

Creating a Korean Educational System, 1945-1951

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Education is a national obsession in South Korea. Everywhere there are cram schools (*hagwon*) where elementary, middle and high school students study late in the evening and on weekends. Every neighborhood has a store selling textbooks, supplementary readings and guides to the entrance examinations. Adults, too, study at night schools attempting to advance their education. Real estate prices are dependent as much on the reputation of local schools as on the inherent desirability of the location or the quality of housing. South Korean families invest heavily in the education of their children, and children and young adults spend a huge portion of their time studying and preparing for examinations. Education pops up in conversation often, and the success of a son, a daughter or a grandchild at entering a good school is a source of great pride. Although education is important in every nation, even casual visitors became aware of the intense preoccupation South Koreans have with schooling. Furthermore, this preoccupation with education is not confined to a class or region but is an all pervasive feature of South Korean society.

This obsession with formal learning has accompanied a remarkable educational transformation of South Korea in the half-century after its liberation from Japan. In 1945, when the thirty-five year Japanese colonial rule in South Korea ended, the majority of adult Koreans were illiterate. At that time, mass primary education had only recently begun, and less than five percent of the adult population had more than an elementary school education. There was only one university in Korea, and most of its students were Japanese, not Korean. Five decades later virtually all South Koreans were literate, all young people attended primary and middle schools, and ninety percent graduated from high school. There were over 180 colleges and universities; and the proportion of college age men and women who enrolled in higher education was greater than in most European nations. The quality of education was high as well, at least judging by comparative international tests. These tests usually rate the math and sciences skills of South Korean primary and secondary students as among the highest in the world.

The rapid expansion of state directed formal education in the second half of the twentieth century is not unique to South Korea. National educational systems developed at impressive rates during this period in both Koreas. The growth of formal

schooling in South Korea was part of a what has been called the "Educational Revolution," the global expansion of national education systems that occurred after the Second World War, and was especially dramatic in the developing world. The post-1945 era saw the emergence of many new independent states, and the general acceptance of universal literacy as a national goal in almost every state. Yet, even if we place South Korea's educational development within the context of this educational revolution, it stands out in terms of the intensity of its development. Indeed, since the 1950s South Korea has been on the extreme end of the correlation between the general level of education and the level of economic development, with a higher level of educational attainment than other nations of comparable per capita income. As the country advanced economically into a major industrial power, the general level of educational attainment remained higher than almost all other nations at a similar level of GNP per capita. That is, not only did education keep abreast with the nation's much admired rapid economic development, but kept ahead.

South Korean education also differed from most other developing nations in the sequential nature of its educational development. In other words, an emphasis on bringing the entire school age population up to a certain level of schooling before building up higher tiers of the educational system, and in its greater stress on uniformity of content and quality. Only a few other nations, most notably Japan and the other tigers of East Asia: Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, so consistently pursued these aims. The nation's schooling was also characterized by long hours of study, strict discipline, educational advancement contingent on success in competitive entrance examinations, and a high level of competency among teachers, whose education followed a rigorous and rigorously enforced course of training.

It may be impossible to establish precise causal links between economic, political and educational development. Yet South Korea's pursuit of education clearly contributed to its industrial transformation: from the position it held as late as 1960 as among the world's poorest nations to its membership in 1996 in the OECD, an organization of industrially advanced states. South Korea's achievement in schooling its young provided it with a highly literate workforce. The educational system with its stress on teacher authority and intense competitiveness, driven in part by highly competitive school entrance examinations, produced a workforce that was highly disciplined, and a society ready for the competition characteristic of a capitalist industrial regime. This was especially true, since the sequential nature of educational development and the wide diffusion of values and goals that universal schooling achieved, brought much of the population into to this competitive struggle for educational advancement. The relative uniformity of educational standards and opportunity may also have accounted for the relatively equitable distribution of wealth in South Korea, and prevented the creation of an underclass, or of pockets of ignorance and poverty, that could breed discontent and social turmoil. South Korea has thus avoided the gaps in educational development that have characterized many developing nations, for the state has always stressed bringing the general population up to a shared standard of education rather than concentrating resources and efforts on creating a well schooled elite. The uniformity of the educational system, and the ability of a strong centralized state to impose uniformity of content, at least assisted in adjusting education to developmental goals as well as creating a sense of shared values.

