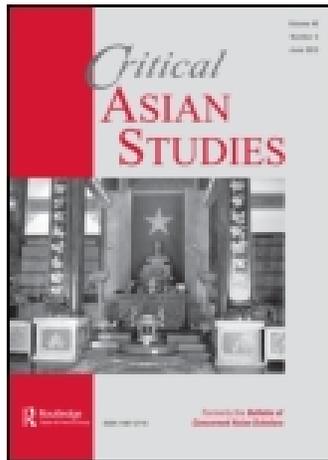


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# EAST ASIA'S ASTRONAUT AND GEESE FAMILIES

## Hong Kong and South Korean Cosmopolitanisms

Nancy Abelman, Nicole Newendorp, and Sangsook Lee-Chung

**ABSTRACT:** In this article, the authors compare two prominent examples of the East Asian middle-class transnational split family (TSF) form of international migration in which typically the mother accompanies children abroad while the father stays home to economically support the family: the “astronaut families” (*taikong*) in Hong Kong in the 1990s, and the “geese families” (*kirögi kajok*) in South Korea in the 2000s. Many scholars have located the origin of this migration form in shared East Asian cultural values of familism; moreover, what appears to unite these East Asian TSFs is their shared instrumentalism. The authors argue, however, that the construct of cosmopolitanism—in which citizens share a deep-seated interest in membership in the global community of developed, liberal nations—allows for the appreciation of the distinctive characteristics of TSF migration in Hong Kong and South Korea. The authors analyze Hong Kong and South Korea’s respective popular media representations of the rise and wane of the TSF migration pattern in order to elaborate on their particular cosmopolitanisms. During the rise period, Hong Kong’s migration was a strategy to *secure* the region’s foundational cosmopolitan identity, while South Korea’s was motivated by the *search* for a newfound cosmopolitanism. In the wane period, the authors suggest that Hong Kong and South Korean cosmopolitanisms are converging. First, in both locations people have begun to question how effective sojourn abroad is for either acquiring or securing cosmopolitanism. Second, in both areas people have begun to recognize the possibility of living cosmopolitan lives at home.

The transnational split family (TSF)<sup>1</sup> form of international migration, in which typically the mother accompanies children abroad while the father stays home

to economically support the family, has emerged as an important form of migration across East Asia. This migration form has been documented not only for Hong Kong and South Korea, the cases discussed here, but also for Taiwan—and most recently for China and Singapore. In this article, we focus on two prominent examples of TSFs: the “astronaut family”<sup>2</sup> (*taikong*)<sup>3</sup> in Hong Kong in the 1990s; and the “geese family” (*kirögi kajok*)<sup>4</sup> in South Korea in the 2000s, which was one form of early study abroad (*cbogi yubak*) in which children ventured abroad for short-term education before college.

Scholars who have considered TSF migration across East Asia have been quick to appreciate shared cultural features of this phenomenon, foremost in relation to ideas about the East Asian family.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, they have called attention to familism, meaning the family as a central economic and political actor; patriarchy and the gendered division of labor; and the role of women as family managers. In this article, however, we turn the lens to a quite different, and less obviously long-standing cultural, shared feature of this East Asian family migration strategy: the pursuit of cosmopolitanism. We refer specifically to palpable desires for inclusion in a particular community of nations and a desire for membership in the modern, democratic world that is characterized by particular lifestyles and commitments. We contend that not only is the pursuit of cosmopolitanism a fundamental motivating factor in East Asian TSF migration strategies but also that using this interpretative lens to examine TSFs allows for an understanding of the differences—beyond shared cultural features—that animate this structurally similar East Asian migration form. To this end, we argue that Hong Kong and South Korean cosmopolitanisms have motivated and animated the TSF strategy in distinctive ways: Hong Kong elites’ efforts to secure cosmopolitanism contrast with South Koreans’ interest in seeking cosmopolitanism.

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1. Throughout this article, we use TSF to refer to “transnational split family.” TSFs thus refer to transnational split families.
  2. “Astronaut” refers to parents (most often husbands) who return to Hong Kong to work and then “shuttle back and forth” between Hong Kong and the residence abroad where their wives and children live. Maria Siumi Tam explains that “the children and wives are considered stranded in outer space and totally reliant on the father-husbands who support them financially....” (2003, 177). She also explains the pun inherent in this term, which can also mean “the wife is an empty person” in Cantonese (183).
  3. All Chinese romanization in this article is in Mandarin rather than Cantonese, despite the use of Cantonese as the primary spoken Chinese dialect in Hong Kong. We’ve elected to use the pinyin romanization system because it is generally accessible to a broad audience of Chinese speakers and because Cantonese is less systematically standardized with multiple romanization systems.
  4. For Koreans, “geese” (*kirögi*), which migrate seasonally to mate, have traditionally symbolized marital fidelity. In this contemporary educational migration, the father typically visits his children and wife overseas once or twice a year during his vacation. Although it is difficult to figure the exact number of geese fathers, a 2009 *Korea Times* article estimated the number of such fathers somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000. In recent years, other types of “bird fathers” have emerged. A *toksuri* (eagle) father has the social and economic resources to visit his family whenever he wants. A *p’engguwin* (penguin) father is unable to visit his family members, like penguins who cannot fly. And very recently another term has emerged, the *ch’amsae* (sparrow) father who cannot afford to send his children overseas at all. This species diversification suggests the extent to which ESA is class stratified. See Cho 2004; Goh-Grapes 2009; Ly 2005; and Lee and Koo 2006.
  5. See, for example, Chiang 2008; Ho and Bedford 2008; Waters 2005; and Zhou 1998.

tanism. We believe that this distinction holds particularly true for the 1990s escalation phase of the strategy for Hong Kong and the parallel 2000s phase for South Korea. In the present wane phase of the TSF migration strategy, however, these distinctions seem less apparent. As both Hong Kong elites and South Koreans found the social and financial costs of pursuing their cosmopolitan dreams abroad too high, many migrants returned to their places of origin or chose not to emigrate at all, as they instead reevaluated the possibilities for achieving a cosmopolitan lifestyle at home. To substantiate this argument, we turn to the considerable media coverage on TSF migration in both Hong Kong and South Korea during the peak and wane periods of this social phenomenon. This media analysis provides a valuable lens for examining homegrown understandings about and justifications for TSF. In both locations, the media took up a conversation about what the seeming exodus revealed about the nature and well-being of Hong Kong, South Korea, and their citizens.

In Hong Kong, media conversations documenting the exodus of Hong Kong people focused on goals of securing an already existing cosmopolitanism. Leading up to Hong Kong's 1997 return to mainland Chinese sovereignty after more than 150 years of British colonial rule, Hong Kong residents worried about the possible loss of their unique social and political distinctiveness (foremost in contrast to China)—a loss that they feared would compromise not only their individual rights and freedoms but also their long-standing global connections. Hong Kong has long been a gateway to and from China, through which generations of Chinese left to pursue economic livelihoods overseas. This distinctive migration regime is an integral feature of Hong Kong's history and of its global interconnections born of colonialism, resulting in a "way of life" defined by possibilities of mobility oriented away from China and also deeply interconnected with global capitalist systems and overseas economic markets. These ties to a global market infrastructure are at the heart of what Gordon Mathews et al. have identified as Hong Kong's unique brand of "market cosmopolitanism,"<sup>6</sup> namely, the desire of Hong Kong people to maintain their membership among a globally elite group of nations defined by democratic governance and capitalistic economic practices.<sup>7</sup>

In a different vein, South Korean media focused on seeking cosmopolitanism, namely, an urgent interest in securing full membership in the global community—an urgency born in national anxiety about being left behind in the global arena and an inability to successfully compete nationally or individually in this realm. Further, for South Koreans, TSF registered a deep-seated critique of South Korea's way of life and a decision to seek something new and different. Interestingly, although South Korea shares with Hong Kong and southeastern China a large global diaspora, it has experienced neither the same sort of dense

6. Mathews et al. 2008.

7. Although the TSF formation represented a shift from earlier periods in which predominantly male economic migrants and refugees emigrated from Hong Kong, it can nonetheless be considered an extension of that diasporic orientation through which families engaged with extensive global networks of people and goods. See Skeldon 1994 and Skeldon 1995.

migration circuits nor the same level of global connectivity among its diasporic communities. Nonetheless, there are in fact large immigrant communities in all of South Koreans' original TSF destination sites. Also relevant is the sizable South Korean elite educated abroad and the history of elite education in Japan, the 1910–1945 colonial metropole. However, in spite of this considerable diaspora and legacy of postsecondary study abroad, TSF migration in South Korea registered as a very new phenomenon.

