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# Habitus Transformation: Immigrant Mother's Cultural Translation of Educational Strategies in Korea

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to examine the transformation of *habitus* through a case study of immigrant mothers who navigate a heated educational competition in South Korea. To illuminate the process of *habitus* change, this study investigates the ways in which immigrant mothers make sense of a unique educational cultural practice of Korean parents, which is heavy reliance on shadow education.

## **Keywords**

habitus, Korea, immigrants, parenting, education, shadow education

## **Disciplines**

Asian Studies | Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Curriculum and Instruction | Demography, Population, and Ecology | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Educational Sociology | First and Second Language Acquisition | International and Comparative Education | Linguistics | Race and Ethnicity

# **Habitus Transformation: Immigrant Mother's Cultural Translation of Educational Strategies in Korea**

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## **Habitus Transformation: Immigrant Mother's Cultural Translation of Educational Strategies in Korea**

**Hyejeong Jo**

This study aims to examine the transformation of habitus through a case of immigrant mothers who navigate a heated educational competition in South Korea. Especially this study pays close attention to the ways in which they make sense of a unique educational cultural practice of Korean parents, which is heavy reliance on shadow education to understand the process of habitus change. *Habitus*, a signature concept of Bourdieu, has been a popular concept to explain the mechanism of social reproduction. Habitus refers to a set of dispositions and embodied behaviors derived from the unconscious internalization of the social structure (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990, 1993; King, 2000; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). According to habitus theory, individuals internalize their social position within social structure into their dispositions and unconscious behaviors (Lee & Kramer, 2013). Since habitus explains why agents from different social groups (i.e., social class, gender, and race) show different pattern of social behavior and attitude, which leads to different social outcomes, it explains the mechanism of stable reproduction of social structure (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2007; Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003; Erin McNamara Horvat & Antonio, 1999; McNay, 1999). Also, scholarship on social stratification has considered habitus to contribute to the perpetuation of social inequality because habitus is formed in early childhoods through family interaction and it lasts for the rest of life stages (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; King, 2000). In general, habitus helps to understand the subtle mechanism of maintenance of social structure through the interaction between social structure and social agency.

However, critiques have criticized his theory of habitus, especially focusing on his early works: They assert that habitus is an overly deterministic concept (Adams, 2006; King, 2000; Reay, 2004). As the concept of habitus supposes that habitus is a lasting unconscious disposition and behaviors derived from an individual's social location, they argue that the concept of habitus rules out the possibility of social mobility or social change. They argue that the concept is limited because "any choice individual can make are always already given by the habitus which is itself determined by their objective, prior, and therefore, unchangeable [social] position" (King 2000: 425). In contrast to the criticism on the conceptual rigidity of habitus, other researches claim that the criticism is based on misinterpretation of Bourdieu's theory (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Horvat, 2003; Horvat & Davis, 2011; Lee & Kramer, 2013). They argue that Bourdieu admits the possibility of habitus transformation. Moreover, they empirically show that habitus can be modified in accordance with the change of social environment or how individuals juggle between their old habitus and new habitus they acquire through social mobility. To them, habitus is a fluid concept, which helps understand the ways in which individuals interact with changing social circumstances.

While agreeing with the latter point of view on habitus, I contend that previous literature does not explain the actual process of habitus transformation though it discusses the consequences of habitus modification. In other words, previous researchers do not explain the ways in which individuals acquire new habitus and they develop new strategies based on the newly acquired habitus. Moreover, most of previous studies pay attention to educational institutions as a social arena where individuals experience the change of habitus. Bourdieu support this idea by arguing that habitus can be changed through the contact with total institutions such as prison and boarding school, which scholars later call "institutional habitus"

(Cornbleth, 2010; Erin McNamara Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Reay, David, & Ball, 2001). However, previous studies do not consider the possibility of habitus transformation of adults in daily lives. If the transformation of habitus is to be conceptually generalizable as previous research suppose, the habitus change should be possibly observed not only in educational institution but also in non-institutional mundane lives. Thus, we still have unanswered question about the habitus modification; how the habitus transformation takes place in daily lives and it alters individuals' life experiences.

This study addresses these questions by examining the ways in which immigrant mothers in South Korea alter their habitus toward a highly competitive educational market which characterizes Korean education through social contacts with individuals from other groups that Lareau and Calarco (2012) term “cultural mentor” as well as with educational institutional gatekeepers. Also, it delves into how immigrant mothers change their educational strategies based on the transformed habitus in order to transmit the educational advantages to children. I begin by discussing the concept of habitus and how we can understand the educational strategies of immigrant parents through the theoretical lens of habitus transformation. I then explain the contextual background where immigrant mothers in South Korea are located and research method. Also, I present data from in-depth interviews with immigrant mothers with their elementary-age children. I then take up the implications of these findings for the conceptual models of habitus transformation.

### **Conceptualizing *Habitus***

I argue that habitus can be transformed through social interaction with individuals from other social groups in later life and the habitus transformation influences the ways in which

parents constantly adjust the strategies to transmit educational advantages to the next generation. Bourdieu defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1990: 53), which “functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions (Bourdieu, 1977: 83).” In sociology literature, based on Bourdieu’s concept especially in his early works such as *Distinction* (1984) habitus is usually defined as one’s embodied disposition, which influences the actions that an individual take.

Scholarship on social stratification has paid close attention to habitus because the concept of habitus theoretically explains an important mechanism to reproduce the existing social relations (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2007; Katz-Gerro, 2002; Dumais, 2002; McNay 1999; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009; Reay, 1995). I suppose that previous researchers focus on two crucial aspects of habitus in general. First, the formation of habitus takes place in an early stage of life. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suppose that the habitus is formed through one’s early life experiences including family history and schooling experiences and lasts stably for a long time. It contributes to the rigidity and durability of habitus for a lifetime. Secondly, as habitus is shaped through early socialization, it is inscribed in not only individuals’ body but also their unconsciousness. Because individuals internalize their objective social conditions (i.e., social class or gender), the individuals come to have tastes and practices appropriate for that social position (Dumais 2002: 47; King 2000: 423). In sum, habitus becomes “second nature” individuals acquire in early childhood (Bourdieu, 1990: 56), and it produces different pattern of practices for social group and accordingly different social outcomes, which ultimately helps maintain the reproduction of social relations.

These characteristics of habitus, which is rarely or never changing and deeply inscribed in individuals, attract criticism that habitus is an overly deterministic concept and rules out the possibility of social change and agency of individuals (Adams, 2006; Jenkins, 1994; King, 2000; Reay, 2004). For instance, King (2000) criticizes the habitus concept is trapped in objectivism even though Bourdieu himself criticizes it. He asserts that social change will not take place in Bourdieu's habitus model because the habitus prevents individuals from introducing new social practice into the social structure. It implies that individuals cannot improvise the strategies for social mobility since they repeat their habitus formed based on their social position and their agency is not allowed in the model.

