

# 24

## Political Change and Development of Centralized Curriculum Policy in South Korea

YONGHWAN LEE

### The Introduction of Modern Schools and the Development of Central Control

Until the Korean peninsula was colonized by Japan, Korea had had its own unique educational system for thousands of years. Traditionally, Koreans prized the humanities and regarded the technical subjects as vulgar. The nobility studied Confucian ethics and philosophy in primary community schools, and the practical subjects were for “the common people” and thus not taught in regular schools. All primary schools and some secondary schools were established and managed privately, and the rest of the secondary schools were run by central or provincial governments. The central government was responsible for higher education. Generally speaking, curricula prepared students for the state examination, which was virtually the only means to become a government official for centuries.

Westerners have depicted Korea as “the land of morning-calm” (Gregor 1990) and “the hermit nation” (Griffis 1905) until the feudal dynasty was forced to open the country to foreign intercourse in the mid-nineteenth century. Accordingly, the Western missionaries—Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist, in turn—invaded this apparently serene country, carrying their belief not only in God but also in the superiority of their own culture. They opened, with a small group of children, informal Western style (primary) schools as a part of their missionary work and taught the students arithmetic, reading, writing of the Korean language, and English, as well as the Word of God. The dynasty showed a great interest in the new educational institutions, invited teachers (H.V. Allen, H.B. Gilmore, and B.A. Bunker) from the United States, and established schools in the Western style. They began to teach foreign languages and practical technologies such as medicine in 1886. Those schools were the first modern schools in Korea (Underwood 1926, pp. 11–16).

The government soon provided laws and ordinances for the new modern education along with other policies

to reform the whole society. Local educationists began to found new private schools for the children of their own community. These private schools were not under government control, and they could choose teachers and curricular contents as they wanted. In these private schools, some teachers who recognized the peril their country faced from the imperialist powers tried to inculcate a nationalistic spirit in their students and especially to bring to them an awareness of Japan’s designs to colonize Korea.

Due to the geopolitical nature of the country, Korea became a target of the powers’ competition from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. After winning the Russo-Japan war, Japan forced Korea to conclude a protectorate treaty in 1905, after which Japan intervened in almost all public and political spheres in Korea. The Japanese supervisor started to implant the Japanese educational system and curricula into Korea and oppressed especially the nationalistic private schools.

Even before the 1910 annexation, almost half of the officers of the central Ministry of Education were Japanese. Japanese teachers came into the country and were hired in national and public schools. Class time allocated to Japanese language education was the same as or more than that allocated to the Korean language (Ham 1976, pp. 28–29, 33–34). If a private school did not educate according to the curriculum, it could not be legitimized as a regular school. Textbooks that had not been published or approved by the Ministry were banned in all schools; this doctrine was aimed at those books used in private schools that promoted patriotism and the spirit of independence. Even after a century, this central control over the administrative process and curricular content of public and private schools, which some call “statist educational policy” (Kim 2004, 2005), remains almost intact and causes various kinds of friction in attempts to localize and diversify education.

Dissatisfied even with this protectorate treaty, Japan in 1910 replaced it with an annexation treaty, making the

Korean peninsula its colony; thus, all the efforts of the Korean government and people to modernize voluntarily the education of this country ended in vain.

### **Establishment of Central Control: The Colonial Period**

The colonial government tried to oppress expansion of resistance against the colonial rule among especially private schools by establishing a strong central control over education. The general aims of education in Korea during the colonial period (1910–1945) were known as “Japanization and mobocracy.” The policy of Japanization, or adaptation, was officially stated as “educating the Korean subjects to be loyal to the Japanese Emperor” and mobocracy, or differential education policy, as that “schools should educate pupils aiming at making human workers suitable to their own conditions and standards” (Ham 1976, pp. 65–67). The Japanese colonial officers called their islands “inner continent,” and “integration of Korea into inner continent,” which were the official slogans that undergirded all the colonial policies. In actuality, the educational policy of colonial Japan was to differentiate Koreans from the Japanese and make Koreans “suitable workers to their own conditions and standards.” Underwood (1926), who had been himself a missionary and educator in Korea since the late eighteenth century, summarizes the policy as follows:

The policy of the government . . . meant to all Koreans three things . . . against all three of which they mentally rebelled. First, separate and different education for Koreans in Korea and Japanese in Korea. Second, the frank and rather bald statement that the chief object of the education offered was the making of loyal citizens of Japan; third, that education in Chosen (Korea) was to be adapted to the backward conditions and low mentality of the people. (p. 192)

Korea was regarded as an object of exploitation, not of investment. Korean students were to learn Japanese as their mother tongue and vocational training was enforced. Those who wanted post-secondary education had to go to Japan because schools for higher education in Korea were not approved. The humanities classes were reduced to the minimum amount in the school curriculum, and neither history nor geography was taught in primary schools. The Japanese controlled, and then closed, private schools, the number of which were more than that of national and public schools. Concerning the private schools, the Proconsul admonished the local governors as follows:

Among private schools, many are established and managed by foreign missionaries though there are some established by Koreans. Each governor must watch if the schools observe the laws and regulations, if the teachers perform their duties, if they are using textbooks published or approved by the Ministry of Education, and if they

inspire useless patriotism and the spirit of independence by teaching some strange songs and others. Especially, mission schools have not been intervened by the Ministry because of diplomatic immunity. From now on, discipline them by emphasizing separation of religion and education, but be cautious not to offend their feelings. (Lee 1948, pp. 180–181).

