The educational system in South Korea: a case study

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Abstract
This paper examines the reaction of the educational system in South Korea to the globalization. Notions such social regime will be analyzed through the eyes of the conception of Esping-Andersen. The well-known critics addressed to his work ask for a new definition of welfare States out of Europe. We will try to establish how the State of South Korea integrates itself in this framework. In order to do so, we will focus on the educational system defined as an important part of social policies in Korea since the creation of the modern State in 1953. Our conclusions underline a shift from a developmental regime, which is a notion who was created to complete the Esping-Andersen theory, to a more liberal social regime. This shift seems to be more a superposition then a replacement, a new construction on grounds of productive State policies.

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ACRONYMS
EU: European Union.
OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.
PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment.
UN: Organization of the United Nations.
INTRODUCTION

The research question

It is recurrent to read that the idea of social regime was an European creation as a Bismark's initiative. Aged of more than a century, the “social question” remains today an important part of the State policies, as legitimacy and welfare process. This scheme of social organization is being covered worldwide the majority of countries, from South America to Japan, with, however, a lot of particularity; enough to ask the question: can we really speak about a social regime far away from Europa, or is this idea a cultural question? This question still difficult and controversial. Nevertheless, many scholars take up the issue. This paper would also participate to the debate, focusing on South Korea and his (supposed) Welfare State.

My approach will interrogate the educational system in Korea as a part of its social regime by using the theoretical framework stressed by Esping-Andersen. Considering the critics addressed to him, some scholars imagined an East Asian welfare State model supposed conforms to Korea. This starting point will orient my work. The recent PISA results, which are an evaluation program of the educational system of OECD countries, through a common test given to young people aged 15, give us fresh data about education in Korea, allowing some comparative analysis.

Table 1: This table shows the PISA top-ranking. Korea is the first country if we except city-countries like Shanghai (source: OECD, 2009).

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2 This paper will not speak about North Korea, and the reader must understand “South Korea” by “Korea” thereafter.
Indeed, it seems that we're facing an impossibility to make a case study without considering a large scale identify by the word “globalization”. Ritzer defines the concept by this words : “Accelerating set of processes involving flows that encompass ever greater number of the world's spaces and the lead to increasing integration and interconnectivity among those spaces.” The circulation of the idea of Welfare State would be include in a consequence of the globalization. The State, understood as a form of social organization derived from the works of Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau, is covering the political map on the five continents; because of the hegemony of the occidental model of modernity, but above because of the trends of Occidental researchers to apply their own concepts to the rest of the world. Finally, my research question could be formulated as follow : “How reacts the educational system of South Korea with the Esping-Andersen theory ?”

**Historical background**

South Korea is neither Europa nor USA, but links and similarities are strong. It could be useful to remind here briefly some elements of the historical background. Korea has/is a modern State inherited from the Korean War (1950-1953), built largely with the US funds, by the will of counter the communist expansion in Asia. Syngman Rhee is the first elected president of South Korea in 1948. He retains the power until 1960 in a context of reconstruction. In the domain of education, there is not particular need, but a need of labor taken from the campaign by the government. For the next decade, industries are in need of skilled workers. Yun Po-sun became the first president of the second republic, staying in place not more then a year, quickly overthrow by General Pak Jeong Hee. This last has expand vocational education at the secondary school level. With the grew in the 1970s of the importance of heavy industry, the country was in need of technical college. Their number has been doubled in this period. A major issue for our subject is to see the parallel development of economy and education. The education was in charge to answer to the need of the market. From 1980s the situation will change a bit : elementary and secondary education became universalized. The high technology and information industries was placed in a competitive position with other countries, pushing the government to base his educational system on science and technology. Since 1987 Korea is a democracy that has had its ups and down; it has managed a good transition since the end of the war and is today considered as a highly developed country. For the UNESCO, four words are describing the educational system in Korea actually : 

5 Rocca, Jean Louis. (2006) *La condition chinoise*, Karthala, coll. Recherche internationale, Paris. In his book, Rocca explains that the main difficulty in order to understand the political system in China is the unconscious will to use occidental concepts. Such approach prohibits to take China like an autonomous substance because it always comparing it with what we already know. We must take into account its critic for our analysis.
democratization, autonomy, localization and globalization.

