

THE GROWTH OF THE KOREAN MIDDLE CLASS AND ITS SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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The middle class in the Republic of Korea grew quickly in the course of the country's rapid economic growth. This paper analyzes the characteristics of Korea's new and old middle classes by examining the socioeconomic conditions, experience of mobility, and social consciousness of the people in these classes. Analysis shows that many people presently in these well-off classes have experienced intra- and intergenerational mobility. While the old middle class is greatly open to both inter- and intragenerational inflow, the new middle class is close to intragenerational inflow. The probability of reaching the new middle class is greatly affected by one's level of education; however, education level largely depends on one's class origin. It is also shown that the Korean new middle class has a comparatively progressive social consciousness. However, people's political attitudes are determined not by one's position in the class structure but by nonclass factors, such as one's age, education level, and native region.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN 1987 the movement for democracy in the Republic of Korea grew stronger leading to the June 29th "Declaration for Democracy" which marked the end of the authoritarian regime and opened the way for the country's transition to democracy. Researchers in and outside of Korea have been very interested in studying the social factors that brought about this political change, and have focused on the social consciousness and political role of the Korean middle class which expanded rapidly in the course of Korea's strong economic growth.

There has been an ongoing practical interest among Korean scholars in studying the movement for further social change, and from this underlying interest there arose during the late 1980s and early 1990s a lively debate among scholars and social activists in Korea over the political orientation of the country's middle class.¹ While most researchers outside of Korea focused on the leadership role of the middle class in Korea's political change, within Korea's internal debate the working class was assumed as the prime mover for social change. The point at issue was whether or not the middle class would come together join with the working class to

¹ Regarding the development of studies on the Korean middle class, see for example Hong (1992) and Cho (1996).

become part of the movement for social change. While some scholars stressed the conservatism of the middle class, others emphasized its progressiveness and the possibility of its solidarity with the working class.²

With the start of this debate many empirical studies were done in Korea on the country's middle class, but the central issue of these studies was whether or not the middle class was politically conservative or progressive which was largely a continuation of the debate (Cho 1996, p. 269). Such preoccupation led to the neglect of many important issues concerning the middle class in Korea. Some of these will be presented below, and will be analyzed in the remainder of this study.

First, many of the studies on the Korean middle class made the white-collar workers in the organizational sector (the new middle class) the primary subject of their examination, and there was insufficient research on the old (urban) middle class.³ One reason for this neglect was the strong influence of Marxist theory on the study of social class in Korea, but as will be confirmed later in this paper (and contrary to classical Marxist theory), the old middle class in Korea has been steadily expanding. One aim of this study is to compare this class with the new middle class and other social classes in order to shed more light on the nature of this growing class.

Second, although acknowledging that the Korean middle class was expanding rapidly, most researchers did not sufficiently examine the formation process of this class. Considering that most of the middle class is first generation, and that most enjoy comparatively comfortable living conditions in the society, as will be pointed out later in this study, we have to carefully examine what kind of social mobility they experienced to reach the middle class, and what conditions made their rise possible. This examination is a second purpose of this study.

Third, most studies to date focused on describing middle-class social consciousness and political orientation, which has led researchers largely to neglect the examination of factors that determine social consciousness and political attitude. However, some recent research clearly shows the diversity of consciousness within the middle class (e.g., Cho 1996; Kim 1999). Therefore, when studying Korea's middle class, researchers cannot simply be concerned about the differences in inter-class social consciousness, they also have to examine the factors themselves that bring about the diversity of consciousness. A third purpose of this study is to analyze the factors that determine people's social consciousness, taking into consideration not only their position in the society's class structure, but also the influence of numerous other variables, such as their experiences of social mobility, level of education, and their native region which greatly influences an individual's political attitude within the distinct context of Korea. Through this sort of comprehensive analysis we can examine how greatly the fact of being middle class itself influences the social consciousness of the people in this class.

² Examples in the former group, Choi (1989) and Suh (1988); in the latter, Han (1987, 1991).

³ Kim (1986) and Choi (1991) are the exceptions.

By utilizing the data of a social survey done in 1990, this study will examine the three issues discussed above in order to bring out more clearly the characteristics of Korea's middle class. At the same time it will reexamine the appropriateness of a "class politics" perspective which has been the tacit premise of most of the studies on political change in Korea.

II. THE POSITION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN KOREAN SOCIETY

From the 1960s onward, Korea's rapid economic growth brought about very great change in the country's social structure. Looking at the change in the composition of the working population in the three major industrial sectors (shown in Table I), in 1960 the primary sector employed two-thirds of all workers; by 2000 this had shrunk to about 10 per cent. Thus in the course of one to two generations there was a rapid movement of the labor force into the secondary and tertiary industrial sectors.

