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## **Globalization, Statist Political Economy, and Unsuccessful Education Reform in South Korea, 1993-2003**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the relationship between globalization and national education reforms, especially those of educational systems. Instead of exploring the much debated issues of how globalization affects national educational systems and how the nations react by what kinds of systemic education reform, however, it focuses on what such a method often leaves out – the internal conditions of a nation that facilitates or hampers reform efforts. Taking South Korea as an example, it explores that country's unique national context which restricts and even inhibits education reforms. Especially noted here is the established "statist" political economy in education. In the paper's analysis, although South Korea's statist political economy has made a substantial contribution to economic and educational development, it is now considered increasingly unviable as globalization progresses. Nevertheless, the internal conditions, resultant from the previous statist policies, set limits on policy makers' efforts to alter the existing educational system. The analysis suggests that a fuller assessment of globalization's impact upon national educational systems or their reforms requires a perspective which is broad enough to encompass not only the concepts

and/or theories of globalization and nation states but also the power relations and ideological setup of individual nations.

I begin by exploring the meaning of globalization and pointing out the need to consider individual nations' internal conditions. Focusing on South Korea, then, I identify a statist political economy that is in place and the policy making venues it implicates. Then, the analysis moves on to identify the statist educational policies employed during the developmental years of military dictatorship and the structural educational problems resulted from such policies. This is followed by an examination of the educational reform agendas of liberalization and diversification that emerged at a time of globalization and civilian democracy, and of the way in which the country's internal conditions obstructed reform efforts. I conclude by suggesting that, in spite of such negative functions, the internal conditions will eventually be altered as statism becomes increasingly unviable under the forces of globalization.

### **Globalization and the Internal Conditions of Nations**

A salient theme of the globalization discourse concerns the emergence of transnational capital—financial and industrial capital which freely “roams around the world in search of profits and efficient production sites” (Fudge and Glasbeek 1997, 219). According to Cox (1993, 259-60), globalization exhibits “two principal aspects.” One is the global organizations of production involving complex transnational networks of production, which take advantage of costs, markets, taxes, and access to suitable labor as well as political security and predictability. The other principal aspect is global finance, which involves a very large unregulated system of transactions in money, credit, and equities. These aspects of globalization are also, in his view, the principal aspects of the global economy which follows globalization and, in operation, transcends national boundaries, thus reducing the nation state's autonomy and demanding that national economies be adjusted to its own exigencies (Ibid.; Ohmae 1993; Gummet 1996). Further, the integration of domestic economies into the global economy places the nation states under “insecurity” (Ratinoff 1995, 147) notably of revenues which generate financial resources for governing and protecting domestic activity. While state revenues depend on the nation's economic performances, the latter now rely on the transnational behavior of the global economy. The nation state, it follows, has not only to conform to the global economy but also to reduce its domestic role to an affordable level. If so, then, public education, which has been expanding at the time of the state's ever-increasing commitment, may no longer do so. Rather, it may have to go through a restructuring process involving such policies as liberalization, decentralization and privatization.

The globalization discourse also involves another theme, that globalization is related not only to transnational capital and the global economy but also to other factors, notably global “cultural forces” that affect national educational systems (Mazrui 1990; UNESCO 1998) and prompt transformations and transitions (Mebrahtu et al. 2000). Included in such forces, and noted among them, are information and communication technology (ICT) and the innovative processes it foments (Carnoy 1999; Nelson-Richards 2003). In this theme, a nation's economic prosperity depends on its performance in the global economy, which, in turn, relies on the

workforce's adjustment to, and leadership in, the knowledge-intensive mode of production buttressed by ICT. Of importance for this is to have "a workforce that has the foundation to enhance the quality and efficiency of product development, production and maintenance, and the flexibility to acquire the new skills required for new jobs" and "a cadre of highly-trained scientific, technical and processing personnel" (Haddad 1997, 37). The former requires solid primary and secondary education while the latter calls for quality higher education. These requirements can be met by increased state investment in education and a reinforced national educational system. In this theme, thus, the state has to enhance its role in education.

The two conflicting themes have generated different responses regarding the impact of globalization on national educational systems. One such response is found often in the works by those who are outside the field of education. It speaks of public education's continuity at a time of crisis and points to the necessity of restructuring national educational systems in order to make them cost-effective, decentralized, market-friendly, and viable in the new environment (World Bank 1995; Burnett and Patrinos 1997; Popkewitz 2000; Daun 2002; Mok and Chan 2002). The second response, which is prominent in the works of those within the education field, runs in the opposite direction. It defends state commitment to education for equity and justice and denounces the more or less harmful effects of globalization, for instance, on the educational systems of Third World countries (Pannu 1996) or in advanced industrial nations such as Canada (O'Sullivan 1999), on the worse-offs in public schools in comparison with the better-offs in private schools (Espinola 1992; Reynolds and Griffiths 2002), on neglected primary and secondary education in comparison with favored higher education (e.g., Samoff 1994), on tensions between global and local dynamics in culture and education (Burbules and Torres 2000; Stromquist and Monkman 2000; Torres 2002), on the need of resistance to globalization (McLaren and Farahmandpur 2001), and so on. To be fair, these responses are both empirical and moralistic, empirical because they draw upon facts collected from individual nations and moralistic because they are disposed to condone or condemn globalization.

A third response is more moralistic than empirical. It denies both of the above-mentioned themes and demands that nation states increase their commitment to education because globalization elevates, and does not lower, their status, allegedly, as is evident in East Asian countries (Green 1997; Green 1999). Meanwhile, a fourth response, which is more empirical than moralistic, states that globalization has rendered "little effects" to national educational systems (McGinn 1997).

