the women. In the case of Hun's Mother we observed the way in which a vague sense of life on a broader stage presented itself as a possibility, but we also listened in as she wondered aloud as to what would really become of the likes of *her* children abroad. We saw that English presented itself to Hun's Mother as a vexed sign of her mobility desires; of her own education deprivation (i.e., that she had no

idea about the quality of what she could offer her children); of her economic limits (i.e., that she could offer her children so little in comparison to others); and finally of a vague sense of cosmopolitanism. For Min's Mother, we observed that English spoke both to her own considerable class and cosmopolitan capital (as a teacher and for having been abroad), and to her resignation to the instrumentality of the South Korean social and educational system in which the life of English exceeds the linguistic entity. Furthermore, we listened to Min's Mother's own doubts about the "larger stage" described by Hun's Mother, as she wondered about Korean immigrants' ability to make their way abroad. Finally, in the case of Jinu's Mother we observed a less ambivalent cosmopolitan celebration enabled by English exposure and mastery. English not only promised her children's futures at home, but answered her own vague hankering for cosmopolitan membership. We assert that Jinu's Mother's celebration is one afforded by privilege and by her easy embrace of her own upper-middle-class life and of the upper-middle-class futures that she is busily securing for her children. We suggest that we have across these stories cosmopolitan strivings that have been variously realized with Hun's Mother's real doubt, Min's Mother's ambivalence, and Jinu's Mother's self-satisfaction.

Taking the case of these three women together, we underscore that English exceeds its most obvious meanings. First, English refers to South Korean local projects (e.g., school achievement, employment, and workplace success) quite independent of its global currency. Here we can recall Min's Mother's ambivalence about the fact that one needs to learn English in school even if it has little to do with success in a real English speaking setting. Second, English speaks to South Korean imaginaries of opportunities abroad; here we can recall Hun's Mother's sense that English might promise her children a life abroad. But we can also recall Hun's Mother's keen sense that life abroad is also stratified, and her worries about how far her children's English and education could ever really take them. Third, English satisfies cosmopolitan strivings quite independent of its functional or instrumental character; here we can think about Jinu's Mother's personal satisfaction via English, her sense that English was enlarging her children's futures just as it was redressing frustrations about her own past. For all of the women, although each differently inflected by class, English tweaked the bounds of what it means to be a national citizen (i.e., a South Korean) in a global era. With this article, we thus suggest that English education, and most particularly the English private after-school market is a privileged site for examining the ways in which South Korea and South Koreans are living globalization.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>South Korea offers an example of the changing "centre of gravity" of English (Crystal 2003:69): namely, increasingly a larger percentage of English speakers are using English as a second language or foreign language. Combining the second language and foreign language speakers of English, the ratio of native to non-native speakers of English is 1:3 (Crystal 2003:69). Our focus diverges from that of the robust linguistic discussion of world English(es) which is largely interested in linguistic form and functioning (e.g., on the variations of spoken English, on the status of dying languages in relation to English's power etc.) (Kachru 1982).

<sup>2</sup>South Korea's current English mania can be charted in many ways, including for example the recent escalation of private English educational market for all ages and the boom of "early English education" (*yōngō chōgi kyoyuk*) as well as the enormous popularity of "English study abroad" (*yōngō yōnsu*) (see also footnote 10). One of the most notorious items speaking to the English craze is "tongue surgery" or frenectomy, a procedure administered to young children to make them better able to pronounce the English "r" and "l" which are particularly difficult for Koreans because the distinction is not made in Korean. Although sensationalized in the media both in South Korea and abroad, it is hard to determine the frequency of such operations (Detroit News April 6, 2002; Chosun Ilbo April 2, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>In 2002, the Korean Broadcast Service (KBS) aired a popular series on the "English education boom." The series explored the problems of "early English education" and "exam-oriented English education" and detailed the intensive English boom at all education levels, including adults. The estimates of the English education market in South Korea that we cite here are drawn from this program. The KBS series queried the failings of English education in South Korea, asserting that it has not been effective in spite of this extraordinary effort and economic investment (KBS website 2002, <http://www.kbs.co.kr/4321>).

