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RAISING GLOBAL ELITES FROM A DISTANCE:  
TRANSNATIONAL PARENTING OF SOUTH KOREAN STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

JUYEON PARK

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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ABSTRACT

RAISING GLOBAL ELITES FROM A DISTANCE:  
TRANSNATIONAL PARENTING OF SOUTH KOREAN STUDENTS

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Drawing on interviews with 74 South Korean (hereafter Korean) students and 34 parents at ten elite U.S. colleges, I examine how elite Korean parents seek to reproduce and extend their family privilege through children's transnational education. I analyze how each group – children, mothers, and fathers – interprets and represents their views of the elite transnational parenting they experienced or practiced. By triangulating the narratives of three groups, I explore the family dynamics of the transnational families of high-achieving Korean students abroad.

Well-educated yet opt-out mothers intensively managed their children's early education, often relying on gender-segregated networks. In contrast, cosmopolitan professional fathers heavily engaged in guiding their children's education and career preparation abroad, using their class resources, such as English proficiency, professional careers, and social networks of other elites. In children's narratives, mothers' lifelong care for their private life was undervalued and criticized, while fathers' growing involvement in their later education was highly valued and appreciated.



Across employment statuses, mothers in this dissertation shared and internalized the notion of “intensive mothering.” Mothers with professional occupations extended the meaning of being a “good” transnational mother by providing their children with both motherly care and academic support. In contrast, less-transnational opt-out mothers limited the scope of their involvement in their children’s lives abroad due to their lack of transnational resources, such as English proficiency and knowledge about elite education and careers abroad.

Elite fathers in this dissertation pursued extensive transnational fatherhood, an extended version of engaging fatherhood. Studied- or worked-abroad fathers emphasized their effort for both academic and emotional support for their children. While they shared a great deal of joy and a sense of fulfillment from their fatherhood, less-affluent, never-studied-abroad fathers undervalued their fatherhood, doubting their capability to help their high-achieving children abroad.

Class privilege, or transnational mobility, is being reproduced based on the gender achievement gap within elite families. My findings contextualize the discourse of Asian high achievement, which has been racialized and gendered, reflecting the notions of “model minority” and “tiger mother.” This study re-writes the stereotypical dichotomy between intense mothers and distant fathers in Korean or Asian families.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **ELITE KOREAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES: THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT**

It was a bright, warm Spring day when I met Sarah for an interview at a coffee shop near her college campus in New England. Sarah was one of the students who contacted me after seeing the recruiting ad that I circulated to Korean student associations at some Ivy League schools. I appreciated her meeting me in the middle of a school semester, which she said was not easy due to her “crazy schedule.” She seemed very enthusiastic about my research. Asked why she decided to participate in my research, she answered, “I always thought someone needed to study people like me.” As the interview proceeded, I soon realized what she meant by that. The story of her life, which was transnational and high-achieving, sounded intriguing enough and worthy of study, at least to me who grew up and attended K-12 schools only in South Korea (hereafter Korea). “I know that my life has been quite different than many other people [in Korea],” she said with a subtle smile. I felt the smile implied that this was not the first time she had told someone the story of her life as an elite transnational.

She was a smart, diligent, and sophisticated young Ivy Leaguer who radiated a great deal of energy. Although she was born in Korea, she did not spend her entire childhood there; because of her medical school professor father’s sabbatical at a U.S. research institute, her family moved to California and spent a couple of years there. That was the first time she lived and attended school abroad. She reflected on those times:

I was only eight years old, so I didn't worry about my life much. I just enjoyed being there. It was really fun and relaxing. Every day after school, I went swimming with my friends, and I just loved it. For young kids, California's weather is just perfect to have some fun outside. I had a lot of fun there.

Her father, who first exposed her to the world outside of Korea, was central to her memory and understanding of her development. She emphasized her father's influence on her college major decision: "My dad, especially his work, had a lot of influence on me. I shadowed my dad at his hospital when I was in middle school, and that made me interested in medical science." She also said that her father was the one who "got [her] into reading." She said:

He stacked a lot of books on my desk whenever he had a chance... Those books were the ones that I would never pick up on my own. I once told him to give me money instead so I could buy some books that I liked more!

She admitted that despite being cautious, her father was trying to mold her into the kind of person whom he hoped she would become.

While talking about her mother's influence on her upbringing, her tone changed quite dramatically. Her mother, who quit her job at one of the foreign embassies in Korea in order to prioritize motherhood, was the "good cop" in Sarah's life, always laid-back, generous, and humorous. She thanked her mother for being "somewhat indifferent" to her college major choice, which was once a "hot issue" in her family. "My mom did not weigh in with her opinion [when I decided my college]," she said. Resisting the widespread belief that (almost) all Asian mothers are "tiger moms," she defensively added, "You should believe me. She really had no opinion." Then she implied that her father, not mother, was the one who tried to shape the "big" choices in her life: "My dad was... Well, he definitely wanted me to know the beauty of math or physics, although he did not force me to pick a certain major." This is similar to how most of my respondents

understood the difference between their mothers' and fathers' involvement in their upbringing. As they saw it, parents performed distinct and unequal roles.

A few months later after I met Sarah in the United States, I met and interviewed her mother in the Greater Seoul region in Korea. Sarah's mother was a cheerful and optimistic person, just as Sarah described. Throughout her interview, she elaborated how she understood the division of parenting between her and her husband. As Sarah said, she agreed that her husband was a "bigger influence" on their daughter's life, especially with regard to education abroad. She noted that sometimes there was a "spark", but also occasional conflict, between her daughter and her husband, often because of her husband's input on Sarah's reading list:

Sarah loves to read and does read a lot, but my husband stacks even more books on her desk even when Sarah doesn't even touch those books. It's not that my husband pushes my daughter hard, but they sometimes have a conflict, although it's not obvious or loud... [...] Sarah loves to read humanity books, but my husband wants her to read more science books. [...] My husband is a scholar, so he and Sarah share a lot of things. But sometimes they disagree [with each other].

"I really don't want to be involved [in that conflict]," she said with a laugh. She sided with Sarah, who she thought was "smart enough" to make her own reading list, but she also showed sympathy toward her husband, understanding why he kept recommending science books to Sarah. She thought her role in the family should be and was that of mediator:

If Sarah comes to me and complains about her father, I ask him [Sarah's father] to leave her alone for a while. I don't think he does anything bad for her. But my job is to settle both of them down [in those situations]. [...] Sarah always thinks too much because she is just too smart. She sometimes overthinks about her future, and it stresses her out. I really want to help her [in those situations,] but sadly there's not much for me to do for her.

She belittled her capacity to help Sarah plan her future. She, however, still believed there was something that only she, as a mother, could do for Sarah:

The only thing I can do for her now is just listening to her patiently, doing some online shopping together, and bringing her to a café and having something delicious together. I always tell her that life shouldn't be that difficult.

This approach, she thought, separated her from her husband who she found was “always serious” about their children. “My husband tries to find a solution when Sarah complains, but I don't do that. What kind of advice can I give to Sarah? Now she is way smarter than me,” she said. She defined her assistance for Sarah as a gendered work: “What I'm doing [for Sarah] is what only a mother as a woman can do for her child.”

Sarah's father, whom I had to work hard to recruit for this research, exceeded my expectations with the depth and length of his stories—he was one of the most enthusiastic interviewees that I met. In his office at a university hospital in the Greater Seoul area, he proactively shared his memories about how he, as an involved father, raised his two children who were both studying in the United States at the time of his interview. He insisted that he, not his wife, was the one who mostly raised their two children, especially after the children decided to study abroad. He did not think that liberal or hands-off parenting would benefit children—the high-achieving ones, in particular. “They [children] are still young. Parents shouldn't let children do whatever they want to do. They need to give input into children's growth. They need to take some *actions*,” he said decisively.

He, perhaps as an effort to defy the public belief about “tiger parenting,” elaborated on why his hands-on parenting was benefiting not only his children but also himself. He emphasized that he was “growing together” with his children: “As I see them



growing up, I can also see myself growing up [as a parent]. [...] I keep learning whether my input was right or not. That's a great learning process." He insisted that his fathering was not forceful, unloving, or selfish:

I'm not trying to achieve something for me through my children. I'm just trying to guide them. It's all about interacting with them, and I keep interacting with them after they entered college.

At the end of his interview, he gave himself a high rating: "Sarah's mom tells our kids about how lucky they are to have me as their father, although I'm not a great husband for her. [...] She once told Sarah that she could have gone to an Ivy League school if she had a father like me," he proudly said, laughing at the memory.

The stories I heard from Sarah and both of her parents encapsulate the family dynamics that many families in my research shared: children appreciated their transnational and multicultural childhood, which they believed was led by their fathers; children, like many fathers and even mothers themselves saw mothers as "cheerleaders" when their children lived abroad; fathers, the most understudied group, embraced and enjoyed their demanding transnational fatherhood. Many children, mothers, and fathers explicitly assessed their transnational family life and parenting as highly gendered. And they recognized that class privilege, intersecting with gender expectations, was key to the transnational parenting of their high-achieving children.

Drawing on 107 interviews I conducted with children, mothers, and fathers of elite Korean transnational families, I, in this dissertation, theorize how intergenerational class reproduction is, in part, based on and deeply intertwined with gender inequality in the parent generation of these elite Korean families. Addressing how high-achieving Korean young adult daughters' and sons' identities and experiences are shaped by

transnational parental engagements and the cultural impact of the elite U.S. colleges' they attend, I conceptualize elite transnational parenting as a class- and gender-specific process, which involves a series of negotiations among parents and children, embedded in and shaped by external social contexts, such as immigration laws and school cultures.

Next, this introductory chapter turns to the macro, situating those elite Korean families in the broader context of contemporary Koreans' migration and education abroad. I show the education-driven transnational family has become a class reproduction strategy for many Korean elites in the hierarchical global economy and culture.

### **Education Abroad as Class Capital in Korea**

Korea is an important case when it comes to examining transnational class reproduction strategies in today's globalized world. Korean (international) students from advantaged families have constituted a large student population at many elite schools in English-speaking Western countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. In the United States, Korea has been one of the primary sources of international students enrolling in colleges, coming in third behind India and China—countries with populations more than 20 times that of Korea's. The number of Korean students in the United States skyrocketed in the 2000s, and in 2015 when I met most of the student participants, about 64,000 Korean students were attending U.S. colleges and universities, more than from any other country except China and India (International Institute of Education 2016). Many of those students applied and went to elite colleges in the United States. Korean applications to Harvard University tripled from 2003 to 2008 (The New York Times 27-April-2008). In the academic year of 2017-2018, Korean

students comprised about 5.2% of the international population of Yale University, which is the fourth largest international group following those from China, Canada, and India (Yale Office of International Students & Scholars 2019).

The “Korean fervor” for elite education abroad needs to be understood in the socioeconomic context of Korea, where degrees from schools abroad, especially from elite institutions, are deemed almost a prerequisite for becoming a member of the elite (J. Kim 2008). College degrees function as “positional goods” (Veblen 1899, cited in Hirsch 1977), and degrees from colleges abroad, in particular, signify more than a mere education credential in the country; they function as cultural capital of those who speak fluent, “native-like” English, understand and appreciate Western culture, and are geographically flexible and transnational in pursuing their career and family lives. Together these compose the cosmopolitan life in not only Korea but many Asian countries (See Ong 1999).

Degrees abroad have particular values in the job market as well. In today’s Korea, which has the highest youth unemployment rate of the last ten years (Statistics Korea 2019), holding degrees abroad and speaking fluent English often guarantees an edge in the fierce competition for “good” job opportunities in Korea (Johnsrud 1993; Kang & Abelmann 2011; J. Song 2012). In this context, Korean young people seek a chance to go abroad and absorb English, ideally from an early age, in order to speak it “like a native.” While most of them “visit” English-speaking Western countries for one or two semesters at some point in their college years, often through exchange programs, affluent, highly-educated Korean parents tend to send their children to schools abroad, ideally the elite ones in the United States, from a young age. The students I met for this research are part

of the group “Early Study Abroad Kids” (“jo-ki-you-hak-saeng” in Korean), as Koreans call it (Kim & Okazaki 2014; Park. J. 2009; Shin et al. 2014). They are in the families I studied.

Many of them started their transnational education track at a relatively early age, mostly around the age of 12 or 13, before they graduated from middle school. With outstanding school grades and a native-like English proficiency, they were accepted by some of the most selective high schools in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, and eventually gained acceptance to elite U.S. colleges. Some were born abroad, mostly in the United States, while their parents pursued graduate degrees or further careers in the mainstream of the global economy. This experience reflects the fact that the United States, continuously drawing human, economic, and cultural capital from the rest of the world, is still the center of the globalized world. And U.S. colleges in general, and elite ones in particular, play a central role in reproducing the hegemony of the country as a hub for human capital, as they have been ranked at the top of the hierarchy of higher education for multiple decades (See Hazelkorn 2011; Shin, Thoutkoushian & Teichler 2011).

Koreans have a relatively brief history of studying abroad; it was not until January 1989 that degrees abroad became legally recognized in Korea. This legal reform ran parallel with the expansion of a more general globalization of Korean society. In the early 1990s, under the regime of Kim, Young-sam, president of South Korea from 1993 to 1998, the Korean government made aggressive efforts to prepare the society for rapid globalization. During Kim’s regime, globalization, or “se-gye-hwa” in Korean, was the motto of the country: schools increased the hours of and credits for English courses, and

corporations began prioritizing applicants' English proficiency in their hiring process. More and more Korean elites left their home country for higher education, and those who acquired degrees from elite colleges abroad started occupying the top of the social hierarchy, becoming politicians, corporate executives, and academics who now have significant status in Korea. As a number of scholars (Lee & Koo 2006; Kang & Abelmann 2011; J. Kim 2008, 2015; Park & Abelmann 2004) argue, English and degrees abroad became a requirement for being a member of the Korean elite.

As the world's first "global language" (Crystal 2003), English proficiency is a valuable commodity throughout the world. But English means more than a global language in Korea and many other East Asian countries—it carries symbolic value. Knowledge of and comfort with English has been a sign of not only educational opportunity but the experience of travel or study abroad which itself is highly valued. English has become a marker of class distinction in Korea. Nancy Abelmann, an anthropologist who explored contemporary Korean education in depth, defined "cosmopolitan striving" as a desire to become "citizen[s] capable of living at home in the world" (Anagnost 2000, cited in Park & Abelmann 2004, 646). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, traveling around the world and studying in other countries, especially in Western countries, became much more possible for Koreans. English proficiency emerged as a crucial asset of not only occupational mobility but cultural capital. It is in that sense, as Abelmann argued, English became an "index of cosmopolitan striving" (Park & Abelmann 2004, 650) in Korea.

In this context, education abroad rapidly became popularized. The sensational popularity of ex-study abroad students' autobiographies indicates how Koreans tout, even

romanticize, education abroad. For instance, Korean businessman and politician Jungwook Hong's autobiography *Act 7, Scene 7* ("Chil-Mak-Chil-Jang" in Korean) created a massive sensation after its publication in 1993 due to its vivid descriptions of his experience at Choate Rosemary Hall, Harvard, and Stanford. Hong wrote that his reading of a book about John F. Kennedy, the 35<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, strongly motivated him to transfer to an elite U.S. boarding school at the age of 14. In his book, Hong says:

There was a perfect life in the book [about John F. Kennedy]. His education, appearance, parents, and even spouse were all perfect. Once I learned about his perfect life, I had no option other than pursuing a similarly perfect life for myself. I was excited to be able to plan a perfect life for myself on my own from an early age. I was happy to have the potential to create my own destiny [Page 25].

Throughout the autobiography, Hong praises and promotes the elite U.S. education he received without noting how privileged he was to grow up in such an elite environment. In his narrative, the U.S. education in general was highly romanticized in a sharp dichotomy between "developed" Western education and "developing" Asian or Korean education. He wrote:

If Korean education focuses on evaluating which students are smarter than others, the U.S. education aims to imbue students with a sense of confidence and endless potential. [...] Erich Fromm once said that 'education is identical with helping the child realize his potentialities.' Without a doubt, it is important to measure the outcome of education. But what is more important is to teach students about their potential. Through learning, students should get to acknowledge their responsibility to develop not only themselves but their society [Page 290].

After the great success of Hong's book, more ex-study abroad students published their autobiographies. In her book *Study at Level-9 and Persevere at Level-10* ("Gong-bu-gu-dan-oh-kee-sip-dan" in Korean), another mega-hit autobiography of a young Korean transnational elite, Won-hee Park, who claimed acceptance from ten elite U.S. colleges,

documented her journey from a selective Korean high school to Harvard. Upon its publication, her book rapidly became a must-read for Korean students who aspired to study abroad. Her confession that she was “just always pursuing to be the best” rather than being smart or being raised by elite parents helped many Korean students believe Ivy League schools were within their reach. Her book described most of her achievements as a result of her own hard work, which she often elaborated on; here she reflected on her days at high school—a highly-selective private boarding school with a special program for students who prepare for and pursue college education abroad. She wrote with more ambivalence than Hong:

Have you ever heard grass bugs singing loudly around 2 A.M.? Over my dorm room window, I heard them singing every single night, staying up all night studying. [...] I did not have time to appreciate how romantic the night was. I did not have time to feel how lonely I was, either [page 55].

She attributed her academic success to her own “hard work,” and rarely elaborated on her family background. Her father, a high-earning ophthalmologist, and her mother, a highly-educated stay-at-home mother “who loves writing poems,” figured little in her explanation of her academic achievements. She instead gave her own perseverance and passion credit for her acceptance by multiple Ivy League schools.

By reading these autobiographies, which highlight the “fruits” of elite transnational education, many young Korean students who grew up in the 2000s absorbed what it would be like studying at elite schools abroad and aspired to a privileged transnational upbringing that they thought would offer such “fruits.” At the same time, more affluent Korean parents also learned about such educational tracks and made plans to prepare their children for it. Several magazines marketed to mothers included articles about how to send children to “good” schools abroad, particularly in the United States,

Canada, and Australia. For instance, in August 2015, *Real Women* (“Yeo-Seong-Joong-Ahang” in Korean), one of the best-selling Korean magazines for middle-aged women, wrote:

“...Sending talented children to schools abroad is not a new invention at all. Many scholars of Choson Dynasty (1392–1910) also studied at schools in China and India. [...] They shared a similar reason to study abroad with today’s students – while abroad, students can learn through experiencing different cultures and civilizations, and once they come back to our home country, they would be capable of and compassionate about improving the culture and civilization of our own. Study abroad is indeed an outcome of such passion for learning.”

The article went on to emphasize prestigious U.S. boarding schools and give detailed advice for mothers who wish to send their children to those schools from an early age:

“If you decide to send your young child to schools in the United States, you might want to start collecting as much information about U.S. boarding schools as possible. [...] More and more children are now starting their education abroad before they graduate from middle school. As a result, there is greater interest in junior boarding schools in the United States; junior boarding school education will help your child to master English at an early age, get accustomed to dorm life, and eventually start navigating colleges ahead of other students. [...] If you decide to send your child to a junior boarding school, you might want to send your child to the summer camps of the schools of your (and your child’s) preference before your child finishes elementary school.”

The article concludes that “... it’s never easy for young children to spend their school days being apart from their parents, but if they can enjoy and appreciate the U.S. education, boarding schools can be great starting points for their transnational education.”

<sup>1</sup> Such magazine articles stimulate the public’s interests in education abroad, especially at prestigious schools. Korean parents, affluent and highly-educated ones in particular, tend to contrast education of developed Western countries to Korean local education. Many do not believe that Korean local education would meet their aspirations for their children (Jo et al. 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> The article was originally written in Korean, so I translated the quotes that I cited.



Reflecting the country's fervor for education, Korean students have outperformed their peers in other parts of the world in many international comparisons of student achievement. In 2015, even President Obama publicly praised Korean students' high achievement, crediting Korea's nation-wide educational fervor and well-funded public schools for it. He reportedly said there was "much (to) be learned from South Korea's approach to education" (Fenton 2015). But many Koreans found Obama's complement to their education questionable and uninformed; they felt Obama and many other Westerners were misunderstanding the realities on the ground, because students in Korea spend long hours in self-study or *hagwons* (cram schools) after school, feeling a great amount of pressure to excel or at least not to get behind in school (Horn 2014). Many Koreans believe that highly standardized tests and the emphasis on memorization lead to students' lack of creativity and independent thinking (H. Park 2013). Many Koreans believe that students' academic achievements are a result of private supplementary education, rather than of public school education. In sum, many Koreans deem the Korean K-12 education system highly-stressful, unnecessarily-competitive, and not-cost-effective.

In this climate, sending children to schools abroad emerged as an alternative option for affluent Korean parents who tend to consider Western education, which they think is liberal, student-focused, creative, and therefore superior to what they view as standardized and conformist Korean education (M. Cho 2002). Such a dichotomous view leads a considerable number of advantaged parents to send their children to middle or high schools abroad, hoping their children will acquire not only cultural and linguistic capital but creativity and originality that standardized Korean education system is often

criticized as incapable of cultivating (Abelmann & Kang 2014). Educating children transnationally became one way for Korean parents to resist Korean local education—but it is an option that is available exclusively for those who are well-educated and affluent.

### **The Emergence of Asian Transnational Families**

My analysis provides an understanding of a central, though understudied, piece of globalization—intergenerational class reproduction of transnational elites. Most studies of transnational families in the globalized world discuss the transnational circuit of (low-skill) labor, with particular focus on how it has multiplied working-class transnational families and their migration for “family survival.” To consider class variation, I analyze a more-advantaged circuit of labor and capital in a highly transnational world—studied-abroad Asian elites and their intergenerational reproduction of transnational mobility.

Affluent parents in Asian countries other than Korea, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and China, share the fervor for children’s education abroad with Korean parents. During the 1980s and 1990s, the “New Rich” Asian populations emerged who possessed both the wealth and skills to navigate the world (Chu 1996; Robison & Goodman 1996; Waters 2003, 2005). Thanks to their high level of transnational mobility, they are a group who are most able to benefit from participating in global capitalism (Nonini & Ong 1997; Ong 1999). In this sense, recent Asian migrants and their families require a different analytical lens than the earlier Asian migration, which was mostly for family survival and settlement in the destination country (Ho & Bedford 2008). For example, in her recent book *Raising Global Families*, Pei-Chia Lan (2018) examines how Taiwanese parents negotiate cultural differences and class inequality to raise children in

the context of globalization. From her interviews with Taiwanese parents both in Taiwan and the United States, she argues that highly-educated Taiwanese parents develop class-specific, context-sensitive strategies for children's transnational education as an effort to cope with uncertainties in the globalized world economy and job market. Except for her recent study, despite a sizable literature on the contemporary Asian diaspora, little research has addressed the use, importance, or consequences of transnational education and migration through the lens of both children and parents. This dissertation aims to fill the gap.

Some studies that make empirical contributions to this discussion tend to focus on “astronaut families” (Chee 2003; Ho 2003; Ong 1999; Pe-pua et al. 2008; Waters 2002), the (largely-Chinese) family in which the members reside in different countries across the world, and “parachute kids” (Bartley 2003; Eyou et al. 2000; Ho 1995; Larmer 2017), the children sent abroad often alone for education while their parents remain in their home country. Those studies address the circumstances in which advantaged Asian parents seek and adopt children's education abroad as well as the specific ways they implement the deliberate family project in a transnational setting. However, most of their attention has been paid to “study mothers” (Chee 2003; Huang & Yeoh 2005) who accompany their children abroad, while fathering or fatherhood in that context and children's assessment of such family arrangement are still understudied (For an exception, See S. Lee 2019 for a recent study about Korean middle-class transnational fatherhood.)

In contemporary Korea, transnational families are quite common but take diverse forms. Roughly since the late 1990s, education-driven transnational families or “global households” (Douglass 2013) have changed the structure of and norms for Korean

families. Among their diverse forms, the “Wild Geese” family (“gi-reo-gi-ga-jok” in Korean) has been the most prevalent family arrangement. Similar to geese that migrate every year, a “Wild Geese family” is one in which the mother and children live abroad, mostly in English-speaking countries, while the father remains in Korea to work and send remittances to the mother and children. In Korea, the term “Wild Geese” has been widely used when referring to education-driven transnational families. The emergence and increase of “Wild Geese” families was recognized as one of the most prominent social issues in the early 2000s, as it entails spousal separation (See Lee & Koo 2006). Not many families in my research, however, experienced such family arrangements; most parents rather sent their children alone to preparatory boarding schools when their children reached the age of 13 to 15, often without an accompanying parent.

These families are not simply portrayed and praised as a cultural and educational vanguard. Increasingly, they are also criticized. Geographically-separated family arrangements started drawing negative public attention roughly from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, amid the growth of global consciousness and an expansion of early education abroad among Koreans. This was evidenced, in 2002, in the spread of the term “gi-reo-gi-ah-ppa,” literally “wild goose father” in English, a term was included in the report 2002 New Word by the National Academy of Korean Language. This term emphasizes that Korean parents’ focus on education has split wives from husbands and children from fathers. The *New York Times* says that the emergence and growth of “Wild Geese” families has “upended traditional migration patterns by which men went overseas temporarily while their wives and children stayed home, straining marriages and the Confucian ideal of the traditional Korean family” (Norimitsu 2018).

This new type of Korean family, along with the increase of young students abroad, has stirred up discussions in Korea not only about the high financial cost of such family arrangements but about its implication for family dissolution and children's identity crisis. Some researchers see the prevalence of "Wild Geese" families as a reflection of weakening family bonds (i.e. Kim & Jang 2004). Ample academic attention (Finch & Kim 2012; Y. Kang 2012a, 2012b; S. Lee 2016a, 2016b; Lee & Koo 2006; Park & Abelmann 2004) has been paid to the "Wild Geese" global household, with researchers asking if the geographical separation among family members causes marital discord or emotional distance between father and children. Most of the studies focus on mothering more than on fathering, despite a few recent studies that highlight fathers' non-financial contributions. "Wild Geese" mothers, in the existing literature, tend to be described as sole managers of children's academic and emotional growth, whereas "Wild Geese" fathers are usually portrayed as economic providers for their families who often struggle with loneliness (S. Kim 2006).

Similar views prevail outside the academe. Media reports often see "Wild Geese fathers" ("gi-reo-gi appa" in Korean), who make seasonal visits to their faraway families, as being burdened with an overwhelming breadwinning responsibility and therefore emotional deterioration, whereas "Wild Geese" mothers abroad are frequently scrutinized for their commitment to marriage and criticized for being "excessive" or "selfish." Children of "Wild Geese" families are often deemed as lacking a strong national identity or patriotism, and therefore suffering from an identity crisis (D. Lee 2008; U. Cho 2010).

While the traditional form of "Wild Geese" families faces many criticisms for the separations it imposes on parents and children (D. Lee 2008; U. Cho 2010), affluent,

transnationally-educated parents can choose to and actually do send the child alone to a prestigious boarding school abroad. Although different from the “Wild Geese” family, this kind of transnational families, who are likely more advantaged than the “Wild Geese” families, has rarely been examined. Given the high tuition fees and living costs required, the Korean transnational parents are likely to be more affluent than those who endure a geographical separation between wife and husband for the sake of children’s education. Only parents who can afford and manage the necessary financial capital and parental labor can and do employ children’s elite transnational education as a means of class reproduction.

To fill the gap in the existing literature on transnational families, this dissertation examines the Korean families who send children to schools abroad instead of being “Wild Geese” for a long period of time. This research is “studying up”—examining highly-affluent, well-educated Korean transnational parents and children who have been rarely studied. A qualitative study of their privileged transnational family life and parenting, despite their small number, speaks not only to the class inequality that affords an opportunity to transfer “transnational mobility” (Ong 1999) intergenerationally in a globalizing world but to the gender inequality that is reproduced within families through their transnational family life. Unlike most studies of “Wild Geese” families, I look at children as well as mothers and fathers.

Family is a site for class reproduction, and parenting is often a primary mechanism of it. Transnational education, which now is widely available to affluent individuals, has constructed the flow of study-abroad students across continents, often between Asia and English-speaking developed Western countries. And such opportunity

to absorb cultural and educational capital beyond national borders is usually transferred to the next generation within elite families with ample financial and cultural resources. My study of elite Korean transnational families delineates how education abroad is understood and implemented by mothers and fathers. Children's education abroad closely intersects with gendered parenting in reproducing class privileges intergenerationally among Asian elites. In this dissertation, I aim to address some understudied dimensions of the global flows of human, economic, and cultural capital. To provide a broader social context I, in the next section, review some previous studies about the impact of mothering and fathering on class reproduction across race and ethnicity.

### **Class Reproduction through Gendered Parenting**

The notion of intensive mothering reflects and reinforces middle-class values and practices of childrearing. According to Hays (1996), it has been constructed and functioned as an ideology that “good” mothers should raise their children in “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” (8) ways. Following Hays’ influential work, many studies (Blair-Loy 2003; Butler 2010; Christopher 2012; Johnston & Swanson 2006) adopted and extended the concept, mostly by documenting how professional working mothers embrace, negotiate and sometimes resist the notion while juggling work and family. Hays’ classic definition, although it does not take race or ethnicity into account, opens the door to a broader discussion on how mothers are expected and pressured to act as primary nurturers throughout children’s life course.

Due to the high financial and emotional cost, not every mother can afford and properly practice intensive mothering as a family strategy for social reproduction. Even though not all works use the term “intensive mothering,” ample sociological research (Arnett 1995; Byrne 2006; Calarco 2011, 2014; Chin & Phillips 2004; Condrón 2009; Cucchiara & Horvat 2009; Fox 2006; Gillies 2005; Lareau 1989; 2002; [2003] 2011) has built the literature on classed mothering or parenting in general, by delineating how parents’ class condition affects values, practices, and consequences of parenting. According to Lareau (2002, [2003] 2011), the class difference in parenting produces unequal consequences, as those middle-class parents who practice “concerted cultivation” raise children with a “sense of entitlement” while working-class parenting focuses on “natural growth” of children often leading them to have a sense of constraint (Lareau 2002, 753). The benefit of advantaged parenting can also be found in the dichotomy of “good” mothers and “bad” mothers. Societies and mothers themselves tend to conceive mothers who have abilities and resources to put intensive mothering ideology into practice as exemplary whereas those who cannot or fail to do so tend to be seen and feel less competent in mothering than their advantaged counterparts (Elliott et al. 2015; Leigh et al. 2012).

Recent literature on school choice also studies the impact of class on parenting. Unlike early parenting literature that focused mostly on early childrearing, recent works (Armstrong & Hamilton 2013; Ball et al. 1996; Fingerman et al. 2009; Fingerman et al. 2011; Furstenberg 2011; Reay, Crozier & James 2011) has shifted the focus to the parenting of adolescence or young adult children, particularly by studying school choices, considering school as a place in which classed parenting intersects most with other



highly-stratified social institutions. In societies where class is dynamic rather than static, “something that has to be achieved and struggled for” (Byrne 2006, 1002), mothers who passed their early parenting stages become in charge of finding the “best fit” for their child’s education and even career. Advantaged mothers who have the necessary desire, skills, and resources, according to these scholars, attempt to provide the right school where their child can not only learn middle-class values but socialize with peers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds (See Leigh et al. 2012).

The literature reflects the social construction of women as primary caregivers and principal childrearers in the family across cultures (Arendell 2000; Crittenden 2001; Gross 1998). Especially in middle-to-upper-class families, mothers are usually in charge of most of the “status production work” such as “training children in class-appropriate language, behavior, appearance, physical and intellectual skills, health, hygiene, and even presentation of the self” (Papanek 1979, 777). While intensive parenting has been narrowly discussed in terms of educated mothers’ strategy of social reproduction, elite, professional fathers usually have been absent in the discussion despite—as I argue in this dissertation—their ability and aspiration to reproduce class privilege through parenting.