Such diverse responses, however, commonly leave out one area which is important for a fuller account of the relationship between globalization and national educational systems. This area is actually hinted at in the fourth cited response, in which decentralization confronts resistance from "conservative" teachers, parents and local actors who do not want changes to the status quo (Ibid.). Education reforms are initiated and pursued by those who recognize the necessity of change. More often than not, however, their policy agendas and ideas are not finalized as policies straightforwardly. In the policy making processes, such agendas and ideas confront opposing agendas and views, and are compromised, revised and even discarded to the good or bad. For this reason, what is observed in state education policies, school statistics, changes or no changes to national educational systems, shows the outcome of the negotiations and compromises which have taken place in a relatively short time span. It does not readily reveal the kind of impact of globalization that is now canceled out by opposing forces but will

resurrect later on when the opposing forces recede.

Important to consider in this light is the internal conditions which play a crucial role in the policy making and implementation processes, especially the state's established political economy which is institutionalized in state-society, state-education relationships. In their application to individual nations, globalization-triggered reform measures—such as liberalization, decentralization and privatization—confront the state's established way of dealing with societal and educational matters. If the established way is one of relatively open and permissive of freedom of activity in society and education, such measures may be applied with relative ease. If not, however, it may not. The reason is that the reform measures are, in this case, more than mere *reform* measures: they aim to alter the established political economy itself. If a state's established political economy is closed and not permissive of freedom in society and education, therefore, such measures are either unlikely to be employed or to be employed superficially as if nothing has happened in spite of globalization, or even as if the nation state has enhanced its status due to globalization as Green (1997; 1999) mistakes.

Here, it is interesting to examine how South Korea's established political economy influences policy making and implementation in education. It is so because the country's "statist" political economy has created internal conditions that are not susceptible to globalization but, rather, inhibits changes to existing state-society, state-education relationships.

## **Statist Political Economy and Its Policy Making Process**

### **Statism as a Political Economy Concept**

Statism is a concept of political economy which denotes a peculiar way in which the political state deals with the economic activity of individuals and groups in the civil sphere (or "civil society" or "society").<sup>1</sup> In the statist political economy, roughly, the state subjugates the interest of individuals or groups to its own interest or the interest of the nation (or society at large). However, statism in this rough sense is too broad to be useful as an analytic tool, for any intervention by the state in civil matters can be seen as the subjugation of individual or group interest to the state's own interest. In fact, all modern states intervene in civil matters in one way or another, so all of them can be "statist" as the libertarians would claim. Statism in such a broad sense proffers no help to distinguishing a state's way of dealing with civil matters from another state's. To be a useful analytic tool, it needs circumscription against the concrete context of specific countries.

Statism, as it is found in South Korea is, generally, a legacy of Japan's colonial rule, 1910-1945, and Japan, in turn, imported it from Prussia. Therefore, statism in South Korea shares certain general features with those in Japan and, indirectly, in Prussia (and also with other East Asian countries which employ the "Japanese model of market economics" [Sakakibara 1993], such as Taiwan and, arguably, China). An important common feature of this type of statism is that the state maintains big power, bureaucracy and institutional networks by which to control and manage the activity of civil society in order to make "the nation wealthy and its military strong" (*fukoku kyohei; pugug kangbyong*) as proclaimed in the past, or to promote "economic development" and "social well-being" as emphasized more recently. State intervention in society in South Korea and Japan is so extensive and intensive that its influence is felt at all tissues of social fabric, so much so that it is often questioned whether these countries

really have a “civil society” in the sense of a collectivity of self-seeking individuals (see McVeigh 1998). In Prussia, as well, the individuality of a person was considered—for instance, in the works of Hegel—in reference to the totality of the state.

On the contemporary scene, however, statism in Japan and South Korea shows different features from what remains in Germany. While Germany’s political economy is often characterized by social partnership and corporatism, such characteristics are not visible in those two countries. Policy making and implementation in Japan is a process in which the state unilaterally decides for society according to its own agendas (Schoppa 1991). The state does not seek public consultation or consultation with the parties to be affected by the policies under consideration except through some nominal procedures. Policy negotiations and compromises occur within the governing circle, involving government leaders, the ruling political party and state bureaucrats, in the manner of “patterned pluralism” (Muramatsu and Krauss 1987, 543). Particularly noteworthy here is the bureaucrats’ prominent status. According to Schoppa, the Liberal Democrats’ long one-party domination allowed the bureaucrats to accumulate power to the extent that, in the mid-1980s, they successfully thwarted government leaders’ efforts to liberalize the overly state-controlled educational system in order to better cope with globalization.<sup>2</sup>

The state’s unilateral process of policy making and imposition is conspicuous also in South Korea.<sup>3</sup> But the roles of political parties and the bureaucrats in the process are not as powerful as they are in Japan. Whilst in Japan the long domination by the elected Liberal Democrats did not generate serious issues about the legitimacy of power, South Korea’s military dictatorship did so. General Pag Chong Hi’s government was installed after the 1961 coup and ended in 1979 upon his assassination. Then, Generals Chon Du Hoan and Ro Tae U usurped power through a multi-stage coup completed with the Kwangju massacre of 200 protestors, and took turn to rule the country until 1993. During the three decades, the military elite confronted repeated challenges to the legitimacy of their power. In response, they tightly controlled the population and employed the state bureaucracy as an instrument for this. And in order to secure the efficiency of this instrument, they meticulously prevented the bureaucrats from acquiring prerogatives in their respective fields.<sup>4</sup> Although the military elite had political parties for the legislature, as well, such parties were not permitted to air independent voices. As a result, the state-society relationship established during the military years was characteristic in that the state tightly controlled—or at least tried to control—the population, and the bureaucrats and political parties remained subservient.

### **Venues to Policy Making**

A unique policy making process emerged from this state-society relationship. The military elite’s principal concern in handling the persistent legitimacy crisis was the maintenance and legitimation of their power. They addressed this concern through a few typical venues to policy making. The first and foremost venue was, of course, the control of civilian activity, the suppression of resistance by means of the state apparatus, and the justification of such policies by pointing to the constantly “imminent” North Korean invasion. This venue, however, promised only short-term benefits; in the long run, it was detrimental rather than beneficial because it invited further resistance. The long-term security of power had to be sought for through another venue: a “mobilization strategy” (Brown 1998) with which to draw the unsupportive population to their side and thus legitimate their power. For this strategy, Pag’s

military junta in 1961 put forward a project of legitimation by economic development (or developmental legitimation) and all successive military governments adhered to this project albeit with modifications. The gist of this project was the messages to the population that everyone would have a fair share of the fruits once development became reality, and that the military elite who offered such a great promise were far greater than the “corrupt and incompetent” civilian leaders.