**Is education a part of a social regime?**

Before entering in the heart of our subject, I must address a relevant question whether education is a part of a social regime. Was does it mean for education to be a social policy? On a paper of UNESCO⁷, we can read that education is, in Korea, but elsewhere, a philosophical and economical issue. Its educational system is supposed to “develop the self-sustaining ability to attain independent lives, acquire the qualifications of democratic citizens, participate in the making of a democratic State, and promote the prosperity of all humankind.” However, more than a civilizing process, education is also an aspect of economical policies. As we see in the historical background, the educational system was in harmony with industrial needs. Indeed, an educated person could be able to find a job by upgrading its hiring potential. This is consistent with the idea that a well educated people doesn't need so much social help, and, consequently, that education is a factor of social stability and cohesion.

Education is also considered as one of the “Big Five”, which are the major part of social policies, next to “social security, housing, health, social work⁸”. For Kühnle, “The politics of welfare policy development and welfare State construction is about equalization of life chance, social justice, social security, social cohesion and stability, and about how to create the optimal conditions for sustainable economic growth and productive development⁹.” With such definition, the link between education and social policies become an evidence. The educational system must be integrate in a global concept of welfare regime.

![Table 1: Government Budget, 1993–2003.](attachment:image)

Table 2: Here is the government budget of Korea between 1993 and 2003. We can see that education constitute during the period an important part of its policies. (Source: Kwon & Holliday 2006¹⁰)

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I – The Theoretical Framework

Esping-Andersen: The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism

After those clarification, we can now dress up the theoretical framework took from the academic debate on the question of social regime. The main author I will use is Esping-Andersen, who wrote a famous and very quoted book called The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism\textsuperscript{11}. It work makes a typology of social regimes in Europe. His task was to identify the transformation of European societies to welfare regime. The key component of social rights is that they're supposed to spread people of the market determination. “Three further criteria are employed to distinguish worlds within that universe. They are ‘the quality of social rights, social stratification, and the relationship between State, market, and family\textsuperscript{12}.” He observed three different evolutions:

- The Liberal system is current in the Anglo-Saxon’s society. They use the principles of a minimal State which play a role of regulation. Individuals are placed under their own responsibility first. In fine, the market is the first actor of this system, it's the framework people have to enter in, and State has to keep under surveillance.

- In a Conservatism system, the social regime is the result of negotiation between three actors: employers, employees, in a legal framework given by the State. This corporatist approach creates “des accords de branche”. The universality of the access to social benefit isn't respected, because people get social rights based on their job and social position. Relationships between individual and the State are not direct, but relayed by sub-social group.

- The third “world of welfare capitalism” is called social-democratic, and refers to the “Nordic-” or “Scandinavian-” model. The main principle is there “universalism”, relayed by egalitarian orientation. Everyone has right to an access whatever its social status. Social benefits are ideally the same for all.

This classification has been a lot criticize, but a majority of scholar recognize the contribution, trying to improve it. Looking to Asia, the typology is weak because of the euro-centrism; categories are too rigid to be adapted in a very different context such Korea. Scholars also ask for an evolutionary theory that could be able to take in account the time and the historical trends of a model. Furthermore some countries in Europe was halfway between one or the other model, particularly the Mediterranean ones.

\textsuperscript{11} Esping-Andersen Gosta, \textit{Op. Cit.}
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid}, p. 29.
The hypothesis of an East Asian Model

