Author: Hee Jung Choi

Title: East Asian Students at the IEI(Intensive English Institute): Neoliberal Subjectivities, Cultural Capital, and More

About the Author: I am a first year graduate student in socio-cultural anthropology at UIUC. I received BA and MA in Korea from Sogang University and Yonsei University respectively. My current research interests include border crossing, migration, neoliberalism, global citizenship, national identity and nationalism.

Keywords: neoliberalism, global education, cosmopolitan capital, English learning

Abstract: This project is about East Asian students from Korea, Japan, and Taiwan studying at the Intensive English Institute of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. We conducted face-to-face individual interviews with eight students and one interview with a former IEI instructor. We asked how these students give meanings to their study abroad experiences on this campus. Particularly we explore how external "push factors" such as neoliberalism and globalization affected the students' decision making to study abroad, and at the same time how they negotiate on their own terms based on their individual micro circumstances. Furthermore, we study the meanings of multicultural or global experiences during their stay in the United States as well as English learning. We found out that the students are pushed to study English by prevailing forces such as neoliberalism, but at the same time they are not just passive followers of external forces. They give their own meanings to their English learning and multicultural/global experiences on their own terms through subtle contradiction, resistance, and negotiation. We also learned that the institution itself is reshaping and customizing its curriculum in order to satisfy the students' needs.

Response Paper
#1: Response paper #1 (week 3)

Brooks, David. The Organization Kid


The two articles by Brooks and Boo touch upon neoliberalism and globalization embedded in everyday lives. The lives of students in Princeton University and workers in Chennai show how neoliberalism and globalization are lived among young adults worldwide. And as anyone can easily expect in this global era, I found myself and peers in South Korea are not much different from those in the two articles.

Brooks describes the generation of meritocracy which emphasizes achievement and competition. In addition, young adults in Princeton, according to Brooks, do not protest against established order. Rather, they work and study hard in order to move up the ladder within the frame of established order. The characteristics of current young adults
are very different from previous generations who were rebellious against authority and who were considered as progressive. East Asian youth, at least those in South Korea, share the characteristics of American youth. They are goal-oriented, seeking achievement within the established order, and they do not protest as their previous generations did in the past. For example, in the presidential election of last December, more than 50 percent of university students in South Korea was said to support Lee Myung Bak, who will be next president of South Korea. Lee was a candidate from a very conservative party, and his policy is business friendly and emphasizes competition and development more than distribution and welfare.[1] Young adults in South Korea consider this capitalism and neoliberalism focused on competition, achievement, and money as natural, and they try to follow the rules in order to be successful.

The Americanization of Chennai written by Boo depicts how young adults in Chennai changed from globalization and neoliberalism, by working for US market or directly for US companies. The competence for English, American corporate value, order and manner are all important not only in US and Chennai, but also in East Asia. English learning industry is huge and students (or their parents) are eager to improve their English skills from their earlier years. The competitiveness in a global world cannot be more emphasized in East Asia. Because universities are the space where many of young adults learn and study, I looked at the websites of the leading universities in South Korea. Interestingly, all three universities I searched for, Seoul National University, Yonsei and Korea University, promoted their “global” character on the first main page of the websites.[2] Their catch phrases include “Global Korea,” “Yousei Standing Proud in the World,” and “The University of the World.”

In South Korean universities, the departments of humanities are suffering from the lack of fund and students, while the classes of business administration are flooding of fund and students. Now students are taking the classes like “how to be rich,” and “how to invest,” for their general education. In addition, the bestseller list of Kyobo bookstore,[3] one of the largest bookstores in South Korea, shows books about how to win, how to succeed, and how to invest are popular. Another group of bestselling books is those for English learning.

It is not the intention to say that competition, goal-oriented attitude, hard working, and globalization are bad things. They have their own merits. However, the point here is that, as Brooks and Boo mentioned, people might have been happier in other ways. Young adults including myself might need opportunities to think about character, virtue, sense of duty, etc.
Response Paper #2: Hee Jung Choi

Response paper #2

Austin, Joe. Youth, Neoliberalism, Ethics: Some Questions.


Anagost, Ann. Imagining Global Futures in China.

A Star Yearbook 2006/07

The three articles and the AStar Yearbook show how neoliberalism and globalization affect the life of youth. They describe how neoliberalism and globalization are lived by different subjects such as youth, their parents, and nation-states. Some of the articles consider youth as in crisis in risk society, while other parts of today’s readings also show neoliberalism and globalization as an opportunity to youth.

In my understanding, the article by Joe Austin has the most negative perspective toward the impact of neoliberalism on youth. Through the review of recent works in youth studies, the author says that youth can be represented either as criminal/risk or as consumer within the governmentality of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism caused privatization of institutions and practices such as schooling, the juvenile justice and prison system, cultural education, etc. In this article, neoliberalism is seen as a loss of security, opportunity, and equality, and consumerism may be seen as the new “public school.”

I really enjoyed Ann Anagnost’s article about Chinese youth, because the change brought by neoliberalism was more evident in China if we compare with Chinese past as a socialist country. Particularly because of the only child
policy, the child becomes the site of investment and he/she is expected to become successful in order to climb up the social ladder. This article provides various examples and explanations showing how Chinese family become considered as privatized space to produce human capital and how Chinese childhood became commoditized. The commodification of childhood involves not only with education but also with new bodily aesthetic of height and slimness. The author points out that through neoliberal child rearing, Chinese children may have problems such as self-centeredness and social-phobia.

Ong Aihwa gives an opportunity to connect neoliberal education, globalization and citizenship. By using the examples of a globally diverse student body in American institutions and the globalization of American universities, Ong points out that American education has too much focus on creating neoliberal subjects and promoting neoliberal ethos. The yearning of Asians for higher education in prominent American universities are related to “flexible citizenship” seeking both education and citizenship abroad, and becoming “global citizens” educated in west, working for global companies in global cities. Ong raises a question whether American institutions can promote the Kantian view of cosmopolitanism, and she also argues that American institutions should provide both technical/professional training and moral education like democracy and human rights.

The AStar Yearbook can be an exact example of Ong Aihwa’s article. This book shows the priority of technical education, globalization of American and Singaporean institutions, and the training of neoliberal human capital from “guppies” to “whales.” In addition, the book relates the PhD degrees in science and engineering with the possibility of entrepreneurship. I think this global project of AStar program is just the production of neoliberalism and globalization.

Throughout the readings for today, I had a sense that youth can be divided to the extreme, just like the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Youth from middle/upper-middle class family can afford to privatized intensive education, even they pursue higher degrees overseas. On the other hand, youth without such family support are in risk because social services that were once public became privatized and not available for youth without capital any more. Thus, young people with capital have great opportunities before them, while others become criminals within the prison-industrial system.

In addition, what I found interesting was that parents and nation-states may expect different things from neoliberal global education. According to Ong Aihwa, parents seek “flexible citizenship” for the sake of their own family, while AStar program tries to build a talent pool of Singaporean PhDs for the sake of Singapore, the nation-state. Thus, different subjects take roles with different subjectivities in this neoliberal globalized education.

Another important is the problems caused by too much competition and too much focus on study and work. As Ann Anagnost points out, children with the lack of moral/value education tend not to have interests on collective social goals, and they may not be able to “face society” independently. The
story of Japanese Hakikomori, who are not working in society, just staying home, and living in their own world, is another example of this problem. Also, in South Korea, youth who are too much dependent on their parents are called as Kangaroos. I think these issues are related to side effects of competitive commoditized education of childhood as neoliberal investment, with lack of moral/value education to become an independent responsible adult.

