

Social Success and Happiness in Korean Higher Education

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<Abstract>

This paper discusses the relevance between social success and happiness in Korea from the perspective of Korean higher education. To review this study systematically, three research questions are stated. First of all, what is social success? Second, is social success able to provide happiness for us? Last, what is the relevance between social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education? To defend the questions, the researcher uses a content analysis method with a cross cultural approach. As for the limitations of the study, social success is focused on the lenses of social, econo-political, and educational aspects in contemporary Korean society and higher education. The significant of this study is to provide valuable resources and basic theories for global education theorists and practitioners, finding relevance between social success and happiness in Korean society and higher education.

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*Key words: social success, happiness, higher education, Korean higher education, Confucianism, cross cultural approach

The purpose of this study is to examine the relevance between social success and happiness in Korea from the perspective of Korean higher education. To discuss the study systematically, three research questions are stated. First of all, what is social success? Second, is social success able to provide happiness for us? Last, what is the relevance between social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education? To defend the questions, the researcher uses a content analysis method with a cross cultural approach. As for the limitations of the study, social success is focused on the lenses of social, economic-political, and educational aspects in contemporary Korean society and higher education. The significance of this study is to provide valuable resources and basic theories for global education theorists and practitioners, finding relevance between social success and happiness in Korean society and higher education.

A number of studies related to social success were performed by domestic and foreign theorists (Albrecht, 2006; Greve, 2013; Han, 2013; Holt, 1904; Kim, 1982; Lee, 2003; Life, 2015; McCabe, 2016; Porter, 2012). In Korea, several studies have mainly discussed or reviewed systems and problems social, political, and educational based on the theories of educational success and socio-cultural capital. On the other hand, in foreign countries, not a few studies have generally discussed or argued how to approach or achieve social success. In this paper, the author will mainly review and discuss the relevance between social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education.

What is social success?

Success literally means that the accomplishment of an aim or purpose as well as the attainment of fame, wealth, or social status (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>). In this vein, social success is the accomplishment or attainment of an individual aim or purpose related to fame, wealth, political power, and social status in his or her society. In the cultural history of Korea, social success has been traditionally regarded as the most important value of filial piety as well as the main pillar of education. Two of the classical Confucian scriptures, *the Classic of Filial Piety* (*The Classic of Xiao* in Chinese; *Hyo-Kyung* in Korean) describes "when we have established our character by the practice of the (filial) course, so as to make our name famous in future ages and thereby glorify our parents, this is the end of filial piety" (*The Classic of Filial Piety*, The Scope and Meaning of the Treatise; English translation: *James Legge*). The first sentence means the amplification of the perfect virtue, and the second sentence includes the amplification of making our name famous. That is, "when his conduct

is thus successful in his inner (private) circle, his name will be established (and transmitted) to future generations" (*Filial Piety Sutra*, The Amplification of Making Our Name Famous; English translation: *James Legge*). In addition, *the Book of Poetry* (*Si-Kyung* in Korean) illustrates that "Intelligent is he and wise, Protecting his own person" (Greater odes of the kingdom, Decade of Dang, Zheng Min; English translation: *James Legge*). The former 'Filial Piety' value had been changed into the ideology of socio-political success by a number of Confucian bureaucrats in the Choson dynasty era, while the latter '*Shi-Kyung*' value had been turned into the ideology of protecting ego and family or opportunism not only by a large number of Confucian learned men in the Choson kingdom era (1392-1910 AD), but also by highly educated persons in modern Korean society.

The above two Confucian Classics emphasize making the perfect virtue, and then amplifying one's name famous. Nonetheless, a number of educated people have mainly intended to pursue the amplification of making their names famous instead of establishing perfect virtue. To make the perfect virtue has been related to *Seonbi-Jeongsin* (the spirit of Confucian learned men who perfectly cultivated themselves), while to amplify one's name famous is concerned with *Choolse-jooeui* (the ism or ideology of social success). The author calls that the former is virtuous intelligent, and the latter is egoistic intelligent.