<sup>4</sup>By the beginning of 1997 (the first year of adopting English for elementary school curriculum), nearly half of the 3rd graders who were about to begin formal English instruction as an official school subject were already enrolled in extra-curricular English lessons (the national average for third grade extra-curricular English instruction was 48.8%; for the more prosperous Kangnam area (i.e., South of the Han River) of Seoul the figure was 73.8%, and 69.2% for Seoul's Kangbuk area (i.e., North of the Han River)) (Chosun Ilbo 15 February 1997). Also, in Park's own survey (conducted in 2002 among 753 parents of 3rd graders and 6th graders in 7 elementary schools in Seoul), 79.2% of the elementary students were participating in English private after-school education market.

<sup>5</sup>According to a report, the consumers of the six largest worksheet companies number about 5,500,000, and the annual sales of the worksheet industry (including other subjects as well as English) is estimated at about \$3,333 million (4 trillion won) (Korea Consumer Protection Board, 2000: 5). Three quarters of these sales are for elementary students. The cost for English worksheets is considered “cheap,” varying from 25,000 won to 60,000 won per month (\$21-\$50). On the other hand, the monthly cost of English for specialized institutes (*yŏngŏ chŏnmun hagwŏn*) is much more expensive, usually about 100,000-220,000 won (\$83-\$183, usually 2-3 days per week, 2 hour lessons each day).

<sup>6</sup>The larger project considers mothers' management of their children's private after-school education in relation to their classed maternal subjectivities (see Anagnost 2000 on “maternal citizenship”; see also Alison 1992 for the case of Japan).

<sup>7</sup>There were very few exceptions, including athletics, art, music, t'ae kwon do, and flower arranging (*kkotkkoji*) (Seth 2000, 159). Although this strong state ban on private after-school education was able to reduce the expansion of this market, there were continuous debates over the ban. In particular, after Chun's regime, the state policing of private after-school education and the enforcement of the measure were gradually relaxed (Kim 2001; Seth 2000; Sorensen 1994; Lee 2002).

<sup>8</sup>South Korea's decision to extend English education to elementary school and its push for English language instruction in college reflect the state's concerted attempt to meet the challenge of English's global ascendance (see Crystal 2003:16 on the possibilities of bilingualism if a “language is taught early enough...and if it is maintained continuously and resourced well”).

<sup>9</sup>Although Samuel Kim's edited volume, *Korea's Globalization* (S. Kim 2000), analyzes the multiple dimensions of Korea's *segryehwa* (globalization) drive, it does so mostly at the state-level, and does not fully appreciate the cosmopolitan striving entailed in both the state's project and that of the diverse populace.

<sup>10</sup>Recently, “early study abroad (*chogi yuhak*)” and “educational immigration (*kyoyuk imin*)” (neologisms) have been hotly debated. Early study abroad has been criticized for leading to family breakdown, for its excessive costs, and for its negative effects on children. Some observers blame South Korean education for compelling people to exit, while others suggest that the problems are elsewhere (H. Kim 2001).

<sup>11</sup>Shin and Chang (2000, 88) report that the self-reporting as middle class decreased from 64% to 36% according to a survey conducted in September 1998; and from 62% to 41% according to another survey one month later.

<sup>12</sup>In *Happy End* (1999, director: Jung Ji-woo) (appreciated as one of South Korea's IMF Crisis films), the male protagonist has been laid off by the bank where he worked for over a decade while his wife thrives as the owner of a prosperous English language institute (see K.H. Kim 2004 for an interesting analysis of the film). The film takes up the trials of this South Korean unemployed stay-at-home Mr. Mom. Although it is widely appreciated that women suffered disproportionate job loss in the IMF Crisis, interestingly in this film the wife manages to remain economically vital. Her institute promises its parents English e-mail among other cutting edge services. Here, getting e-mail, like English education, speaks to the sense of being in the world, while living in South Korea.