As a conclusion, I think society should provide certain level of public education to all children, because it is the essential base of access to equality and opportunity. At the same time, I also feel that children also deserve “happy childhood” outside of the demands of neoliberal subjecthood and competition. However, it seems to be very difficult within this frame of neoliberal world. What kinds of identities/subjects global education is producing and should produce is another important question to think about. American institutions should provide the Kantian view of cosmopolitanism? Or is it enough to provide technical and professional training? I think education needs to teach some kinds of values and morals, but it is hard to define what are the values and morals to globally diverse students. I do not have the answer to these questions, and hope to discuss some of the points during class.

The four articles show how Japan and South Korea developed after the end of the second World War. They draw a picture of how the Japanese and South Korean states, business, people as laborers, citizens, and consumers participated in this development process. The articles deals with how the different actors cooperated and conflicted and how postwar Japan and Korea were able to achieve development and overcome crisis.

Kathleen Uno focuses on the movement of women during the similar periods as Andrew Gordon does. In postwar Japan, women participated in consumer, day-care, anti-military-base, antinuclear, environmental, and other social movements in order to protect their children and family. The women in this movement emphasized their differences from men and participated as “good wife and wise mother.” However, the movements changed direction towards jettisoning the concept of ryosai kenbo. Post-1970s women’s movements denied the inevitability of wifehood and motherhood, and women argued that they had rights to choose to contribute to home life, public life, or both domains. According to Uno, the women’s movements had achievements, but with limitations. In addition, Uno points out that we need to avoid dichotomies as equity feminism and social feminism/relational and individualist feminism, in order to fully understand Japanese women’s movements.

I think Uno’s argument on ryosai kenbo, women as wife and mother, is similar to the Chinese women who should be inside of family as Lisa Rofel described. Korea has also the same concept of “wise mother and good wife” and in Korean, “inside person”(ansaram) means wife. Uno says that “good wife, wise mother” is still influential, even though women have received more freedom. Also, according to Ann Anagnost, Chinese women are expected to be a good mother for the future generations. It is also the same in South Korea, in which women are expected to be a good wife and wise mother, even though women work outside the home. As Uno mentioned in the article, women in Japan, China, and Korea have double burden as professional women and “wise mother and good wife.” Also, I am curious about how the circumstances are similar or different in the United States and Europe.

Andrew Gordon’s article, “The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan” well describes how Japanese companies have successfully went through for their profits/benefits, despite various challenges after the end of war until 1990s. Gordon shows with details that there were challenges against the corporate-centered society such as small company unions, environmental activism, protests by women or the young, and a reform-minded state, but they were not enough to become a major threat to the corporate-
Cho Hee-Yeon talks about South Korean developmental regime and its transformation after the financial crisis of 1997. According to the author, South Korea was able to achieve economic development because of developmental regime with statist mobilization and authoritarian rule under the condition of the anticommunist regimented society. I appreciated the analysis that what brought economic development to Korea was at the same caused economic crisis in 1997. The crony capitalism, the chaebol’s expansion oriented management and the poor management of the banks were not able to protect Korean market, faced with the rapid mobility of international financial capital in the open context. It says that even after financial crisis and political change from authoritarian government to democratic government, state initiative in coordinating the economy and intervening in a market-friendly way. The author calls this transformed developmental regime as neo-developmental regime.

I read Cho Hee-yeon’s article with Andrew Gordon’s, because both of them deals with development strategies in two countries. My perception after reading the two articles is that Japanese development strategy was more corporate-centered and South Korean one was more of government-led policies or government-business cooperation. I want to know whether it is because the focus of analysis in the two articles was different or indeed state had more say in South Korean development process.

While Cho Hee-Yeon’s article deals with the role of the South Korean government and its cooperation with business sector in economic development, Laura Nelson shows the cooperation of South Korean citizen-consumers in the economic development process. South Korean development strategy appealed to citizens using patriotism through “appropriate” consumer behavior. The “appropriate” consumer behavior changed from frugality, humility, and patience to expansion of consumption with credit card in order to resuscitate national economy after 1997 financial crisis.

Reading the article, I felt that this is my life story. As Nelson analyzed, my mother always told me that I should not do kwasobi, I should be frugal, and I should save money as much as possible. I remember that one day in 1980s, I really wanted to eat a banana when I went to market with my mother, but I refrained from telling her to buy me a banana. At that time, banana was a somewhat luxurious fruit in Korea, so I thought eating a banana was not an “appropriate” consumption. As Nelson shows, the meaning of “appropriate” consumption greatly changed after 1997. When I was a freshman in college in 2000, agents on commission promoted credit cards accounts in front of the university. Students were able to apply for credit cards at that time with their name, address, and other basic information, even though they did not have their own income. I remember that I received about 10 dollars
as an incentive for applying for credit cards from the agents. Interestingly, my mother also changed her voice toward me. She now tells me, “enjoy your life, spending too much is bad, but you need to spend for your happiness and pleasure to some extent.” I imagine her change in voice was affected by broader socio-cultural change in South Korea.

I agree with Nelson that the cooperation of patriotic self-conscious consumers were one of the engines for economic development in postwar South Korea. However, at the same time, I am not sure whether current consumers are spending money for better national economy. It seems that they are now spending for themselves and their family rather than the nation-state. As Nelson points out, current South Korean society is very materialistic and people consume a lot not only domestic products but also numerous imported goods. It is obvious that egalitarian promises in the past has not been realized, and from my perspectives, people now care about their well being, happiness, and pleasure more than national development. Thus, I raise a question, can we say that Korean consumers are changing as more individualistic and less concerned about national wellbeing? Or, is it possible to analyze the current Korean consumers as part of cooperative, self-conscious consumers?

The four articles above were very different from Lisa Rofel’s book, “Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism,” in terms of methodology. Uno, Gordon, and Nelson developed their arguments mostly based upon historical detailed facts. Particularly I found the Cho Hee-Yeon’s article quite distinct from Lisa Rofel’s. While Lisa Rofel trys to analyze from individual person’s life story, Cho Hee-Yeon analyzes from broad structure. Personally I thought if Cho used some of stories about how real people went through the developmental regime and neodevelopmental regime in South Korea, the analysis would have been more enriched and persuasive.

The four articles are mainly about postwar Japan and South Korea until the 1990s. Thus, questions remain about how Japan and South Korea have changed or been similar in 2000s. What is the status of Japanese women like now? How Korean consumers have changed? What are the changes in the relationship among Japanese state, business, and workers? Is the term neo-developmental regime proper to explain current South Korean government? It seems that Japan and Korea are rapidly changing, particularly with globalization and powerful presence of international free market system and international capital. I think that we need following analysis of Japan and Korea after the 1990s in order to fully understand the current Japan and South Korea.

Response Paper

#4:
Response Paper #4

2008.02.25


Pazderic Nickolas. Smile Chaoyang.

The three articles for today deal with China and Taiwan. Using job-seeking and university education as examples, the three articles show how neoliberalism and traditional values such as socialism in China and state neo-confucianism in Taiwan are conflicting and co-existing at the same time. According to the articles, individuals are not free from states, discipline, nationalism, etc., even though choice, autonomy, self-responsibility, and competition are emphasized as new rules of society in China and Taiwan.