South Korea's achievements in education are all the more remarkable in view of the turbulent nature of its history. The sudden end of four decades of harsh occupation by Japan was followed by the division of the nation by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. and by internal unrest. The emergence of a new state the Republic of Korea after a brief three years of U.S. military government came at a time of widespread poverty and internal tensions, and it possessed a government with questionable legitimacy and nationalist credentials. South Korea had to cope with not only the loss of markets, and most of its modest industrial structure which lie in the north, but with an influx of refugees from North Korea and Japan. Tragically, independence was followed by the horribly destructive Korean War (1950-1953). After a slow, economic recovery real industrial growth began only in the early 1960s. But educational development proceeded rapidly from 1945 onward and continued uninterrupted, seemingly immune from the post war political turmoil and economic chaos and warfare that punctuated its history.

South Korea's educational development has been characterized by other features that are in some ways just as striking as its growth. Perhaps foremost is the pervasive preoccupation with competitive examinations or as Koreans often term it examination mania. The Japanese phenomenon of examination hell" has been widely commented on by observers of that nation; South Korea too has its examination hell and it has been no less important in shaping schooling and society. The entire educational system from elementary school through high school has focused on entry examinations into higher levels of schooling. Examination preparation as the center of learning, which has deep roots in Korean history, has been widely criticized by the public and by officials, yet, a half century of reforms efforts have resulted in only an intensification of this phenomenon. Perhaps most, interesting is the degree in which examination mania came to embrace the virtually the entire populace; families from all social or regional grouping made enormous sacrifices and went to great lengths to aid the success of their children in the entry exams. It could be argued that South Korea became the most exam obsessed culture in the world.

Another prominent feature of South Korea's educational development has been the continual, and to a considerable extent, unsuccessful attempts by the state to coordinate education with economic development needs. While often seen as a model of successful state directed economic development South Korea's state planners have been less successful in matching the curriculum and shaping the school system with the economic development agenda. The creation of a well educated and disciplined work force was a major factor in accounting for South Korea's transformation into a industrial nation. Educational development, however, often took on a momentum of its own, driven by public demand for schooling and degrees rather than the practical requirements of industrialists and technocrats. As a result, government officials encountered difficulties in trying to promote technical and vocational training, and directing enrollment growth into ways that met the assumed needs of the expanding industrial economy. Policy initiatives to coordinate education with economic goals generated tensions and met resistance when they ran counter to popular aspirations for educational attainment. These difficulties the state had in coordinating education with development strategies suggest limitations to its ability to control national development and underline the role of popular demand for schooling in shaping the nation's social transformation.

As striking as the rapid growth of schooling, the preoccupation with competitive exams, and the difficulty a series of authoritarian, bureaucratic regimes have had in directing educational development to meet economic objectives, is the extraordinary cost of South Korean schooling. No nation in the world spends a larger share of its income on education. While this may seem admirable to some at first glance, less commendable is the fact that this cost has been progressively driven up for five decades by the relentless competition to score well on entry exams. Competition for educational entry into higher levels of schooling and into prestige institutions generated huge expenses for private tutoring, cram schools, and under the table payments to teachers and school officials. The scale of this problem cannot be precisely measured but is certainly enormous and has produced not only great financial hardship for millions of Koreans but also many anomalies in both the educational system and in the general economy. Another prominent feature of educational finance is the unusual degree to which the state has been able to transfer most of the cost of South Korean education directly to the students and their parents. Education has been publicly under funded. The state instead has relied on the popular demand for schooling to pay for the greater portion of educational development.

Thus both the success of Korean education and many of its problems can be traced to the education fever the unbridled social demand for schooling that has characterized the country since 1945. The origins of this education fever can be found in the Korea's pre-modern cultural heritage and its colonial experience, but that enormous drive for educational advancement was also a product of the very turbulence that characterized Korean society during this period. Korea up to the end of the nineteenth century was a society whose Confucian values equated education with rank and prestige. The Japanese during the rule of the peninsula, 1910-1945, placed severe restrictions on educational opportunity that led to the great pent-up demand for education. For the middle class of wealthier farmers and larger landowners, government functionaries, businessmen, professionals, and skilled workers, the narrow aperture that the Japanese had imposed on higher education was especially frustrating, since it meant condemnation to the lower ranks of status and privilege. After the fall of the Japanese Empire, these middle class Koreans sought to achieve for their sons and daughters what had been denied to them, creating the great spurt in the growth in education in the late 1940s and 1950s. Though this public pressure for access to higher levels of schooling was strongest among the urban middle class, it was shared by Koreans at all social strata; the farmer who sold his only ox or his best paddy to raise tuition for his children became a stereotype based on the reality of rural aspirations. Indeed, in part, because the ambition to achieve social mobility through schooling pervaded all social classes, the discrepancies between urban and rural rates of educational attainment became low compared to other developing nations.

