

South Korea's Education Exodus: The Life and Times of Early Study Abroad

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I. The Lay of the Land

Introduction: South Korea's Education Exodus: History, Context, and Motivations

Nancy ABELMANN, Soo Ah KWON, Adrienne LO, and Sumie OKAZAKI

This introduction frames early study abroad in a historical context. Locating the rise of early study abroad in relation to the neoliberalization of the South Korean educational and labor markets, it traces the complex motivations which spur families to embark on their arduous and expensive journeys. It examines the various forms of study abroad and its spread to new locations, discussing its relationship to other kinds of migration.

Chapter 1. The Survey and Demographic Portrait of Early Study Abroad

CHON Sun Ihm (Sejong University) and Hee Jung CHOI (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

This chapter uses demographic and survey data to trace the historical rise of early study abroad (ESA). It provides a broad overview of the phenomenon, detailing how the class, educational background, age, and regional origins of ESA students have changed over time. It discusses the varying definitions of ESA, which has come to encompass everything from short summer trips to the Philippines to decade-long sojourns. It provides quantitative documentation of the global reach of the phenomenon and its rapid escalation over the past decade.

Chapter 2. The Domestication of South Korean Early Study Abroad in the First Decade of the Millennium

Jiyeon KANG (University of Iowa) and Nancy ABELMANN (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

This chapter examines a considerable shift in the newspaper discourse on South Korean early study abroad. In the early years of ESA, South Koreans sustained a belief in the promise of alternative subject formation through ESA, namely that with time abroad young people's potential and character would be significantly altered. However, as early study abroad increased dramatically in the 2000s, the discourse came to assert that ESA success relies both on technical preparation at home and pre-existing character. This shift is a product of both escalating social and economic anxieties in post-IMF South Korea; and the maturation and escalation of ESA itself. The chapter argues that ESA is domesticated: no longer depicted as a distinct or discrete education field abroad, but instead an extension of the highly stratified and competitive South Korean education market that demands precisely the same assets for success.

II. Navigating Class and the Global

Chapter 3. Education "Between" South Korea and New Zealand: Hopes and Limits in a Transnational Social Field

Bon Giu KOO (Hanyang University)

This chapter examines how transnational migrants in New Zealand attempt to exploit a transnational social field to escape from the monopolistic hegemony of the Korean nation state over the social mobility of its members. It analyzes how New Zealand's image as a slow, rustic, affordable, and peaceful country has led to its rise as a new ESA destination, particularly for migrants who are peripherally located in South Korea. It discusses the different educational resources that parents invest in depending on their envisioned reentry into South Korea, and how students' mobility is constrained by the perception of New Zealand as a peripheral state.

Chapter 4. School Choice in the Global Schoolhouse: How Korean Education Migrants Calibrate "Success" in Singapore

Joseph Sung-Yul PARK and Sohee BAE (National University of Singapore)

This chapter explores the complex meaning of "success" in early study abroad through an analysis of how ESA families in Singapore deal with the choice of which school to attend—local, government schools or private, international schools—and how these negotiations reveal a tension inherent in the goals of early study abroad. It shows how these different schools can be seen as representing two types of cultural capital: the global cosmopolitan whose capabilities are indexed through her command of globally recognized forms of English, and the disciplined elite whose competence is demonstrated through achievements in competition within the academic arena. While these two aspects are often conflated in the discourse of ESA, the particular choices engendered by the educational landscape of Singapore draw attention to how families come to terms with what "success" means. By observing how families deal with the question of school choice within a network of constraints and social forces—such as the brokered nature of ESA and the competition-oriented educational culture of Singapore—this chapter shows how this construction of "success" is deeply rooted in local circumstances and in considerations of how cultural capital acquired through ESA will map the future.

Chapter 5. The 'Other Half' Goes Abroad: The Perils of Public Schooling in Singapore

Jeehun KIM (Inha University)

This chapter investigates the experiences of lower middle class migrants who attend public schools in Singapore. Such students often become "stuck" in Singapore, demoted in school, unable to return to South Korea, and tracked towards vocational education. By comparing how children's language learning experiences and acquisition of educational and social capital are structured by parental resources, this chapter reveals how the experience of pre-college study abroad and its percolation to less privileged sectors of society is shaped by class.

III. The Dilemmas of Global Citizenship

Chapter 6. Going Global in Comfort: South Korean Education Exodus in Singapore

Yoonhee KANG (Seoul National University)

This chapter discusses the multiple motivations for and understandings of early study abroad among elementary school aged South Korean students and their parents in Singapore. Early study abroad to destinations within Asia is growing, partly because of lower costs and geographical proximity but also because of discourses which position such destinations as "comfortable" initial stepping stones in imagined trajectories of global citizenship. The analysis focuses on migrants' competing notions of being "global yet Asian," and the ways in which sharply-varied evaluations of the English spoken in Singapore (Singlish) relate to ideas about

global vs. Asian modernity. It discusses how discourses of comfort position emotional capital as a valuable resource for facilitating children's efficient acquisition of cultural capital, thereby highlighting the affective dimension of educational migration.

