

## Actual vs. Ideal Attraction: Trends in the Mobility of Korean International Students

Peter G. Ghazarian, EdD  
Department of Education  
Keimyung University (Korea)

### Abstract

*In the Republic of Korea (Korea), pressures emerging from the domestic education system seem to drive growing numbers of tertiary students abroad. This trend creates an outward flow of resources and has a number of impacts on Korean society. This study examines trends in the movement of tertiary students out of Korea from 2001 to 2010 and compares destinations' actual market share with the Korean public's ideal attraction. The results provide insight into the push-pull factors influencing Korean students' destination choice and the influence of higher education policy in the global market for international students.*

**Keywords:** higher education, student mobility, Korea, international students, policy

---

Global higher education consists of “(1) global flows and networks of words and ideas, knowledge, finance, and inter-institutional dealings; with (2) national higher education systems shaped by history, law, policy, and funding; and (3) individual institutions operating at the same time locally, nationally, and globally” (Marginson, 2006, p. 1). In this multifaceted role, global higher education influences the patterns and strength of links in the emerging networks of globalization. Governments engage in the global higher education market because of the appeal of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the knowledge economy (Varghese, 2008). In this growing market, players increasingly attempt to influence the flow of knowledge, reshape tertiary education systems, and spur HEI innovation to ensure that they are receiving a net benefit.

Cross-border students represent an important currency in the flows of global tertiary education. Past research on these students has focused on marketing strategies for making destinations more attractive (Forbes & Hamilton, 2004; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007), the decision to study abroad (Park, 2009; Salisbury et al., 2009) and the qualities that make destinations attractive, such as cost, ideology, prestige, target language and culture, employment opportunities, relative income level, and visa programs (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott, 2012; Varghese, 2008). Flows in the international student market can be understood through the framework of push-pull factors. Push factors influence students to look abroad for education and pull factors the decision in favor of a particular destination (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The Republic of Korea (henceforth, Korea) has seen rapid social change since the end of the Korean War. After decades of economic growth, the social infrastructure, particularly education, has struggled to keep pace with the changing economic demands. In the knowledge economy,

human capital has become a primary source of economic growth (Varghese 2008). Thus, for Korea's economic success to continue, the education system must foster specialized human resources needed in the private sector. Higher education has an important role to play in ensuring students acquire the skills necessary to become productive members of society. Yet in Korea, increasing numbers of tertiary students are turning to the global market for higher education. As the Korean government and HEIs attempt to retain more students, their foreign counterparts are attempting to attract more students abroad. In this situation, all parties will need a deeper understanding of pressures influencing the market for Korean tertiary students. Additionally, the Korean case may provide some insight into the future trends and preferences of outbound students from other countries in the region.

This study examines trends in the flow of tertiary students out of Korea between 2001 and 2010. In particular, this study analyzes the stakeholders in Korean higher education, the push factors contributing to outbound flows of domestic students, and the consequences of students going abroad. The study determines:

1. How does ideal interest in a destination compare with a destination's actual market share?
2. What destination pull factors influence outbound students' destination choice?
3. What does this reveal about higher education policy in Korea and popular international destinations for Korean tertiary students?

### **The Stakeholders**

When household incomes rise and tertiary education enrollment rates grow, more students express their frustrations with domestic systems of higher education and decide to study abroad (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). As growing numbers of students internationally take part in cross-border higher education, the amount of resources at stake within the global higher education market grows, driving international competition among HEIs (Choudaha & Li, 2012). Market players increasingly attempt to influence the global higher education market to their benefit. In the case of Korea, the key stakeholders in this market include the Korean government, Korean HEIs, foreign governments, foreign HEIs, and Korean tertiary students.

For the Korean government, cross-border tertiary education presents both benefits and drawbacks. On one hand, outbound students may return with new knowledge and global professional networks. Korea also has the opportunity to attract foreign resources into its own economy by cultivating flows of cross-border students into the Korean higher education system. On the other hand, Korean students who do not return after studying abroad contribute to outward flows of domestic resources. Thus, the global higher education market offers both economic opportunities and risks for the government.

For Korean HEIs, more students going abroad represent a significant challenge to the sustainability of many institutions. Population decline and growing numbers of outbound cross-border students put pressure on Korean HEIs to attract students. With fewer domestic students, Korean HEIs are forced to recruit aggressively abroad to fill empty places (McNeill, 2009; McNeill, 2011). Some universities, such as Myungshin University and Sunghwa College, have already been forced to close as the government attempts to ensure quality in this time of intense competition (Yonhap News, 2011a). While this pressure on Korean HEIs may be beneficial to domestic tertiary education over time, it imposes an enormous amount of stress on the system in the short term as HEIs compete to attract the limited number of domestic students and meet rising government quality standards.

Meanwhile, for foreign governments and foreign HEIs, outbound Korean students represent an opportunity for gain. These students are a source of both financial and human resources (Ghazarian, 2011a) for a destination's economy. Typically, cross-border students must pay tuition fees and spend a considerable amount of money to maintain their lives in a foreign country. This financial influx benefits both foreign HEIs and their host communities. After students conclude their studies, they may take jobs and provide skilled labor, further contributing to the destination's economy. In other words, these students are seen as a necessary source of foreign labor to replace aging domestic populations in many destinations (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007).