In 1958, the South Korean government sent Lee Man-gap, one of the country's first American trained anthropologists, to survey rural communities. As he studied village attitudes and values he found everywhere a hope for social advancement through education, as well as complaints of the shortage of facilities and the expense of schooling. Although hope for an improvement in the family's fortune rested on seeing one of its sons rise to a prestigious position in society, Lee found that most parents regarded the education of their daughters to be important as well. It made

sense for even the poorest Koreans to invest in sending their oldest or ablest children to higher reaches of schooling, because of the corporate structure of the Korean family. Status in this rank conscious society was based as much on the corporate family as a whole, as the attainments of the individual. Success by a student in reaching higher levels of education brought about social benefits for the entire family, since achievements by one member brought an enhanced social position for all. Furthermore, the Confucian emphasis on filial piety strengthened the parental pressure on the pupil whose education was not simply an individual, but a corporate concern. This helps to account for the enormous sacrifices families made to educate their children that Lee and others observed.

Traditionally social barriers had restricted access to education, in practice, if not in theory. Members of the *yangban* aristocratic class held a monopoly over the higher civil examinations that were the gateway to coveted government posts that were needed to secure status and privilege in Korean society. For the majority of Koreans, basic instruction in the Confucian classics for their boys was all that could be expected. This changed with the breakdown of the old order in Korea during the first half of the twentieth century. Under the Japanese, higher education was no longer the exclusive right of the *yangban* families but was open to the lucky few who possessed the money or connections. After 1945, with the colonial restrictions on education removed and with the old social order crumbling, a belief that educational chances were there for everyone prevailed. This was further encouraged by the ideology of equality, equality of opportunity, and democratic education open to all that was encouraged by the American example, and that became part of public, as well as, intellectual discourse.

An important factor contributing to South Korea's education fever was the educational system between 1945 and 1951. When the Japanese Empire collapsed in 1945, it left the Korean people with a centralized, militarized, and rigidly meritocratic educational system. There was little educational autonomy as all effective decision making was controlled from the center. Schooling was carried out in a highly formalistic, ritualized and militaristic manner with the authority of the teacher in the classroom paramount. Korean children were assigned at an early age to one of several educational tracks. The education they received was strictly occupational in orientation with each student's future decided by the educational path he or she was placed on, with only a select few on the elite university track. It was also highly restricted so that there was an unmet social demand for schooling that made itself felt immediately upon the termination of Japanese rule in 1945. After the collapse of the Japanese empire when southern Korea was occupied by the United States for three years (1945-1948) an alternative system of education was presented. The Americans proposed that the centralized system with its narrow gate to higher levels of education would be replaced by an American-patterned educational system that was based on broad and equal opportunity, that was administratively decentralized and rooted in American ideas of child and community centered progressive and democratic education.

The U.S. military advisors and their Korean colleagues such as Yu Ok-kyŏm drew up plans for reforming Korean education along the lines of the American education system, but the American occupation ended before these plans were implemented. Consequently, the Americans made only a few minor administrative changes in the centralized

administrative system created by the Japanese colonial government. It was, therefore, left to the new government to establish the basic education law that set the structure of the educational system that was to serve the nation for the next decades. Establishing the basic education law became the highest priority of the Ministry of Education (MOE) as the Department of Education was renamed. The law was worked out in the National Assembly which became the main forum for a public discourse over education .

When the Republic of Korea was proclaimed in 1948, a lively debate and discussion among Korean educators on the type of education they wanted for their nation was underway. Much of this debate occurred in the framework of educational organizations. In 1948, there were three main organizations for the promotion of educational ideas in South Korea: the *Sae Kyoyuk Y?n'guhoe* (New Education Research Society), the *Munhwa Kyoyuk Hy?phoe* (Culture and Education Association), and the *Chos?n Kyoyuk Y?n'guhoe* (Korean Education Research Society). The largest of these the *Sae Kyoyuk Y?n'guhoe* was organized by advocates of the so-called "new education" (*sae kyoyuk*) as American Deweyism was called. Among its leaders were O Ch'?n-s?k and Yun Chae-ch'?l who were active promoters of progressive education reforms during the American military government. Their views were disseminated through *Sae Kyoyuk* (New Education), the main journal of education after 1948, in workshops run for teachers, and in pamphlets, textbooks and newspaper articles. The *Sae Kyoyuk* leaders felt they were introducing a truly new education which with its ideas of child-centered classrooms, and individualistic learning, broke with traditional Korean Confucian education. Almost all were concerned with both classroom instruction and democratizing society, and felt there was a direct link between the structure of the classroom and of society. Virtually every article dealing with education, linked whatever principle or method that was being discussed with the construction of a democratic society.