In sum, for both Hong Kong and South Korea, the escalation phase of the TSF phenomenon was thus deeply rooted in concerns about social reproduction. In Hong Kong those concerns were reflected in anxiety over how Hong Kong would maintain the economic and political infrastructure to ensure the territory's central prominence in global financial networks post-1997, and over how its people would be able to continue to benefit from those networks to maintain a secure economic and political future. In South Korea, on the other hand, it was the 1997 Economic Crisis and the subsequent precipitous fall of the middle class that called into question the country's place in the world of developed and democratic nations. South Koreans arrived at a veritable consensus that they needed to acquire new skills and assets, such as the ability to speak and work in English, as well as creative and democratic ways of thinking.<sup>8</sup>

Yet these regional distinctions in the pursuit of cosmopolitanism seem to disappear in the media coverage of what we call the wane phase of TSFs in both Hong Kong and South Korea. Our analysis indicates a convergence in which Hong Kong residents and South Koreans alike come to reconsider whether they could truly achieve their cosmopolitan ambitions abroad. We suggest that in this phase, people in both regions weigh whether it might be at home that they can best realize some of cosmopolitanism's most humane ideals, as families opt for more comfortable efforts toward global membership rather than the hardships associated with TSF migration. Thus in both areas people have begun to reconcile with what we might call "cosmopolitanism at home" or "good-enough cosmopolitanism." The notion of cosmopolitanism at home might seem to run counter to the idea of cosmopolitanism as a state of being "at home in the world"; we suggest instead, however, that recognition of the costs of cosmopolitan projects abroad speaks perhaps to a new mode of global comfort. We are intrigued that with these homespun cosmopolitanisms, both Hong Kong people and South Koreans are perhaps asserting that cosmopolitan ideals—such as human liberty and creative human development—can be best achieved in the comfort of home, avoiding the considerable familial, social, and economic costs of migration abroad.

Below, we begin our discussion of comparative Hong Kong and South Korean TSF strategies with a closer look at theories of cosmopolitanism before introducing the specific context and history of Hong Kong's astronaut and South Korea's geese families and our analysis of the media about those social phenomena.

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8. Cho 2004; Lee and Koo 2006; Park (Joseph) 2010; Finch and Kim 2012.

## Cosmopolitanisms

By focusing our analysis on the cosmopolitan motivations of Hong Kong and South Korean TSF migration—both in the rise and wane periods—we challenge previous conceptions of this East Asian migration phenomenon as exclusively culturally based (with its roots in East Asian familism), and also as narrowly economic or instrumental in purpose.

The East Asian regional variant of TSF migration seems to share certain features with labor migration. In this latter, primarily economically motivated migration pattern, parents (most often fathers, but increasingly mothers) leave children behind in less developed world areas as they venture to the urban global North in order to contribute to their families' economic survival.<sup>9</sup> The common denominator of both migration patterns is family separation; as with the case of East Asian TSFs, economic migrants often spend years separated from their immediate family members, who may even be barred from residing in the countries in which their mothers, fathers, husbands, or wives are working.<sup>10</sup> However, while the split families of economic migrants have been understood as one component of a diversified family strategy to achieve economic stability,<sup>11</sup> the TSFs of economic elites have instead often been described as deriving from the social mobility strategies of those with economic leeway, including, for example, Hong Kong's "flexible citizens," as described by Aihwa Ong.<sup>12</sup> We appreciate that these more elite and education-related migrations also entail labor: both the labor of the parent/s who labors (either at home or in the migrant site to support the family) and/or the possible future migrant labor of the child, who would likely be afforded work options abroad. However, we think it is important to call attention to the focus on the cosmopolitan educational project for the children in these instances of TSF as well as to distinguish these kinds of professional labor (viewed as largely positive by industrialized nations whose immigration systems favor professional migrants over those with less education) from the hardships associated with labor migration by individuals seeking financial survival through the service industry or other forms of unskilled employment abroad.

These differences aside, what unites labor migrants and East Asian TSFs is their apparent narrow instrumentalism: namely, that these migrations are motivated nearly wholly by goals of economic or social mobility. We are, however, inspired by recent theorizing of cosmopolitanism that calls into question this instrumentalist take on the global experiences and motivations of TSF migrants; this new approach allows for a more complex appreciation of the desires and motivations that animate the Hong Kong and South Korea residents who opt for this form of migration. In particular, citizens of both Hong Kong and South Korea share a deep-seated interest in membership in the global community of developed, liberal nations.

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9. See, for example, Parreñas 2001; and Massey et al. 2002.

10. See, for example, Parreñas 2005; and Constable 2007.

11. Massey et al. 2002, 12.

12. Ong 1999.

Our analysis of Hong Kong and South Korean TSFs is informed by recent challenges to theories of what has been dubbed “normative” or “ideal”<sup>13</sup> cosmopolitanism, epitomized in Pnina Werbner’s summary: “ideas of tolerance, inclusiveness, hospitality, personal autonomy, [and] emancipation.”<sup>14</sup> Normative cosmopolitanism refers to these universal human ideals, which are in turn posed against the nation and other sectarian collectivities.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we align our own understanding of cosmopolitanism with the many humanists and social scientists who have coined phrases to amend these classical notions of cosmopolitanism, among them “vernacular,”<sup>16</sup> “discrepant,”<sup>17</sup> “banal,”<sup>18</sup> “working class,” and “marginal.”<sup>19</sup> Together, these scholars have observed that normative cosmopolitan ideals are both elite and Western-centered, principally indexing the tastes and travels of yesteryear’s few: “those who can claim to be a ‘citizen of the world’ by virtue of independent means, expensive tastes, and a globe-trotting lifestyle.”<sup>20</sup> With vernacular, discrepant, banal, and the like, however, scholars consider the travels and possible affinities of nonelites who nonetheless find themselves—although most often not by choice—encountering the world.

Even as our subjects here are primarily elites (whose personal freedoms have not been violated and furthermore whose cosmopolitanism is neither incidental nor accidental), we are nonetheless interested in these revisionist theories of cosmopolitanism because cosmopolitan desires of Hong Kong and South Korean TSFs we describe appear quite different from—although still retaining some features of—normative cosmopolitanism. What can appear to diverge from normative cosmopolitanism for the people we feature here are the instrumentalist and material interests that motivate their emigration trajectories: be those of the Hong Kong businessman who wants to secure his fortune, or the South Korean middle-class professional who seeks to educate his children abroad because of class reproduction anxieties. Yet, these apparent instrumentalist divergences from normative (and thus “authentic”) cosmopolitan ideals can belie other important features of these same figures: the Hong Kong businessman may also be equally concerned with protecting his family’s rights and freedoms; just as the South Korean professional might also be deeply committed to educating his children to become “global citizens.” Moreover, these migrants’ recognition of a “good enough” cosmopolitanism that ultimately brings them back home similarly challenges assumptions that cosmopolitan ways of life are often less easily accessible from home rather than by being elsewhere “at home in the world.”

The critical literature we draw on has elected to retain “cosmopolitanism” in

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13. Beck and Sznaider 2006, 9.

14. Werbner 2008, 17.

15. Beck and Sznaider 2006, 6.

16. Homi K. Bhabha, cited in Werbner 2008, 17.

17. Clifford 1997.

18. Beck and Sznaider 2006.

19. Werbner 2008, 17.

20. Robbins 1998 (Comparative), 248.

order to signal that nonelite sojourners are perhaps collectively fashioning something that is potentially liberating, creative, and productive. For example, writing of working-class cosmopolitanisms, Werbner describes “the figure of the expanding cosmopolitan subjectivity of a Pakistani migrant working on a building site in the Gulf, a simple man who *embraces different cultures and members of diverse ethnic groups*, but who nevertheless retains his transnational yet rooted identity as a Sufi.”<sup>21</sup> Pheng Cheah describes “the rise of new normative cosmopolitanism, mass-based emancipator forms of global consciousness, or actually existing imagined political world communities.”<sup>22</sup> These newly coined cosmopolitanisms turn their attention broadly to lived practices rather than ideals—to, for example, “actually existing practical stances”<sup>23</sup> or “*unintended and lived* cosmopolitanism.”<sup>24</sup> With Bruce Robbins, these scholars appreciate “a plural for ‘cosmos’”<sup>25</sup> or what Werbner handily summarizes as the “historicities and distinctive worldviews” of cosmopolitan practices.<sup>26</sup> These authors are thus interested in the transformative potential of even these other cosmopolitanisms. In this vein, we appreciate that local redefinitions of how best to be “cosmopolitan” in Hong Kong and South Korea have important social and political repercussions, particularly through renewed commitments by residents of both locations to strengthen and cultivate the path to their cosmopolitan desires at home rather than abroad.