For Korean tertiary students, cross-border tertiary education offers a valuable alternative to the domestic system. Higher education qualifications have become a 'positional good' (Hirsch, 1976) that can lead to a better social status and stronger lifetime professional opportunities (Hirsch, 1976; Marginson, 2006). On one hand, a foreign degree can provide graduates with an advantage in the job market (Varghese, 2008) by differentiating a student from his or her peers. Cross-border study also offers a chance to escape the frustrations of the domestic system into a foreign system that judges learners according to different criteria. On the other hand, going abroad to study in higher education also has costs to Korean tertiary students. Informal networks among alumni from a particular HEI can be extremely important for professional life in Korea (Lee & Brinton, 1996). These informal social networks forged in Korean HEIs are often a source of employment, business deals, and other opportunities for their members. Thus, study abroad not only incurs a heavy financial burden, but also means foregoing the opportunity to join such a social network in Korea.

### **Push Factors for Korean Families & Students**

After China and India, Korea is the third largest source of outbound cross-border tertiary students (UNESCO, 2010). Compared to other major source countries, Korea has a very high number of outbound students relative to its population. This trend seems to stem from Korea's economic development. Despite the country's economic change, education remains a rigid, conservative system leftover from the period of industrialization. As other source countries develop, they too may see dramatic increases in the number of students who choose to pursue their higher education abroad. Thus, the case of Korea offers a window into one possible future and set of challenges for tertiary education policy in other source countries.

A number of push factors contribute to the large numbers of outbound tertiary Korean students. Previous research by Park (2009) and KEDI (2005) shows a strong correlation between dissatisfaction with domestic education in Korea and a positive attitude towards studying abroad. These two studies find that Korean students are attracted by the use of English at foreign HEIs and are disappointed with the quality, expensive private tutoring, excessive admissions competition, job prospects, atmosphere, and teaching methods of the domestic education system.

One cannot underestimate the influence of "education fever" in Korean society (Kim et al., 2005). As many families obsess over the educational performance of their children (Chang, 2008), education fever has fueled a culture of excessive competition (Lee, 2011). There are a number of detrimental social consequences. The high-stress educational culture is often associated with negative psychological repercussions for students (Hwang, 2003; Yang & Shin, 2008; Lee et al., 2010), and Korea has one of the highest suicide rates in the developed world (OECD, 2011) with youth suicide the largest cause of death among young people in Korea (Yonhap News, 2012). The system also has very real severe financial consequences for the Korean families, despite government policies to decrease these costs (Byun 2010; Lee et al., 2010). For example, areas with a reputation for high quality public and shadow education are much more expensive places to live (Woo, 2012). These housing costs only add to the financial burden of tuition fees for shadow

education, such as tutoring services and private institutions for study outside of public schools designed to give students a competitive advantage on their examinations.

In fact, educational competition has intensified to the point that the overall costs may now outweigh the benefits of education in Korea. Such a system hinders individuals, households, and the economy. While the status quo of the Korean education system is not universally negative, it still poses a significant policy challenge. In such a situation, the relative costs and benefits may push families to consider sending children to study overseas earlier. For instance, some high socioeconomic status (SES) families avoid the Korean secondary education system altogether and decide that a secondary and tertiary education abroad would be more beneficial for their children relative to the cost.

The university entrance system in Korea, hinged upon *suneung* examination scores, likely further contributes to the numbers of outgoing students. The high-stakes system was designed with meritocratic fairness in mind. Unfortunately, the growing importance of shadow education has perverted *suneung* preparation into an economic endeavor tied to the amount of resources available for shadow education tuition (Dawson, 2010) and shadow education market savvy in the family. In order to decrease the intensity of this competition, the government has tried to discourage the public belief in the necessity of higher education for success in the job market (Korea Herald, 2011) and to restrict the provision of shadow education. Despite their efforts, the rate of tertiary education attendance and shadow education participation remains high. Other countries with similar high-stakes university admissions systems, such as the People's Republic of China, may also see the concern over shadow education and excessive competition worsen over time.

Furthermore, students in Korea's highly status-conscious culture are reluctant to attend domestic universities that do not have strong reputations. As explained by Lee and Brinton (1996), "School background is a basis of informal social groupings that serve as an important source of social capital among South Koreans" (p. 182). In other words, lower tier institutions may not provide tertiary students with the personal and professional networks they would like to have later in their lives. The mass quantity of places available at domestic HEIs inherently decreases their perceived value (Marginson, 2006). Additionally, low prestige HEIs do not offer the same level of personal branding as a degree from a well-known university (Ghazarian, 2011b), branding that can provide a competitive edge in the job market that may justify the sacrifice of developing a social network at a domestic HEI.

The relative quality and cost of higher education institutions in Korea may also contribute to the number of students pursuing their tertiary education overseas. Although highly ranked Korean universities do hold the allure of domestic networking opportunities, the top fifty ranked global universities in any of the international ranking systems is dominated by universities in English-speaking countries (Ghazarian, 2011b). The waxing importance of English in the highly competitive job market (Park, 2010) only further contributes to the interest in international study. Consequently, students and families dissatisfied with the higher education entrance process or the quality of HEIs may look overseas for other opportunities.

### **Repercussions for Korea**

Clearly, many push factors contribute to the decision to pursue a higher education outside of Korea. From education fever to the *suneung* examination system, many students feel dissatisfied or trapped. Compounding these negative feelings, students and their families may have concerns about the quality and cost of domestic HEIs and employment prospects after graduation. As these

pressures direct more attention overseas, Korea can expect a number of social consequences associated with rising numbers of outbound tertiary students. These consequences may include demographic challenges, economic impacts, widening class stratification, and the rise of education inflation in the job market.