Not surprisingly members of the *Sae Kyoyuk Y?n'guhoe*, were usually pro-American in their attitudes. Americans were the liberators of Korean education from the rigidity, formalism and authoritarianism of Japanese education. Americans were victorious in the war, and this triumph was considered by many a product of a superior society based on a superior set of educational principles. Kang Kil-su, an active supporter of *sae kyoyuk*, wrote that the "Americans listened to educators opinion," and introduced the idea of an educational system that was run by professional educators. Thus, American education was free from bureaucratic control; it was a system that respected the autonomy of teachers, respected their professional expertise, and favored decentralized control. In the American educational system, decisions were made through committees and a "democratic attitude" prevailed in educational administration. If "stiffness" (*ky?ngjiks?ng*) was the legacy of colonial education, Kang wrote, "flexibility" (*yunt'ongs?ng*) was the alternative provided by American education. This flexibility would allow for individual freedom and a practical, problem-solving approach to the nation's reconstruction. All agreed that education reform was part of the reform of society. Kim P?m-nin, a Buddhist scholar, who served as the third Minister of education, echoed the views of most society members when he wrote that "the basic principle of *sae kyoyuk* is to apply education to the needs of society," and that "education must seek to reform society." Members advocated a democratic reform of society through the new democratic, American inspired education.

A more nationalist tone was characteristic of another educational organization the *Chosŏn Kyoyuk Yŏn'guhoe* founded in August 1946 by An Ho-sang, who served as President Rhee's first education minister. An and the other core members, Sim T'ae-jin, Son Chin-t'ae and Sa-gong Hwan have been regarded as opponents of the *sae kyoyuk* and their organization during its short existence from 1946-1949 promoted more traditional views on education. The society's journal *Chosŏn Kyoyuk (Korean Education)* and its editor Kim Ki-o emphasized education for national revival. Adopting a nationalist stance, the members were critical of those who borrowed too freely from the United States. Articles in the society's journal frequently expressed resentment at Korea's involvement in the Cold War. Sim T'ae-jin for instance urged that Korea develop its own educational system based on its own unique culture, which would be different from either American or Soviet education. An Ho-sang argued that *sae kyoyuk* was "simply not appropriate" for Korea. Members of this society gave greater stress to the ethical content of education, and expressed fears that the new education reforms would lead to a break down of discipline and morality. A third major educational organization the *Munhwa Kyoyuk Hyŏphoe*, was largely a vehicle for the promotion of the ideas of Paek Nak-chun an Christian educator trained in the United States, who also promoted championed adopting U.S. educational methods and administration.

The dominant voices of among Korean educators in 1948, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and their supporters in the National Assembly and among the public believed that the school system should be maintained along the lines established under the American military government. This system was held to be based on the principle of egalitarianism and would serve to produce a society that was democratic, open at all levels, with equal opportunity the central operating principle. But for some Koreans, including the non-educators in the bureaucracy and many members of the National Assembly, the American inspired schooling system was a dangerous innovation that would erode standards and hinder the development of an educational system that would be suitable for Korean needs. They called for a system that would provide a specialized, multi-tracked schooling and that would maintain the best of the pre-liberation education. The conflicts over the school system and the administrative structure complicated the process and it took two and a half years to formulate the Education Law. Yet this was the most urgent task concerning education for the new government. So crucial was the debate over the Education Law that not even the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 interrupted it.