The policies were particularly noticeable during the first decade of the colonial period. To control private schools, the Japanese not only revised the general educational laws and regulations but also enacted the Private School Law so that the private schools were put in double fetters (Ham 1976, pp. 72–74; Underwood 1926, pp. 195–208). It became more complicated and difficult to establish especially missionary private schools, and teaching of the Bible was legally banned in all schools. Whenever private schools wished to replace their principals or teachers, approval was required from the local Governor. Not merely a certificate but strong command of Japanese was needed to be a school teacher because Japanese was the official medium of instruction. Male teachers had to wear uniforms and sabers while on duty. Even in the traditional informal community schools, which numbered almost 25,000 in the nation, the authorities of education forced the teaching of Japanese and the use of textbooks published or approved by the Ministry (Underwood 1926, p. 179). As a result, the number of the community schools and enrolments had continuously decreased until 1917 after the annexation (pp. 175–178). Great was the resentment not only toward the founders and teachers of the schools but of the general people at this harsh policy over education, and protests soon came into bud.

In January 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson delivered his “14 points address” in a joint session as a major program for world peace, and a year later his proposal was accepted in the Paris Peace Conference after the end of World War I. President Wilson’s proposal was based on “the principle of self-determination of peoples” and thus promised restoration of the territories occupied by the imperialist powers in Europe. This proposal inspired Korean students in Japan, and they finally declared independence of their own country on February 8, 1919. Koreans in Korea also heard the declaration and a nationwide independence movement started on March 1, 1919. Missionaries played important roles in the protest, assisting communications between the leaders of the independence movement in Korea and those in exile in Shanghai, China.

Although the movement ended after six months with numerous deaths and arrests, the Japanese government changed its colonial policy, at least outwardly, from a military to a cultural one. The ruling system of the Military Police was abolished, and teachers no longer had to wear sabers in class. The number of years in the school system for Koreans was extended to match the school years for Japanese, and higher education was opened to Koreans.

The principle of “vocational education for the Korean” was partly abrogated, and the humanities reappeared in school subjects along with foreign languages. The government loosened the strict qualifications for private school teachers and tried to appease the foreign missionary educators by relaxing the principle of separation of education from religion.

This change of policy was more illusion than reality. The colonial government organized the Committee of Education to examine the educational demands of the Korean people after the 1919 independence movement. But only three Koreans were appointed to the committee of 28 members. Although the Korean language appeared as a subject in the primary and secondary school curricula, class hours allocated to it were far fewer than those for Japanese. The textbooks of all other subjects were written in Japanese. Korean students still had to learn the Japanese language and Japanese history and geography as if those were their own (Oh 1964, pp. 284–286). In 1922, the new education laws were enacted according to the new policy, but the foremost function of primary and secondary schools remained “cultivating educated workers loyal to the National (Japanese) spirit” (Ham 1976, pp. 120–125). The new education laws exerted highly centralized control over education; even the subjects to be taught in each grade of primary and secondary schools and their class hours per week were regulated by the central government.

Japan declared war on China in 1937, and education in Korea was mobilized towards the war effort. The colonial government assured Koreans that they would be treated equally with the Japanese. The names of the schools for Koreans were changed to match the schools in Japan in an attempt to eliminate opposition among Koreans, but the Korean language became an elective, not required, subject. Korean students were prohibited from speaking Korean in school, and all Koreans were forced to change their names to Japanese names. Students were urged to report friends who spoke Korean.

After the 1941 air raid on Pearl Harbor in the United States, the school years for colleges were shortened so that the colonial government could draft as many young Koreans as possible into the armed services. The humanities in the curriculum were replaced with science and technology, and in 1943, “colleges” were renamed “training centers” that were mobilized for the war. Many students went to the battlefield; others collected materials and food for the war or constructed runways and trenches.

The highly centralized educational administration during the colonial period was one of several authoritarian bureaucracies the Japanese built to control and colonize Korea. Cumings (1995) summarizes:

The Japanese unquestionably strengthened central bureaucratic power in Korea, demolishing the old balance and tension with the landed aristocracy. Operating from the top down, they effectively penetrated below the county

level and into the villages for the first time, and in some ways neither post-colonial Korean state has ever gotten over it: Korea is still a country with remarkably little local autonomy. (pp. 17–18)

### **Missing an Opportunity to Democratize and Decentralize Curriculum Policy**

On August 15, 1945, the Japanese Emperor Hirohito broadcasted unconditional surrender to allied forces, and Korea was liberated. While freed from Japan, Korea was not free, as south of the 38th parallel it was to be ruled under the trusteeship of the United States. As Cumings analyzes (1995, pp. 24–25), there was no historical justification for Korea’s division. There was no internal pretext for it either: the 38th parallel was a line never noticed by the Korean people. Regardless of the Korean people’s will, the destiny of Korea was determined according to the interests of powerful countries in the same way as it had been under Japan.