Despite disproportionate academic attention to mothering, some recent studies (Acker 2006; Coltrane 2004; Doucet 2006; Gerson 1995; Longlands 2014; Marsiglio 2008, 2009; Shows & Gerstel 2009) show how fathers’ class location shapes the practice of fathering and the meaning of fatherhood. While full-time, high-paying employment is often deemed as having a zero-sum relationship with motherhood, it provides fathers with some advantages in becoming “responsible” parents. In the era of “New Age” fatherhood, advantaged fathers can pursue the ideal of a “good” father who provides both financial

and emotional support, whereas less-advantaged fathers often lack financial, cultural, and educational resources for such fathering. For example, Shows and Gerstel (2009) find a gap between professional fathers' intermittent but special "public fathering" and working-class fathers' daily yet less-visible "private fathering." Among the emerging research on Asian fathering, Ide et al (2018)'s study, which compares Asian American, Black and White public college students' views of their parents' involvement in their college life, finds that Asian American college students were those most likely to criticize their fathers for being distant breadwinners.

Yet, the processes through which advantaged fathers themselves seek to reproduce their class position are still understudied. In this dissertation, I delve into elite professional fathers' intense involvement in their children's life abroad and see in what ways gender differentiates fathers' engagements from that of mothers. I argue that fathers who have aspirations, abilities, and resources for social reproduction through transnational parenting, actively guide and advise children, albeit differently from the ways mothers do. I find that the Korean students in my study praise their fathers rather than criticizing them, given their fathers' considerable resources for transnational fathering.

### **Gendered and Classed Expectations of Korean Parents**

Inside and outside academe, Asian parenting is often described as not only authoritarian and emotionally distant but also over-involved. Korean parents, in particular, often are stereotyped as "too child-focused" when it comes to utilizing family resources (U. Cho 2004). Few studies, however, differentiate between gender and class or

discuss their role in such intensive parenting. Gender greatly shapes expectations and roles of Korean parents, but the style of gendered parenting varies across class lines. The ideal of a “good” Korean middle-class mother is a mother who provides her children with day-to-day, intensive attention so the children can become capable and competitive (Chun 2002; J. Park 2009). To do so, she needs to have profound knowledge of childrearing and the education system to which her children belong. And often in doing so, she sacrifices herself, especially her career (Hong 2014).

The normative idea of a “good” Korean mother has created a culture where mothers are often judged by children’s accomplishments. Many studies (U. Cho 2010; Cho & Bang 2005; Yang & Shin 2011) argue that the Korean society burdens women with not only heavy domestic duties but responsibilities for children’s education and its outcome. Many Korean mothers, regardless of their career, have internalized such expectations. Despite emerging ideals of an engaged father, Korean mothers, much more than fathers, tend to (be expected to) take the responsibility of providing children with intense educational support along with emotional care (Hwang 2012; E. Lee 2013). Korean mothers are living in the culture of “mother-blame” or the “mothering as labor” era where mothers are “responsible for their children’s every success or failure” (Varallo 2008, 152). Some argue that highly-educated, middle-class Korean mothers share an “institutionalized maternalism” (Lim 2001), which normalizes mothers’ systemic and deliberate “service” for children’s education.

While Korean mothers, especially middle-class mothers, tend to be pressured to do a great deal of motherwork as “managers” of their children’s education, Korean fathers across class lines face significantly less pressure for the daily support of

children's education, although social expectations for paternal involvement have recently increased (Kwon & Roy 2007). Like those in the U.S. neo-traditional families, they are expected to perform primarily as providers for their families rather than as caregivers or educators. Y. Song (2011) showed that recent increases in time spent by Korean parents on childcare result much more from an increase in mothers' time than that of fathers.

Meanwhile, the term "Chi-ma-ba-ram" (literally meaning "the swish of a skirt," a rough Korean equivalent to "tiger mom") stereotypes and even pathologizes Korean mothers exclusively as being obsessed with pursuing children's high achievements (Lim 2001). On the other hand, Korean fathers, regardless of class, are rarely accused of being over-involved in their children's education, and when they are involved in their children's education, they often get praise for being "uncommonly engaged" (A. Kim & Pyke 2015). Breadwinner fathers who financially support their children's education are often seen as successfully fulfilling their paternal duties.

This gender expectation of transnational parents is also found in the literature on transnational or migrant families. Whereas mothers are often described as solely responsible for children's education, research suggests that fathers' contribution, especially in Asian transnational families, is often limited to their breadwinning activities (Parreñas 2005; Hossain & Shipman 2009; See Qin & Chang 2013 for Asian fathers). In the dichotomy of intense mother and distant father, mothers are usually the ones who are either reprimanded for diminished family bonding or praised for the children's exceptional academic achievements, as they are deemed the ones who decide to migrate abroad in order to better enact the ideology of intensive mothering (S. Lee 2016a, 2016b).

This trend overlooks the impact of gender achievement gap between fathers and mothers, not only of transnational families but throughout society.

Not only in Korea but in other countries, men still tend to have higher levels of education and more work experience, let alone transnational mobility, than women (Almquist 1987; Heward & Bunwaree 1999; Jacobs 1996, See Oh 2006 for the Korean case). In elite Korean transnational families, too, fathers are likely to be more-educated and more-transnational than mothers, although those mothers tend to have above-average levels of education and transnational mobility. Not many studies, however, discuss if and how this gender disparity or inequality shapes mothers and fathers differently in terms of their involvement in and aspirations for their children's education abroad. The transnational family literature, in large part, has not yet examined extensively non-financial paternal contributions, as well as the ways in which children in those families understand and respond to the gender divide. I, therefore, examine how both mothers and fathers in elite transnational families – who often have different levels of class-based resources – differently engage in their children's transnational upbringing. I also analyze their children's perceptions of the gender divide.

Korean students at elite U.S. colleges emerge out of a specific class, educational, and family context. Their academic achievements largely depend on their parents' advantaged class resources and high-stakes decisions for early study abroad, which are all required for what I call "global elite parenting." In contrast to the common view that ascribes intensive parenting and outperforming Asian students to widely-shared Asian cultural traits or values, I instead argue that any kind of intensive parenting should be understood in terms of social reproduction processes organized around the intersection of

class, race, and gender. By analyzing gendered and classed aspects of transnational parenting of high-achieving Korean children at elite U.S. colleges, I contend that children's education abroad is a means of class reproduction that is available only to affluent, highly-educated Korean parents, and their class reproduction is a deeply gendered activity.

### **Gender Divide between Daughters and Sons**

Existing studies about the impact of a child's gender on parental investment found that high-status parents tend to invest more in sons, whereas lower-status parents invest more in daughters (Freese & Powell 1999; Hopcroft 2005). The Trivers-Willard (T-W) model, so-called, has been tested to prove that sons of high-status fathers attain more education than daughters and that the daughters of low-status fathers attain more education than sons. Studies applying the model also found that mothers with ample resources tend to favor sons over daughters, either by adjusting the sex ratio at birth or by discriminative provisioning of sons and daughters (Hewison, Mark & Gaillard 1999).

Sons' advantageous position over daughters has been studied from multiple angles. Harris and Morgan (1991) found that daughters receive less attention from fathers than sons, although this differential can be attenuated by belonging to a sibship that contains more brothers. Fathers seem to make a greater differentiation between sons and daughters (See Siegal 1987). Raley and Bianchi (2006) found that fathers' investments appear to be higher in families with sons than those with daughters, as fathers spend more time with sons than with daughters. Gender roles and expectations have a larger impact on daughters than on sons: daughters do more housework than sons, reflecting the gender

division of labor in the family (Blair 1992; Crouter et al. 2001; Raley & Bianchi 2006). As children age, this gendered expectation seems to grow, as mothers choose daughters over sons as sources of emotional support and closeness (Suito & Pillemer 2006).

Research on Asian families highlights the gendered expectation of Asian daughters. Confucianism, at least symbolically, has built the Asian culture where sons are expected to take the major responsibility for taking care of parents. But researchers (Lei 2013; Oh, Ardel & Koropecj-Cox 2017) found that daughters are expected to and do provide more instrumental and emotional support to parents than sons. Asian parents also expect daughters, rather than sons, to derive status through marriage and perpetuate “authentic” culture and tradition of their families. For example, Asian parents who sent their daughters to U.S. colleges fear their daughters’ exposure to certain Western customs, such as premarital cohabitation (Constantine et al. 2005). The Asian patriarchy and its gendered notion of filial piety reproduces the docile subjects of a model minority (Ninh 2011). It sometimes prompts Asian women’s decision to leave home early and even migrate to the Western world (Y. Kim 2013).

Studying high-achieving Korean daughters at U.S. colleges allows me to investigate whether and how affluent Korean mothers and fathers treat daughters and sons differently, especially regarding their expectations of their children’s elite education abroad, future career, dating relationships, and marriage. Drawing on children’s narratives, I also examine whether and how daughters and sons view their parents’ involvement in their upbringing differently and what causes that gender difference.

## Data and Methods

This research draws on in-depth interviews with Korean students and their mothers and fathers at elite U.S. colleges. Individual interviews enabled me to conduct an analysis of the ways elite Korean children and parents constructed their meanings and realities of being either students abroad or transnational parents. I first interviewed 74 students, (38 daughters and 35 sons) who were either attending an elite U.S. college (66) or fresh out of an elite college (8) (graduated within the past year) at the time of their interviews. I then interviewed 34 parents (24 mothers and ten fathers), who sent their children to elite U.S. colleges. Among them, 29 parents were recruited through their children, and the rest of the parents, three mothers and two fathers, were recruited through other parents whom I had interviewed. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to interview those five parents' children, primarily because the children—mostly sons—were fulfilling their military duty in Korea or doing internships abroad outside the United States. But as the following analysis makes clear, their stories were similar to what I heard from the parents of the students I interviewed.

SAMPLING STRATEGY	
Children	Daughters = 38
	Sons = 35
Mothers	24
Fathers	10
Total = 107	

Table 1. Sampling Strategy

### *Students Interviews*

After receiving IRB approval for this study, I conducted interviews with students at elite colleges from December 2014 to April 2017. Most of these interviews took place



in the United States. I define elite colleges as colleges with acceptance rates lower than 15 percent. I also took the “value” residing in the name of the school into account, because in Korea, like the United States, only a handful of U.S. colleges are widely known and deemed prestigious. All things considered, I chose seven “Ivy League” schools (Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Dartmouth, Brown, Cornell, and the University of Pennsylvania) along with two prestigious technological universities (The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and The California Institute of Technology) and one selective liberal art college (Amherst College).

For interviews, I used a respondent-driven sampling technique. First, I contacted the associations of Korean students at the colleges I chose and asked if I could utilize their email lists for recruiting my research participants. Most board members of those student associations were cooperative and helped me throughout my recruitment process. At my request, they sent out my recruitment email through their email lists, and about 10% of the members of those associations contacted me to express their interests in my study. In December 2014, I met and interviewed the first student participant, one of the few students who contacted me for participation and asked if he could recommend a couple of his “Korean friends or colleagues” from a similar educational background so that I could contact them for an interview. He and many other first-round student participants helped me “snowball” my sample; I relied on a respondent-driven sampling after the first round of interviews. However, I restricted participants recruited by respondent-driven sampling to no more than three students recommended by any individual in the email sample.

I attempted to recruit the same number of daughters and sons, as gender is an important lens to analyze their transnational personal and family life in this study. That goal was mostly achieved, as the final sample included 38 daughters and 35 sons. I did not control students' citizenship status in respondent recruitment. Being "Korean" is defined as the way respondents identify themselves rather than on their legal status: during the interviews, I learned some Korean international students had U.S. or other citizenship since they were born overseas while their parents were studying or working abroad. This suggests that even when a student is not a legal citizen of South Korea, some identify themselves as ethnically and culturally Korean, and have been educated transnationally between Korea and other countries, including the United States. Social class was not screened prior to interviews. However, given the limitation on financial aid for international students and also high costs for maintaining transnational family such as frequent air travels between two countries, I could conclude that most student participants came from upper-middle or upper-class families; this conclusion was borne out in the interviews.

Age or grade in college were not controlled in initial email recruitments but were taken into consideration in subsequent sampling as a way to prioritize late-stage college students because juniors or seniors are more likely to have longer and more diverse experiences of study-abroad and job search compared to first- or second-year students. Reflecting Asian students' overrepresentation in business, technical, and health-related majors at the U.S. colleges (Simpson 2001), more than half of student participants were majoring in "hard" sciences, such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) although I did not select on those grounds. Half (37) of the students

graduated from high schools abroad, mostly in the United States, while another half (37) finished high school in Korea, although many of them also once attended K-12 U.S. schools for a short period at certain points in their upbringing.

Almost all of the students attended selective high schools either in Korea or abroad. Many of those who finished high school in the United States, for example, went to either one of the most prestigious U.S. boarding schools such as Phillips Academy in Andover, Phillips Exeter Academy, The Lawrenceville School, and Deerfield Academy, or public “magnet schools” such as Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology and the Commonwealth Governor's School. The students who finished high school in Korea shared a similar background in Korea: there are less than ten high schools with exclusive programs for students who wish to go to colleges abroad, including Daewon Foreign Language High School, Hanyoung Foreign Language High School, Hankuk Academy of Foreign Studies, and Korean Minjok Leadership Academy, all with a strong record of admission to elite U.S. colleges. These elite Korean prep schools have been teaching their “chosen” students “Ivy League skills” since the early 2000s (See Dillon 2008). Being graduates of those schools implies not only that students have considerable academic talents but also advantaged class backgrounds, as the tuition for those schools is much higher than the average cost for public high school education in Korea.

The interviews took place at or near student participants’ school or residence, at a quiet place of their choosing. As most schools I chose are in the Northeastern part of the United States, I was able to visit the schools the students were attending during school semesters, thanks to my residency in Amherst, Massachusetts. Each interview lasted

about two hours, and I recorded it in a digital format with their permission. I am fluent both in Korean and English, so either or both languages were used for interviews according to the participant's preference.

Interview questions for students covered the following topics: the circumstances under which they decided to or happened to study abroad, their ways of communicating with their parents and other family members while studying abroad, their evaluation of the parenting (from both mothers and fathers) and family dynamics, especially around schooling, that they experienced from their early years to their years in college, and their experiences in the United States both inside and outside of school. I used open-ended questions to assess their motives for transnational education and future plans, as well as daily experiences of being a transnational subject in both family and school. Finally, I asked more focused questions about their future prospects, especially in terms of marriage and career after graduating from college to examine how elite transnational migration had shaped these views.

### *Parents Interviews*

The second group of interview participants consists of 34 parents who sent their children to the elite U.S. colleges I chose to study. The primary purpose of interviewing parents is to compare their narratives with those of their children, in regard to parenting practices and experiences of transnational family. Thanks to interviews with both children and parents, I was able to describe their family dynamics with multiple sides; just as decades ago Jessie Bernard (1982 [1972]) argued every heterosexual marriage contains two marriages, a "his" and a "hers", I argue that every family likely contains

generational “sides”—that of parents (or mothers and fathers) and that of children (perhaps daughters and sons).

As with students, I did not strictly control or restrict parents’ demographic characteristics, such as age, occupation, income, educational level in recruitment. Parents’ gender, however, was taken into consideration because one of my primary focuses is on the impact of gender on the elite transnational parenting that I chose to study. I tried my best to recruit the same number of fathers and mothers, but in order to recruit as many as parent respondents, I did not restrict the number of parent participants who were introduced to me by their children or other parents.

At the end of each interview with students, I asked if I could interview any of their parents, ideally both, and if they agreed, I contacted their parents to schedule a face-to-face interview. About half of the children participants gave me their parents’ (mostly mothers’) contacts, and in total, I ended up interviewing 24 mothers and ten fathers, including four couples. In an attempt to triangulate interviews from mothers, fathers, and children, I tried to interview as many couples as possible, despite the difficulties. In total, I ended up interviewing four pairs of parents who were married to each other at the time of their interviews. Despite many of the parents’ ample experience of education and career abroad, most parent participants were residing in Korea at the time of their interviews. Therefore, I interviewed all of them while I was on summer breaks in my home country. Venues for in-person interviews depended on parent respondents’ preference, but it was mostly within the Seoul metropolitan area due to the extreme centralization of the capital region in Korea.

Some parents, more fathers than mothers, were frequently traveling or sometimes living abroad because of their work. Consequently, it was difficult for me to find fathers who were willing to participate even in a video chat interview. As a result, I interviewed more mothers than fathers. Moreover, as more fathers than mothers were working outside the home, having elite professions that often entail long-hours working and only a few days off, fathers seemed much more reluctant to participate in interviews than mothers. It is also possible that both parents and children, either consciously or unconsciously, considered having an interview with me upon children's request as a part of mothers' job, not of fathers. Interestingly, interviews with fathers tended to last longer than interviews with mothers. That is, the fathers that I could meet and interview were likely to be exceptional—they were very passionate about my research and wanted to contribute to it by sharing their reflections on not only their transnational fatherhood but their own educational and career trajectories in detail. Despite possible selection bias, the in-depth, life history interviews with ten elite Korean fathers provides a lens to understand how elite men could and actually do utilize their class resources for fathering.

As for demographic data, all parents but one mother had a college degree or higher. Nine mothers were employed, and 15 were stay-at-home mothers. Among the nine employed mothers, eight mothers had higher education degrees abroad, while one mother acquired her doctoral degree in Korea. All of them were professionals, including a doctor, college professor, private institute researcher, public school principal, and vocational counselor. As for the 15 stay-at-home mothers, none of them acquired their higher education degrees abroad. Except for one mother, all of them graduated from college or graduate school, mostly elite ones, in Korea and had some white-collar work

experiences – working as a school teacher, college lecturer, office worker in a large corporation, or translator – before marriage or childbirth. They said they chose to opt out of the workforce primarily to focus on childrearing.

Compared to the mothers, most father participants had higher levels of education—all ten fathers had postgraduate degrees. More than two-thirds of fathers (8) earned their master's or doctoral degrees abroad, mostly from U.S. colleges, whereas only two fathers are locally educated. Regardless of degrees, all fathers worked in elite professions—executive of large corporations (including a CEO), doctors, and college professors. Regardless of their residency, which was often fluid, fathers were the sole or primary breadwinners in all families except for one; there was one less-transnational, locally-educated father whose wife was earning slightly more than he was, although both of them had doctoral degrees and worked as professionals. Throughout the analysis, I use parents' education and profession to designate their class backgrounds. Despite some drawbacks, education is the most common measure of class in higher education literature (See Ide et al. 2018; Wilkins 2014). I categorize those who studied or worked abroad for a relatively long period of time (more than two years) as “highly transnational,” and others as “less transnational.”

Although interviews with parents were designed to cover many of the same topics as the students' interviews, I incorporated some additional questions, using the life history interview method to trace parents' own transnational experiences throughout their life courses. More specifically, interview questions for parents covered topics as follows: the purposes they sent their children to schools abroad at a relatively early age, their own transnational experiences such as studying or working abroad before and after marriage,

why they wanted to engage in this form of parenting, the strategies they used to parent their child transnationally, their efforts to maintain family bonds in a transnational setting especially through communications with the child or spouse abroad, their evaluation of their own parenting style and overall transnational family life, and their opinion about the public discourse on “tiger parenting” and “Wild Geese families.” Finally, I also asked about their aspirations for their child’s future after college, both in terms of career and marriage, and asked them to identify what they considered the ultimate goal of elite transnational parenting. Since I adopted the life history interview method, the interviews with parents lasted longer than those with students, with most lasting between two and three hours. Harvey (2011) suggests that elites often try and control an interview and be more particular about the questions they are willing to answer than other interview subjects. Therefore, I asked a number of open-ended questions deliberately designed so they could talk without feeling too much constraint. I think this helped them elaborate on their stories of their children, parenthood, aspirations and career.

My use of children’s and parents’ narratives provides a useful approach to meanings that they “relate about their own life episodes or lives” (Polkinghorne 1996, 77). The accounts of children and parents are reflective of their own experiences, but they also shed light on their household and parenting arrangements. While the homogeneity of the sample allows me to consider some within-group variations, it does not allow me to compare my sample to their less advantaged counterparts. Instead, studying elite families is a “strategy of the extreme case” (Blair-Loy 2001) that seeks to document highly resourceful agents and any structural constraint that limits them.



Children (74)	Transnational children	Korean high schools = 37 (50%)
		High schools abroad = 33 (44.6%)
	Migrant children (*Children who migrated to the United States with their parents in their childhood)	4 (5.4%)
Mothers (24)	Affluent opt-out mothers	12 (50%)
	Elite professional mothers	8 (33.3%)
	Less-affluent opt-out mothers	4 (16.7%)
Fathers (10)	Studied- or worked-abroad	8 (80%)
	Never-studied-abroad	2 (20%)

Table 2. All Participant Demographics

### *Data Analysis*

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then coded and analyzed using the qualitative research software NVivo 11 and 12. After transcribing interviews, I read transcripts multiple times and loosely coded them, first based on the main questions of interest in the study, then proceeding to more “focused coding” following constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2014).

After conducting interviews, I took notes on prominent findings, connections to the literature, and methodological reflections. While transcribing, I wrote more-detailed notes about emerging themes surfacing across transcripts. I incorporated all of my notes

into the process of developing coding schemes. I developed codes not only surfacing from my data but also for themes developed in prior studies of transnational families, study abroad students, and intensive parenting.

If respondents used any English word or phrase while speaking mostly in Korean during interviews, I used their exact word or phrase as much as possible. Because most student respondents used their English names more frequently than their Korean names, I used English pseudonyms for students throughout. And I refer to parent participants using the title “mother” and “father” and their children’s English names, such as Sam’s father or Emily’s mother, as most children in this study were frequently using their English names while abroad. After becoming parents, it is very common for Korean parents to be called by their children’s names; both my research and other studies adopt this naming practice (See Park & Abelmann, 2004; Kang, Park & Park 2020 for examples).

### **Research Questions and Dissertation Outline**

I address the following research questions to analyze shared and different understandings of mothers, fathers, and children regarding the processes of transnational elite parenting and the family dynamics that they experienced.

Focusing on children, I ask:

- 1) How do children view and interpret their mothers’ and fathers’ involvements in their transnational academic and personal life?
- 2) Which mothers and fathers do they consider as “good” parents? To which parent or parents do they give credit for their (academic) achievements?

Turning to the parents, I ask:

3) What parental goals or aspirations do mothers and fathers attempt to achieve through their children's studying abroad and what kinds of resources – financial, intellectual, cultural, and emotional – do they say they utilize to meet such goals?

4) In what ways, if at all, does such parental engagement in their children's schooling (choices and experiences) change or develop throughout children's life course?

Finally, for both parents and children, I address gender, asking:

5) How does gender of parent shape parental engagements throughout children's life course? Do the sons and daughters have different views of their mothers and fathers' involvement in the various stages of their lives? Does gender also affect the ways they accommodate to and utilize their transnational education?

In an attempt to demonstrate the impact of gender and class on transnational parenting and family experiences *within* each group, I decided to treat the narratives of children, mothers, and fathers separately. However, I still compare the narratives of three groups with one another not only throughout the next three chapters but in the Conclusion. In Chapter Two, using children's narratives, I discuss how high-achieving Korean daughters and sons studying abroad assess the gender divide between their mothers and fathers in their privileged transnational upbringing. The gendered expectation of mothers and fathers, as well as their achievement-oriented, highly-competitive background, shapes the way both daughters and sons understood and appreciated their parents' involvement in their upbringing.

In Chapter Three, drawing on interviews with mothers, both those who are employed professionals and stay-at-home mothers, I show how mothers understand

transnational motherhood, how it is organized and practiced largely according to the woman's own class position, especially women's educational background and occupational status. Whereas the ideal of a "sacrificial mother" led both groups of mothers to devote most of their energy to their children's education, only elite working mothers who once studied or worked abroad could stay involved in children's life abroad and get credit for that.

In Chapter Four, turning to elite transnational fathers, who are rarely studied in migration literature, I discuss how gendered class resources, such as high occupational status, prestigious educational credentials, and connections with other elite men, enable only a handful of Korean men (but many of the fathers in this dissertation) to father their high-achieving children abroad "successfully," in the eyes of themselves and their children.

Chapter Five triangulates the narratives of children, mothers, and fathers, I sum up the core empirical findings from the previous chapters and address the theoretical contributions of this dissertation. At the end, I also suggest some questions that future research usefully could address.

**CHAPTER II**

**CHILDREN'S GENDERED AND CLASSED VIEWS OF**

**ELITE TRANSNATIONAL PARENTING**

Gender is constructed via multiple interconnected and intersecting boundaries that mark and construct differences between (or among) men and women, within a system of inequality (Potuchek 1997). As in many other social institutions, gender controls the formation of families and households. On the level of social relations, gender differently shapes maternal involvements and paternal involvements in children's upbringing. For example, educating children is a primary part of maternal duty across cultures, and financial provision is the standard of being a good father. This gender divide distributes family resources to mothers and fathers unequally—it also affects who receives more credit and respect from children, I argue.

Gender conventions in Korea expect mothers to be the primary caregivers of their children, with a great deal of pressure to turn their children into high-achievers, regardless of mothers' employment status (See Hwang 2012; E.A. Lee 2013). Korean mothers are often portrayed as not only self-giving and devoted but playing a leading role in intensive parenting throughout children's upbringing (Chun 2002; J. Park 2009). The roles of fathers, in contrast, tend to be overlooked or simplified as breadwinning. Korean transnational fathers' involvements in their children's upbringing have not been rarely discussed, except for their long-distance financial involvement (See S. Lee 2019 for exceptions). In the dichotomy of intense mother and distant father, only mothers have

been publicly reprimanded for diminished family bonding or praised for the children's exceptional academic achievements.

Some, although not many, researchers (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997; Parreñas 2005, 2013) discussed the gender division of transnational parenting in less-advantaged contexts: in underprivileged transnational families, maintained by parents who migrated to developed Western countries to provide for their children left in home countries, the traditional gender division of labor in the family often got redistributed. As Parreñas (2005) argues in her study of Filipino transnational families, “the formation of transnational households threatens cultural parameters and institutional norms marked by material inequalities between men and women as well as ideology” (5). In most Filipino transnational families, migrant mothers' earning power increases, and migrant fathers experience geographic inconvenience in maintaining their ascribed responsibility of disciplining children. These findings, however, need to be revisited when studying more privileged transnational families, as fathers' breadwinning is less likely to be changed after migration.

Family scholarship and parenting literature, especially about migrant families, have relied mostly on parents', especially mothers' narratives, while children's narratives are analyzed much less (See Parreñas 2005 for an exception). This chapter turns to those often left out of academic analyses—high-achieving Asian children who grew up in an advantaged, transnational context. Drawing on the in-depth interviews with the students who were attending or recently graduated (within one year) from ten elite U.S. colleges, this chapter examines how children make sense of their transnational upbringing and family arrangements in ways that fit and conform to their gendered expectations of

mothers and fathers. I particularly focus on the gendered *and* classed ways in which those children view and interpret their mothers' and fathers' involvements in their academic and personal life. Interrogation of the transnational family life through the lens of young adult children provides a close understanding of the gender divides in elite transnational parenting, which often happens between a highly-developed, English-speaking Western country and an Asian country.

This chapter focuses on children's views of the ways their mothers and fathers engage in their transnational education and their understanding of the "good" mother and "good" father. That is, I ask: who do they give credit to and in what ways do their class resources shape each of those images. Focusing on the gender of children participants, I also compare the daughters and sons. I ask: what generates such difference between the views of daughters and the ones of sons and what can we make of that difference?

### **Extensive Yet Undervalued Maternal Involvement**

#### *Mothers' "Concerted Cultivation" in Early Years*

Most mothers (about 80%) of the students I interviewed were stay-at-home mothers—more than half of them had had careers (that required college-level education) until roughly the time they gave birth. Not many students questioned their mothers' unemployment or interrupted careers, except for some daughters who expressed sympathy for their mothers' "rejected dreams." Students whose mothers were unemployed said their mothers *chose* to opt out of the labor force in order to concentrate on education children. In many children's narratives, especially those of sons, such a decision was depicted as normal.

When asked about his mother's employment history, John, a son who came to the United States relatively early for a prep boarding school, said his mother "naturally" became a stay-at-home mother. Quoting his father, John said:

My dad said he wanted my mom to stay home and focus on children, because he considered children's education more important than additional income. My dad has been working for the same company [a famous Korean conglomerates] for a long time, and because he was able to support for the family on his own, he thought it was better for everyone that my mom stayed home and educate us [him and his sister] well, although my mom was totally capable of working outside the home.

Many sons and daughters, like John, tended to take the man-breadwinner model for granted and found it beneficial to the entire family, despite their mothers' high level of education. In many students' narratives, mothers' top priority was and should be intensive mothering.

Students believed that their mothers, whether employed or not, put a great deal of time and energy into their early education, much more than what they thought their fathers did. Many daughters and sons remembered their well-educated mothers confidently teaching them various subjects, especially English, during their childhood either in Korea or abroad. For example, Yvonne, who spent her childhood in the Middle East, recalled her mother's intensive involvement in her early education:

I remember my mom always encouraged me to study hard when I was in elementary school... She made me work on math and science workbooks after school every day. She also made me read a lot of books. I think she ordered them [books in Korean language] from Korea and got those via air mail.

Even though Yvonne described her mother's early involvement as intense, she did not refer to her mother as an overinvolved "tiger mom." Students seemed to have expected their mothers to be highly involved, particularly early in their lives. The involved mom, in these early days, was in the children's eyes a "good" mom whose intensive help was



what they wanted or needed—whether it was to learn English or engage in extracurricular activities.

In Korea, a country that has one of the largest shares of private expenditure on educational institutions (OECD 2018), searching for the best *hagwon* (supplementary educational institute) or private tutor for their children is deemed an essential part of mothering. As most children in this study seem to have done a wide range of extracurricular activities, often including sports, music, arts, and debates, they vividly remembered how their mothers recruited their teachers in early days.

David, a son who spent his childhood in Korea, reflected on the “busy” days when he was in elementary school:

I learned everything that was available [in the neighborhood], including Taekwondo, drawing, piano... I heard that I was such a shy kid who could barely talk in front of people. So, my mom enrolled me even in a public speech lesson. I really did everything.

While looking back on his crammed schedule in early days, his tone was not critical.

Rather, he tried to understand why his mother was sometimes “obsessive” about his early education, by saying:

Since I was young, I’ve always thought that it is so important for every kid to find the thing that he or she really loves and can do their best for. Look at all famous people like Yuna Kim (South Korean figure skater who won an Olympics gold medal)! I think my mom also wanted me to find my own thing that I could work hard on, and that was why she sent me to so many different lessons.

He rationalized his mothers’ “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003) by advocating the efficacy of it. Despite his parents’ relatively low level of transnational experience, he shared a similar view of early maternal involvement with more-privileged children participants. Such comments show that mothers’ concerted cultivation is a norm among high-achieving Korean students abroad.