The two articles, “Autonomous Choices and Patriotic Professionalism” and “The Chinese Enterprising Self,” talk about the same phenomena, even though they have different focuses. They show how young adults are adjusting to new circumstances without centrally planned job assignment, and with competition, autonomy, and more freedom of choices. Amy Hanser show that how labor market in China has changed for young people. Chinese young adults now are expected to become neoliberally governed enterprising selves, who can go through market-based competition. They prefer flexibility, self-developmet, and challenge over stability of jobs. Amy Hanser also points out that the opportunities and preference are different based on education level, gender, locality, etc.. Thus, there are disappointments and inequalities, but in general, she concluded that those she interviewed seemed to be adaptive to new rules of game today.

While Amy Hanser briefly mentions that the big picture of the whole nation is still considered as important, Lisa Hoffman really focuses on the coexistence of neoliberal techniques and Maoist era values. Lisa Hoffman argues that Chinese young adults are combining their self-managed development and expressions of patriotism, and it is very distinct characteristic of late-socialist China. Hoffman calls these young adults as patriotic professionals. I agree that there are Chinese young adults who have both the ideas of self development, professional success and the ideas of serving the nation.

However, from my understanding, the article does not persuade me well that this is a distinctively Chinese case. Given that China was a highly disciplined socialist authoritarian society, it is likely that China still has stronger presence of state and nationalism. Even though the level would be different, I still think that this is the case in other countries, too. For example, even though individual success is important, Korean youth do not throw away all of their nationalism. As Hoffman points out, if “caring for the nation is no longer about the duty
to sacrifice one’s future for the nation” in China, then, how Chinese young adults are different from those in other countries? It is the remaining question in my mind. In addition, Lisa Hoffman briefly mentions the different opinions among Chinese young adults toward working for the state. Thus, I was curious of the general opinion of Chinese youth. In general, do they have a sense of duty to serve the nation? Or, individual success and development is the most important in current China? After reading the two articles, my feeling is that Chinese young adults are in confusion with different ideas and rules.

From my understanding, the Chinese young people Lisa Hoffman interviewed are different cohort, compared to the Chinese youth in the article, “Imagining Global Futures in China: The Child as a Sign of Value.” Chinese kids in Anagnost’s article are depicted as lacking social responsibility, but Chinese young people in Lisa Hoffman’s article are shown as having both neoliberal techniques and social responsibility. From the differences of the two different Chinese generations, we may imagine that the power of social responsibility would wane in the future, while individual development would be more emphasized.

The article, “Smile Chaoyang,” shows how university education becomes commoditized and changed with neoliberalism in Taiwan. Chaoyang university seems to be the case study which show what we have discussed during class about neoliberal and global education. It shows how the university education is consumed by students as consumers, and at the same time how the university is expected to produce right type of workers for market. Nickola Pazderic argues that the values of neoliberalism coexist with State Neo-Confucianism and Enlightenment. Flag raising ceremonies, cleaning group activities, and encouragement of research in social science and humanities are all telling examples. The second argument about the campaign for smile is, I think, brilliant example to show that the university is expected to produce “docile, cooperative, but not too critical knowledge workers.” As the campaign “Smile Chaoyang” says, students are expected to become happy and docile workers for companies. It overlaps with Ong’s article saying that global education focuses too much on technical training with lack of moral education. Universities are producing laborers just as market wants and needs.

With introduction of neoliberalism, and at the same time with remaining values from previous era, young adults in China and Taiwan seem to be going through turbulent moments right now. The articles show neoliberalism brings similar characteristics to various societies, but how it turns out to be may be different based upon the distinctive circumstances of each society and remaining values from the past.
Response Paper #5: Week 10 South Korea: Indeterminate Futures


The three articles on South Korean youth show how neoliberal and postindustrial changes affected everyday life, dream and imagination of South Korean youth. Even though the three articles deal with different subjects such as college students, alternative high school students, and underemployed youth respectively, all of the different subjects express their sense of self-responsibility and new kinds of imagination/perception toward labor.

Jaesook Song describes how the South Korean government emphasized the value of young people in the neoliberal era after the financial crisis. As she mentions in the title, the core concepts the Korean government used toward youth were venture companies, flexible labor, and the new intellectual. South Korean young people are requested to become creative, risk-taking, and self-responsible in this unstable job market. I was particularly intrigued by her in-depth field work working as a temporary researcher in the Seoul City government, and at the same time as a ‘high-educated unemployed person’ receiving a workfare subsidy as a Public Work Programme worker. I think that her opportunity to look at how the city officials deal with underemployed young people from inside strengthened her analysis. Due to her position within the city government, she was able to grasp the negative perspective toward young people from city managers and the delicate conflicting views among city managers, national government officials and young people.

Song’s article can be read with the articles about Japan. The perspectives toward underemployed young people from city managers
are quite similar to the perspectives toward Japanese unemployed young people in Japan. The city managers tend to see unemployed young adults as idle and spoiled without knowing the bitterness of life, as Japanese young adults are seen as voluntarily unemployed. Both Song and Genda show that unemployment of young people is generally seen as their own fault or choice, comparing to the unemployment/early retirement of older people, the bread earners for the family. Another interesting juxtaposition between Korean and Japanese young adults is two types of unemployed youth. As Driscoll mentions the two types of Freeters, Song shows that there are two types of unemployed young people in Korea. One is called ‘paeksu’('good-for-nothing'), lacking self-responsibility, motivation, and competence. The other is the ones who are currently unemployed/underemployed, but have creativity, familiarity with high technology, courage to take high risk, and flexibility. From the articles above, young people in Korea and Japan seem to share similar experiences faced with neoliberal changes in the both countries.

Reading Jung-ah Choi’s “New generation’s career aspirations and new ways of marginalization in a postindustrial economy” and Nancy Abelmann’s “College Rank and Neoliberal Subjectivity in South Korea: The Burden of Self-Development” together was helpful to understand the whole picture including the different segments of young people. Choi’s article is an ethnographic study on low-income marginalized youths in an ‘alternative’ high school. She describes how this marginalized high school youths are trying to explain, negotiate, and legitimize their own status, faced with South Korean neoliberal education system. Most of them are likely to become lower-class citizens with insecure and low paying jobs in the service sector careers. However, they are becoming a new working class without thinking about class consciousness or structural limitations they have, because it is said that “success is up to the individual, not up to the institutions they belong to.”(p.280) Even though I really appreciate her analysis of individualism-based meritocratic belief among marginalized students by neoliberal education, I think the article would have been more persuasive if it provided more ethnographic data on economic and other backgrounds of students in SGH. If I have more information on why they were not able to do better in “normal” high schools and how they have been marginalized by their backgrounds, her argument that neoliberalistic education is reifying existing social stratification would have been strengthened.

Abelmann’s article on South Korean college students also shows that self-management and self-development became highly important among college students. The interviews with four students reveal that they are trying to become successful neoliberal subjects, even though there are different views, preferences, and dreams based on each individual. What is particularly interesting is the different views toward hardworking and intense competition. Some of the students distinguish private or personal selves and instrumental ones, while others tend to
combine them. Indeed, HeeJin’s friend ask, “You enjoy competition so that you can realize your dreams, right? It isn’t that you want to compete forever, right? Do you want to agonize yourself with endless competition?” Kun also considers self-development as a leisure time project such as traveling and he thinks that working which requires full devotion is not liberating at all. On the other hand, HeeJin and Min are seeking the essence of their own selfhood from hard working and competition well-suited to the neoliberal demands of the day.