This second policy making venue, however, contravened the first venue. The junta’s developmental legitimation project was one of planned economic development. The state configured the final outcome of development, set necessary developmental tasks for intermediary stages, and tried to meet such tasks by allocating resources and opportunities to strategic industries and economic actors in order thus to boost their performances. This approach alienated non-strategic industries and actors and entailed the latter’s discontent and the egalitarian outcry for equality, equal opportunity, social justice, and so on. The 1961 junta’s reaction, and the reactions of subsequent military regimes, took two routes. In one route, it suppressed the display of discontent and open discussions on the egalitarian issues; in the other, it employed “egalitarian policy measures” (Lee CJ 1980) for a temporary mollification of the discontent. Such policy measures, however, aimed mostly at short-term effects in limited areas and did not address the problem directly. Even so, however, such measures conflicted with, and hampered, the developmental legitimation project. For example, the military government forbade and suppressed labor activity in favor of the manufacturer’s capital accumulation but, at the same time, it enforced price control, especially of daily necessities, in order to ease the underpaid workers’ troubles, in effect, restricting capital accumulation.

The developmental legitimation project was impeded also by a third policy making venue. Although the project was useful for the mobilization strategy, it was by nature a call for support in reference to a remote, uncertain future. The present legitimacy crisis required immediately effective means. For this, the military elite took advantage of the traditional “personalist ethic,”<sup>5</sup> in which transactions were made through personal connections rather than through open competition. In this ethic, the military governments allocated strategic resources and opportunities through personal connections bridged by common regions of origin, alumni relationships, military camaraderies, as well as the personal knots bonded by bribery. This venue led to a considerable success because powerful support groups indeed emerged in various sectors, for example, *chaebol* groups (or business conglomerates) in raising irregular “political funds” for the military elite, the residents of North Kyongsang Province (the home of the military rulers) in casting supportive votes on election days, and the alumni of the province’s prominent high schools in promoting pro-government sentiments among the population. The resources and opportunities paid to such loyal support groups involved the channeling of strategic resources—loans from state-controlled banks and state-guaranteed foreign loans—to the *chaebol* groups, the concentration of industrial centers in the favored region, the monopoly of governmental and military posts by the alumni of schools in the region, and so on. The efficiency of the strategic allocation of resources and opportunities thus became significantly compromised.

These were the major venues through which the military rulers unilaterally made and implemented policies for civil matters in the larger society. Education policies, like economic policies, were generated through the same venues and, as in the case of the economic policies, followed by a huge expansion in education as well as serious structural problems.

## **Statist Policies and Structural Educational Problems**

### **Statist Education Policies**

The military elite's concern about the security and legitimation of power was apparent in their policy to control educational institutions. The purpose of this policy was to prevent and suppress resistance to their power and to garner support. To this end, they sought to ensure that all educational institutions, public or private, as well as the teaching staff, operated as instruments to carry out their decisions. The measures taken for this included the legal stipulation of educational institutions as "public institutions" in the case of public schools, and as "public legal bodies" in the case of private schools, and all teachers as "public agents in the field of education." With this legal arrangement, the military elite controlled major spheres of all educational institutions' operation: institutional licenses, student quotas, student selection, the curriculum and textbooks, examinations and tests, employment and management of the teaching personnel, and even day-to-day operation. Especially notable was the policy of uniform instruction ensured by one common curriculum for all schools and the textbooks which were either written by the state or approved according to given specifications. Such textbooks supplied a "right" answer to each question or issue to be dealt with in classrooms.

The developmental legitimation project also bore upon education policies. When Pag's junta developed this project in 1961, it did not consider education to be a strategically important field. The attainment of full participation in primary education in the late 1950s had already secured a sufficient number of educated workers for the low-tech industrialization in pursuit (Cho 1994, 101n). Since available resources fell too short for the developmental legitimation project (which was to be launched in eight years after the destructive Korean War, 1950-1953), it was undesirable that education drained too much of them. On this judgment, the junta decided, for the time being, to freeze educational finance at a lowest possible level and prevent potential pressures for increased state funding for education. The policy it thus adopted was reduction in the supply of student places at the levels of secondary and higher education. It froze school licenses, cut down on student quotas, and downsized the existing education programs of schools and universities in order to make them "small in size but good in quality" (Lee IY 1996). Such developmental education policies took immediate effects in the forms of intensified entrance competition (especially at lower secondary education), popular outcry against "the school's high threshold," and disputes over the fairness of student selection procedures.<sup>6</sup>

Here, the junta turned to the egalitarian policy venue. It introduced a state entrance examination for each level of schooling and instructed all educational institutions to admit students according to the scores from the state examination. The latter indeed assured of a sense of procedural fairness in student selection but, simultaneously, it made entrance competition a major educational problem. Since all students who wanted to advance to the next level of schooling had to write the once-a-year examination, this examination activated a nationwide competition for higher scores, and the latter invited inter-school competitions for more successful graduates in the state examination. The situation worsened so quickly that, by 1966, Pag's (now) government had rescinded its original downsizing policy and allowed for a moderate rise in student quotas (Table 1) while tightly controlling tuition fees in order to allay parental discontent. These egalitarian measures, however, fell far short of addressing the growing



problem. In 1968, therefore, the government decided to drastically increase student quotas and school licenses at the level of lower secondary education, where entrance competition was fiercest, and began to allocate more funds to this level of schooling in order to increase the number of schools. Then, it switched the focus of quota and license control to the next level of schooling: upper secondary education.

**Table 1**  
**University Enrolments During the Early Pag Years**

	1961	1963	1965	1967	1969
State universities	33,472	30,223	25,964	26,893	32,265
Private universities	82,033	82,739	79,679	97,136	100,665
Total	133,709	105,238	105,643	124,029	132,930

Source: KEDI (1997b), pp. 171.