To clarify, Korea faces an impending issue of population decline (Chin et al., 2012; Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011) and the paramount role of education in Korean society factors into the low birth rate. The high cost of education, driven by “education fever,” contributes to the decision to have fewer children in order to concentrate family resources (Lee, 2007). The declining number of children means that fewer domestic students will enroll at Korean HEIs each year. As a larger share of students looks overseas, Korea’s HEIs will continue to face a considerable amount of pressure.

Economically, outgoing international students create a bridgehead for outward flows of resources. Families must support cross-border students’ endeavors while overseas, sending significant sums abroad. This outward flow of financial resources represents a lost opportunity for Korean HEIs and their host communities (Ghazarian, 2011a). Additionally, outgoing Korean international students also contribute to the net loss of human resources and young people, often referred to as brain drain. As Espove et al. (2010) report, South Korea faces potential demographic pressure from emigration of the highly educated and young people. For example, the US Department of Energy’s Oak Ridge Institute for Education found that 42% of graduates from science and engineering doctoral degrees had not left the USA five years past graduation (Han, 2012). In spending time abroad, larger numbers of students become exposed to the possibility of emigration. These trends represent further demographic challenges for the economy.

Meanwhile, SES increasingly impacts educational attainment and success. In fact, recent educational trends contribute to the development of widening cross-generational class stratification. Those from higher SES backgrounds with more resources at their disposal often spend more on shadow education tuition, presumably giving their children an edge over their classmates (Dawson, 2010). Some families may effectively be priced out of equal educational opportunity (C. Lee, 2005). In order to ensure a privileged future for their children, many of those households rich enough to support their son or daughter to study abroad from a younger age are beginning to do so, even if that means dividing the family (J. Lee, 2011). Furthermore, higher SES families are also able to afford tuition at more prestigious destinations that distinguish their children from their peers.

If these trends persist across multiple generations, class stratification will continue to grow over time. One aspect of this class stratification includes growing cultural differences between social classes. As children (and oftentimes an accompanying parent) return to Korea from studying abroad, they bring back with them aspects of the host culture they experienced. For instance, Park and Abelmann (2004) describe how attitudes towards English language and education can be associated with a family’s SES. Affluent families become increasingly successful at using their resources to give their children an educational and cultural advantage. As a result, an individual’s educational success may be increasingly determined by his or her family’s SES.

The emergence of education inflation in the Korean job market represents another economic challenge for the education system’s status quo. Growing numbers of young Koreans spend more time in education and do not participate in the labor market. Meanwhile, as academic qualifications become increasingly common, they also lose their value (Marginson, 2006). Jobs require ever-higher qualifications, increasing the cost of education for students and removing human resources from the labor market for ever-longer periods of time. In order to stem the rise of academic inflation, the government has attempted to raise the profile of vocational schools (Yonhap News, 2011b), but such initiatives are unlikely to have much lasting effect. Meanwhile, as more students decide to study abroad, a foreign degree may lose its luster and also fall victim to education

inflation. A foreign degree could possibly come to be perceived as a requirement rather than a relative merit for particular jobs.

The Korean government and HEIs need to carefully examine trends related to the global higher education market in Korean society. Greater understanding of the phenomenon could help avert unnecessary economic costs, growing social problems, and future demographic challenges. Policy reform must focus on increasing the attractiveness of a Korean higher education for young Koreans, students from other countries, and the job market. Meanwhile, foreign governments and HEIs looking to attract Korean tertiary students would also benefit from better understanding patterns in the demand for international tertiary education. With good information, policy initiatives could better influence the flow of international students out of Korea.

Yet research on the outbound movement of students from Korea is surprisingly limited. Previous research by Park (2009) builds on the general model of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) by focusing on the push-pull factors specific to Korean students. Via survey research, the study finds that dissatisfaction with domestic education serves as a strong push factor for Korean students. More specifically, the study examines how academic and environmental expectations factor into student destination choice among the US, China, UK, and Australia. While this study provides insight into Korean students' views on the process of deciding to study abroad, it draws on a sample of students only from the capital and does not consider data collected from other important stakeholders in the decision-making process, such as parents. The present study seeks to complement this line of research by examining a nationally representative sample and by comparing how nationally stated ideal preferences compare with actual destination choice across the Korean population.

### **Research Method**

This study addresses three questions about the flow of cross-border tertiary students out of Korea. The present study examines two samples. The first consists of a population sample of data on all outbound undergraduate, graduate, and language study tertiary students. This first sample is drawn from the Korean Ministry of Science, Technology, and Education (MEST) data on outgoing tertiary students (MEST, 2010). The second sample consists of a nationally representative sample for the population over 19 years of age in Korea (n=1029) drawn from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs' (2008) "Soft Power in Asia" Multinational Survey. Data collection took place between January 22 and February 5, 2008 as face-to-face interviews in Korean. The sample is nationally representative for the population nineteen years of age or older from all administrative regions except for Jeju, which was excluded based on its remote location, high costs, and low percentage of the population (1.1%).

The study considers participants' responses to the question: "If you were to send your children to receive their higher education in another country, which country would be your first choice? What about your second choice?" In these responses, the European Union (EU) is coded as a single destination, and thus EU members are treated as a single destination for this study.

The analysis of these data consists of three steps. First, the study takes a descriptive look at the total number of cross-border tertiary students out of Korea each year between 2001 and 2010. It primarily focuses on USA, China, Japan, and the EU's market share of tertiary students by year. These destinations account for the vast majority of outbound tertiary students between 2001 and 2010. Together with Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, they account for at least 95% of all

students each year. The first step of the analysis establishes a baseline understanding of trends in the number of tertiary students out of Korea and their destinations for study.