[Habitus] can never construct new strategies for new situations because they are not aware of their habitus and, therefore, cannot begin to reinterpret them. ... Thus, the habitus rules out the possibility of social change. Significantly, ... individuals in other societies, operating under their own habituses, will be similarly constrained in their activities and will not seek out new contacts with other groups. (King, 2000: 427).

However, I contend that the criticism is derived from the narrowly defined formal concept of habitus. We should understand habitus in conjunction with Bourdieu's another signature concept, *field*. Whereas habitus brings into the subjectivity into the theoretical model, the field focuses on the objective aspect of practice (Grenfell & James, 1998). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) explain:

[S]ocial reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a "fish in water": It does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted.

The field, where practices take place, is "a network or a configuration of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 97). Also, "the field is a veritable



social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of forces of a particular type are exerted (Bourdieu 1990b: 164).” In other words, individuals in the field struggle over the scarced position within the field and the accompanying rewards based on “the rules of the game” played in the field. To win the game, individuals should tranform their habitus strategically, given their relations with others (King 2000: 425). For example, in *Dinstintion* (1984), Bourdieu presents the ways in which the upper classes bring in new fashions as their old tastes are spread among lower classes.

Since habitus is now tied to the field, it can be transformed when an individual face an unfamiliar field (Bourdieu 1990a). In fact, Bourdieu (1990b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), in his later works, defines habitus as “feel for the game” or “sense for the game,” which is more flexible than his formal definition presented earlier. Habitus in the field provides not just internalized disposition toward a certain practice based on the social position, but a feel for the rules of the game and a sense of likelihood of various outcomes derived from the practices. Thus, with the revised definition tied to the field, habitus includes cognitive aspect as well as non-cognitie unconscious one. Drawing on this definition, for this study, I define habitus not only unconscious embodiment of social structure but also a conscious and intellectual sense of what is going on in the field, which I will discuss later again.

### **Habitus Transformation**

Note that this study is not the first one considering the habitus a flexible entity. There have been several researchers who pay attention to the transformation of habitus, refuting the critisism of the deterministic habitus (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Cornbleth 2010; Harris & Wise, 2012; Horvat, 2003; Horvat & Davis 2011; Lee & Kramer, 2013). They have attempted to prove

that habitus is not deterministic, but fluid enough to be changed in a new social setting including an elite educational setting or an educational program providing a new point of view on the world.

For example, Lee and Kramer (2013) examine how low socioeconomic status students in an elite higher education institution juggling “cleft habitus” which means having both newly acquired elite cultural norms and non-elite habitus they internalized in hometown. They found that having both new and old habitus has the effect of constraining and weakening relationship between students who achieved educational mobility and their home communities. Lee and Kramer argue that the findings imply that habitus can and does change and it affects the social network with the old community having provided initial habitus. Similarly, Horvat and Davis (2011) show that school program transform habitus of high school dropouts through its asset-based, mission-driven approach. Through the program, participants change habitus including an increase in self-esteem, the ability to accomplish something desirable, and the capacity to help other individuals. It eventually improves the participants’ socioeconomic position. Like Lee and Kramer, Horvat and Davis argue that habitus is more fluid than previous understood (165).

However, most empirical studies examine the transformation of habitus taking place in the educational setting. They focus on educational institutions as a social arena where individuals experiences “out-of-habitus” (Reay et al., 2009) or “fish-out-of-water” (Dumenden & English, 2012), which means that individuals encounter a situation where their old habitus does not fit the dominant habitus in the new social setting. They usually delve into the ways in which students with non-elite background navigate the habitus dissonance with elite students’ habitus and develop (or failed to develop) new habitus. Their common underlying hypothesis is that the educational institution is social space where individuals from different social groups can meet

(Lee and Kramer 2013) and transforms not only students' cognitive knowledge but also disposition and aspiration. Bourdieu supports this idea by arguing that habitus can be changed through the contact with total institutions such as prison and boarding school, which scholars later term "institutional habitus" (Atkinson, 2011; Cornbleth 2010; Horvat & Antonito 1999; Morrison, 2009; Reay, 1998; Thomas, 2002). However, it does not mean that transformation of habitus cannot take place in non-institutional situations, including daily interaction with neighbors or colleagues. Though non-institutionalized interactions in mundane life may not have transformative power as strong as the educational institution or correction system, it might be important to look at how individuals go through habitus transformation in daily life in that not just it has an implication for larger population than student groups; but also we can test whether habitus can really be shaped and transformed beyond family and school, which researchers have rarely examined. Thus, I will show the flexibility of habitus by examining how individuals experience the habitus transformation through interactions in non-institutionalized mundane daily life

Also, the existing empirical studies do not explicitly explain the process through which individuals transform their old habitus shaped in earlier life and the ways in which the newly acquired habitus influences their strategies in the field. For instance, Horvat and Davis (2011) show the students' changed habitus but they do not explain how the program helps to develop their new habitus. Reay and his colleagues (2009), who argue that habitus persists stably even after non-elite students enter an elite institution, do not delve into how the institution or members in the institutions affects students' habitus transformation and why it fails. No matter whether they agree with the idea of habitus transformation, they commonly do not examine the actual process of habitus transformation or failure to transform of habitus. Furthermore, the previous

literature does not mention the ways in which habitus change may influence individuals' strategies in the field. As mentioned earlier, habitus is connected to the concept of field and habitus provides a basis for the strategies individuals deploy for the competition in the field (Bourdieu 1990b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Accordingly, if one's habitus become changed, her strategies should be modified as well. Given this criticism, I will delve into the ways in which mundane interaction facilitates the habitus formation process and the newly acquired habitus influences the strategies of individuals in the field through the case of immigrant mothers who come to encounter the highly competitive education market in South Korea.

### **Immigrant parents and habitus**

To explore the transformation process of habitus and its consequences on the strategies in the field, the first generation immigrant parents provide a good empirical case. Even though race and ethnicity as well as gender is one of the main stratifying factors in society, Bourdieu has been criticized for giving short shrift to factors other than class that distinguish people from one another (Hall 1992). Habitus is not solely tied to social class and “[it] is primarily a method for analyzing the dominance of dominant groups in society and the domination of subordinate groups” (Reay, 2004: 436); so, habitus can be formed and influenced by not only social class but also other factors such as gender and race (McClelland, 1990). However, scholarship of habitus has not paid attention to ethnic groups and their habitus with a few exceptions (Bauder, 2005) where as there have been increasing interests in the ways which gender (Dumais, 2002; Gorely et al., 2003; McNay, 1999; Powell, 2008) and race (Bodovski, 2010; Diamond, et al., 2004; Horvat & Antonio, 1999) intersects with habitus. Thus, examination of immigrant parents' habitus transformation would fill the gap of the previous literature.

