Towards an original contribution based on “Asian education”?

A review of existing theories of educational expansion

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Introduction

One of the most well-known Western scholars of educational expansion, Randall Collins, once wrote:

Asian educational history is not very well known in the West, but it ought to be; among other reasons, it shows us the dynamic by which bureaucratic systems of formal education not only stratify society in societal classes but also foster competition that leads to both school expansion and inflation of educational credentials.

(Collins, 2000, 214)

Some two decades on from this, scholars writing about “Asian education” still encounter serious dilemmas when presenting their work, in English, to a global audience: What debates should it seek to contribute to? How should it be framed? How much does the audience already know? To what degree is an original contribution possible?

Facing these questions, one option—perhaps the easiest—is for such scholars to stick tightly to exhaustively collecting and faithfully recording empirical detail. Here the approach is to translate relevant local language materials into English, gather original/additional data, ensure high standards of methodological rigor in the analyses, and then package the work in familiar concepts and theories. This packaging is a afterthought; an attempt to bestow the empirical data with the needed legitimacy to gain acceptance to global debates, conducted in English, and undergirded by Western social theory.

Another option—perhaps the most difficult—is the attempt to resist simply packaging original data in existing debates, but to view that data from the very outset as pregnant with the potential to challenge them. Here the approach is not simply to translate data so that non-native speakers can understand peculiarities of a local context and categorize it within their existing epistemic cosmos. It is instead to translate the local context in ways that could potentially change the very parameters of the existing epistemic categories. In short, the first approach is empirical elaboration, while the second is epistemic challenge.
Scholars of "Asian education" have overwhelmingly adopted the first approach. In part this is personal choice. In part it reflects clear structural constraints: the practical difficulties of reading high-level theoretical works in foreign languages, the time needed to piece together on-going global debates from translated and frozen fragments, unfamiliarity-cum-dissonance with externally generated images of the home context, and the increased likelihood of being accepted into major Western scholarly journals if data is packaged in ways that are familiar to Western-educated editors (Anderson-Levitt, 2014). Importantly, there are also long-standing traditions of what constitutes "good" scholarship embedded within particular national research cultures that can often differ dramatically from what constitutes "good" in the Western/global academic realm. There is insufficient space here to fully unpack why the first approach has been so appealing to date. The point is simply that most work has been of this descriptive, empirical nature.

The consequences of this are that "Asian education" has remained relatively unknown in the Western/global debates. This is all the more striking given the widespread recognition that "Asian education" is home to some of the highest achievements, most equitable systems in the world. When Randall Collins among others argues that Asian education is "not very well known," he is arguably speaking less about the lack of raw empirical data available but instead about analyses of the different dynamics at play in the East Asian space that would further expand the West's existing epistemic imagination. Although his appeal that we "ought" to learn more from "Asian education" can create its own problems (as we return to explore in the conclusion), Collins does confirm that the way forward is the second approach: not simply collecting empirical data, but working out a robust epistemic contribution.

This chapter attempts to contribute, albeit indirectly and in a preliminary sort of way, to future studies aspiring to elaborate the second approach. It aspires to sketch a rough roadmap for studies attempting to travel the more difficult path of developing an epistemic challenge to Western-cum-global imaginings of "Asian education." In effect, it tries to offer up a shortcut of sorts for those attempting the more arduous climb towards an original theoretical contribution. In the context of this volume—works arguably empirically solid but theoretically conventional—it invites the reader to think through the theoretical possibilities of what is presented in other chapters. The major contribution of the current chapter then lies less in the fine details; more in invigorating our theoretical imagination and sharpening the lenses through which we view, theoretically, the chapters in this volume. With only clarity on theoretical commitments can future work begin to elaborate alternatives.