Such significant change in the composition of the working population also meant a change in the class structure of the society. Relying on population census data, Hong, Kim, and Jo (1999) showed how extensively Korea's class structure changed during these three decades (Table II). Particularly striking was the rapid decline of the agricultural class, and the equally rapid growth of the new middle class made up mainly of white-collar workers.

Table II also shows that during this same period the working class expanded as fast as or even faster than the new middle class. This was because manufacturing was the principal driving force of Korea's economic growth, and this sector had a very high capacity for absorbing workers. Another point to be noted was the change

TABLE I
CHANGES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING POPULATION IN
KOREA'S THREE MAIN INDUSTRIAL SECTORS

Year	Primary Sector	Secondary Sector	Tertiary Sector
1960	66.2	9.4	24.4
1965	58.5	13.3	28.3
1970	50.4	17.2	32.4
1975	45.7	23.5	30.9
1980	34.0	28.7	37.3
1985	24.9	30.5	44.5
1990	17.9	35.0	47.1
1995	12.4	32.9	54.7
2000	10.9	27.8	61.4

Source: For 1960, Economic Planning Board, *1960 Population and Housing Census of Korea*; for 1965–85, Economic Planning Board, *Annual Report on the Economically Active Population Survey*, various years; for 1990–2000, National Statistical Office, *Annual Report on the Economically Active Population Survey*, various years.

TABLE II
CHANGES IN CLASS SIZE AS A RATIO OF TOTAL POPULATION

Year	Upper Middle Class	New Middle Class	Old Middle Class	Working Class	Urban Lower Class	Self-Employed Farming Class	Small-Scale Farming Class	Total
1960	0.9	6.6	13.0	8.9	6.6	40.0	24.0	100.0
1970	1.3	14.2	14.8	16.9	8.0	28.0	16.7	100.0
1980	1.8	17.7	20.8	22.6	5.9	23.2	8.1	100.0
1990	1.9	26.1	19.6	31.3	4.2	13.0	4.9	100.0
1995	3.6	25.5	22.2	27.7	8.2	12.1	0.6	100.0

Source: Hong, Kim, and Jo (1999, p. 141).

in the component ratio of the old middle class. Although the organization of economic activities progressed rapidly as Korea industrialized, exemplified by the formation of large-scale enterprises (e.g., *chaebols*), the old middle class still basically continued to expand. These facts tell us that both middle classes (along with the working class) came into being within a very short period of time as a result of the country's great economic growth starting in the 1960s, and both are still in the process of formation.

Relying on data from the "Survey on Inequality and Equity" conducted in 1990 by the Korean Social Science Research Council, we can examine the characteristics of these recently formed classes in more detail. This was a nationwide social survey which conducted direct interviews with persons sampled by multi-stage stratified cluster sampling. The planning and execution of each stage was carried out with great care, and the data that the survey provided is exceedingly reliable.⁴

In this study I have arranged Korean society into five classes, based on one's occupation and employment status, and taking into consideration the characteristics of the country's social class structure. These five are: the "capitalist class" of company owners (who employ five or more workers); the "new middle class" made up of specialists, technicians, and employed administrators/office workers; the "working class" made up of employed sales/service workers and skilled and unskilled laborers;⁵ the "agricultural class" of people engaged in farming, forestry, and fishing; and

⁴ The final number of valid samples was 1,976. See Whang (1992) for a detailed summation of the survey. I would like to thank Professor Cha Jongcheon (Sungkyunkwan University) for his assistance in obtaining the original survey data and using it in the present study.

Previous studies that have used this survey data to analyze Korea's social classes have preferred to concentrate on examining intergenerational mobility. I know of little research work that deals with intragenerational mobility, or that deals with the evaluation of the distribution policies of the authoritarian regime based on this survey data. Thus it seems it would be very meaningful to use this valuable data to analyze these as yet unresearched issues.

⁵ In Korea there is little difference in wages, job prestige, and the character of work between workers

the “old middle class” composed of employers and the self-employed (excluding specialists, technicians, those engaged in farming, forestry, and fishing, and company owners who employ five or more workers). Since it is impossible to determine the class of Korean females based on their occupations only, the analysis below has been limited to sampling only males.

Table III shows the socioeconomic profile of each of the five classes based on the data of the 1990 survey. Looking first at the average individual monthly income, both the new and old middle classes have incomes that are much higher than those of the working or agricultural classes, although they are well below the capitalist class as would be expected.⁶ The average income of an individual in the old middle class is above that for a person in the new middle class, but the situation is reversed when income is based on the entire household. This latter fact is probably because in the old middle class, when the wife works, she usually does so as an unpaid family employee. But whether based on the individual or the household, the difference in income between the old and new middle classes is very small, and both classes earn quite high incomes when compared with the working and agricultural classes. Although not shown in Table III, the same gap exists in the ownership of durable consumer goods (Arita 2002).