This critical literature not only describes contemporary developments, but also makes another intervention with its suggestion that normative cosmopolitanism has always been rife with contradictions, including its apparent contradiction with nationalism.<sup>27</sup> For the Hong Kong and South Korean sojourners featured here, at issue is their relationship to the values of normative cosmopolitanism, whether, for example, in Werbner’s terms they “embrace different cultures and members of diverse ethnic groups.”<sup>28</sup> We join revisionist scholars of cosmopolitanism in arguing that the underlying values and commitments of these Hong Kong and South Korean migrations can be understood as variants of cosmopolitanism. In this vein, we appreciate that what scholars have described as Hong Kong’s market identification is foundationally an embrace of globally oriented personal and political freedoms that distinguish it from socialist China. Hong Kong’s unique “market cosmopolitanism” sets Hong Kong people apart from citizens of other nations who are foremost concerned about national belonging and allegiance.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Hong Kong people, Mathews et al. argue, are characterized by their primary identification with the global financial market<sup>30</sup>—an identification that indexes an affiliation with a particular world of

21. Werbner 2008, 16; emphasis added.

22. Cheah 1998, 32.

23. Cheah, describing Clifford 1998, 21.

24. Beck and Sznaider 2006, 7; emphasis in original.

25. Robbins 1998 (Introduction), 2.

26. Werbner 2008, 17.

27. Robbins 1998 (Introduction), 2.

28. Werbner 2008, 16.

29. Mathews et al. 2008.

30. Ibid.

nations understood to be united by many of the features of normative cosmopolitanism. Likewise, South Korea's cosmopolitan yearnings, escalating as they did with democratization and an aggressive globalization regime, can be appreciated as fundamentally a bid for membership in a global democratic world of nations similarly united by respect for personal freedoms, democratic communication, and so on. In this way, both Hong Kong and South Korean TSFs share the appearance of emigrant instrumentalism, but are at once profoundly committed to contributing to the fashioning of a national cosmopolitanism that aligns with normative cosmopolitan ideals.

### Hong Kong and Korean Transnational Split Families

Although Hong Kong and South Korean TSFs are similar in form, their histories are in fact very distinct: Hong Kong's TSFs were formed inadvertently as economically elite migrant families sent one or both parents home for their livelihoods (often after facing barriers to employment abroad); in contrast, the South Korean TSF was a planned family form oriented around children's short-term educational migration.

#### *Hong Kong: Securing Cosmopolitanism*

The Hong Kong TSF phenomenon is well documented<sup>31</sup>—particularly in connection with Hong Kong's handover on 1 July 1997. As Ronald Skeldon has shown, TSF migration in Hong Kong began as a large-scale phenomenon in the mid to late 1980s, following the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, which negotiated Hong Kong's post-1997 future.<sup>32</sup> Yet even before this time, large numbers of people were already emigrating. This flow was facilitated by Hong Kong's British colonial connections and its location at the crossroads of Chinese travel throughout the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> By 1984, approximately 20,000 individuals were leaving annually.

By 1987, however, there was a clear jump as some 30,000 people began to emigrate annually, the number rising to 45,000 by 1988. The Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989 further catalyzed emigration, as fears about political freedom in post-1997 Hong Kong reached a fevered pitch. The numbers of people leaving Hong Kong peaked in 1992, when 66,000 individuals departed. Over the course of the 1990s that number decreased: first, to 40,000 in the mid 1990s, and, after 1997, back down to 20,000—on par with pre-1987 levels of emigration.

The numbers of emigrants leaving Hong Kong during the peak periods of exodus correlate with heightened moments of public concern about the post-1997 maintenance of Hong Kong people's ways of life—which had crystallized over the long period of British colonial rule as an identity locally understood as substantially different from (and better than) that of “communist” China. Hong

31. See, for example, Skeldon 1994; and Salaff et al. 2010.

32. Skeldon 1994.

33. For example, James Watson notes that one-third of all village families he surveyed in one Hong Kong New Territories village in the late 1960s had at least one male who had worked as a sailor on international routes between 1900 and 1940 (1975).



Twenty-first anniversary of the June 4th incident, Victoria Park, Hong Kong, 6 June 2010. In the post-1997 era, Hong Kong people were nervous about preserving their fledgling democracy, protecting their individual freedoms, and safeguarding the financial and political infrastructures of Hong Kong's market cosmopolitanism. (Wikimedia Commons)

Kong people were nervous about preserving their fledgling democracy with its basis in the rule of law, which included rights and freedoms not available to mainland resident PRC citizens as well as the promise of increased democratic governance into the future. Moreover, for Hong Kong people, this legal system was a primary marker of cultural identity<sup>34</sup> in addition to providing the foundation for Hong Kong's political and economic distinctness from the rest of the mainland. Thus the concern over Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty was not only about maintaining access to individual freedom but also about safeguarding the financial and political infrastructures of Hong Kong's market cosmopolitanism that privileged Hong Kong people's global interconnections and worldwide networks oriented away from mainland China. As Hong Kong professionals and elites sought to mobilize social and economic capital to relocate in North America, Australia, or Britain, TSF migration emerged as a response to the economic, political, and social limitations that Hong Kong people encountered as they sought to replicate their Hong Kong ways of life abroad.

Hong Kong has always played a significant role in regional and international migratory pathways. It is a place from which Chinese have embarked on long journeys abroad, a point of transit for individuals hoping to migrate, and a site of return for those who have been overseas. Moreover, Hong Kong has been the hub for transportation, communication, and economic exchange for Chinese in Southeast Asia and the far-reaching networks that link those individuals to a sig-

34. For a more detailed discussion of how the "rule of law" in Hong Kong is deeply connected to local identity, see Ng 2009 and Newendorp 2011 (Contesting).

nificant Chinese diaspora.<sup>35</sup> As Skeldon points out, Hong Kong people's emigration pre-1997 built on these regional migration patterns and historically based networks.<sup>36</sup> This long-standing regional migration regime was foundationally based on familial separations that often lasted for decades following husbands' emigration;<sup>37</sup> however, the TSF migration form does register a new era in this long history, with husbands returning to Hong Kong and leaving their wives and children abroad.

For these Hong Kong astronaut families, the priority was to obtain citizenship abroad while still retaining the right to live and work in Hong Kong. Moreover, by obtaining dual citizenship, TSFs could ensure their continued ability to travel abroad and maintain the kinds of global connections and ties that they had access to in Hong Kong and through which they identified more strongly with the world beyond China rather than with China itself.

### *South Korea: Seeking Cosmopolitanism*

Although TSF migration in both Hong Kong and South Korea emerged from middle-class anxieties about uncertain futures, in contrast to the TSF phenomenon in Hong Kong, the South Korean geese-family phenomenon developed as a particular form of early study abroad (ESA), a middle-class and upper-middle class educational strategy to raise global citizens through the mastery of English and some experience of Western education. Different from Hong Kong TSF migration strategies, South Korean TSF migration goals have not typically included permanent settlement overseas or the acquisition of foreign citizenship; indeed, ESA most often ends as soon as families decide that the educational goals have been achieved (or abandoned). The phenomenon has been increasingly visible since the mid 1990s, when the South Korean government instituted a "globalization" (*seggyehwa*) strategy in the name of attaining status as an advanced world nation.<sup>38</sup> Before this era, study abroad was primarily for graduate degrees and was monopolized mostly by very wealthy families or a limited cadre of intellectuals.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1990s first phase of ESA, the number of students was small and ESA was seen for the most part as a means of escape for youth who could not adjust to the rigors of the South Korean educational system. Beginning in the 2000s, however, especially as the South Korean economy was just recovering from the 1997 Economic Crisis, the number of ESA students escalated rapidly. While the number of primary and secondary school students leaving South Korea for study abroad in 2000 was annually only 4,397, by 2002 it had reached 10,132.