Intensive mothering in Korea was not a solo activity. Instead, it was very much a collective enterprise. Mothers' intense and collective management of children's education often continued and became more important after the students entered middle school. According to children, especially during their high school days, many mothers cooperatively managed extracurricular activities that bolstered college application packages, such as volunteer work, internships, or tournaments. Almost all children recalled their own and their friends' mothers interacting in what they called a "team"—a small, exclusive network of mothers who sent their children to the same school. For example, as a "team," they said their mothers hired private tutors for the children's Advanced Placement courses or the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Because there are a very small number of (less than ten) Korean schools that prepares their students for colleges abroad, such team tutoring was deemed necessary by their mothers, these students suggested. Mothers' collective management of their children's college application is thus the product of their particular needs and context.

Children's views toward such mothers' "cartel," as one student put it, was ambivalent. On the one hand, engaging in mothers' groups was deemed a quality of a "good" mother in their elite social circle. A small number of children complained if they thought their mothers did not, or could not, actively take part in such networks, emphasizing it as a problem in their upbringing. For instance, Yoana, who described her mother's parenting philosophy as "too hands-off" regardless of her family's affluence, explained why she wanted her mother to be more involved in her extracurricular activities:

I sometimes blamed my mom. I was such a competitive kid, so I wanted to learn everything my friends were learning, such as debates and dancing. But my mom

kind of ignored me if I asked her to send me to such lessons, and it made me sad... When I was in high school, many of my friends' mothers brought opportunities for all kinds of extra- curricular activities. But my mother never did so.

Although she felt proud of her independence, she simultaneously emphasized the efficiency of the “team” approach by saying, “If my mom would have hung out with more of my friends' mothers, my college application could be so much easier.”

On the other hand, children often criticized mothers-led “teams” for non-academic reasons. The students' ambivalent stance largely stemmed from the society-wide stigma attached to “too-involved” mothers. When I asked Sam if his mother joined any “team” for his education, he defensively answered:

My mom attended some mothers' meetings... But there were so many mothers who were more aggressive than my mom, like those who went to every briefing session on college admission. My mom was not like them. She actually didn't like those mothers.

He tried his best to understate his mother's engagement in any kind of mothers' groups:

She usually hung out with mothers who were laid-back like herself, and if they came up with any plan for extracurricular activities, then I naturally joined it with the children of those mothers.

Although admitting that he largely benefited from the opportunities his mother generated with other mothers, he tried to describe his mother as “chill” and “not-that-intense,” worrying if his mother could be seen as “too much” compared to what, he believed, typical Korean mothers would do. He also deemphasized her involvement by saying it was “natural” for him to join these groups.

Both inside and outside academia, Korean mothers, especially those of middle-to-upper class, are stereotyped as excessive when it comes to children's education. The Korean term “Chi-ma-ba-ram” (equivalent to “helicopter mom”) pathologizes mothers'

excessive “status production work” (Papanek 1979) by assuming that children would grow dependent under obsessive mothers. This stigma of intensive mothering, especially with regard to mothers’ groups, may deter students from unquestioningly advocating their mothers’ participation in mothers’ groups. As a consequence, students tended to elaborate on other mothers’ activities in teams, attempting to understate their own mothers’.

Some children, especially those who went to boarding schools abroad, blamed mothers’ groups for mother-child conflicts. Rather than individual approaches, mothers of boarding school students seemed to prefer collective parenting arrangements, as they could not visit schools abroad frequently. Through intimate yet exclusive meetings, children believed that their and their friends’ mothers stayed informed about not only the school but children’s daily lives, especially regarding dating relationships. This exchange of information was seen as nosy and gossipy, as the children considered it their mothers’ covert surveillance.

James, who graduated from a U.S. prep boarding school, explained why he did not fully appreciate several mothers’ groups that his mother was participating in:

There are all sorts of mothers’ groups. Like my middle school’s mothers’ group, my [U.S.] boarding school’s mothers’ group, and current college’s mothers’ group... She is not a leader of any of it, but she tries to attend as many meetings as possible. ... When I was in high school, she heard that I had a girlfriend from other mothers before I told her. I felt awkward to talk with my mom afterward.

He admitted that socializing with other mothers – regardless of purpose – was a part of his mother’s limited social life. However, when it came to the supervision of his private life, he could not help blaming mothers’ networks as the main source of conflict.

On another note, Megan, whose parents went to elite Korean colleges but had not studied abroad, said her mother kept a distance from other mothers whom she described

as “highly-transnational” yet “too intense.” Although she was proud of herself for being less dependent on any kind of support from mothers’ groups, she did not hesitate to elaborate on the disappointment she felt about her mother’s peripheral position in mothers’ network during her high school days:

Some of my friends’ mothers went to Harvard or other U.S. colleges. They also had cousins who were attending Ivy League schools. It discouraged me sometimes, as I thought like, “How uninformed my family is!” To be honest, I was jealous of those friends, because we were in such a harsh competition at that time.

She said she honestly talked about it with her mother, persuading her mother to engage in mothers’ network more:

My best friend’s mother was one of those [studied abroad] mothers, and she knew about [U.S.] college admissions so well. My mom got to get close with her, so she shared a lot of information with my mom. That was how my mom managed to help me.

She felt uncomfortable with the exclusivity of such select groups, but simultaneously, was relieved that her mother eventually managed to engage in them for her college admission. She continued to say:

Sometimes I found those [mothers’] groups very select and exclusive. At first, I thought it was made of students whose mothers were close to each other, but it was not like that. It was more like a group of students whose family backgrounds were similar to each other.

Her remark showed her ambivalence toward mothers’ groups and consequential class divides among students in her prestigious high school, which was well known for its preparatory program for U.S. college admission.

Few children denied their mothers’ participation in mothers’ networks and the support (and benefits) they received from it. Not many children, however, praised it as crucial to their “success” in getting into elite U.S. colleges. They rather tended to

reinforce the society's pathological view of intense mothers by emphasizing the drawbacks of mothers' collective management of children's education, such as "raising dependent children," perhaps in order to highlight their own efforts for their achievements and independency.

### *Mothers' Role as "Emotional Experts" at All Stages*

In children's narratives, mothers, at all stages, were (expected to be) "emotional experts" (Risman 1998) whose primary job was to take care of the emotional well-being of their family members. Despite occasional mother-child conflicts, mothers seemed to be emotionally closer to their children than fathers, as mothers shared more intimate moments with their children. Children tended to describe their mothers as more nurturant and sensitive than their fathers. Many of them said that emotional support was the greatest support they received from their mothers, especially after they started studying abroad.

Aaron, who started his transnational education in Canada at the age of 11, reflected on the days when his mother was staying in Canada with him for his middle and high school education. His mother, in those days, was a "Wild Geese" mother while his father, a CEO of his own business, was supporting the family project financially from Korea. Looking back on the extracurricular activities he did in high school, he remarked:

I can't believe how my mom supported me with all the rowing practices I had in high school. We sometimes had practices at 4 a.m. three times in a week. She woke up earlier than me to wake me up, made a good breakfast, persuaded me to eat, and drove me to the practice place. [...] She always waited for me, standing at the riverside and watching me practicing until the end. Many of my teammates' mothers also did so, but I still think it wasn't easy for anyone.

As his rendition suggests, his mother's help with his extracurricular activities clearly included physical sacrifice, practical help and educational support. He, however, interpreted the help as emotional. And he emphasized that his mother "was always there" whenever he needed to feel supported.

As these high-achieving children put much emphasis on their academic achievements and therefore were sensitive to competition, they remembered their mothers' emotional support during their high school days, especially in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, very vividly. They gave their mothers ample credit for this support.

After entering college in the United States, children seemed to expect to receive more direct emotional support, such as warm words of encouragement, from their mothers. They said that their mothers initiated overseas phone calls, video chats, and text messages more often than their fathers did. And they did not find it unusual; mothers in children's narratives were often "messengers" of their families, and many children found that their mothers fulfilled the task successfully. It, however, does not mean that their fathers were "off the hook" for communicating with their children abroad. Rather, many children found that their fathers were also engaging in parent-child transnational communications, although not as frequently as they thought their mothers were.

Not many children complained about the frequent calls or text messages they had with their mothers. In fact, quite a number of daughters and sons said they *enjoyed* talking with their parents, especially with their mothers, as it relieved the stress and loneliness they felt while abroad. Rather than criticizing their parents for being controlling or obsessive, children tended to find frequent parent-child communication beneficial not only to their mental health but to family bonding.

Sam, who left Korea for a U.S. boarding school at the age of 15, said, “I’m talking to my parents almost every day. I talk to them more often than I did in high school.” Although he found his father much involved in their “family [text message] chat room,” he admitted that his mother was the one who usually heard his complaints. Sam was one of many children who said they talked to their parents almost every day, or at least every other day, during school semesters. This might well be associated with their class background, as class affects the frequency of parent-child communication. Other studies suggest that sons with college-educated fathers report higher relationship quality and more frequent communication than others (See Ide et al. 2018).

Many children believed that such frequent conversation strengthened the bond between them and their mothers. But some children felt that their mothers, much more often than their fathers, probed into their private life, especially with regard to dating relationships. Daughters, more so than sons, confided in me about this. For example, Hailey, who introduced her mother as one of her “best friends,” elaborated on the ambivalent feelings she often felt when having an overseas call with her mother:

When I was in ninth grade [in a U.S. boarding school], I thought my mom was too obsessed with me. [...] I couldn’t understand why she wanted to know every bit of my life, especially about my friends. [In college], she is still asking a lot about my friends. She wants to know what I do with them, such as whether I drink with them after classes or not.

Although she seemed to see her mother’s surveillance as an inevitable part of transnational mothering, she could not help expressing her displeasure. To ensure that their children were transitioning to adulthood properly, in their eyes and the eyes of others in their social circles, some mothers appeared to routinely check on their children’s personal life across the ocean. And this part of “status production work” was often



stigmatized as “too much” by the children. This was exacerbated in daughters’ cases: given the double standard that punishes women’s casual sex more harshly than men’s, daughters said they had a stricter curfews and suggested they had parental supervision more often than did sons.

This emotional and private maternal involvement appeared to compensate for the decreasing influence mothers had on the practical decisions of children’s college education and career preparation. At that point, children tended to find their mothers, especially stay-at-home mothers, taking their hands off from their children’s school and career decisions and ceding the guiding role to their fathers. Moreover, not many children saw their mothers as having the cultural capital to be “good advisors.” That was reserved for their fathers, who were mostly high-earning and highly-transnational.

Heather, who decided to study abroad at her father’s urging, described her relationship with her mother in sharp contrast to her relationship with her father:

[After studying abroad] my mom never gives her opinion on my education. My father is the one who is in charge of it. I sometimes talk about my grades or job plans with my mom, but very roughly. We just hang out together and talk about trivial things in my private life. We don’t get serious.

Although she seemed to appreciate the strong bond with her mother, she simultaneously undervalued her mother’s involvement by describing it as related to “trivial things.” In contrast, she described her father’s advice as regarding the “more important” aspects of her life, such as college education and career.

Aaron, who went to school in multiple countries, including Korea, Canada, and the United States, elaborated on his mother’s constant emotional support from early years to college days. “Whenever I get stressed out, my mom tells me like, ‘It will be alright. Everything will work out, so you just do your best.’ I think that is what she really wants

from me.” Despite his genuine gratitude for his mother’s “cheerleading”, he moved on to complain about some parts of the conversations he was having with his mother:

She still asks me whether I’m eating well or not [while in college]. That’s the main content of our conversation nowadays. At this point, I don’t really think she needs to ask about that, you know, because I’m all grown up!

Mothers’ transnational support for children’s college life abroad seemed to involve not only words of encouragement but concern for children’s health, and many children, like Aaron, started to find such concern sometimes excessive or even unnecessary as they grew up.

This was more notable in the case of children whose parents had not lived, studied, or worked abroad at all. David, one of those children, said his mother was the one who led the transnational communication he was having with his parents, a view similar to what children of studied- or worked-abroad parents said:

My mom is the one who usually calls me. My dad rarely calls me, because he just assumes that I’m doing well most of the time. My mom, however, calls me often and asks if I ate well, slept well, or took vitamins, and so on...

He moved on to elaborating on the difficulty of having a college- or career-related conversation with his never-lived-abroad mother—he felt there was no longer a “rapport” between him and his mother after he left Korea for college:

My mom sometimes asks me which grades I got, but she doesn’t really know about the classes I’m taking here [at an Ivy League college]. She doesn’t know anything. [...] Even if I talk about how I’m preparing for the job market now, I don’t think my mom understands it. That’s why I don’t bring up that issue [while on the phone]. [...] If I really need to talk about it [job market preparation], then I really have to use the vocabularies that she can understand, and it will limit our conversation. Do you think she will understand the term like “private equity fund”? [laugh]

He continued: “My mom always talks about my health. That’s all.” Despite his genuine appreciation of his mother’s concerns for his private life, especially health, he seemed

disappointed that neither of his parents could counsel him with regard to career preparation.

Daughters were similar when it came to undervaluing mothers' emotional support in later years. Hilary, a daughter who finished her schooling in several countries, said that she "had to go through" her father's approvals when making decisions about not only her education but private life, such as trips with friends. She said:

I need my dad's approval for almost everything, so that's what makes me talk to my dad first. After explaining everything to my dad, I usually feel exhausted, so I don't re-explain everything to my mom. So, my mom gets to know the result only at the end.

Her mother, in her eyes, was the one who could share more "fun moments" with. "I go out shopping with her when I go home for summer. That's how we interact," she said. In her comparison of her father and her mother, her father served as the final decision maker because of his breadwinning role as well as his higher level of transnational mobility.

Managing young adult children's private life, dating relationship in particular, seemed to be reserved for mothers across class lines. Quite many sons and daughters found mothers' involvement bothersome or even intrusive. It led them to avoid having "too-specific" conversations about their life abroad with their mothers. For example, Henry, who said he "adored" his mother's cheerful voice over the phone, seemed to be cautious about the calls he had with his mother:

[During the phone call with my mom,] I do talk about my private life, even about the person who I'm dating. But I don't talk about the nitty gritty much. I just want to make that conversation as short as possible.

He found the dialogues with his father "quite different" than the ones with his mother, although he did not talk to his father as often as he did to his mother. "My dad just listens to what I say, like, what I'm studying or working on." In his narratives, his father was the

one who was more comfortable to talk to, especially when it came to his college life abroad.

Similarly, Emily, a daughter who considered herself very close to her mother, said her stay-at-home mother was “not aware of what I’m doing” for career preparation, even when she gave a detailed explanation. “Now she [my mother] just tells me to do my best. How can she help me now? She tries to understand what I’m doing and always be supportive,” she said. Instead, she often found her mother “nagging” when they talked on the phone. “She doesn’t like me walking around at night. But she also wants me to date someone,” she said with a laugh. She tried to understand such advice as a sign of her mother’s care or even a “joke.” She, however, also said that her father rarely asked about her personal life, appreciating this as his “coolness”.

### **Unusually Tangible Paternal Involvement**

#### *Fathers’ Early Involvements: Being a “Good Cop”*

Daughters and sons’ views of their fathers during their childhood was fairly different from their views of their mothers at this time. Few children remembered their fathers directly managing their early education. Some children seemed to have learned math or science from their fathers during childhood if their fathers majored in the “hard sciences.” But such paternal involvement in early education was uncommon; children said their fathers were just “too busy” to spend much time with them in the early years. As such, few children criticized or complained about their fathers’ under-involvement in their early education, perhaps because they – and the society – tended to give mothers the responsibility of educating young children. In turn, the fathers’ “hands-off” approach did

not seem to surprise or disappoint the children. Instead, in the early years, fathers tended to play the role of mediator, or “good cop” as children put it, while mothers diligently managed their children’s daily schedules as the major part of their maternal role, for which some children criticized their mothers.

Ethan was one of those students who draw a clear contrast between his mother and his father when it came to their early involvement. Looking back on his childhood, he said: “I was quite stressed out because my mom pushed me quite often. I think she expected a lot for me.” With a different tone, he reflected on his father, who he thought was “much more chill” than his mother. He said, “My father wanted me to take good care of my health, so he asked me to work out constantly. That was all. Except for that, he didn’t give me any specific guidance.”

Similarly, Jennifer remembered receiving warm words from her father when she was up until late at night to study and do homework. “My dad didn’t like me studying until late at night. Whenever he saw me being tired, he said, ‘Hey, don’t study too hard. You will do well on the test.’” Like her, many children remembered their fathers trying to relieve them from the “pressure of perfection” by frequently complimenting what they achieved or siding with them if there was a mother–child conflict. Some even said that their fathers’ conciliatory role prevented possible mother–child conflicts.

Fathers’ “good cop” role was often seen as emotional support, especially when children found their mothers “too intense” with regard to their early education. Emily, who attended an elementary school in the United States for a few years owing to her father’s overseas assignment, spoke of an episode during those days:

After I came back [from the United States], I attended an English supplementary institution specifically for returnee children. Oh, I hated it! Everyone except me

spent several years abroad so they spoke English much better than me. The class was too intense.

She moved on to comparing her mother and her fathers in terms of their reactions to her “sniveling”:

My dad finally got to know how much I hated it, so he told me to quit immediately. My mom didn’t agree with my dad, but he told me it was totally okay to quit if I didn’t like it.

Emily attributed her relatively relaxing childhood to her father’s considerate and “laidback” attitude, while disparaging her mother’s intense involvement, even though she later added, perhaps out of a desire to not seem too critical of her mother, that both of her parents “did their best” for her.

Despite their under-involvement in children’s early education, fathers were not entirely distant in children’s memoirs. In certain circumstances, fathers, in the eyes of children, were more involved than mothers. Disciplining children, for example, seemed to have often been a fathers’ role. Neither sons nor daughters, however, said they were frightened of their fathers. They remembered fathers’ disciplinary role being reserved exclusively for teaching manners or etiquette and healthy lifestyle, such as “getting up early,” “working out regularly,” and “behaving well to others.”

Many sons and daughters genuinely appreciated their fathers for willingly taking that role. For example, Julia, remembered her father being generous to her most of the time: “My dad rarely scolded me even when I did poorly on the test. He was happy if I did my best.” When asked about any conflict she had with her father during her childhood, she ended up pointing out only one memory: “When I lied about something, he lectured me on the importance of honesty. But that was the only moment he was mad at me. Except for that, he never disciplined me.”

Using very similar vocabularies, Eric also explained how his father disciplined him during his childhood. He called his father a “tiger dad,” not because his father pushed him to study hard but because his father disciplined him hard *when needed*: “He was sweet most of the time, but he disciplined me so hard when I didn’t behave well. He got mad at me only in those circumstances. It was very effective,” he said, expressing gratitude to his father. In children’s narratives, the term “tiger” connoted resoluteness and authority.

Children expressed greater appreciation for their fathers’ moral advice than their mothers’ meticulous management of their early education. For instance, David emphasized that his father was the one who “made [him] a good person,” despite his father’s low academic involvement in the early years. He said:

He wanted me to become a good person rather than a smart person. [...] He never told me to become successful or famous. He just wanted me to become a man of upright character.

Especially in sons’ narratives, fathers were distant yet deserving of respect and appreciation, whereas mothers were self-devoting yet sometimes controlling. This children’s high respect toward their fathers continued when they moved on to discussing parents’ support for later education.

#### *Fathers’ Role as “Study Abroad Counselor” in Later Years*

The understated paternal involvement in children’s education ended when the children applied to high schools, especially to those abroad. According to children, their fathers, more often than their mothers, were the ones who initiated prepping for school interviews, and sometimes made contacts with school administrators or teachers abroad.

Children attributed such assistance with their school applications to fathers' high level of transnational mobility, especially as it entailed proficiency in English and ample experience of and knowledge about the U.S. education system.

Jennifer, whose father went to a U.S. graduate school, confessed that it was her father who initiated her and her brother's education abroad. Looking back on the day when she decided to study abroad, she said:

One day, my dad asked us if we wanted to go to a U.S. boarding school. We first said no. But he didn't give up and continued persuading us. he even gave us a book with a title something like "America's top 100 boarding schools" and the book was all marked and underlined with the schools my dad chose.

Jennifer understood her father's intense education fervor as a natural consequence of his own high academic achievement and came to attribute her academic success to his active involvement.

Jake, drawing a sharp contrast between his mother and his father, explained why his father, who finished his Master of Business Administration (MBA) program in the United States, was more involved in his boarding school life than his never-studied-abroad mother:

My dad speaks English much better than my mother does, and he knew more teachers of mine than my mom knew. . . . My mom also can speak English a little bit but because my dad often goes abroad for his business, he knows more about the life abroad than my mom knows. . . . My dad took care of big, important things and my mom took care of other small things when they visited my school during parents' weekends.

Jake did not question much about his father's heavy involvement in his education abroad, believing (and appreciating) that his father "knew well" about the U.S. education. Simultaneously, he saw his mother as less qualified to be involved in his education abroad due to a lack of transnational experiences. To Jake and many other children, the



parent who had more firsthand transnational experiences was the “better guide” for their education abroad.

Helping children’s college or high school application, especially for schools abroad, was reserved for fathers particularly when fathers had studied or worked abroad. For example, Henry elaborated how his father, who once worked as an exchange professor in the United States, largely helped with his college application. Instead of his mother who took care of most of his early education, Henry said his father was the one who helped his college application the most, even more than did his school teachers:

[Korean magnet] schools do not help us boost our applications [with extracurricular activities]. We have to do it by ourselves. [...] Most information [about extracurricular activities] was on the Internet so my dad searched the Internet a lot for me. At that time, I was so busy with AP [Advanced Placement] classes so I didn’t have much time for that, so my dad did it for me. he found out some application deadlines and reminded me of them.

Henry found his fathers’ guidance proactive and productive, whereas he believed his mother “usually gathered some information from other mothers.” Although he seemed to genuinely appreciate the support from both parents, he gave more credit to his father’s firsthand knowledge than to his mother’s secondhand information. This was typical of the students – both daughters and sons – I interviewed. Moreover, fathers’ role as “managers” of children’s transnational education continued, and even expand, after children entered college.

#### *Professional Paternal Involvement in later Years*

In the later stages, particularly after the children entered college in the United States, fathers’ involvement and influence tended to increase dramatically as they had more resources to offer to support their children’s academic and career achievements.

Many sons and daughters confessed that their fathers provided them with substantial assistance for their career preparation, such as choosing the field to work in or finding internships.

Fathers' influence often shaped which career children decided to pursue. William said his father, an executive member of a Korean large corporation, was the one who affected his career choice the most. He remarked:

My father had a lot of friends and acquaintances who were working in the consulting field. Although his job was managing the company he was working for, he seemed to want to work in the consulting field, so he often talked about the field to me.

While explaining parental influence on his career choice, he drew a clear contrast between his father and his mother, who was a stay-at-home mother. "When it comes to my future career, my father's input is much bigger than my mother's, because my father is still working [outside the home] and my mom is not." He believed such gap made his father a better adviser than his mother.

Many of the high-achieving children wanted to receive hands-on support or advice for career preparation from their parents, especially from elite fathers. And in most cases, fathers were the ones who were capable of providing such involvement. Walter, one of the few children who felt the lack of such support from their fathers, said, "Even when I talked about what I'm thinking about my future job, he seems not being able to relate to me. I can't learn much in such circumstances. [...] I rather wish to hear more about his own work."

Except for a few children including Walter, most daughters and sons elaborated on the ways their fathers "helped" their career preparation, such as their search for internship opportunities. For instance, Yoana, whose father was a doctor, appreciated her

father for his help with her search for an internship, even in the field which was not his father's own. "How can young students like me find a good internship on our own? At first, I felt disappointed when no one helped me find an internship. [...] [But] I ended up finding one thanks to my dad's help. He had a friend who was working in the financial field," Yoana confided in me.

Elite fathers' social networks often helped them provide their children with career-related support. Many high-status professional fathers seemed to have introduced their children to people who could provide internship opportunities or detailed career advice. Children who received such paternal support admitted that such "bridges" were very helpful for their career search.

Rachel, whose father was an executive member of a large Korean corporation, elaborated on how her father helped her career preparation:

My dad knows many businessmen or executives of major companies, so he asks a lot of things of them for me. [...] When I was searching for internships, he helped me a lot. he did not like my decision to work in a small start-up company. But I didn't change my mind, and thankfully he continued helping me [find an internship at a start-up.]

As most children, including Rachel, wanted to find a job either in the United States or in Korea, internships and detailed guides to the Korean (or the U.S.) job market would be one of the most beneficial resources they could get from their fathers' network of diverse professionals.

Entering college led many children to see the (potential) value of their fathers' class resources even more clearly. The unusually tangible paternal involvement was not what most Korean lower-class, less-transnational fathers, not to mention mothers, would

or could do for their children. This distinctiveness of their fathers' involvement led these children to frame it more positively.

Many sons and daughters introduced their elite fathers as “examples of success” that they could emulate. Sometimes this started early: Sarah, whose major is cognitive science, explained how she ended up hoping to follow the same career path as her father:

My dad is a doctor, a brain specialist. he influenced me a lot on my interest in neurology. When I was in elementary school, our school had a lot of experiential learning activities, such as shadowing our parents at work, so I often went to the laboratory where my dad used to work and played with brain models there. If any of my parents could have guided me more, everything could have been much easier.

When asked about career aspiration, Sarah did not talk much about her mother, who opted out of a professional job to prioritize motherhood. Instead, she said that as she grew up, she started to understand how hard it would be to be successful and “hard working” as her father was.

This was more common among sons. Ethan, whose dream was to establish a start-up company, said his father was “one of the biggest supporters” of him. “He always wishes the best for me, staying behind me rather than leading me from the front.” Ethan said. He moved on to explaining why he “wanted to learn more” from his CEO father:

He has gone through many hardships and tasted the sweetness and bitterness of life [outside the home] . . . I really admire his diligence. he is quite old now but still works very hard. he always thinks big and looks far ahead. . . he can see where the money goes.

As a “self-made” businessman, Ethan's entrepreneurial father seemed to be the role model Ethan could look up to. He said his father's career achievement was a motivation for him to pursue high-level career goals. “I grew up thinking my father was so cool,” he added.

Fathers' career success, particularly in the fields of elite professions in which many children wanted to work, led high-achieving young adult children to evaluate their fathers as "good" fathers. The term "competent" and "capable" were used in a number of children's descriptions of their fathers. For example, Hailey said her father, a CEO of an IT company, was "born hard-working." She said: "He is somewhat obsessed with his job. He even sketches [for new products] on the weekends." The work obsession that she believed her father had was not something negative. Rather, she saw it as a source of success, which she respected. Being proud of her father, she said:

It's so interesting to see how obsessive my dad is when it comes to his work. I thought my dad was an easy-going, laidback person, but actually he's not like that. He loves working, especially with people. He loves making achievements with his employees.

With regard to her mother's career, which was also an elite profession, she did not provide the same description. Instead, she explained how her father facilitated her mother's work: "My dad is in the IT field, so he uses SNS [Social Networking Service] very well. So, he recommended my mom to use SNS for her work." To Hailey, her father was not only a successful entrepreneur but also a good father whom she could look up to.

Similarly, Sam attributed much of his own achievement to the lesson he learned from his CEO father. "My father grew his business through a lot of hardships. [...] Even when he was in a doctoral program [in the United States], he had multiple jobs for me and my mom." He described his father's success as the "driving force" for his own future. "When I see him [my dad], I see what hard working really is. He was the reason why I worked so hard [in school]," he added.

When it came to fathers' emotional support in later years, children presented diverse views: some – about one third of children participants – remarked on how helpful

their fathers were, not only academically but emotionally, throughout their upbringing.

Yoana explained her father's support for her decision to go to a graduate school after college, which she greatly appreciated about.

He always tells me to do whatever I want. [...] I was worried about the tuition of an Ivy League school when I applied for it, but when he got to know about my concern, he told me to stop worrying. He said he would take care of the tuition, so I didn't have to worry about it. He told me like, "I will be so happy even if you just become a stay-at-home mother after graduating from an Ivy League school. Your college experience will make you a very special stay-at-home mother." He was so sure that I would love attending an Ivy League school.

She interpreted her father's support for her choice of college and future career, which was possible due to her family's material affluence, as both financial and emotional support, in this case for the possibility of a potentially highly gendered – i.e. stay-at-home mom – choice.

Elite fathers' (transnational) education and career appeared to be the primary source of their emotional support for their children abroad. Hailey, whose father who went to college and graduate school in the United States, whom we heard talk critically of her mother's surveillance commented on why her father was more understanding of her college life abroad than her mother, especially regarding her off-campus social life:

My mom does not know how often U.S. college kids drink and party. But my dad knows about it because he also went to a U.S. college.

She implied that her father's "good cop" role continued even after she entered college:

My dad always takes my side whenever there's a conflict between me and my mom about drinking and partying. My dad has worked outside the home for a long time, so he understands well why hanging out with friends and going to a party is important for social life whereas my mom doesn't really understand it. So, I never talk about details of my social life to mom.

Hailey, who said she only shared a fraction of her social life with her mother, gave more credit to her father's emotional support than to her mother's, attributing her father's generous attitude to his long experience of studying abroad and breadwinning.

Some sons, even more than daughters, expressed their appreciation for their fathers' emotional support, which they found gradually increasing as they grew up.

William, who graduated from a U.S. prep boarding school, explained the moment he and his father, who he found quite distant in early years due to his father's busy work schedules, finally became close to each other:

When I was applying for multiple [U.S.] boarding schools, he [his father] helped me a lot so we naturally got to have a lot of conversations. He was the one who accompanied me on the school tour. I have one aunt who lives in the United States, so she visited some schools with my dad and I for a while, but once she got to be very busy, my dad and I finished the rest of the tour on our own. During that tour, we got to be very close to each other.

William painted his highly-transnational family in rosy terms

My family had such a great relationship with each other so far. Speaking of myself, I was very close to my mom until I finished middle school, and since then, I've had a lot of opportunities to get close to my father. We are a harmonious family, and I feel so lucky for that.

His father's transnational mobility, acquired through experiences of working abroad, served as the primary source of support for William's education abroad. School tours abroad, which many children went on with their fathers, were often an opportunity for children to actually *feel* their fathers' care and support for them.

James, using similar terms, expressed his appreciation for his father's effort for a good father-son relationship, which he said he started to recognize more and more as he grew older:

While I stay in Korea [during school breaks,] my father cancels most of his appointments so he can spend night time with me. When we have dinner together,

he talks about what he wants to teach me as a father. He also wants to hear about my school life [in the United States]. If I were attending college in Korea, he could have been able to support me right beside me, but because I'm in the United States, he can't do so. That's why he wants to spend as much time as possible with me when I'm in Korea.

He continued to elaborate on what his father's advice was about:

He wants me to be more successful than he is. He graduated from the best college in Korea, and he worked so hard for all the achievements he made. I am so proud of him. To me, he is such a great man, but he tells me to become greater than himself.

He put special stress on that his father "did not push him." "He just expects much from me. It's not like he's pushing me." Like many sons, he said his father's high expectation was the driving force for his academic achievements. "I want to live up to his expectation," he happily said.

In contrast, about two thirds of student participants, more sons than daughters, commented on the complicated emotional relationship they had with their fathers, especially after they entered college. They confessed that sometimes they found their fathers not fully agreeing with their major- or career-related decisions. But that did not deter them from pursuing the majors or schools of their choice or taking some semesters off from college for career preparation; children tried to describe the father-child conflict as soluble and contemporary.

Jack, who spoke very highly of his father's career, confided in me that his father, who he thought was supportive most of the time, "got mad" at him when he wanted to take one year off from college in order to launch a start-up company. He said:

I was so surprised when my dad said 'no' strongly. His answer was a strong no indeed. He rarely said no to me before that, so it was a big surprise. He wanted me to graduate from college as fast as possible. He didn't understand why I stopped college for a while and start a company even in Korea. He believed I had to start my career in the states.