Concerning the years of education,⁷ the new middle class (along with the capital-

TABLE III
SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE SOCIAL CLASSES

Social Class	Age (In Years)	Individual Income (Thousand Won)	Household Income (Thousand Won)	Years of Education	Assets (Million Won)	Home Ownership (%)
Capitalist class	44.1	1,487	1,725	14.3	284.3	75.0
New middle class	38.2	799	1,076	14.1	92.4	63.1
Old middle class	41.6	861	1,021	11.0	71.1	54.2
Working class	38.3	539	647	10.2	27.9	40.8
Agricultural class	49.6	377	475	7.6	50.3	95.7
Overall average	42.4	658	814	10.6	65.1	65.4

Source: Calculated by the author using data from the 1990 survey.

Note: The sampling on “household income,” “assets,” and “home ownership” are only those for the head of household.

employed in sales/services and those employed as laborers; therefore in this study both categories have been included in the working class.

⁶ The exchange rate at the time of the survey was 1,000 won equal to about U.S.\$1.4 (about 200 yen).

⁷ For each individual surveyed, the number of years of education was calculated as the shortest number of years required from the time of entering elementary school until reaching the final level of education that the individual completed. For those who left school before completing a particular level of education, half the number of years was subtracted from the total number of years required to complete that particular level of education.

ist class) has the most, its fourteen years of education being some three years more on average than the old middle class. Looking at the percentage of those who graduated from four-year universities or obtained higher degrees, the rate was 50.0 per cent for the new middle class compared to 10.9 per cent for the old middle class, and only 3.7 per cent for the working class. This indicates that the length of a person's education, especially the completion of higher education, is a very important factor for reaching the new middle class. By comparison, the length of education for the old middle class is relatively short, hardly any more than the number of years for the working class. But income differs considerably between these two classes, as was seen earlier, depending on whether a person runs his own business, no matter how small the scale, or is employed.

Table III also shows the average value of total assets and the rate of home ownership for the different classes. It indicates that in the area of assets, as with income, the new and old middle classes are much better off than the working and agricultural classes. But there is also a noticeable disparity in assets ownership between the two middle classes. This noticeable difference in the size of assets, contrasting with the similarity of current income, indicates that those who belong to the old middle class presently had a much lower income in the past than those in the new middle class.

Until twenty years ago, the urban self-employed sector in Korea was regarded by most scholars as an "urban informal sector" with low barriers to entry but also with very low productivity and income (e.g., Bai 1982). A 1976 social survey of Seoul residents conducted by Koo and Hong (1980) indicated that the income of urban self-employed workers at that time was quite a bit lower than that for white-collar workers. However, as of 1990, the average income of the old middle class, which contains small-scale one-man businesses in the service industry, was little different from that of the new middle class. Certainly there is a sizeable number of people among the urban self-employed who, because of the small-scale size of their business operations, suffer unstable economic conditions. But looking at the sector as a whole, Korea's decades of economic growth substantially raised the income and standard of living of the self-employed, to the extent that it is suitable to regard them as being a part of the "middle class."⁸ This greatly improving economic situation

⁸ Business activities of Korea's urban self-employed have been concentrated in the tertiary sector, with a very high percentage of them providing sales and services to individuals, such as retail shops and restaurants. Thus their income is greatly affected by changes in the level and pattern of household consumption.

Korea's economic growth starting from the 1960s brought about the sustained rise of household income, but this took a marked jump during the economic boom of the "three lows" (low oil price, low exchange rate, and low interest rate) in the latter half of the 1980s. Between 1985 and 1990, real household income experienced a rise of about 70 per cent. The financial surplus that this created at the household level changed the very pattern of consumption. Taking the example of eating out as a portion of urban household expenditures, it remained in the 1–2 per cent range up until the mid-1980s, then it rose rapidly reaching about 6 per cent by 1990 (Korea National Statistical Office,

has been the main factor behind the substantial expansion of the urban self-employed sector in Korean society.

The foregoing discussion shows that the old and new middle classes as a group are distinctly separate economically and in living standard from the working and agricultural classes. A person's occupation and employment status have led to significant differences in socioeconomic conditions among individuals in Korean society, and this also suggests that the criteria based on the sort of work one does, which are employed in this study, are appropriate for categorizing the country's social classes.

III. CHARACTERISTICS IN THE FORMATION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

The rapid growth of Korea's middle class clearly means that most of the people who presently belong to this class have experienced inter- and intragenerational mobility. This section will look at the class origins and the mobility patterns of people who reached the middle class. It will also examine the factors that shaped the pathways to the new and old middle classes.

Using data from the 1990 social survey, Table IV shows the class of one's father and the class of one's first career (i.e., the class that a person belonged to when he had his first job) for people presently in the old and new middle classes. Looking first at the class of one's father, the table shows that only 23.6 per cent of the people presently in the new middle class and 23.0 per cent of those now in the old middle class have father who were also in the same class. The others reached the middle class through intergenerational mobility. The percentage of those that came from the agricultural class was particularly high, accounting for 48.6 per cent of those surveyed in the new middle class and for 62.1 per cent of those in the old middle class.