Through the remaining military years, state intervention in the supply and demand of student places alternated between, and often straddled, developmental and egalitarian policy venues. The former always led to the containment of educational expansion and, therefore, restrictions on student quotas and new school licenses, while the latter persistently escalated entrance competition. Here, the uniformity of instruction supplied a common ground for the examination competition. Moreover, the state's concern about the state entrance examination as an efficient and fair device for ranking aspirants of admission established a principle that its questions should be prepared exclusively from within the uniform textbooks. Entrance competition, thus, became a highly technical matter of who remembered more of what was written in the textbooks. The schools which got swept in the competition taught students to memorize textbooks and ranked and re-ranked them through repeated tests, thus turning them against each other and alienating underachievers. Entrance competition quickly expanded beyond the school gate to after-school cramming classes and home tutoring. When, thus, it engulfed the entire nation, the demand for more and higher education soared up, for the competitive atmosphere both inside and outside the school continually coerced students, even those with no serious interest in advanced learning, to partake in it and move toward higher levels in schooling.<sup>7</sup> And when, as in 1968, the aggravating competition inflamed a social crisis, the state decided to drastically raise the supply of student places at the troubled level of schooling, thus switching entrance competition to the next level of schooling.

As a result of alternating or straddling such policy venues, secondary and higher education grew rapidly. Between 1960 and 1990, the number of schools increased 2.4 times in lower secondary education, 2.6 times in upper secondary education, and 4.2 times in higher education. Meanwhile, student enrolment grew more quickly: 4.8 times, 9.2 times, and 19.0 times respectively (data from Kim CC and Lee CJ 1994, 61). In 1990, thus, participation rate at those levels of schooling became respectively 99.8 percent, 95.7 percent, and 46.0 percent (data from MOE 1998). From the perspective of political economy, however, such a speedy expansion of education prepared serious structural problems.

### Structural Problems

(1) Financial problems. The most serious problem was related to the soaring numbers of schools and students, which directly challenged the policy makers who pursued to contain educational expansion in order to prevent pressure for additional financial responsibility. The ever-intensifying entrance competition and the rising demand for more and higher levels of education made it inevitable for them to permit educational expansion and, thus, prompt the pressures for increased state funding. As suggested by the above figures, the students enrolled in middle schools doubled during the thirty years while those in high schools and universities quadrupled and quintupled respectively. Since the schools' revenues were restricted by the state's tuition fee control and low education funding, the infrastructure of educational institutions deteriorated quickly (see Table 2). The state initially attempted to address this problem by inducing additional investment from the owners of private institutions (where the infrastructure was much worse) but in vain. The owners did not have the money and would not spend it for their schools even if they had it, for reasons that will be presented shortly. Here, the state chose to transfer the burden to the parents by gradually increasing tuition fees. But this policy could not persist indefinitely.<sup>8</sup> From 1980 on, therefore, the military government began to increase its education budget until its size hit a peak in 1993 at 23.4 percent of the total state budget (MOE 1997, 870).<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2**  
**The Deteriorating Educational Infrastructure during the Pag Years**

	1965	1970	1975	1980
Students	105,643	146,414	208,986	403,989
Students per professor	19.9	18.8	20.7	27.9
(State universities)	(13.7)	(13.3)	(16.2)	(24.6)
(Private universities)	(23.4)	(21.1)	(22.6)	(28.7)
Library items	N/A	33.2	30.7	23.0
Building space per student (m <sup>2</sup> )	15.2	14.3	12.3	11.5
(State universities)	(19.1)	(15.6)	(10.4)	(11.5)
(Private universities)	(14.0)	(13.9)	(13.0)	(11.4)

Source: KEDI (1997b), pp. 171, 173, 175, and 184-5.

Considering the large defense budget and the increasing demand for welfare programs,<sup>10</sup> it was fair to say that the military government, by 1993, had come to spend for education up to the limit of its available resources. By that year, however, parental financial burden also had reached a peak: 58.4 percent of the total operation cost of all schools and universities (Koh 1998, 26),<sup>11</sup> plus a sum of after-school cramming fees which well exceeded the total operation cost of all schools and universities (Kong and Paeg 1994). In other words, the parents paid directly out of their pocket at least 1.6 times of the money spent for operating the entire school system while the state, on its own, committed to educational financing as much as it could.

(2) *Dependence on entrance competition and low-cost educational programs.* Another serious problem was that more money had to be spent for education outside the formal educational institutions than inside, and this entirely at parental burden. The principal cause of this problem was of course the intense entrance competition which drove students to after-school cramming classes. Were there no intense entrance competition, the huge sums of cramming fees would be unnecessary. Logically, the problem was not hard to solve. Since the intense entrance competition was caused by the education policies of seeking uniformity of education and containing educational expansion, the problem would vanish if the state stopped such policies. Such a simple solution, nevertheless, was unavailable to the military rulers because their political interest required the maintenance of power by uniform instruction and its developmental legitimation project. While the former laid a common ground for the nationwide competition, the latter dictated the minimization of educational expenses by keeping student places in short supply. In this sense, it is fair to say that the security and legitimation of power necessitated the intense entrance competition.

More important to note, however, is that educational institutions became dependent on the intense entrance competition. While the state's student quota and tuition fee control, together with curricular and textbook control, restricted the freedom and autonomy of education, entrance competition and the subsequently rising demand for education, on the other hand, guaranteed student supply and, thereby, tuition fee-generated revenues. Although such revenues were limited, they allowed the institutions to run education programs without or with insufficient state funding if only they did not spend more than absolutely necessary. The schools and universities thus settled in a low-cost mode of operation. The schools widely practiced rote learning and drill in the uniform textbooks and testing and ranking students in preparation for the state entrance examination, and this in classrooms equipped and staffed minimally. University instruction, on the other hand, was widely perceived to be superficial. This mode of operation provoked complaints neither from the schools, where every student was driven by entrance competition, nor from the universities, where all students had already had "enough study." Moreover, this mode of operation became increasingly profitable as the cyclical entrance competition crises compelled the state to increase student quotas and tuition fees. The guaranteed supply of students, thus, deprived educational institutions of the incentives for improving, and ability to improve, educational quality through mutual competition for new students.