Chapter 7: From FOB to Cool: Transnational Migrant Students in Toronto and the Styling of Global Linguistic Capital

Hyunjung SHIN (University of Saskatchewan)

This chapter discusses how globalization and the rise of "Korean cool" provide middle class Korean *yuhaksaeng* (visa students) in Toronto with resources they can mobilize as strategies of distinction. It describes how *yuhaksaeng* constructed themselves as new transnational subjects with hybrid identities that were simultaneously global and Korean. They deployed re-valued varieties of Korean language and culture as stylistic resources in the globalized new economy, contesting their marginal positions as "FOBs (Fresh-Off-the-Boats)" and "Nerds" in dominant Western racial discourse, and constructing themselves as wealthy, modern, and cosmopolitan "Cools" vis-à-vis long-term immigrants in local Korean diasporic communities as well as Canadians. The stories of *yuhaksaeng* illustrate how notions of "global" and "local" linguistic resources are transformed under the material conditions of globalization and its structures of inequality.

Chapter 8. Early Wave Returnees in Seoul: The Dilemmas of Modernity and Morality

Adrienne LO and Jenna KIM (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

This chapter examines how young professionals who spent their high school and college years studying in North America reflect upon their ESA experience after returning to Seoul in their early to mid-twenties. Interviewees discovered that in the aftermath of the escalation of ESA, the educational and linguistic capital which they had invested in so heavily was not as valuable as they had hoped. While their overseas experience did provide some benefits on the job and marriage markets, returnees also struggled with discourses that positioned them as lazy and morally suspect escapees. "Returning" to Seoul was thus not so much a triumphant culmination of a long journey as a momentary pause in a restless and lifelong project in pursuit of the global.

IV. Managing Early Study Abroad

Chapter 9. The Legal and Religious Citizenship of Wild Goose Mothers

Kyungju AHN (Syracuse University)

This chapter looks at how the varied legal and class status of mothers who accompany their children on early study abroad impacted their participation in religious institutions in upstate New York. In undertaking ESA, families often experience long periods of separation, where the mother and children live abroad while the father remains in South Korea and works. Split transnational families are the subject of gendered moralizing discourses which are fractured by social status. In the U.S., these discourses take on a religious tone, as some wild goose mothers are portrayed as "un-Christian" while others are heralded as religious models. This chapter highlights the diversity of wild goose mothers, showing how women's immigration status as students, green card holders, or visiting professionals influences both the extent and form of their religious involvement.

Chapter 10. "We are more Racist": Navigating Race And Racism in (Korean) America

Sohyun AN (Kennesaw State University)

This chapter describes how racial ideologies affected ESA students' relations with Whites, 2nd generation Korean Americans, non-Korean Asian Americans, and other ESA students in a high school in the American Midwest. ESA students detailed how they were racialized as culturally inept foreigners by Whites and how, in turn, they projected White notions of "dorkiness" onto Chinese Americans and Hmong Americans. While they condemned White stereotypes of Asians, ESA students also evaluated Korean racial ideologies in relation to White discourses of colorblindness. One way they resisted homogenizing discourses of racialization was through investment in South Korean popular culture. At the same time, these students also distanced themselves from second generation Korean Americans, who they framed as inauthentic Koreans. Through the mobilization of discourses of racial authenticity, moral superiority, and class, students denounced other ESA students as "wannabees" and "escapees," demonstrating how racializing ideologies suffused intraethnic encounters.

Chapter 11. Psychosocial Adjustments of Korean Early Study Abroad Students

Sumie OKAZAKI (New York University), Anne SAW (University of California, Davis)
& Jihee CHO (Teachers College, Columbia University)

This chapter examines the psychosocial effects of the ESA experience on parent-child relationships and peer relationships among Korean college students who remained in the United States for higher education. Although sociological and psychological research on immigrant and international students has documented their psychosocial stress, many ESA students also experience the added stress of prolonged separation from one or more parent during critical stages of their childhood and adolescent development. This chapter summarizes the findings from a survey of 49 former ESA university students, which suggest that the students' current distress level was associated with lack of secure attachment to their mothers and their peers but not to their fathers.

V. The Field Speaks

Chapter 12. Coming to Terms with Our "Asian Invasion": A Practitioner's Perspective on the Korean Education Exodus in a Christian School Setting

Rick WILLIAMS

This chapter is a case study of the South Korean study abroad phenomenon at a private, Midwestern Christian high school where the percentage of Korean students jumped from under 2% to over 14% over 8 years. Demographic data associated with this shift are presented along with considerations of the particular pedagogical and social challenges faced by faculty, administration, and students. These challenges include differences in learning styles, gaps in language proficiency, limited parental oversight, racially-motivated tension within the student body, and ethical and religious concerns. The essay examines the opportunities this cross-cultural experience opened in the school's academic, arts, athletics, and extracurricular programs, resulting in a more culturally rich environment. It also honestly addresses significant challenges faced by both students and teachers that resulted in changes in school policy over time. It raises important questions for all those involved in the study-abroad experience, utilizing assessment data, ethnographic vignettes, and experienced insights from a teacher and administrator who has worked closely with South Korean students and their families.

Chapter 13. My Life in the States, Alone

Namkyu KANG

This chapter presents a first-person perspective on one ESA journey by an ex-ESA student studying at an American university. We learn about what it feels like to be an ESA student and to deal with penny pinching boarding houses, difficult relatives, lonely ESA peers, and American classmates in small towns/suburbs across the South and Midwest.