In order to adapt the theory of Esping-Andersen to Asia, many academic papers look to the possibility of thinking an East Asian Welfare Regime. Indeed, view from Europe, two major characteristics was common to the Asian countries: 1) political regimes was roughly authoritarian, 2) the region had a great economic growth who transmitted the image of economic Dragons. From this points, scholars developed the category of a “productive welfare regime”, some also say “developmental regime”. Ian Holliday published in 2000 an article which has given a clear definition of what is a productive welfare regime: “The two central aspects of the productivist world of welfare capitalism are a growth-oriented State and a subordination of all aspects of State policy, including social policy, to economic/industrial objectives”. His task was to completed the Esping-Andersen typology. Its conclusions accept the theory of a developmental welfare regime which must complete the Esping-Andersen's classification. However, he stressed up difference between countries he focused on: “A productivist world of welfare capitalism needs to be added to Esping-Andersen’s conservative, liberal and social democratic worlds. Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan can all be placed in that world, though they separate into additional clusters within it.” The Holliday's paper still considered as relevant, but recently appear scholars whose looking closer to the difference between the Asian East countries; the debate still open. Lee & Ku wrote a paper in 2007 to test the hypothesis of a particular Productive regime in Asia from empirical hard data. Their conclusion was a bit similar to those of Holliday. Furthermore, they stressed a stronger link between Taiwan and South Korea, and make of both the closer countries to the East Asian model. In the same vein, Gouch contributes to the debate about the impact of globalization on social regimes, and specially in Asia. He studied the reaction of East Asian countries after the financial crisis of 1997. Its conclusions are that “despite common, sudden and decisive macroeconomic problems, the social policy reactions have differed across the five countries, in part reflecting variations in their welfare regimes.” But an hidden difference still relevant: the five countries are, there, “Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia”!

One of the trap concerning the idea of an East Asian category of Welfare regime is the great variety of culture, land, government and regime in the region.

In conclusion, I considered relevant for our study, as a starting point, the idea that South Korea is (or, at least, was, few year ago) a productive welfare regime, meaning that social policies

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are subordinate to economic orientation. We will see from now whether the behavior of the Korean educational system confirm or not those conclusions during the last decade.

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II – THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN SOUTH KOREA THROUGH EMPIRICAL DATA

The road of a Korean student

We will start our excursion in the educational system in Korea with a practical conception of the way a Korean student has to take to finish his study. Five steps are essentially, quoting the Korean Embassy in France\(^\text{16}\). The kindergarten is the first one, but is not often a part of public education. Parents use to send children to private kindergarten. The educational system really starts with the elementary school (“Chodeung hakgyo”), which is free, compulsory and is six years. In 1999, there were 5 544 elementary school with 3 935 000 students, that is 98,5 % of the concerned population. Korean student learn English in school to be “prepared to the globalization”. The secondary school last six years, three for the middle school, the same for the high school. During years students are under a high pressure from parents and teachers, because of the feared “Sou-Neung Exam” that is the key to the best as worst universities. This is a so important day that the working population begins to work one hour late to permit parents to prepare their children in the morning! Thereafter is the university almost always private, from general to technical curriculum.

Table 3: Share of private expenditure on educational institutions

This table shows that in Korea, 80% of universities are private, compared to 10% in Belgium. (source: OECD)

\(^{16}\) The website of the South Korean Embassy in France gives official statistic about education. [http://www.amba-coreesud.fr/coree-information/etude/enseignement-coree.htm](http://www.amba-coreesud.fr/coree-information/etude/enseignement-coree.htm)
To get a better understanding of the education universe in Korea, we can also dress up some global trends I find important for our subject. There is, first, a big asymmetry between cities and campaigns because education financing is function of the district where people live. But with universalism policies, the State tries to redistribute with equity. Secondly, but I already mention it, there is a great pressure on student. They have to take extra courses on night school (“Hakwon”) and work a lot if we can trust blog or some scholars articles\(^\text{17}\). Those school are private, often expensive, but almost compulsory and, last but not least, highly recommended. Third, schools are all led by the Ministry of Education in term of program's contents, despite the variety of private and public establishments. Fourth, the number of student for a teacher is one of the highest in the world\(^\text{18}\).

**Financing educational**

We can now focus on the relevant question of financing. This point is essential to establish the form of the social regime in Korea : I said above that a productive welfare State has two characteristics: a growth oriented State, and a subordination of social policies to economical goals. A such approach calls for a planning policy released to industrial needs. I will try to see whether the educational system is a part of such regime.

OECD published in 2008 a report on education in Korea in which statistics are given\(^\text{19}\). Let's begin with the State effort which is a very important value. Indeed, it shows the involvement of the government in a policy, and also the weight he wants to keep on it. In South Korea, the effort is relatively weak: “Spending per student across all levels of education in Korea is, at USD 6 212 (equivalent), substantially bellow the OECD average of USD 7 527.” The gap with the OECD average is wide “in pre-primary education where the spending – at 2 426 USD equivalent - is half of the OECD average of 4 888 USD (equivalent).” We already provide an explanation on the topic: the State is relayed for the kindergarten by private school. Furthermore, we find the same argument on tertiary education, as the table above shows\(^\text{20}\).