Since there are different views among the students, I think that using the group settings when interview them was effective to include various perspectives. Even though I share similar academic backgrounds with HeeJin, I felt strong uneasiness on many points she expressed during the interview. For me, the comments by her friend were helpful to have more balanced view about how South Korean students think about their future and self-management/development. In that sense, I appreciated the methodology of interviews in the article, using the group settings and including different kinds of school, class, and gender. It made me think about my own interviewing for the class project, because I have intentionally avoided group setting until now.

Throughout the stories of unemployed young adults, various college students, and marginalized high school student, the articles provide a chance to understand big picture of South Korean youth faced with indeterminate futures, particularly after the financial crisis in 1997 and following neoliberal transformation. Even though there are different factors, circumstances, and stories from each individual and each article, what people say/think in common is that success/failure is up to individuals. The three articles share the main theme that this individualized narratives obscure structural differences/inequities, “foisting the entire burden” (31) on individuals.

Response Paper
#6: Hee Jung Choi

Interview/Observation report #3

I conducted the third interview with a Taiwanese female student. She is twenty four years old and she graduated from a university in Taiwan last year. She came to the United States last August, so it is the second semester at the IEI program of UIUC. From now on, I will call her as Kathy.

Conducting an interview with Kathy was really difficult, and at the same time very unique. She was quite different from other interviewees. From when I first met her, I was able to see her gloomy and somewhat upset feelings from her face. At first, she said that she came here in order to study English. When I asked her future plan, her answer was applying for a graduate program in the United States. She studied Sociology in Taiwan, so she wanted to continue to study Sociology here.
However, it was weird to see a person talking about a graduate school with such a voice without any passion and energy. Thus, I asked her why she want to continue to study in the United States. Then, she began to talk about her own story. Her stay in the United States in order to study English and apply for a graduate school was a fixed plan by her parents rather than her own. She said that she may go to a graduate school here, but she has no interest on pursuing a degree.

Kathy came to the United States, because her parents forced her to do so. When I asked her whether she is satisfied with her experiences, she said that it does not matter because she had no expectation from the beginning. Faced with her such a pessimistic manner, I was somewhat embarrassed to ask questions to her. Trying to change the gloomy atmosphere, I asked her different questions about cultural experiences such as socializing with foreign friends. However, she does not enjoy other cultural experiences in the United States, either. Her roommate is a Korean girl, but Kathy does not get along with her roommate. She seems to have not many friends on this campus. She does nothing but going to the IEI classes. Kathy told me that she usually stay in her dorm room.

I asked her what she does in her room during her free time. Then, Kathy began another story. She is studying in order to prepare an exam to get a job in Taiwan. Her dream is to work for the Taiwanese government, and in order to do that, she needs to pass the exam given by the government. Even though I was not able to express my inner thoughts to her, I was really glad that she has something she wants to do. I asked her, “why don’t you tell your parents what you want to do and study for the exam in Taiwan?” Kathy answered that her parents do not support her idea of working for the Taiwanese government. Even though government jobs are considered as decent jobs with stability in Taiwan, her parents want their daughter to live in the United States, because they worry about rising China. According to Kathy, her parents overworry about China, and they think that Taiwan may become part of mainland China in the future. In that case, those who work for the Taiwanese government may be in danger of losing jobs, etc. That is the reason her parents are against her future plan.

Thus, she is studying for the government entrance exam in her dorm room in the United States. She said that preparing for the exam is a secret from her parents. She really wants to go back to Taiwan after this semester, but she can not. When she told her parents that she would work for the government rather than go to a graduate school in the United States, they said that they would cut all the financial support for her if she does not follow their decision. She said that she has no choice but to stay in the United States, preparing for the exam by herself, in secret.

The interview with Kathy was unlike other previous interviews our group conducted before, because she is not highly motivated to
achieve English skills and other cultural experiences. She was not interested in global education Aiwah Ong and Ann Angst talked about, whether it is technical or cultural education. However, at the same time, the interview with Kathy also shows similarities with other previous interviews. In common, they were not just passive followers of neoliberal current and other external factors, but they were constantly negotiating in their own life circumstances. Kathy was not an exception, even though she was doing this in somewhat different ways.

Response Paper
#7:

Preliminary Question: South Korean men are required to do mandatory military services for two years. They serve for the South Korean nation state for two years mostly in their 20s, receiving about 60 to 80 dollars per month. From my perspective, their contribution of two years of life to the military services is huge, because they should take time off from universities and they lost many other opportunities of self-development in critical periods of their 20’s. Some pregnant women even come to the United States to give birth, if they know their babies are male, in order not to send their sons to the military in the future. Particularly it seems more significant, because the South Korean society is changing along the line of neoliberalism.

We have discussed during class that the characteristics of neoliberalism is about privatization of social services once provided by governments. It means that there are less and less guarantees of social security we can expect from governments. Individual responsibility and meritocracy have been emphasized. In this current neoliberal society, I raise a question about the grounds for mandatory military services. If each individual is responsible for their welfare, happiness, education, health, etc., then does the South Korean government have a right to force Korean male citizens to do the military services?

The question gets more complicated, given the neoliberal stress on economic borderlessness. Ong talks about “global citizens” who have degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and other famous western institutions and work for multinational companies in global cities. With this concept of “flexible citizenship,” for Korean men who want to become global citizens, what is the meaning of mandatory military services for the sake of one nation state? Can you imagine Joe, in the article “The Best Job in Town: The Americanization of Chennai,” who are living in a hotel and willing to move around for financial benefits, do the mandatory military services for two years receiving less than 100 dollars a month?

In order to look into the issues and questions above, I think, Korean male students at UIUC would be an appropriate window through which we can analyze the questions. I plan to conduct interviews with Korean
male students in computer science graduate program on campus. I particularly chose the computer science graduate program, because it is a very strong department, among the top 3 nation-wide, and it is located in one of the most fancy and new buildings on campus. It means that they have more funding and projects with private companies. Comparing to other departments, it is more likely that those in computer science will find jobs in the United States rather than going back to Korea after graduation. Thus, I will ask them how they did their military services (engineering majors have some choices in Korea), what are their perspectives toward military services, how their military experiences affected their self-development, particularly their coming to the United States, and what are the meanings of military services for them, if they chose to work in the United States for the rest of their life.

I expect to understand some of significant aspects of neoliberalism, global education, and the meanings of citizenship throughout this project.

(this moodle does not show my paragraphs in a right way today.. sorry about that.)

**Interview/Observ. #1:** Hee Jung Choi

Interview/Observation report #1

I conducted the first interview with a female IEI student from South Korea, who is nineteen years old. The interview was taken in her dormitory lounge on February 29th Friday morning. The interview was conducted in Korean. Below is the summary of the interview with her, and I used pseudonyms for her and her university in Korea.

Kim is from South Korea and she has been here for about one month. She is an undergraduate student in K University in Seoul, and she is here as part of the global program between K University and IEI program at UIUC. K University sends 11 students every year to IEI program at UIUC for intensive language training. She was selected to come here after interviews in K University, and K University supported 2,000 dollars per student. It is a one semester program, and she can transfer credits up to 12 hours from IEI courses into K University.

Before coming to UIUC, she expected that she would not speak Korean during her one-semester language program. Thus, she was really surprised to see so many Koreans on this campus. In her class of ten students, eight are Koreans and two are Taiwanese. For her, the presence of Koreans is irony. She wants to have “global” experiences which are different from her life in Korea, but at the same time she felt more comfortable with Korean friends. She told me that she is trying to hang out with American friends rather than just making friends with Koreans.
She seems to be really passionate toward learning English and having "global" diverse experiences. She joined animal club on campus, and she pleasantly told me that her club is planning to hold an event washing dogs. In addition, she is close to her American roommate.