More importantly, studying the habitus of immigrant parents may be useful for understanding the transformation of habitus. Immigration does not only moving into a new society; it also involves entering a new cultural field which their original habitus might not fit. Especially, immigrant parents who were socialized in earlier life in homeland come to encounter a new set of cultural practices in the educational field, which generates dislocation of their habitus. Thus, immigrant parents may experience what Bourdieu terms “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu 1977, 1996, 1984) Hysteresis effect, an analogy from the physical phenomenon of magnetic effects lagging behind their causes, refers to lag between a new field and habitus (Bourdieu 1977: 78-79). It means “habitus lags behind the objective material conditions which gave rise to it and with which the habitus has to catch up” (King 2000, 427). When individuals enter a new social setting (i.e., a new field), they experience their old habitus does not fit in with the new reality. The original habitus they have maintained becomes outmoded and in conflict with the new setting. The individuals are imperative to catch up the new habitus, or they can take up a disadvantaged social position in the new field. Since immigrant parents are in a new social setting, empirically examining their hysteresis effect and the ways in which they overcome it or maintain their old habitus will provide an interesting lens through which we can answer an important question about habitus; whether habitus can be transformed and how it affects individuals’ strategies in the field.

Though the process of immigrant parents’ habitus transformation could be interpreted as the assimilation process, I argue that habitus transformation and its consequences portray the immigrant parents’ experiences in a more nuanced way by focusing on their agency. One of theoretical merits of using habitus to study individuals’ practices is that it enables to explore the ways in which individuals interact with social structure because habitus is structured by the

social structure and it affects the maintain or change of social structure in turn. On the surface, the definition of *assimilation* seems similar to one of *habitus*. Park and Burgess (1969: 735) define assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.” Though it appears to explain the process of cultural transformation of the ethnic minorities, the concept focuses on “the social processes that bring ethnic minorities into the mainstream of American life (Alba & Nee, 1997: 828).” Despite the diverse definitions having emerged after Park and Burgess, an important goal of assimilation study is examining the integration into the mainstream experienced across generations by many individuals and ethnic groups (Alba & Nee, 1997). Assimilation theory explains where individuals are located in the social structure. On the contrary, *habitus* explains how individuals end up being located there. The concept of *habitus* enables to examine the ways in which individuals from ethnic minorities navigate the new field, building up a new set of strategy to take up an advantaged social position through competition with others. Thus, this study delves into the experiences of immigrant mothers and their educational strategies through the theoretical framework of *habitus* transformation.

### **Rules of the Game in Korean Education**

This study empirically examines the experiences of immigrant mothers in Korea. Korean education and immigrant mothers in Korea make a particularly appealing case for the study of *habitus* transformation. First, in general, immigrant parents’ educational experiences not only in Korea but also in other destination countries in Asia have been rarely documented by sociologist. Their life experiences and immigrant children’s education issues are usually discussed in the

Western context, especially in the American context. Moreover, the relatively short history of immigration in host countries in East Asia may result in the lack of empirical study about immigrant parents' experiences. The destination countries in East Asia, including Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, began emerging in the 1990s. For instance, it was only the 1990s when immigrants, including female marriage migrants, began to increase in Korea and Korea experienced a rapid increase in immigrants in the 2000s (Kim, 2009). However, their life experiences should be different from those in Western countries because social and cultural contexts in newly emerging destination countries in East Asia are heterogeneous from ones in Western countries, which calls for empirical studies on immigrant parents and the ways in which they navigate the social circumstances in the host society.

Next, among immigrants in East Asian countries, immigrant mothers in Korea are an especially interesting case for the study on habitus transformation due to exceptional educational culture of Korea. In Bourdieu's term, immigrant mothers in South Korea encounter "a set of new rules of the game" in the educational field that the existing players are familiar with. The first rule is the intense educational competitions among parents as well as among children. "Going to a prestigious college" takes an important role in an individual's life (Park 2010) and family life in Korea. For example, college graduates enjoy more income and higher employment opportunities than high school graduates (Kim & Lim, 2012; Yoon & Shin, 2012). Also, college graduates are more likely to have a "good job" encompassing higher income, occupational prestige, and subjective satisfaction of one's occupation than their counterparts who do not have college certificate (Phang & Lee, 2011). However, the quality of life is determined not just by whether one graduated from college but also by how prestigious the college she graduated. In other words, the benefit from college education is mediated by the ranks and reputation of the

educational institute. Going to colleges in Seoul metropolitan area considered to be more prestigious are more likely to have full-time jobs and higher salaries, and work at the larger-sized firms than ones from colleges in non-Seoul metropolitan area that are seen to be less prestigious (Ryu, 2005).

Also, Korea has held a cultural belief in intergenerational social mobility through education. Through the rapid modernization, Korean society has experienced rapid expansion of all tiers of education and culturally it has been emphasized to have higher education as the way of achieving social mobility. Thus, it would be a desirable trajectory for younger citizens to go to college, which should be followed by having a secure white-collar occupation. In other words, going to college means not only you have an opportunity to acquire human capital and social capital valuable in job market, but also an important rite of passage for Korean adolescents to become cultural citizens. Regardless of legal citizenship, cultural citizenship is crucial to have “becoming a full realized subjects” because it is “a measure of value, self- worth, and citizenship” (Anagnost, 2000). It affects one’s sense of “dignity, thriving and well- being” (Rosaldo, 1994). Thus, having cultural citizenship, exceeding legal status, is an important social aspect for a citizen to be integrated into a society (Abelmann and Kim, 2005; Choo, 2006). In this light, going to college has a cultural meaning that one achieves a full cultural membership by participating in the credential society as well as signals one’s qualification as a job candidate. Also, thanks to value attached to college education, the academic success of children at entering a “good” school is a source of family pride (Seth, 2002).

The second rule of the game in the educational field that immigrant mothers come to encounter is heavy reliance on shadow education as a way to facilitate students’ academic performance. The importance of college education in Korean young people’s life makes



educational competition unusually intense especially because of the high stake of standardized college admission test for the college admission process. In order to apply for college in Korea, students must take the Scholastic Ability Test called *soo-hag-neung-ryok-si-heom* (or *soo-neung*), which takes once a year when the government appoints. Despite the increasing importance of other criteria including high school GPA or extracurricular activities in college admission, the most critical factor is still scores from the SAT (Park et al., 2011). Also, the SAT scores become more crucial especially when one applies for a prestigious college (Kim and Jeong, 2007). Since college substantially influences one's life chances and college admission relies on a SAT score, parents and children have to invest their resources to boost the SAT scores, which leads to the intense educational competition among students and families.