Next to the absolute value, an other is relevant. Is that of the evolution of the budget. The

\(^\text{17}\) Sorensen, Clark (1994) *Success and education in South Korea*, in: Comparative education review, vol 38, University of Chicago Press.

\(^\text{18}\) OECD Directorate for Education (2008) *Education as a glance*, OECD Briefing Note For Korea. We can read in that: “Korea has the largest average class-size among all OECD countries with 31.6 students per class in primary education and 35.8 students in lower secondary education (against the OECD averages of 21.5 and 24.0 respectively)”

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid, p. 11. “At the pre-primary level, where relative proportions of public funding range from 100% in Sweden to 41.1% in Korea. Private financing in Korea thus carries the larger part of the funding in pre-primary education. Public spending on tertiary education in Korea rose by 36% between 2000 and 2005. Nevertheless, in 2005 less than a quarter (24.3%) of tertiary education spending was financed by public money, which is the lowest figure among all OECD countries.”
same report affirms that school financing of the State is quickly on the rise: “Between 2000 and 2005, spending on primary and secondary education increased by 49% while enrollments declined by 2%, resulting in a spending increase per student of 52%.” As table 2 shows, the part of the government budget allocated to education experienced a change and was very weak in 2000. In 2003 was the allocation back to 18%, like in 1993. The most probable explanation was the Asian financial crisis which has forced State to reduce their effort to social policies. Similarly, the trend in tertiary education is the same as in secondary education. There is an increase to the spending per student of 22% between 2000 and 2005. This evolution seems to be a return to normal (18-20% of the budget), but also underline the will of the government to keep control on education.

We can be surprised that the Korean State doesn't spend a lot of money in his system, and in the same time, is the top-ranked country in Pisa results. The answer is that the family participation to the education of children is very high. I already mention “Hakwon” which is very expensive for parents. But in university, their effort still high because of tuition fees: “In Korea, tuition fees charged to national students by tertiary-type A institutions are on average around USD 3 883, which is among the highest in OECD, exceeded only by Japan (USD 3920), and the United States (USD 5027).” In the EU, excepted United Kingdom and Netherlands, there is no public university asking for more then 1000 $ a year. Finally, the private share of funding increased from 19.2% to 23% between 2000 and 2005. If the State effort appears weak, students in Korea are well allocated because of direct costs supported by families. Korea spent 7.2% of GDP on educational institutions at all levels of education in 2005. That well above the OECD average of 5.8%!

Table 4: Annual expenditure by educational institutions per student in primary through tertiary education, by type of services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Services</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>OECD Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Public institutions only.

Countries are ranked in descending order of expenditure by educational institutions per student for core services.
Source: OECD Table B1.2, See Annex 3 for notes (www.oecd.org/edu/eag2010).

This graphic shows the position of Korea compared to other OECD countries in term of spending per student by institutions (Source: OECD)
Globalization and the educational system in Korea

Before to conclude on the educational system, I would like to stress points concerning the influence of globalization on it. That allows to analysis quickly the weight of economic preoccupation on education. First, English language is learned from the elementary school two hours a week. There is a will of Korea to insert herself in the globalized world. Secondly, there is few foreign student on the Korean ground. For example, they are 4.7% in advanced research programmes in 2008, and they are becoming more. An other data gives by OECD is the number of Korean students send to foreign countries: “Over 100 000 Korean students are studying throughout the world” in 2008. That is the fourth “State launcher”, after France, Germany and Japan. 10% of the foreign students in USA are Korean; 17% in Japan. This few data show a country that takes into account a globalized world, and that try to be an important part of it.

To conclude this chapter, I will give results I found in order to characterize the educational system in Korea and to compare it to the theoretical framework, as follow : the Korean State doesn't spend so much on education compared to other OECD countries; however, he keeps a close control as leader of curriculum, redistribution, school programmes; families together account for a large part of the cost of the studies, at any level; there is a privatization of higher education, but also of the kindergarten level; the economic competitiveness is a preoccupation, longer a concern that an absolute obligation.