In the history of Korea, education was traditionally monopolized by the upper class people who had viewed as an essential tool for achieving their social success or maintaining their socio-political position and benefit (Lee, 2002). Under the stratified social system, higher education or elite education was accessible to the upper class. With the rapid expansion of higher education since governing of American military in 1945, education fever has been bloomed by almost all of Koreans regardless of social strata. The rapid change of socio-political system from the bureaucratic Confucian dynastic society into the westernized democratic society brought on the necessity of social success as well as the accessibility of higher education (Lee, 2002). With higher education, social success has been not only an effective tool to upgrade socio-economic position but also a significant means to maintain socio-political power in contemporary Korea.

Is social success able to provide happiness for us?

Is social success able to provide happiness for us? From the capitalistic or materialistic viewpoints, social success may give us happiness. The former principally

emphasizes capital or money, whereas the latter primarily stresses material or physical things. In a western sense, materialism and capitalism are mainly based on Epicureanism and mammonism. In this vein, social success which can bring wealth, power, and fame may be an effective means or a worthy tool to make happiness.

In the cultural history of Korea, however, a number of upright Confucian scholars in the old era esteemed for the spirit of scholastic integrity instead of pursuing social success or pleasure. Nonetheless, the general tendency of Confucian bureaucratic scholars pursued social success because they regarded it as the end of filial piety. In Confucianism, filial piety (Chinese/*xiào*; Korean/*hyo*) is a virtue of respect for one's parents, ancestors, and elders. Filial piety has been not only a core value to Confucian role ethics but also a key virtue in Korean culture. According to *the Classic of Filial Piety (Filial Piety Sutra)*, Confucius said,

The service which a filial son does to his parents is as follows: In his general conduct to them, he manifests the utmost reverence. In his nourishing of them, his endeavor is to give them the utmost pleasure. When they are ill, he feels the greatest anxiety. In mourning for them (dead), he exhibits every demonstration of grief. In sacrificing to them, he displays the utmost solemnity. When a son is complete in these five things, (he may be pronounced) able to serve his parents (An Orderly Description of the Acts of Filial Piety I, trans. James Legge).

Filial piety in Korean society has been a basic value to almost all of Koreans as the standard of respect for the family. Traditionally, sincere rulers and Confucian bureaucratic scholars adhered to the dogma of *Da Xue (The Great Learning/ Dea-Hak* in Korean):

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families

were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy (*The Great Learning*, Ch. 2, trans. James Legge).

The Great Learning shows that the family is a core element or a basic foundation for a harmonious society and a righteous nation. Several classical Confucian texts cited these sentences in the *Da Xue* and briefly mentioned, "when one's family is harmonious, all goes well." With the virtue of filial piety, the value of family concordance has been regarded as the basis of governing one's society and state.

In the contemporary Korean society, the majority of Koreans have still thought social success as the best way for filial piety and family's honour. From a Confucian standpoint, in order to achieve societal tranquility and national happiness, to cultivate oneself is priority through things being investigated, one's knowledge being complete, one's thoughts being sincere, and one's hearts being rectified.

Without cultivating oneself, is social success able to provide happiness for us? According to the orthodox Confucian principle, the first priority is the amplification of the perfect virtue, and then the second is the amplification of making one's name famous. That is, cultivating oneself takes precedence of social success. From the viewpoint of the *Da Xue*, without virtuously individual cultivation, social success is unable to make us happy. Nevertheless, a great number of people in contemporary Korean society have thought that social success can make them happy regardless of morally individual cultivation. To clarify this thought, the author intends to discuss the relevance between social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education.

Social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education

In the history of Korean education, elite or higher education has been an effective tool or means to obtain social success. Like the ancient Chinese "Urge to Study Poem" written by Emperor Zhenzong (986-1022) of the Song dynasty, the upper class of Korean people under the Confucian Choson dynasty (1392-1910) also recognized the amazing value of education. The "Urge to Study Poem" says:

To be wealthy you need not purchase fertile fields,
Thousands of tons of corn are to be found in the books.