This intense educational competition in Korea has fostered the development of the largest shadow education system in the world (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Byun, Schofer, & Kim, 2012), which I define another rule of the game in the educational market in Korea<sup>1</sup>. In Korea, Shadow education refers to educational activity outside of formal schooling for the purposes of enhancing the student's formal school career and academic achievement (Buchmann et al., 2010; Byun & Park, 2012; Byun, Schofer, & Kim, 2012; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Shadow education can be used for remedial education to help students struggling to improve their academic performance or to enrich students' academic development beyond what formal schooling may provide (Buchmann et al. 2010). Indeed, shadow education takes a crucial role in interweaving children's educational experiences and family life in Korea. A recent national survey showed that 74.6 % of primary and secondary students in Korea were enrolled in at least one kind of shadow education

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<sup>1</sup> Stevenson and Backer (1992) argue, "the use of formal examinations, contest norms of social mobility, and tight linkages between the outcomes of educational allocation in elementary and secondary schooling and future educational opportunities, occupations, or general social status" can foster the development of shadow education. Shadow education is often interchangeable with private tutoring services or cram school. Shadow education is often interchangeable with private tutoring services or cram school.

program (Korea National Statistical Office [KNSO], 2010). It was reported that in 2008 Korean families spent approximately US\$19 billion on shadow education, which was almost one-tenth of the national annual budget and slightly more than the total education budget in Korea (Korean National Statistical Office [KNSO, 2009]<sup>2</sup>.

In the Korean context, using shadow education is “a form of parental involvement” (Park et al., 2011). It requires parents’ careful attention to and active intervention in children’s educational experiences. Unlike the public education that is highly standardized in Korea, shadow education are diversified and stratified as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, parents should know whether child needs shadow education and which program should fit into her needs. Also, they should have knowledge and information about shadow education programs in their local contexts. For example, they should know which cram school has strength in preparing in a certain subject or which private tutor is better known than others in the area. Thus, shadow education not only interweaves children’s daily lives, but also has a crucial role in parent’s strategies to transmit educational advantages to children.

In sum, immigrant mothers encounter two rules of games that they may not very familiar with: the intense educational competition among students and parents and the heavy reliance on shadow education to facilitate students’ academic development outside of school. Thanks to the exceptional obsession with education in Korean society, immigrant women’s experiences as

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<sup>2</sup> One of shadow education programs is weekly workbook delivery service called *hagseupji*. Students receive a set of worksheets once a week based on their academic development. An instructor visits a student once a week and keeps track of the student’s progress. Another form of shadow education is cram school called *hagwon*. Students enrolled in the cram school program go to *hagwon* after school. *Hagwon* usually has a very similar curriculum to school curriculum and uses a similar teaching skill. In classroom, a teacher teaches students with the textbook to preview or review what students learn at school. Finally, some students hire an instructor to visit their house to teach once or twice a week. Students usually spend one or two hours with the instructor and the instructor customizes the class based on the student’s educational needs and learning progress. This form of shadow education is called *gwawe* in Korea.

mothers in Korea can provide an appealing case through which we can examine whether these new players change their sense of the game called habitus and how they experience the transformation.

### **Data and Methods**

In order to understand the process of transformation of habitus, this paper analyzes the in-depth interview data collected in 2011 and 2012 in Korea. Specifically, I conducted 51 interviews with immigrant mothers who have elementary-age children in *Harbor Town* with 300,000 residents and in *Mountain Town* with 40,000 citizens. Harbor Town is a middle-size city where a national chemical industrial district is located and has a small number of agriculture and fishing population. Mountain Town is a small military town geographically very close to the military borderline with North Korea, but the civilian residents are earning a living through agriculture. Two cities were carefully chosen: Since a research question of the study is how habitus can be transmitted through social contact, I chose two cities whose social environments are substantially different to find potential interviewees with diverse scopes of social contacts with host society. Respondents in Harbor Town enjoyed the broader social contacts not only with co-ethnic community but also with native Koreans through work, neighborhoods, or community centers for immigrants. Compared to Mountain Town, the public transportation is more accessible in Harbor Town and the job opportunities are more diverse to respondents including language tutors, factory workers, and sales clerks. Most of respondents in Harbor Town have works outside home, which helps them to experience social contacts with Korean native parents on a regular basis. On the contrary, respondents in Mountain Town are more socially isolated. Also, respondents live in small villages that are geographically distant from each other and they

do not have many neighbors who have elementary-age children in the villages due to aging population in Mountain Town. The job opportunities in Mountain Town are not as broad as ones in Harbor Town. Naturally, the respondents in Mountain Town tend to have a limited scope of social contacts, which is concentrated on their co-ethnic groups, extended family members, and neighbors.

To recruit the potential interviewees, I used the snowball sampling method: I contacted a couple of non-profit organizations for the immigrant women respectively in Harbor Town and Mountain Town. I asked them to introduce me to a person from each origin country. They introduced me to one interviewee from seven different countries including China, Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Uzbekistan. I asked these initial interviewees to introduce their co-ethnic friends. Through a snowball sampling method, I was able to recruit 31 immigrant mothers in Harbor Town and 20 in Mountain Town. The number of immigrant mothers by country of origin in Harbor Town is; eight from Philippines, six from China, five from Japan, three from Mongolia, three from Vietnam, two from Thailand, and two from Uzbekistan. Also, I interviewed seven Thai, four Japanese, three Vietnamese, three Philippine and three Chinese immigrant mothers in Mountain Town.

Most of respondents in this study are from the marriage migrant group. Except for two respondents who experienced labor migrants, the majority of respondents moved to South Korea by marrying Korean men. The marriage trajectories were diverse: All Japanese, nine Filipinas, and five Thai respondents met their husbands through the Unification Church<sup>3</sup>. Another 17

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<sup>3</sup> The Unification Church is well known for their global matching program and they believe the international marriage contributes to world peace by combining individuals from different lineages (CITATION). Even though the respondents came to Korean through the Church it does not mean that they are all religious. Whereas all of Japanese respondents have been religious and they married for a religious end, none of Filipinas were not religious and are not religious now, either with a couple of

women met their current husbands through international marriage agency, for which the husband-sides paid. Lastly, the other ten women met their husbands through their acquaintances or relatives. With an exception, respondents were currently in marriage with their first husbands at the time of the interviews. One respondent divorced her ex-husband four and a half years ago and had lived with her only son. The respondents had two children on average at the point of the interviews. The average age of the first child is around 9.2 years old. Mothers are 32.1 years old and their spouses are 47.9 years old on average. The average duration of marriage is 11.2 years. Among 51 respondents, 30 mothers lived in the houses their husbands or their parents-in-law owned. The others rent houses. Especially, 15 mothers were living in apartments for which government subsidizes the rents.