Concerning the class of one's first career, a very high level of 86.1 per cent of the people presently in the new middle class also belonged to this class when beginning their careers. Of the remainder, 9.9 per cent came up from the working class. A closer examination of this latter group shows that most of them moved into clerical work (especially as civil service workers), and almost none went into specialized, technical, or managerial work. In fact, in the majority of Korean enterprises, there are very few paths open to blue-collar workers for promotion to specialized, technical, or managerial jobs (e.g., Jeong 1998). For this reason, in order to get these jobs which are high paying and prestigious even in the new middle class, one's first job has to be in a white-collar occupation.

Turning to the old middle class, a large portion of the people in this class have

"Annual Report on the Family Income and Expenditure Survey," various years). Presumably the change in the level and pattern of household consumption during the latter half of the 1980s was one factor behind the substantial rise in income for the urban self-employed workers.

I would like to thank the anonymous referee and Mr. Keigo Hayashibara of Hitotsubashi University Graduate School for their useful comments on these points.

TABLE IV
THE CLASS OF ONE'S FATHER AND THE CLASS OF ONE'S FIRST CAREER
(FOR INDIVIDUALS IN THE MIDDLE CLASS)

A. Class of One's Father

Present Class	Capitalist Class	New Middle Class	Old Middle Class	Working Class	Agricultural Class	Total
New middle class	10 (3.4)	70 (23.6)	50 (16.9)	22 (7.4)	144 (48.6)	296 (100.0)
Old middle class	7 (1.7)	38 (9.4)	93 (23.0)	15 (3.7)	251 (62.1)	404 (100.0)

B. Class of One's First Career

Present Class	Capitalist Class	New Middle Class	Old Middle Class	Working Class	Agricultural Class	Total
New middle class	1 (0.3)	279 (86.1)	7 (2.2)	32 (9.9)	5 (1.5)	324 (100.0)
Old middle class	3 (0.7)	70 (16.6)	162 (38.4)	149 (35.3)	38 (9.0)	422 (100.0)

Source: Calculated by the author using data from the 1990 survey.

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

come in from the other classes. According to the survey data, the percentage of those who were in this class when beginning their career was only 38.4 per cent. The largest inflow of people, accounting for 35.3 per cent, came from the working class. There was also a rather frequent occurrence of people moving from the new to the old middle class intragenerationally; this movement accounted for 16.6 per cent. The volume of this cross-flow is further proof, as pointed out in the first section, that the economic standing of the old middle class is not all that different from that of the new middle class.

Looking at income for individuals currently in the old middle class by the class of their first career, the data from the 1990 survey shows that the average income at that time was 965,000 won for workers in the old middle class who were in the new middle class when beginning their career; it was 880,000 won for those who were in the old middle class itself; it was 820,000 won for those who were in the working class, and 767,000 won for those who were in the agricultural class. Thus there is some disparity in income depending on the class of a person's first career. However, when we compare this to the data in Table III, which shows the average income for individuals presently in each of the classes, an individual who moved from the new into the old middle class intragenerationally has an income 166,000 won higher than a person now in the new middle class; an individual who moved from the working class into the old middle class intragenerationally has an income 281,000 won

higher than a person now in the working class; the situation is the same for those who moved from the agricultural class. It is evident from this data that moving into the old middle class intragenerationally will on average bring about an increase in a person's income. For Korean blue-collar workers in particular, whose promotion within the company to specialized, technical, and managerial positions is greatly limited, becoming an independent self-employed worker is one of the important paths leading to upward social mobility.

Next we will examine the factors that shaped the pathways to the new and old middle classes, which will give us a better understanding of the characteristics of these two classes. This examination will focus on the paths which are especially important for reaching the middle classes as shown in the foregoing discussion. These paths are: (1) starting one's career in a white-collar occupation that leads one into the new middle class; and (2) moving into the self-employed sector after having entered the work force that leads one into the old middle class.

Looking first at the new middle class which enjoys a relatively high socioeconomic standing, it has already been pointed out that the possibility of getting a job in a white-collar occupation is greatly affected by the level of a person's education (e.g., Hong 1980). To further verify this point, we will examine the factors that affect getting a first job in a white-collar occupation. In this connection we will also examine the effect of the class of a person's father.

Table V provides the results of a logistic regression analysis of the probability of getting one's first job in a white-collar occupation.⁹ According to the results, the

TABLE V
LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF ONE'S FIRST JOB
BEING IN A WHITE-COLLAR OCCUPATION

Constant	-9.728***
Age	0.041***
Years of education	0.632***
Father's class:	
Capitalist class	0.615
New middle class	-0.012
Old middle class	-0.627
Agricultural class	-0.598*
.....	
χ^2	611.7
$-2\log L$	1,090.6

Source: Calculated by the author using data from the 1990 survey.