Jack ended up taking one year off from college as he wished, but he felt apologetic for disagreeing with his father whom he greatly admired. This ambivalent attitude toward fathers' later involvement was found in some daughters' narratives as well. For example, Miranda, who finished her schooling in three different countries, said: "My mom was the one who arranged my tutoring classes and extracurricular activities, but in fact, my dad was the one who actually pressured me more." She interpreted the pressure from her father as a consequence of his high expectations for her as she matured :

What bothered me the most was people's high expectation, including my dad's. All people around me assumed that I would get accepted by one of the best colleges in the world, and it was such a big pressure. My mom told me not to care that much, but my dad was different. He had a college that he wanted me to attend.

She moved on to delineating the day when she got an acceptance to one of the Ivy

League schools:

Because of the time difference, the result [of my college application] came out at 5 a.m. where my family was living at that time. I didn't want to see the result in such early morning, because I was so scared if I didn't get accepted. I didn't want to ruin the whole day because of the result. But my dad woke me up at 5 a.m. so I could check the result as soon as it was released. I told him that I didn't want to do so, but he begged me to see the result right away.

She could not help but say that she was "so frustrated" at that moment:

My mom told my dad to stop, but he didn't stop begging me. Thankfully, I got accepted to that school, and my dad finally went back to bed.

Then she went on, clarifying that she was not too critical of her dad: "That was the only moment when my dad made me so frustrated." Although she, like many other sons and daughters, tried to justify any pressure (from parents) as a source of her hard work, she ended up expressing her discomfort with her fathers' "sometimes-too-high" expectation of her academic achievements.

Henry, another child who commented on a child-father conflict in the later years, said his father did not fully support his career plan: “My dad wants me to earn money while teaching at a college. He collaborates with a couple of companies while teaching, so he believes that I can do the same thing. But I honestly don’t understand why I have to teach if I’m not that interested in it. I’m more interested in doing business rather than teaching or researching.”

Children spoke of going through such a “negotiation process” for their major and/or career choices with their fathers, much more often than with their mothers. When they had conflicts with their fathers, they seemed to rely on the emotional support of their mothers, who, they thought, usually “listen[ed] carefully.” However, despite intermittent father-child conflicts in later years, most children still highly valued their fathers’ class resources and believed that their fathers made a big “investment” in their life, including a significant amount of spending on their education. Whether they recounted parent-child conflict or not, they also suggested that guiding their future career – and a sense of gratitude for it – was reserved mostly for fathers.

### **Children of Migrant Families:**

#### **“Everything Changed after We Moved to the United States.”**

Out of 74 children participants, there were four children – two sons and two daughters – whose parents moved to the United States primarily for their children’s education. In many ways, those children’s narratives differed from the narratives of children from non-migrant transnational families; they found neither of their parents deeply involved in their later education in the United States. Migrant fathers, in the eyes

of children, were either “emotional experts” or absent fathers rather than exemplars of success. It led migrant children to give less credit to their parents for their academic achievements.

Migrant children found their families relatively less advantaged than most of their friends’ or classmates’ families. Michelle, who first came to a U.S. middle school alone and reunited with her parents in the United States after a few years, said:

All of my friends’ families are so well-off. All of them went to expensive private schools, and I went to a school in the country side [in the United States]. At first, it was hard to get along with them [at college].

Like many other mothers, Michelle’s mother seemed to have chosen Michelle’s schools in the United States, but Michelle’s view of her mother’s such involvement was quite different than the ones of her more-affluent counterparts. “[When I came to the United States alone,] My mom searched for the cheapest U.S. boarding school on the Internet. How could she find a good school for me in such a way [without visiting]?” she sarcastically commented.

All of the migrant children, including Michelle, elaborated on the downward mobility that their parents experienced after migration. Their parents’ occupations, particularly their fathers’, changed dramatically after their families moved to the United States. Except for one son, their parents, both mothers and fathers, had elite professions in Korea, such as managerial positions in large corporations, college faculty, and high-ranking governmental officer. Those elite parents, however, lost their occupational prestige after migration.

The downward mobility seemed to have greatly shaped migrant children’s upbringing, including their views toward their parents. As their parents gave up their

careers in Korea to move to the United States, primarily for children's education, the migrant children's criticism, even ingratitude, was especially notable. It implies how crucial parents' class resources are to children's views and assessments of their parents.

Another migrant daughter, Julia, said that her father could have been a "Wild Geese" father if her mother did not insist on migrating with family. Her mother could keep her career as a nurse after migrating to the United States, but her father seemed to have experienced a downward occupational change. Julia said:

My dad was in a very important position in a big design company [when we lived in Korea]. He even published a book. I remember him being promoted to vice president of the company right before we moved to the states.

She saw her father going through a lot of changes after migration. Sympathetically, she said:

He was quite successful in Korea. He's very academic, so he loves reading and writing. But after we came to the states, he got to feel a language barrier in most places. There were not many options for him, I guess. He didn't really want to talk about those hardships with me, so I couldn't ask much, either. As far as I remember, he once worked as a food service worker, and after that, he opened a small business, which ended up closing not long after.

In Julia's narrative, her nurse mother was the primary breadwinner of her family as well as the "manager" of her education throughout her upbringing. Her mother seemed to perform as an elite father in her family, especially after migration. Julia frankly said her mother gave her a lot of pressure, as her mother, Julia thought, clung to the prestige of elite colleges and professions. She was very straightforward about the conflict between her and her mother:

She really wanted me to have a good job, you know, a job that earns a lot of money. When I was very young, she wanted me to become a lawyer, and after I entered high school, she wanted me to become a doctor. That caused a conflict between us.

She found her mother sometimes stubborn about her choice of major and future career – such conflict was more common between children and fathers in more-affluent, non-migrant children’s narratives.

Migrant children’s views toward their fathers were mixed rather than homogeneous. Two of them said their fathers, who they thought lost a great deal of financial resource and occupational status, became “emotional experts” in their migrant family, whereas they found their mothers becoming “tigers” who attempted to ensure children’s academic success in the destination country. Julia expressed her discomfort with her mother who, she thought, was “very pushy” when it came to her education in the United States. This led her to consider her father more supportive than her mother. She said, “I feel more comfortable talking to my dad than to my mom, especially nowadays [after migration].” She moved on to explaining why she felt so:

[In my childhood,] my dad usually stopped my mom whenever she scolded me. My dad was a peace maker. He allayed my mom’s anger and also tried to help me understand my mom.

It was not that her father did not have much expectation of her academic achievements, according to Julia. What she appreciated for was the way her father conveyed his expectation:

He didn’t say what he expected of me. He just wanted me to do my best. As far as I did my best, he seemed to be fine regardless of the result. He definitely wanted me to work hard, but that was all he wanted.

Just as many more-affluent, non-migrant children described their mothers, Julia said her father was a “good listener,” whereas her mother was “strict most of the time.” As her mother had more economic power than her father in her migrant family, her mother

seemed to take the lead in advising her education, whereas her father took the role of an “emotional expert.”

The other two migrant children explicitly commented on their bitterness about the lack of paternal support they felt throughout their upbringing. Michelle had ambivalent feelings toward her father. First, she felt guilty for the downward change in her father’s career after migration:

My father couldn’t adjust to the life in the United States well. He was used to being respected by other people [in Korea], but after moving to the United States, things changed a lot. Not many people said hello to my father, because they thought my dad couldn’t speak English well. He actually couldn’t speak much English at first, so he didn’t have much interaction with other people.

She believed such negative experiences transformed her father to a different person:

Everything was difficult to my father, so he became quite violent. He easily got mad at so many things, and it hurt our family. [...] The family bond weakened.

She felt disappointed about the lack of parental support for her college application.

Cautiously, she confided to me, “If any of my parents could have guided me more, everything could have been much easier.” Despite her genuine gratitude for her parents’ sacrifice, she simultaneously felt bad for – and also blamed – her father, who had to quit his high-status government job when they migrated. She said, “When we were in Korea, I felt so proud of my dad.” The lack of parental help made her wonder, “What if my parents would have stayed in Korea?”

Similarly, Steve seemed to be reproachful of the lack of paternal involvement, in both early and later years. He even criticized his father for “not doing his role” as a father:

I don’t find my father being a good father, to be honest... He didn’t do much. [...] He hasn’t had much presence in my life, except for the moments when my grades

were released. [...] He scolded me if he didn't like my grades, although he didn't help me by any means.

As he believed neither of his parents helped his education abroad and college application, he thought that "everything [with regard to education] could have been possible even if I was an orphan." One of his dreams was to become a father who provides children with ample hands-on academic and financial support.

In contrast to their more-affluent, non-migrant counterparts, migrant children did not necessarily consider education abroad and consequential family migration ideal or beneficial. Such negative, or at least lukewarm, evaluation stemmed from their own family migration experiences. For example, Michelle found that education-led migration harmed the bond between her and her parents:

When I was overwhelmed by college applications, my sister was at puberty, and my dad was adjusting to his new job, and my mom was sick. It caused a lot of conflicts among us. When I was studying in the United States alone, I thought my parents and sister would be so helpful for me if they would move to the United States, but the reality was not like that. They made my life even harder.

Her narratives resemble what research on migrant children has found: children generally report more migration stress than their parents, as children, being bilingual, often are expected to and do assist their parents' adaptation to destination countries culturally and linguistically (See Levitt 2009). Michelle continued:

I decided not to depend on anyone else. It made me not to have much conversation with my parents. [...] When I was so busy with my own work, my parents wanted me to translate bills or accompany them on their trip to a car repair shop.

She not only found herself quite distant from her parents but felt guilty for her parents' financial and occupational sacrifices: "They gave up almost everything for me. I felt so

sorry for that.” Such sense of guilt, she thought, did not necessarily help her connect with her parents.

Julia also felt apologetic for the hardships her parents, especially her father, had to experience after her family’s migration. The sense of guilt seemed to pressure her to “achieve more” and “do better.” At the same time, it eventually deterred her from having deep conversations with her parents:

I hate disappointing my parents, and it makes me not to share much of my life with my parents. [...] If I go home, I have to talk about what I’m doing and how things are going, so I try not to visit my parents often, even during breaks. I don’t want to talk about the challenges I’m experiencing in college with my parents. I want to share only good things with them. They know about that, so they always ask me to share everything with them, but it’s still hard for me to do so.

This separated Julia from her more-affluent, more-transnational counterparts who tended to (want to) have college-related conversations with their parents, especially with fathers.

As my analyses here suggests, the relationship of children and parents in these transnational families is not homogenous. As I discussed above, the optimistic view of education abroad and gratitude, especially toward fathers, was common among more-affluent, highly-transnational sons as well as daughters. In contrast, none of the migrant children expressed much gratitude toward either parent after they migrated. This is particularly notable as these migrant parents tended to move to promote their children’s careers at the same time as they, especially the fathers, faced significant losses in their own careers. This pattern may well be a result both of differences in migration experiences and the (resultant) differences in class position.



## **Conclusion:**

### **What Do “Global Elite” Children Think of Their Parents?**

Drawing on the narratives of high-achieving Korean young adult children at elite U.S. colleges, this chapter analyzes gendered and classed views children have of their parents’ involvements in their transnational upbringing. In the eyes of the children, Korean parents performed gendered roles in and responsibilities for their education, in both early and later years. And such gendered views were heavily shaped by class—parents’ occupational statuses and careers, in particular. I argue that gendered patterns of parenting are deeply intertwined with class and, specifically, with the transnational family arrangements.

According to both sons and daughters, their mothers, often with the help of gender-segregated networks, practiced “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003) during their children’s early education. Although being grateful for such maternal involvement, children found that their mothers, especially stay-at-home, never-studied-abroad mothers, handed over most of the parenting work to their studied- or worked-abroad fathers after they entered schools abroad. Children tended to expect their mothers to be “emotional experts,” and in fact, many of them found that their mothers heavily involved in their upbringing, mostly by taking care of their physical and emotional well-being (Hays 1996).

However, the children tended to undervalue or sometimes disdain their mothers’ “status production work” (Papanek 1979), which sometimes involved an intense supervision of children’s personal life. Compared to fathers, mothers did not bring much of their own transnational education or career resources to their marriage, or gradually

lost these after opting out of the workforce to prioritize child rearing. Warm words, as well as cooking and homemaking, were the kinds of support both sons and daughters wanted (and expected) to receive from their mothers in both early and later years. And not many children considered their mothers' caregiving as worthy or desirable as career success in professional fields.

In contrast, children found that their elite fathers, who tended to be under-involved in early years, shifted to heavily engage in their later education abroad and career preparation by using transnational resources and networks. Children often justified fathers' under-involvement or distance as a buffer against mothers' intense management of early education. And as they grew up, many sons and daughters started to highly value and appreciate fathers' involvement in their college education and career horizons, believing that it was beyond what their mothers (not to mention lower-class, less-transnational Korean fathers) could provide. In many high-achieving children's narratives, their fathers were "examples of success" who provided them with substantial career-related assistances. This gender disparity between couples eventually brought fathers more credit and respect from their children, while frustration or resentment of intensive involvement seemed to be directed mostly at mothers. Recognizing the gap between their father's and mother's education and experience abroad, many children asserted that their fathers were more appropriate guides for their education abroad than their mothers.

Despite the small sample size, the narratives of migrant children, who all experienced some degree of downward mobility after migrating to the United States, show the power of class in shaping children's view and expectation of their parents. The

experiences of downward mobility led those children to undervalue their parents', particularly fathers' involvements in their education in the United States, as high-achieving children in this dissertation tended to value fathers' hands-on support for their later life, which requires a great deal of class resources. They found their mothers' caregiving, such as cooking, homemaking, giving rides, and cheerleading, relatively constant before and after migration. Fathers' academic- and career-related support, however, dramatically decreased as their fathers lost class privileges after migration. In the circle of high-achieving students, fathers seemed to be expected to perform as competent guides for higher education and exemplars of career success. In this context, migrant children tended to have an ambivalent view of their fathers: they felt apologetic for their fathers' loss of class resources, as the family migration was primarily for their own education. But they also tended to undervalue, and even blame, their fathers for not being helpful for their college education and future career. Education-led migration, in the eyes of migration children I met, was not worth the downward mobility their families experienced.

The narratives of daughters and sons were very similar. Using similar explanations, both the young women and men were more likely to praise their fathers than mothers when it came to parental involvement in their higher education abroad. Both, that is, participated in reinforcing the intergenerational gender divide. My study uncovers an intergenerational gender divide – between mothers and fathers – in the eyes of young women and men. But, at least in the young adult years (when they are what some refer to as “emerging adults”), there is little evidence in these stories, that their mothers and fathers attempt to reproduce gender inequality by handing it down to their

children. One might wonder what this similarity will mean for the future: will they both continue on similar career and family paths? Will the women want to be equals but confront more constraints than the young men once they become parents? Future study might usefully incorporate these questions.

I contend that the gender divide in elite transnational parenting is shaped not only by parents' differential occupational involvement but also by the broader social structure and normative gender expectations in Korea. In a society where men are expected to learn and achieve more than women, Korean elite fathers tended to practice career-oriented "public fathering" (Shows and Gerstel 2009), using their exclusive educational and occupational resources. Mothers, despite their above-average levels of education for Korean mothers, tended to meet their children's, and society's, expectations of "good" mothers mostly through emotion-oriented "private mothering."

Such mothering became less valued as the children entered transnational education tracks that required knowledge outside of those mothers' local experiences or networks. This finding extends our understanding of the gender divide in parenting among Korean, or more generally East Asian, families. In existing literature (Ide et al. 2018; McLoyd et al. 2000; Nguyen 2008), Asian fathers are often described as distant and under-involved in their children's lives, particularly with regard to education. Instead, Asian mothers are the primary implementers of intensive parenting, not only in childhood but throughout their children's lives (Chao and Tseng 2002; Cheah, Leung, and Zhou 2013; Chua 2001). In contrast with existing literature, elite fathers, except for a few migrant fathers, were notable in the narratives of the children especially with regard to later education. Using their gendered class resources, elite transnational fathers guided

their children's later education and career in a practical and detailed way, and their children expressed gratitude for their contributions. Such involvement was not often expected of the (stay-at-home) mothers in my study, despite their high levels of education.

**CHAPTER III**  
**ELITE TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERHOOD:**  
**IMPACTS OF PROFESSIONAL CAREERS**

Women's careers, particularly full-time, labor-intensive ones, have often been discussed as impediments to intensive motherhood. Conceptualizing work and family as separate and mutually exclusive spheres, family scholars have developed the orientation model of work and family (Garey 1999). Often, married women are described as being either "work-oriented" or "family-oriented," rarely successful in achieving both (See Blair-Loy 2003; Gerson 1985). Despite fitting into a larger ideological framework of separate spheres (public vs. private), the dichotomy between career and motherhood does not contribute much to discussing how employed mothers choose and aim to integrate their career and motherhood.

Mothering varies according to the cultural and economic contexts in which mothers raise their families and children. Collins (1994) argues that "mothering takes place within specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender" (56). Mothers' social locations – intersections of class, ethnicity, nationality or citizenship, culture, and sexuality – condition "the strategies and meanings" that parents "fashion through their agency" (Lamphere, Zavella & Gonzales 1993: 4).

In this chapter, I compare stay-at-home mothers to employed mothers who both were mothering their young adult children transnationally. Highly-educated Korean mothers, whether employed or not, share "institutionalized maternalism," which involves

mothers' unselfish, unceasing "service" to their children (Lim 2001). In Korea where middle-to-upper class mothers are expected to conduct extensive management of children's education and are often judged by children's accomplishments (Chun 2002; Hwang 2012; E. Lee 2013; J. Park 2009), mothers who sent their children to elite U.S. high schools or colleges are likely to be praised and respected as "good" mothers. Although the boom for children's overseas education was ignited among Korean parents in the early 2000s, it still is a highly privileged means of class reproduction, as it requires a great amount of financial, educational, and cultural resources. Using their class resources, affluent, highly-educated mothers in this chapter perform their role as the manager of their children's transnational education, but in the process, their prestigious career complements their motherhood, I argue.

"Concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2003) of children's transnational education entails a great deal of time and energy, and thus stay-at-home mothers most clearly become such intensive mothers. Employed mothers in this chapter, however, have uniquely valuable resources for their mothering—their (transnational) elite professions. They are among the ones who have ample resources to balance their employment and their motherhood, which both tend to be intensive, despite structural and cultural constraints. In the context where their high-achieving children are likely to need highly-academic and cross-national involvements of their parents, elite professional mothers could have an advantage in guiding and supporting their children's transnational education. In that sense, studying their motherhood entails "the strategy of the extreme case" (Blair-Loy 2001).

In this chapter, I turn to the stories that mothers themselves tell. Drawing on the narratives of affluent, highly-educated Korean mothers who sent their children to elite U.S. schools, this chapter discusses 1) How highly-educated but opt-out mothers and employed mothers with professional occupations reported they engaged in their high-achieving children's transnational upbringing, and 2) How mothers in each group made sense of their own and their partners' parenting and parenthood.

My focus is on the intersectional power of gender and class, occupational status and educational background in particular, in shaping elite mothers' parenting, "as both an activity and an identity" (Garey 1999). I compare stay-at-home mothers with elite employed mothers in terms of their ideal of a "good" mother, particularly in their privileged transnational context, and also their day-to-day practices to realize the ideal. A comparison of these two groups leads to understanding of the impact of elite professions for women on their intensive transnational mothering and motherhood.

### **Stay-at-home Mothers' Full-time Motherhood**

Many stay-at-home mothers I interviewed said they opted out of wage work – mostly high-earning, white-collar professions – in order to prioritize motherhood. In Korea, such "opting out" is not unusual. On the one hand, the number of Korean women college graduates has dramatically increased. According to OECD (2018), 43.4% of Korean women from age 25 to 64 have college diplomas, which is higher than the OECD average of 38.4%. However, fewer Korean college-educated women (63.4%) have paid jobs compared to women college graduates in other OECD countries (80.1% on average). According to Statistics Korea (2018), married Korean women with interrupted careers



occupied 37.5% of the total married employed women aged between 15 and 54. The difficulty of juggling work and family in the Korean society leads many women, including highly-educated ones, to leave their job and become stay-at-home mothers (M. Kim 2015).

Stay-at-home mothers I met were not exceptions. Except for one mother who only had a high school diploma, all stay-at-home mothers I met for this study had at least a bachelor's degree. Four of them acquired their postgraduate degrees from either Korean local colleges or U.S. colleges. All stay-at-home mothers I met, except for three mothers, used to work outside the home as school teachers, college lecturers, office workers, or translators before marriage or childbirth, and they said they quit their jobs mostly for their young children.

Most opt-out mothers said they had no regrets about leaving their job. They strongly believed that it was the best decision for their children, as they shared the belief that mothers should be the primary caregivers of their children. The account of Sarah's mother, who used to work at a foreign embassy in Korea, showed why stay-at-home Korean mothers in her age group – mid-50s – tended to prioritize motherhood over prestigious careers. She said:

Back then, not many mothers of young children worked outside the home. [...] I hesitated a little bit, but I ended up leaving the job because I was somewhat jealous of my friends who were just focusing on their kids at home. [...] Like them, I wanted to focus on raising my kids. I wanted to raise them well.

To her and many of her affluent friends, being a stay-at-home mother seemed to be a privilege that allowed a focus on educating children. Although she once sought employment after Sarah turned five, she said it was not easy to find a job that would allow her to spend as much time in childrearing as she wanted. Despite her college

diploma (from a prestigious Korean college) and transnational career experiences, she chose to live the life of stay-at-home mother who, she believed, tended to be more informed about children's education than employed mothers would be.

Even at the cost of their professional careers, stay-at-home mothers seemed to have endeavored to provide their children with 24/7, undivided care, whether their children were in Korea or abroad. Their notion of a "good mom" largely hinged on the traditional roles of mothers in the family—making healthy and delicious meals, cultivating a clean and peaceful home environment, and providing enough emotional support. Mark's mother, another stay-at-home mom, lived in the United States with her children for about 10 years while her husband was living in Korea alone to keep his career. Mark's father's career, in fact, was what brought their family to the United States at first. After two-years of overseas assignment, Mark's father went back to Korea alone and left his wife and children in the United States, primarily for their children's education. For more than a decade, this family arrangement meant Mark's mother became a "Wild Geese" mother. Reflecting on those days, she remembered trying her best to build an "ideal" home for her children in the United States during her husband's absence. She said:

I was in the United States just for my kids. I had only one duty, which was to take a good care of them. [...] What I did my best for was making good meals. I made them good, authentic Korean dishes almost every day. I never gave them instant food. They sometimes ate ramen as a snack, but not as a meal, even the days when I did not really want to cook.

Her comment highlighted the importance of the work of feeding. The cultural division of labor has assigned more responsibility for care to women than to men. DeVault (1991) argues that feeding the family is one of the most articulated and deliberate work that

women do to fulfill their motherly role. By feeding their families, mothers feel deep satisfaction and pride. In migrant and transnational families, in particular, feeding ethnic food means much more than a mere provision of substance or having quality family time. Migrant mothers use food and its preparation to instill their children pride in their ethnic heritage as well as to provide emotional stability (See Bowen & Devine 2011; Y. Kang 2012b). Mark's mother, perhaps like many other transnational mothers, made her children ethnic Korean food as often as possible so her children would feel their home in the United States was as "comfortable" and "homey" as possible.

She believed that such "Korea-like" environment reduced the stress her children received from attending a foreign school and eventually helped the children stay "emotionally stable." Throughout the interview, she constantly stressed the importance of helping children stay "stable," as she believed it would benefit her children not only psychologically but academically. Being a devoted stay-at-home mother, in her eyes, not only served an emotional purpose but produced an instrumental outcome, such as improving her children's academic achievements. Because she was, as she saw it, "one of the most devoted mothers in the neighborhood," she said she deserved some – if not all – the credit for her children's high academic achievements, which she believed were closely tied to her extensive cooking and homemaking. In order to do those tasks as diligently as possible, she said she gave up some opportunities to study or work in the United States.

She seemed to be very proud of her undivided, wholehearted care for her children, and in turn, quite critical about employed mothers who, she believed, were seriously lacking time and energy for their families. She questioned, "How can such busy women

make warm, fresh dinner for their kids every night?” Her own devotion to her children and husband, although the couple had lived separately across the Pacific for an extended period of time, led her to wish for a daughter-in-law who shared a similar “family devotion schema” (Blair-Loy 2001), which expects women to intensely mother most of their adult lives and sacrifice other commitments for their children. “I prefer a girl who can put Mark’s mind at rest. I don’t want a woman who prioritizes her career over everything else. Oh, I don’t want that kind of person as my daughter-in-law,” she added. Reproduction of intensive mothering was one of the goals of mothers, especially those with sons.

*Mothers’ Groups: A Collective Strategy for the Reproduction of Class and Gender*

To mothers in this study, participation in a – sometimes multiple – mothers’ group(s) seemed to be an essential, if not the most important, part of their mothering, especially while their children were in middle and high school. As many children elaborated in their interviews, stay-at-home mothers seemed to have collectively arranged extracurricular activities and private group lessons for SAT or AP tests with other mothers who sent their children to the same school, either in Korea or abroad. Many stay-at-home mothers talked favorably about their experiences of meeting and “working with” the members of their groups. They often noted that mothers with jobs, especially full-time ones, could not join their meetings, as those meetings were held during children’s school hours.

Drawing on the case of mothers in the Boondang District of the Seoul Metropolitan area, a middle-class neighborhood that is well-known for its fervor for

education, Kim and Sang (2015) argue that Korean middle-class mothers share a culture of “child management,” which entails mothers’— much less often fathers’— active management of their children’s school grades, daily schedules, and friendships as an effort to send the children to prestigious schools. The authors found that, in the pursuit of such goal, mothers tended to build a group of mothers from similar class backgrounds, in which they could share education-related information and arrange extracurricular activities *exclusively* within the group. In the narratives of the mothers I interviewed, such groups were also common and valued. This collective action helped them establish an exclusive class gateway, which was highly gendered.

As we saw earlier, children, in their interviews, were often ambivalent about their mothers’ involvements in such mothers’ groups, perhaps due to the society-wide stigma against “intense” mothers, or in order to emphasize their own work and independence. Most children seemed to try to downplay their mothers’ involvement in mothers’ groups, but Bill was one of the few who strongly denied his mother’s intensive mothering. He believed his mother was quite distant from and different than some of his friends’ “intense mothers.” “She even rarely visited my school or met my teachers,” he said gruffly but proudly.

In contrast, Bill’s mother, in her interview, confessed that she tried her best to keep up with other mothers by attending their meetings as often as possible. She, who quit her public school teacher career in order to “raise [her] kids better,” said with a bitter smile: “I even had two planners, one for each of my kid, because I couldn’t write down all of the appointments [with other mothers] in one planner.” Like Bill’s mother, many stay-at-home mothers said they tried their best to engage in or at least catch up on

mothers' groups for the sake of their children. They found such effort an essential part of their mothering, as they believed their "team work" eventually boosted their children's resume.

The relatively-more-affluent stay-at-home mothers tended to favor and even advocate such groups more than their less-affluent counterparts did. For them, it served multiple functions. For example, Emily's very-affluent mother who spent her childhood in Europe due to her father's transnational career, described her time with some of Emily's friends' mothers positively. Her involvement in such group seemed to be not only for her daughter but also for herself. Downplaying the (possible) impact of their "group work," she said:

It's more like a social gathering. The important decisions [regarding education] are usually made by children, not mothers, so there's not much we do for them. If we try to do too many [practical] things [for children] together, then it destroys the harmony of the group. The kids are the ones who make most of their decisions, and we just support them from the behind. We just hang out, eat lunch, and sometimes chat about the school. That's all.

Her comment demonstrated the way many affluent, cosmopolitan Korean mothers viewed the mothers' groups that they were part of. They tried to frame meetings with other like-minded mothers as "intimate," "congenial," and "mother-centered" rather than all-for-children. Since she left her translator job to take better care of her children, she said she had rarely gone out at night. To her, such meeting was not all for her daughter: it was not only her chance to "hear what happened to [her daughter's] school and teachers" but also a special event in which she could socialize with people outside of her family. It kept her from feeling isolated.

Not all stay-at-home mothers, however, seemed to have had enjoyed or benefited from participating in mothers' groups. A small number of stay-at-home mothers who

were relatively less affluent in my sample, tended to think they were excluded from such groups, although not explicitly. They tended to think they, in the eyes of more affluent and transnational mothers, lacked transnational education or experience. For example, Jill's never-studied-abroad mother who introduced herself as "not as brainy as other mothers," explained her distant and even uncomfortable relationship with most mothers of Jill's school friends:

I just can't [enjoy mothers' groups]. I don't know many other mothers. How can I describe them...? Well, they are special. Very special in many ways. They share some information only among them. To be honest, I'm not close to any of those mothers.

She tried to justify her exclusion by denigrating the groups:

I heard that they don't share all of the information they have even within their groups. They are not always honest to each other. Why in the world are they like that?

She hinted at why less-affluent, less-transnational mothers could not hang out and eventually "work with" more-affluent mothers: "I just... I don't even try to join them because I don't know much [about education abroad]." Although she had a bachelor's degree in art, which is one of the prestigious, uncommon majors for women in Korea, she found herself unqualified to help her high-achieving children abroad, due to her lack of transnational education and career—it led her to think of herself as "not savvy" as other mothers. She believed what she could do for her daughters abroad was calling them often and feeding them well when they came home. Justifying her absence from mothers' groups, she said: "My kids are doing their best. I'm happy with it. That's all I want for them." She emphasized her position by asking, "In life, there are a bunch of things that are more important than education. Don't you think so?"

Although there were a few who were not fully involved, participation in mothers' groups and collaborative management of children's education with other mothers appeared to be a norm or even a requisite for mothers of studying abroad children. Whether heavily involved or not, most mothers were well aware of such group and its effectiveness in arranging children's extracurricular activities and private lessons. Few fathers, in contrast, commented on their participation in it, which I elaborate on in the next chapter. In a gender-segregated context, mothers who had enough financial and cultural resources to mingle in such exclusive group appeared to share knowledge with similarly-privileged mothers and also reduce their own isolation. In many ways, then, these mothers thought the groups helped them sustain both the gender divide and their class privilege: by helping them learn how to assist their children become members of the elite, by sharing resources with those (and only those) who were also affluent stay-at-home mothers, by helping create connections and friendships with these other women that they wanted to combat the potential isolation of motherhood. These groups, in the eyes of the mothers, both integrated mothers within class and divided them across class. In this sense, the groups played a dual role in class reproduction—both between mothers and their children as well as among mothers.

*“My Husband Didn't Do Much, But I Was Okay with It.”*

Like their children, most stay-at-home mothers said that they were in charge of managing their children's early education more than their husbands were. Few of them, however, blamed or criticized their husbands for being less-engaged or distant. Most stay-at-home mothers seemed to understand or justify their husbands' low involvement in



their children's early education, insisting their husbands did not have much time and energy for that due to busy work schedules. For example, Sunny's affluent mother who quit her teaching job in order to focus on her only daughter's education, said her husband "didn't do much" for their daughter's education in early stages:

When we just got married, my husband and I did not have much financial resource, so I thought I had to teach my daughter on my own. It was my responsibility.

Despite thinking that it was her responsibility to educate her daughter well, she said her husband was not entirely unhelpful:

My husband and I had a lot of conversations about her education, but most of the time he left it to me. That was his stance, but still, he gave me his entire support. I mean, emotional support.