The respondents' occupations in Harbor Town varied. Of respondents in Harbor Town, 14 mothers are homemakers. Except for three mothers, their husbands had low-paying manual jobs. Three husbands were working as drivers, another three are construction workers, and eight were working in small factories that did not guarantee job security and benefits. The other three husbands were working as operators for large-sized firms that offered high-level of job security, diverse benefits including free housing and healthcare, high incomes. Also, eight mothers were working as part-time language instructors at private tutoring service institutes. Three Chinese mothers taught Chinese and five Philippine mothers taught English at private education institutes. Three mothers are working at manufacture factories. Two are working as servers at a café and another two mothers are working as a backer. Also, two mothers are working as a sales clerk. In Mountain Town, the occupations of the respondents were much less various. 15 respondents were homemakers and they worked on and off at the farms helping husbands and parents-in-law.

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exceptions. Three Thai mothers are still going to the Church, but the other two mothers are not attending any more.

Six husbands did not have their own farms and worked as tenant farmers. The husbands usually worked at factories during winter seasons. The respondents sometimes worked as a part-timer at factories or at restaurants, but most of them did not have stable jobs. Most of them wanted to work outside home, but they could not find a job opportunity in Mountain Town relying on agriculture industry.

In terms education, the majority of the immigrant mothers in both cities are at least high school graduates. 11 mothers in Harbor Town and eight mothers in Mountain Town graduated from four-year college. Five mothers in Harbor Town and three mothers in Mountain Town are graduated from two-year college or dropped out of four-year college. Ten mothers in Harbor Town and six in Mountain Town graduated from high school. In Harbor Town, one mother is a high school dropout and two mothers graduated from elementary school. Three mothers in Mountain Town graduated from middle school or elementary school. Even though their education level was not low, their income was not high. Compared to average monthly income of South Korean, the respondents did not enjoy affluent income. On average, in 2011, the average monthly income of households in South Korea was 3.85 million KRW (around \$3,700). In Harbor Town, however, the median income of mothers was 0.35 million KRW (approximately \$300) per month and the median income of their husbands was 2.5 million KRW (around \$2,100) per month. In Mountain Town, the median income of mothers was 0.14 million KRW (approximately \$ 100) per month and their husbands' was 1.1 million KRW (around \$1,000).

To build rapport before the actual interviews, I called each respondent at least a couple of times. Also, I visited their workplace, community center where they have job trainings, the Unification churches, and a couple of their family picnics (I could not meet their husbands in the picnic, either). I went out with some of the respondents and their friends when they went

shopping or hung out at the karaoke once respectively. Also, I was invited to six dinners or two houses barbeque party. On the day before I left Harbor City, I had a privilege to have a farewell party that six respondents threw for me. At the party, one Filipina gave me a cushion that she made and another Japanese woman bought me a cake as a farewell gift. Even though this study is not an ethnographic study, these interactions with my respondents were helpful for me to understand the daily lives. Interviews were usually conducted at the interviewee's houses or workplaces. They lasted roughly from one hour to two hours. When I thought that it was needed, follow-up interviews were conducted to collect further information about the interviewees. I conducted followed up interviews for five people. During interviews, I asked several questions about their lives before marriage, their own educational trajectories, experiences with Korean educational institutions, the relationship with their husbands, and their parenting practices. To reduce social desirability effect and retrospective bias, I asked them to describe their daily lives. For example, I asked them to list what they did with children in the previous weekend or on the day before the interview. Interviews were conducted in Korean in most cases, but sometimes in English for the Filipina interviewees. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. All names shown in this paper are pseudonyms.

### **Habitus Hysteresis and Habitus Failure**

#### *Habitus Hysteresis*

Bourdieu (1996) argues that individuals experience the lag between their original habitus and the new rules of the game, when they enter the new field because the old habitus tend to last stably for a long time. He terms this discrepancy of the habitus and the field "habitus hysteresis" (1996). Under the influence of habitus hysteresis, individuals become "a fish out of water" as

their old habitus is outmoded, but it still influences their behaviors. The narratives of the immigrant mothers in this study are aligned with Bourdieu's explanation: The immigrant mothers remembered that their initial impression about Korean education was quite negative. Also, their early reaction on Korean education was based on their own understanding of education, which derived from their old habitus that they internalized in homeland.

Moe, a 45-year-old Japanese, clearly remembered her "shock" when she saw many students getting off a big shuttle bus carrying students from a cram school in downtown to her apartment complex almost one night two months after she moved to Korea. Walking back home from a welcome party that her husband's friends threw for her, Moe thought that the students getting off the bus were probably coming back from their field trip that lasted longer than planned because it was almost midnight. However, her husband, a 48-year-old express bus driver, told her that the students were on their way back home from cram school class that ends late. She remembered that she was not only shocked but also furious at seeing students roaming around at midnight. Moe, who was constantly calm for the entire interview, raised her voice saying, "What kinds of parents on earth can let children walk alone at night? It is unacceptable in Japan that kids wander without parents or guardians at night no matter what." I was shocked and angry. Children should be under protection of their parents all the time. Study may be important, but that is not all [for children's development]." She remembered that that event taught her that Korea is very different from where she came from. Though she assumed that Korea is similar to Japan because they share historical experiences and cultural characteristics including "putting family first" or "respecting the elderly," she felt that Korean parents probably would cherish children's academic development more than anything, which might not be always the case in Japan.



Thai, who is a 41-year-old immigrant mother from Thailand, first had a similar feeling about Korean education when she socialized with friends of her husband, a 55-year-old construction worker currently working in Dubai. When Da-young, Thai's first daughter, was about two and a half years old, she had a chance to go out with her husband's friends. She remembered that she was very overwhelmed by the conversation where the friends mostly talked about children's education not only because they spent hours talking on children's academic development, but also because education is tremendously important in daily lives of Korean family. Thai explained that education is generally important in her homeland, but "not this much."

They kept talking about education, such as someone's daughter got 100 out of 100 points from the midterm and her mother did X, Y, and Z. There was a wife of my husband's best friend and she was so obsessed with education. She knew all famous cram schools in Harbor Town and even the name of instructors. I thought to myself, "Wow, she must do nothing but researching cram school!" ... I was shocked by the fact that they spent so much money on cram school thing. Some kids of my husband's friends were enrolled in four or five cram school programs even though their jobs did not pay well back then.

However, the realization of the different educational reality in Korea does not automatically lead to the habitus change. With a couple of exceptions, all respondents tried to raise children, as "they would do in homeland." Indeed, their old habitus was an important guidance in their early parenthood. For instance, 45 out of 51 respondents reported they did not enroll children in any kind of cram school programs for any enrichment purposes when children were the first grader, though majority of them experienced *hagseupji* (weekly workbook) thanks to the government's assistant for multiethnic families. Though six respondents said that they did not send children to cram school because they did know about it, the other respondents reported that they did not want children to experience cram school because they thought that "it is not necessary for children." For instance, Moe did not enroll her son in any kind of shadow

education because she believed that it should be schoolteachers and parents who help students develop academic ability “at least in Japan.” She argued:

Of course, there are hagwons in Japan. However, hagwons are just for students with learning disabilities as far as I know. It is not something that everyone has to do to boost their scores. .... It’s really embarrassing to say this, but I think that something is going wrong with school in Korea. I am sorry but I guess that it is too easy for schoolteachers to do their job in Korea because every student learns at hagwon what they need to learn at school.