Particularly interesting about her interview was her future plan. Before coming to UIUC, she had imagined that she might stay in the United States rather than going back to her school in Korea. It was not a fixed plan, but rather in between thinking, imagining, and dreaming. After staying here for about one month, she is more likely to stay in the United States, but she has not decided about specific plans. Her parents think that it is better for her to stay and study in an American University, and Kim seems to agree. Kim said that she may go to Parkland College first and transfer to university later. Kim said that she is going to take classes in Parkland College next semester, taking time off from the K university in Korea, and will decide whether to stay in the United States or to go back to Korea.

Thus, I asked her why she wants to study in the United States and what her dream is. She wants to become a vet, but she was not able to go to the department of veterinary science with her university entrance exam score. Thus, she is studying animal husbandry as an alternative in Korea, but she is not satisfied with it. Kim expects that she still has opportunities to become a vet, if she majors in animal science in the United States. At the same time, she has another dream which is related to international marketing and trade. Her parents prefer her studying international marketing and trade over animal science. She knows that she really likes to do work related to animals, but her parents does not like the idea. Faced with conflicts with her parents, she is still thinking about what she wants to do in the future. In general, she does not want to live necessarily in Korea and she wants to do something international. Her dream is not fixed yet (she is nineteen), but she has general ideas about her future plans.

She expressed curiosity and interests toward me during interview. She wanted to know my opinions about her dream and asked my advice, because I am studying at UIUC as a graduate student and I have similar experiences as her, as an international student when I was an undergraduate student. She asked me how to improve English, and shared her difficulties in balancing between studying English and hanging out with friends. At the end of the interview, Kim asked my cell phone number, and she wanted to keep in touch with me.

Group Research Question: Revision Mar 24

Chie Furukawa, Hee-Jung Choi, Benjamin Cheng

Research Question

Our research group is, in the broadest sense, interested in how Asian
students at the Intensive English Institute (IEI) give meaning to their study abroad experiences at the University of Illinois and, to be more specific, the ways in which those experiences and expectations are shaped by the prevailing forces of neoliberalism, accumulating cultural capital, and the idea of a global space. We will not assume that the three – neoliberalism, cultural capital, and global space – are necessarily countervailing forces. Instead, it would be best to think of three as being in a constant state of flux, perhaps one in which expectations and actions are shaped by them and how these students navigate these discourses to create unique subject positions as global citizens.

Of neoliberalism, we already see a common thread among our interview subjects of the “push factor” that compels them to seek study abroad opportunities mostly designed to improve their English proficiency. This seems to be especially true as the horizons of global capital are being expanded under the aegis of neoliberalism, which tirelessly promotes the de facto international language of English as a necessary component for being able to compete in Asian countries. The recent propensity of Asian governments for slowly divesting themselves of social welfare networks pushes these students to seek out study abroad opportunities at the IEI and the University of Illinois; as Aihwa Ong argues, this influx of Asian students compels the university to “go global” in ways that emphasizes the technical education that these students crave while consequently putting the university's traditional mission of a moral education at risk. Thus, we are interested in the twofold question of how these students expect their experiences to shape themselves as viable, hardworking citizens back home and in how their priorities are reshaping the IEI itself.

It is also clear from our preliminary interviews that these students are interested in accumulating cultural capital, a sort of global experience that they can bring back to Asia and project. For example, we are interested in how these Asians students encounter, perceive, and interact with other internationals and especially Americans. What are their perceptions before and after these encounters, and how do these experiences match or contradict their expectations? These experiences are, of course, something that these students project back to their friends and families back in Asia, most notably through social networking websites that are so popular over there. This can be linked to the gender issues as well. In this, we would ask: Does the cultural capital accumulated in the U.S. have the same effects among students of different genders – female and male – when they return to their home countries?

A final question to explore is the students' own conception of the IEI as a space defined by themselves. The students already interviewed have variously defined the IEI as a global space for a multicultural, multiethnic experience and also as a transitional space, where they accumulate the necessary technical skills (English) and cultural capital...
necessary to succeed later in life. The interviews would, thus, be interested in how these students conceive of, for example, what is “global” and, perhaps, with how this – perhaps, inadvertently – intersects with the age-old dichotomy of East-West.

Old Revision

The project of our group tries to see how our discussion of neoliberalism and global education during seminar is lived in the real life of students at UIUC. Particularly we are focusing on IEI students, who are learning English here.

Below are some of our questions until now.

Why did you decide to come to the United States?

What were your expectations and purposes before you came here?

Are you satisfied with IEI program and your experiences here?

What is your major and future plan?

Has your future plan been changed after you came here?

How your current experiences in the United States would help your pursuing your dream?

What do your parents think about your studying here?

EUI Links:  Link: http://hdl.handle.net/2142/3603

Title: Korean Early Study Abroad Students: How Do They Narrate Their Personhood as an ESA Student at UIUC?

Author: Lee-Chung, Sangsook

this project is about Korean Early Study Abroad Students. It explores how the students give meanings to their study abroad experiences, and at the same time what their presence on this campus mean for the University. Even though the research subjects are not the same, it overlaps with our project in that both the projects explore study aborad experiences of East Asian students and its meanings to the institution itself.

Interview/Observ. #2:  Interview/Observation report #2

I conducted the second interview with a Korean female IEI student in the union building on campus in March 6th. She is twenty four years old, and undergraduate student in Korea. She came to UIUC IEI program in January, so it is the first semester here. From now on, I will
call her as Eunhee.

Eunhee took time off from her university in Korea in order to study English. Her major is Architecture and she is in senior year. She told me that she has one more semester to go before graduation. I asked her why she decided to study abroad before graduation, and how it relates to her future plan. According to her, English is not that important in her major, Architecture, and not many of her friends in that major consider English as significant. For her, however, English is important because she wants to do more than Architecture such as drawing up a plan for buildings. Eunhee dreams of working not as an architect but as a manager. She wants to work in managing department of companies related to architecture. In order to work as a manager, Eunhee considers English as a necessity. In addition, because she wants to build experiences in working with foreign companies, she has strong motivation toward learning English.

About her experiences in IEI program, she expressed satisfaction in general. One of her friends recommended UIUC IEI program to her because the curriculum of the IEI program is relatively good. Eunhee feels that IEI program considers its students as part of this UIUC community, and she feels good about it. She knows that IEI program is different from other degree-seeking program, but at least she wants to be considered as members of UIUC campus. Furthermore, after joining IEI program and seeing so many Korean students seeking academic degree at UIUC, she hopes to study as a graduate student in the United States in the future.

Even though she wants to study more in the United States in the future, she feels uncertain about her future. First of all, she does not know whether she wants to go to graduate school with architecture major. She told me that she may want to go to MBA program after working for a few years. Second, she expressed the conflicting expectation from herself and her parents. Her parents were against her idea to come to the United States in order to study English for a semester. According to Eunhee, her parents want her to graduate soon, get a job, and get married early. Her parents think that studying abroad and improving English are not necessary for her. They expect their daughter to settle down and have “ordinary” life in Korea. When she got permission from them to come to the United States this time, she promised them not to date with foreigner and she will live in Korea. Eunhee said that her parents do not want her great success as a professional because she is a daughter. Her mother told her that the happiness of women depends more on her husband and family than on professional success. Thus, she thinks that it would be really difficult to persuade her parents if she wants to go to a graduate school in the United States.