The second step of the analysis examines the Korean public's ideal first-choice and second-choice destinations. This step compiles a single indicator of ideal preference based on the total number of responses for each destination. The indicator consists of the percentage of total first choice and second choice responses for a destination. This indicator allows for further investigation into the relationship of ideal preference with the actual proportion of students going to each destination. It provides a standard against which to compare a destination's actual market share with ideally stated interest.

The third step of the analysis examines the results of the previous steps for patterns in the actual and ideal destinations of outbound Korean tertiary. These trends are further analyzed through Cubillo, Sánchez, and Cerviño's (2006) framework for destinations' pull factors: personal reasons (i.e. personal improvement, advice), country image (i.e. cultural distance, city image, cost of living, immigration), program evaluation (i.e. international recognition, specialization), and institutional image (i.e. corporate image, faculty quality, facilities). Additional secondary research on these factors is used to provide a context for the results relative to the special qualities of each destination in the global higher education market.

Some limitations emerge as a result of the combination of two data sets. For instance, individual observations from one set do not directly coincide with individual observations from the other. As a result, the present study does not provide information about individual decisions to study abroad or how single destination choices relate to individually expressed ideal first and second choice destinations. In spite of this limitation, these data do provide important insight at the country-level of analysis into Korean national trends regarding the actual and ideal attraction to particular destinations. Additionally, no MEST (2010) data were collected in 2002. As a result, that year has been omitted from the analysis.

## Results

The results from the first step of the analysis reveal consistent growth in the numbers of outbound tertiary students from Korea. The approximately 150,000 outbound students in 2001 has increased nearly every year to a maximum of approximately 280,000 in 2009 and finally just over 250,000 in 2010. However, these increases are not divided evenly across all destinations. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how these gains are reflected in student numbers and market share.

Figure 1. Number of Korean Outbound Tertiary Students by Destination

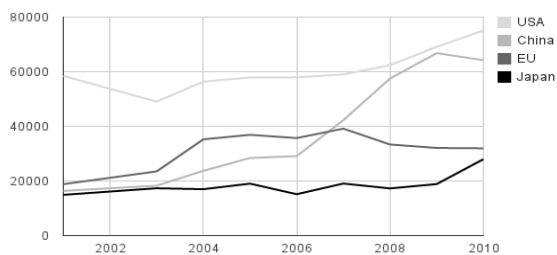
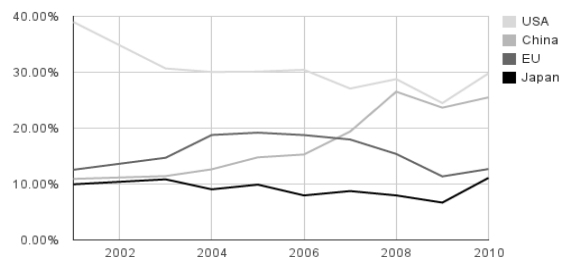


Figure 2. Korean Outbound Tertiary Students by Destination Market Share

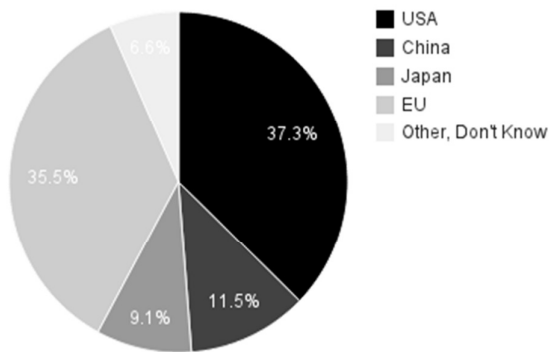


For the sake of clarity, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are not included in Figures 1 and 2, but were included in the preliminary analysis. Australia's market share remained static, receiving approximately 7% of students each year. Canada experienced a drop from 14.6% in 2001 to 5.6% in

2010. Meanwhile, New Zealand rose modestly from 1.81% to 4.34% over the same period. Due to the relatively small market share of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, further analysis focuses exclusively on the USA, China, EU, and Japan. Although the USA made gains in the number of students it received each year, these gains did not keep pace with increases in the overall output of tertiary students from Korea. As a result, USA market share consistently declined from nearly 40% to 30%. China, on the other hand, has seen strong yearly growth in the number of students it receives each year since 2006, up to 26.52% market share at its highest point, very close to US market share at that time. The EU has fluctuated between 10% and 20% of market share, with a swift increase in the total number of students followed by a plateau that has failed to keep pace with overall output of Korean tertiary students. Japan's figures are stagnant, although there is a sudden increase in the number of recipients in 2010. As a result, Japan has a slow, steady drop in market share until 2009, when it returns back up to roughly 10% in 2010.

The second step of the analysis provides a single indicator for each destination's ideal attractiveness to the Korean public. The vast majority of interest lies in just four destinations.