To accomplish this, the first half of the chapter undertakes a concise review of the major theories of educational expansion dominant in the English-speaking world. This section is divided into three parts: a first section that looks at the four major theories that dominate the United States conversation on educational expansion, followed by two additional theories that command the center of sociological debates in England (and perhaps Australia as well). The second half of the chapter then turns to briefly explore major theories of the public/private balance in the post-expansion phase. It shows that theories of expansion overlap closely with theories of public/private balance. A short third section of the chapter then offers one possible alternative theory of the state, modernity, and—by extension—educational expansion. It is offered up by a Japanese sociologist explicitly seeking to capture the historical experiences in non-Western contexts—Koto Yosuke’s "Externally Invoked Modernity" thesis (Koto, 2006).

Although no authors in this volume ultimately utilized it, it is retained to point the way towards future work that might help us imagine an original theoretical contribution.

Emphatically, the purpose of this review is not to suggest that work on East Asia should adopt one of these theoretical lenses, but instead to start to highlight how theoretical constructs derived from the Western historical experience of educational expansion may be inadequate for understanding the full dynamics at play in the case of East Asian countries. Rather than seek definitive answers to educational expansion then, the attempt here is to simply highlight lacuna in existing theories that might form the basis for developing a serious epistemic challenge to Western social theory vis-à-vis educational expansion.

Clearly the ambitions of this chapter far exceed the space permitted. This leads inevitably to numerous limitations. First, works by French, German, and other European authors theorizing educational expansion have been excluded. Although English-language theoretical work dominates the global academic discourse and are thus the focus of this review, there is clearly excellent work being done by other European writers and must be taken into account in the future. For example, works by French scholars have made a powerful contribution in suggesting that dominant classes who seek new codes and channels through which to reproduce class differences are the driving force behind educational expansion and the progressive lengthening of compulsory education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Second, too little space is devoted in this chapter to exploring other theoretical constructs by Asian sociologists. In highlighting Koto Yosuke’s (2006) work in the third section, the attempt is to briefly gesture towards what Western social theory has missed, not to claim that his theory can explain what happened across all of East Asia. It is simply one exemplary model and, in fact, functions as more of an appeal to locate robust, viable "indigenous theory," then elaborate its possibilities in conversation with Western social theory. This project is increasingly the focus of recent works in sociology, all broadly inspired by post-colonialism (see Connell, 2007; Chen, 2010; Takayama, 2016). The twin hope is that theories akin to Koto Yosuke’s can be located (developed?) in other East Asian contexts and that these, in turn, can be linked to the empirical work on educational expansion in due course.

Existing theories I: United States

What has driven school expansion in the twentieth century? What factors explain both the growth in enrollments and the progressive lengthening of schooling?
What have been the consequences? The enormous expansion of formal schooling, both across the United States and worldwide, was one of the defining puzzles in the field of American educational sociology. With one major scholar defining expansion as "the most important school reform of the 20th century" (Walters, 2000, 254), accelerating enrollments in the second half of the twentieth century offered American educational sociologists rich material to elaborate, test, and debate a range of theoretical propositions. Out of this milieu emerged four major theories: structural-functionalism, Marxist, status-competition, and world culture accounts. Each are sketched out below.

In the American context, arguably more so than in the English one, research on expansion has been tightly coupled with the puzzle of the changing structure and distribution of educational opportunity. While the former line of research studies why the educational "pie" continues to grow, the latter focuses on the way that pie is divided among the individuals, groups, and social classes (Ibid.). Although the effects of expansion on equity are certainly important, the review here focuses primarily on the factors driving expansion.

**Structural-Functionalism**

Functionalist theories of school expansion posit that expanding enrollments are driven by a combination of increasingly higher levels of technological advance in a given society and the increasing demand for schooling to respond to this ever-evolving complexity. Derived from Parsonsian structural-functionalist theories that dominated American sociology in the 1950s and 1960s, proponents of functionalism read society as a complex organism where a combination of norms, customs, traditions, and institutions worked like "organs" mutually interacting to keep the "body" well regulated, stable, and healthy despite on-going change and interaction with the environment (Parsons, 1977). Within this wider milieu, the institution of education played two key roles: (i) sorting individuals according to some combination of ability and merit, and (ii) providing educated individuals with the requisite repertoire of cognitive, social, and technological skills needed to function in the labor market and wider society. Against the backdrop of rapid scientific advances, increasing levels of industrialization, and a steady climb in school enrollments in twentieth-century America, the theory initially seemed to explain rather well what was driving expansion.