Besides learning English and hopefully helping her to find a job in the future, staying here as a language student provide more opportunities
to taste broad world out of the boundary of Korea and to have different global experiences for her. She is hanging out with friends from different countries a lot and she considers having fun with foreigners as self-development. To use her expression, “playing is studying here.” In other words, accumulating cultural capital with global/international experiences is another important aspect of studying abroad for Eunhee. In addition, she mentions that staying in a foreign country, far away from her daily routines in Korea, gives her time to think about herself. She is constantly asking “what I want, what is my dream, what kinds of life I pursue, what is happiness for me.” She explains that it is a chance for her to develop her self-identity and try to answer to the broad questions about life.

At the end of the interview, she asked me whether she can email me if she has questions about studying in a graduate school in the United States in the future. After the interview, she went out to meet her foreign friend for dinner.

The interview with Eunhee can be read with the article, “College Rank and Neoliberal Subjectivity in South Korea: The Burden of Self-Development,” by Abelmann, Kim and Park. Eunhee shows the similar subjectivity with the interviewees in the article with pressure of self-development and self-management, dreaming herself not within the boundary of Korea but on the global stage. In addition, like the two male students in the article, she appreciates her time in a foreign country as a way of self-development in two different ways, accumulating global cultural capital and at the same time spending time for herself with broad questions about life and self. At the same time her conflicting views with her parents show that she is still not free from remaining traditional expectation as women. It can be compared to the article, “The Death of “Good Wife, Wise Mother,”” about Japan, and related to the discussion of how traditional female role is still affecting the sense of female self and make conflicts with identity making in rapidly changing Korean society and global arena.

**Group Summary:**

**Summary of Preliminary findings**

Hee Jung, Chie, and Ben

By investigating the ways in which Asian students at the IEI give meaning to their study abroad experiences, we were keen to explore how the narratives of our subjects are informed by neoliberalism and the extrinsic factors that “pushes” these students to seek that study abroad experience in the United States. But these Asian students also exert a presence of their own, by shaping the very institutions where they choose to study and creating new social spaces that are cosmopolitan and multicultural.

Ann Anagnost reminds us that every aspect of “the educational”-- not only test scores but the character-building spheres-- has become
commodified, in a package of “quality education.” The emphasis on cultural/moral education does not necessarily mean their experiences are separate from instrumental, namely neoliberal, aspect of education. It is evident that the interviewees’ narratives, which are full of dreams and aspirations for academic/career success in the future, overlap with neoliberal discourses of self-development and self-management. Learning English plays pivotal roles for their future plans especially since all of the students we interviewed want to go beyond IEI program, pursuing further degree-seeking programs in the United States. They tend to perceive English as being necessary to realizing these opportunities. Also, as a global player in English language education, the IEI itself participates within a market where they compete to sign students, a function tantamount to being a business. The interview with one instructor at IEI reveals that the institution tries to customize its curriculum and makes efforts to recruit students from non-Asian countries in order to satisfy the concept of a multicultural education.

Although the students identified their primary purpose of being at the IEI as being primarily the purpose of improving their English, the cultural experiences gleaned from living and learning in the United States is not less important for them. All of the interviewees value socializing with Americans and other foreign nationals in their IEI classes and their new experiences in a new country with different culture. In one, it is the package of “multiculturalism” that they eagerly signed up for at the IEI that may not just be beneficial in a solely instrumentalist sense. While Aihwa Ong problematizes the trend of global education and its leaning toward instrumental/vocational directions, our interviewees seem to be experiencing not only instrumental education (language learning) but also cultural/moral education in the U.S.

Whereas these findings confirm how the experiences of study abroad participants from Asian countries are structured through neoliberal discourse, what are struck by how our interviews demonstrated contradictions and resistance against neoliberalism. The case of a Japanese student, who looked less ambitious than other Korean interviewees, and one Korean student’s skeptical views against the boom of English leaning, illustrate study abroad participants are not always passive followers of the neoliberal current, but rather constantly negotiating both macro and specific micro situations of their life context.

Overall, from the previous interviews, our group was able to see how East Asian students in IEI program fit in the neoliberal subjectivity, while they accumulate cultural capital with global/American experiences. At the same time, we were intrigued by the emergence of subtle contradictions, resistances, and negotiation.

Paper:
Hee Jung Choi
Final Paper

East Asian Youth and Global Futures

Prof. Nancy Abelmann and Prof. Karen Kelsky

2008.04.29

East Asian students at the IEI

As a group, our project began with a broad question of how the students from East Asia give meanings to their experiences at the Intensive English Institute (IEI), and how their experiences and expectations are shaped by prevailing forces such as neoliberalism, accumulating cosmopolitan capital, and the idea of a global space. We tried to see how East Asian students’ study abroad decision, experiences, and expectation at the IEI are affected by the exterior forces, and at the same time, how the students navigate these prevailing discourses to create unique subject positions as competent global citizens. In addition, we were also interested in how the IEI is reshaping itself faced with the flux of East Asian students.

Shaping our research questions, we drew upon the existing literature on neoliberalism in general (Duggan 2003), and neoliberal subjectivity and global education particularly in East Asia (Anagnost forthcoming, Genda 2005, Lukacs forthcoming, Abelmann et al. forthcoming, Song 2007) and the U.S. (Brooks 2001, Ong 2006). The previous scholarship on the topic shows that the neoliberal trend and changes emphasize individual responsibility, self-development, privatization, and technical education rather than cultural/moral education. And the literature provides contextual information about our research subjects, particularly after Asian financial crisis in 1997, the decade-long Japanese recession, and with rapidly developing China.

We used face-to-face individual interviews as our methodology. We conducted interviews with eight IEI students and one IEI instructor. Our interviewees include two Japanese, one Taiwanese, and five Korean IEI students with one American instructor. In general, they are in their 20’s and most of them are undergraduate/graduate students with a few exceptions. One Japanese interviewee is employed, and another Japanese interviewee is taking a break between changing jobs.

The interviews with the students confirm that neoliberalism affect their decision to come to the United States in order to study English. As the push factor that compels the students to seek study abroad opportunities mostly designed to improve their English proficiency, neoliberal subjectivity is explicit in the narratives of the students. Particularly with the decreasing role of government to guarantee welfare of citizens, and with the heightened sense of job insecurity and
more intense competition, neoliberal discourse is taking a significant role to explain these East Asian students at the IEI. Indeed, the interviewee’s narratives are full of dreams and aspirations for academic/career success in the future, overlapping with neoliberal discourses of self-development and self-management. For the interviewees, learning English plays pivotal roles for their future plans either to go beyond IEI program pursuing further degree-seeking programs in the United States or to be competent enough to get a decent job in their home countries.

For example, Kerry admits that she “doesn’t like to learn English,” but that she “really, really needs English” for her research and further study in the future. Another interviewee, Eunhee says that she has strong motivation toward learning English because she wants to build experiences in working with foreign companies after graduating her college in South Korea. Even though many of the interviewees are not sure about specific future plans for now, they believe that English is necessary to extend their future life opportunities in this globalized world.

Likewise, through the interviews, we were able to learn that the primary purpose of the students coming to the United States and the IEI program at the University of Illinois is in order to learn English. However, at the same time, cultural experiences in the United States are not less important for them. Most of the interviewees mentioned how they develop themselves not only through English learning but also through other experiences in the United States. They value their socializing with Americans and other foreign friends from different countries, and their new experiences in a new country with a different culture.