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

⁹ In logistic regression analysis, the logit of the probability of a certain phenomenon occurring ($\log[p/(1-p)]$) is estimated using the same linear equation as in regular regression analysis. In this study, people whose first work was in the capitalist class have been excluded from the analysis because of problems with the number of samples.

number of years of a person's education exhibits a strong positive effect on the probability. In other words, the more years a person has studied, the significantly higher his probability of getting white-collar work as his first career. Moreover, among the father's class dummy variables for which the working class serves as a reference category, only that of agricultural class origin exhibits a significant negative effect; otherwise no other variable is significant. In other words, when the length of a person's education and his age are the same level, then a difference in one's class origin does not make a big difference in how easily one can get a first job in a white-collar occupation with the exception of having agricultural class origin.¹⁰ Therefore, even when the difference of the class of one's father does have some effect on a probability of reaching the new middle class, most of these effects are mediated by one's education level, otherwise one's class origin has little direct effect.

Examining more closely the relationship between one's class origin and one's years of education which is an important determinant for starting work in a white-collar occupation, Table VI presents the results of a regression analysis of the years of a person's education. The results show that even when age is the same level, when compared with a person brought up in the working class (reference group), the years of education for a person with a new middle class origin is over three years longer, and it is nearly two years longer for a person with an old middle class origin. This differential in the length of education consequently affects the probability of getting one's first job in a white-collar occupation. In fact, when using a model that excludes the length of education as a variable from the model in Table V (not shown in the table), analysis shows that there is a great difference in the probability of obtaining a white-collar job depending on one's class origin (Arita 2002).

TABLE VI
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S YEARS OF EDUCATION

Constant	16.179***
Age	-0.150***
Father's class:	
Capitalist class	3.466***
New middle class	3.326***
Old middle class	1.965***
Agricultural class	0.112
R^2	0.331

Source: Calculated by the author using data from the 1990 survey.

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

¹⁰ The low probability of people raised in the agricultural class starting work in a white-collar occupation is because of the scarcity of such jobs in rural areas and the high tendency to take up agricultural work as a result of inheriting agricultural land.

Turning next to an examination of the old middle class, we will focus on intra-generational movement from the new middle class and working class into the old middle class by carrying out a logistic regression analysis on the determinants of this movement. Table VII (left column) presents the results of this analysis done on a dummy variable that assigned a score of 1 for those who were in the new middle class when starting to work and moved into the old middle class by becoming self-employed, and a score of 0 for those who have been in the new middle class since the beginning of their career. The analysis shows clearly that the length of education has a significant negative effect on the probability of becoming self-employed. In other words, among people belonging to the new middle class when they started to work, the fewer their years of education, the more likely they are to quit a job and choose self-employed work. In Korea, the possibility of promotion within an organization is greatly affected by one's education level. The negative effect of one's years of education means that people with relatively less education, which will limit their future advancement, will tend to seek better social standing outside of an organization. This would indicate that many of those who move intragenerationally from the new into the old middle class are doing so as their second-best choice. However, the fitness of this model is very small, which indicates there are many other factors determining the movement from the new to the old middle class.

To examine determinants of the movement from the working class into the old middle class, we again carried out the same logistic regression analysis (Table VII, right column). The results of this analysis show that while an individual's age exhibits a significant positive effect, both the length of his education and the dummy variable of his father also being of the old middle class exhibit no significant effects. This indicates that skills acquired through schooling and academic studies are not absolutely necessary for becoming an independent self-employed worker (Hong 1980, p. 144). Moreover, being old middle class in the father's generation does not act as a decisive factor for the individual to become self-employed. As a final note,

TABLE VII
LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF INTRAGENERATIONAL
MOVEMENT INTO THE OLD MIDDLE CLASS

	New → Old Middle Class	Working → Old Middle Class
Constant	0.388	-2.851***
Age	0.031*	0.045***
Years of education	-0.230***	0.050
Old middle class (father's class)	0.688*	0.396
χ^2	25.3	15.2
-2logL	299.0	487.0

Source: Calculated by the author using data from the 1990 survey.

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

since the result of the logistic regression analysis does not demonstrate a strong effect, we may assume that other factors, such as a strong entrepreneurial spirit and a network of human relationships needed for self-employment, also exert a great deal of influence.¹¹

IV. THE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS AND ITS DETERMINANTS

In this section we will examine the Korean middle class from the aspect of its social consciousness. We will focus on how this class evaluated the country's authoritarian regime, something which has been a major point of contention in research on the middle class. We will compare evaluations of the old regime among the classes and examine the determinants of the evaluations.

The 1990 social survey included a question which asked people to evaluate how much the government during the Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Huan administrations had sought to make life equitable for the people. According to the suppositions of those scholars who stressed the conservatism of the middle class, having enjoyed more of the benefits of Korea's economic growth, there would be a stronger tendency for the people in this class to give a positive assessment of the distribution policies under the authoritarian regime compared to that of the working class which had no choice other than to accept a low standard of living because of the government's harsh labor policies (supposition 1); moreover, within the middle class itself, a person who reached the middle class through upward mobility would tend to give more positive assessment (supposition 2).