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III – COMPARING RESULTS TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Results I found must by now be compared with the theoretical framework described above. Esping-Anderson used three criterion to define worlds of welfare capitalism : “quality of social rights”, “social stratification”, and “the relationship between State, market, and family”. What is the link between results and those indicators ? We must remember that this study focus on education, and isn't relevant to compare the whole social regime in Korea, but the educational system.

Concerning the quality of social rights, if an opinion could be given, South Korea has nothing to envy anyone concerning education. The top-ranked position it has in the PISA results shows a very efficient system to secondary level. Despite of that, “Korean parents are as satisfied

21 OECD, ibid.
with the disciplinary atmosphere in their child’s school 78.4% (79% country average) but 79.4% felt that the school did a good job of educating students compared with the average of 85% among the countries with available data”. Why parents send their children to Hakwon is because they still skeptic about the quality of school. The fact that so much costs are supported by parents move away the idea of an universal access to education. However, it is right that during the secondary school, the State provides establishments and public curriculum; and, furthermore, that he looks for a full educated population although schools are private. Facts push for a high stratified society, because of the private costs families have to furnish. When costs increase, people able to pay decrease. This seems close to the conservative system, because the access to schools are determined by money in a large part, and so restricted to categories of population. The structure creates a very complex relationship between State, family and market which is not comparable with European social regimes. As said Lee & Ku, “the non coverage of welfare entitlement is similar to the liberal model22,” and the market plays a great role through the privatization of pre-elementary and tertiary schools. The core of educational system remains in the hand of the State. However, there is no “decommodification” of education, which is considered like a product which can be sale. In a social-democratic regime, social policies are not a service, but a right people can use without the mediation of markets. I remember that the question isn't there to ask if a regime is better or more efficient than an other, but to compare our results with the Esping-Andersen's theory.

Arguments point out a mix of criterion which structure the three worlds of welfare capitalism in Europe. There is a universal basis, inherited from the historical trends during and after the reconstruction of the State, that furnishes the core of the educational system in Korea. This core is relieve by an individualist social approach of education at all level of the road of a student, that is expressed by the privatization of establishments and recommended extra-school, especially for the preparation of the “Sou Neung” test. And finally, families plays a great role to support their children costs and motivations needed to pass the studies. Furthermore, there is no more government-plan for education, and the main orientation seems to be given by the market, under a close control of the State.

My conclusion is that the inherited developmental regime from historical roots, as scholars mention it, still there as a core of the educational system in Korea. However, I notice that there is a substantial shift from a developmental regime to a liberal regime. The core is being covered by a privatization of education, and this process is not a transformation, but a superposition. This is particularly visible at the pre-elementary and tertiary level of education.

CONCLUSIONS:

Summering the paper, I began to dress in the introduction the background of the study, essentially through historical indicator and the PISA ranking. My research question is: How reacts the educational system of South Korea with the Esping-Andersen theory? Thereafter I demonstrate that education is a part of a social regime and must be include in a global concept of welfare State. The first chapter dressed up the theoretical framework with Esping-Andersen theory, and the hypothesis of an East Asian Welfare Regime which is a place of an active academical debate, because scholars try to adapt the European theory worldwide. They need theories of globalization, social policies, comparative analysis, statistics etc. I asked the question of the adaptation of South Korea to the developmental social theory. The second chapter presented the educational system in Korea through empirical data, mainly from OECD. I regrouped some results concerning the road of a Korea student, global trends, education financing and globalization. The third chapter compared results to the framework, and conclude to a superposition of liberal aspects on the developmental core regime ground. Economic goals for education still very present but are, in a large part, regulated by the market. The way changes, not the goals.

To finish the paper, I would ask whether education presents similarities with the global social regime in South Korea, and let Kwon and Holliday answer 23: “In the wake of the financial crisis, Korean welfare capitalism remains productivist. There has been little change in the philosophy and the fundamentals of the Korean welfare State. The expansion of the Korean welfare state is more of a response to economic crisis and an attempt to bolster industrial competitiveness and economic growth by increasing labour market flexibility. […] It thus seems likely that the greatest impact on Korea’s productivist form of welfare capitalism will derive from gradual social change rather than from the shock experienced during the Asian financial crisis.” Maybe South Korea will soon more deal with aging that with growth. Knowing whether education can help in such challenge is an other question.

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