<sup>13</sup>Here it is relevant to recall the late 1990s public debates over the idea of adopting English as a second official language along with Korean. This would have been an entirely unthinkable idea in the past, but entered public discourse because of novelist Pok Kŏ-il who ventured this suggestion in his essay collection, *National Language in the Era of International Language* (1998). Pok predicts that English will become the only international language, while other national languages will gradually disappear or become “Museum languages” (1998: 173). He offered this suggestion as the only reasonable way to survive in the era of “global empire” (*chigu chekuk*) and anticipated his deterrents with his admonition to con-

sider this option without taking a nationalistic perspective (182). Pok's suggestion provoked heated debates in the largest daily newspapers, popular magazines, and T.V. talk shows (see Ko 1998). While the debate deserves more serious analysis in its own right, for our purposes here it offers striking evidence of the extent to which English has become much more than a key subject on the college entrance examination. This media blitz contributes in its own right to the public perception of the hegemony of English in the global world.

<sup>14</sup>We employ class categories in this article with caution, appreciating that static labels do not capture the complexity of the life of class in South Korea's compressed modernity (see Abelman 2003). We name these three women as "so-and-so's Mother" following the naming conventions among women in South Korea.

<sup>15</sup>Multiple-household dwellings refer to houses with several renters (*tasedae jut'aek*). In South Korea today "apartments" are considered fancier, more spacious, more convenient (i.e., more modern) living places than houses (*jut'aek*), although there are some luxurious upper-class homes that are exceptions in Seoul (W. Kim 2000, 237-246; On apartments as modern living spaces, see also Kim 1993; Lett 1998). In general, and more specifically in Hun's Mother's neighborhood, most people who live in multiple-household dwellings are considered poorer than those who live in apartments. The price of buying or renting an apartment is much more expensive than buying or renting a house (i.e., multiple-household dwellings) even when the size is comparable.

<sup>16</sup>In South Korea, giving birth in the United States for the explicit purpose of citizenship is referred to as ("*haeoe*) *wŏnjŏng ch'ulsan*." Those who trade in these services estimate the numbers as follows: circa 3000 in 2001, 5000 in 2002, and over 7000 in 2003 (Chosun Ilbo Sep. 6. 2003). Recently the U.S. embassy arrested 10 South Korean mothers who gave a birth in the Los Angeles area while visiting the United States with a travel visa. Although they were eventually all released, this incident sparked ongoing debate about this issue (Chosun Ilbo Sep. 20. 2003).

<sup>17</sup>Nowadays, Chinese language education as well as trips to China are also very popular in South Korea. Recently, there are various reports about the popularity of learning Chinese among students as well as adults (Chosun Ilbo 4 February 2003; 4 March 2002).

<sup>18</sup>The importance of TOEFL scores even for elementary, middle, or high school students is related to the recent neo-liberal educational reform, particularly the significant change of the university entrance exam system during the Kim Dae Jung government (1998-2003). The new university entrance exam system emphasizes the "diversification" of the ways for college entrance, which is popularly labeled a move from the policy of "one avenue for entry (of universities)" (*hanjul seugi*) to that of "multiple avenues for entry" (*yŏrŏjul seugi*). Thus, the government advertised that a creative student, who is excellent at only one subject (e.g., English, computer, writing, etc.), can go to university now more easily in accordance with more diverse criteria of admissions, although there has been continuous debates about the effectiveness and negative byproducts of this change. This change in part also affects the current English education boom and the private after-school market for children's preparation of TOEFL or TOEIC in particular.

<sup>19</sup>Very recently, we learned that Jinu's Mother went to New Zealand again with her two sons in summer 2003. This time, she decided to put her children in "home-stays," while she lived in a separate place and met them only on weekends. A private agency for "studying abroad" (*yuhagwŏn*) arranged these "home-stays." Additionally, she escorted two of Jinu's classmates on this trip. The agency charged 7,000,000 won (about \$5800) for each child.

<sup>20</sup>Aihwa Ong (1998: 149-150) discusses Chinese corporate elites' strategy to educate their children (especially sons) in Western countries as an "entrée into a Western democracy." In those cases, fathers make plans of the entire future for their children so as to ensure their economic benefits beyond national boundaries, while mothers actually manage their children's education abroad. In contrast to Ong's case, Jinu's Mother played a more active role

in crafting her children's future. This difference also reflects a difference of family social status: The families that Ong describes are global corporate elites, while Jinu's family case is that of the upper-middle class in South Korea.