The entire system of education thus came to turn on the single hinge of entrance competition. And the state policies which provoked entrance competition gradually became part and parcel of the institutionalized network of a statist political economy—"a concrete set of institutionalized channels" (Evans 1992)—in which they sustained themselves despite, actually thanks to, repeated "education reforms."

(3) *Private and public education.* A third structural problem concerned the incorporation of private education into the public system. Private education has been defended in North America in light of consumer choice. The typical argument for this was that where public education served the population as a whole, the consumers ought to have alternative venues in their pursuit of education. Also, North American advocates pointed out that private education allowed for the freedom of dissentient educational practices outside the public system. An important point in the political economy perspective, however, was that it helped public education by reducing the state's financial and other burdens for education, for more students in private education

meant less in public education. Private education in this sense was a safety valve to the financial stress under which the state provided education. In South Korea, however, statist policies have obliterated private education while keeping private schools and universities under private ownership. The state's uniform control of education deprived private schools and universities of autonomy and independence and turned those institutions to pseudo-public institutions, or "institutions of public education" (*konggyoyuggigwan*). Financially, this meant an additional burden on the state side, because the difference between the tuition fee-generated revenues and the reasonable cost of operation (including profits in one form or another) had to be paid out by the state given that the latter set limits on revenues. From the 1980s, therefore, the government began to fund private schools and, by 1993, it had come to defray 70.6 percent of the operation cost in lower secondary education and 42.5 percent in upper secondary education. Meanwhile, it paid public schools only 77.4 percent of the operation cost in lower secondary education and 78.0 percent in upper secondary education (Koh 1998, 28). Apparently, here, the state brought private education into the public sphere at the expense of public education.

This caused another financial trouble. Since full participation was attained at both levels of secondary education, it would now be hard for the state to sidestep the pressure to equalize funding for private and public schools and, furthermore, to offer full funding to both types of school. The actual financial impact of this pressure was extraordinarily great, because, in 1993, private schools accommodated 24.5 percent of all students in lower secondary education and between 58.4 percent and 66.3 percent of the students in upper secondary education (Ibid.). The potential pressure for increased state funding was much greater at the level of higher education. While 83 percent of the students in higher education were enrolled in private institutions, state grants for such institutions accounted for less than 2 percent of their operation cost.

(4) *The personalist ethic.* The prevailing personalist ethic was also a problem in the educational system, for it wasted, through corruption, a large portion of financial resources allotted to public and private schools. Financial irregularities in private schools and universities were frequent despite, or because of, state supervision and control. Efficiency in the state's management of school and university licenses was also impaired by the personalist ethic. When the state decided to raise student quotas and new school and university licenses, for instance, the benefit was often distributed via personal connections. As a result, some institutions received additional student quotas and approval of new programs even though they did not possess necessary infrastructures. As well, licenses were often issued to those who did not have resources necessary for opening a school or university and even to those with no experience in education.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the personalist ethic contributed to the decline of quality while educational expansion was rapidly in progress.

By 1993, the structural problems had deteriorated to such a degree that many South Koreans considered their educational system to be in a major crisis. In that year, the military government was replaced by President Kim Yong Sam's civilian government. Also in that year, globalization became a burning issue among the debaters on education reform as well as among policy makers. Naturally, the debaters and the policy makers both considered the structural problems of education in light of how to cope with the new environment created by globalization and civilian democracy.

## Globalization and Inability to Reform

### Structural Problems and Responses to Globalization and Civilian Democracy

As summarized earlier, the themes brought up with respect to the relationship between globalization and national educational systems are two: (1) that the nation state now has to restructure the educational system to reduce its own role in education by employing such reform measures as liberalization, decentralization and privatization, and (2) that, nevertheless, it has to prepare a well-trained, flexible and versatile workforce by reinforcing primary and secondary education and, at the same time, secure a cadre of highly-trained professionals by improving quality in higher education. Generally, these themes were also addressed by South Korean debaters on the needs and directions of education reform at the time of restoring civil democracy and grappling with globalization (Kim and Jung 1994). In spite of the diversity of the views they advanced from different angles, the debaters shared a common opinion that the existing educational system needed a large-scale overhaul if it was to be viable in the new age. The frequently-employed grounds for this common opinion were roughly three: (1) that the existing educational system had evolved through the military years and, for this reason, stifled educational actors' free initiatives; (2) that the rapid educational expansion had degraded educational quality at all levels of schooling; and (3) that the imminent opening of South Korea's education market to the globalizing world would jeopardize the future of the educational institutions settling in the complacency of low-cost, low-quality mode of operation on guaranteed student supply. It was also pointed out that the entrance competition-dependent schools and universities did not supply adequate manpower to the business community which now had to compete with foreigners on their own home ground. This idea led to a widely-supported view that the overly state-controlled educational system had to be "democratized," "liberalized," and "decentralized" (Ibid.). The objectives of this envisioned education reform were clearly to diversify educational activities and, thereby, cope with the growing pressure for increased state funding, to eliminate entrance competition based on the uniformity of the curriculum and textbooks, to revitalize private education, and to have a system of education that was to be operated rationally, not along personalist connections.

The first civilian President Kim Yong Sam, 1993-1998, incorporated this view into his political platforms. During his 1992 election campaign, he promised to employ "epoch-making and revolutionary" measures to liberalize and decentralize the educational system, to solve the entrance competition question, and to upgrade educational facilities and performances to the global standards (*segehoa*). Then, in 1994, he appointed reform-minded educationalists to a Presidential Commission on Education Reform (PCER) with a mandate to develop policies for the promised education reform.