The U.S. military appointed to the post of Administrator of Education Captain E. L. Lockard, who had been an English professor at the City College of Chicago. Lockard organized the Korean Committee on Education, composed of 10 boards that were all chaired by Koreans. The Committee undertook the task of replacing Japanese officials, provincial superintendents, principals, and teachers with Koreans. At that time, over 40 percent of primary school teachers were Japanese, and the proportions at the secondary and higher levels were even greater (Sohn 1992, p. 248; Underwood 1951, p. 19). The Committee soon reorganized the Ministry of Education, which was then rearranged and expanded to become an Educational Council. Now it had about 100 members, many of whom had studied in the United States and could communicate with the U.S. military officials. A few were from the American military.

In the new government, Americans employed mostly Koreans who had had worked in the colonial regime; they thought they had no other choice after 36 years of discriminated education: dissident intellectuals had been jailed or deported. According to Truman Doctrine, Americans wanted to make Japan the outpost against the expansion of communism in East Asia after the war. They thought that the prompt stabilization of the political situation in Korea was more important to the reconstruction of Japan than was a thorough reform of colonial legacy (Cumings 1995, pp. 26–33). This de facto policy did little to democratize and decentralize the authoritarian educational policy. As Kim (2004) points out:

South Korea’s education system was built on the foundation left by the Japanese. After their departure, policy makers persistently borrowed from them not only policy ideas but the policy-making procedures permitting bureaucratic manipulation. (p. 522)



The new Ministry of Education adopted almost without modification the decisions made by the council, but the fact that the authorities appointed mainly “experienced” individuals laid the ground for a series of anti-American movements some decades later. Although they were mostly right-wing intellectuals and thus supported the interests of the United States, e.g., obstructing the expansion of communism, they refused to relinquish their own vested interests by a thorough reform of the Japanese colonial legacy. The U.S. military’s self-identification as an “occupation force” in contrast to the Soviet military’s self-identification in the North as a “liberation army” did not help the American image. The U.S. occupation commander, General John R. Hodge, and his staff have been criticized not only by Koreans (e.g., Sohn 1992) but also by American scholars (e.g., Cumings 1981, 1983) for their ignorance of Korean history and culture.

The Ministry of Education reopened all schools and prepared temporary courses of study for these schools. The use of textbooks written in Japanese was prohibited, and Korean became the instructional language. Great efforts were made to teach Korean, to train teachers, and to publish textbooks in Korean. The government was also concerned about adult education, through which it tried to teach the new social order and eradicate illiteracy. A 6–3–3–4 system, which was the dominant school system in the United States, was adopted as the basic structure of education. Japanese language classes were replaced with Korean ones, and English became a compulsory subject in the secondary school curriculum.

Although textbooks of Korean language and Korean history were promptly published by a few Independent Movement groups that had operated underground during the colonial period, other classes had to depend mainly upon blackboards and materials mimeographed by teachers. Not only the content and method of education but the structures of educational administration did not change much. Although Koreans had their lost identity back, they did not have the opportunity to reform the colonial legacy on their own.

In 1946, the American Military Government arranged a visit to the United States for six Korean educationists according to the Program of Educational Aid from America. This group, named the Korean Educational Commission, was composed of those who had studied in the States and stayed in Washington and met officials of Department of State and Office of Education. The next year, the American government sent the Educational and Informational Survey Mission to Korea in return. Later, this Mission was renamed American Educational Mission to Korea, and it visited Korea 10 times from 1952 to 1961. A Teacher Training Center, school districts, and board of education were established according to the recommendations of the Mission. Korean officials and educators who had studied in the States and American advisors introduced such Deweyan concepts as “experience,” “education as life,” “integrated subject,” “learning by doing,” etc., and

the integrated subject “Social Studies” was placed in the primary school curriculum. A New Education Movement, mainly based on the theory of progressive education in the United States, expanded throughout the nation, but only in slogan because few teachers and educationists fully understood, appreciated, or practiced the Deweyan educational theory based on democracy. Most teachers had been trained through authoritarian Japanese militarism and the physical, cultural, and political conditions of the day were not supported for the establishment of a “new education.”

Student activists argued later that American-led educational policy in this three-year period of American trusteeship was the origin of serious problems. It is true that the American military initiated reconstruction of the Korean education system, and thus some aspects of education (such as the contents of textbooks) were pro-American and pro-Western. But problems of “uniformity, rigidity, and exclusiveness”—which have been described as the major problems of the Korean school curriculum (Ministry of Education 1992)—are in fact vestiges of Japanese colonial rather than postwar American policy. Secondary school students had to wear military-style school uniforms until the 1980s, and the concept of “Nation School,” a translation of “*Volksschule*” of the Nazi era, persisted in Korea until 1995. National Curriculum, teacher-centered instruction, and rigid state policy over education cannot be attributed to the “American style” education but to the Japanese colonial legacy.