Since the immigrant mothers in the study did not believe in the unusual importance of academic success in children’s life in Korea based on their old habitus, they tended not to put much emphasis on children’s education especially when they were younger. Even though they knew that other Korean parents overinvest children’s educational development and the parental competition around the academic performance of children is very intense in Korea, they did not participate in the competition. Rather, in their early parenthood in Korea, they kept distance from the competition and disciplined children to grow up to be social and moral. Especially, they believed that children would be spoiled and disrespectful to others when parents only teach them to study hard and excessively emphasize the importance of successful life. Thus, they did not push children to study hard and control their after-school hours, which Yumiko, a fifty-two years old Japanese with three sons, called “lassie-fair parenting style.”

Yumiko explained that her eldest son, Cheong-hoon, “had so much fun” before he became the fifth-grader because his mother did not engage in his academic experiences much. She said, “I didn’t tell him to study or so. Only did I emphasized was respecting others and following the rules in society because that was what my parents and teachers had taught me. I couldn’t sing a song at home at night because my parents it might bother our neighbors even though they lived so far away from where we used to live.” Also, despite his low academic

performance at school, she added that she did not push him to study more. She believed that her son would be able to catch up when “he realizes he should” and that the ways in which Korean parents push children might make children dependent on parents and less fond of studying eventually. Since Yumiko did not believe that was a desirable way to raise children “in her perspective,” she let her son do what he wanted to do and waited him to have an academic aspiration by himself.

### *Habitus Failure*

Unfortunately, many respondents including Yumiko reported that their children had not been doing very well at school. Yumiko had to see her son struggle not only with the low academic performance but also with psychological distress. Cheong-hoon, a 12-year-old boy, showed an academic performance “below the average of the class.” Yumiko said that her “son used to be a very social and friendly boy when he was younger.” However, as he showed a low performance at standardized tests constantly and his teachers scolded him for not studying hard enough, Cheong-hoon lost self-confidence and became timid. Yumiko seemed to be upset about the performance-centric attitude of teachers. Raising her voice, she criticized:

Schoolteachers should help students with low grade. In Japan, teachers spend hours with students who are running behind after class to help them catch up with others. However, teachers do not take any responsibility for children’s performances. They only scold them and ask them to study at home! What’s the point of having a schoolteacher then? Why should we go to school instead of going to cram school if the education is all about having a good grade and going to good college!

While she blamed schoolteachers for Cheong-hoon’s struggle, Yumiko were skeptical about her strategies that she called lassie-fare parenting style based on her old habitus. She thought that she “ruined” Cheong-hoon’s academic experiences by not engaging in his learning process and not disciplining him academically as “Korean mothers would do.” Especially, she

regretted that she did not have Cheong-hoon have help from cram school earlier. She thought that Cheong-hoon's situation got better gradually as he grew up and cram school might be a waste of time and money. Yumiko said that she was sorry for her son: The world Cheong-hoon lives as a Korean is very competitive and academic-oriented, but he may not be suitable for the society. She, with a sigh, said, "I was too naïve and simple. I feel sorry that my son is suffering because of his ignorant mothers."

Similarly, Thai interpreted her daughter's low academic performance as the consequence of her inability to facilitate Da-young's academic potential. Thai lamented that she missed a right timing to have Da-young interested in studying since she did not care about Da-young's academic development. She had thought, "children should be fine as long as they are physically healthy and they will find a way to feed themselves." As an elementary school graduate, Thai herself had made a living for herself and her family since 15 years old. Also, she said, "It is not rare at all for young children to help parents financially" in her country, Thailand. Moreover, she used to think "having a good skill is equally good as or sometimes better than having a college degree." She used to believe that Da-young could grow up to be socially successful without academic career by having a job-specific skill such as hairdressing or cooking. Naturally, Thai did not worry about Da-young's low grades at school and expected her to find her interest, which would lead to

However, Thai said that she became dubious about her own philosophy when Da-young's educational experiences did not get better and she became more familiar with the ways in which other Korean mothers help children become academically successful. Also, she worried about Da-young especially she now knew that it is important to have a college degree especially from a good school in Korea unlike Thailand. She said:

I didn't know that studying well is so important in this country. I thought skill mattered the most even though it should be desirable to have a prestigious job with a good degree everywhere. However, it is not the case in Korea. Study just matters the most. You can't be treated properly when you don't have a college degree. I wish someone else had told me this. ... I am worried about Da-young. She is going to middle school soon, but her teacher said that she was very concerned with Da-young's academic ability. She said that Da-young might not be able to catch up with other students. ... I told Da-young, "You may have met a wrong mother."

Even though many respondents showed critical evaluation about the rules of the game in Korean education including the intense competition and the heavy reliance on shadow education, they also blamed themselves for the low academic achievement of children. They often pointed out that their initial strategies based on their original habitus they internalized in homeland did not help to transmit educational advantages to their children. When they encountered a constant academic failure of children, they tried to reconfirm whether their parenting style was fit into the Korean educational culture and institutions while they blamed the problems of the rules of the game as well.

### **Habitus Transformation**

#### *Habitus Transformation through Contacts with Institutions*

Including Bourdieu, many scholars have pointed out that individuals may transform their habitus through the experiences within the *total institutions* such as prisons or elite educational institutes (CITE). Although this study does not examine the influence of total institutions, it found that the immigrant mothers' habitus are affected by the contact with institutions, which is aligned with the previous literature. However, this study emphasizes the importance of interaction in the micro-level influencing the transformation of habitus in mundane life.

The immigrant mothers in this study frequently reported that schoolteachers of children actively introduced the rules of the game in Korea and suggested they follow the rule of the game for the sake of children's academic advantages. For instance, Solongo, a 45-year-old mother who came to Korea 14 years ago, is one of the respondents who show the role of schoolteachers in transforming the old habitus. Her son, Jae-hoon, had not been performing academically well at school and his mother did not pay attention to his progress carefully. Solongo explained that children used to be the ones who take care of their academic development, not parents. In fact, Solongo left her parents when she was six years old to attend school in downtown that was two hours away from home and lived in school dorms until she graduated high school. In her early parenthood, she used to believe in the parental roles in facilitating children's physical development and supplying children with necessities such as food and clothes. Her early idea of parenthood appears similar to "the philosophy of natural growth" through which Lareau (2003) describes the parenting style of working/poor-class parents in the United States.