The environment was even more favorable to this type of education reform in 1998 when the next President Kim Dae Jung took over in the wake of the November 1997 financial meltdown. (His government remained in charge until 2003.) The immediate cause of that crisis was the sudden pullout of transnational funds, which shook hard the state-controlled financial institutions and, subsequently, the *chaebol* groups which relied on favorable loans from those financial institutions. The crisis aroused an even stronger public opinion for economic and educational reforms aiming to terminate the statist political economy which, by excessive state

control, obstructed development of a free market economy and deprived the economic actors of market competitiveness. Kim Dae Jung, therefore, promised a thorough education reform, of which goals remained the same: liberalization, decentralization, *segehoa*, and the termination of entrance competition.

### **Negative Internal Conditions**

In spite of such a favorable environment, however, the reform measures which the civilian governments employed did not bring significant changes to the existing educational system. The most important reason for this was their obvious underestimation of the magnitude of promised reforms. Liberalization meant that excessive state control of education would be withdrawn and the educational actors—schools and universities, teachers and professors, and students and their parents—would be allowed to operate freely and responsibly. Decentralization implied the transfer of power from the central authority to local residents. Finally, the termination of entrance competition meant the abolition of established state policies to control the curriculum and textbooks, student selection, tuition fees and student quotas, and the state entrance examination. Employing such measures meant a Copernican turn from a statist political economy to a political economy based on the educational actors' free and responsible initiatives. The internal conditions did not permit such drastic measures, however.

First and foremost to note, the governments of the civilian leaders were not literally "civilian" by the nature of their power basis. The military elite's effort to build supportive groups and regions along the traditional personalist ethic had tremendous impact upon South Korean voters. By the time the military elite relinquished their rule, South Koreans were divided into antagonistic groups and regions on the basis of what they called sarcastically "group egoism" (*chibdan igjuyi*) and "regional egoism" (*chiyog igjuyi*), so much so that neither of the two civilian leaders was able to garner a nationwide support. They both managed to gain power by coalition with the influential military factions, each with its own group and regional support bases. Kim Yong Sam, the politician from the South Kyongsang Province received endorsement from the voters in his province and the urban middle class. He grasped power by allying with Ro Tae Wu of the second-generation military group supported by the North Kyongsang Province and Kim Chong Pil of the first-generation military group supported by Chungchong Provinces. When Kim Chong Pil broke with Kim Yong Sam, Kim Dae Jung, who was supported by Cholla Provinces and the urban lower classes, worked out with him a "power-sharing" agreement (*kongdongjongguon*). The heterogeneous constituencies within the power groups, and the complicated regional and group affiliations, practically forbade reforms which were injurious to the interests vested in the status quo.

The civilian leaders' weak power bases, on their own, had restrictive effects on available policy options. Although their power was obtained through fair electoral processes and did not generate disputes about legitimacy, their failure to draw nationwide support made it inevitable for them to continue with the developmental mobilization strategy, egalitarian policy measures,<sup>13</sup> and oppressive measures where necessary.

There was another stumbling block. The years of state policies to control and manage education had left a huge body of bureaucrats. The ending of military rule released the bureaucrats from the tight grips of governmental leaders. Moreover, the civilian leaders' lack of experience in running the state apparatus gave rise to the bureaucrats' importance in policy making and implementation. The bureaucrats took advantage of all this in their effort to

maintain their own interest vested in big offices with ample resources and power. They obstructed the employment of such reform ideas as liberalization and decentralization by exhibiting reluctance to cooperate (*pokjibudong*, “lying with face down and making no movement”) and, at opportune times, by manipulating the policy making processes in order to filter reform ideas to policies suitable for their own interest by maintaining or further enhancing state control and management. The bureaucrats thus began to intercept in the state-education relationship to the effect of holding educational policy making and implementation within the existing statist political economy. And such efforts easily found endorsement from the educational institutions and their teaching staff equally dependent on the guaranteed supply of students under the entrance competition-hinged educational system.<sup>14</sup>

Gradually, thus, such internal conditions shifted the themes of education reform debate from liberalization, decentralization, and so on, to a reform that would enhance educational performances—in particular, “quality, excellence and the nation’s competitiveness”—within the existing arrangement but with enhanced state intervention and financial commitment (Kim and Jung 1994; Kim KS 1997). After all, it was now argued, education was “public by nature” (*kyoyug-yi konggongsong*) and the state’s extensive and intensive intervention in education was a prerequisite for the integrity of the educational system. The influence of such negative internal conditions becomes clear upon examining the two civilian governments’ policies on entrance competition.

### **Entrance Competition Policies**

(1) *Maintaining Entrance Competition*. When appointed in 1994, PCER members understood liberalization, decentralization and the revival of free educational initiatives as necessary reform measures to solve the entrance competition question and rearranging the educational system for the new era of globalization.<sup>15</sup> They generally perceived that the entrance competition question originated from the military governments’ extensive and intensive control of education and unsuccessful efforts to manage the supply and demand of student places. Therefore, in their view, the question would easily banish in the civilian era if educational activities were diversified by means of liberalization, and so on. But the “New Educational System,” which the PCER laid down in its official report after a year of work with Ministry of Education bureaucrats and other interested parties, demonstrated substantial modifications to those members’ original views (PCER 1995).

Basically, the PCER Report maintained that the new age into which South Korea was entering was going to be one of “a great turning point in the history of civilization,” in which the industry-guided world would become one dominated by information and new knowledge. From this outlook, it observed that an education reform that was in pursuit had to aim to endorse the nation’s economic prosperity in the new age by rectifying the structural problems of the existing educational system. As such structural problems, it pointed to entrance competition and such related problems as:

- rote learning and drill in fragmentary knowledge which wiped out creativity and diversity from classroom; superficial instruction in schools and universities;
- heavy parental financial burden for after-school cramming classes (the cost of which in 1994, according to the Report, accounted for 5.8 percent of the gross national product in comparison with the state’s education budget which remained at 3.8 percent),

- the state's uniform control of education which restricted the educators' professional autonomy, and
- disappearance of moral character from the students (referring to the selfishness of students engaged in entrance competition). (Ibid., 11-4)

The Report thus brought up some key structural problems in relation to the entrance competition question. However, its approach to solving the problems did not differ from that of the previous military era. It stated that entrance competition was caused by the simple fact that student places were in short supply as evident in "the bottleneck phenomenon at university gates" (Ibid., 13). As the cause was simple, so was the solution: widen the narrow university gates by increasing student quotas and new university licenses until supply met demand. Once supply met demand, the PCER Report predicted, entrance competition and after-school cramming practice would disappear altogether and schools would return to their "normal" operation (Ibid., 101-7). This was exactly what the policy makers of military regimes had been saying whenever they decided to increase the supply of student places at times of crisis.