Figure 3. Total Mentions as an Ideal Destination for Tertiary Education

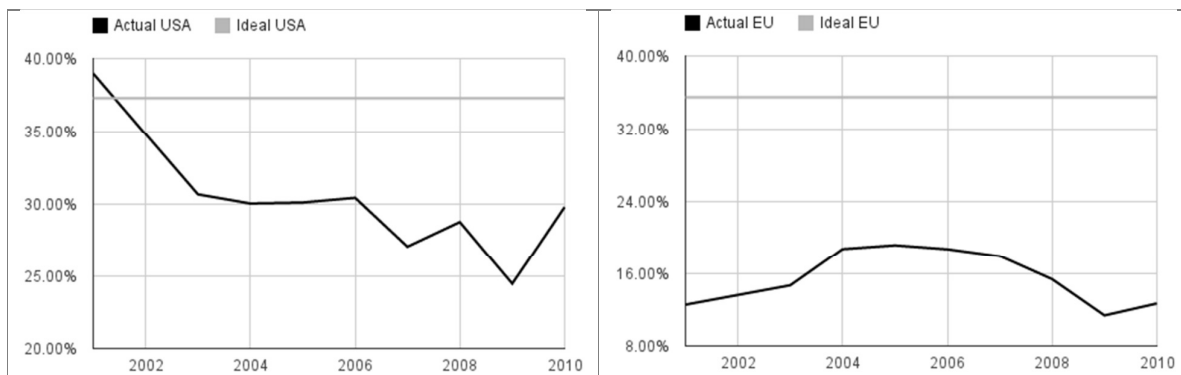


While compiling a single variable for public interest in each destination, an interesting difference emerged in the way destinations were mentioned as a first or second choice destination. Both the EU and USA performed quite strongly as first and second choice destinations, with approximately 40% interest each as a first choice and 30% interest each as a second choice. This contrasts sharply with China and Japan, which both only attract approximately 5% interest as a first choice destination and 17.6% and 12.5%,

respectively, as second choice destinations.

Figure 4 reports the results of step three, comparing each destination's market share by year with the total interest in that destination. The results reveal very different situations for each of the destinations.

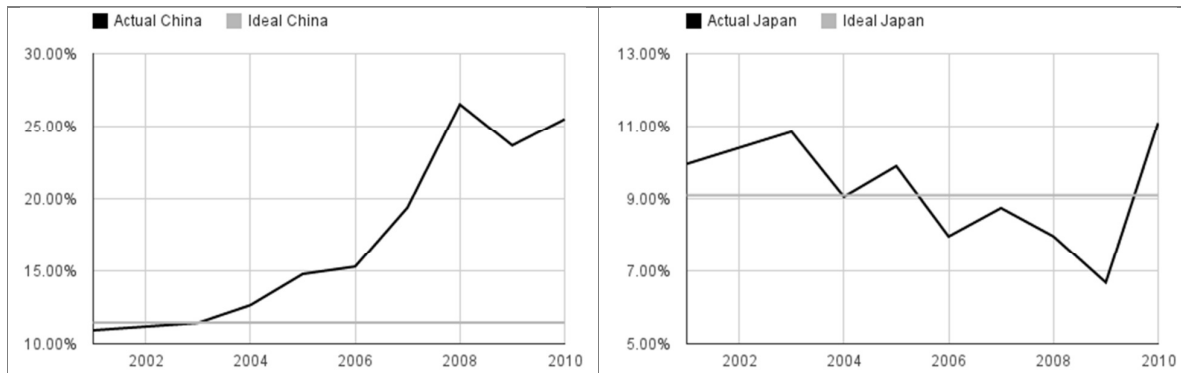
Figure 4. Actual Market Share vs. Ideal Interest by Destination



Although the USA began over-performing against ideal interest, by 2010 its actual market share was well below ideal interest. Yet the gap between ideal interest and actual market share in the USA



is dwarfed by the EU's gap over the same period. The EU's best performance for attracting tertiary students in any single year between 2001 and 2010 remains 16.31% below the Korean public's stated interest in EU destinations.



Meanwhile, China begins the decade at just below ideal interest, and ends in 2010 well above ideal interest of 11.45%, with a staggering 25.5% of market share. Finally, Japan's market share remains consistently around the ideal interest of 9%.

### Discussion

The results of the analysis reveal a number of interesting trends in Korean outbound tertiary students. First of these trends is overall growth in the number of outbound students from Korea, suggesting that domestic push factors may be causing growing numbers of Korean students to look abroad. The findings also reveal that increasing numbers of cross-border students are not heading to their first-choice destination for higher education. As a result, China has benefited most from the increased outward flow of cross-border students from Korea. Meanwhile, the EU and USA are both under-performing relative to ideal demand, but for very different reasons. Lastly, Japan's position as a destination for outbound Korean students has remained relatively stagnant, despite strong interest in Japan as a second choice destination.

Fluctuations in students' movements show a growing number choosing to remain in the Asia Pacific region, with China becoming an important destination for Korean students. This result supports previous findings of greater interest in developing countries as destinations for tertiary education (UNESCO, 2009; Varghese, 2008). The Chinese government has promoted policies encouraging the internationalization of higher education as a means of promoting Chinese culture and perspective (Huang, 2003). This policy has met with success in attracting Korean students, who often view China as an important part of Korea's economic future (Snyder, 2009) and thus an attractive destination for developing future job prospects, desirable language skills, and a useful international professional network. The Chinese government supports these growing ties with South Korea as a means of hedging against its relationship with North Korea (Shambaugh, 2003; Shambaugh, 2004), which may result in a sense of welcome for South Korean students in China.

Despite success in attracting increasingly more Korean students, China seems to be a destination of necessity rather than a destination of choice. The results suggest that students who are turned away or unable to afford from their first choice destination may ultimately pursue a tertiary education at some alternative destination. These students go on to pursue an international tertiary education, but perhaps choose a destination with relatively less competition or lower costs. This second-choice phenomenon seems to greatly benefit China, which has supplanted the more traditional second-choice destinations like Canada. In fact, as the number of outbound students has

increased, China's market share has grown as US market share decreases. Thus, the results reveal that despite a much greater demand for US higher education, China has in recent years performed nearly on par with the US in terms of market share.