However, despite her good faith efforts derived from her belief in good parenting, Jae-hoon's teacher evaluated that his academic ability and performance were not up to the expectation that the school had. He suggested to Solongo, "You must do something." Solongo clearly remembered the shock that she had from the phone call with Jae-hoon's teacher when he just started his second year at elementary school. His teacher let her know that Jae-hoon had an issue with learning in class and he needed Solongo's close attention.

One day Jae-hoon's teachers called me, asking me whether I knew that he was so distracted in class. ... His grades were so low that the teacher was worrying about him. He said, "you as a mother must do something." Also, he told me that it is important to study well in Korea. I was shocked. I thought he was lively and active and didn't imagine it means that he has some issues in class. ... I didn't know what to do for

children's education. Kid's dad had said nothing because he himself knows nothing about education. If I had been in Mongolia, I would have known what I should do.

At the same time, Jae-hoon's teacher wanted Jae-hoon to take extra classes from cram school in order to catch up with other students. He specifically requested to Solongo, "Why don't you send him to cram school?" Since Solongo talked to the schoolteacher, she "changed a lot" as she said. The first thing that she did after the discussion with the teacher was banning any type of computer game during weekdays and restricting TV watching. Also, she began monitoring children's learning process closely and making children study more at home. She said that she usually watched Jae-hoon doing his homework and read books right next to him in order to make sure whether he "actually study." Also, she started searching for the cram schools for Jae-hoon and his sister, Jae-hee even though it was not an easy job to find good cram school for children because not only she had a limited budget but also there were "so many kinds of cram schools on the street." She told me that she was trying her best to help children to academically successful. When asked why she put a lot of efforts, Solongo replied, "My kids are Koreans and they should do as others do in this country. I can't just see them running behind only because their mother is a foreigner." Then, she added, laughing loudly, "I almost become a Korean mother"

Also, the local government influences the process of the habitus transformation. The local governments in Harbor Town and Mountain Town provide diverse educational assistance for children from "multiethnic family" which usually refers to family with a Korean husband, a foreign-born wife, and children. Since many of these families in a less affluent economic situation and foreign-born mothers struggle with language and cultural difference, local government has assisted children's educational experiences in various ways in order to prevent children from multiethnic family from being disadvantaged. For instance, at the time of the

interview, many respondents were recipients of “Multiethnic Family Boucher,” which provides weekly workbook subscriptions for children. Also, children benefited from after-school programs at school that local governments provide for free for children from multiethnic families as well as from private tutoring services that dispatches tutors to children’s home who help children study at home. In addition to the government assistance for multiethnic family, since the interviewees in this study are all low-income working class or poor class, they were receiving other educational benefits for students in low-income family.

This social support helps immigrant mothers to educate children within their material limited resources. On top of that, these educational programs yield unexpected consequences: They contribute to changing immigrant mothers’ understanding of the Korean education and their educational strategies. For instance, Rem, a thirty-three-year-old Filipina, had received social support for children from the local government since A-ram, her ten-year-old daughter was seven years old. She began enrolling her daughter for weekly worksheet program thanks to the Boucher program. When A-ram was the second grader, she started to have a private tutor with an assistance of the local government. Like Solongo, Rem, a high-school graduate in the Philippines, did not pay particular attention to A-ram’s academic progress. Rem thought that “school will take care of A-ram’s education while parents should take care of her moral aspect and health.” Even though A-ram showed good academic performance, Rem did not take it seriously. She thought “A-ram would get better when she thought she would have to study and she was too young to care about study.”

However, she changed her point of view on A-ram’s educational experiences when she met the teachers thanks to the government support. Rem thought that the private tutor that A-ram had had for two years had had influenced not only A-ram and her mother. Rem told me that she



had conversations with her daughter's private tutor, who visits twice a week and help A-ram with homework and her general learning process, on a regular basis. Rem relied on "Teacher Chang" when she had an issue with A-ram. For example, when A-ram's teacher called Rem about her daughter's passive attitude in class or low performance in math. She told me, "Teacher Chang told me how other Korean mothers do for children. She knows very well how to do because she's raised two sons and one of them is already a college student." "Teacher Chang" specifically taught Rem:

I learned that mothers take a critical role in children's education in Korea. My parents did nothing for me. ... She told me that A-ram would never be able to catch up with other kids once she began leaving behind. Teacher said it is critical timing for A-ram's life because it matters for the latter outcome whether she is doing well or not now. ... I agree with her that immigrant mothers like me are less enthusiastic about children's education and I am worried that our children will be not as good as "Korean children."

Based on her daughter's private tutor's advice, she enrolled A-ram in multiple worksheet programs on her own even after the government ceased supporting her. Moreover, Rem began taking an active role in A-ram's educational experiences. For instance, she increased her interaction with A-ram's schoolteacher to make sure whether A-ram was doing well at school. Also, she planned to send A-ram to cram school for three days a week when the private tutor does not visit A-ram. Rem said, "I am lucky to meet the teacher. A-ram likes her, and so do I. She helps us a lot." As the cases of Rem and Solongo shows that the social contacts with institutional agency or institutional gatekeepers may help immigrant mothers make sense of the educational field that they encounter in the host society. Note that the institution does not intend to transform habitus of new comers, as the total institution would do. Rather, the transformation of habitus is unexpected byproduct of the social contact between the new comers and the social institution including school and welfare programs of local government.

Of course, there are respondents who were not influenced by the social contact with social institution. Even when schoolteachers gave similar advice, they tended to neglect it and to stick to their old habitus. For example, Nimpong, a 28-year-old mother with a seven-year-old son, said, “Yoo-soung’s schoolteacher called me. He asked me to send Yoo-soung to cram school. ... I think that is too much for a young child. He is still young. I think he will be all right when he grew older.” She supposed that the teacher was “too impatient” with young children. She was confident with his bright future in Korea because “he is a Korean who can speak Korean. He does not have any social barrier that immigrants would have. If he works hard, I believe he will have a successful life.” However, the case of Nimpong would not hurt the findings of the study in that she does not have many social interactions with Korean native parents, which I will pay close attention to below. Since Nimpong is geographically and socially isolated from Korean parents, she does not have an opportunity to observe how other Korean parents understand the field and set up strategies for the competition in the field. However, as shown later, the social contact with native parents in mundane life plays an important role in reformulating the habitus of immigrant mothers.

#### *Habitus Transformation through Cultural Mentor*

Another important mechanism of the habitus transformation is the daily interaction with native parents in Korea, which Lareau and Calarco (2012) term “cultural mentor.” In their ethnographic studies, they found that some working-class parents *learn* how to manage the micro-interaction with the institution from middle-class parents who have class cultural resources that helps them to transmit educational advantages to children. Even though working-class parents showed passive interactions with school institution, they changed their strategies

after receiving advice from middle-class parents. In a similar manner, many respondents in this study reported that they changed the ways in which they understand Korean education and the strategies that Korean parents deploy for intergenerational transmission of educational advantages.