For example, Eunhee said, “playing is studying here (in the United States).” In other words, accumulating cultural capital with global/international experiences is another important aspect of studying abroad for Eunhee. Another interviewee, Kim, values her club activity with other UIUC undergraduate students on this campus, and she is proud of being close friends with her American roommate. Kerry’s explanation about her changing perception toward Black people is also interesting. Kerry had fear of Black people due to the media depiction of violence of African Americans in the past, but she now recognizes that Black people are very nice upon making friends who are Black, an African international student at the IEI and African Americans she met through her current roommate, on this campus.

These examples of the interviewees, emphasizing both learning English and accumulating cosmopolitan capital with global experiences in the United States, indicate that instrumental education and cultural/moral education may not be mutually exclusive. While Aihwa Ong and Brooks probelmatizes the trend of education toward instrumental/vocational directions at the expense of cultural/moral
education, our interviewees seem to be experiencing not only instrumental education, language learning, but also cultural/moral education in the United States.

However, the emphasis on cultural/moral education does not necessarily mean that their experiences are separate from instrumental, namely neoliberal aspect of education. It should be noted that, as Anagnost describes, every aspect of the educational – not only test scores but also the character-building spheres – has become commodified, in a package of “quality education.” In that sense, the boundary between technical education of language learning and cultural/moral education of multicultural/global experiences becomes blurred. The complaints about the presence of too many Koreans at the IEI from the interviewees and the interviewees’ narratives of learning English during socializing with foreign friends are examples of the blurred boundary between technical education and cultural/moral education.

With neoliberalism and globalization, not only the students see themselves as self-entrepreneurs, but also the educational institution, the IEI, sees itself as a business within this global education network. The interview with one former instructor at the IEI reveals that the institution tries to customize its curriculum and makes efforts to recruit students from Non-Asian countries in order to satisfy the demand of a multicultural education from its students. According to Nancy, the former instructor at the IEI, the issue of the overwhelmingly Asian demographic of the IEI is a sore point for both the administration and the students. Because of the heavy Korean presence at the institution, Korean students joke that the IEI should instead be called the “Intensive Korean Institute” and complain about the preponderance of Korean students. Because the IEI is a business and it should satisfy the demands from the students, the administrators try to actively recruit students from various countries and to divide classes up by nationality such that each class is as diverse as possible.

In addition, in order to satisfy the demands of some Asian students, who are highly oriented towards improving their test scores such as TOEFL, the IEI offers a specific grammar class, a specific pronunciation class, and even a dedicated TOEFL class. Indeed, one of our interviewees, Han, expresses his expectation for higher TOEFL score by attending the IEI classes. While this division of language learning satisfies the demand of Asian students, who expect this type of curriculum, it contradicts some ESL pedagogical theory that valorizes task-based learning, where each aspect of language learning – reading, writing, listening, and talking – are strung together in a single course that emphasizes “tasks.” The example of offering a dedicated TOEFL class may not, as Nancy notes, assist in improving a student’s English in a real sense, but it does satisfy the need to replenish student enrollment in an increasingly global, market-oriented education system. Likewise, through the interview with a former
instructor at the IEI, we recognize that not only students but also institution itself is taking part in neoliberal discourse with the form of global/multicultural education as a business.

Whereas these findings confirm how the experiences of study abroad participants from Asian countries are structured through neoliberal discourse, individual narratives from each interviewee reveal that individuals give their own meanings to their study abroad experiences. Our ethnographic data illustrate study abroad participants are not always passive followers of the neoliberal current, but rather constantly negotiating between conflicts and contradictions within their own life context. One Korean student, Chul, says that English skill is not necessary to work for Korean companies for most of people, but the companies still want to hire people with English skills. Criticizing the boom of English learning, Chul explains his learning English as an enjoyable challenge. Even though it is controversial to decide whether he is following neoliberal discourse or resisting the discourse, at least he is trying to give different meanings to his presence in the United States and his studying English.

The interview with Koji also shows how he gives meaning to his study abroad experiences based upon his own circumstances. Because his stay in the United States is financed by his company in Japan, he still emphasizes the traditional relationship between employers and employees with lifetime employment and loyalty for a company. At the same time, he also supports part of neoliberal work style, which requires workers to be flexible and responsible through constant self-development, just like he is studying English in the United States. His position as a beneficiary of typical traditional Japanese companies influences his interpretation of study abroad experiences.

The most common conflicts, according to the interviews, come from different opinions of the parents. Parents’ expectations often conflict with their children’s plans, and the parents’ opinions significantly affect the decision making processes of their children. Sometimes the parents are more into the neoliberal discourse, but in other cases, parents have rather more traditional values. Particularly interesting case is the different views between Eunhee and her parents about her future. According to Eunhee, gender becomes an important factor to form a certain expectations of the parents. Eunhee’s parents are against her study abroad because they still expect their daughter to live somewhat traditional feminine life as a Korean woman, while Eunhee is highly oriented toward professional success. While she is taking time off from her everyday lives in Korea, taking English classes at the IEI, Eunhee is navigating between different expectations from her parents and her own of going to graduate school in the United States in the future.

On the other hand, Kim is having conflicts with her parents about her major and future jobs. Kim originally wants to become a vet, but her
parents want her to study business related major and work in an international marketing field. Her parents are really supportive about Kim’s study abroad and they want Kim to stay in the United States and go to an American university rather than going back to her university in South Korea. Thus, Kim is thinking to go to a college in the United States after the IEL program, but she has not decided what to major and still is negotiating among different choices.

The most extreme case of the conflicts with parents is Kathy’s story. She is not at all interested in global education and accumulating cosmopolitan capital. She has no expectation towards her presence at the IEL in the United States, and she gives no meaning to her study abroad. She is staying here just because she is forced to do so by her parents. She wants to work for Taiwanese government in Taiwan, but her parents insist her going to graduate school in the United States and becoming globally competent person in the future.

In other interviews, the students from East Asia also show that they are using the opportunity which was not available in their home countries. They can use new possibilities in a new country, because of different cultural norms in East Asia and the United States. Kim is navigating the second chance to become a vet, which she was not able to achieve in South Korea. Yoshiko is having a new opportunity away from the strict age norms in Japan.

As we can see from the examples above, East Asian students at the IEL are not passive followers of a fixed neoliberal subjectivity, but at the same time, they are not active agent to pursue their interests free from any constraints. In reality, they are navigating and negotiating with their own life circumstances. To conclude, from the interviews, our group was able to see how East Asian students at the IEL program fit in to the idea of neoliberal subjectivity, while they accumulate cultural capital with global/American experiences. By investigating the ways in which Asian students at the IEL give meaning to their study abroad experiences, we were keen to explore how the narratives of the interviewees are informed by neoliberalism and the extrinsic factors that push these students to seek the study abroad experiences in the United States. At the same time, we were able to see how these students exert a presence of their own, by shaping the very institution where they choose to study and creating new social spaces that are supposedly cosmopolitan and multicultural. In addition, faced with different conflicting and contradicting expectations and circumstances within their own life context, we were intrigued by the emergence of subtle negotiation and resistances from the students.

References


Reflect: For this project, compliance with IRB was not difficult at all. I also found out that working with other group members and communicating with other classmates and professors through Moodle was very helpful. However, I think that it would be better if we can use the same page for the project as a group and archive the research results together.

Recommendations: With only small number of interviews we had, we were not able to compare the possible differences based on the interviewees' nationality. However, Kathy from Taiwan shows that the rising China and the relationship between Taiwan and China have huge impact on her stay in the United States. In addition, Japanese interviewees have their own explanations on their study abroad experiences, which is somewhat different from Korean students. Thus, if future research can deal more with differences based on their homecountries, it would be helpful to understand why students from a certain country have such expectation and attitudes. In that way, I think, the IEI can better understand the demands and needs of its students.