On 28 September 1948 the Ministry of Education (MOE) submitted the Basic Educational Law (*Kyoyuk Kibon-pŏp*) drafted by respected educators Paek Nak-chun, O Ch'ŏn-sŏk, Chang I-uk, Yun Chin-o and Hyŏn Sang-yun, all among the most respected figures in Korean education. The laws retained essential features of the American system. Among these were: the 6-3-3-4 school system (six years of primary school, three years of middle school, three years of high school and four years of college or university), the one track system in which students pursued a single curriculum path well into secondary school, and the September to June school year. It also called for the implementation of the local school boards that had been proposed by the military government the previous year. In 1949, the Ministry of Education was dominated by proponents of an education system that was based on the American model. Politicians in the National Assembly, however, were more cautious about abandoning the educational system inherited from Japan. This was reflected in a separate set of

proposed educational laws that the members of the Education and Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly drew up. The Education Committee's draft education law maintained the six-year elementary school but established a two-track secondary school system. Three to four years of middle school (*chunghakkyo*) would be followed by a two-year college preparatory or a four-year vocational higher school (*sir?pkod?nghakkyo*). The latter was seen as terminal but the preparatory school students could continue on to four years of university or college.

The debate that ensued centered on two versions of the educational law. The two versions reflected fundamental differences in educational policies. The National Assembly draft essentially resembled the prewar Japanese system with its early sorting of students into specialized tracks. The MOE version maintained the essential features of the American system with its unitary single-track system. There was general agreement on a universal, compulsory six-year elementary schooling but little agreement on any other specific sections of the educational law. Nationalist feeling ran strong and proponents of both models were careful in arguing that they were creating a Korean educational system and not implementing a purely borrowed one. Supporters of both versions attacked the other for uncritical foreign borrowing. The MOE version was defended by its supporters as "proper for Korea and because every other country has adopted this system." While supporters of the National Committee version attacked the current system as too American and unsuitable for Korea's needs. Framers of the MOE version were also accused of merely translating the American inspired 1947 Fundamental Education Law of Japan. What was needed, critics charged, was a truly Korean educational law, not a copy from another country. Responding to these charges, An Ho-sang in a newspaper interview replied that "whether it is American or Japanese, we will adopt whatever is best." The MOE proposal, however, he added, was "far from being Japanese." Ironically the stigma of being "Japanese" was attached to both versions of the educational law. The National Assembly draft was lambasted as adhering to the prewar imperial Japanese system and the MOE draft as being a copy of the newly established educational structure of postwar Japan.

Most significant among the differences American model/MOE draft and the Japanese model/National Assembly draft was the greater emphasis on access to upper levels of education in the former and the more elitist approach to education in the latter. The question of how open the educational system should be at the higher levels became the central issue in the formulation of the education law. Politicians, officials and educators who argued for separate vocational and academic middle schools asserted that a common, general three-year middle school, that is, nine years of general education, was a luxury that Korea could not afford. And they further maintained that greater emphasis should be placed on career training. These arguments carried considerable weight in the National Assembly and by November, there was a strong push for a four-year academic or vocational middle school followed by a two-year college preparatory school for university-bound students and higher technical schools for vocational middle school graduates.

Practical as these arguments may have been they ran counter to a broad-based push for access to education that was occurring throughout Korea, which was in part a result of pent-up demand for education brought about by the restrictive policies of the Japanese colonial government. Noted by many was what one observer described as the "almost frightening" determination by parents to have their children advance as far

as possible up the educational ladder. Everywhere private secondary schools and colleges were springing up to meet this demand. Thus there were two related reasons for supporting single-track education: to create a democratic and truly egalitarian society rather than a more rigidly structured, elitist society; and to keep the gate of opportunity from narrowing to an academic track available only to a university-bound few.

During the subsequent debate no clear agreement could be reached and a bewildering variety of modifications were proposed. Some suggested maintaining a single-track system but reducing secondary school to four years. Most Assemblymen wanted a single institution of secondary education that would be of two types academic or vocational while others argued that this would force students to decide upon a career while they were still in elementary school. But supporters of vocational secondary education maintained that there was a need to begin vocational education early and that academic students needed a long rigorous preparation for college. Led by Yi Yong-jun, chairman of the National Assembly Education Committee, proponents of the National Assembly draft felt that they were building an educational system that would serve the nation's need for high professional standards. What Korea required was an educational system that would produce qualified specialists with needed technical skills and that would insure that the command posts of the new nation would be guided by only the brightest, most talented and rigorously trained. Yi expressed fear that the educational standards were falling as the result of the rapid expansion of education after 1945. American reformers had reformed too fast without regard to the situation of Korea and, as a result, academic standards were falling. Ultimately not only intellectual or technical skills, but the morality and the spirit of the nation would be endangered.