It is here to be noted that the PCER's policy making, as reflected in its Report, followed the venues established by the military elite—egalitarian and developmental. In the egalitarian venue, it recommended the increase of student quotas, new university licenses, and increased state funding of education. In the developmental venue, however, it sought to maintain the system of state-imposed student quotas, to contain new school licenses, to keep uniformity of the curriculum and textbook and the institution of annual state entrance examination. It only sought to "mend" the institution for improved efficiency through a newly-created National Institute of Educational Evaluation (KIEE). Given that such policies would not stop entrance competition, the PCER now turned to the egalitarian venue and recommended to suppress private cramming by resorting to the 1980 law of the Chon military junta, and to offer free state cramming services via a satellite television network (which was to be established exclusively for that purpose) in order thus to alleviate parental financial burden. In either of the two venues, the institutions of state control of education became reinforced by new institutions and increased funds in the hands of bureaucrats.

The effects of implementing PCER recommendations were what had actually happened repetitively during the military years: persistent entrance competition, further expansion of education, and further enhanced pressure for increased state funding for education. By 1998, thus, the total of student quotas in higher educational institutions had grown to the capacity of accommodating 94 percent of the year's high school graduates. The institutions of higher education, however, managed to attract only 84 percent of them (Kim KS 1999).

(4) *Extending Entrance Competition to Graduate Schools.* The surplus of student places created new problems for policy makers to deal with. Since the high participation rate in higher education was due to the drive toward universities and colleges triggered by intense entrance competition, the students who managed to enter one such institution included many who could not remain there due to financial reasons.<sup>16</sup> The student places vacated by such students were filled with those transferred from other universities. Here, most students in less popular universities continued to look for opportunity to move to a more popular university. Thus, the over-supply of student places inflamed an unprecedented crisis for the universities which had



been relying on the student supply guaranteed by entrance competition. In reaction, the PCER in 1997 devised a policy agenda for “research-focused, graduate school-centered universities” (*yongu-jungjom taehaguon-jungshim taehag*) (PCER 1995, 23).

The underlying ideas of this program were three-fold. The first was that since large-scale increases in student quotas and new licenses did not bring entrance competition to a halt due to the popular preference of the top universities in the hierarchy, the PCER felt it necessary to close those top universities’ undergraduate programs or to reduce their student quotas to a degree of “near closure.” Instead, second, it felt that those universities should be transformed to “research-focused, graduate school-centered universities” while other universities were guided to concentrate their effort on teaching undergraduate students. Finally, the state should provide the research-focused, graduate school-centered universities with massive funding in order to transform them to very attractive (“world-class”) research universities. In the PCER’s developmental perspective, this would ensure the supply of high-quality research personnel for the country’s competitive performance in the global economy. In its egalitarian perspective, it would “extend” entrance competition to graduate programs and thus sustain the supply of students for the troubled undergraduate programs of middle- to low-ranking universities.

The subsequent Kim Dae Jung government has taken over this program and implemented it with a new name, “Brain Korea 21” (or “BK21”). In doing so, it also followed the military elite’s footsteps on the road to mass education at the level of graduate studies.

### **The Viability of the Statist Educational System**

The foregoing analysis shows the difficulties of changing a national educational system that has been established during the decades of statist political economy.<sup>17</sup> The policy makers of the civilian governments understood that their nation’s prosperity in an era of globalization depended on having a viable educational system and, for this, it was essential to liberalize and decentralize the existing educational system. The process of policy making, however, guided them to policy measures which maintained the existing educational system and left its structural problems unaddressed.

What remains to be examined, then, is how the unresolved structural problems would bear upon South Korea’s economic future. South Korea cannot go ahead with the current educational system if it desires educational endorsement of continual economic prosperity. Note, in the first place, that participation in higher education is now almost full and, in addition, the policy to extend entrance competition to graduate schools will stimulate demand for education in those institutions. Full participation in higher education suggests either of two possible scenarios: that the nation’s workforce will soon consist entirely of university- or junior colleges-trained professionals, or that many higher educational institutions will actually be producing non- or semi-professional workers instead of professional workers. The former means serious manpower shortage in the industries demanding non-professional workers;<sup>18</sup> the latter, on the other hand, implies the waste of precious financial resources. There is one more problem. If the observation is correct that ICT triggers perpetual innovation in the workplace, then the vitality of the workforce will rest on the periodic reeducation and retraining of workers by the institutions which deal with new knowledge and technology: universities and colleges.

However, the method of selecting students by ranking applicants in terms of how much they know about what high schools now teach will prevent most currently-employed workers from reeducation and retraining at the level of higher education. Therefore, those workers will be quickly invalidated by the perpetual innovation.

Financial problems are an even more serious concern. In 1997, according to OECD (2000, 32), the total expenditure of South Korea's educational institutions, including state funds and parental expenses (yet excluding after-school cramming fees), was the highest of all OECD nations in terms of its proportion in the gross domestic product (GDP): 7.4 percent. In 2000, according to Bank of Korea estimation, the state's education budget alone accounted for 5.7 percent of the GDP (KEDI 1997a, 59). Even so, however, educational institutions remain very much under funded. Compulsory education is still limited to six years in primary schools except in some rural areas where it also covers additional three years in middle schools. Compulsory education of such a short time span, none the less, is not free. 3 percent of public primary schools' operation cost (in governmental statistics and no less than 10 percent in reality) is collected from parents. Moreover, in urban centers, as many as 1,000 public school classes operate on a two-shift basis. Meanwhile, state grants to private institutions of higher education still covers less than 3 percent of their operation cost. Higher education being practically universal, and graduate programs attracting more and more students, the pressure for the state's increased financial commitment will become much higher from now on than ever before. Parental financial burden, meanwhile, has already gone well beyond a tolerable level.