35. Skeldon 1994; Sinn 1995.

36. Skeldon 1994, 1995.

37. See, for example, Szonyi 2005 and Newendorp 2011 (Seniors).

38. It was the Kim Young Sam administration (1993-98) that promulgated an aggressive globalization regime, officially naming it "*seggyehwa*" (globalization) in 1995. *Seggyehwa* described a comprehensive effort, "encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural enhancement to reach the level of advanced nations in the world" (Kim [Samuel], ed. 2000, 2-3). See also Kang (Myung Koo) 2000; Shin 2003; and Cho 2005.

39. Kim (Jongyoung) 2011, 2012.

Subsequently, the number continued to increase rapidly, peaking at 29,511 in 2006, a 45 percent increase over the previous year.<sup>40</sup> In this escalation phase, ESA destinations, which originally had been English-speaking Western countries, grew more diverse as some middle-class parents sought more economical ESA opportunities for their children in predominately English-speaking countries in Asia, including Singapore, the Philippines, India, South Africa, and China.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the average age of ESA students became younger. The number of primary school students studying abroad surpassed middle and high school students in 2002; and by 2006, this number reached 13,814, an impressive 69.5 percent increase over the previous year. As the typical ESA child became younger, it is no surprise that geese family migration became more widespread. However, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008, in which the South Korean currency was badly hit, the number of ESA students declined, dropping to 18,118 in 2009, the first time since 2004 that the number of ESA students fell below 20,000. The numbers increased slightly to 18,741 in 2010. Although there are no official statistics for geese families, the geese family TSF phenomenon has become both visible and controversial, both as an educational strategy and as a larger social issue.

It is widely understood that what decisively drove the South Korean middle class to ESA was the aftermath of the Economic Crisis. After the 1990s democratization,<sup>42</sup> South Koreans increasingly clamored for the liberal principles of freedom and individuality; in parallel, the state was interested in its membership in the modern, democratic, and developed world. With the Economic Crisis, South Koreans were not only made more acutely aware of their global connectedness than ever before, but they also had to face the harsh reality of competition for survival in the global economy. As South Koreans witnessed both their country's fall "from being an economic miracle to an economic fi-

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40. The actual numbers of ESA students are probably much higher than official statistics. The figures do not, for example, include those students who accompany parents working or studying overseas. It is widely understood that it is in fact these students (the children of families abroad) who have the greatest potential to later become ESA students in geese-family arrangements.
41. In these countries, South Korean children tend to attend international schools where they can learn English. In addition the ability to learn Chinese (for example in Singapore) is also attractive. Also, increasingly Chinese is understood as a global language that can promise the same advantages as English. Some scholars have argued that intra-Asian study abroad is more comfortable because of racial and cultural proximity and the existence of diverse speakers of English. See Kim (Jeehun) 2010; Kim (Jeehun) forthcoming; and Park and Bae forthcoming.
42. The year 1987 was a major turning point for South Korean democracy when massive demonstrations finally led to the surrender of the Chun Doo Hwan military regime and to open, direct presidential elections. Until then, democratic freedoms had been constantly limited by authoritarian governments in the name of national security and economic development. Although Roh Tae Woo won the presidency with a bare plurality in the 1987 elections, the public expressions of suppressed desire for freedom, human rights, and economic equity and justice exploded (including an aggressive labor movement). Kim Young Sam was later elected, becoming the first civilian president (1993–1998); Kim Dae Jung, who had been sentenced to death and barred from active politics under Chun's regime, eventually became president (1998–2003), making for the first peaceful regime change to the opposition party in postwar South Korea. See Robinson 2007, 167–81; and Eckert et al. 1990, 347–418.

asco”<sup>43</sup> and the bottoming out of the middle class, uncertainty clouded the bright futures that South Koreans had imagined for themselves as global citizens of a developed country. These circumstances made for intense middle-class reproduction anxieties. As the state was less and less able to guarantee bright futures for its citizens, people increasingly felt that they had to take sole responsibility for their own (and their family’s) survival.<sup>44</sup>

It is no surprise that in the face of this Crisis, South Korean families became ever more obsessed with their children’s education, as education has long been appreciated as the driving force of the country’s rapid development and of families’ upward mobility.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it is commonplace in South Korea to speak of people’s “education zeal” or “education fever.”<sup>46</sup> After the Economic Crisis, not only did the proportion of people who saw themselves as members of the middle class drastically drop,<sup>47</sup> but also people’s confidence in the South Korean educational system nearly collapsed. South Korean education appeared to be lacking the ability to nurture the very assets that people increasingly considered to be central to the country’s future competitiveness: knowledge, information, cultural creativity, and productivity.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, South Koreans have become increasingly aware of the postindustrial, knowledge-based global labor market that demands high-skilled professionals who have an excellent command of English and cosmopolitan assets.<sup>49</sup> Both the educational and employment sectors in South Korea were more and more reorganized around the value accorded to these skills.<sup>50</sup> Thus ESA and TSF quickly emerged as both a strategy for success and a profound critique of South Korean society. Indeed, in the beginning, ESA was considered a public embarrassment, emerging as it did from excessive education zeal, instrumental familism, and the fetishism of English. Both scholars and the media also called attention to the financial and psychological effects of ESA on families. Although many news articles discussed family breakdown (e.g., financial hardship, divorce, and fathers’ suicide in the case of TSFs) and the maladjustment of ESA children, the numbers of parents who wanted to send their children abroad nonetheless increased steadily.

In contrast to the TSF phenomenon in Hong Kong, in which elites went abroad primarily as the result of desires to maintain cosmopolitan ways of life already available to them in Hong Kong, the South Korean TSF phenomenon demonstrates South Koreans’ newly emerging cosmopolitan yearning for global belonging and their efforts to secure elite belonging at home through the

43. Kim and Finch 2003, 120.

44. Song 2006, 2009; Abelman, Park, and Kim 2009; Park (Joseph) 2011.

45. Kim and Song 2007; Koo 2007.

46. Oh (Uk-Whan) 2002, 2008; Seth 2002.

47. In social surveys before the Economic Crisis of 1997, circa 60 to 70 percent of respondents identified themselves as middle class, but after the Crisis, the number drastically dropped to the 40 percent level. See Koo 2007, 51–52; and Hong 2005, 1–5.

48. Kim (Dae-Jung) 2000.

49. Kang (Myung Koo) 2000; Kim (Samuel) 2000; Cho 2004; Chung 2008.

50. Park (Joseph) 2010, 2011. Over this period there was a rapid increase of paths to higher education outside of the single national examination, some of which gave value to these sorts of new skills and assets; and of course, the college entrance examination continued to place great emphasis on English.

attainment of cultural capital overseas. The TSF migration strategy in both Hong Kong and South Korea was, as we have shown, foundationally committed to a particular global membership founded in liberal social ideals of individual freedom and political democracy. We suggest that we can consider these as the characteristics of a particular variant of cosmopolitanism.

### The Rise and Wane of TSF Migration in the Media

In both Hong Kong and South Korea, the media followed the precipitous rise and wane of the TSF strategy; and in both places the numerical indices of the phenomenon were treated as telltale signs of global standing and well-being. Although the media did not offer uniform interpretations of the rise or wane of TSFs, there is no question that the phenomenon did variously index cosmopolitan confidence and desires. We thus observe that media reports on the TSF strategy as a veritable barometer of social and cultural well-being in both Hong Kong and South Korea.

#### *Hong Kong's TSF Peak: Cosmopolitan Crisis*

Our review of the Hong Kong Chinese media from 1988 to 1992<sup>51</sup>—the period of peak emigration from Hong Kong—confirms TSF migration's link to a "lack of confidence" (*wuxin xin*) over Hong Kong's post-handover future.<sup>52</sup> The concerns about the impending threat to Hong Kong ways of life centered foremost on two key themes: (1) brain drain (as significant numbers of well-educated professionals fled Hong Kong for other locations) and a resultant concern about the potential collapse of the professional and service infrastructures sustaining Hong Kong's market cosmopolitanism; and (2) the post-1997 continuation of political rights and freedoms, which were seen as underpinning Hong Kong's fledgling democracy as well as the migration regimes that had always been central to its ways of life.