Prelim. Research Prop.: Hee Jung Choi

Research Proposal
East Asian Youth and Global Futures

Prof. Abelmann and Prof. Keslky

2008. 05. 12

Backpack Travel of South Korean Young adults

: The blurry boundary of work and play, freedom and insecurity

Research Problem

In today’s world with intense globalization and neoliberal trends, the life of young adults has been hugely affected by the prevailing forces such as neoliberalism and globalization. Particularly young adults in South Korea is a rich resources to show the impact of neoliberalism and globalization, because they have gone through the rapid changes in about only ten years after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and IMF bailout. Thus, in this project, I will examine how the external changes brought by neoliberalism and globalization have affected the life of young adults in South Korea.

Particularly I will focus on the possibility of the individual opportunities which were enabled by neoliberal changes and globalization. While many of existing literatures have dealt with the difficulties and problems caused by neoliberalism and global competition (Duggan 2003, Giroux 2005, Ong 2006, Anagnost Forthcoming, Genda 2005, Driscoll 2007, Song 2007, Choi 2005, Abelmann et al Forthcoming), I will try to study whether neoliberalism and globalization may provide opportunities and more freedom of choices for individuals. In addition, I will begin this project with assumption and perspectives to see individuals not as passive followers but as active navigators to give meanings to their lives on their own terms. Particularly in this project, I will examine South Korean backpackers around the world and how they fit in this neoliberal discourse or how they give different meanings on their own terms.

Duggan (2003) and Giroux (2005) have claimed that neoliberal changes restrict individual freedom and access to social services, emphasizing individual responsibility, privatization, self-development and competition. With this neoliberal reform, young adults in East Asia have suffered insecurity of job market and have been asked to become flexible labor and self-entrepreneur (Genda 2005, Driscoll 2007, Song 2007). In addition, students in this neoliberal era are faced with huge pressure on self-development and they experience intense competition not only within their own countries but also on the global stage (Anagnost Forthcoming, Abelmann Forthcoming, Brooks 2001, Ong 2006).
With this framework, the EUI project on East Asian students at the Intensive English Institute (IEI) in University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (will be archived, 2008) during 2008 spring semester provoked questions about positive aspects of neoliberal and global changes and education. Most of the interviewees indicated that they value socializing with foreign friends and having multicultural experiences as much as learning English. According to Eunhee, one of the interviewees, “Playing is studying here.” And the interview with a former instructor at the IEI and other students show that many of young students consider traveling in the United States as important.

Lukacs (Forthcoming) also points out the blurred boundary of the line between the world of wage labor and the world of pleasure in Japanese workplace dramas. Thus, I will study the meanings of blurred boundary of work and having fun among South Korean backpackers, since backpackers are prominent examples to value the world of freedom and pleasure. My questions will include whether the blurred boundary between work and play is meaningful for South Korean young adults as positive opportunities brought by neoliberalism and globalization; whether it is another face of neoliberal subjectivity which emphasize not only working hard but also even playing hard to experience the world to its fullest (Yan 2003).

Eunhee, an interviewee from the research on the IEI students, pointed out that another aspect of staying in a foreign country is having a time to think about herself. She said that “I am constantly asking what I want, what is my dream, what kinds of life I want to pursue, what is happiness for me.” She explained that staying in the United States far away from her routines in South Korea gives her a chance to develop her self-identity and to try to answer to the broad questions about life. Her narration about experiences in a foreign country parallels with the narration of Kûn in the article, “College Rank and Neoliberal Subjectivity in South Korea: The Burden of Self-Development” (Abelmann et al. Forthcoming). Even though his experiences of travel are within Korea, his remark about traveling is similar to Eunhee’s explanation of staying in the United States. According to Kûn, “I think of travel as something that gives you time to contemplate. The way I think of travel is that while passing through new environments, it allows us to think alone and to plunge into our own thoughts.” He sets out questions such as “how I should live,” “what life is,” and so on at the beginning of his travel. For him, travel means self-development and the realization of freedom (Abelmann Forthcoming, 27-28).

The self-narration of the two people, Eunhee and Kûn, calls attention to the question of self-development. Self-development means getting a technical and vocational education and develop skills which corporate needs from workers according to the previous scholarship (Ong 2006, Anagnost Forthcoming, Brooks 2001). However, self-development as contemplation about self by Eunhee and Kûn shows the possibility that
it may mean moral and mental self-development not for job market but for individual happiness. Sociologist Jacques Donzelot has argued that the transfer of responsibility to the individuals, more freedom and autonomy become self-generating sources of compensation rather than work itself under neoliberal conditions (1999). Therefore, through the example of South Korean backpack travelers, I will explore the relationship between the two different meanings of self-development, one is technical, vocational development for success in this neoliberal market, and the other is contemplation about self, freedom, and pursue of happiness.

Methodology and Research Plan

In order to explore how backpackers give meanings to their experiences abroad, I will conduct research during 2008 summer in South Korea. First of all, I will read memoirs by South Korean backpack travelers to examine how the travelers narrate and interpret their experiences abroad. For example, as powerpoint presentation, Mysterious English Land, shows, BiYa Han wrote serialized memoirs about her backpack travel all over the world (Kang and Lee 2007). She was a pioneer, and there have been more and more that kind of books following her. Reading the books, I will keep in mind to pay attention to the boundary between play and work, and between freedom and insecurity.

Secondly, I will conduct interviews with people who have done backpack traveling. To frame the questions for the interview, I will separate the interviewees based on their job status. The first group consists of students who have had experiences of backpack traveling by taking time off from their universities for one or more semesters. The other group includes people who quit their jobs and go travel for months or years. Some of them go travel frequently, while earning money from part-time jobs when they stay in South Korea between their travels. I expect that students and unemployed backpack travelers may have different explanations about their love for travel and purposes to go abroad. Their narration on self-development through travel abroad may have different meanings - accumulating cultural capital to become a marketable neoliberal subjects or spending time for contemplation with broad questions about life and self.

In addition, I will ask them how they differentiate playing and working when the boundary is blurred. Another question to ask particularly for travelers after graduating college is that how they see themselves as unemployed backpack travelers. It may mean that they have more freedom to choose what they want to do in their lives, but at the same time, they may think that it is because of insecurity of job market and they might have been forced to become flexible labor reservoir.

Conducting the interviews, I will pay attention to other possibly
significant factors such as class, gender, education level, and the kinds of capitals they have. I will look at how these factors affect their decision to go travel, their experiences abroad and narration about their travels. The attention to these factors may reveal that already constructed structural factors affect the decision making of people and their life course, while neoliberal discourses tend to transfer responsibility as much as possible onto individuals, obscuring the impact of structural factors.

Research Significance

Overall, I expect that this project on South Korean backpack travelers would provide a window to show how individuals follow, adapt, resist, and negotiate faced with prevailing external forces such as neoliberalism and globalization. While recognizing the critiques on neoliberal reforms from previous scholarship, the narratives of backpack travelers may show possible opportunities brought by neoliberalism and globalization. People may make use of blurred boundary of work and play for their own benefits and happiness, and take advantage of freedom and choices from flexible labor market. Throughout the project, I will explore how neoliberalism and globalization affect particular group of people, backpack travelers, and what kinds of meanings and self-development they expect from their experiences abroad. The project will be conducive to open more possibilities to explain the effects of neoliberalism and globalization to individuals’ lives, particularly backpack travelers’.

References


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