### **The New Republic, Civil War, and Inherited Central Control**

On August 15, 1948, the three-year American trusteeship ended, and South Korea started its new life as a Republic. The Ministry of Education proclaimed an Education Law in the next year to administer the educational system, which had still been plagued with shortages of teachers, facilities, equipment, and textbooks. Primary education for six years was legislated as compulsory, and school years; contents of education; use of textbooks; and teaching material, technical education, and teacher education were accorded legal status. However, the Law regulated every aspect of education as strictly and uniformly as the colonial government had. Regarding, for example, the content of education, the Law declared that “subjects of schools except for colleges, teachers’ colleges, and informal schools shall be prescribed by a Presidential decree, and the courses of study and class hours shall be regulated by the Ministry of Education.” The Ministry declared that the government would publish all textbooks for primary schools, and also key textbooks for secondary schools, including those for Korean language and literature, Korean history, civil ethics, and social life. The Ministry required all other textbooks to be approved by the government.

The government’s effort to take more specific steps to provide a national curriculum and textbooks was to be delayed due to the war between South and North Korea,



which broke out in 1950. The three years of full-scale war made normal schooling almost impossible, and the government promulgated Special Measures for Education during wartime in 1951. These institutionalized a state-level entrance examination for secondary schools, which continued to exist until mid-1970s. The entrance examination for secondary schools, along with college entrance examination system, would later be blamed as one of the major causes of noncritical and “cramming” lessons in the South Korean schools.

The ideological war caused the government to scrutinize the school curriculum and strengthen its ideological content. Anticommunism permeated all humanities, and the word communism became an antonym of the word democracy. This anticommunist ideology and the central control system exerted great influence on the contents and methods of education, and consequently on teachers’ autonomy thereafter.

After the war ended—technically it was suspended rather than terminated by the armistice agreement between the United Nations and North Korea—the government set out the first national curriculum for primary and secondary schools, based upon the *Curriculum Handbook for the Schools of Korea* and published by the third American Educational Mission to Korea (Sohn 1992, pp. 446–449). Korean curriculum scholars characterize this curriculum as “subject-centered curriculum” because it was defined officially as the “organization of subjects and other educational activities of schools.” The government decided what, when, and how to teach. Courses of study, including detailed chapters and contents, were prepared even for the subjects in which textbooks were not published by the government.

In 1960, the authoritative President Syng-Man Lee, who had been in power from 1948, resigned and took refuge in Hawaii after a series of student protests against rigged elections. The new government tried to delegate some of the central government’s decision-making powers to the local governing bodies. As the first step in decentralizing control, local legislators, administrators, members of local Boards of Education, and superintendents were democratically elected. However, even before various democratic measures of the new government were implemented, the new democratic government was overthrown in 1961 by a military coup d’état. Not only central government officials but governors, mayors, and police chiefs were replaced by military officers, and the educational autonomy system was abolished. The military government declared anticommunism to be “its first cause” in order to secure political support from the U.S. government, which had at first been suspicious about the ideological background of Chung-Hee Park, the coup leader. The new regime also pledged to achieve economic development in order to gain the support of the Korean people.

In 1963, the national curriculum was revised and contents justifying the coup were included in the humanities textbooks. “Anti-communism” appeared as a distinct and

compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum. At this time, the Deweyan theory of education as experience was officially adopted, and curriculum was defined as “all learning activities which students experience under the guide of the school” (Research Committee of Curriculum and Textbooks 1990, p. 11). Thus, this second national curriculum was later characterized as “experience-centered curriculum” by Korean curricular scholars. William Kilpatrick’s Project Method was introduced to teachers, and a peer group problem-solving approach was encouraged. However, peer group problem-solving was often mistakenly taken to mean searching a prescribed answer to the same problem in the same class by group. All curricular decisions were still made by the central government, and teachers were regarded as technicians who should sincerely transmit preselected and organized educational contents to students.

The government’s devotion to economic growth brought another impact on school curricula. Efficiency emerged as an important virtue in Korean society and was used as a major excuse to amend the Constitution and hence to perpetuate the authoritarian rule. Variety, differences, and discussions were rejected as inefficient. The Ministry of Education even requested American systems-approach specialists and behavioral psychologists, including Gagné, to analyze the cost-efficiency of the Korean educational system (Morgan and Chadwick 1971). The government instituted and forced students and teachers to memorize the National Charter of Education (1968), which stated that efficiency and practicality “were to be respected.” Some educators were fired because they criticized the totalitarian nature of the Charter, which they said was no different from the Japanese Emperor’s Edict on Education in the colonial period. In this political and social situation, education was almost indoctrination and Deweyan theory had no place in curriculum practice.