The results also tell of missed opportunities by other more desirable destinations, particularly EU member countries, to attract more students from Korea. The consistently low market share of the EU relative to ideal interest suggests the presence of some barriers for Korean tertiary students. These barriers are likely both cultural and financial. Ritzen and Marconi (2011) argue that for the EU to improve its standing as a viable destination for international students, it will need to broaden and deepen offerings of English language medium programs, expand support for international programs, consider higher living and travel costs for international students in the loan-grant systems, develop better visa regulations for highly skilled migrants, and further internationalize accreditation and quality control. As the EU works through these concerns, member countries may struggle to attract the total possible number of students from Korea. Additionally, the high exchange rate of the Euro relative to the Korean Won may also contribute to the low numbers of tertiary students heading to EU HEIs. Confronted with issues such as language concerns, travel costs, high cost of living, or expensive tuition fees, many potential students may opt to pursue a more affordable destination in the global higher education market.

Though the USA holds a large market share of outbound Korean students, the USA has significant room, relative to ideal demand, to grow as a destination. As the US enjoys strong popularity as a destination in the global higher education market, competition for seats allocated to international students intensifies, and as a result more students will fail to gain admission or will simply decide on another destination. While US HEIs face financial cuts at home, they may increasingly look abroad for international students as a source of needed finances and make room for more international students. Despite the potential benefits these students offer, a number of factors stand in the way of more Korean students entering into the US higher education system. Cost and competition are likely barriers for many students. Further contributing to these are a weakening country image and tightening visa policies (Warwick, 2005).

Despite the strong ideal demand for US higher education, the US image abroad suffers as a result of a number of factors. Firstly, many international students on US HEI campuses are not having positive experiences. Case studies find international students perceive discriminatory and unfair practices (Lee, 2010), and feel isolated by the passive cultural attitude towards international students in the US and prejudice they face from American peers (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). A study by Gareis (2012) finds there are few close friendships between international and American students, meaning that neither international nor domestic students are benefiting from the opportunity for greater intercultural learning. International students with negative experiences may warn off other potential students from their home country and may not recommend their host HEIs or the US as a destination for study, serving as a barrier to growth in inbound student numbers. Secondly, as the US economy slowly recovers from financial problems and a high rate of unemployment, the attraction of the US as a potential destination for migration after study may have also suffered. As a result, fewer students may settle upon the US as their final choice for a destination.

In addition, the visa reform issues following the events of 9/11 also represent a large barrier to Korean students wanting to study in the US. The changes have increased the bureaucratic burden for Korean students, as well as for US HEIs who now must deal with more work in order to process fewer students. After 9/11, President Bush established the 'Interagency Panel of Advanced Science and Security' to supervise visa applications from international students to protect knowledge and

technology in sensitive areas on a case-by-case basis (Warwick, 2005). As a result of these added steps, processing times and other visa concerns may play a part in fewer Korean students heading to the US for study. Thus, cost, competition, visa restrictions, a weakening image, and problems with internationalizing campus life may be contributing to US underperformance.

The market share of Korean students heading to Japan has remained relatively stable, remaining within two degrees of ideal demand. Without much disparity between actual and ideal demand, Japan appears relatively unremarkable as a destination for Korean students. Yet the question remains as to why Japan has not benefited as a second-choice destination in the way that China has, given the high response rate of Japan as an ideal second choice. On one hand, Japanese HEIs have some of the strongest reputations in Asia. Cultural similarities between Korea and Japan cause relatively fewer problems with adjustment for Korean students (Tanaka et al., 2004), meaning that students may have a more enjoyable experience while there.

On the other hand, in the past Japanese HEIs have not had sufficient structures in place to recruit or provide information about their HEIs to potential Korean students (MEXT, 2008) and has struggled to build a strong intercultural understanding and internationally inclusive social practices on campus (Whitsed & Volet, 2011). As the best Asian students look to the EU or the USA (Ishikawa, 2009), Japan is pushing to develop English language medium courses. Even so, these efforts must overcome barriers such as overworked faculty, insufficient English language ability, and quality concerns over instruction in a foreign language (Tsuneyoshi, 2005). The improving quality at Chinese and Korean HEIs also means that Japanese HEIs are facing greater competition within the region (Yonezawa, 2007) and the high cost of living in Japan can create stress for Korean students (Murphey-Shigematsu, 2002). In addition to the relatively high cost of living, the grim economic situation in Japan may also contribute to interest in China over Japan. For Japanese HEIs, China's windfall as a second choice destination for Korean students seems to be a missed opportunity.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal growth in outbound international tertiary students from Korea, the rising importance of second choice destinations for these students, and the increasing popularity of China as a destination for Korean tertiary students. The Korean government is responding to increasing numbers of outbound tertiary students with policies aimed at internationalizing domestic HEIs and establishing international alternatives to domestic HEIs within Korea (MEST, 2007). These policies cater to the increasing intraregional student mobility and may help stem the flow of Korean tertiary students overseas. Even so, the current policies need to be further developed and refined to maximize their benefits.

Internationalizing Korean HEIs could attract more foreign students into Korea's tertiary education system, relieving the demographic pressures on domestic HEIs and potentially, with immigration reform, the Korean economy. Although internationalization efforts at domestic HEIs have been underway for some time, government policy has not always facilitated deep organizational change at these institutions. As Byun and Kim (2011) describe, the government's heavy emphasis on the "economic rationale" for internationalization has fostered a policy based on quantitative requirements that overlook the quality of internationalization taking place. Quick implementation English-medium instruction and other internationalization reforms can also create conflict and have unintended consequences at HEIs (Byun et al., 2011; Cho & Palmer, 2012; Kim, 2005; Palmer and Cho, 2012). Such an approach may not take into account the penetrating organizational changes necessary for an HEI to effectively produce an environment conducive to international study.