For professional educators such as O Ch'ŏn-sŏk, Paek Nak-chun, Kang Kil-su, and their supporters in the National Assembly and the press, the establishment of a single secondary school instead of separate middle and high schools and the differentiation of post-elementary school into vocational and elitist academic tracks would be a painful setback to the creation of a new, democratic, egalitarian society. They expressed fears that this would destroy the principle of equal opportunity, that it would lead to class consciousness, and benefit the rich. "The 4-2 system will aggravate class consciousness, its enactment will be a mistake," the *Chosŏn ilbo*, a leading morning paper, editorialized. Defenders of the two-track system countered this argument by stating that in reality most Korean children, especially those in rural areas, could not afford to attend school, so the "principle of uniform education is only an ideal." In actual practice, the argument went, Korean education was two-tracked: basic education for the poor and advanced education for the rich. The most rural students could expect beyond primary school was some practical training.

Despite the vocal opposition of most leading Korean educators, such as O Ch'ŏn-sŏk, Kang Kil-su and Hyŏn Sang-yun, the principle of a multi-track single secondary school won out. There were several factors that may help to explain this setback to the more American style system. Principals and owners of secondary schools did not want to see their institutions divided into separate middle and high schools, especially if this meant placing them under separate administrators. Furthermore, Parents and educators disliked the idea of children sitting for two sets of entry exams, one for middle

school and one for high school. Another reason may be sought in the composition of the National Assembly. The First National Assembly elected on 10 May 1948 consisted primarily of independents and members of minor political organizations making it difficult to assign party affiliations. Assemblymen tended to be well educated, more than half were college or university educated, although a tenth of them were without any formal education. Many of the older members were educated during the late Yi dynasty, but most had received their higher levels of education in Japan or in Korea under Japanese rule. Only one in fourteen had received education in the West, although some had attended Western mission schools. By profession, the largest number came from backgrounds in government service. More than a third had served as civil servants in the Japanese bureaucracy. In the second largest occupational category were educators who made up about 18 percent of the membership in the Assembly. While most but not all of these educators in the National Assembly supported the 6-3-3-4 system, the majority of other Assemblymen supported a system closer to the one in which they had been educated and in which many had served through the bureaucracy that administered it. Consequently, on 26 November 1949, this National Assembly by a comfortable margin voted for the 6-4-2(4)-4 system: six-year elementary school, followed by either a four-year academic middle school or a four-year vocational middle school. Those attending the four-year academic middle schools could attend a two-year college preparatory school and continue on to four years of university. Vocational middle school students could continue on to a two or four-year technical school which would be the terminus of their educational advancement. Specialized normal secondary schools under strict national supervision would serve as still another specialized track for teachers. This system was almost identical with the Japanese system. One difference though was that middle school had been shortened from five to four years. As one of the authors of this change, Assemblyman Yi Chae-ik, explained "for a poor country like Korea...trained persons are needed who can finish education in a very short time."

A major controversy over Korean education in the First Republic was whether all educational decision making would be made at the center or whether there would be a degree of decentralized control. The American military government had, out of expedience and fear of disorder, run education as they did the other organs of administration, with the same apparatus of centralized control that they found in place in 1945. Yet American educators saw local community control over education as an essential feature of a democratic society. A highly centralized bureaucratic educational administration was, the Americans believed, vulnerable to authoritarian subversion or manipulation. They regarded such systems of education as being a major factor in the formation of authoritarian regimes in prewar Germany and Japan. Creation of school boards would break the vertical lines of control that led to authoritarian societies and would stimulate and democratize education by generating alternate viewpoints on educational policy and implementation. For many Koreans excited by the new ideas on education that the Americans introduced, the introduction of local school boards was a high priority of educational development. The MOE gave three reasons to the National Assembly for the need for local educational autonomy: to avoid bureaucratic "strict control," to insure that education was suitable for the community, and to develop a sense of national consciousness in educational policy through popular participation in the administrative process. Educators such as O Ch'ŏn-sŏk, Kang Kil-su, Paek Nak-chun and Yu Chin-o spoke of the need for democratic education, for community involvement in schools reflecting the influence of Deweyism