Bloom’s *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956, translated into Korean in 1966) and Mager’s concept of behavioral objectives (1961, translated into Korean in 1976) were introduced along with behavioral psychology. They enjoyed general popularity among teachers and educators because of their efficiency focus. McClelland’s Achievement Motive Theory was used to justify education for economic development, and Chung’s definition (1970, p. 15) of education was taught in colleges as the one and only definition: “Education is deliberate change of human behavior.” Education was regarded as the means to an end extrinsically imposed, whether it was the country’s economic growth or students’ success in entrance examinations. Nobody raised serious questions about this aim.

Thus, despite the official definition, the actual curriculum managed by classroom teachers was not unlike traditional subject-centered teaching. Because the state not only had controlled primary and secondary school curriculum but had published or approved their textbooks since the colonial period, textbooks had represented the state authority regarding curricular knowledge. Curriculum

was still identified with state published textbooks, and good teaching meant efficient transmission of textbook knowledge to passive students. Continuing vestiges of Japanese imperialism and the powerful hierarchical Confucian tradition could not be excluded from the various factors influencing the centralistic and authoritarian nature of Korean education and curriculum management. There were other reasons why experience-centered curriculum was an empty slogan: the generally low quality of teachers, poor school facilities, and pressures from parents who wanted their children to pass entrance examinations to junior and senior high schools and colleges. Entrance examinations to junior and senior high schools were later abolished for the “normal management of school curriculum” in 1968 and 1974, respectively.

### **Solidification of Long-Term Dictatorship and Tightening Control Over Education**

In 1972, President Chung-Hee Park, who had already been in power for a decade, declared a state of emergency amidst incessant student protests against his tyranny, suspended the Constitution, and dissolved the National Assembly. Presidential term limits were eliminated and a third of the National Assembly members were designated by the President in the new Constitution. Immediately after this second and pro-government coup d'état, the national curriculum was revised again. Contents justifying the new coup were incorporated in subjects like National Ethics, Korean History, Social Life, and even Korean Language. At this time, curriculum was defined officially as the structures of the disciplines (Research Committee of Curriculum and Textbooks 1990, pp. 19–20). Bruner's theory of the structure of knowledge (1959) was fully accepted, and all school subjects were expected to have spiral curricula.

These theories were combined effectively with the already well known Tyler-Bloom-Mager rationale that curriculum should have certain steps. First, aims or objectives should be predetermined. Overall aims should have already been set by the government, usually in the form of a law. Objectives in each subject, each unit, and even in each class were decided by specialists in those subjects under the central control, and these were included in the national curriculum and government-published curriculum guides for teachers. Second, the scope of the contents of each subject was defined to achieve those aims and objectives efficiently. Students of the same age were expected to learn the same contents. Third, the contents were organized in a spiral form by subject specialists. Teachers had to be well acquainted with teaching methods specified in the curriculum guides. Fourth, students' achievement was measured rather than evaluated according to the prespecified aims and objectives and was ranked in a hierarchical order.

Teaching itself could not have great significance because the objectives, contents, teaching method, and evaluation method of each subject were selected and organized by the

government. So long as teachers did not raise serious questions about the contents they were teaching nor deny the official teaching method, they were safe. Good teachers were those who transmitted faithfully government-published textbook knowledge. They did not have to research anything because the textbook represented the official knowledge that they were supposed to teach. There were teachers expelled from their schools for teaching “outside the textbooks.”

The government was so autocratic in this period that various controls over the contents of classroom teaching, as well as over the press, were complete. Military training had already been a required subject in senior high schools and colleges since the late 1960s, even in girls' high schools. School picnics were officially renamed “military marches.” Efficiency for the economic development and national security against the bellicose communists of North Korea were always cited as the excuses for oppression, but were actually means by which the ex-military officers ensured that they stayed in power.

The Korean curricular field in the 1970s was obviously swayed by theories of the structure of the discipline. Peters (1966) and Hirst (1965) contributed not only to justifying Bruner's theory of the structure of the discipline but also to reconsidering what had been taken for granted so far. Peters and Hirst showed, like Dewey, that the current concept of education, and therefore curriculum as a means to an end, was wrong. They denounced the theory of extrinsic values in education that had undergirded the Tyler-Bloom-Mager rationale and aroused advocacy, mainly among professors in colleges and departments of education, for education as an end in itself.

At the same time, dissident teachers who had been expelled from schools formed an important anti-government group. They studied political, especially Marxist, theories of education, including those of Paulo Freire, Martin Carnoy, Louis Althusser, Madan Sarup, and Kevin Harris. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) had long been banned in South Korea but was now read widely among radical teachers and scholars. Freire's concept of “conscientization” became a common word describing “teaching something anti-governmental or anti-capitalist and therefore communist.”

### **Military Rule and the Resistance**

In power for almost two decades, Park's autocratic government collapsed when the chief of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency assassinated the President on October 26, 1979. Despite the Korean people's demands for a freer society and for a civilian democracy, a group of generals who were afraid of losing their power carried out another military coup d'état, killing hundreds of innocent civilians in May 1980.