In addition to internationalization efforts, other policy initiatives focus on bringing foreign HEIs into the Korean system (MEST, 2007). With the support of public organizations, foreign HEIs are increasing their presence in the domestic Korean market via branch campuses. These projects are restricted to Free Economic Zones (FEZ) and the first foreign HEI to open a campus in Korea was the Dutch Shipping and Transport College, in the Gwangyang Bay FEZ (MEST, 2008). More recently, Songdo Global University Campus has pursued bringing a number of foreign programs from HEIs such as SUNY Stony Brook, Ghent University, and George Mason University to Incheon FEZ. Despite some initial difficulties emerging from the financial crises in the USA and EU, the increased presence of foreign HEIs within the domestic tertiary education system seems certain.

While it is possible that internationalization of domestic HEIs and the introduction of foreign HEIs could curb growth in the number of outgoing tertiary students, both initiatives will take time to mature. For these policies to be successful, Korea will need to attract a constant and diverse stream of tertiary students from other countries. Without enough incoming foreign students, both Korean HEIs and branch campuses of foreign HEIs would fail to provide sufficient international exposure to their students. The Korean government needs to continue promoting Korea as a destination in the global market for higher education and improving national brand image.

Further research should examine the experiences and satisfaction of Korean students in the US, EU, China, and Japan. These studies could help determine differences in the types of students these destinations attract and the relative benefit of a higher education at each of these destinations for Korean students. Case studies documenting successful national and institutional approaches to internationalization and attracting students from abroad would help provide guidance towards meeting these goals.

### References

- Bodycott, P. (2009). Choosing a higher education study abroad destination: What mainland Chinese parents and students rate as important. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 8, 349-373.
- Bodycott, P. (2012). The influence and implications of Chinese culture in the decision to undertake cross-border higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16, 252-270.
- Byun, S. (2010). Does policy matter in shadow education spending? Revisiting the effects of the High School Equalization Policy in South Korea. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11, 83-96.
- Byun, K., & Kim, M. (2011). Shifting patterns of the government's policies for the internationalization of Korean higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15, 467-486.
- Byun, K., Chu, H., Kim, M., Park, I., Kim, S., & Jung, J. (2011). English-medium teaching in Korean higher education: Policy debates and reality. *Higher Education*, 62, 431-449.
- Charles-Toussaint, G. C., & Crowson, H. M. (2010). Prejudice against international students: The role of threat perceptions and authoritarian dispositions in U.S. students. *The Journal of Psychology*, 144, 413-428.
- Chin, M., Lee, J., Lee, S., Son, S., & Sung, M. (2012). Family policy in South Korea: Development, current status, and challenges. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21, 53-64.
- Cho, Y. H., & Palmer, J. D. (2012). Stakeholders' views of South Korea's higher education internationalization policy. *Higher Education*, in press.
- Choudaha, R., & Li, C. (2012). *Trends in International Student Mobility*. New York, NY: World Education Services.

- Coleman, D., & Rowthorn, R. (2011). Who's afraid of population decline? A critical examination of its consequences. *Population and Development Review*, 37, 217-248.
- Cubillo, J. M., Sánchez, J., & Cerviño, J. (2006). International students' decision-making process. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20, 101-115.
- Dawson, W. (2010). Private tutoring and mass schooling in East Asia: Reflections of inequality in Japan, South Korea, and Cambodia. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11, 14-24.
- Esipova, N., Pugliese, A., Srinivasan, R., & Ray, J. (2010). Developed nations attract young vs. educated migrants: Developed Asia would see significant brain drain. Available at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/144287/developed-nations-attract-young-educated-migrants.aspx>
- Forbes, L., & Hamilton, J. (2004). Building an international student market: Educational-balanced scorecard solutions for regional Australian cities. *International Education Journal*, 5, 502-520.
- Gareis, E. (2012). Intercultural friendship: Effects of home and host region. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, in press.
- Ghazarian, P. G. (2011a). Higher education global ranking system in East Asia. In J. D. Palmer, A. Roberts, Y. H. Cho, & G. S. Ching (eds) *The Internationalization of East Asian Higher Education: Globalization's Impact*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ghazarian, P. G. (2011b). *Measuring quality, measuring difference: International rankings of higher education* (Doctoral dissertation). Boston, MA: Boston University.
- Han, J. (2012). Half of Koreans don't return after getting US science degrees. *The Korea Times*. Available at: [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2012/01/182\\_103688.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2012/01/182_103688.html)
- Huang, F. (2003). Policy and practice of the internationalization of higher education in China. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 7, 225-239.
- Hwang, Y. S. (2003). A study of factors influencing suicidal ideation among adolescents: Focusing on the home and school environment. Master's thesis from Gyeongsang National University, Jinju.
- Kim, T. (2005). Internationalisation of higher education in South Korea: reality, rhetoric, and disparity in academic culture and identities. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49, 89-103.
- Kim, J., Lee, J., & Lee, S. (2005). Understanding of education fever in Korea. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 2, 8-15.
- Korea Herald. (2011). Major employers hire more high school graduates. *The Korea Herald*. Available at: <http://view.koreaherald.com/kh/view.php?ud=20110724000266andcpv=0>
- Kuwamura, A. (2009). The challenges of increasing capacity and diversity in Japanese higher education through proactive recruitment strategies. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13, 189-202.
- Lee, C. J. (2005). Korean education fever and private tutoring. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 2, 99-107.
- Lee, C. J., Lee, H., & Jang, H. M. (2010). The history of policy responses to shadow education in South Korea: Implications for the next cycle of policy responses. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11, 97-108.
- Lee, J. (2007). Sibling size and investment in children's education: an Asian instrument. *Journal of Population Economics*, 21, 855-875.
- Lee, J. (2011). Education and family in conflict. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15, 395-401.
- Lee, J. J. (2010). International students' experiences and attitudes at a US host institutions: Self-reports and future recommendations. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 9, 66-84.
- Lee, J. T. & Brinton, M. C. (1996). Elite education and social capital: The case of South Korea. *Sociology of Education*, 69, 177-192.
- Lee, S. Y., Hong, J. S., & Espelage, D. L. (2010). An ecological understanding of youth suicide in South Korea. *School Psychology International*, 31, 531-546.