Although she did not think of herself as "the smartest mother in the world," she said her husband "believed in" her capacity to educate their daughter and supported most of her decisions. By internalizing the belief that educating children is one of a mothers' duties, she was generous about her husband's lack of practical support in early parenting stages.

Like her, few stay-at-home mothers made an issue of their husband's absence in early parenting. Instead of resisting or negotiating, they embraced and internalized the society's and also their husbands' expectations that they take charge of their children's early education. Moreover, despite their husband's lesser involvement, many stay-at-home mothers gave a lot of credit to their husbands for making most of the "important" decisions about their children's later education, particularly with regard to moving, or sending children only, abroad.

This parallels many children's narratives: both stay-at-home mothers and children tended to believe that fathers were the ones who were more ambitious, passionate, and

knowledgeable about education abroad than anyone in their families, primarily due to fathers' own transnational experiences. Thus, the gendered divide in elite transnational parenting appeared to be reproduced largely by stay-at-home mothers' beliefs about their own role and responsibility in their families. As few stay-at-home mothers studied or worked abroad, they tended to depreciate their own capacities to guide their children's later education or career abroad. At the same time, they highly valued their husbands' competence in coaching their children's transnational life during and after college, mostly because, they said, of their husbands' ample experience of and knowledge about education abroad.

The account of Bill's mother, who once lived in the United States during her professor-husband's sabbatical, shows that she, consciously or not, reinforced the gender divide in parenting. When asked about whether she was guiding her son's college education, with regard to which class to take and when to take a gap year, she answered:

It's not my field, so I just ask my husband to take care of it. [...] I just try to let my son know that I care. That's all.

Smiling shyly, she continued:

What I helped him [Bill] most was making him good food and giving rides, which every mother did. Anyway, [now] I just try to make him feel comfortable and relaxed.

Although she considered herself involved in her son's life both in his early and later stages, she devalued her own support, which she believed was mostly care labor for her son's physical and emotional needs; indicating that devaluation, she used the word "just" several times when describing her part in parenting.

Kyla's mother presented a similar view of the divide between stay-at-home mothers and elite professional fathers with regard to guiding children's education. Before

I met her in Korea, Kyla's mother had resided in the United States for a decade with her whole family for both her husband's doctoral degree and children's English-based education. She elaborated on her feelings about the relationship between her husband and her daughter who shared the same interest in finance as her dad. Proudly, her mother said:

My daughter's major is what my husband is teaching [at a college]. They always talk about their research, and I love seeing them doing so. It's so heartwarming to see them talking about some kinds of economic models or whatever, which I don't really understand.

She went on to talk about her daughter's worries that she might feel left out: "My daughter sometimes asks me, 'Mom, aren't you bored?'" And she indicated what she saw as her husband's view of her as the family spectator who provided emotional support rather than specialized guidance for their child's career: "My husband overhears our conversation and says, 'Hey, your mom loves us having this kind of conversation.'" Sharing her husband's and daughter's assumption, she said she never felt sad or excluded in such circumstances. She continued: "I even tell my daughter like, 'you should ask him more. You need to read more of his articles and see if there's anything you can do with him.'" She believed that her husband was one of the most helpful resources for her daughter's life during and after college, and it seemed to lead her to overlook and tolerate her diminishing role in guiding her elite daughter.

When her children were young, she said she was the one who mostly took care of their education, both in Korea and the United States. Her daughter, Kyla, also commented on her mother's early academic and emotional support, which she genuinely appreciated. However, when asked about whether she received any academic help from her mother during her time at a U.S. high school, she answered with some bitterness, "I don't

remember much. I don't think she met any of my teachers." With a laugh, she continued, "It was because she couldn't speak English well, you know. What could she do in my school?" She thought that the amount of academic support she received from her mother dramatically decreased after her family moved to the United States. "[After moving to the United States,] my mom spent most of her day just hanging out with other Korean mothers," she said. Kyla considered her mother's socializing with other mothers as mere recreational, or at least not of much help for her high school education and college application. Due to lack of knowledge about or experience of the U.S. education, her mother, in her eyes, was not capable of being much involved in her schooling in the United States.

Unlike what her daughter said, Kyla's mother insisted that she tried her best to support her children's education in both Korea *and* the United States. She elaborated on how she gathered education-related information from the Internet as well as other Korean mothers in her neighborhood. She said her effort continued until Kyla finished high school. When asked about whether she gave any substantial support to her daughter while in middle and high school in the United States, she answered:

Of course, I did! I also carefully listened to other mothers and got some information. [Meeting those mothers] was very helpful. They always talked about what other kids were doing [for extracurricular activities] and which tutor was the best, so it was not that difficult to get informed.

Unlike what Kyla said, she said she attended her daughter's school events as often as possible. She considered that as one of her greatest efforts for her children's education, as she said she did not always feel comfortable in those events:

American schools have so many events, like concerts and parties, almost every night! [laugh] I attended most of them, but I couldn't have much of small talk with teachers because of my short English. You know what I mean, right?

Smiling shyly, she continued: “So, I always took my husband to school with me.”

As Kyla said in her interview, she also remembered that her husband’s involvement was essential to her children’s education in the United States. Although she thought her English was not as good as her husband’s, she believed there was something that only she could do for her children: beyond getting along well with other Korean mothers, she said she tried to mingle with “American mothers” as well, which her daughter Kyla did not comment on in her interview. Looking back on children’s birthday parties that she attended for her children, she said:

I tried to hang out with American mothers there. I couldn’t talk much, but I tried my best to mingle. What could I do alone at a party when all mothers were having small talk outside of the house? I tried my best to join them as much as I could.

To her, hanging out with other mothers, either American mothers or Korean mothers, was one of her most important efforts to help her daughter’s school life. Given such efforts, she believed that she was quite helpful – although not as helpful as her husband – to her children’s transnational education.

She, however, admitted that she “took [her] hands off” from guiding her children’s “high-level” college education and career preparation. Instead of feeling sad or excluded, she said she was “grateful” for her husband’s academic involvement in their children’s college education in the United States, which seemed to continue after the couple returned to Korea. Like other mothers, she too believed that her husband, who acquired his doctoral degree and used to work as a professor at a U.S. college, was more capable of providing their children with “practical” support than herself. She seemed to think that she retired from her life as the primary manager of her children’s education, but she did not express any disappointment or bitterness about that, at least during the

interview. By appreciating her husband's authority in guiding their children's adult life, she reinforced the value of men's education and career, especially transnational ones, and simultaneously devalued her own contribution.

*Costly Transnational Motherhood: Who Thinks It Would Pay Off?*

Across socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, stay-at-home mothers tended to believe that sending their children to elite U.S. high schools or colleges was a good strategy for ensuring their children's membership in the elite. They tended to regard the Korean education system as inferior to the one in the United States and even harmful for their children due to high competition among students and heavy dependence on private (supplementary) education in Korea. While studying in elite U.S. schools, they believed that their children would earn "tools" to succeed in a global society, such as fluent English and cosmopolitan cultural capital.

Regardless of their preference for transnational education, the financial cost of studying abroad, especially at prestigious U.S. schools, seemed to burden each mother, albeit in different ways, depending on their level of affluence. More-affluent mothers considered their children's education in the United States "economically efficient," because they thought they might have spent a similar, or even more, money on their children's education if they had sent their children to schools in Korea. For example, Sam's mother complained about the Korean school that her son went to in the early days: "I didn't like what Sam learned at school [in Seoul]. The school was too small, and the teachers were not that great. I could see how unprepared the teachers were." To supplement the Korean school education that she did not love, she confessed that she had

to spend a great deal of time and money on Sam's education when Sam was in Korea. "[Before we sent him to a U.S. boarding school,] my husband and I taught him at home every night. We just let him play at school in the daytime, and after he got home, we literally homeschooled him," she said. For Sam, she also hired multiple private tutors who were able to teach Sam some U.S. textbooks: "I cherry-picked Sam's tutors. I recruited the best tutors in Korea and gave them a detailed guideline of how to teach Sam. [...] It took a lot of time and money, of course." Such time- and cost-consuming process seemed to have led her to transfer Sam to a U.S. boarding school where she and her husband did not have to spend extra time and cost for their son's school education.

Relatively-less-affluent mothers, in contrast, tended to worry and complain about the high cost of studying abroad. For example, Bill's mother, one of the relatively-less-affluent mothers, said she sent both of her children to a prestigious Korean local prep school, perhaps as an alternative to a U.S. boarding school, despite some financial hardship. She elaborated on her sympathy toward and concern about the students of that Korean school, who mostly chose the school in order to go to colleges abroad, including her own children:

I always felt sorry for those kids. They worked so hard, sometimes too hard. It made me so sad whenever I watched them.

Her concern did not end even after her son's graduation from the school:

I always worry that my son works too hard. He sometimes gets totally exhausted. When I see him like that, I ask myself, "Why did I send him to the United States. [for college]?"

Her view of her son's transnational yet competitive life was ambivalent:

He has achieved a lot, and I'm thankful for that. But at the same time, I'm worried if he can go through any hardship that he has never experienced so far. I pray to

God so someday he gives him a small challenge, not a big one, so he gets to learn how hard the life is.

This implies that she may not entirely share the achievement-oriented mentality with many more-affluent parents and children. At the time of her interview, her son Bill, in his senior year, was already appointed to a job in one of the Asian branches of a large transnational corporation in Singapore. She seemed to be grateful for the chance her son “earned,” but at the same time, she said she felt sad when “picturing him living abroad for the rest of his life.” When asked about any plan to move abroad to live with or near her son, she adamantly rejected the possibility, despite her experience of living in the United States due to her husband’s work. With a laugh, she said:

I don’t like [living in] the United States. I love living in Korea. I can’t speak English well, and... More than anything else, I love watching Korean TV shows.

When I said she would be able to watch most of the Korean TV shows anywhere in this world, she replied with hesitation: “I know, but... All of my friends are here, and...” Her reluctance to living abroad separates her from more-affluent mothers: most more-affluent mothers wished their children to settle abroad, and moreover, had a plan to migrate to where their children would be. They neither worried about their children’s transnational life nor wanted their children to return to Korea someday. More-affluent mothers, who themselves were quite cosmopolitan, seemed to justify their desire for the reproduction of transnational mobility by saying that they would prioritize their children’s choices over their own emotional needs.

Stay-at-home mothers’ expectation of their children’s future career differed not only by their financial capability but also according to the level of their own transnational experience. For instance, Miranda’s never-employed mother, who had lived in multiple



countries due to her husband's overseas assignments, said she hoped her daughter could "do everything on her own" in terms of having a career and raising a family in the future. "I already told her that I won't help her raise her children," she said half-jokingly. But soon, I found her torn about that decision. She continued:

But if she struggles, then she will send out an SOS call to me and then... How can I ignore that? If I have my own job, then I might be able to say no, but I do have some time to spare, so... I don't think I can say no to her.

Her comment illustrates how closely stay-at-home motherhood tied into the notion of femininity: she defined her support for her high-achieving daughter mostly in the realm of traditional maternal duties, perhaps due to her lack of transnational education or career. She believed that her business-executive husband was in charge of guiding her daughter's career after college. By providing "motherly" care, she wanted to continue to help her daughter who wished to become an international lawyer but worried about her living so far away.

A handful of less-affluent, less-transnational mothers, in contrast, doubted if they could provide their children with any substantial support after college. None of them had a plan to move abroad to live with or near their children. Thinking, or hoping, that their children would eventually settle down in Korea, they nonetheless tended to worry whether their children's U.S. college diploma would be valued *highly enough* in Korea. On the same note, they seemed to want and even tried to persuade their children to have financially-lucrative college majors, such as math, economics, and engineering. Some of them explicitly said that they wanted their children to pay back the financial cost they "invested" in their children's transnational education. David's mother, one of the less-affluent, never-lived-abroad mothers, confessed that paying her son's elite U.S. college

tuition was “beyond budget.” She, however, said she and her husband tried their best to pay it as much as possible, which she considered as “the only help” they could give their son, the only studied-abroad person in their family. Regarding her son’s life after college, which she anticipated would be transnational, she doubted if she and her husband would be able to help him much:

What can we do for him besides that? Everything [her son does] is now related to the United States or other countries. That’s beyond our capacity.

She, instead, mentioned another support she wished to continue to provide her son with throughout her son’s life:

Even when he does his best for everything, he still needs a bit of luck. That’s what my daily prayer is for.

Her use of the term “we” implies that she felt herself similar to her husband in terms of the capacity to help their transnational son substantially. Unlike more-affluent mothers who were the majority of the mother participants, she seemed not to find a sharp hierarchy between her and her husband, perhaps because neither of them had studied or worked abroad.

### **Employed Mothers’ (Wish-to-be) Perfect Motherhood**

All eight employed mothers I interviewed had master’s degrees, and five of them acquired doctoral degrees, mostly in the United States. Balancing family and career seemed not easy even for them: many confessed that they experienced work-family conflicts frequently, and sometimes they had to make professional sacrifices for their families, especially for their children. Thanks to relatively good family policies and job security for public employees in Korea, one mother who was a vice-principal of a public

school said she could take long-term childcare leave without worrying about losing her job. Other employed mothers, however, confessed that their motherhood often interrupted and harmed their career, especially when their children were young.

Few of their husbands seemed to have helped them much in early stages, and Greg's journalist father was not an exception. Greg's mother, a Korean college professor, reflected on the days when Greg was a preschooler:

When I was struggling [to balance work and childcare] a lot, my husband focused on his work only. He sometimes came home from work early, but he didn't do much. He always seemed to prioritize his work over childcare. He didn't pay much attention to Greg when he was a baby.

She immediately continued and said, "Maybe I'm not the only mother who did most of the childrearing in my generation." By generalizing the gender gap in housework and childcare, she seemed to try to make her husband look at least a little better. She, however, still believed that such gender gap hindered her career.

Despite their interrupted careers, no elite employed mother regretted getting married or having children. Rather, they tried to rationalize their decision to prioritize motherhood over career. For instance, Herbert's mother, a renowned pediatrician, said:

I was a good student at the top medical school in Korea. If I had some support [for childrearing], I could have become a medical professor of my home school.

Although she sounded disappointed when she talked about her unfulfilled dream, she ended up saying that she made "the right decision," which was to prioritize motherhood. Her comparison between herself and some of her unmarried doctor friends shows how she rationalized her choice to leave the medical school and open her own clinic instead:

Some of my friends who finally became medical school professors come home very late every day. They are always busy. I'm working only 9 to 6, so I can go home relatively early and take care of my family. I really like it.

Despite her demanding career, she said she made her best effort to attend as many of her sons' school events and mothers' meetings as possible, just like stay-at-home mothers said they did. To her, it was a crucial part of being a "good" mother regardless of her career: by dedicating as much time as possible for her sons, she could regard herself as a good mother. Whether employed or not, Korean mothers are expected to sacrifice a great deal of time and energy to their children's education—this heavy responsibility disproportionately falls onto mothers, given the gender expectation of "good" parenting. Living up to such high standard for a good Korean mother entailed some career sacrifices for most of the mothers: Herbert's mother talked about the sacrifices she made for her sons, which she did not regret much. Rather, she seemed to be proud of it:

I did not hesitate to close my clinic on their [her sons'] field days, picnics, or parents' days... Those events were my top priorities.

Attending as many school events as possible, just like what many stay-at-home mothers said they did, was not only for the sake of their sons. It was also for her own sake:

I didn't want to miss those opportunities. Although I have my career, I am a mother above all else.

Being a good mother and a good doctor at the same time seemed to be the primary goal of her life. If she had to choose one over the other, she seemed to have sacrificed her career for her children, a choice that she tried to generalize to all employed mothers. "Even animals like tigers and foxes have maternal instincts. It's not something to be surprised by," she adamantly remarked.

*The Ideal of a “Perfect Transnational Mom”*

Similar to stay-at-home mothers, elite employed mothers tended to believe that *all* mothers should be devoted and self-sacrificing for children. To mother “right,” employed mothers said they paid special attention to and did their best for their work in the family, including making “good” meals, keeping the house clean, and taking care of their children’s physical and mental health, even when they were assisted by paid housekeepers. Such “maternal practice”—nurturing, protecting, and training of their children, was central to their identities as mothers regardless of their career or education.

Employed mothers tended to grade themselves as devoted caregivers and try to find “joy” in that role, despite their hectic schedules. For instance, Henry’s vice-principal mother elaborated on how busy she was even after work during Henry’s high school days. Proudly smiling, she said:

I’m not that physically strong, so I always had a short nap after I came back from work. After the nap, I made dinner for Henry every single day. I used all kinds of vegetable, like tomato, lettuce, and cabbage along with low-fat meat. Sometimes it was hard to wake up from the nap, but I never missed a single day.

Asked about why she put so much work and effort into her son’s meal and snack, she answered, sounding much like many stay-at-home mothers:

It was the best thing I could do for him during those days. What could I do better than that for him? It was the most important role of mine.

During the interview, she talked about some of her academic support for her son, mostly in early stages. However, she did not put much emphasis on that. Rather, she stressed how much time and energy she put into homemaking and cooking, which she believed were the greatest work a mother could do for her children.

All the mothers I interviewed, whether employed or not, shared the notion of intensive mothering. It is the normative standard by which mothering practices and arrangements are evaluated, particularly among middle- and upper-class mothers, often regardless of the mothers' own career and education. For all mothers I interviewed, the notion of intensive mothering is a "cultural script." But the elite employed mothers I talked with found an extended value of being intensive caregivers: their career, they argued, made it possible for them to provide their children with both motherly care and professional advice. It allowed them to build both a sense of self-esteem as well as entitlement to their children's respect. Believing they were fully supporting their children in both public and private realms, they tended to attempt to balance a career with motherhood. For their children and themselves, investment in career promoted, rather than decreased, quality in motherhood.

For example, Greg's professor mother who described herself as "obsessed with feeding [her son] well," seemed not to be overwhelmed by her demanding life as a professor-mom. Rather, she considered it a chance to be an outstanding mother. Proudly, she said:

No matter how busy I was because of my work, Greg was always the center of my life. [...] After he entered high school, we moved near to my office so that I could be able to make dinner for him every day. I went home, made dinner, and ate it with Greg, and then came back to my office to do the rest of my work until 11 pm. That was how I spent a day during that time.

"Feeding Greg was the hardest work," she said in retrospect, just like many other mothers said. She, however, stressed why that work was *harder* for her due to her busy work schedule than it would be to unemployed mothers. By performing such a difficult task successfully, she seemed to feel good about herself and believe that she was mothering

“right.” She said she was fighting against the belief that employed mothers’ children tend to eat less healthy than stay-at-home mothers’ children. Feeding her son well was a way to prove that she could mother just as well as, if not better than, stay-at-home mothers would.

Extending the notion of an intensive mother, employed mothers with professional occupations presented multiple ways to incorporate their competitive work into their intensive motherhood. One example is the way elite employed mothers used their “empty time,” such as the time waiting for their children to finish classes or private lessons. Whereas many stay-at-home mothers complained about how “wasteful” and “boring” that time was, employed mothers tended to emphasize their tactics to maximize such time for their own good, particularly for their work. For example, Greg’s professor mother reflected on her time to wait for her son to finish lessons and said:

I love working at a coffee shop, so it was not a big deal for me. I sometimes asked my students or colleagues to come to the coffee shop I was working at and did some work together. It was like having my office hours there.

Building up on the academic’s identity that she believed she shared with me, she went on to say:

As you know, we can work anywhere if we have a laptop so I tried to work as much as possible while I was waiting for him. I sometimes did some grocery shopping, too, because I don’t usually have much time for that.

By stressing how efficiently she utilized her “empty time,” she attempted to argue that employed mothers could be “good” mothers, sometimes even better mothers than stay-at-home mothers. Like her, many elite employed mothers seemed to be trying their best to juggle their career and motherhood, both which they found were taxing yet worthwhile. Internalizing the ideal of a “perfect mom,” they learned to adopt their demanding

motherhood as a chance to become a “better” woman who has both a good career and a good family.

*Elite Mothers’ Intensive Involvement in Children’s Education Abroad*

Compared to stay-at-home mothers, elite employed mothers tended to give ample credit to their own involvements in their children’s education, not only in the early years (as the stay-at-home mothers emphasized) but also during the later years. They were likely to believe that they “knew [their] children the best,” not only as their children but as students and as their mentees, and it led them to value their academic involvement highly. They had distinct rules and philosophes of their own parenting, which they believed were “expert-guided” and “professional.” In fact, many employed mothers I met had education-related careers. For example, Hailey’s vocational counselor mother, who acquired her master’s degree in the United States, showed one way to apply her career to her mothering in an “integrated” way:

I often apply the theories I use at work [job counseling] to Hailey. I can’t help but analyze my own daughter!

With a laugh, she moved on to evaluating her daughter, just as she would do at work:

In today’s world, curiosity and perseverance are the most crucial elements of success, and Hailey has both of them.

To provide Hailey with an environment where she could fully develop her own “unique texture,” she said she studied the list of the U.S. preparatory boarding schools thoroughly.

In retrospect, she said:

There were some compelling considerations. The first one was school size. Also, I wanted a school that put a lot of focus on writing. That was why we chose that school. I wanted her to study humanities more than practical subjects from an



early age. [...] I didn't want her to choose applied sciences as her major even in college.

Along with her meticulous guidance on her daughter's school and major choices, she emphasized the mottos she imbued her daughter with—"being unique," "having fun," but "persevering in everything."

As most elite employed mothers once studied or at least resided abroad for an extended period of time, mostly in the United States, they seemed to be able to deeply understand and sympathize with what their children were learning, experiencing, and struggling with in U.S. high schools and colleges. This special bond helped those mothers appreciate and enjoy their transnational motherhood. For example, Hailey's mother, who herself studied in a U.S. graduate school, said she genuinely loved the overseas calls she was having with her daughter. Given her profound knowledge about and long-term experience in the U.S. education, Hailey's mother said she could easily search for her daughter's class schedule and syllabi on the Internet and imagine what her daughter's day, week, or semester would be like:

When I see the name of the class [that Hailey was taking], I can immediately picture what the class would be like.

She believed that her profound understanding of Hailey's life was what connected her with her adult daughter abroad. "It makes our conversation more interesting and intimate," she added. Unlike relatively-less-transnational mothers, she said she had attended every single parents' weekend of Hailey's U.S. boarding school. And when I met her, she seemed to be still traveling to the United States frequently to visit her daughter in college.

Having careers, especially high-status professional ones, helped elite employed mothers have not only academic but career-related conversations with their children in college. They viewed it as a rewarding part of their later mothering. According to most children whose mothers were not employed, having “serious” parent-child conversations was mostly reserved for their fathers. But some children whose mothers had professional occupations said they were frequently consulting not only their fathers but also their mothers about college- and career-related issues. As such, thanks to their own (transnational) education or career experiences, elite employed mothers – the privileged minority among the mothers of all student respondents – seemed to be able to share that role or opportunity with their similarly-educated husbands. Herbert’s doctor mother shared an example of having college- or career-related conversations with young adult children:

Herbert talks to me about diverse aspects of his life, such as his classes, friends, and also girlfriend. [...] The other day we talked about the gay parade in New York [her son attended] for multiple hours.

She attributed the opportunity to have such conversation to her prestigious career:

It’s because he’s a nice kid, but also because I’ve been working [outside the home] most of my life.

Here, she drew a distinction between herself and stay-at-home mothers:

Most mothers in my generation are stay-at-home mothers, and I think I can give my son better answers than what those mothers would give their children.

She said, as her son grew, he started to have more conversations with her husband and receive career-related advices. She, however, believed that she was not entirely left out of the conversation. Happily, she said: “Sometimes he talks to me before he goes to his dad.” By providing her son with college- or career-related advices, which she found

similar to – if not better than – her husband’s, she seemed to continue mothering her adult son quite intensively. She believed it helped her maintain a close relationship with her son, too.

Herbert’s mother’s professional career led her to have another attribute of an elite transnational parent. She found herself *another* exemplar for her high-achieving son, similar to what she believed her husband was. The anecdote below shows why she found herself entitled to her son’s respect, particularly for her successful career:

Herbert once worked at my clinic part-time [during breaks]. He said he wanted to become a doctor like me at that time, although now he has a different dream. He liked seeing patients get better after getting treatments from me. He seemed to feel how rewarding my work was.

She recalled the day when her son verbally expressed his respect for her job:

I felt so good and appreciated. I told him jokingly, “Did you see the people [her patients] smile when they walked out of my office? It’s weird, because I’m so harsh on them!

Parallel to what she said, her son Herbert, in his interview, also gave a lot of credit to his mother for her career success. Recalling his childhood, he said:

I loved the fact that my mom was working just like my dad. I really liked it because it was my pride. Our neighbors were so kind to me because I was a son of their children’s pediatrician. Most of my friends were my mom’s patients. I was very proud of my mom for her hard work.

Most of his respect toward his mother’s career seemed to stem from the high social status of the doctor occupation. Similarly, Josh’s college lecturer mother found herself an exemplar for her children, mostly because of her “delayed but never abandoned” academic career. With regard to her (possible) influence on her children, she said:

They have grown up seeing me always writing at home. It’s not like I acquired my PhD degree to show it to my children. But they may have seen me working hard for something despite all of the difficulties.

Not because of the value of her doctoral degree or dissertation but because of her perseverance, she believed that finishing her doctoral program as a mother set an example for her children.

Elite employed mothers' professional, and often transnational, careers appeared to promote their motherhood in many ways: like many elite fathers, they tended to utilize their own connections with other professionals for helping their children's extracurricular activities or college application. For example, Greg was one of the few children who commented on their mothers' connections and the benefit they received from them. He said his professor mother was the one who "made [his] internship" in the NGO in which his mother was involved as an external advisor. Although Greg's mother did not elaborate on it, such tangible help led Greg to highly respect his mother's career. Greg said: "It was somewhat natural for me to aspire to be a scholar. Because of my mom, I got to be interested in academia and decided to become an activist scholar like her." In contrast, few children of stay-at-home mothers said their mothers were their *role models* for their career. The term "role model" was reserved by most children for their elite fathers.

#### *Who is a "Better" Transnational Mom? Comparing Themselves to Stay-at-Home Moms*

Elite employed mothers constructed their own ideal of the "perfect mom" often by comparing themselves to their stay-at-home counterparts. Although sharing a similar ideal of a "good" mother, elite employed mothers constantly tried to set themselves apart from their stay-at-home counterparts. Some of them commented on their respect toward stay-at-home mothers' intense care for children, but the majority of them eventually

undervalued or even pathologized stay-at-home motherhood, saying such 24/7, self-sacrificing care for children was “not necessarily good” for either children or mothers.

Herbert’s mother’s account shows that there may have been a tension between employed mothers and their stay-at-home counterparts. Reflecting on the stay-at-home mothers she interacted with at Herbert’s high school, she said:

They were smug about how well they took care of their children. I know that they always stay close to their children, and they put every bit of their time and energy into taking care of their children. I know that it’s true.

She said she “did only 20%” of what most of Herbert’s friends’ unemployed mothers who, she thought, were very well-off and having ample time for children. Perhaps being jealous of those stay-at-home mothers’ abundant time for children, she said: “stay-at-home mothers would see themselves superior to employed mothers like myself.” At the same time, she tried to resist or challenge the belief that stay-at-home mothers would be always “better” mothers than employed mothers by saying:

I think they [stay-at-home mothers] sometimes get jealous of my career. If I attend any school event, they ask me, “Why are you here at this time? Shouldn’t you be working now?”

Although she seemed to feel sorry that she was not always being physically available for her sons, she still felt proud of and appreciated her high-status, highly-professional career that she thought was not something that every woman could achieve. She stressed how hard she had to work for both her career and her family. Drawing a clear distinction between employed mothers and stay-at-home mothers, she said:

People who don’t earn money tend to have lower self-esteem. I know that many of them are ignored by their partners. Even stay-at-home mothers from very wealthy families cannot assert themselves in front of their breadwinner husbands.

By stressing her successful career and financial independence, she tried to alleviate the feeling of guilt for being a “super busy mother.” She also interpreted her career as her exclusive resource for good mothering: for example, she believed that, to some extent, her doctor career bridged the gap between her and stay-at-home mothers in her mother’s group. In order to mingle in a group that was, in her eyes, dominated by stay-at-home mothers, she said she offered free health checkups and medicines to those mothers and their children. “They let me remain in the group because I was useful to them,” she said half-sarcastically and half-proudly.

Josh’s college lecturer mom, who continued her education in the United States while her children were attending U.S. schools, tried to set herself apart from stay-at-home mothers who, she believed, were “just staying home” and “didn’t achieve anything.” Using strong words, she said:

If I was a stay-at-home mother, my kids could have found me lethargic and incompetent. That kind of mother cannot be a good exemplar for her children, especially for grown-up children.

She seemed to consider her academic work more productive and valuable than stay-at-home mothers’ 24/7 care for the family. As she believed that she fulfilled roles of both a hard worker and a devoted mom *despite* constantly moving back and forth between Korea and the United States, she could find herself quite influential, particularly to her high-achieving son in college.

*“I’m Good, But My Husband is Better.”*

Elite employed mothers tended to believe that they would be able to provide substantial support for their children’s adult life, whether in Korea or abroad, mostly

because of their career. Many of the employed mothers used the term “we” instead of “I” or “my husband” while talking about their academic support for their children. For example, Henry’s vice-principal mother said, “[Raising children] was not one-sided. *We* always discussed with each other and divided every work.” Similarly, Daniel’s mother, a painter who was teaching at an international school in Korea, elaborated on how she and her professor husband assisted their son’s college application together:

College applications should be mistake-free. We discussed what Daniel had to include in his statement, but neither my husband nor I edited it. We just helped him brainstorm what he wrote, and a professional editor helped him in the last step.

Despite admitting that they needed extra help from the outside of their family, she was certain that she *and* her husband were essential to their son’s college application:

Although the editor helped him, we also needed to help him in earlier stages because we were the ones who knew about him the best.

Unlike stay-at-home mothers who tended to put more emphasis on their husbands’ effort, she stressed that the assistance was a collaboration between her and her husband. As both of them went to U.S. graduate schools, she said they did not need to hire a private counselor for their son’s college application, which she believed many never-studied-abroad parents did. Using her own judgment on “what would be right” for her son, she said she and her husband weighed in with their suggestions when Daniel chose his college and major.

Some mothers, who had a similar or even higher transnational education than their husbands, seemed to have had more say in how to educate their children. Hailey’s mother’s anecdote corroborates this theory: she and her husband attended the same graduate school in the United States. She remembered that her husband preferred one of

the highest ranked Ivy League schools for their daughter's undergraduate education. She, however, insisted on sending their daughter to a different (also elite) school, which she believed was lower-ranked, because of its "better" location and academic atmosphere at least for their daughter. "I strongly persuaded him, and he finally agreed to my decision," she proudly said. She seemed to believe that her daughter Hailey was enjoying college life thanks to *her* insight rather than her husband's.

Similarly, Greg's professor mother, who acquired her doctoral degree from a U.S. college, said she worked hard to dissuade her highly-educated but never-studied-abroad husband from pushing their son to apply only for "top ranked" Ivy League schools. Sarcastically, she said, "I'm the one who makes all the fuss in our family." She, however, did not degrade herself for all her "fuss." She believed it was necessary for her son's education, and eventually it led her to become the primary guide for her son's later life:

Because I made most of the big [education-related] decisions, he tried to give Greg more emotional support.