The national curriculum was revised once again in the year after the new government took power. This time, humanistic theories in education, such as Kelly's,

Maslow's, and Rogers's psychology and theory of latent curriculum, were reflected in the new national curriculum. School hours were reduced by one or two hours per week, and the difficulty level of school subjects was lowered. Extracurricular activities were emphasized in order to relieve students of the excessive burden of preparation for college entrance examinations. In addition, integrated subjects were introduced into the primary schools. However, students, especially at the upper secondary level, had to stay at school almost until midnight under the name of "self-study classes" or "compensatory classes," and extracurricular activities were rarely conducted for the students. At the same time, the government banned private tutoring, which had long been a social problem because of its high cost and hence its availability only to the rich. The risk increased the cost, and secret tutoring became a lucrative job. As a result, the overall expenditure by households on private tutoring became greater than that of the government on public education (Kong and Chun 1990). In order to prevent students from focusing only on major subjects such as English and mathematics for college entrance examination, the government ordered colleges to determine admission not only by applicants' performance on college entrance examinations but also their high school grades.

The subsequent iron-fisted rule made the dissident groups even more violent, radical, and sometimes pro-Marxist. After this coup, students began to openly criticize that the United States had preferred autocracy over "instability" in the Korean peninsula. Anti-government riots erupted more frequently than ever. *Time* magazine described protestors as "rebels without a pause" (Greenwald 1987). Young scholars and professors no longer concealed their interest in radical social theories such as the third world theory and dependency theory. Some criticized Korean society as a "neo-colonial monopoly capitalism" (Park and Cho 1989).

The New Sociology of Education from England and Conflict Theory from the United States were introduced to Korea. The New Sociology challenged Korean educators' taken-for-granted view of curriculum, and Anyon's (1979) study of American History textbooks was often quoted in studies that tried to reveal distorted ideologies in Korean school textbooks. Some practitioners and theorists raised fundamental questions about the usefulness and validity of the centralized policy over education, and of the Tyler-Bloom-Mager rationale in the national curriculum (Lee 1982).

The government could not suppress the demand for democracy any more. It had to loosen restrictions on civil rights and freedom. Inspired by the Korean people's desire for freedom, teachers tried to secure more autonomy in their daily teaching practice by organizing a union. Their theoretical support was mainly provided by the teachers who had been expelled from schools. The government did not permit the union, and many teachers who had joined it were fired. Although some of the activists were excessively

biased toward Marxist theories of education, their experience enabled them to carry out much practical research, and they began to publish a series of important critiques of the contents of state-published textbooks and classroom knowledge (Union of Subject Teachers 1989; Teachers' Association for Korean Language and Literature Education 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1990; Teachers' Association for Moral and Ethics Education 1989; Teachers' Association for History Education 1989; English Teachers' Association 1991; Subject Department in Teachers' Union of Korea 1990; Association of Korean Language & Literature Teachers in Chung-Nam Province 1988). Open education, which had been introduced to Korea with Neill's Summerhill School (Neill 1962), was also revitalized as another possible alternative to the uniform national curriculum.

### **Civilian Governments and Efforts to Democratize Curriculum Policy**

In 1993, the first civilian President was elected after the long military regime, and various steps were embarked upon toward a more democratic and free society. Although the new government did not permit teachers' unions yet, in 1994, most of the teachers who had been fired during the autocratic rule because of what they had taught and of their attempt to organize a union returned to their schools, giving up the union but not its ideals. Teachers' unions were finally legalized in 1999. Military training as a required class, which had been a symbol of both authoritative policy of education and the partitioned state of the country, was eliminated from the high school curriculum in 1995. Content justifying government power was removed from so-called policy subjects.

Since the early 1990s, discussions and actions were carried out to decentralize administrative power in education. Various laws were enacted to separate educational administration from general administration and local education management from central administrative control. The civilian government also organized a Presidential Commission on Education Reform to liberalize and decentralize the educational system in 1994, and since then, this Presidential Commission has been operated under different names. However, the system of local education self-governance currently practiced in South Korea hardly guarantees autonomy and professionalism in educational management because local administrations' financial revenue depends on the central government funds, and the central government applies unnecessarily specific standards and regulations to local education offices (Kim 2002).

Kim (2004, 2005, pp. 13–14) points out South Korea's long-standing "statist culture" as the more fundamental cause of the failure of the education reform. The governments of the civilian leaders, according to him, were not literally "civilian" by the nature of their power basis, and the civilian leaders could not help associating with other power groups such as the military elites and a huge body of bureaucrats. The heterogeneous constituencies within



the power groups practically forbade reforms that were injurious to the interests vested in the status quo. Particularly, the bureaucrats manipulated the policy-making process in order to filter reform ideas to policies suitable for their own interest by maintaining or further enhancing state control and management. In the process, the themes of education reform debate were shifted from liberalization, decentralization, and on so on to a reform that would enhance educational performances—in particular, “quality, excellence and the nation’s competitiveness.”