For an empirical examination of these suppositions, we composed an evaluation index of the authoritarian regime (EIAR) by totaling each interviewee's evaluations of government distribution policies during three periods: under the Park administration in the 1960s, under the same administration in the 1970s, and under the Chun administration in the 1980s.¹² Table VIII column (1) presents the average EIAR of each social class. It shows that the agricultural class gave the highest positive assessment; this was followed by the working class, the old middle class, and finally the new middle class which gave the lowest assessment. The result of an analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows that this unexpected difference in evaluation among classes is significant at the 0.1 per cent level, and therefore does not support supposition 1.

Table VIII columns (2) and (3) present the average EIARs of the two middle

¹¹ Although both are crucial factors that require careful scrutiny, analysis concerning entrepreneurial spirit and human relationship networks remains close to nothing because compiling such data is extremely difficult.

¹² In the survey there were four possible answers ranging at one-point intervals from +1.5 (made a great effort) to -1.5 (made no effort at all).

TABLE VIII
EVALUATION INDEX OF THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME BASED ON
ONE'S PRESENT CLASS AND CLASS ORIGINS

(1) All Classes		(2) New Middle Class		(3) Old Middle Class				
One's present class	Capitalist class	0.61	Father's class	Capitalist class	—	Class of first career	Capitalist class	—
	Newle class	0.35		New middle class	-0.21		New middle class	0.50
	Old middle class	0.82		Old middle class	0.41		Old middle class	0.87
	Working class	0.88		Working class	0.60		Working class	1.02
	Agricultural class	1.29		Agricultural class	0.51		Agricultural class	0.56
Overall average	0.86	Overall average	0.35	Overall average	0.82			

Source: Calculated by the author using data from the 1990 survey.

Note: In columns (2) and (3) the samples for the capitalist class were very few, so they are not shown.

classes by class origins. For the new middle class, class origin is showed by that of one's father, and by the class of one's first career for the old middle class. Looking first at the new middle class, those who moved into this class after growing up in the working class gave the highest positive evaluation; this was followed by those who had grown up in the agricultural class, then those who had grown up in the old middle class, and the lowest evaluation was by those who had been brought up in the new middle class itself. These may mean that persons who reached the middle class via upward mobility tend to evaluate the old regime more positive than others. However, the result of an ANOVA shows that the differences in assessment within the new middle class depending on the class of a person's father is not statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. Also, a check of the index for the old middle class (Column 3) may give the impression that persons who reached this class through upward mobility, such as those who were in the working class at the beginning of their career, tend to evaluate the old regime more positive. However, the difference is not significant at the 5 per cent level. Therefore supposition 2 also has to be rejected.

Why would the new middle class, which enjoyed quite well-off socioeconomic conditions under the old regime, have had the more critical political consciousness toward the distribution policies of the authoritarian regime? Most studies that have pointed out the new middle class's strong critical consciousness against the old regime have attributed it to the class's high level of education. The logic behind this explanation has been the assumption that "modern" education in itself fosters an individual's rational thinking, and this can heighten a person's sense of social criticism. Before accepting this explanation, however, we need to look at the particular role played by the university within the sociopolitical context of Korea.

During the time of the authoritarian regime when antigovernment movements were violently suppressed, the university in Korea remained an important societal space where freedom of political speech and action were at times tolerated. At many

universities the spirit of social criticism continued to be passed on from upper to lower classmen through close schoolmate relationships and lively debate among students. This critical atmosphere and the student movements for political change that it fostered exerted a substantial ongoing effect that induced real political change. Considering this aspect of the Korean university, there could be another explanation for the effects of education on social consciousness. That is, attending university and enjoying political freedom may free a person from the ideology which justifies the regime and give him a consciousness that is strongly critical against the regime.

Most of the studies to date that have described the social consciousness of Korea's middle class have accepted that the middle class's high level of education has influenced its political attitudes. But these studies have not sufficiently considered the nature of this influence. Moreover, although having a high-level education is a very important attribute for reaching the new middle class, it is not equivalent to "being in the new middle class" itself. While keeping these points in mind, the present study will seek to provide a comprehensive explanation of the determinants of middle-class social consciousness by venturing answers to the following: The effect of high-level education on evaluating the old political regime—is it a consequence of the rational thinking fostered by modern education? Or is it the result of the politicized consciousness coming out of the experience of attending university (especially four-year university where student activism can be intense) which reflects a distinct social context within Korea? Or are there other variables existing that affect the evaluation of the old regime? And even when the effects of these variables are controlled for, does the fact of being middle class itself significantly influence the social consciousness of the people in this class?