By 1988, Chinese-language newspapers in Hong Kong were already sounding alarms about a significant increase in emigration from Hong Kong that had begun the year before. From the outset, news articles presented evidence of the considerable anxiety about Hong Kong's future—anxiety that caused professionals to emigrate in growing numbers over the subsequent few years. Article titles that proclaimed "Acute Shortage of Professionals,"<sup>53</sup> "More than 75 percent of Pharmacists in Hong Kong are Planning to Emigrate,"<sup>54</sup> and "Insurance Industry Quickly Developed but 80 percent of Insurance Companies Understaffed"<sup>55</sup> described the crisis of confidence over Hong Kong's future and also incited ever-growing numbers of professionals to consider emigration. Between mid 1988 and 1990, the media described the exodus, real or planned, of social work-

51. This discourse analysis is drawn from a survey of 549 news articles on the topic of Hong Kong's 1997 handover published in the Hong Kong Chinese news media (including *Ming Pao*, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, and *Singtao Daily*) between 1987 and 1998.

52. See, for example, Skeldon 1994; and Skeldon 1995.

53. *Singtao Daily*, 14 January 1989.

54. *Ibid.*, 9 April 1989.

55. *HKEJ (Hong Kong Economic Journal)*, 15 May 1988.

ers, public servants, engineers, middle school teachers, doctors, business managers, professional administrative staff, lawyers, nurses, architects, bank employees and managers, accountants, travel agents, university faculty, pharmacists, dentists, and police. The desire to emigrate came to be seen as so routine that filing one's documentation for emigration was referred to in one article as "running an errand at a foreign consulate."<sup>56</sup>

Throughout these articles, statistical data were employed to document the emigration phenomenon and register the government's and society's anxieties over Hong Kong's future. Some numbers spelled panic and predicted impending social and economic crises. Nonetheless, the numbers did not tell a singular story. For example, articles published in the weeks following the Tiananmen Square Incident talked about applications for emigration being up,<sup>57</sup> even as they also reported on survey results indicating that most Hong Kong people were willing to stay in Hong Kong.<sup>58</sup> In another case, an article documented that overseas Hong Kong undergraduate students intended to remain abroad because of their concerns over Hong Kong's future economic security and political freedoms, while graduate students, on the other hand, preferred to return to Hong Kong because of their knowledge about the difficulties of getting promoted to senior positions abroad.<sup>59</sup>

The worry about "brain drain" (*rencai liushi*) crystallized around concerns about the erosion of Hong Kong's financial services and other professional infrastructures. One 1990 *Singtao Daily* article reported, for example, that the Hong Kong Observatory had been unable to make accurate weather predictions because of a lack of qualified technical personnel.<sup>60</sup> Another article, published a year later, reported that significant numbers of Hong Kong teachers were likely to emigrate to Australia over the following two years, as the Australian government implemented new policies aimed at attracting qualified professionals to teach Asian languages in Australian schools.<sup>61</sup> In this way, the professional class—those individuals who were integral to the maintenance of market cosmopolitanism—seemed to nearly stand in for the nation.<sup>62</sup> The media thus suggested that with their departure, the future of Hong Kong itself was at risk.

To counter this anxiety, the media also reported on measures that might abate emigration flows. News articles discussed the possibility of creating incentives for the professional elite to stay in Hong Kong (primarily through tax breaks) and of encouraging already emigrated elites to return to Hong Kong through the establishment of employment recruiting centers in Toronto. Other articles sought to dissuade emigration entirely with stories of hardships abroad, including the difficulty of gaining employment; the hidden expenses of additional tax burdens for those who became citizens of other countries, but

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56. *Ibid.*, 3 August 1990.

57. *Ming Pao*, 15 June 1989.

58. *Ibid.*, 23 June 1989.

59. *Singtao Daily*, 22 July 1989.

60. *Ibid.*, 3 July 1990.

61. *Ming Pao*, 6 June 1991.

62. See also Hamilton 1999.

continued their business interests in Hong Kong; and the psychological toll on children and families who chose to pursue the TSF way of life.<sup>63</sup> And, in an effort to reassure Hong Kong's population about the extent of the exodus, some articles suggested that fewer people overall, and, moreover, fewer *important* people were leaving Hong Kong than assumed. One such 1988 article made the case that those leaving were not necessarily Hong Kong's "talent,"<sup>64</sup> nor were all those who stay in Hong Kong just "second-hand goods."<sup>65</sup>

A second set of concerns expressed in newspaper discourse during the peak period of emigration was overtly political, focused on maintaining the rights and freedoms that Hong Kong people hoped to be able to maintain post-1997. Two of the most commonly cited words in news articles referring to the hand-over were "human rights" (*renquan*) and "freedom" (*ziyou*). As an article in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* in early 1988 notes, Hong Kong's history as the place of emigration from China was central to residents' fears about maintaining a future society that would be politically stable with continued commitment to freedoms, rights, and the rule of law:

Because the political future is unclear, many families are emigrating to foreign countries. Most of the people in Hong Kong are themselves refugees who fled here from China in 1949. They escaped from the communist polity hoping to enjoy a stable life in Hong Kong. . . . The Chinese government says they will maintain the status quo in Hong Kong but China's political reputation has eroded Hong Kong people's confidence in its future.<sup>66</sup>

This article, as well as others that predate Tiananmen, observed that the crisis of confidence in Hong Kong's future was already linked to the problem of China's system of communist governance even well before that crackdown, which further stoked the flames of residents' fears. For example, in April 1989, an article in the *Singtao Daily* suggested that Hong Kong's Basic Law should include the Convention for Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms as a way to boost public confidence in Hong Kong's post-handover future.<sup>67</sup> In another article, the following month, survey findings indicated that 40 percent of would-be emigrants were more concerned with political than economic factors in thinking about Hong Kong's future.<sup>68</sup> By the mid 1990s, with the handover fast approaching, concerns about the interference of "China" in Hong Kong's governance and the potential and actual increase in corruption became prominent in news reports.

To hedge their bets in the face of these growing concerns, many of Hong Kong's elite "decided. . . both. . . to stay and to migrate at the same time [by maintaining] their lives and livelihoods in Hong Kong [while also spreading] assets

63. See, for example, one article: "The person is in California, but his heart remains in Hong Kong, so it's not easy to be happy," *Singtao Daily*, 9 December 1989.

64. *Singtao Daily*, 4 September 1988.

65. *Ibid.*, 10 November 1988.

66. *Ibid.*, 23 February 1988.

67. *Singtao Daily*, 20 April 1989.

68. *Ibid.*, 24 May 1989.

and family members around the world.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, it was the peak period of emigration from Hong Kong—with the anxious discourse about the potential collapse of Hong Kong’s professional infrastructure and the further erosion of that infrastructure in a post-1997 communist Hong Kong, combined with escalating concerns about access to basic human rights and freedoms—that explains the emergence of the TSF phenomenon. In other words, Hong Kong people felt compelled to emigrate in order to maintain the cosmopolitan ways of life that they enjoyed as pre-handover Hong Kong residents. Interestingly, however, as they counted down the years leading up to the handover, Hong Kong people increasingly found that the best place for them to pursue their Hong Kong-based market cosmopolitanism was in fact in Hong Kong, even as these same individuals were reluctant to give up their secure footholds in the other world areas to which they had moved their families in pursuit of a cosmopolitan ethos.