To build a house you need not set up high beams,
Golden mansions are to be found in the books.
To find a wife you need not worry about not having good matchmakers,
Maidens as beautiful as jade are to be found in the books.
To travel you need not worry about not having servants and attendants,
Large entourages of horses and carriages are to be found in the books.
When a man wishes to fulfill the ambition of his life,
He only needs to diligently study the six classics by the window.
(trans. Suen, H. K., 2005)

Almost all of Koreans have esteemed social success to be happy. Under this strong creed, education fever had been sprouted in a Confucian kingdom society, and bloomed in a democratic Korean society. The true aim of education under the old Confucian dynasty era was practically based on the philosophy of social success instead of achieving a virtuously cultivated gentleman. Social success was the final goal of education as well as the end of filial piety. Succeeding to the above thought and tradition, social success has been a main aim to Koreans, and higher education has been a significant means or tool for achieving social success in a westernized democratic Korean society.

Under such a cultural background, education has been a ladder of social success. Especially, higher education has played an important role to achieve social success, with forming of bureaucratic elitism and political cliquism. Both became not only a motive of academic factionalism, but a cause of politico-economic tied bureaucratism in contemporary Korean society. Even though higher education as a ladder of social success has been a significant merit, it has brought a lot of negative problems. In particular, excessive education fever has had lots of social problems or issues, such as educational credentialism society, elitism on the basis of academic factionalism, educational instrumentalism, egoistic familism on the ground of social successism, extremely competitive education system, excessive education expenditures, social disharmony between the rich and the poor, and so on (Lee, 2002, pp. 183). Education fever, of course, has had several positive effects on Korean society, such as rapid economic development, democratization of South Korea, universalization of higher education, and upgrading one's social status.

Despite the merits and demerits, the great majority of Koreans believe that social success can provide them with happiness. In this paper, social success is focused on the

lenses of social, econo-political, and educational aspects in contemporary Korean society and higher education.

First, in the social aspect, social success as an effective agent is able to change one's social status or to maintain one's social position. Higher education is the easiest way to access social success if someone likes studying and has a sufficient financial ability to attend at higher education institutions. In the present South Korean society, the degree or diploma of a prestigious university may be as a warranty document for achieving social success. In this vein, South Korea has become an academic back-ground oriented society.

Second, in the econo-political aspect, social success is able to provide legal authority and honor as well as weath and power. The persons who have either excellent educational credetials or political ties can be bureaucrats, technocrats, or politicians. On the one hand, the other persons who have abundantly financial ability can make their own interest group or cartel to protect their vested wealth and rights or to promote their interests, and on the other hand, others who are rich and have enviable educational credentials can make their own wealthy kingdom or political power to build strong econo-political ties or connections.

Third, in the educational aspect, it is not too much say that the access of higher education is the entrance of social success. In South Korea, higher education has already become a means or tool for producing the elite as well as for achieving one's social success not only because postsecondary institutions have mainly pursued elitism and social success oriented education, but because egoistic elitism based on ego-familism has sought after social success. Owing to this tendency of Korean higher education, Korean education has had a lot of problems, such as the blood tied of educational instrumentalism for social success, excessive expenditure for private education, college or university entrance examination hell, the devastation of public education, and so forth.

In sum, the relevance between social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education is generally positive because the great majority of Koreans have esteemed social success to make happy. Under this strong creed, the Korean people have unsparingly invested their ardor and money in education for social success of their sons and daughters. To justify their conduct and thought as well as to upgrade or maintain the standing of their families, the Korean parents are willingly devoted themselves to their children's education. Indeed, can social success bring the Korean people happy? Although it is the author's thought, the true happiness does not belong to material possession such as social success based on wealth, power, and fame, but belong to spritual satisfaction or self actualization.

Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this study is to discuss the relevance between social success and happiness in Korea from the perspective of Korean higher education. To discuss the study systematically, three research questions are stated. First of all, what is social success? Second, is social success able to provide happiness for us? Last, what is the relevance between social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education? To defend the questions, the researcher uses a content analysis method with a cross cultural approach. As for the limitations of the study, social success is focused on the lenses of social, economic-political, and educational aspects in contemporary Korean society and higher education.

The significant of this study is to provide valuable resources and basic theories for global education theorists and practitioners, finding relevance between social success and happiness in Korean society and higher education.

The research findings of this study are as the following:

First, social success is the accomplishment or attainment of an individual aim or purpose related to fame, wealth, political power, and social status in his or her society. In the cultural history in Korea, social success has been traditionally regarded as the most important value of filial piety as well as the main pillar of education. The rapid change of socio-political system from the bureaucratic Confucian dynastic society into the westernized democratic society brought on the necessity of social success as well as the accessibility of higher education. With higher education, social success has been not only an effective tool to upgrade socio-economic position but also a significant means to maintain socio-political power in contemporary Korea.

Second, social success which can bring wealth, power, and fame may be an effective means or a worthy tool to make happiness. According to the orthodox Confucian principle, the first priority is the amplification of the perfect virtue, and then the second is the amplification of making one's name famous. In contemporary Korean society, however, a great number of people have thought that social success can make them happy regardless of morally individual cultivation.

Third, the relevance between social success and happiness in terms of Korean higher education is generally positive because almost all of Koreans have esteemed social success to make happy. Under this strong creed, the Korean people have unsparingly invested their ardor and money in education for social success of their sons and daughters. To justify their

conduct and thought as well as to upgrade or maintain the standing of their families, the Korean parents are willingly devoted themselves to their children's education.

In conclusion, based on the research findings of this paper, the researcher strongly suggests that colleges and universities in Korea should design curricula achieving for self-actualization or spiritual satisfaction instead of elitism centered curricula as well as social success oriented education. In addition, in order to maintain a socio-economically harmonious and affluent society as well as to keep a socio-politically stable and peaceful country, Korean higher education should strengthen moral education and cosmopolitanism education.

For future study, it is recommended that this study should be empirically undertaken to examine the merits and demerits of social success in contemporary Korean society with quantitative or qualitative research methodology. Finally, the researcher hopes that this academic position paper will provide basic theories and useful resources regarding happiness education in higher education institutions for the educational practitioners and theorists of the world.

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I would like to give this academic paper, as a heartfelt gift, to my lovely and precious grandson, **Theo**, with God's grace and macarios. I gladly congratulate my grandson on **his first happy birth day** (October 15, 2017).

***Author:**

Jeong-Kyu Lee, educational scholar, the 2017 Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award Winner, Marquis Who's Who in America 61st Edition (2007), and Marquis Who's Who in the World 24th-33rd Edition (2007-2016) listed educator with a degree of Philosophy of Doctor (Higher Educational Administration at The University of Texas at Austin), former President of Central College, Canada, Guest Scholar of the University of British Columbia, Canada, Research Fellow of Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) under the Korean Government, Joint Professor of Hongik University in Seoul, former Columnist at University News Network (UNN) in South Korea, and reviewer or editor of several international journals, such as The Cambridge Journal of Education, Higher Education, Educational Administration and Policy Studies, etc. Dr. Jeong-Kyu Lee's academic articles and books have been published in domestic and many foreign countries, and international organizations such as Canada, the U.S.(ERIC), the U.K., France, Mexico, Spain, Australia, South Africa, Brazil, India, China, South Korea, OECD, UNESCO(IAU/HEDBIB), and the UN(UNPAN). A number of academic articles and books were written in English and Korean, and translated into French, Spanish, and Chinese. There are two poetical works: *The Songs of Nature and Spirituality*, and *The Songs of Mountain Villages*.