We will examine these questions by carrying out a regression analysis on the above index (EIAR). We will start by incorporating two variables: the years of a person's education and his age (which is also assumed to influence the person's evaluation of the old regime) into the model (Table IX, Model 1). The estimation results of this model show that there is a significant positive effect for age but a negative one for years of education. In other words, the older a person is the more positive his evaluation of the authoritarian regime; but the more years of education a person has, the more negative his evaluation. In order to examine this "education effect" more closely, we will replace the variable "years of education" with the dummy variable "experience of attending four-year university" which assigns a score of 1 to the people who attended four-year university and a score of 0 to those who did not (Table IX, Model 2). As expected, this dummy variable exhibits a significant negative effect, meaning that a person who has experienced attending four-year university tends to express a more negative evaluation to the authoritarian regime.

Here attention needs to be paid to the coefficients of determination of these two models. The variable "years of education" is an interval scale which contains more

TABLE IX
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE EVALUATION INDEX OF THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.863**	-0.455*	-0.297	-0.371
Age	0.023***	0.034***	0.032***	0.033***
Years of education	-0.091***			
4-year university attendance		-0.834***	-0.755***	-0.760***
Capitalist class			-0.078	-0.132
New middle class			-0.207	-0.126
Old middle class			-0.148	-0.095
Working class			-0.047	-0.063
Kyongsang upbringing				0.527***
Cholla upbringing				-0.798***
R^2	0.073	0.072	0.073	0.128

Source: Calculated by the author using data from the 1990 survey.

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

detailed information concerning an individual's level of education; however, the dummy variable "experience of attending four-year university" can only take a score of 0 or 1, so this variable possesses a very small amount of information. Nevertheless, the coefficients of determination of these two models are very similar. Therefore, Model 2 which has equal explanatory power based on less information compared to Model 1 is the relatively superior and plausible model. From the above we can say that one considerable effect of education when evaluating the authoritarian regime is that a person becomes more critical of the regime as a result of attending four-year university where one is allowed much more freedom to speak and act politically.

Even when a person's educational experience and age effect are controlled for, will being middle class (as defined by occupation) in itself have any effect on a person's assessment of the authoritarian regime? In order to examine this point, we will add to Model 2 the individual's "present class" as the dummy variable and call this Model 3. The estimation results of this model indicate that although the age and the four-year university dummy exhibit significant effects, the social class dummies show no significant effects, and the coefficient of determinant hardly rises. Therefore we can consider most of the difference in the evaluation of the old regime among the classes, which was confirmed earlier in this section, as being explained by the differences in age and experience of attending four-year university. Although the results were not shown here, the coefficient of determinant of the model composed of age and the dummy variables of one's present class was smaller than that of Model 2 which is composed of only age and the dummy variable of four-year university attendance. This result also supports the above interpretation.

The foregoing analysis, although brief, indicates that variables such as age and educational experience exert a stronger influence than does a person's social class when evaluating the distribution policies of the authoritarian regime. Also the progressiveness of the new middle class, as already pointed out, has been due mainly to the actions of these variables. However, the coefficient of determinant of Model 2 in Table IX is quite small. These two variables can explain only a little over 7 per cent of the variance of EIAR. Is there some other variable besides age, education level, and one's present social class, that has a strong influence on the way a person evaluates the authoritarian regime?

To answer this question, we need to examine the influence of a person's native region which was mentioned in the first part of this study. It is well known that there has been a great deal of regional inequality within Korea's economic development. Since the Park regime of the 1960s, industrial investment has been directed predominantly at the Kyongsang region in the southeast of the country, and the people in this region have enjoyed great economic benefits. Meanwhile, the Cholla region in the southwest of the country suffered particularly from a lack of sufficient industrial investment, and its economic development has lagged relative to that of other regions.¹³ Considering this difference in economic experience, it is possible that an individual's native region will also influence his evaluation of the distribution policies under the authoritarian regime.

In order to examine this possibility, we will add to Model 3 the dummy variables "Kyongsang upbringing" and "Cholla upbringing," and call this Model 4 (Table IX). From the estimation results of this model, the "Kyongsang upbringing" dummy variable exhibits a significant positive effect while that for "Cholla upbringing" a significant negative one, as expected. In other words, compared with people brought up in other regions, a person raised in the Kyongsang region will tend toward giving a positive evaluation while a person brought up in the Cholla region will give a more negative evaluation. Moreover, the addition of these two dummy variables considerably improves the fitness of the model, indicating that the "region of upbringing" variable has a sizeable degree of influence on a person's evaluation of the authoritarian regime.