in the discussions of child-centered, community-centered, education, and a school system that was a model of democratic values. Legislators and educators spoke of the need to limit bureaucratic authority and to raise local support for the finance of education. Another major reason that advocates gave for the existence of local school boards was their usefulness as a device for fundraising. The main argument for local educational autonomy, however, was the need to limit the role of the general bureaucracy in controlling education. The chairman of the National Assembly Education Committee, Yi Yong-jun explained that the creation of local school boards and local educational districts (*kyoyukku*) was "the best means of securing educational administration." The issue was to maintain the administration of the schools in the hands of professional teachers, educators, and parents and prevent the schools from becoming an instrument for authoritarian control. Only by creating educational districts could the "general administration," that is non-educators, be prevented from "impeding genuine educational administration," the future Educational Committee chairman, Kw?n T'ae-h?i declared; "[we must] insure the consistency of education that is not subject to change in administration." Germany, Italy, and Japan were cited as examples of the political manipulation of education by a strict central bureaucracy unimpeded by the control of schools by educational personnel and by local communities. Furthermore, the creation of local educational districts would, it was argued, promote the security of teachers by protecting them from the political pressures exerted by a central bureaucracy.

But local educational autonomy was greatly watered down. The National Assembly rejected arguments that the local school boards be directly elected. Opposition came from the Interior Ministry that objected to the local school boards arguing that this would interfere with the "uniformity of administration." Resistance came also from the Minister of Finance who regarded the system as too ambitious and costly. School boards were created at the county (*kun*) and provincial (*to*) levels but they had little real control over curriculum and standards and were abolished in 1960. South Korea remained highly centralized. This made it less flexible but also meant that the state was able to impose uniform standards and a uniform curriculum.

The Basic Educational Law the Basic School Law was passed at the end of November and promulgated on 31 December 1949. The majority in the National Assembly had supported Yi Y?ng-jun and his fellow Education Committee members who essentially revised the American-inspired system to a school system closely resembling the Japanese one that had existed before 1945. University was four years and six years for medical students; no change from the American introduced system. Regulations for a system of adult schools (*kongmin hakkyo*) were established basically along the lines of the MOE draft. More importantly the principle of local educational autonomy had prevailed. Nevertheless, the egalitarian ideal and the 6-3-3-4 system that was associated with it had lost out. The resultant law disappointed An Ho-sang, the staff of the MOE, the leaders of the Korean Federation of Teachers' Associations (KFEA), and the professional educators who had supported the MOE draft. Hy?n Sang-yun, president of Kory? University and one of the compilers of the MOE draft expressed "surprise at the changes from [our] proposal."

Unhappy with the rejection of its original plan, the Ministry of Education almost immediately set out to revise the Education Law. With the support of the KFEA, a series of meetings to revise the Education Law were held in each province. These

meetings organized special committees to lobby for the revision of the law (*hakche suj?ng sim?i-hoe*) urging the restoration of the 6-3-3-4 system. On 9 February 1950, the proposed revisions, that is, the original MOE draft, was resubmitted to the National Assembly. At that time, Kw?n T'ae-h?i the new chairman of the National Assembly Education and Social Affairs Committee came out in support of most of the revisions. He suggested that high school be made uniformly three years, that entrance to high school be limited to those who completed a three-year middle school, and that the opening day be changed to September first. An Ho-sang then elaborated on the need to create a uniform educational system.

In the ensuing debate, supporters of proposed revisions, argued that the overriding principle had to be equal opportunity in education. Even though the three-year high schools would be divided into academic, technical, agricultural, and fishery schools, students enrolled at any high school should be allowed to sit for the university entrance exam. All should take a common core of courses that would prepare them for that exam. Supporters of multi-track secondary school cited the example of Germany with its bifurcation of secondary education into *realschule* and *gymnasium* as examples of professional excellence. They also spoke of the need to limit university enrollment to the numbers of intellectually trained personnel that the economy could absorb. Furthermore, fear was expressed that there was already a surplus of college graduates. But in the end, attacked as elitist, and unprogressive and as harking back to the discredited system that Japan itself in defeat had rejected, the multi-track system was rejected and the upper level secondary school system was revised. In place of the two-year college preparatory school and the two to four-year higher technical school the MOE proposal for a uniform three-year high school (*kod?ng hakkyo*) was approved on 9 February 1950. The new system was 6-4-3-4: six years of primary school, four years of middle school, three years of vocational or academic high school, and four years of college or university. Also consistent with the emphasis on equal opportunity, was the rejection of a suggestion by chairman Kw?n that the high school entrance exam be limited to middle school students. When the National Assembly met in Pusan the emergency capital in February 1951, debate on the Education Law briefly resumed. On 19 February three revisions were suggested: the reduction of the four-year middle school to three years, the reduction of junior college from four to two years, and the return to a September opening day. Only the last and least important part of the MOE proposed school system failed, with the school year continuing to start on April 1 (later this was changed to March 1). Supporters of the 6-3-3-4 system prevailed. Every major outline of the MOE draft was put into law except for the school year.