- Marginson, S. (2006). Dynamics of national and global competition in higher education. *Higher Education*, 52, 1-39.
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). 'Push-pull' factors in international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16, 82-90.
- McNeill, D. (2009). South Korea moves to make its universities more international. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Available at: <http://chronicle.com/article/South-Korea-Powers-Ahead-With/44530/>
- McNeill, D. (2011). After decades of building colleges, South Korea faces a lack of students. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Available at <http://chronicle.com/article/article-content/129896/>
- Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST). (2007). Higher education in Korea. Available at: <http://english.mest.go.kr/web/1710/en/board/enview.do?bbsId=258andboardSeq=1885andmode=view>
- Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST). (2008). Gwangyang sets up Branch of Dutch Shipping and Transport College. Available at: <http://english.mest.go.kr/web/42207/en/board/enview.do?bbsId=265andpage=10andcurrentPage=23andboardSeq=1801andmode=view>
- Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST). (2010). 2010 Korean International Student Statistics. Available at: <http://www.mest.go.kr/ko/board/view.do?bbsId=146andmode=viewandboardSeq=14618>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). (2008). *International Comparison of Educational Indicators*. Tokyo: MEXT.
- Murphey-Shigematsu, S. (2010). Psychological barriers for international students in Japan. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 24, 19-30.
- OECD. (2011). *OECD Factbook 2011-2012: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Palmer, J. D., & Cho, Y. H. (2012). South Korean higher education internationalization policies: Perceptions and experiences. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, in press.
- Park, E. L. (2009). Analysis of Korean students' international mobility by 2-D model: driving force factor and directional factor. *Higher Education*, 57, 741-755.
- Park, J. S. (2010). Naturalization of competence and the neoliberal subject: Success stories of English language learning in the Korean conservative press. *Linguistic Anthropology*, 20, 22-38.
- Park, S. J. & Abelmann, N. (2004). Class and cosmopolitan striving: Mothers' management of English education in South Korea. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 77, 645-672.
- Ritzen, J. M. M., & Marconi, G. (2011). Internationalization in European higher education. *International Journal of Innovation Science*, 3, 83-100.
- Salisbury, M. H., Umbach P. D., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2009). Going global: Understanding the choice process of the intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 119-143.
- Shambaugh, D. (2003). China engages Asia: Reshaping the regional order. *International Security*, 29, 64-99.
- Shambaugh, D. (2003). China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the long term. *The Washington Quarterly*, 26, 43-56.
- Snyder, S. (2009). *China's Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Tanaka, T., Takai, J., Kohyama, T., & Fujihara, T. (1994). Adjustment patterns of international students in Japan. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 18, 55-75.
- Tsuneyoshi, R. (2005). Internationalization strategies in Japan: The dilemmas and possibilities of study abroad programs using English. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 4, 65-86.
- UNESCO. (2009). *Global Education Digest 2009: Comparing Education Statistics across the World*. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

- Varghese, N. V. (2008). *Globalization of higher education and cross-border student mobility*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Verbik, L., & Lasanowski, V. (2007). *International mobility: Patterns and trends*. London, UK: The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education.
- Warwick, S. (2005). Will the academy survive 9/11? Scholarship, security, and United States government policy. *Government Information Quarterly*, 2, 573-593.
- Whitsed, C., & Volet, S. (2011). Fostering the intercultural dimensions of internationalization in higher education: Metaphors and challenges in the Japanese context. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15, 146-170.
- Woo, J. (2012). Parents' zeal for education drives up rents. *Wall Street Journal*. Available at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2012/02/23/how-parents%E2%80%99-zeal-for-education-drives-up-rents/>
- Yang, S., & Shin, C. S. (2008). Parental attitudes towards education: What matters for children's well-being?. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 1328-1335.
- Yonezawa, A. (2007). Japanese flagship universities at a crossroads. *Higher Education*, 54, 483-499.
- Yonhap News. (2011a). 2 Nonviable Colleges Ordered Closed Under Gov't Education Reform. *Yonhap News Agency*. Available at: <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2011/11/07/71/0302000000AEN20111107006700315F>
- Yonhap News. (2011b). Academic Inflation Bedevils Korea. *Korea Joongang Daily*. Available at: <http://koreajoongangdaily.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2939297>
- Yonhap News. (2012). Suicide Leading Cause of S. Korean Youth Deaths: Report. *Yonhap News Agency*. Available at: <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/fullstory/2012/05/02/99/4500000000AEN20120502002300320F.html>

---

#### Author the Author:

**Dr. Peter G. Ghazarian** has been involved in international education at the secondary and tertiary levels in the USA, Germany, UK, and Korea. His research interests include social change in multicultural and knowledge economies, the international flow of human resources, processes of regional integration, and the politics of education. He can be contacted at [pghazarian@kmu.ac.kr](mailto:pghazarian@kmu.ac.kr).