The foregoing analysis in this study shows clearly that an individual's evaluation of the distribution policies under the authoritarian regime is determined largely by the person's age, level of education (especially experience attending four-year uni-

¹³ Over the years the gap in economic development among the regions has decreased; however, as of 1990 the per capita gross regional product for the Kyongsang region (which includes directly administered cities) was 4.22 million won, while that for the Cholla region (again including directly administered cities) was 3.41 million won, indicating that a considerable gap still exists. (The overall regional average was 4.08 million won.) Looking at the difference on the basis of manufacturing, the gap is even more striking, with the Kyongsang region standing at 1.61 million won and the Cholla region only at 0.81 million won (Korea National Statistical Office, Korean Statistical Information System, <http://kosis.nso.go.kr>).

versity), and his native region. Moreover, the degree of difference among the social classes in their evaluation of the regime can ultimately be attributed to the difference among the classes in the value of these several variables.

V. CONCLUSION

The middle class in Korea grew quickly in the course of the country's rapid economic growth that started in the 1960s. This economic growth not only brought about a substantial expansion of the new middle class, but also induced a steady expansion of the old middle class. At the same time this economic growth greatly improved the economic standing of many of the urban self-employed, transforming them into a stratum that now can be called part of the "middle class." Important in this middle class growth has been a large amount of inter- and intragenerational inflow mobility. Korea's middle class contains many people who have come in from other social classes, and both the new and old middle classes have a very large percentage of people who grew up in the agricultural class.

However, the new middle class is largely closed to intragenerational inflow mobility. About the only way to reach this socioeconomically well-off class is to get one's first job in a white-collar occupation, and the possibility of garnering such a job is greatly dependent upon a person's level of education.¹⁴ However, there are clear differences in the level of education depending on the social class a person grows up in. Thus the class of one's origin ultimately makes a great deal of difference in the possibility of reaching the new middle class.

In Korean society, it has become widely accepted that "No matter how poor one's family, as long as a person gets schooling, he can rise in society." This ideal has been the factor driving a fervor for education, what in Korean society has been dubbed "education fever" (Kim 1995). But while a person's educational attainment largely determines the social standing he can attain, there is great disparity among the social classes in the opportunity to access education. This fact in itself makes a difference in the possibility of a person reaching the new middle class, and is rather differs from the optimistic idea in Korea about the process of social status attainment. In future research, study needs to be directed at the economic and noneconomic factors that give rise to this disparity in education.

Compared with the new middle class, the old middle class is extremely open to intragenerational inflow mobility. Particularly for the working class, whose path to promotion in the organizational sector is closed, the move to self-employment has been an important road to a much higher income and upward social mobility. This

¹⁴ It needs to be pointed out that these characteristics of the Korean new middle class are not only affected by purely economic factors, but also by institutional ones, notably employment and wage practices.

“pull factor” also affects the continuing expansion of the Korean old middle class.

A comparison of how each class evaluated the distribution policies of the old authoritarian regime shows that there are differences between the classes. But an analysis of the determinants of these evaluations, assuming also the effects of variables other than the position in the class structure, shows that the important determinants are a person’s age, level of education (especially experience of attending four-year university), and his native region. When controlling for these, the position in the class structure itself does not have a significant effect on a person’s evaluation of the authoritarian regime.

The reason for this lack of effect is the fact that the Korean middle class (as well as the working class) expanded so rapidly, and the fact that it contains so many people who have come in from other social classes. Because of such diversity within the middle class, it is probable that this class (and the working class as well) still lacks sufficient cohesion.¹⁵ It is also noteworthy that in Korea a person’s social consciousness is determined to a large degree by his native region and this cuts across social classes. With the gap in regional economic development that started mainly during the Park regime, the point that has really attracted people’s interest has not been the conflict of interest based on the social class one belongs to, but the conflict of interest based on one’s native region. All these points call into question the appropriateness of attempts to understand Korea’s political change only as an outcome of “class politics.”

This study has pointed out the strong critical consciousness of the (new) middle class against the authoritarian regime. But most probably this strong critical consciousness is a result of the “education effect” existing in Korea’s distinct social context, i.e., a result of the “aroused political consciousness” brought about by attending four-year university. But even if it is accepted that the strong critical consciousness of the (new) middle class against the authoritarian regime has influenced Korea’s transition to democracy, this should not be seen as a direct consequence of middle-class growth based on the country’s economic growth. It may be due to “education fever” in Korean society, or maybe is an unintended result of the government’s higher education policy.

In closing I would like to emphasize that this study has analyzed only a limited number of questions concerning the middle class in Korean society.¹⁶ It is only an initial attempt to understand the characteristics of this class and of Korean society in general, and much more research on the issues still remains to be done.

¹⁵ This suggests that Korea’s social classes are largely different in substance from those of Europe.

¹⁶ One important issue is the financial crisis that broke out in late 1997, which caused widespread unemployment among middle-aged and older white-collar workers, and which prompted arguments about the “collapse of the middle class.” With the recovery of the economy, unemployment has declined greatly, but the recent and future direction of Korea’s middle class needs to be observed closely, especially in areas like employment and wage practices which have a great impact on the social standing of this class.

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