Her account implies a reversal of the typical gender divide in elite transnational parenting: because of her transnational education, which her husband did not acquire, she said she was (able to be) more involved in her son's U.S. college education than her husband. She believed that this couple dynamic, which was often found (in reverse) in the families with more-transnational fathers and less-transnational mothers, led her husband to (try to) provide their son with emotional support rather than academic one. As we shall see in the next chapter, this narrative – exceptional from a mother – was similar to the ones of many elite fathers who believed they were more involved in children's education abroad than their wives. It is a useful reminder that the intersectionality of class and gender tend to reinforce hegemonic masculinity, given that it does the reverse here. A



woman with more financial and career-related resource become the more powerful spouse, at least with regard to educational choices. This suggests that class, at least in the context of elite transnational parenting, might trump gender or that the gender, as socially constructed, is in part defined in terms of status and resources.

Yet when it came to mentoring children's future career, employed mothers, regardless of their level of transnational education, tended to consider their husbands as "better" mentors for their children than themselves, reflecting the gender hierarchy in the labor force. For example, Greg's mother said, "[while Greg is in college,] I have advised Greg how to prepare for his career, just like what his father has done. I can refer to my career, and he can refer to his own [when advising their son]." She, however, anticipated that "dynamics could change" between her and her husband in terms of who could "coach" Greg *more* as Greg and his career grows:

My husband knows a lot of people from diverse backgrounds because of his work. I am the one who has decided what Greg should do [for extracurricular activities and college application], but I have to ask my husband if I need someone else's advices. If I ask, he finds someone who can counsel very easily. It's a huge help. Sometimes I ask him to meet that person on behalf of me, then he does so and tells me later what that person's advice is. That's the biggest help he can give to Greg.

Like her, most elite employed mothers greatly appreciated their husbands' support for their children in later stages, especially career-related one. In particular, they put a special value on their husbands' connections with other professionals – mostly socially-successful men – who could counsel their children on school, major, and career choices. As fathers and mothers are usually (but not always) the central members of children's social networks, children's development is bound closely with the quantity and quality of resources that parents provide. Given the importance of connections among high-

achievers, elite employed mothers tended to value their elite husbands' career-related resources, often more highly than their own due to gender disparities in the labor market. For example, although Greg's mother seemed to have helped her son using her own connections, such as bridging him and an NGO in which she was involved, she still valued her journalist husband's connections with other professional men more highly. She also gave a lot of credit to her husband's deliberate and meticulous advices for their son, such as "tactics to manage social relationship," which she somehow believed she knew less about.

Similarly, Herbert's mother, who was very proud of her career as a doctor, enthusiastically praised her husband's doctor career, which she considered more valuable and successful than her own. She said:

Herbert's goal is to surpass his dad. My husband is like a big mountain for Herbert. He [her husband] has achieved so much success.

There was a hierarchy between her career and her husband's, although both of them were doctors. In order to prioritize motherhood, she said she gave up going to a graduate school to earn The Doctorate of Medicine and of Philosophy degree (MD-PhD), whereas her husband acquired the degree and became a professor at a Korean medical school. She, however, did not complain about the gap much. Rather, she said her husband "well deserved" what he accomplished.

This glowing account of Herbert's father's career was found in Herbert's interview as well. Herbert paid a great deal of respect toward his father and his work, even more enthusiastically than he did his mother's. He said, "My dad is a very famous, maybe one of the most famous surgeons in his field. He's a great, great doctor." As such,

both mothers and children tended to glorify elite professional fathers' careers, which they believed made those fathers not only good citizens but good parents.

In addition to being influential with their children, elite employed mothers tended to find their husbands morally exemplary for their children, often more than they thought they were. They shared similar – almost exactly the same – vocabularies to describe their husbands—“hard-working,” “enterprising,” “reliable,” “responsible,” “respectable,” and more than anything else, “*family-centered*.” Many children used those terms to describe their fathers in their interviews as well.

When asked about her husband's greatest contribution to raising their sons, Herbert's mother answered:

I have utmost respect for him. There are not many men who receive this much respect from their wives. I can say I respect him the most in this world. He is generous to others but strict to himself. Our sons are lucky to have him as their father. They can learn so much from their dad. My husband is educating our sons simply by living his life in his way. Herbert always says that he wants to become an adult like his dad.

She did not think being close and friendly was enough for being a good father. Instead, she believed that her husband's perseverance, which she believed led him to a success in his career, was what made him a great father and a role model for their sons.

Henry's vice-principal mother also praised her husband using similar words. She believed that Henry inherited academic curiosity and single-mindedness from her professor husband who “always reads at home.” She said in retrospect:

Since Henry was very young, he's been always mimicking his dad. If his dad was sitting at a desk, then he was also sitting at a desk, right next to his dad. That's what my husband passed on him.

Not only being academic but being responsible and family-centered, she believed her husband was being a good role model for their son, more than for their daughter. She was

among the few parents who explicitly compared sons with daughters. “My husband works very hard and never drinks or smokes. He’s such a family man,” She said. And she strongly believed that someday her son Henry, who she believed had great admiration for her husband as a mentor, would be a good father as well.

Elite employed mothers’ career accomplishments did not compete with or diminish those of their husbands. They tended to tolerate or embrace the inequality between their career and their husband’s, which reflects a larger gender education and career gap between women and men in their generation, not only in Korea but across countries. Instead of denying or challenging the gender hierarchy, elite employed mothers tended to value and appreciate their husbands’ contributions, not only to children’s education and career but to their self-construction as *good* human beings. By doing so, they reproduced and reinforced the gender disparity between themselves and their husbands, although probably unintentionally. Perhaps they so valued their husbands because it also brought them status as a spouse at the same time as it led them to give less weight to their own relative contributions.

### *Idealized Views of Transnational Motherhood*

Given their own transnational life, elite employed mothers were more favorable to and flexible with their transnational household arrangements than less-transnational, less-affluent mothers who were mostly stay-at-home moms. Many elite employed mothers believed and anticipated that their children’s future career abroad would prolong the separation between themselves and their children. Though instead of being sad or worried, they were likely to (try to) be optimistic about and excited for such future. For

example, Herbert's mother said she never felt sad for or worried about her son's expected-to-be-long-term transnational life, as she believed her son "fit[s] the U.S. society better." She said:

It's totally fine for me to live far away from him. [...] I already started to think of him as a totally independent person. He's more than just my son. His life is entirely his own.

Her own long-term experience of living abroad and capacity to travel freely seemed to have shaped her stance on her son's transnational life. Similarly, Daniel's mother also said that she was "not afraid of living abroad" and therefore having a plan to move abroad, preferably the country where their sons, who were both abroad at the time of her interview, would eventually settle down. Given her own transnational mobility, she found living abroad "even more comfortable than living in Korea." Elite mothers' own transnational mobility – fluent English, financial resource for international travels, profound understanding of other cultures – seemed to diminish the emotional cost of long-term transnational motherhood. Many of them were ready to cross the national boundaries if they needed or wanted to do so.

Few of them believed that transnational family arrangement was dysfunctional or problematic; they did not worry much about if it would eventually weaken the family bond. Rather, they tended to believe that such family arrangement served certain purposes, which they valued. Greg's mother, for example, strongly rejected the ideal of living-together-families:

People tend to think family members should live with or close to each other. But my family has lived in a different way. I lived in the United States. for six years alone for my PhD degree while my baby son and my husband were living in Korea with my parents. And now my husband is in China for his work, and my son is attending a U.S. college.

Living far from family members seemed nothing new or negative to her. She continued:

I'm not saying that living with family is bad. What I'm saying is that transnational families can be happy, too. Each of us has lived in all different locations so far, so how can I ask Greg to come back to Korea and live with me at this point?

As Greg was her only child, she said she missed him a great deal. She, however, seemed to be willing to endure such an emotional cost of transnational motherhood for the sake of her son; she remembered her time in a U.S. graduate school as quite challenging mostly because she started studying abroad at a later age. "I was always an eternal stranger [in the United States]," she said. As Greg started studying in the United States at a younger age, she believed her son would acquire a "better" transnational mobility than her own. It was her hope:

I wish him to be able to live anywhere on earth and globally influential. I wish there will be no language or cultural barrier for him. If he can live like that, it will be my best achievement.

To her, the advantages of transnational motherhood outweighed its pitfalls, because it would, she hoped, allow her son to forge a path of transnational success.

With a strong belief that living transnational lives would benefit their children, elite employed mothers' view of transnational family arrangement and children's long-term living abroad, or eternal migration, was much more positive and rosier than those of less-affluent and less-transnational mothers. In the literature on American families, affluence often buys separation between parents and children, as middle-to-upper class young adults tend to have ample career and financial resources that promote less proximate geographic locations and levels of interaction with parents (See Smith 1998, Matsudaira 2016). Among the elite Korean transnational families that I met, many parents and children wished to (or at least were ready to) live separately, often in

different continents, for the purpose of raising children transnationally mobile and cosmopolitan. Believing a high level of transnational mobility would diversify options for children's career, marriage, and future family life, mothers, especially those with ample transnational experience, tended to prioritize their children's mobility over the emotional benefits of living with or near children.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I address three main findings from the interviews with mothers. First, for both stay-at-home mothers and professional mothers, motherhood is a central component of their identity and practice. Even when stay-at-home mothers limited the scope of their involvement in their children's adult life, motherhood was the basis of their social connection and collective life, especially for those who were not in the paid work force as they created groups, which was highly gendered, to strategize about ways to conduct elite transnational motherhood.

Second, the way they practiced elite transnational motherhood created a divide between the two groups of mothers—stay-at-home mothers who mostly opted out of the work force and employed mothers with professional occupations. They criticized one another, perhaps as a way to shore up their own self-esteem and legitimate their way of becoming a “good” elite transnational mother.

Third, although the two groups of mothers criticized one another, they much less often criticized their husbands. Both groups of mothers tended to speak highly of the special contributions their husbands made as fathers. In doing so, these mothers themselves, especially the stay-at-home mothers, reinforced the gender divide between

elite couple. That simultaneously helped maintain their intergenerational class reproduction.

Mothers' occupational statuses distinguished elite employed mothers from highly-educated but opt-out mothers in terms of their involvements in their children's education as well as their assessments of mothers' employment. Stay-at-home mothers tended to present themselves as better – or almost “perfect” – mothers who could provide their children with not only motherly care but tangible support for higher education and career preparation abroad. In contrast, stay-at-home mothers, regardless of their economic affluence, tended to limit the scope and degree of their involvements in their children's adult life, particularly with regard to education and career abroad, primarily due to their lack of transnational education and career experiences.

Mothers I met, both stay-at-home mothers and employed mothers, tended to share and internalize the notion of “intensive mothering” (Hays 1996). It is the normative standard by which mothering practices and arrangements are evaluated, particularly among middle- and upper-class mothers. Scholars argue that it portrays mothers as devoted to the care of others, not necessarily as “subjects with her own needs and interests” (Bassin et al. 1994, quoted in Arendell 2000, 1194). Although sharing the similar ideal of a “good” mother with their stay-at-home counterparts, mothers with professional occupations constructed an extended value of being a “good” transnational mother: by providing their children with motherly care and academic- or career-related support, they tried to realize their ideal of the “perfect mom,” which required a high level of (transnational) education as well as a high-status career. These class resources functioned as a *bond* between those mothers and their high-achieving children, who



wished to be “global elites” just like their parents. By sharing similar life trajectories with their children and being “exemplars” for them, employed mothers found themselves deserving to be “perfect” mothers who could support their children both in public and private realms, just like what their husband were likely to do. This eventually led them to find their demanding motherhood worthwhile and meaningful.

Thanks to their own high-status education and career, elite employed mothers appeared to be able to cross over the gender divide in elite transnational parenting, whereas opt-out, less-transnational mothers were not able to do so. Using their career and educational resources, elite employed mothers were deeply engaged in their children’s later education and career, for which some of their children expressed their appreciation and respect. By doing so, they constructed the worth of intensive transnational mothering and actively embraced it. Christopher (2012) shows that full-time employed mothers in the United States tended to reject the ideal notion of the traditional intensive mother(ing) and rather construct their own scripts of good mothering in line with their employment and career. Similarly, by utilizing their elite profession as an exclusive resource for mothering, particularly of their high-achieving children abroad, elite employed mothers I met constructed their own notion of a “perfect transnational mom” and were willingly aiming for it.

Both groups of mothers, however, tended to give more credit to their elite husbands who, they believed, were more capable of guiding their high-achieving children’s education and career abroad. This parallels many of their children’s narratives: both mothers and children tended to believe that fathers were the ones who were more ambitious, passionate, and knowledgeable about education abroad due not only to

fathers' career resources but also their own transnational experiences. In fact, a gendered division of elite parenting, particularly of high-achieving children abroad, appeared to be reproduced largely by stay-at-home mothers' beliefs of their roles and responsibilities in their families: because few stay-at-home mothers studied or worked abroad for a long period of time, they tended to depreciate their own capacities to guide their children's education or career abroad. At the same time, they highly value their husbands' competence in coaching their children's transnational life during and after college, mostly because, they said, of their husbands' ample transnational experiences of education and career.

Such reproduction of the gender divide in elite transnational parenting was found from elite employed mothers' narratives as well, although less prominently. Their educational and career accomplishments did not compete with or diminish those of their husbands. They seemed to embrace, or at least tolerate, the hierarchy between their career and their husband's, which reflects a larger gender education and career gap between women and men in their generation. Instead of denying or challenging the gender hierarchy, elite employed mothers tended to value and appreciate their husbands' contributions to children's transnational upbringing. By doing so, they reproduced and reinforced the gender disparity between themselves and their "more successful" husbands. They, however, did not explicitly comment on the disparity; most mothers across class lines did not seem to be always aware of it or much bothered by it.

## CHAPTER IV

### ELITE TRANSNATIONAL FATHERHOOD: THE POWER OF TRANSNATIONAL RESOURCES

I met Daniel's father in his office at a university in the Seoul metropolitan area. Daniel's father, a professor in engineering, shared his life story with passion for more than two hours, as many of the father participants in this chapter did. It was not easy to persuade him to participate in the interview. But as the interview went on, I began to forget about the difficult recruitment process; at the end of the lengthy interview, he genuinely thanked me for providing him an opportunity to reflect on his fatherhood and his relationship with his children abroad.

Being a U.S. Ph.D., he believed he had a good reason for encouraging his son to study abroad. Reflecting on his days in a Korean local college before he left Korea for his postgraduate degrees in the United States, he said:

When I was attending [a Korean local] college, there were not many professors who studied abroad. I don't even remember much of what I learned from [Korean local] professors. We were basically self-taught. But in the United States, I was able to learn from the authors of some famous textbooks! It was such a great opportunity.

Because he "loved [his] days in a [U.S.] graduate school," he said he wanted his kids to have the same opportunity. He said he desired to transfer the privilege to study abroad to his sons because he found the U.S. education, at least beyond the earliest years, more advanced than Korean education. Thanks to his effort, his two sons, Daniel and Daniel's younger brother, were both attending U.S. colleges at the time of his interview.

Looking back on the days of his doctoral program in the United States, he apologized for not “helping” his wife much with childrearing, although his wife was also pursuing her master’s degree. But his wife, Daniel’s mother, called her husband an involved father who “cared much about children’s education” both in early and later years. “Sometimes he was more involved in our sons’ education than I was, even in early days,” she said. In that respect, she found her husband unique and different than most of the other Korean fathers, who she assumed were less involved in children’s education than their wives. She remembered her husband searching for the best *hagwons* (for-profit private institutes) or tutors for their two sons together with her: “Most of the time, we decide together what to do for our kids’ education. [...] He and I visit schools or hagwons together and see whether they would fit our kids or not,” she said.

Just as his wife said about him, Daniel’s father, throughout his interview, elaborated on his involvement in his children’s school education with a tone of proud. For example, he vividly remembered how he taught Daniel math, especially functions, and also science, which was his area of expertise. He also talked in detail about how he supported and nurtured Daniel’s interests in neuroscience, which Daniel ended up choosing as his major in college, by connecting Daniel with his neuroscience-expert colleagues.

More than anything else, Daniel’s father counted his sabbatical year in the United States as the greatest privilege that he provided his children, because he brought his entire family with him to an area with a great school district and multicultural atmosphere. In order to provide his children with an opportunity to master English through U.S. schooling, he said he decided to leave his children and wife in the United States after he

finished his sabbatical year at a U.S. university—it was one of his ways to make the most of his sabbatical year abroad.

Reflecting on those days in the United States, he said, “I spent a lot of time with my family. I guess it was the happiest time for our family.” The primary reason why he greatly appreciated that time lies in the fact that he believed he bonded with his son, not only through academic involvement but day-to-day interactions, which he believed were intimate:

We had a lot of conversations. Daniel read the books I read, and we discussed those after he finished reading. [...] We also traveled a lot. It was such a great year for our family. Wish we could have had more time like that, though. What made that one year so special was that we could talk with each other a lot. We could get close to each other.

Nostalgic for those days, he added: “I remember I often brought Daniel to a big pond in our neighborhood and talked about his future and the books we read together.” Believing that building such close father-son bond was a part of “good” fathering, he said: “During that one year, I think I was a decent father.” He, however, did not grade himself higher than that. Despite his delicate and diligent efforts to help his son academically and sometimes emotionally, too, he said: “I wish I could have played more sports and traveled with them more, too.” His remarks show his high expectations of himself as a father. He wanted to be more than an engaged father. He wanted to be a *great* father—being a great father, he believed, requires efforts not only to provide them with substantial support for schooling and career preparation but also to build a strong emotional bond with children. He believed it was the way to gain children’s respect.

Daniel, a U.S.-born student who attributed his opportunity to study abroad to his studied-abroad parents, expressed his gratitude for his father’s hands-on assistance for his

transnational education. He said his father was a great teacher for him in the early days. As for the days when he struggled to adjust to the U.S. middle school education, he commented:

When our family came to the United States [for his father's sabbatical] first, I couldn't solve math problems in English well. I could understand neither English nor math. That was why he helped me so much at first. He sat next to me and walked me through the math problems. The things I learned from him in those days still help me.

Daniel said his father continued helping his study after he entered college. He expressed his gratitude for his father's input on the exploration of college majors and future career:

When I got interested in psychology in high school, he gave me a lot of interesting books about psychology. Now I'm thinking of studying neuroscience in graduate school, so now he's sending me some interesting journal articles. If I get interested in something, then he starts studying it so he and I can have a conversation about it.

"That's how we communicate," Daniel added. He noted, with some pride, that such paternal involvement was unusual, as not every father had access to such hands-on academic resource or professional knowledge.

Daniel's view of his father was, in many ways, parallel to how Daniel's father himself described and understood his fatherhood. In both of their narratives, Daniel's father was an engaged father who was constantly endeavoring to be a "better father"—a warm, competent father who can and does utilize his class resources to support his children. But at the same time, Daniel's narrative hinted at why his father elaborated on the lack of father-son bond. Daniel, unlike other children, did not talk much about the emotional support he remembered receiving from his father in either early or later years. He rather confessed that he and his father did not talk for a while:

I can't say we had no conflict around my [college] major. To be honest, I did not talk with him at all in my junior and senior years [because he desperately wanted

me to go to a medical school which I did not like much.] I After I got accepted in a graduate school recently, he and I started talking again.

Unlike his father who did not articulate any father-son conflict, perhaps in an attempt to project himself as a good father, Daniel, although cautiously, talked about the discord between him and his father with regard to his college major and career plan. In order not to project his father as a bad father, he added: “He taught me so many things. I appreciate him for that.” However, he ended up not giving much credit to his father for his emotional support. “Sometimes he just doesn’t really catch what I want to say. [...] It sometimes makes me hard to talk with him,” he added.

This father-son conflict was notable in Daniel’s mother’s interview as well.

Daniel’s mother, although simultaneously trying to downplay it, couldn’t help mentioning the discord that she had observed between Daniel and his father:

To be honest, Daniel once had a conflict with his dad. Daniel’s dad sometimes showed his ambition about Daniel’s college admission, and that might have been seen as pushing Daniel. [...] We all were stressed out around that time [Daniel’s college application], so it’s not about who was right and who was wrong. Daniel’s dad was just trying to emphasize the importance of getting a good result that Daniel was striving for.

During that time, she admitted that she had to arbitrate between the two. Daniel supported her argument by depicting his mother as one of his best friends and a good mediator: “I have had a good relationship with my mom throughout,” Daniel said. Daniel believed that his father’s *strong* – in Daniel’s eyes – opinion on his academic and career plans once created a fissure between him and his father. But it did not deter him from genuinely appreciating the academic support he received from his father. He still believed that his father was the one who influenced his transnational education the most.

This case is a good example of how the elite fathers in this research explained and evaluated their transnational fatherhood and how their children and wives corroborated or contradicted their narratives. Fathers in this study considered themselves involved in and passionate about their children's transnational education. Their hands-on support for children's education and career abroad, which was not attainable for all Korean fathers, led them to feel proud of their paternal involvement and the overall transnational fatherhood. However, intentionally or not, they sometimes left some father-child conflicts unseen or at least untold, which set them apart from their children and wives. Their ideal – the “good” transnational father – was deeply involved in children's upbringing academically *and* emotionally, regardless of the geographical distance between father and children. And whether they thought themselves as such fathers or not, they tried to pursue that ideal.

### **Emerging Extensive Transnational Fatherhood**

Parenthood is a gendered institution. Gendered social systems, such as employment, shape motherhood and fatherhood differently. Such gendered parenthood, in turn, affects social systems outside the home. Parenthood and employment are represented as a dichotomous or a zero-sum relationship for women but not as often as for men. Being (expected to be) the primary parent and caregiver in their families, women constantly need to (re)align their career and work with their motherhood whereas men tend to face less work-family conflict, as they are expected to perform primarily as breadwinners. For fathers, employment and family are rarely portrayed as detracting from one another. Unlike work-oriented women who are likely to be seen as less serious about



their families, work-oriented men, especially those with high-paying, prestigious occupations, tend to be respected and praised for their contribution to their families. The gendered ideology of separate spheres (public vs. private) have spawned the “career advancement double standard” (Coltrane 2004), in which professional men, more than professional women, have an advantage in pursuing both an elite profession and a harmonious family.

Middle-to-upper class fathers, thanks to their class resources, are in a more favorable position in becoming “good” fathers than their working-class counterparts. At the same time, they tend to face and deal with high expectations for their fathering and fatherhood. Cultural expectations of “engaged” or “New Age” fathers have dramatically increased across cultures, and the ideal of new fatherhood has caught the attention of the middle-to-upper class fathers more than any other groups (Coltrane 2004; Dermott & Miller 2015). Cultural and social changes have weakened the connection between masculinity and the expectation of “good” fatherhood (Marsiglio 1998). For contemporary fathers, relational engagement and caregiving work are now crucial elements of “good” fathering (Marsiglio & Roy 2012). Now many fathers push the boundaries of the basic “provide-and-reside” definitions of “good” fathering (LaRossa 2005; Marsiglio 2009a). Men who aim for the ideal of a “New Age” dad attempt to embody the “growing spirit among new dads to be accepted, both at home and in the workplace, as whole persons” (Marsiglio 2008a). In pursuit of achieving the ideal fatherhood, which entails *more than* being a diligent breadwinner, middle-to-upper class fathers now provide their children with hands-on care (Doucet 2006; Pleck 2010b; Walzer 1998). Nonetheless, researchers (Lareau 2000; Gottzen 2011; Griffith & Smith

2005) find that the daily labor of managing children's education still disproportionately falls on mothers, and few fathers, across class lines, participate in "complementary educational work" (Griffith & Smith 2005), such as helping with homework and volunteering in class.

A father who actively participates in the details of day-to-day childcare is now seen as a good father who engages in "androgynous fatherhood" (Rotundo 1985). He involves himself in a more expressive and intimate way with his children, unlike his own father who tended to leave that role to his wife. This kind of paternal involvement has been discussed as one of the most significant fathers' contributions to the socialization process of his children. Early parenting researches tended to depict fathers' hands-on care of their children mostly as spending "quality time" with children—often "playing" with their children (Doucet 2006, 2013). Scholars argue that the changing culture of fatherhood have led to a bifurcation of the adult men population into those who assume care of their children and those who do not (Furstenberg 1988). And social class, more than any other social categories, greatly impacts fathers' capacity for such intensive fatherhood (Astone et al. 2010; Cooper 2000; Deutsch 1999; LaRossa 1997; Risman 1998; Shows & Gerstel 2009).

Fathers' hands-on care of their children is diversifying *beyond* having intimate play time with children. Highly-educated fathers tend to emphasize the importance of formal education and have a high expectation of their children's academic achievements (Lareau 2003; Gottzen 2011). Some research, then, suggests that not only to become "good" fathers but to reproduce their class privilege, well-educated middle-to-upper-class fathers (try to) engage in their children's life not only emotionally but academically.

Korean Fathers in this chapter represent a case for studying the views and practices of elite fathers, or “New Age” fatherhood, particularly in a transnational context. Their multifaceted efforts to become “good” fathers involve academic and emotional involvements in their children’s transnational upbringing, which require profound knowledge about education abroad and significant financial resources. Given their privileged financial and educational background, they qualify for the “ideal” transnational fatherhood they defined: all of the ten fathers I interviewed had master’s degrees at least, and seven fathers had doctoral degrees, all from U.S. colleges. There were only two fathers who did not study abroad—one college lecturer and one executive of an international company who both acquired their postgraduate degrees from Korean colleges. Except for those two, all fathers had above-average, ample experience of transnational education or careers.

Drawing on ten elite Korean fathers’ narratives about their transnational fatherhood, this chapter shows how they utilize their transnational resources, which only a small number of elite Korean men own, in order to become “good” transnational fathers as well as to transfer their “flexible citizenship” (Ong 1999) to their children. I discuss both the culture of fatherhood (shared norms, values, and beliefs surrounding men’s parenting) and the conduct of fatherhood (what fathers do, their paternal behaviors). In order to highlight the class impact on elite transnational fathering and fatherhood, I compare studied-abroad, highly-affluent fathers with never-studied-abroad, relatively-less-affluent fathers, although the analysis is of course hypothetical or tentative due to the small number of cases. Through the comparison, I indicate the class resources which enable extensive transnational fatherhood. I also discuss how such class resources led

only certain fathers – those with high levels of transnational mobility and wealth – to consider themselves deserving children’s love and respect and therefore to find their fatherhood joyful. In an effort to analyze their fatherhood from multiple angles, I present some children’s and mothers’ narratives alongside of their fathers’ or husbands’ narratives.

### **Elite Fathers’ Academic Involvement**

Unlike most mother participants whose career or post-college education were interrupted by motherhood, almost all father participants – eight out of ten – finished their education or career abroad by relying on their wives’ and children’s support. Few fathers said they experienced conflicts between career and fatherhood whereas many, as we have seen, employed mothers confessed they had to work hard to balance the two. Eight fathers with degrees abroad said that their wives and children accompanied them on their graduate schools or working abroad. However, among the wives of those fathers, there was only one woman who also acquired her postgraduate degree abroad. This suggests that elite fathers’ uninterrupted transnational education and established career was a family effort in a highly gendered context.

Jake’s father, who proudly said he was “always involved” in his children’s life, emphasized the need for fathers’ heavy involvement in children’s education. Implying the gap between the level of his education and his wife’s, he said: “Fathers should be attentive to their kids and helping them. It becomes a great help. It’s much better than letting mothers do all the work [for children’s education].” Like other highly-transnational fathers, he did not see himself as unusually engaged. He insisted that *all*

fathers, not only certain privileged ones, needed to be engaged throughout their children's life. But he never mentioned about which class resource is required for such extensive fathering.

Similarly, Sophia's father did not think that he was unusually passionate about his children's education. As for the fathers he regularly met in his social circle, he said:

All fathers are passionate about their children's education. It's not only me. Most fathers around me are like me, especially if they themselves did well in school. They tend to teach their kids on their own. Some fathers co-teach their kids, using their different majors. It's a way to share their knowledge. It's very common.

Because of his high level of education, he believed managing his children's education, in both Korea and the United States, was part of his responsibility rather than his wife's. To provide his children with what he regarded as the "best" education, he rearranged the common gender divide in Korean parenting—the Korean society still burdens mothers with more responsibilities of educating children (Hwang 2012; E. Lee 2013). The elite Korean fathers I met were well aware that the gender divide between themselves and their wives was somewhat reversed and unconventional, and they believed it "worked" well for their children's elite education abroad.

Elite fathers, particularly the ones who brought their children abroad for their education or career, believed that the opportunity provided their children with a chance to learn in a "better" educational environment. Given their own experiences of studying or working in the U.S., the majority of fathers thought highly of the U.S. education, especially the elite one, which they believed was "liberal," "creative," "student-focused," "academically superior," and "culturally diverse." In contrast, they tended to describe Korean education and schools as "rigid," "authoritarian," "nerdy," and "too competitive."

Including such exclusive opportunities to study abroad, they tended to believe that they provided their children with diverse academic assistance from an early stage.

For example, Natalie's professor father talked about how he taught his daughter English before his family moved to the United States for his sabbatical:

I showed her a lot of Disney movies without subtitles or dubbing. She loved watching those. Young kids love watching television, so I tried to show her programs or movies in English as often as possible. I bought those Disney video tapes at a bookstore by myself.

He stressed that he "was the one" who conducted the task. And he believed that he was *eligible* to do so:

I'm not an education expert, but I heard that languages should be taught from an early age in a fun way.

He believed that his teaching was efficient and effective. In addition, he said he "handpicked" the Korean private elementary school for Natalie and her sister. He described himself as "quite passionate" about his children's education both in early and later stages, and believed it was "nothing unique" among his professor-father friends.

Fathers and their children did not always tell the same story. Jenna's father, who initially said he "did not do much" for Jenna's early education, recalled that he recommended to Jenna that she had to learn multiple foreign languages, although he did not think he "forced" her. In contrast, Jenna, in her interview, said her father "made" her master at least one foreign language other than English. But she "ended up" appreciating him for that.

Thanks to him, I could learn Japanese. My mom didn't like it, because she thought learning Chinese would be better than learning Japanese. But my dad was very strong about me learning Japanese, and I ended up loving it.

She thought her entrepreneur father had a rational reason for recommending she learn Japanese in particular:

My dad has some good insights. [...] When my dad was young, engineers needed to be fluent in Japanese for their businesses. He can also read Japanese a little bit, and it seems to help him run his business. He pushed me to learn Japanese at first, but now I'm really grateful for that.

Because of her native-like Japanese, she seemed to have advantages in her comparative literatures and Asian history major at an Ivy League school. She described her father as a "good advisor," although she did not find herself extremely close to him. "He gives me a crucial advice once or twice a year. That was all," she said with a laugh.

Despite increased cultural expectations for fathers' involvement in children's schooling, research suggests that middle-class mothers are still the ones who experience most pressure for the educational work across cultures (Casper & Bianchi 2002; Craig 2006). Whereas only a handful of mothers and children in my research commented on fathers' hands-on effort during early education, most fathers I met said they were much involved in their children's education both in early and later years. Some elite Korean Fathers, according to their own narratives, suggested that they were as much involved, if not more, in their children's education than their wives in early years. Unlike many stay-at-home mothers who tended to understate their involvements, elite fathers rarely hesitated to elaborate on their effort for their children. They rather seemed to want to brag about it, believing that it would separate them from other Korean fathers.

Similar to what many mothers and children perceived, most elite fathers themselves claimed that they started to take the lead in managing and supporting their children's transnational education in the later stages. Fathers who studied abroad seemed to be the ones who first encouraged their children to go abroad for school. Especially studied-

abroad fathers, who mostly received their postgraduate degrees in the United States, said they were the ones who first encouraged their children to go to high schools or colleges abroad.