### *Hong Kong’s TSF Wane: Business as Usual*

Our analysis of the newspaper discourse of the wane period begins around 1993, by which time concerns about the future of Hong Kong had largely been assuaged through reports of fewer professionals choosing to emigrate, the return of emigrants to Hong Kong, and the successful training of a new professional class in Hong Kong. What comes through most clearly in these articles was not so much that the flood of professionals leaving Hong Kong had stopped—since emigration rates remained higher than pre-peak levels all the way through 1997—but that those who had left earlier had the potential to return. Increasingly evident was that the professional elite who made up the majority of emigrants during the peak period weren’t lost to Hong Kong forever, as many of these emigrants were reassured about Hong Kong’s still thriving market cosmopolitanism in spite of the early 1990s global recession. The social effects of this assurance, in combination with the continued commitment to Hong Kong by individuals who had never contemplated leaving, meant that emigration from Hong Kong began to decline. And while some articles continued to document the exodus as late as 1997, other articles recorded the challenges of TSF life abroad, such as an April 1993 article in the *Singtao Daily* that reported on the bullying of astronaut children.<sup>70</sup>

Many articles provided statistical documentation that the numbers of returnees to Hong Kong began to increase around this time, including these from *Singtao Daily*: “Employees of airline companies have recently started to return to Hong Kong”<sup>71</sup> and “One-quarter of Emigrants in Vancouver Plan to Return [Leading to] Astronaut Families.”<sup>72</sup> The steady documentation of return immigration continued through the mid 1990s, as each year increasing numbers of

69. Hamilton 1999, 8.

70. *Singtao Daily*, 25 April 1993.

71. *Ibid.*, 25 October 1993.

72. *Ibid.*, 7 April 1994.

emigrants were documented as returning to Hong Kong.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to the panic over brain drain just a few years earlier, the articles from this period made clear that Hong Kong was still a place where people could flourish on account of economic stability and opportunities for career development. For example, one article noted that “many Hong Kong return emigrants expressed that working in Hong Kong provided more job satisfaction and better opportunities for career development,” even for individuals with residency rights in foreign countries.<sup>74</sup> These news reports also made clear that most emigrants who returned to Hong Kong had already secured citizenship abroad—which one article referred to as the “protective amulet” of foreign citizenship.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to articles stressing Hong Kong’s economic stability, others reassured the likelihood of Hong Kong’s continued political stability post-1997. Beginning in 1992, references to China took on a substantially more neutral tone than had been the case during the peak period of emigration. Rather than inseparably linking China to its “communist” system of governance, China was now referred to in politically neutral language such as the “Chinese side” (*zhong fang*), the “mainland” (*dalu*), “Beijing,” and the “interior” (*neidi*).<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, increasing numbers of articles also expressed concern about how the “one country, two systems” policy<sup>77</sup> would work in practice and about possible Chinese interference in Hong Kong affairs.<sup>78</sup> In this vein, one 1993 article asked: “Can China’s one party dictatorship allow Hong Kong to maintain the separation of powers for the three separate branches of government?”<sup>79</sup> By 1996, articles were pointing out concrete problems that had arisen from the implementation of the “one country, two systems” policy, such as the People’s Liberation Army’s request to be stationed in Hong Kong even before the hand-over took place.<sup>80</sup> Articles from this period also focused on increasing cases of corruption pre-1997, reflecting fears that Chinese “ways” had already begun to erode Hong Kong’s rule of law-based system of governance. Rather than the peak period anxious discourse dominated by panic about the brain drain and Hong Kong’s uncertain infrastructure, these articles offered a more level-headed assessment of the possibilities for Hong Kong to maintain a stable and democratic system of governance post-1997. These articles also demonstrated that Hong Kong people were increasingly evaluating the future possibilities of

73. *Ming Pao*, 11 September 1996.

74. *HKEJ*, 5 July 1993.

75. *Singtao Daily*, 20 May 1993.

76. While this shift may result from pro-Beijing political and economic interest in Hong Kong in tamping down inflammatory rhetoric about China, it is also possible that this shift reflects local accommodation and the gradual acceptance of the idea of reunification with the mainland. However, around the time of the handover in 1997, the use of the term “communist” in article titles reappeared considerably more frequently.

77. This was the policy established through the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration that would enable Hong Kong to largely retain political and economic autonomy from the rest of the PRC until 2047.

78. See, for example, “Over half of interviewees believe they’ll have less freedom post’97,” *Ming Pao*, 13 October 1993; “Citizens’ attitudes towards the handover,” *Singtao Daily*, 4 July 1996.

79. *HKEJ*, 25 March 1993.

80. *Singtao Daily*, 25 October 1996.

securing their pre-1997 ways of life in Hong Kong as they reexamined the causes of the peak period emigration. Articles complained, for example, that the Hong Kong government had not sufficiently understood the motivation for the exodus of Hong Kong's professional class and thus had not taken sufficient action to stem its tide. This open criticism served to remind Hong Kong residents about one key difference between Hong Kong and the PRC that was still in place and would hopefully remain so post-1997: freedom of expression.

Even as Hong Kong people seemed reassured that their political futures were less bleak than previously imagined and that their economic futures were secure (as indexed by the return of skilled emigrants), Hong Kong's financial outlook succumbed to the same global downturn that had already affected emigrant livelihood in cosmopolitan locations abroad. At the height of reports about emigrants returning to Hong Kong in the mid 1990s, the media reported that Hong Kong had entered its own recession. This unfortunate new development just as the handover was about to take place led to confusion: while some news reports reassured Hong Kong people of their future security by documenting that return migration was at its peak, other articles suggested that Hong Kong's failing economy might be causing those same return emigrants to leave again for other locations abroad. For example, one article from July 1995 reported that although twenty-eight out of one hundred emigrants had returned to Hong Kong the previous year, 67 percent of those returned emigrants planned to leave again.<sup>81</sup> While these numerically dominated reports were reminiscent of the panic around statistics during the height of Hong Kong's brain drain, the media made clear that Hong Kong was still a cosmopolitan location, where residents' orientation away from China continued as it had before the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, and people could be relatively certain that Hong Kong's global membership, market orientation, and political freedoms would continue post-1997 as the "one country, two systems" policy promised. While there remained obvious concerns about the security of those cosmopolitan ways of life post-1997, Hong Kong's cosmopolitanism was "good enough" for many emigrants to return and for many individuals who had initially planned to emigrate to decide to stay in Hong Kong once and for all.

One index that Hong Kong's cosmopolitanism was "good enough" was that as 1 July 1997 approached, motivations for emigration once again echoed those of earlier periods of emigrants who had left Hong Kong for family reunification abroad and labor migration well before the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. In an article in the *Singtao Daily* published the day before the handover, a reporter mused on the motivations of people leaving Hong Kong at that historic moment. He wrote:

Many travel agents said that in order to commemorate the special day [1 July 1997], people wanted stamps in their passports and were traveling to Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and Japan.... Mr. Lin and his wife left Hong Kong on June 29 as emigrants to another country because flight tick-

81. *Ming Pao*, 13 July 1995.

ets were cheaper in June. He claimed that their emigration was not because of the lack of confidence in Hong Kong's future, but only about seeking better education for his children.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast to earlier, panicked reports about Hong Kong's future and the potential decimation of Hong Kong's infrastructure, this article—with its focus on historical mobility patterns of coming and going from Hong Kong, including travel for leisure, along with traditional migration motivations such as children's educational outcomes—demonstrated that Hong Kong's cosmopolitan ways of life seemed secure despite the much-anticipated return of Hong Kong to mainland Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

### *Korea's Precipitous ESA Rise: Educational Exodus*

As discussed above, during the precipitous rise phase of early study abroad in South Korea, it was resoundingly clear that ESA indexed a serious social and educational crisis. Indeed, running through the media discourse was a keen sense that the “system is broken”; phrases such as “breakdown” and “collapse” were ubiquitous in the media. A 2001 *Dong-A* article, for example, reported on the impressive consensus response (64.9 percent) to the statement, “[South Korean] public education is in crisis.” In turn, the article suggested even more impressive percentages for younger and better-educated respondents; readers could thus easily imagine a near-consensus diagnosis of the crisis by South Korea's supposedly most discerning citizens.<sup>83</sup>

For South Korea, the discourse of educational crisis worked easily as a broad-based social critique of features of South Korean social structure and culture, including human capital development demands that were out of synch with the rest of the developed, democratic world and unfair taxation of the population for education and other social welfare expenditures. These are the sorts of social ills that were understood to have contributed to South Korea's then still tenuous global membership. It was in this context that ESA promised alternative human capital development that could contribute to the realization of that membership.

Interestingly, well into the wane period we discuss below, a 2009 article spoke eloquently to precisely this promise of ESA beyond instrumental returns.<sup>84</sup> Although the piece declared study abroad a “failed experiment” in cost-benefit terms, it reported that nonetheless nine out of ten of those surveyed considered their overseas education a success; and eight out of ten would consider sending their own children to study abroad. “Happiness”—not “academic reputation, English skills, or money”—was what returnees spoke of as they recalled their time abroad. One interviewee was reported to have explained how it was thanks to American education—with its interest in uncovering the “why” of things—that he was “no longer afraid of having different opinions than others.” In this way, beyond the tangible benefits of English

82. *Singtao Daily*, 30 June 1997.