Thus, until now, bureaucrats tend to be sure that centralized state control over education could ensure individual student’s high performance, hence the nation’s competitiveness. The civilian governments of South Korea since the 1990s have tried to decentralize the educational policy and reform the uniformity and rigidity of the decision-making process in educational administration on the one hand; the governments’ bureaucrats have tried not to lose their control power on the pretext of enhancing educational performances on the other. The centralized control is even reinforced when, as occasioned by the presidential election of 2007, a more conservative political party takes power. Since 2008, all schools in the country have been forced to carry out an annual standardized test on the same day and the test results are compared between schools. Teachers and principals who rejected the national standardized test were punished while the civilian government had claimed “diversification” and “autonomy” of school curriculum as its prime educational policies. Ordinal numbers are no longer designated officially to the national curriculum after the 7th, but it still regulates subjects to be taught in each grade and specifies content, time allotment, teaching method, and evaluation method of each school subject.

South Korean students’ academic performances have almost always been ranked in the top five in all areas, for example, among 65 countries on PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2009 by OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) and among 50 countries on TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) 2007 (KICE 2011). Although it is very controversial that primary and secondary students’ high performance signifies the nation’s competitiveness, it is undeniable that rigid central control over daily teaching practices by the specified national curriculum has contributed the students’ high performance. Even a state-run television network (EBS, Educational Broadcasting System) provides students daily with choosing-a-right-answer lessons for subjects in the national curriculum. Thus, an OECD study analysed already that the formal teaching methods prevalent in Korean education emphasized mainly the memorization of fragmentary information rather than creative and critical thinking (OECD 1988).

On a 1989 standardized math test given to 13-year-olds in six countries, Korean students did the best and American students did the worst. On the same test, there was a question, “I am good at mathematics.” American students were

number one worldwide in answering in the affirmative, with 68 percent. Korean students came in last in this category, only 23 percent answering yes. An analyst of *Time* magazine (Krauthammer 1990) explained that a reason behind American students’ “doing bad and feeling good” was because “American students may not know their math, but they have evidently absorbed the lessons of the newly fashionable self-esteem curriculum wherein kids are taught to feel good about themselves.” On the other hand, American educators in Korea also pointed out Korean students’ low self-esteem, or “doing well and feeling bad” (Ellinger and Carlson 1990, pp. 17–18) —as follows— which showed the negative aspects of highly centralized, rigid, and uniform national curriculum of Korea:

We emphasize creative problem-solving in mathematics, for instance, while Korean educational system stresses rote memorization, which pays off when students take the typical standardized test. Also, the urgency to succeed and the almost relentless family and societal pressure are not without their toll on Korean students, as evidenced by the high suicide rate.

### Summary and Review

One of the most noticeable features in the twentieth century history of curricular reform in Korea was that major political transitions were always followed by reforms of national curricula. Those who seized the political power always needed the reforms in order to add content legitimizing the new governments. New curricula needed to be adapted to new educational and curricular theories, too. Every national curriculum since 1945 was the result of the subtle, sometimes very odd, combination of these two purposes. Hence, official educational policy could not help being authoritarian, and control of the central government over planning and managing the curriculum was almost inevitable. There was, and still is, little room for teachers, students, parents, and even curricular theorists.

Accordingly, the Korean national curriculum has been most vulnerable to Marxist criticism, such as Harris’ (1982) view that curriculum in any capitalist society is a major means to present a distorted view of the world and to offer a misrepresentation of reality. This sort of political critique about education and curriculum was so prevalent in some academic circles during the mid-1980s that few in those circles dared to point out its weakness, afraid of being branded conservative. While these political theories identified problems, they failed to offer solutions to the problems.

Another distinctive feature of the Korean history of curriculum is its constant influence by external forces and foreign theories. Centralized control over education began with the Japanese occupation, and American and other Western influences have had big impacts on education and school curriculum since 1945. The lack of indigenous and idiosyncratic theories and practices of curriculum has been pointed out as a major problem in Korean education.

As a possible reaction to this, some radicals sought a way of liberating the Korean curriculum from Western, particularly American influences. In the mid-1980s, North Korean President Il-Sung Kim's version of nationalism, "Idea of Self-Reliance," was introduced to young radicals underground. This movement, however, showed very chauvinistic tendencies and raised another important question of whether it was possible to have an indigenous orientation to education and curriculum without being nationalistic or chauvinistic.

Although civilian governments have taken various measures to decentralize and liberalize Korean education since the 1990s, governments have not yet delegated the right to decide what, how, and when to teach in schools. Whether the reason has to do with administrative procedure or with struggles between power groups, as indicated in the last chapter, a highly specified national curriculum symbolizes rigidity and uniformity of the Korean educational system as a whole. The same level achieved by the same contents taught by the same methods could help students score high on international standardized tests at the cost of the students' self-esteem, creativity, and critical thinking, and of the teachers' autonomy and professionalism.