Studied-abroad fathers said they felt “comfortable” sending their children abroad, even at a young age, because they were “familiar” with the education their children were receiving. They believed their preference for transnational education, elite U.S. education in particular, was well-grounded, given their firsthand knowledge of it—that knowledge was a key factor in promoting their engagement in their children’s schooling in the United States. Most of them recalled their experience of studying in the United States as a positive and precious memory. Strongly believing that elite U.S. education would eventually “pay off” as it did for them, most said they actively encouraged their children to study abroad from an early age.

This rendition often involved not only praise of the U.S. education but also devaluation of Korean education. Sarah’s father, a medical school professor who was also running a medical start up, was a strong advocate of raising children globally. And he thought fathers had to take a large role in it. Believing in the value of a version of “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003), he said, “Parents should not let children do whatever they want to.” In order to make a “necessary” interruption in his children’s upbringing, he said he brought his two young children to the United States with him for his sabbatical in a U.S. research university in the early 2000s. He said he “always wanted to raise [his] kids in a large country,” as he found Korea was too small for his children.

He lectured on how “enlightened” Korean parents, he believed, should raise their children:



Learning English should be done first, and in order to learn it perfectly, children should attend elementary schools [in the United States]. That's what parents should do for their children, but not every parent can do so even when they are very well-off. Of course, children need to be smart enough to survive in the new learning environment. Parents can bring the kids to a clean, beautiful pond, but kids are the ones who actually drink the water. What parents can and should do is to bring the kids to a good pond.

The confident tone of his voice showed that he considered himself a good parent who could and did bring his daughter to a “good pond,” as he put it. His daughter Sarah, like many other children, mentioned in her interview that her time in a U.S. elementary school was “one of the best times” of her life. She appreciated her father for bringing her to the United States for his sabbatical at a university in California. Thanks to that opportunity, she thought she could speak English without any accent. She seemed to appreciate her father for that, which supported her father's high score for his own parental involvement.

Sarah's father did not think teaching “native-like English” was the only reason for him to raise his children transnationally. Throughout his interview, he put great emphasis on the importance of “being global.” To give Sarah access to the network of “pioneers” of diverse fields, he said he sent her to an Ivy League school. “My goal is to let my kids meet world-class scholars and bosses,” he said in a strong voice. To support his daughter's college education, he said he also needed to “keep learning” about the U.S. education system, especially Ivy League schools:

I have to be able to understand how the [elite U.S.] schools are run. It's not about my wealth. I have to work on understanding my kids' life [abroad]. I'm always busy with my work, but I always read and study [for his children]. That gives me the capacity to guide them.

As the primary parent assisting Sarah's college application, according to his account, he seemed to feel a strong sense of responsibility to keep abreast of Sarah's life inside and

outside of school. To him, such responsibility was a joy rather than a burden. Expressing both commitment and pleasure, he said:

Her college sends parents a lot of letters. By reading them, I can learn what Sarah is learning there. I'm learning what I didn't know before. I cannot go back and be a student again, but thanks to her, I'm learning something new at this age. It makes me able to ask her some good questions, and it makes her ask me about whatever when she needs some advice.

"It's fun to have such conversations," he concluded. Thanks to his capacity to grasp how the elite U.S. college system operates, which he was continuously developing, he was able to plan and manage Sarah's elite transnational education deliberately and maintain a bond with his adult daughter abroad.

To make the father-daughter relationship supportive rather than top-down, he said he tried to be "very cautious" whenever he gave her advice:

Sometimes Sarah tells me, "Dad, you say I can do everything, but it's not true. There are things that are just hard to achieve." Then I realize how pushy I was. I don't want to be pushy, so I try to tone down.

In sharp contrast, he did not frame his wife as intense or "pushy" as much as he thought he sometimes was. In his narrative of involvement in Sarah's transnational upbringing, he was the sole implementer of "concerted cultivation." His wife, according to him, was more like a "buffer" that protected their children from his "sometimes-too-meticulous" parenting. "Thanks to their mom, our kids are chill and independent. [...] In most Korean families, mothers are the ones who manage everything, right? But my wife is not like that at all," he said, giving credit to her for "doing the opposite" of what he believed he was doing. At the same time, he gave more credit to himself for his hands-on support that he believed only a handful of Korean fathers could provide.

*Less-Transnational Fathers: "I Didn't Do Much."*

The only two fathers who had not studied or worked abroad gave their involvement in their children's education a low rating. Heather's father, a manager in a multinational cooperation who had studied only in Korea, described both himself and his wife as "permissive" and "easy-going" compared to other parents in his social circle. "We did not have many guidelines or rules. We just let Heather do whatever she wanted," he said. However, he seemed not to be entirely uninvolved in Heather's education either in the early and later years:

I did not vigorously search for *hagwons* or tutors for her, but... I once introduced her to an academic institution, which was more like a book club. They had an economics class for young kids, and I recommended her to attend it for a while. And... What else...? Oh, I think I also made her go to an English class.

Believing that other fathers did much more for their children than he did for Heather, he tried to understate his academic involvements by saying, "That was all. Except for that, I did nothing." Other elite fathers' extensive academic support, which he said he observed around him, seemed to lead him to downplay the amount and impact of his own academic involvement.

Heather's interview replicated most of her father's narratives. As her father insisted, she said she had little influence from her parents, which set her apart from other children respondents. Although she did not talk much about academic assistance from her parents, she did remark on the essay competition she won when she was in high school, for which she gave some credit to her father:

I first worked as a student intern at my dad's company, although I didn't do much important work. After that, I wrote a mini thesis based on what I learned from the internship. At first, I had a hard time thinking about what to write about, because I was not that smart.

With a shy laugh, which I did not see often from other student respondents, she continued:

One day, my dad saw me struggle, and suggested me to write about B2B marketing, which he was doing at work. I took his advice and wrote a thesis about it after reading some of his company's cases. I ended up getting an award, and it helped my resume.

She strongly believed that her father's help, which she believed was based on his knowledge and experience from his career, enabled her to win the essay contest that she said boosted her resume.

However, her father surprisingly did not recall much about the essay competition in his interview. When asked about it, he said: "To be honest, I don't remember that [the essay contest] much. Did she say that I helped her essay much?" He laughed, and continued:

I do remember that I gave her an internship opportunity at my company, but except for that, what did I do for her? I don't know. I already told you that I made her attend a children's financial academy, right? I'm working in the market economy, so I thought it would be good for her to learn about it at an early age. But besides that, I don't really remember what I did for her.

Instead of any hands-on academic support, he rather remarked on his non-academic efforts for Heather's high school education and college application:

I didn't do much except for giving her rides to wherever she needed to go. That's all. What could I do?

Rides were what many stay-at-home mothers considered as the most substantial support they provide their children with. In that sense, his accounts resembled those of the mothers who were similarly less-transnational.

Holly's father, a Korean local Ph.D. who was teaching at a college as a lecturer, rated his academic involvement even lower. "She did everything on her own. I didn't give her any help for her education," he said in the beginning of his interview. Asked

why he and his wife sent Holly to a selective Korean preparatory high school for applicants for colleges abroad, he responded:

I didn't even know such school existed, to be honest. I didn't even think the students of that school looked happy.

His self-deprecating tone continued throughout the interview. Using the term "we," he said:

We [he and his wife] were not capable of helping her, to be honest. I don't know much about the United States, so...

Feeling the increasing academic gap between him and his daughter in the United States, he said:

Even if I gave her some [academic] advices, I don't think she would take them seriously.

Holly, in her interview, made a similar remark: "My dad... Well, he didn't do much for me [during high school days.] He just gave me some rides." However, she did not mention that she sometimes asked her parents for their feedback on her college assignments, which her father happily recalled in his interview:

After entering college, she asks for our [his and his wife's] help on her paper from time to time. We feel so happy when she does that. It shows that she believes and respects us. I don't remember whether she asked for our help in high school as well, but... Anyway, recently she sometimes talks about her paper with us from time to time, and whenever she does so, I try to give my best feedback.

Unlike more-transnational fathers who said "I" instead of "we" when explaining their academic support in later years, Holly's father said he helped his daughter as did his similarly-educated wife with a Korean Ph.D. degree. Trying to give his daughter enough credit, which few more-transnational fathers attempted to do, he added:

[When giving feedback] I don't have to talk a lot though, because she catches what I'm trying to say very fast.

In his narrative, his daughter was the most intelligent and transnational person in his family, which separated him from more-transnational fathers. Instead of emphasizing what *he* did for his daughter, he rather articulated how smart and independent his daughter was throughout her upbringing. Some more-transnational fathers also praised their children for being intellectual and independent, but Holly's father was the only one who seemed to feel apologetic for her daughter's independent attitude, which he believed a consequence of the lack of his and his wife's hands-on support. This stance separated him from more transnational fathers even further, perhaps because he had fewer resources—whether financial, educational, or cultural than his more-transnational counterparts.

### **Elite Fathers' Effort for Emotional Care**

Not only do recent studies emphasize fathers' involvement in the education of their children, more tend to emphasize men's capacity to nurture their children as an essential part of the standard of a good father. Dowd (2000) suggests that nurture involves physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual care that leads to children's positive development. Nurture means more than simply doing. It also means "the manner in which things are done, and their results for children" (Marsiglio & Roy 2012, 5).

Fathers I met shared this definition of nurture and strived to achieve the ideal. Internalizing the ideal of a "New Age" dad, elite fathers in this chapter stressed their extensive efforts to provide emotional care for their children, both in early and later years. They tended to believe that their care was all-round; although not many mothers or children elaborated on fathers' emotional involvement, especially in early years, many

elite fathers believed that they contributed to the psychological development of their children by being, in their words, “close,” “friendly,” “accessible,” and “not-as-stern-as-other-fathers.”

Fathers believed their efforts at providing emotional care was essential. They did not think that providing hands-on academic assistance automatically made them “good” fathers, as they internalized the emerging ideal of an engaged father who is also (expected to be) loving, nurturing, and involved. Buying into this model, elite fathers, the more-transnational ones in particular, said they tried to spend as much quality time as possible with their children, believing it was crucial to become a “good” father.

Many of them redefined emotional support in what people often conceive of as masculine ways, especially those with sons—fathers who had sons tended to stress their physical effort to play with their sons, particularly in early years. Jake’s father, who sent his two sons and one daughter to the United States for high school, emphasized that his effort for emotional support started at an early stage:

I love kids, not only mine but also others’. I know many of my children’ friends by name. [...] I played with many of them when I had some time to spare.

Especially with his two sons, he said he tried to spend ample time playing sports, as he believed that it was the key to the “great” relationship that he believed he had with his sons. More than his academic support, such as searching for the best *hagwon*, tutor, and school, he believed that his intimate time with children, especially playing sports and going on (international) family trips, was what made him a good father. This seems much like what researchers find among U.S. dads: physical play with children is one of the most common ways fathers say they give nurture (See Doucet 2006).

As children grew up, he changed how he stayed close with his children but it was still in a masculine way—talking about sports with his sons over overseas phone calls. While his sons were in U.S. prep boarding schools, he said he tried hard to close the geographical and psychological distance between him and them. He elaborated on his effort:

Parents could see who scored at soccer games on the school’s website. I checked the website almost every day so I could talk about the games with him [his oldest son] on the phone.

Although the topic of father-son conversation was masculine, his intention was not necessarily masculine:

I thought [such call] was necessary. Although we were apart from each other, I thought, as a parent, I needed to show my care.

Similar to what many mothers across employment statuses said, he said with emphasis: “I wanted him to know that I really cared about him.” Not only to be informed about the school but to show his care for his children, he said he attended every single parents’ weekend at his children’s U.S. boarding schools. Thanks to his CEO position, he said he was able to manage to balance his work and such school-related events abroad, which he thought was not possible for every father.

Compared to Jake’s father, Sarah’s father spoke of a less masculine way to bond with his daughter. He proudly said that he was the “main caregiver” for Sarah while she was in a Korean boarding high school and his wife and son were in the United States for their son’s education. He took that responsibility as an opportunity to get closer to his daughter and did not speak of it as a burden or a source of frustration. He elaborated on how much he appreciated the time he spent alone with his daughter during those days, although Sarah did not articulate it in her interview:



On the weekends when she came home [from her high school dorm,] I volunteered to pick her up, although I had to drive more than one hour. I also drove her back to school at the end of the weekend. We talked a lot in the car. She talked about all of the conflicts she had with her friends or teachers, and I carefully listened to her.

He believed such intimate time built a special bond between him and his daughter:

I was like her chauffeur, and thanks to that role, I could get to know a lot about how she was doing at school.

As an effort to “get to know” his children more, he said he was investing a good amount of his time in having intimate conversations with his children. Because of that effort, he saw himself as a good father. When asked about his wife, he understated her academic contribution by saying: “She does her job by hanging out with [his children] and cheering them up when they are discouraged. That’s pretty much it.”

By “doing it all” – being academically *and* emotionally involved, Sarah’s father believed that he was the primary parent of his children, particularly after they grew up. We can also see the power of this new age ideal of fatherhood in its absence. A couple of highly-transnational fathers who thought they failed to build a strong father-child bond regretted it, as they believed they did not meet the standard of the “New Age Dad.” They felt their (physical) absence in their children’s childhood was their “fault.”

#### *Less-transnational Fathers’ Special Emphasis on Emotional Support*

The two fathers without much transnational experience also stressed their efforts to provide emotional support, sometimes even more than their more-transnational counterparts did. Heather’s father, like many other fathers, said he frequently drove his daughter to her high school dorm or to multiple *hagwons* (supplementary educational institutions) whenever she needed rides before she left for a U.S. college. Remembering

the time when Heather was in a Korean boarding school, he said, “She came home for most of the weekends, and I brought her back to her school almost every time.” He framed those drives as not only the most intimate time he spent with his daughter but his largest contribution to his daughter’s education. In this sense, his remarks are reminiscent of many stay-at-home mothers’ narratives.

He did not think his effort for emotional care stopped there. He said, “I sometimes stopped by her school if I was meeting someone [for work] near her school. I asked her out and had lunch with her.” He believed he provided her daughter with as much emotional support as he could; unlike her father, Heather did not mention such drives or lunches she had with him during her interview, and instead elaborated on his assistance with her school assignments or college applications, which she found intermittent but substantially helpful. She emphasized and recalled a more masculine dad who provided, although not frequently, her with academic support.

Holly’s father, the least-transnational father in this study, also put a great deal of emphasis on his effort at providing emotional support for his children. He said he rarely commented on his children’s school grades or extracurricular activities, as he believed that his educational administrator wife “did a better job” on that part of parenting:

That [managing children’s education] was her job, and thankfully, our kids listened to her words well. I did not need to add more opinions [on children’s academic performances], because she’s doing it enough.

He seemed to believe that his effort for emotional care compensated for the lack of his academic input on his high-achieving children, particularly for Holly who was the only one of his children who went abroad for college. Not being able to picture what Holly’s life in the United States would be like, he felt a growing cultural distance between him

and his daughter. He confessed that he rarely talked with Holly during her school semesters, as “there [was] not much for [him] to help her” with her education at an elite U.S. college, which he said he “never heard the name of” before she got accepted to it.

More similar to stay-at-home mothers than to more-transnational fathers, he found himself playing the role of an “emotional expert” for Holly who he believed was often stressed with school. He said the drives he had with his daughter from their house to her boarding school in Korea were special to him, just like what many other fathers said. He, however, narrated those drives with a much more emotional tone.

I usually had some jokes with her, because I wanted to relieve her stress. [...] I never brought up any serious issue. I didn't want to give her any additional burden. I think our relationship got better through that time. I don't know how she thinks, but I do believe so.

He believed those “fun” conversations built a strong bond between him and Holly. He even found himself closer to Holly than his wife was, as he proudly said:

Holly sometimes tells the truth only to me, not to her mother. [...] I saw her lying to her mom from time to time. It's interesting that Holly hides something from her mom, not from me.

Sharing some of his daughter's secrets, to him, was a sure sign of the strong emotional bond he tried to – and he believed he did – build with his daughter. About his relationship with Holly's older sister, a Korean college graduate who was working in Korea at the time of the interview, he made similar remarks:

I believe it is very important to have intimate talks with kids, because by doing so, they seem to relieve a lot of stress. She [Holly's sister] talked to me about the problems she had at work. It might be hard for her to share those things even with her friend, I guess.

His effort providing emotional support did not go unnoticed: Holly was well aware of her father's care, although she did not appreciate the “intimate” time with her

father as much as her father did. She said she did not call her parents as often as she believed her friends did during school semesters. “My mom doesn’t care much [about not having many calls], but my dad does. He seems to want to have more calls with me,” she said. For her relationship with her father, Holly made an ambiguous remark: “Our relationship is hard to define. We are close to each other for sure, but we don’t love everything about each other.”

She believed her friends were receiving much more substantial support from their highly-transnational fathers than what she received from her father; it meant she did not give much credit or respect to her father despite what he saw as his intensive effort to provide her with emotional support. In stark contrast to daughters from more-affluent backgrounds who tended to think very highly of their fathers, even as ideal marriage partners, Holly said cynically: “I will never marry someone like my dad.” In her social circle, in which she often found herself as an “outlier,” fathers’ academic- and career-related support was viewed as necessary as emotional support, if not more so.

In general, both sons and daughters across these class lines looked to their fathers for substantial support for their college education and careers rather than emotional support. That is, for the most part, more traditional expectations prevailed. Although many of their fathers aspired to be the “new dad”, most of their children seemed to emphasize a more traditional dad—with some believing fathers met that expectation and others believing their dad did not meet either the new or old model of fatherhood.

### **Extensive Fathering Deserves Children's Respect?**

Fathers I met across levels of transnational mobility found extensive fatherhood a norm in the circle of Korean elite fathers. Reflecting on the information session he attended for his daughter's U.S. college admissions, Jenna's father remembered seeing "a bunch of [other] fathers" there, who he believed constituted almost half of the parent participants. He insisted that he was not alone when it came to the extensive management of children's education. By emphasizing that he was "one of" the extensive fathers in his social circle, he tried to normalize the extensive fathering of students abroad, which he assumed people outside his social circle might find "too much."

Because of their extensive parenting, which they believed was common and positive, more-transnational fathers in this study tended to believe that they were entitled to their children's respect and appreciation. Some of them said they actually could feel their children's respect: Sarah's father, who believed he knew "everything" about his daughter, did not hesitate to say that he was being appreciated by his entire family.

Quoting his wife, he said:

My wife sometimes jokes to our kids like, "I wish I could have had a father like yours." And the kids know why their mom says so. Yesterday, my wife says to my son, "If I had a father like yours, then I could have gotten into an Ivy League school, too!"

Extensive fathering sometimes collided with the ideal of raising independent children.

Sarah's father confided in me that he sometimes, although not always, wondered if his way of raising his children was "too much":

If my daughter or son has an application due, then I become so nervous and cautious. I have to watch every single step [of the submission]. [...] I'm worried if I'm raising my kids too cautiously.

Middle-class intensive fatherhood involves ambivalence and guilt, as middle-class fathers are the ones who try the hardest to act according to the emerging ideal of an engaged father. While doing so, “[middle-class fathers] can be consumed with how they are doing as fathers and how they can do better” (LaRossa 1998, 456). Thinking that he elaborated on his involvements in Sarah’s life too much, Sarah’s father seemed to be worried that his daughter would be seen as too dependent because of what he said in his interview. For his daughter’s sake, he added: “She always asks about my opinion after she already made up her mind. [...] She sometimes follows my advice, and sometimes she doesn’t. She tries hard not to be influenced by me too much.” This remark shows his ambivalence about his extensive fathering—he believed his involvement was necessary for many reasons, but at the same time, he wanted to represent his daughter as *independent enough* by other people’s standards. That was one aspect of his parental anxiety.

Daniel’s professor father also worried that he was sometimes overinvolved, although neither of his sons disregarded his advice on their education. Very cautiously, he confessed that he was wondering whether his advice was well received and appreciated by his son or not. As he was able to and actually did introduce his son to his neuroscientist friend, he strongly believed that neuroscience was a good fit for Daniel. What he worried about was any possibility that he and Daniel were not on the exact same page about Daniel’s college major and career plan:

Now I sometimes wonder whether I did right or not. He could have had more time to contemplate on what to major, but I didn’t give him such time. I just gave him an answer. He sometimes asks me, “Dad, am I going to the right way?”

This concern led him to wonder if his grown-up son’s respect toward him was diminishing:

When he was young, he definitely respected me a lot, because I could teach him a lot. But now he's grown up and learning so many different things in college. His knowledge is growing so fast [in college], and it seems to make him respect me less than he did before. Now he knows more than I do at least in his field!

He believed his academic knowledge, sometimes more than his humane qualities, was what made him a good father. He said, with an awkward laugh, "I don't think he respected me as a great human. He respected me because I knew more than he did [in early years]."

His doubt may be valid. His son Daniel also seemed to feel ambivalent about his father's involvement in his college education and career plan. He was agonizing over changing his career plan, as he constantly questioned if he really liked the major. Despite his sincere gratitude to his father, he could not help implying that he chose his college major and his original career plan in order to meet his father's expectation, which he sometimes found overwhelming:

I like neuroscience. I do. But sometimes I wonder if I'm studying it only because he [his father] wanted me to become a neuroscientist, like a puppet, you know... But it is true that my dad and I share a lot of interests. I know that I like this major, but still I sometimes try to make sure that I was the one who chose this path.

Like most children participants, he tried to emphasize his independence and autonomy in choosing college major and future career. It was the very end of his two-hour interview when he finally confided in me that he sometimes felt pressured by his father's high expectation. Child-father fissure, particularly regarding career plans, was not elaborated much in most children's narratives, either because they fully internalized their fathers' expectations of their future or because they wanted to portray their families as harmonious as possible. Nevertheless, it was clear that quite a number of fathers I

interviewed did seem cautious about their hands-on involvements, despite believing in the value of extensive fathering.

*Less-transnational Fathers: Self-deprecating View toward their Fatherhood*

Unlike their more-transnational counterparts, less-transnational fathers did not find their fathering particularly extensive or unusually helpful for children. Defining himself and his wife as outliers in their social circle, Heather's father recalled the time when both he and his wife visited Heather's high school, which was a prestigious boarding school in Korea: "One of her teachers even said that me and my wife were too easy-going with her," he said. By saying so, he tried to separate him from other parents, including fathers, who he sometimes found too-engaged. Being cynical, he said:

You know what? One of my friends also sent his kid to a [prestigious Korean] boarding school, and I saw him dedicate all of his weekend to supporting his son. He drove to his son's school that was two hours away from Seoul, picked up his son and drove him to his tutor in Seoul, and drove him back to the school at night. I didn't really understand why he had to do so every weekend.

He thought his support for Heather, such as daily drives from school to home, was minimal compared to the ones of other fathers in his social circle. He continued:

I once went to my co-worker's son's [classical music] concert. He spent so much money and time for arranging it. I was shocked by how much work he did for his son. [...] It was like he made the concert possible for his son's resume... You know what I'm saying, right?

By highlighting other fathers' unusually heavy – in his eyes – involvement, he constantly tried to portray his fathering as *normal* as possible. Despite being relatively less-involved, he, similar to his more-involved counterparts, also worried if some of his advice for Heather may have been coercive. He worried particularly if he recommended the field of accounting and business management, in which he was working, to Heather "too early":



I think I talked too much about which field was promising or what she needed to do [for entering that field]. Maybe she chose the job she recently got because of my advice.

Asked if he considered himself a good father, he responded, hesitatively:

Well... I really don't know. Now I look back on the past and think that I may have given her too many advices. I never asked her to do the exact thing I recommended. I just showed her some possible options, but as she was too young to make her own decisions, she may have felt that I was pushing her. Maybe I shaped her decisions too much.

His view of his own fathering was very ambivalent. Internalizing the ethos of “liberal parenting,” he seemed to believe that “good” parents never push their children. This belief led him to give some credit to his own fathering, compared to “more successful fathers,” as he put it, who he believed were competent and resourceful but sometimes over-involved. Simultaneously, compared to less-advantaged Korean fathers outside his (or Heather's) social circle, he was concerned if he molded his daughter's career path “too much.” Regretting that aspect of his fathering, he said, “Wish I could have just listened to her without making any strong suggestions.”

At the time of his interview, his daughter Heather ended up deciding to go back to Korea after graduating from an Ivy League school. Unlike Heather who did not blame her parents for any of the “failures” she felt she had in her life abroad, her father seemed to feel responsible for her daughter's decision to drop out of the lane of transnational elites—he was aware that most of Heather's Korean friends at college were pursuing careers abroad. Recalling the days when Heather was applying for U.S. colleges including Ivy League schools, he confessed:

To be honest, I was not financially prepared for my life after retirement, so I told her everything about the situation, maybe too honestly. [...] When I met her college admissions counselor, I even told him that I didn't want her to go to an Ivy League school. I frankly told him that I wanted Heather to go to a public

college with scholarship, and he laughed hard because he didn't meet any parent like me. He didn't even think that I was serious.

Believing that he was less-advantaged, both financially and academically, than most of Heather's friends' fathers, he ascribed Heather's struggles mostly to his lack of resources, especially financial one:

Because I shared too much of my financial situation, she may have done most of her [academic] work on herself and not asked for any external [professional] help. I believe there was a gap between what she really wanted to do and what I actually could provide her with.

He insisted that the extensive fathering of high-achieving Korean students abroad required not only emotional efforts but a great amount of financial support. Eventually, it led him to devalue his involvement in his daughter's transnational upbringing.

Holly's father, the least transnational father in this research, was the one who denied most emphatically being defined as a "good" father. In a firm tone, he said:

No, I'm not [a good father]. I did a lot of wrong things [to his children], which I regret now. I made a lot of faults.

He elaborated on the faults he thought he made as a father:

To be honest, I think I've avoided a lot of my responsibilities as a father and made a lot of excuses. It made me such a bad father.

Fathers' responsibilities, in his definition, were not all about academic or career-related involvement. His definition of a good father was more abstract and idealistic compared to the ones of more-transnational fathers:

My own father was like God to me. [...] I don't remember much of what he did for me, but still, I loved him so much. He was always honest to me. It was not like he hugged me a lot or something, but still, I could feel his love. If my kids see me the way I saw my father, then I would be able to say I'm a good father.

Although he wanted his children to feel his love, he said he and Holly started having less conversation after she left Korea for college. He said he had not visited her school or any

other regions of the United States. The growing culture gap between him and his daughter made him feel that his fathering reached its end:

Now my daughter is truly on her own hook. It seems like she is already married. She is all grown up now. What should I worry about her from now? Recently I don't even think about her much, to be honest. [laugh]

This remark was in stark contrast to the ones of more-transnational fathers who found themselves capable of assisting their children's transnational life after college. Those fathers, in contrast, seemed to believe that their extensive fatherhood would continue even after their children's college graduation.

### **Fathers' Classed Views toward Their Spouses' Involvement**

Among ten fathers I interviewed, five fathers' wives were college-educated but opt-out mothers, and five fathers were married to women who were similarly educated and as transnational as themselves. Highly-transnational fathers whose wives were stay-at-home, never-studied-abroad mothers tended to find themselves the sole "decision makers" in managing their children's transnational education, especially after their children went abroad. They believed their "experience-based" approaches were much more authentic, unique, and cost-effective than those of less-transnational parents who, they believed, tended to outsource their children's college application and experience.

Jake's studied-abroad father told me why he, not his wife, was the one who attended every parents' weekend of his children's U.S. boarding schools. He, first, said he "consulted" his wife when *they* managed their children's education in early years in Korea. However, very similar to what his son Jake said in his interview, he drew a stark

contrast between himself and his wife, who he found less capable of guiding their children's education after the children left for schools abroad:

My wife cannot speak English that well... [...] If she wanted to attend parents' weekends alone, we may have needed to hire a guide who can navigate and translate, and it could have been very expensive. Because of that cost, I thought it would be much better for me to go there and directly talk to the teachers.

Finding himself highly competent for and engaged in his children's education abroad, he seemed to feel very entitled to the appreciation of his children and wife. Proudly, he continued:

I sometimes joke that I should have become a tour guide [for parents of students abroad]. By doing it, I could have earned big money!

His familiarity with the geography and culture of the United States led him to believe that he was providing his children abroad with uniquely helpful support. He, who himself went to an Ivy League college for his master's degree, said he would never forget the college tour in the Northeast United States that he arranged for his children. All of those memorable experiences abroad, which he knew not every Korean family could afford, led him to categorize himself as an unusually helpful father, thanks to his own transnational resources. His occupational status, the CEO of his own trading company, was desirable for his fatherhood as well, as it provided him with not only money but the autonomy to schedule his own calendar.

He drew a clear divide between himself and his wife in parenting of their three children who all were studying in the United States. He gave credit to his wife exclusively for the "daily support" that she provided their children, such as rides and meals while their children were staying in Korea. "My wife and I have different specialties. There's a divide in what she does and what I do [for children]," he said. He

found his wife's unemployed status was what separated them from each other: "She is a housewife, so she cannot do what I can do." As all of his children were pursuing careers abroad, he seemed to believe that his never-studied-abroad wife was not able to guide their children's later life as much as he could; all she could provide, he thought, was emotional support. He expected that this divide would persist in the future, as he believed all of his children would continue to live transnationally after college. In his narratives, his wife's support for their children's day-to-day life and psychological health was taken for granted, as he found it "what every mother does" for their children.

Sarah's father, another highly-transnational man, shared a similar view and expectation of his wife. He genuinely appreciated his stay-at-home wife who, he believed, was "always being there" for their children. But when it came to managing children's education, he believed he was the one who did most of the work. He believed that such divide between a more-engaged father and less-engaged mother was the opposite of what he believed other (less-transnational) Korean parents would experience. He said, "In most Korean families, mothers are the managers [of children's education], right? But my wife is not like that at all." He thought his hands-on fathering was unusual, but in a good way. He was proud of himself for being able to help his children as much as he believed he did. He seemed not to be concerned about his masculinity while engaged in his children's life "just like a mother." He rather wanted to promote such intense fathering. Looking back on the days when Sarah was in high school, he said:

I didn't attend any of the parents' meeting because I'm a man. Those meetings were very much women-segregated. There was no fathers' meeting [at her high school] like that. I think it's a problem.

Although feeling excluded sometimes, he seemed not to feel uncomfortable or burdened with the fact that he was one of the few fathers who were as much, if not more, involved in children's education as mothers. Rather, he said he "enjoyed" most of the chances to help and guide his children. He strongly believed that he was the primary parent of his children, and his role and responsibility as a father was growing rather than waning.

He did not think his wife, whom he believed was less engaged than himself, would feel sad or excluded due to her decreasing role in their children's life. His wife, Sarah's mother, shared his view. She took her husband's extensive educational involvement for granted. "He [Sarah's father] is the one who's in charge of our kids' education. [...] That's his role," she declared. With regard to the increasing influence of him on their children's life abroad, she did not seem to be bothered by it. Rather, she admitted that there was a different realm where she could help her adult children: "It's my responsibility to take care of their health, even their skin condition," she said with a laugh. "Lately Sarah's skin got worse because she's so stressed out about the job market. If she comes home for this summer break, then I should take care of her complexion. That's how I can help her," she continued.

A few fathers whose wives had studied or worked abroad demonstrated a different view and expectation of their wives—they tended to see less of a gender divide in their transnational parenting. Daniel's father, whose wife acquired her master's degree in the United States while he was in his doctoral program, reflected on the days when *they* were helping Daniel with his U.S. college applications:

We did everything equally. Sometimes she did more, and sometimes I did more. But most of the time, we shared a similar amount of work. Although we studied in graduate schools in the States, we had to learn how U.S. colleges choose their

undergraduate students, so we studied together. [...] [Throughout the application process,] Daniel was just listening to us.