83. Lee (Jin-Young) 2001, A30.

84. Park (Seung-Hyuck) 2009.

mastery and credentialization abroad, more general desires for global membership and cosmopolitanism have animated the South Korean ESA and TSF strategy.

The extent to which education—and more—was broken was registered in the media first by the sheer extent of the educational exodus. Palpable was the constant reporting of numbers: of people leaving, contemplating leaving, attending events tied to leaving, and so on—a torrent of numbers that recalls Hong Kong reporting from the early phase. Many articles were evocatively titled with impressive numbers, such as the 2001 piece, “According to a survey of the Education Committee of the Grand National Party 40 percent of South Korean adults ‘hope to participate in Education Migration.’”<sup>85</sup> The article went on to present the more impressive and exact figure, 41.5 percent; and the even more impressive number of college-educated adults (i.e., over twenty years of age) contemplating this migration, 52 percent.<sup>86</sup> By 2006, the peak of ESA, media reports observed the departures in the most visceral way, “Fifty-six students a day placing their bodies on an airplane to leave for ESA.”<sup>87</sup> Further, many articles reported ESA percentage increases year by year. A 2007 article, for example, counted a 44.6 percent increase for ESA since 2005 (i.e., 29,511 leaving from 2006–2007 compared with 20,400 in 2005); and an even more staggering 69.5 percent increase for elementary students.<sup>88</sup>

These sorts of numbers were also taken as evidence of ESA’s proliferation across the class spectrum: “To find the land of opportunity: Education emigration and ESA” (2003), for example, opined that what was once “the monopoly of the privileged class,” has emerged—in the aftermath of the 1997 IMF Financial Crisis—as a viable “alternative” for the middle class.<sup>89</sup>

In this phase, ESA was often reported on in tandem with educational emigration, suggesting a continuum in which ESA was symptomatic of desires for permanent departure through which families “voted with their feet.” The numbers imparted a tip-of-the-iceberg feel to ESA: confirming that indeed the educational system was hopeless; and that the exodus could only escalate exponentially into the future. ESA was increasingly depicted as a stopgap measure for those who did not have the option of (permanent) educational migration (*kyoyuk imin*); implied was, “If they could, they would” and with it a deep-seated critique of South Korean ills. In fact, the rapid escalation and peak ESA period ran parallel to the increase and peak of South Korean emigration.<sup>90</sup> A 2001 *Dong-A* editorial entitled “‘Hopeless education’ that drives people from this land” described “latent emigrants,” ready to leave if they can.<sup>91</sup> Five years later in 2006, “Public Opinion Poll: One in four answers, ‘If I have the opportunity, I will opt for education emigration,’” presented a number of staggering

85. Lee (Jin-Young) 2001, A30.

86. Ibid.

87. Kim (Jin-Kak) 2006, 12.

88. Online at english.chosun.com (accessed 10 February 2011).

89. Hong et al. 2003, A17.

90. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Mofat); www.mofat.go.kr.

91. *Dong-A Ilbo*, 6 March 2001. A5.

survey results, among them that 40.9 percent of parents in their thirties would choose this emigration if they could and that 32.2 percent of the same demographic would opt for ESA.<sup>92</sup>

South Korea's veritable abandonment of its children was placed in stark contrast to perceptions of humanistic and nurturing education abroad. The aforementioned editorial ("'Hopeless education'...") stated: "This is because the education system is fundamentally falling apart. If one only relies on school-based education there is no way to win the race, get into college, or achieve anything at all. This reality drives parents to private supplementary education [*sagyoyuk*] and eventually to education emigration."<sup>93</sup> A critique of the enormously expensive private after-school supplementary education was pervasive; the charge was that South Korea had effectively ceded the training of its students to an expensive and highly stratified private market—without which student survival was nearly impossible. A 2003 *Dong-A* article mentioned one mother who had decided that because one can't but rely on the private after-school market, it was easier to simply attend school abroad.<sup>94</sup> Implied here was the escalating demand for English proficiency by South Korean schooling, the college entrance exams, and the domestic job market alike. The aforementioned 2006 *Dong-A* article added impressive numbers of parents calling for educational reform to the equally impressive figures of those contemplating education emigration or ESA; 54.6 percent, for example, called for the dismantling of egalitarian educational policies that had been instituted since the 1970s in answer to popular demand for equal access for all children to higher education.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, it was these sorts of policies<sup>96</sup> that were broadly understood to counter the development of individual talent and globally competent Koreans. A review in 2011 by Jiyeon Kang and Nancy Abelmann argues that media portrayals of early study abroad offered an answer to these national shortcomings: through liberal education abroad students would encounter a culture of open debate, hone the ability to speak up in public, individuality, and personal talents.<sup>97</sup>

A wane period *Korea Times* article<sup>98</sup> spoke clearly to the profound educational and social critique of TSF migration. Describing wild geese fathers as "poor Korean souls who essentially sacrifice themselves for their children's better education," the article quoted a Seoul National University professor who said that these men were "a clear sign of something wrong in our society": "If Korea were a good place to live, wild geese fathers would not exist." The article

92. Lee and Park 2006, A5.

93. *Dong-A Ilbo*, 6 March 2001. A5

94. Park (Kyung-A) 2003, D5.

95. Lee and Park 2006, A5.

96. These measures included, for example, the 1974 abolishment in Seoul and major metropolitan areas of school-specific high school entrance examinations to reduce differences among high schools and relieve intense competition and the 1980 policy that made private tutoring illegal. Equalization also included a general commitment to a high degree of standardization and centralization. See Park (Hyunjoon) 2007.

97. Kang and Abelmann 2011, 97–98. See also Abelmann and Kang 2014.

98. Goh-Grapes 2009.

is hard-hitting about South Korean education—"the irony...that the government maintains absolute power and manipulation over a failing educational system, including the highly competitive national college entrance exam"—and by extension about broader social inequality: "If you are a graduate of a nameless community college and lack wide connections, you cannot possibly dream of getting appointed to an important position." Educational exodus, then, be it a TSF migration or emigration, sounded a clarion cry for social reform at home that would signal the cosmopolitan belonging South Koreans clamored for.

### *South Korea's Wane Period: Resigned Return*

Media from the wane period were keenly interested in accounting for the apparent reversal of the trend. Suggested was that with the maturation of ESA, confidence in the outcomes of being educated abroad was faltering; a 2008 article, for example, described parents having "lower expectations...as they learn more about the situation."<sup>99</sup>

The media juggled a number of competing explanations for the reversal. While South Korea's economic woes were certainly at issue, also discussed were reduced confidence in the fruits of ESA, the personal and familial costs of ESA, and the difficulties of reintegrating into Korean schooling and society. Yet another explanation offered the possibility that South Korea might build its own global educational infrastructure such that students could become "global" at home—at least prior to college. The media was thus ambivalent: on the one hand it documented Koreans unable to successfully navigate education abroad both because of their own deficits as well as racism and other exclusions abroad; on the other hand, it rang somewhat confident about the possibility of cosmopolitanism at home. A 2008 *Chosun* article, "Spending on study overseas plummets," summarized this ambivalence nicely.<sup>100</sup> It attributed the decreases "primarily to worsening financial conditions, including a weaker local currency and a slowing economy;" but added, "although some attribute this phenomenon to Koreans' reduced preference for overseas studying and language training;" and finally went on to mention that South Korea's "galvanized" English education system might play a role in the decreases and to note that parents have "realized that it's difficult to care for" children overseas.