## References

- Anyon, Jean (1979). Ideology and United States history textbooks. *Harvard Educational Review* 49 (3): 361–386.
- Association of Korean Language & Literature Teachers in Chung-Nam Province (1988). *Praxis Education*. Tae-Jun: Nam-Nyuk [in Korean].
- Bloom, Benjamin S. (1956). Translated by Eu-Do Lim et al. (1966). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives I, Cognitive Domain*. Seoul: Bae-Yung Publishing.
- Bruner, Jerome S. (1959). *The Process of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chung, Bum-Mo (1970) *Education and the Study of Education*. Seoul: Bae-Yung Publishing [in Korean].
- Cummings, Bruce (1981). *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cummings, Bruce (1983). *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943–1953*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Cummings, Bruce (1995). *Divided Korea: United Future?* New York: Foreign Policy Association.
- English Teachers' Association (1991). *English Education for a Right Place*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].
- Freire, Paulo (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Greenwald, John (1987). "Rebels without a Pause." *Time*, June 29.
- Gregor, Anthony James (1990). *Land of Morning Calm: Korea and American Security*. Washington D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center.
- Griffis, William Elliot (1905). *Corea: The Hermit Nation*. London: Harper and Brothers.
- Ham, Chong-Kyu (1976). *A Study on the History of Korean Curriculum I*. Seoul: Sook-Myung Women's University Press [in Korean].
- Harris, Kevin (1982). *Education and Knowledge: The Structural Misrepresentation of Reality*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hirst, Paul H. (1965). Liberal education and the nature of knowledge. In Richard S. Peters, (ed.). *Philosophy of Education*. London: Oxford University Press, pp. 87–111.
- Kim, Ee-Gyeong (2002). Educational decentralization in Korea: Major issues and controversies. Paper presented at the Comparative International Education Society Annual Conference (Orlando, FL, March 6–9).
- Kim, Ki Su (2004). Public and private in South Korea's education reform vocabulary: An evolving statist culture of education policy. *International Education Journal* 5 (4): 521–530.
- Kim, Ki Su (2005). Globalization, statist political economy, and unsuccessful education reform in South Korea, 1993–2003. *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 13 (12): 1–25.
- Kong, Eun-Bae, and Chun, Se-Yung (1990). *The Level of Educational Expenditure in Korea*, Research Report 90–13, Korean Educational Development Institute, Seoul [in Korean].
- Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (2011). Research on 2011 International Academic Performance Evaluation (PISA/ TIMMS), Seoul: KICE [in Korean].
- Krauthammer, Charles (1990). "Education: Doing Bad and Feeling Good." *TIME*, Feb 5.
- Lee, Man-Kyu (1948). *History of Korean Education II*. Seoul: Eul-Yu Publishing [in Korean].
- Lee, Yonghwan (1982). A critique to the taxonomy of educational objectives. *The Journal of Educational Research* 8: 89–107. Kwangju: Institute of Educational Research, [in Korean].
- Mager, R.F. (1961). *Preparing Instructional Objectives*. Translated by Oo-Hyun Chung (1976). Seoul: Educational Science Publishing.
- Ministry of Education (1992). *An Outline of the Sixth National Curriculum*. Seoul: Ministry of Education [in Korean].
- Morgan, R.M., and Chadwick, C.B. (eds.) (1971). *Systems Analysis for Educational Change: The Republic of Korea*. Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, Department of State.
- Neill, A. S. (1962). *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*. New York: Hart Publishing.
- Oh, Chun-Suk (1964). *History of Modern Education in Korea*. Seoul: Educational Publishing [in Korean].
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (1998). *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Korea*. Paris: OECD.
- Park, Yun-Chae, and Cho, Hee-Yun (eds.) (1989). *Arguments about Social Construction of Korea I*. Seoul: Chook-San [in Korean].
- Peters, Richard S. (1966). *Ethics and Education*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Research Committee of Curriculum and Textbooks (1990). *History of Subjects in Korean Curriculum*. Seoul: Korean Textbook Company [in Korean].
- Sohn, In-Soo (1992). *American Military Government and its Educational Policy*. Seoul: Min-Yung Publishing [in Korean].
- Subject Department in Teachers Union of Korea (1990). *White Paper on Textbooks*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].
- Teachers' Association for Korean Language and Literature Education (1988). *Subject Teaching*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].
- Teachers' Association for History Education (1989). *History Education for Life Alive*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].
- Teachers' Association for Korean Language and Literature Education (1989a). *A Guide to the Revised Textbook of Korean Language and Literature*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].
- Teachers' Association for Korean Language and Literature Education (1989b). *Korean Language and Literature Education for Reunification*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].
- Teachers' Association for Korean Language and Literature Education (1990). *Progressive Korean Language and Literature Education*. Seoul: Chin-Goo [in Korean].
- Teachers' Association for Moral and Ethics Education (1989). *Moral Education Together*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].
- Underwood, Horace Horton (1926). *The Modern Education in Korea*. New York: International Press.
- Underwood, Horace Horton (1951). *Tragedy and Faith in Korea*. New York: Friendship Press.
- Union of Subject Teachers (1989). *Textbooks Read Upside Down*. Seoul: Green Tree [in Korean].