Elvie, a thirty-eight-year-old Filipina with three children, provides an interesting case about the ways in which social interactions with native parents in daily lives comes into play in the habitus transformation. Elvie has been working for six years as an English instructor at cram schools and a community center in her neighborhoods. She teaches both children students and adult students who want to learn English. Her job experienced provided a chance for Elvie to get to know about Korean education and native parents' educational strategies. When she began her first job as an English instructor, Elvie thought that "everyone is crazy about children's education." She was shocked by Korean elementary children "who have to run around several cram schools and to study at home for several hours every day." She felt "it is a child abuse to make elementary students study all day long." Also, she thought that children would eventually work as hard as they can once they find their dream. She believed that children should have a good balance between study and play and it should be a key element for their physical and mental development.

However, her point of view of Korean education and parenting style has been gradually changed through the interactions with native Korean friends. One of her friends who have been influential for Elvie's educational strategies for her three children is Kyung-hee. Kyung-hee was Elvie's colleague at her first job and has been a friend with Elvie for six years. For Elvie, Kyung-hee was not only a nice friend but also a good adviser for children's education. Kyung-hee told Elvie who was very skeptical about cram school education and intense educational experiences

of Korean students that going to a good college is important in children's future and they should begin preparing for the college admission from elementary school level. She explained that mother should help children with their study and a way to help them is sending to cram school because cram school teachers know how to boost children's academic performance better than mothers. Elvie said:

I was afraid that something would go wrong with my daughters and son because of their mother. I didn't know Korean and Korean culture. Kyung-hee taught me many things and helped me understand this system. Korean system is different from one in the Philippine. How could I set to know that by myself? She is really helpful. She is nice and funny.

Similarly, Naoko, a thirty-six-year-old Japanese immigrant, has a "cultural mentor" who teaches her how to navigate the Korean education, a friend at the church that she goes to. Unlike many other children of the respondents, Naomi's son, Sung-ju, showed generally good performance at school. Especially, he was interested in the science subject and he showed a good talent in science. Since he did not have any behavioral problems and was satisfied with his school, Naomi "did not care much about his school life." She said, giving me a smile:

I thought my son was doing great. He participated in science contest in our city and received an award. He loves science, robot science. His schoolteacher said he was really interested in science and very talented. He always says that he want to be a robot scientist in the future. He studies science at after-school program at school. I guess it should be just playing with robot though.

However, she did not put additional efforts to develop Sung-ju's academic interests and ability. Since parents are not educational experts, she thought she could not be very helpful for her son's academic development. She thought "school would take care of him well" because the teachers know his best interests. Also, she was critical about the intense educational competition

among students in Korea, she tried to teach Sung-ju to get along with friends and to enjoy his life. Naoko said, “It was not like I never understood why Korean mothers were so into children’s education, but I worried that children would be selfish and self-oriented if they are taught to study all the time and do not have any chance to play with peers. They need a social ability.” Thus, she did not want him to spend too much time on studying and believed that he could care about academic performance when he begins attending middle school. She thought that it would not be too late to “push” him then.

However, when Sung-ju was the second grader, her church friend taught her the importance of “early-education” to Naoko. According to Naoko, she argued that Naoko should “invest now” for Sung-ju’s future. Her friend told Naoko that “boys are usually interested in science and every child is doing well at elementary school anyway.” She taught Naoko that parents should engage in children’s learning process to develop their gift at early stage, and it would be too late if they try to help students when they become middle school or high school students.

She told me to enroll Sung-ju in a science cram school. They are specialized in science education. They provide science projects through which students do science experiments. It is really expensive. To be honest, we can’t afford it. It is beyond our budget for children. .... My friend told me I should enroll him in the cram school. She told me schoolteachers do not know much about science but these people are all science major. Also, she said other Korean kids would be eventually better than Sung-ju even though Sung-ju was doing well now. [She said] though Seung-ju is special now, he will be just like other students. They are working hard now, and they will be able to run ahead of Sung-ju. She told me that I would realize it even before Sung-ju becomes a forth grader.

Eventually, Naoko enrolled Sung-ju in a science cram school, which usually costs \$300, which accounts for one-seventh of their household income. Though she still does not support for intense educational experiences at elementary school level, she worries that she might hurt his

potential by sticking to her opinion about education based on her own experiences. She explained that she might prevent his academic development if she raised Sung-ju very differently from other Korean parents because “things are different in Korea from in Japan.” Also, she thought that “Seung-ju is a Korean” so she should give up her own opinion about the education, which may be not compatible with Korean education.

### **Conclusion**

This study aims to examine the process of habitus transformation through a case of immigrant mothers who navigate a heated educational competition in South Korea. This study showed that immigrant mothers’ habitus, which is defined as a conscious and intellectual sense of what is going on in the field, change through the social interaction with institutions and native parents in daily lives. Many immigrant mothers reported that they went through the persistence of their old habitus in their earlier life in Korea. Their old habitus, which was not compatible with the rules of the game in the new field, provided them with a point of view about the new field. By keeping their old habitus, they were critical and skeptical about Korean education and were not keenly aware of the ways in which the desired positions are distributed through educational achievement in Korea. However, immigrant mothers witnessed children were not very successful at school and blamed their parenting style and educational strategies which is not fit into Korean context.

Note that the respondents did not stick to their old habitus after their children constantly showed the low academic performance, or they started to have social interactions with social institutions including school and local government’s welfare programs and with native parents in their daily lives. Through the social contact, the immigrant mothers in this study learn the ways

in which other Korean mothers put efforts to provide children with educational advantages and why they need to follow the rules of the game to help children to achieve educational achievement in Korea. This learning process changed not only immigrant mothers' understanding of Korean education and parental practices, but also their educational strategies. Many immigrant mothers tried to transmit educational advantages to children by adopting Korean native parents' strategies and utilizing shadow education.

This result shows that habitus, which is defined as a sense of the field or a sense of the rules of the game, is not a stable and determined status. Habitus is constantly "reconstructed, transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structure" (Bourdieu 2005). Especially, this study implies that social interactions between different social groups in daily lives as well as social contacts with non-total institutions can be a crucial source of habitus transformation. Also, the habitus transformation helps individuals to develop a new strategy for a competition in the field. This shows that individuals' strategies in a field are not determined by habitus as previous scholarship has assumed, but interacts with habitus. In other words, parents in competitive educational field set up different strategies not only based on their predetermined habitus but also relying on the newly acquired habitus.

However, the question, to what extent the newly acquired habitus may contribute to the actual social mobility should be examined by future research. Though this study confirmed that habitus can be acquired outside family in later life, it cannot tell whether this new habitus can actually help children have a better educational outcome yet. It calls for a sequential study in the future to understand the role of the acquired habitus in creating one's competitive advantage in the field.

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