His use of the word “we” implies that he did not find any stark divide between him and his wife in helping their son. He continued:

I never thought my wife was ignorant of the U.S. [college education] or less informed than me. She did as much as I did [for Daniel’s application]. She was capable of doing so.

He gave a great deal of credit to his wife for her capability to help their son:

For example, writing the financial aid application was very complicated, and she was the one who wrote it! [laugh] Some people outsource the writing process and pay a lot of money, but she could do it on her own.

Instead of emphasizing stratification *within* his family, he emphasized inequality between his family and never studied abroad families. Continuing to say “we,” he put his wife on the same level as himself as a mentor of their son. Comparing him and his wife with never-studied-abroad parents, he said half-jokingly:

We are different to them. Our children respect us. They are well aware that we know about the U.S. education. They cannot look down on us, you know. [laugh]

According to his theory, helpful academic assistance earns children’s respect. He believed their collaborative assistance for their son’s transnational education was more effective than that of other (less-transnational) parents. Instead of attending information sessions that were usually organized by study abroad consultants or agencies, he said, “We found most of the information from the Internet on our own. We relied on the official websites of the colleges. Those are the most trustworthy.” Because both of them studied in the United States for a long period of time, he believed that neither he nor his wife needed such external help with their children’s education abroad.

Although I could not interview many couples with a similar level of transnational mobility, it was apparent that mothers' own transnational education or career led their studied-abroad husbands to see them as standing on the same – or at least similar – footing as those fathers. Even between him and his wife, however, gender disparity existed and started to grow once their children were in college. Although he genuinely appreciated his wife's academic involvement throughout their children's upbringing, which he found was unusually helpful even compared to other elite mothers, he believed he was the “go-to” parent who his young adult son asked most academic- or career-related questions to. As his son Daniel was about to graduate from college at the time of the interview, he said, “She [his wife] is now giving Daniel moral and religious advices, like the words of wisdom, rather than career-related ones.” To his eyes, his wife *was* a great mentor but in a different field than his. Although he valued his wife's emotional support highly, he started to see its decreasing importance to their son's adult life, especially in a transnational context. He believed supporting children abroad entails detailed advice and career-related resources, such as connections with elites abroad and knowledge about the global job market Daniel was entering. He thought the growing divide between him and his wife originated in the hierarchy between his career, a college professor, and his wife's, an international middle school teacher. “Because I'm teaching at a college, he [Daniel] might feel that I know [about college education and career preparation] better than my wife does,” he said. And he did not remark on any possibility that his wife would feel bitter or sad about her decreasing role in mentoring Daniel's education.



*Less-transnational Fathers: The Impact of Wives' Education and Career*

Two less-affluent, less-transnational fathers differ from each other when it comes to their expectations of their wives. Heather's father, whose wife went to a Korean college but became a stay-at-home mom not long after graduation, found his wife's role entailed domestic caregiving, especially cooking, almost exclusively. Asked about her contribution to Heather's academic achievement, he responded without much detail: "She [his wife] helped Heather stay physically and psychologically healthy."

In Heather's narrative as well, her mother was a "good cook" who poured most of her energy into serving her family healthy meals, sometimes obsessively in Heather's eyes. As for his wife's cooking, Heather's father's comments were similar to what his daughter said: "She's paying a lot of attention to feeding [Heather] well." He continued: "Except for that, she doesn't do anything special [for Heather]." Throughout his interview, he rarely talked about his wife. In this sense, Heather's father saw his wife much like his more-transnational counterparts saw their stay-at-home wives.

Holly's college lecturer father was unique in his view of his wife: compared to other fathers, he expected much more of his wife for their children's education, especially for Holly's education abroad. Although neither he nor his wife had studied abroad, both of them had Korean local Ph.D. degrees in similar fields. And unlike other families in this study, his wife had more income and job security than him. Believing his wife was as academic as himself, if not more, he said he left the management of children's education in the hands of his wife. As he thought his wife did most of the care work including cooking as well, he said: "She [his wife] is the one who did all the [parenting] work."

As we saw earlier, this led him to undervalue his role in Holly's upbringing: "I didn't give her much help or influence. Not much at all." Because of his lack of transnational experience, he found himself inadequate to guide Holly's education abroad:

I was not capable of helping her [Holly]. To be honest, I don't really know about the United States and its college system... Even if I gave her some advice, I don't think she would have taken it seriously.

Instead, he believed his wife was providing Holly with some advice, although not as much as he believed what other (more-transnational) parents would provide their children with. Especially after Holly left home for college, he said he had "no idea" how to help Holly in an elite U.S. college.

Holly, in her interview, supported her father's evaluation of her "highly competent" mother. Finding the divide between her parents different than the one she believed her friends found in their families, she said with a bitter smile:

Both of my parents acquired their doctoral degrees [in Korea], but my mom did so much earlier than my dad. He is so slow in his [academic] career. [...] Although he's lecturing at a college, he earns less money than what my mom earns. His income is not enough for providing for our family.

Holly was not hesitant to undervalue – or sometimes criticize – her father's contribution not only to her education abroad but to her entire family. Recall as she said earlier, "I would never marry someone like my dad." She believed that there was a reason why her mother was more involved in managing her education than her father:

My dad didn't want me to get much supplementary private education, but what he could say when my mom was holding the purse strings?

Like some – not many – students whose mothers were having successful careers, Holly gave a great amount of credit and respect to her mother. What made her view unique was the *reversed* career hierarchy between her parents. Similar to the way many other

children described their fathers, she said her mother was “always busy with work,” which she felt much respect for:

She’s always working later than my dad does. Unlike my mom who’s always busy, my dad usually stays home, so I sometimes tell him jokingly, “Why don’t you go out and work more?” [laugh]

In her comparison between her mother and her father, her mother was a “better” parent than her father mostly because of her career.

Career success, and their view that it entails hard work, was one of the criteria that high-achieving sons and daughters used for evaluating their parents. It was also a critical criterion that parents themselves used to assess their own – and their spouses’ – parenting. Holly’s case shows that the dichotomy between public fathering and private mothering may weaken when mothers outachieve fathers academically and financially. It appears, then, that gender matters less than material resources when it comes to elite extensive parenting and children’s view toward it, though material resources are usually distributed disproportionately between women and men.

### **Conclusion:**

#### **Elite Korean Fathers’ Reproduction of Transnational Mobility**

Researching elite fathers in the United Kingdom, Longlands (2014) found that banker fathers in London confirmed and normalized gender inequalities in their families, based on their financial resources and access to political power. Those fathers attempted to transfer their elite attributes, including highly competitive work ethics, to their children through hands-on fathering. Similarly, elite Korean fathers in this chapter utilized their high educational and career achievements as a source for their extensive transnational

fatherhood. The transnational context, particularly of elite families, largely shapes the gender divide between mothering and fathering and children's expectations of their parents. Highly-transnational elite fathers' class resources – degrees from colleges abroad, high-status careers, and financial capabilities – optimized their hands-on involvement in their children's transnational education, especially after their children entered colleges abroad. Fathers were aware that those resources were still scarce among Korean parents, and therefore precious and essential for assisting their children's education abroad. It led them to believe that their involvements in their children's transnational upbringing were unusually helpful. Therefore, it was worthy of the respect and appreciation from their children and wives. As they strongly believed in the power of high-status, transnational career in parenting, particularly of their high-achieving children abroad, fathers whose wives had similar levels of education or career tended to give more credit to their wives' involvements, relative to fathers whose wives were opt-out and less-transnational. In contrast, fathers who were married to well-educated but opt-out mothers tended to willingly take more parenting roles and responsibilities than their less-transnational spouses, especially in later years.

Although there were only two of them in this study, relatively less-transnational and less-affluent fathers differed from their more-transnational counterparts in many ways. They did not find their fatherhood particularly extensive or worthy of children's respect. Recognizing a disparity between them and more-transnational fathers, they tended to devalue their involvement in their children's education abroad, which they did not find extensive. Rather, they stressed their (efforts for) emotional care, believing it was the best support they could provide their children, very similar to what many stay-at-

home mothers suggested. In that sense, they shared more similarities with less-transnational, stay-at-home mothers than with more-transnational fathers. In this context, gender is associated with or located in class resources, whether education, career or income, more than it is with parents' biological sex.

Extensive fatherhood seemed to be a norm among the parents of high-achieving Korean students abroad, but not all fathers I met believed they achieved it. More-transnational fathers were in a better position to achieve it but felt ambivalent about whether their fathering was sometimes “too much,” due to their – and the society’s – belief in “liberal parenting” as well as the stigma on “hyper parenting,” although fathers tend to feel they were less criticized for this than they thought mothers were. In contrast, less-transnational fathers tended to “give up” achieving such extensive fathering or even criticized it, perhaps as an attempt to defend themselves.

Given that extensive fathering was common, or even a norm, both in their and their children's social circles, fathers with less transnational resources tended to undervalue their fatherhood. When highly-transnational fathers with more class resources shared a great deal of joy and a sense of fulfillment out of their transnational fatherhood, less-affluent fathers without degrees abroad seemed to doubt if they were competent enough to guide their children's education abroad. By emphasizing their emotional support for children abroad or downplaying the impact of paternal involvement on adult children's life abroad, they tried to reconstruct the idea of a good transnational father—the ideal that they could not identify themselves with.

In that regard, they shared similar narratives with less-transnational, unemployed mothers. Both groups of parents either “gave up” providing hands-on assistance for their

children's life abroad or shifted the parenting work to their spouse who they thought were more-transnational and knowledgeable about education abroad. Class, in this sense intersects with, even trumps, gender in shaping transnational parenthood of elite Korean students. However, gender *still* matters—whereas many less-transnational, stay-at-home mothers classed themselves as “good” for their extensive provision of care, less-transnational fathers, did not necessarily count their effort for emotional support or day-to-day care for their children's well-being as an element of a “good” fathering.

High-achieving children in this study also tended to give more credit to their fathers' intermittent yet substantial academic- or career-related support than to day-to-day, emotional care. It shows that in their social circle, fathers are expected to perform as knowledgeable guides for children's education and career abroad rather than “emotional experts” (Risman 1998) in the private realm. In the dichotomy of private mothering and public fathering, which both parents and children across class lines contribute to, only highly-transnational elite fathers aim to become “perfect” fathers who provide both academic and emotional support. In contrast, the rest of the parents—less-transnational fathers, elite professional mothers, and opt-out mothers—tend to face limitations (from the perspective of themselves, their husbands and often their children) in achieving their ideal parenting because of either their gender or class, or both. Resources rooted outside the family buy respect, sometimes even love, inside the family. This is an often overlooked outcome of the gender divide.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In the previous four chapters, I have demonstrated how gender and class, intersecting with one another, shape the way children, mothers, and fathers of elite Korean families view the transnational family arrangements and parenting that they chose for children's education abroad. My central frame of analysis is elite transnational parenting as gendered work, expanding on prior research that has discussed middle-to-upper-class parenting as intensive, demanding, and mother-centered. My research helps us understand the understudied family dynamics of elite transnational families in a globalized world, where many affluent Asian families pursue children's education abroad.

Throughout this dissertation, I focus on two tasks: first, I analyze how each group – children, mothers, and fathers – interpret and represent their views of the elite transnational parenting that they experienced or practiced. Second, by triangulating the narratives of mothers, fathers, and children, I explore the family dynamics of the families that I chose to study—transnational families of high-achieving Korean students at elite U.S. colleges.

In Chapter II, I discuss how children make sense of their transnational upbringing and family arrangements through a gendered lens. The narratives of Korean young adult children illustrate their gendered view of their parents' involvement in their transnational upbringing. In the eyes of the children, their parents performed gendered roles in and

responsibilities for their elite transnational education: in early years, mothers tended to be deeply involved in and lead their early education, parallel to what the society assumes about and expects of Korean or Asian middle-class mothers. When it came to the parental assistance they received with their education abroad, many children discussed mothering as a collective practice rather than simply an isolated one; they saw their mothers relying on the help of gender-segregated networks rather than firsthand experiences of studying abroad, even if these children were sometimes critical of their mother for these group activities. Many children expressed gratitude toward their mothers' early "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2003). At the same time, these privileged children viewed their never-studied-abroad mothers as less capable of helping their later education abroad, which required a high level of competence in English and knowledge about colleges abroad. That is, they in some sense not only valued their mothers but participated in the devaluation of them, especially if they were full-time mothers.

Almost all children reported that as they grew up, their mothers handed over most of the parenting work to their studied- or worked-abroad fathers. As most of their fathers were transnationally-educated, high-income professionals, both daughters and sons acknowledged and appreciated their fathers' class resources, which they believed were particularly helpful for their college education and career preparation. At the same time, not many children criticized their fathers' under-involvement in their early education. Given the scarcity of "useful" parental assistance for elite education abroad in the Korean society, the high-achieving children highly valued their fathers' help on their higher education and career abroad, which they believed were based on the fathers' firsthand experiences of studying or working abroad. That is, by reserving their highest praise for



their fathers, many of these elite children contributed to the construction of inequality, or unequal valuation, of women and men.

Despite sharing a similar (gendered) view of parental involvement in their elite transnational education, daughters and sons sometimes differ in how they credited their mothers. While many daughters were sympathetic to their career-interrupted mothers' disrupted career or "rejected dreams," sons rarely elaborated on their mothers' decision to opt out of the labor force or even justified it as normal or common. On a similar note, sons expressed their respect toward their fathers, especially for career success, more explicitly than daughters did, although many children across genders viewed their fathers as their "role models." In many cases, children's education abroad and parents' extensive yet gendered involvement in it appeared to be a family project to elevate elite fathers' substantial assistance and devalue mothers' "motherly" care for children's transnational lives. Unlike children's gendered views toward their parents, not many mothers and fathers distinguished between daughters and sons in talking about their expectation of their children's education and future career. However, some mothers, especially stay-at-home mothers, hoped their daughters to have a "stable and happy marriage" and not sacrifice it for a full-time, competitive career. This implies that highly-educated yet opt-out mothers tend to reproduce the traditional model of the Korean elite family—a family with a socially-successful sole-breadwinner father and a stay-at-home mother who sacrifices her career for the family.

In Chapter III, drawing on mothers' interviews, I examine the power of (professional) careers in their assessments of their transnational motherhood. Mothers with high-earning, socially-successful careers, who constituted about half of the mother

participants, described themselves as competent in helping and guiding their high-achieving children's education, even after their children entered colleges abroad. In their eyes, a "good" mother, particularly in their social circle, is a mother who can provide substantial assistance for children's preparation for colleges abroad, which entails a great deal of knowledge about schools abroad as well as connections with other elites. In this way, their assessment was similar to that of their children.

In contrast, mothers who mostly opted out of the workforce in order to prioritize motherhood tended to limit their involvement in children's education abroad and adult life, seeing themselves inadequate as an exemplar to their high-achieving children abroad. As they tended to have less or no experience of studying or working abroad, they felt little confidence in their own input into their children's life trajectories. Instead, being stay-at-home mothers, they tended to embrace and pursue the traditional ideal of "intensive mothering," which often requires mothers' 24/7, undivided attention and care for children. Instead of being advisors for children's education or career abroad, they put a high value on their intensive care of their children's physical and mental well-being, which, they believed, made them "good" mothers.

This view contrasts with the perspective of professional working mothers who tended to extend their belief about a "good" mother by prizing their hands-on involvement in children's education abroad. Working mothers who had experiences of studying or working abroad often attempted to set themselves apart from their stay-at-home, not-studied-abroad counterparts by emphasizing their academic contribution to children's achievements. Elite professions (and degrees abroad) work as an exclusive resource for transnational mothering of high-achieving children abroad, as it does for

fathering. The class difference among mothers, with regard to educational and occupational resources, seemed to create divisions among three groups of mothers—mothers with elite professions, affluent yet opt-out mothers, and less-affluent mothers without employment. Affluent opt-out mothers tended to criticize elite working mothers for not spending as much time caring for children as they did. In contrast, highly-transnational working mothers believed their uncommonly hands-on academic support for children’s education helped them “mother better” than stay-at-home mothers without degrees abroad. Thus, given the gender achievement gap even between elite fathers and elite mothers, both working mothers and stay-at-home mothers were likely to find their elite husbands more capable of guiding their high-achieving children’s education and career abroad than themselves. More than a divide between husbands and wives, they seemed to be creating a greater divide among the mothers. This could reinforce the devaluation of women rather than a critique of inequality between women and men. Less-affluent stay-at-home mothers, although being small in number, tended to feel apologetic for being less involved in their children’s education and career abroad, due to their lack of transnational resources.

In Chapter IV, drawing on the interviews with fathers, I discuss how they attempt to, and actually do utilize their high levels of educational and career achievements as a source for their extensive transnational fatherhood. Their class resources – degrees from colleges abroad, high-status careers, and financial capabilities – entitled them to deeply engage in their children’s later education, especially college education and career preparation abroad, which both parents and children considered a crucial phase of children’s life.

Elite Korean fathers tended to find their fatherhood extensive yet gratifying and worthwhile. They believed their involvement in children's education and career preparation abroad was uniquely helpful, given the rarity of the firsthand knowledge about education abroad that they possessed. They, consciously or unconsciously, assumed that their less-privileged counterparts would be distant and under-involved in children's life. Such a dichotomous view led them to define themselves as "New Age" involved fathers who deserve children's and partners' respect and appreciation for their hands-on involvement. The two less-transnational fathers with no experience of studying abroad – the minority of the parents in my study – contrasted with their more-transnational counterparts in many ways: given the high expectation of paternal involvement in children's education in the social circle of themselves or their children, they found their fathering less deserving of children's respect or appreciation. Their transnational parenting with less resource, both financial and cultural, seemed to have become emotionally draining and sometimes overwhelming, especially after their children left Korea for college. And their children, despite their small number, often shared the depreciatory view of fathers' (involuntary) hands-off approach to their education abroad. In most children's eyes, fathers' hands-on involvement in higher education and career preparation, especially abroad, constitutes a uniquely "good" father.

### **Triangulating the Narratives of Mothers, Fathers and Children**

In this dissertation, I uncovered the transnational family project among Korean elites, a collaborative project among family members – mothers, fathers, daughters, sons – which operated to sustain gender inequality. Throughout my analysis, I tried to unpack

how class and gender intersect with one another in creating inequalities among those families. Class, especially educational and occupational background, creates more differences and divides within each parents' group – among mothers and among fathers – than between mothers and fathers. Stay-at-home mothers and professional working mothers differed from each other in many ways. Similarly, there was a huge difference between highly-transnational fathers and never-studied-abroad fathers when it came to their views of children's education abroad and their own transnational parenthood. Despite such class divides, however, parents and children in my study, by and large, shared a common framework to assess the gender divide in the transnational parenting that they experienced or practiced.

Comparing and contrasting the narratives of three groups – children, mothers, and fathers – with one another, I found many parents and children tended to view mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as guides for education and career abroad when it came to parental support for high-achieving children. In their eyes, a “good” parent was the one who could provide their children with substantial academic support, especially for children's elite U.S. (higher) education—an exclusive class privilege in Korea. Given that fathers, mostly elite professionals with degrees abroad, tended to get most of the credit for children's high achievements while mothers, mostly well-educated yet opt-out housewives, were praised by all family members for their provision of “motherly” care. This was often taken for granted and seen as natural, despite mothers' considerable involvement in and input on children's early education. Valuing elite transnational education and transnational mobility highly, very few of mothers, fathers, and children,

said they regretted opting for transnational family arrangements. And none tended to offer critiques of the gender divides it created.

Despite such commonalities, some differences did exist between or among the narratives of three groups. While most mothers honestly, and sometimes proudly, talked about their deep involvement in children's early education, usually until children went abroad, some children tried to underplay their mothers' hands-on academic support in early days, perhaps in order to stress their own efforts and hard work for their academic achievement. Even when children admitted and elaborated on their mothers' educational involvement, they tended to denigrate it as a "team effort," highlighting the impact of mothers' groups in which their mothers were participating in order to support their education. For mothers, their active academic support in the early days, both individual and collaborative, was the basis for their self-esteem as "good" mothers. In the eyes of children, in contrast, mothers' intensive academic support, especially the one from mothers' networks, was something that would make themselves be seen as "helicopter children." Furthermore, some children, particularly those who attended boarding schools abroad, found mothers' networks generated mother-child conflicts with regard to their private life, including romantic relationships.

In comparison with fathers, children, albeit not all, talked relatively openly about conflicts that they experienced with their fathers, mostly about college or major decisions. Despite the conflicts, children still said they had great respect for their fathers and tried to understand the reason for any disagreement between themselves and their fathers. Very few fathers, however, elaborated on any friction that between themselves and their children. Even compared to mothers', fathers' tone was rosier when reviewing

their relationship with children and the overall experience of their transnational families in retrospect.

Fathers and mothers differ in other ways as well. Mothers gave ample credit to fathers for substantial support for children's education abroad, both academic and financial. Not many fathers, however, elaborated on their wives' involvement in or contribution to their children's education, unless they were asked directly about it. If they ever commented on their wives' involvement, they tended to focus on emotional support or day-to-day care for children, which most seemed to take for granted.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

My study diversifies Asian high-achievement and parenting, which has long been stereotyped and pathologized. Many scholars have attempted to explain Asian achievements with the status attainment model, in which "outcomes are predicted by standard socioeconomic and demographic variables, including family socioeconomic status, race, gender, immigrant selectivity, parental educational expectations, and parenting styles" (Watkins, Ho & Butler 2017, 37), or cultural frames, which assumes that all Asian families across class lines share "Asian fervor" for education. Some recent studies seek to adopt both the status attainment model and cultural frames for explaining Asian achievements (See Lee & Zhou 2014, 2015). Yet, most scholarly and non-scholarly debates about Asian high-achievers have overlooked or underestimated the impact of family socioeconomic status on Asian achievements while (positively) stereotyping all Asians as "model minority." For instance, in her very famous autobiography *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, Amy Chua (2011), who generated

immense interest in and controversy over Asian parenting, attributed her children's educational achievements to the "Chinese parenting" beliefs and practices, rather than to her family's financial, cultural, and educational resources. Approaches like Chua's reproduce the "model minority" myth on Asian individuals and families, ignoring the classed dimensions of Asian high achievers. "Model minority" is, or could be, a "culture" only among particular Asians.

My research helps fill this theoretical and empirical niche by studying young adult Korean elites and their education-driven transnational families. I provide an analysis of how intergenerational reproduction of transnational mobility is diversely organized by gender and class. At the intersections of gender and class, the definition of a "good" parent was constructed in the elite cosmopolitan environment that the families I interviewed were embedded in. At least at the state I studied them, many high-achieving young adult Korean children, both daughters and sons, preferred a parent who could deeply understand their study and job aspiration, and provide substantial and detailed advice on the issues they might face during and after college. Given the gender achievement gap within elite Korean families, fathers in this research, except for a very few never-studied fathers, were in an advantageous position for extensive management of and support for children's higher education and career preparation abroad. Because of that, fathers, especially in later years, gained more respect and appreciation from children than mothers, except for a few cases of the families with studied-abroad, highly-transnational mothers. Class privilege, or more specifically, transnational mobility, is being reproduced based on the gender achievement gap within elite families. Will these young adults change their views of parenting and gender when they become parents?



Will daughters and sons in this study reproduce the gender inequality that was shown between their parents? These are some fruitful questions for future research.

My findings re-write the stereotypical dichotomy between intense mothers and distant fathers in Korean – or East Asian – families. Inside and outside academe, Korean families, which are often said to be “too children-focused” (U. Cho 2004), appear to center around involved mothers and distant fathers. According to that popular commentary, Korean mothers are expected to sacrifice themselves and their careers for the sake of children’s education. They, however, easily get criticized if they are seen as overinvolved. While mothers are under constant public scrutiny for the “outcome” of their mothering—usually children’s academic achievement, fathers in Korea are rarely expected to be actively involved in children’s education, especially in later stages. Elite fathers in my study, however, are expected to and actually get involved in young adult children’s education and career preparation abroad because of their exclusive educational, cultural, and financial resources. This shows how class could modify the expectation of gender divide in parenting.

Methodologically, my study broadens the existing literature in two ways. First, by “studying up” elite families, it expands the realm of family studies beyond its concentration on working-class and middle-class experiences. Studying elite families is a “strategy of the extreme case” (Blair-Loy 2001) that seeks to document highly resourceful agents and any structural constraint that limits them. My study also diversifies the literature on transnational families, which has been skewed toward working-class migrant families from developing countries. Second, my study provides a unique lens to interpret the family dynamics and experiences of elite Korean transnational

families. Most existing studies on transnational families focus on parents' views—far fewer focus on those of children. When it comes to studies on Asian families, both local and transnational, very few studies have carefully examined how Asian children embrace, interpret, and sometimes challenge the parenting they experience. The lack of children's voices may possibly reinforce the belief that Asian children are likely to be docile, well-behaved, and filial. To complement the existing family literature, I actively adopt the narratives of young adult Korean children. Their accounts are reflective of their own experiences, but they also shed light on the household and parenting arrangements in which they grow up. To supplement the children's narratives, I also draw on the interviews with mothers and fathers, which allows me to triangulate the narratives of three groups. By comparing and contrasting the narratives of three groups with one another, I could capture the multifaceted dimensions of elite transnational families.

### **Broader Implications**

As I discussed in the Introduction, Koreans emphasized globalization through education. It has the fourth highest number of students pursuing degrees abroad in the world. According to statistics from UNESCO on the mobility of students in 2017, the number of Korean students studying abroad was 105,399. Among them, the United States was the most popular destination, with 52,250 students studying in the country in the same year. The number of Korean students abroad fluctuated throughout the early 2000s when sending children abroad and consequential “Wild Geese” families were in the upward trend in Korea.

Having peaked in 2006 when 29,511 left Korea to study, the number has been gradually declining since then, despite the constant demand for education abroad. In 2014, 220,000 Koreans in their 20s studied abroad, down from 260,000 in 2011. The number of Koreans studying in the United States has fallen for the last couple of years in a row, dipping below 70,000 for the first time since 2007 (Gibson 2015). The latest figures show the number of Korean students under 19 years of age who went abroad for school dropped by a third over the past decade, despite the considerable number of Korean students who are still studying abroad (A. Song 2017).

Some argue that Koreans' enthusiasm for education abroad might be coming to an end. Those who forecast the ongoing downward trend of Korean students' education abroad are looking at the struggles that studied-abroad Korean young adults increasingly face in the Korean job market. A newspaper article written in 2015 (Yeo 2015) introduces a Korean young job seeker who had studied in the United States for "half of his life" and ended up with a bachelor's degree from a state university in California: he ended up founding his global education less worthy and profitable than he expected it would be, as he struggled to find a job in Korea after his return. The article concludes with a quote from an official from the Ministry of Education: "Back in previous days, students believed that studying abroad would help them get a better job. ... But those benefits don't seem to exist anymore," as more and more Korean companies start worrying about whether college abroad graduates would adjust to Korea's unique working environment.

I insist, however, that the decrease of Korean students abroad, especially those in the United States, needs to be considered in a broader context. First, the overall decline of

international students in the United States seems to have strongly affected the decrease in the number of Korean students in the country: according to the recent Institute of International Education report (2019), new enrollment of international students at U.S. colleges declined by more than 10% between the 2015-16 and 2018-2019 academic years, which was the time when the enrollment of international students in other English-speaking countries, such as Canada and Australia, had skyrocketed. Some (Anderson 2019; Redden 2019) argue that the United States' conservative immigration policies under the Trump administration have greatly contributed to the declines in international enrollments at U.S. schools. This substantiates the argument that the decrease of Korean students in the United States can be attributed to structural changes in U.S. immigration policies and school administration, not solely to the extinction of Korean parents' fervor for transnational education or studied-abroad Korean students' difficulty in getting a job in Korea; the majority of job seekers are reportedly experiencing in the country's shrinking job market (Y. Kim 2019).

Although the number is not as massive as it was, a considerable number of Korean students are still pursuing degrees abroad, typically in the United States. I argue that now education abroad, or transnational education, is becoming more *polarized* in Korea than ever. Elite Korean parents, especially fathers, tended to devalue and criticize Korean education, which they believed was authoritarian and uncreative, and glorify the elite western education—especially at Ivy League schools. In today's Korean society where the boom to study abroad at an early age has ended, which parents still want to—or actually do—raise their children transnationally through education abroad? And by doing so, what do they want to achieve at the end? In other words, what does it mean to raise

children transnationally mobile? The frustration that some studied-abroad Korean students (and also their parents) might feel in the Korean labor market exists if they considered studying abroad only as a ticket to success back home. However, what if sending children to schools abroad is not all about occupational success in Korea? The majority of the parents and children I met expressed their hopes for the intergenerational transfer of transnational mobility or flexible citizenship. Many students and their studied-abroad parents cited their experience of studying abroad as one of the most influential experiences in their lives, as they genuinely believed in the impact of (elite) education abroad not only on personal growth but on the common good. Only a few families wanted children to return to Korea and success back home after graduating from elite U.S. colleges—most students aspired to settle in the United States or other “global cities” after college graduation, and many of their parents also shared such hopes. In that sense, these families are highly privileged and exceptional when it comes to the motives for children’s transnational upbringing. Then what is the long-term effect of such intergenerational reproduction of transnational mobility?

Future research usefully could examine the long-term effects of children’s (elite) education abroad and intergenerational transfers of transnational mobility, as I do not have longitudinal data on children’s life trajectories after college graduation. Yet, from the cases of some children participants who graduated from college and got their first job during my data collection period, I was able to observe a pattern suggesting that transnational mobility tends to be smoothly transferred intergenerationally through children’s education abroad in a very prestigious context, such as in upper-class families with studied-abroad, socially-successful parents. Children whose parents were elite

professionals with degrees abroad tended to get a lucrative job in the United States or other global cities, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, whereas children whose parents were locally-educated and less-affluent tended to return to Korea after several attempts to get employed abroad. Across college majors, the majority of children participants aspired to start their careers in the United States or other developed foreign countries and eventually become transnational elite professionals, considering it as the ideal outcome of their costly transnational education.

I also found that transnational education, particularly between Korea and the United States, functions as a cultural bond between elite Korean parents and their high-achieving children. Sharing similar experiences of studying abroad and cosmopolitan aspirations helps those parents and children bond with each other. In contrast, not-studied-abroad parents often feel perplexed in interacting with their high-achieving children abroad. All of these suggest that education abroad is one of the most potent means of class reproduction and a source of family connection in the ever more globalized and competitive Korean society. While concentrating on the “successful” cases of education-driven Korean transnational families with children who attended elite U.S. colleges, my study does not explore the parenting and family dynamics of the transnational families with children who achieved less. For example, the children who dropped out of a high school or college abroad, or the children who aspired to an “Ivy League” degree but did not get accepted into those schools. My study also sheds less light on the students who ended up returning to Korea after studying or working abroad. Some, although not many, researchers (Shin et al. 2014; J. Lee 2011) studied Korean “skilled” returnees who returned home after experiencing education and labor markets in other

countries. According to those studies, the returnees' life trajectories need to be further examined to understand the "recurring themes of exclusion and in-betweenness" that emphasizes the "irony behind seeing returnees as agents of change and privileged transnationals" (J. Lee 2011, 233). While my study pursued a "strategy of an extreme case" by researching the transnational families of high-achieving Korean young adult abroad, the complexities of elite Korean or Asian transnational families would be further understood by future research comparing families on the other end of the class spectrum.

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