These problems alone, aside from other equally serious problems, would be sufficient to warrant a prediction that when globalization progresses further, the current educational system will not be viable in terms of ensuring the continuity of public education and of producing a flexible and versatile workforce and a cadre of highly-trained professionals. Only one solution seems workable: a big surgery on the statist educational system by means of a substantial degree of liberalization, decentralization, and the emancipation of private education as the PCER members originally contemplated. South Korea, however, cannot go for the solution because of the entrenched statist political economy of education—for the time being, at least.

## Notes

1. Depending on the discursive context, it may also refer to a political concept or "a functional logic of political membership" (Kvistad 1999). Political economy is the way in which the political state deals with the economic sphere of civil society. In his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Society* (1593), which is perhaps the earliest English document to distinguish the political state from civil society, Richard Hooker wrote, "The state is not identified with civil society . . . Civil society is the organization of production in society; the state is not the organization of that production, it is the product of the relation between political economy and society" (cited in Krader 1976, 21).

2. On his reading of Schoppa's work, Green (1997, 24) observes that "Anglophone countries' neo-liberal dogmas of free market economy [which prevail the global economy and liberalization of education] run against the bedrock opposition in [East Asian] countries which have strong traditions of state regulation, social partnership and corporatist planning." He mistakes Japan to be Germany and "patterned pluralism" to be social partnership. Schoppa says that in Japan not

only interest groups such as the Japan Teachers Union (*Nikkyoso*) but also political parties with representation in the Diet are left out of policy making processes.

3. This may suggest that statism in East Asia is a modern version of the old mode of government dubbed “Asiatic despotism” rather than an imported political economy. Whether this name is fair or not, the state’s overwhelming status in relation to society is still apparent. In the Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages, “the state” (*kuojia*, *kokka* and *kugga*, “the king’s family”) can substitute “the nation” (*kuomin*, *kokumin* and *kugmin*, “the king’s subjects”), but not the other way round. In the contemporary use, the word for “the nation” is equated with “the members of a nation” or “the citizens” but not vice versa. The members of a nation and the citizens both remain subject to and cared for by the *state*, which is the same as the *nation*. Whether or not the speakers of those languages are aware, their discourse on the state-society relationship must be affected by the semantic linkages of the words.

4. A good example of this is the system of frequently rotating bureaucrats from one office to another. This rotation system was initiated by the military elite who feared the bureaucrats’ independence. But Amsden (1989) observes that South Korea’s economic development under the military regimes was due to the bureaucrats’ enlightened leadership. Her observation is apparently shortsighted.

5. For the “personalist ethic,” see Dore (1982) and Chang (1991). For a critical response, see Kim KS (1999).

6. Seth (1997) observes that developmental policies were not thoroughly enforceable because of the demand from the social forces of “teachers, school officials, private foundations, and especially parents” for equitable distribution of educational opportunity in secondary and higher education.

7. For analysis of the relationship between state intervention, entrance competition and the rising demand for education, see Kim KS (1999) and Koh (1998, 33-63).

8. Parental educational expenditure rose from 64,350 million won in 1966 to 251,288 million won in 1970 and to 458,305 million won in 1975 (Kim YB 1980, 263).

9. The state’s education budget fluctuated between 14.4 and 18 percent in its total budget during the Pag years (1961-1979), and between 18.6 and 22.8 percent during the Chon-Ro years (1980-1992) (Ibid., 821). Although the economy grew fast, educational expansion made the cost of education grow much faster. From 1970 to 1998, the GDP grew 164 times while the cost of education, including governmental and parental portions, rose 221 times. “Kyoyugbi nyongan chichul 25-jowon, GDP-yi 5.7 posentu,” *Dongailbo*, 14 February 2000.

10. The defense budget was similar in size to the education budget. Due to the growing pressure, the Chon government introduced Workmen’s Compensation Insurance, Medical Insurance, and National Pension Insurance. For these programs, in 1987, the state spent merely 2.19 percent of the GDP. See Lee HK (1999, 29).

11. In 1997, a new student in Seoul paid \$1,073 in Canadian currency in both public and private middle schools, \$1,882 in both public and private high schools, \$7,202 in a state university's science faculty, and \$11,482 in a private university's science faculty (MOE 1997, 870).

12. In 2000, for instance, 24 university licenses and 15 junior college licenses did not materialize as operating institutions. "Pobinman mandullgo mun an yon taehag 39 kot," *Chosunilbo*, 3 October 2000.

13. During President Kim Yong Sam's term, for instance, the state's welfare expenditures grew from 3.5 percent of the GDP in 1992 to 4.47 percent in 1996 (Lee HK 1999, 34).

14. Most schools and universities opposed changes to the existing educational system. Vocal in the opposition was teachers and professors. When abolishing the state entrance examination became an issue in 1998, for instance, a professor of education at a private university in Seoul wrote, "Should the state abolish the examination, it would have to tell universities how to select students." Reference is withheld to protect identity.

15. I interviewed three key members of the PCER in 1994 when they were exploring a general direction of education reform.

16. The number of such students at state universities was 102,937 in 1998. This figure accounts for a third of those universities' student quotas. "Hyuhagsaeng chungga kyoyugjaejong abbag," *Hankyoreh*, 17 October 2000.

17. After examining the economic reforms seeking "liberalization" and "deregulation," J.A. Matthews (1998, 757) concludes, "South Koreans have no intention of replacing their former highly interventionist model of development with an Anglo-American style non-interventionist economy based on unfettered market forces."

18. While participation rate in higher education grew rapidly, manpower supply to the industry decreased quickly. In 1980, participation rate in higher education was 16.2 percent and the manufacturing sector felt 3.46 percent short of necessary manpower. In 1990, the participation rate reached 48.8 percent and the manufacturing sector's manpower shortage surged to 6.85 percent (Kang 1996).

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