Just as numbers were important to the escalation and peak phase so too were they to the wane phase. A 2010 *Chosun* article,<sup>101</sup> for example, took stock of the 35 percent decrease from 2006 to 2009 of children from Seoul's two most prosperous districts. This rate was not so different from the 33.7 percent national decreases reported for 2009 in another article.<sup>102</sup> A 2008 *Kyunghyang Online Newspaper* article, "Half of parents say, 'I want to send my kids to study abroad'" made it clear that it was college study abroad that was now the major trend: while 48.3 percent of parents answered that they were interested in college study abroad

99. See online: english.chosun.com (accessed 10 February 2011).

100. Ibid.

101. Online at english.chosun.com (accessed 10 February 2011).

102. Ibid.

for their children, the answers for elementary, middle, and high school were unimpressive at 12.3 percent, 14.8 percent, and 14.7 percent respectively.<sup>103</sup>

Just as the promise of education abroad was at the heart of the media reporting on the escalation, so too was disappointment with that very education abroad central to the reporting on the wane. The media queried whether Koreans were in fact prepared to be able to succeed abroad. In this vein, Kang and Abelmann describe what they call the domestication of ESA, namely, the realization that study abroad is but an extension of the South Korean education infrastructure such that youth who are unlikely to succeed at home will have little ability to do so abroad.<sup>104</sup> A 2009 *Korea Times* piece offered that “there is a possibility that parents are rethinking the effect of early overseas schooling.”<sup>105</sup> The article reported particularly on the employment difficulties of returnee students, citing one woman who said, “I think studying overseas is not an all-round solution.”<sup>106</sup> Drawing on interviews with one hundred students from the 1994–2000 [college] study abroad cohort, the aforementioned 2009 *Chosun* piece is bold: “Based on a bare cost–benefit analysis [i.e., of employment wages], the study abroad fever of the 1990s is a failed experiment.”<sup>107</sup> A 2010 *Chosun* article also mentioned the difficulties of students’ reintegration into South Korean schools, adding that “their opportunities for preferential admission at major universities have diminished.”<sup>108</sup>

Media reporting increasingly describes more modest returns to ESA and advises parents to therefore lower their expectations of the potential benefits of ESA. A 2008 *Korea Times* piece cautioned against the “false illusion” that all children will succeed, noting instead that many children are in fact “ill prepared to learn a language and live in a foreign country.”<sup>109</sup> It urged parents to undertake realistic plans commensurate with realistic expectations (“Children should not be subject to lofty expectations just because they are your children”). A 2009 *Chosun* article focused on survey results from one hundred students from “the first generation of Koreans who went abroad to study as young children [from 1994 to 2000]” and expressed surprise that “only half said they spoke English like natives,” a finding that was reported to have disappointed parents and Korean companies alike.<sup>110</sup> Interestingly, the article suggested that one concern was that fluency “requires understanding of the culture and society,” which is less likely for the fifty-two out of one hundred students who majored in business and commerce while studying abroad (i.e., versus literature or sociology). At issue here were the preparation and choices of Korean youth and their families. Here, too, as noted above, cosmopolitan belonging was perhaps becoming understood in broader terms: no longer was English alone sufficient, but in-

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103. Oh (Kwan-Cheol) 2008.

104. Kang and Abelmann 2011.

105. Kwon 2009.

106. Ibid.

107. Park (Seung-Hyuck) 2009.

108. Online at [english.chosun.com](http://english.chosun.com) (accessed 10 February 2011).

109. Jeon and Goh 2008.

110. Online at [english.chosun.com](http://english.chosun.com) (accessed 9 February 2011).

stead students were called on to acquire larger social and cultural literacies.

In addition to these discussions of modest returns, the media increasingly documents the taxing costs of ESA. A 2010 *Chosun* article on ESA students listed the personal and familial costs of both ESA and TSF, including the case of “children [who] go astray because they weren’t properly taken care of.”<sup>111</sup> Food, in particular, was mentioned in the discussion of care, and one parent reported hearing that some children abroad were only fed hamburgers by host family mothers.<sup>112</sup> A 2008 *Korea Times* piece added family estrangement as a cost of TSF, offering the example of a father who had been very disappointed by his much-longed-for visit to his family abroad: although he thought that he had so much to tell his family, he ended up speaking very little because he had not been able to “understand what they were saying.” The article summarized: “Imprudent decisions made by teenagers studying abroad have caused many problems in Korea. First of all, lots of money is spent without reasonable reward. What is worse is that it causes families to break down. Also it creates many difficulties as each student attempts to adjust to a new culture and later to reintegrate in Korea.”<sup>113</sup> The same article also documented returnee problems, particularly in school, both on account of the unfamiliar and difficult curriculum and because local students often “grow tired of [their] bragging.”<sup>114</sup>

In these ways, the media reveal that it is less and less clear that globalization is best achieved abroad. In this vein the media pay greater attention to the possibility of South Korea’s own institutions perhaps stepping in to do a better job. The aforementioned 2010 *Chosun* article, for example, cited one parent (whose daughter had struggled abroad with loneliness and “poor English”) saying, “There now are a lot of good private tutoring institutes in Korea. I don’t think I’ll send my second child.”<sup>115</sup> And a 2008 article called for the government to “devise practical English education policies to encourage students to remain in Korea.”<sup>116</sup> A fascinating 2008 *Dong-A* article, “The rise of third generation ESA students [who prepare for] international middle schools and specialized high schools,”<sup>117</sup> described the strategy of going abroad early for a short stay (around two years) to prepare for the most competitive ranks of South Korean schooling—international middle schools and specialized (e.g., foreign language) high schools among them—as perhaps after all the best way to prepare for entrance to elite colleges in both South Korea and abroad. In this way, the international sector has “come home.” Increasing also are options for international degrees in educational free trade zones in South Korea, such as Jeju Island’s “Free International City,” which hopes to “absorb at least 20 percent of domestic demand for overseas education.”<sup>118</sup>

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111. Oh (Youn-Hee) 2010.

112. Ibid.

113. Jeon and Goh 2008.

114. Ibid.

115. Oh (Youn-Hee) 2010.

116. Jeon and Goh 2008.

117. Woo 2008, C1.

118. Kim (Hyun-Cheol) 2009.

As with Hong Kong, the possibility of cosmopolitanism at home speaks both to limitations abroad as well as to recalibration of the very meaning of cosmopolitan lives.

## Conclusion

There is no question that conventional understandings of the East Asian regional TSF migration pattern—understandings that have described the shared cultural features of this migration form anchored in family strategies for success and reliant on traditional forms of gendered family labor—help to explain the popularity of TSF migration across diverse East Asian regions. Moreover, these interpretative lenses have also helped to highlight the commonalities experienced among TSF and other labor migrants, whose motivations may also be rooted in economic instrumentalism and who struggle with adjustment to new living environments, separation from close family members, and finding suitable employment abroad. Our point, however, is that these cultural explanations are not sufficient to fully comprehend connections to both the nation and the international realm, as individual migrant actors make decisions about how to mobilize household resources for certain kinds of desired outcomes. Cosmopolitanism, the interpretative lens we have employed in this article, allows us not only to make these important connections, but in so doing also to uncover compelling differences animating these structurally similar TSF forms throughout East Asia.

Our detailed discussion of media conversations around the peak phases of TSF migration in Hong Kong and South Korea has shown that the exodus of emigrants was propelled by fears that were deeply linked to insecurities that were national in origin. In Hong Kong's case, the impending reunification with the PRC sparked fears that the only possibility for Hong Kong people to retain the market-oriented and internationally oriented cosmopolitan ways of life they had obtained through their status as British colonials was by moving elsewhere in the developed world. In South Korea, middle-class residents feared that the only way to compete with other nations as equals on a global stage was to move abroad to gain social and cultural capital through education for young children—who would revitalize South Korea's world standing as cosmopolitan adults. But the cosmopolitan desires that fueled the TSF migration form in both locations had to be reconsidered once emigrants encountered serious obstacles to the comfortable lives that they imagined experiencing as (or becoming) "cosmopolitans" abroad. For both groups, the financial and personal costs associated with TSF led to a reevaluation of how they might actually be able to find "good enough" cosmopolitanism back home.

For Hong Kong and South Korean TSFs, cosmopolitanism may best be experienced in the "comforts of home," where being together with family in a culturally familiar place with relatively easy access to educational and employment opportunities can allow for greater ease of access to "feeling at home in the world" rather than actually living elsewhere in the world, as normative cosmopolitan ideals suggest. At the same time, these would-be emigrants would not have been able to achieve the cosmopolitan desires they had sought by going

abroad without important transformations at home—transformations linked in part to social anxieties that fueled emigration exodus in the first place. In this way, the search for cosmopolitan ways of life becomes a productive force in its own right, fueling change by blurring the boundaries of variants of cosmopolitanism and by creating new cosmopolitan locations and lifestyles at home.

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