Several reasons account for the adoption of this system. Most articulate educators supported the belief that educational should be uniform and open to broad access. Even An Ho-sang, a strong opponent of what he felt an uncritical acceptance of American ideology, supported the principle of allowing as much access to the higher levels of education as possible and was willing to support other "American" features of the education draft for this purpose. He accused the adversaries of the MOE draft of seeking to perpetuate the evils of the restrictive Japanese system that kept Koreans backward and was suspicious of attempts to encourage vocational tracking of education that assigned the nation's children to an intellectually inferior education. The uniformity of the American system, he declared, was conducive to national unity and the "unification of the Korean spirit and mind." Although he remained an opponent

of American educational methods and the excessive reliance on translated American textbooks and materials. The MOE version of the education law was also promoted by rallies organized by the Korean Federation of Educators Associations (KFEA), a national body of that was organized in 1947 with the encouragement of the American authorities. The prestige of these professional educators and their persistent efforts after their initial setback may have been instrumental in convincing enough National Assemblymen to support the MOE's proposed school system. Conspicuous in the debate was the lack of any clear direction from either Rhee or Prime Minister Yi P?m-s?k, neither appeared to have held a clear and consistent vision of education for the nation. Considering Rhee weak support in the Assembly his lack of open support for the new educational system probably assisted in its acceptance. The adoption of the American school system was at least partly accounted for by the prestige of the U.S. at this time in Korea and the fact that the Japanese were instituting similar reforms themselves

But most importantly the MOE's call for a single track system and broad access to education reflected the general desire of most of the articulate Korean public. All the major papers, including the *Tong-a ilbo* the leading evening paper, and the *Chos?n ilbo* the most prestigious of the morning papers, supported this proposed educational system. The press in turn reflected its urban middle class readership which placed high priority on seeing to it that educational opportunities be provided for their children. With all seats in the National Assembly up for election in the spring of 1950 this popular demand could not be entirely ignored. Later the broad support for the open educational system was manifested when attempts by successive governments to limit access to higher education and reintroduce tracking ran into intense public opposition. Whatever, the immediate prospects for most Koreans were, the hope of advancement up the ladder of success was not to be denied.

This education structure that was adopted was both a product of the social demand for education and also further promoted that demand. Education was universal and compulsory at the primary level and open at the higher levels. The new school system was based on the concept that the opportunity for promotion to higher levels of schooling should remain open to all and that children should not be relegated to a lesser educational rung early in life. Although the system underwent a number of mostly minor revisions these fundamental features would remain a permanent part of the South Korean structure of formal learning.

Few newly independent nations after 1945 rejected their colonial educational structures. South Korea's change in educational systems was made easier by Japan's own educational reforms, but it also an indication of the strength desire for South Koreans to seek to improve the life chances of their younger family members through educational advancement and avoid placing them into fixed terminal tracks. The decision had an enormous impact of South Korea's subsequent development for by allowing the possibility for advancement at every level of schooling the way was open for unrelenting competition at every rung of the educational ladder. Many Koreans saw no point of schooling as terminal but each as only a preparation for the next step. This attitude created an enormous demand for higher levels of schooling. It would also inadvertently undermine vocational education since vocational education came to be seen as an unfortunate way station on the path to a more desirable non-vocational university education.

Educational was also to be sequential in development. Government officials argued that Korea was a poor country which could not afford an elaborate system of higher education but could and should place emphasis on basic schooling. The administration displayed a commitment for universal primary education that was enshrined in the Educational Law as well as in the constitution. This policy of focusing on universal primary education would bring a common basic education to all Koreans with positive consequences but it also led to a chronic shortage of middle and high schools and consequently contributed to an intense competition for entry into secondary education. The final outcome of the six year period from 1945 to 1951, when the basic structure of the national school system was created, was that South Korea established an educational structure that was open to the public' s universal call for educational opportunity. It was uniform, centralized and enshrined the principle of equal opportunity, reflecting and facilitating a relentless social demand for education that would transform South Korea.