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## GSAPS SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

### Conceptualizing Bilateral Relationships in Higher Education in the Context of Post-colonialism: Comparative Analysis of South Korean Relations with the U.S. and Japan

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This study examines how historically core and peripheral countries relate to each other in today's global academic system. It uses the example of Korea, examining the relationships Korean higher education has with both the United States and Japan to determine how these relationships have transformed in past decades amid globalization and the proliferation of neoliberalism. By comparing the two bilateral relationships, this paper aims to theorize international relationships in higher education.

Altbach's (1989) academic dependency theory argues that the present international educational system has certain institutions and intellectual "centers" that give direction, provide models, produce research, and in general function as pinnacles of the academic system. At the opposite end of the spectrum are "peripheral" universities; they copy international developments, produce little that is original, and are generally not at the frontiers of knowledge (p.30). This structure is exacerbated by the dominance of English in higher education and a global university ranking system that favors the Anglo-Saxon academic system, adopting these institutions as the global standard regardless of the local needs.

As is the case for most Asian universities, the Korean higher education system has historically been located on Altbach's periphery. Due to Japanese colonization (1910–1945) and the U.S. occupation post-WWII (1945–1948), contemporary higher education in Korea is significantly influenced by both Japan and the U.S. Even after Korea gained sovereignty, higher education continued to depend on the American and Japanese systems in various aspects, including educational resources, policy drafting, and human resources training, which is typically observed in post-colonial context. However, in the 21st century, rapid national economic development combined with globalization and neoliberalism resulted in tremendous growth for Korean universities and increased visibility worldwide. Today Korea has one of the highest gross rates of enrollment in tertiary education and has several institutions at the top of the Global University Rankings. Korean universities attract international students and faculty from around the world. This study attempts to investigate whether and in what ways this development affected the bilateral relationships between Korea and the U.S. and Korea and Japan by asking following three questions:

**RQ1.** How and why has the bilateral relationship between Korea and the U.S. transformed? (1-1) What is the significance of the U.S. in Korea's internationalization activities (1-2) What is the significance of the U.S. in Korea's promotion of world-class university activities?

**RQ2.** How and why has the bilateral relationship between Korea and Japan transformed? (1-1) What is the significance of Japan in Korea's internationalization activities (1-2) What is the significance of Japan in Korea's promotion of world-class university activities?

**RQ3.** How does examining these two global bilateral relationships help conceptualize the overall development of bilateral relationships in higher education?

**RQ4.** What do the transformations in bilateral relationship manifest and what can be interpreted?

To assess these bilateral relationships, following indicators were

analyzed through quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The seven indicators are 1) degree-seeking students, 2) short-term exchange students, 3) collaborative degree programs, 4) inter-university agreements, 5) the highest degree attainment of Korean faculty members, 6) recruitment of foreign professors, and 7) research collaboration. These indicators measure internationalization and promotion of world-class university activities at national and institutional levels.

The analyses strongly suggest that Korea's *bilateral relationships with both the U.S. and Japan went through major transformations*. In recent years, Korea has actively engaged in a wide array of activities that indicate a mutual partnership with both countries. However, *the relationship between Korea and the U.S. remains that of center and periphery countries*. Korea remains dependent on the U.S. in some areas, most particularly faculty training. However, *the degree of dependency has continued to decline*. As Korea diversifies its partner countries, the total share of the activities between Korea and the U.S. saw a significant decline. *Korea and Japan's relationship has continued to move towards a horizontal and mutual partnership, propelled by the regionalization of higher education in East Asia*. While the total share of activities between Korea and Japan have slightly decreased, policy documents and in-depth interviews consistently highlight the importance of Japan as a partner of Korea. Furthermore, as leaders of the East Asian region the trilateral partnership between Japan, China and Korea was repeatedly highlighted.

The different patterns of transformation in Korea's relationships with the U.S. and Japan can be explained by two phenomena: 1) continued American hegemony in the global academic system and 2) regionalization of higher education in Asia (de Wit, 2002; Kuroda and Passarrelli, 2009; Kang, 2011; Byun & Um, 2014).

Due to American hegemony, Korea must look to the U.S. to increase the global competitiveness of their higher education system. As Altbach (1989) argues, the dominance of English also contributes to continued dependency on the U.S. Meanwhile, Korea also identified regional collaboration with East Asia, including Japan, as a key strategy to increase its visibility in the global academic scene. The study also notes that there were tensions 1) between market competition and sustaining academic values and 2) between neoliberal and geopolitical priorities emerging in Korean higher education

This study concludes that the Altbach's center-periphery structure in international higher education is not necessarily structured or permanent. Rather there is a fluidity in positions, making it possible for periphery countries to climb the hierarchy to compete with the center, as observed in the study.

#### Key References

Altbach, P. G., & Selvaratnam, V. (1989). *From Dependence to Autonomy: The Development of Asian Universities*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.