Underlying the functionalist-account were, however, three key assumptions that would later come under considerable attack. First, functionalism assumed that educational expansion was a rational response to the needs of a given society, more specifically the triple needs of the labor market, occupational specialization, and social cohesion. As technological innovation, industrialization, and urbanization advanced, school enrollments were viewed as marching along in lock step. Functionalists held schools would at once support, compensate, and pave the way for these seismic social shifts.

Second, functionalists posited a general evolution from a "traditional" to a "modern" society marked by increasing social complexity. Amidst this transition, functionalists hypothesized that social selection via schooling would shift away from privilege towards more meritocratic forms, in effect slowly erasing the effects of ascribed status and shifting the emphasis to the merits of the individual. Part of the mechanism behind erasing the reproduction of traditional privilege was the expansion of schooling itself: increasingly larger proportions of the youth population would be pulled into formal schooling to meet the needs of a "modern" society, but in doing so would undergo meritocratic selection processes. The implicit assumption was that this process would lead towards the erosion of long-standing inter-generational privilege the further schooling expanded.

Third, given that functionalists read the expansion of schooling through structuralist lenses, they assumed that school expansion had little to do with dramas of politics and differentials in power, either domestically or internationally. That is, in assuming that expansion of schooling reflected the organic needs of a given society as a whole, functionalists held that political processes or sectarian divisions had little explanatory potential vis-à-vis the expansion of schooling. Emerging from this were largely consensual accounts of expansion and the notable absence of divisive intra-social debates on when, how, and why to expand education.

It is worth noting that structural-functionalists accounts became the basis for at least two major theories that would later be used to legitimate, either directly or indirectly, school expansion in non-Western contexts: modernization theory and human capital theory (most recently revamped as knowledge capital theory, see Komatsu and Rappeleye, 2017).

Modernization theory, as outlined most famously by Rostow (1960) adopted the functionalist account wholesale, suggesting that all countries passed through a set of five stages of economic development and that targeted investments in public infrastructure could induce "takeoff." Although Rostow did not place great emphasis on schools or human dimension of modernization, human capital theory as outlined by proponents such as Becker (1962) placed education center stage. In this sense, it slightly modified the Parsonsian structuralist account but kept in place the larger assumptions about how society functioned. Specifically, human capital theory held that education played a key role in the "takeoff" needed for "traditional" societies to become "modern" by providing both advanced skills and—to a lesser extent—inculcating a modern outlook on work, society, and life (see Inkeles and Holsinger, 1974). Whereas functionalism in the 1950s viewed social complexity and school expansion marching in lock step, human capital theory posited that school expansion was a prerequisite to "takeoff" of social complexity.

Regardless of the fine details and differences, the larger point here is that functionalism was a theoretical lens utilized by American educational sociologists to explain school expansion academically, but functionalist premises were transferred almost wholesale into modernization and human capital accounts that were later utilized as the basis (legitimation) of school expansion in non-Western contexts. Particularly in East Asian contexts such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and...
Singapore who received large amounts of Western development aid in the process of school expansion, these functionalist-derived theories came to play a key role in not simply explaining academically the dynamics of school expansion, but in legitimating policy interventions to expand schooling (i.e., manpower planning). This is a major difference between the East Asian and American/Western European contexts that has not been adequately understood to date.

In this volume, the majority of authors subscribe to structural-functionalism, in one form or another. The accounts of China (Chapter 9) and Singapore (Chapter 7) do so in a strong sense: both argue that the expansion of schooling was a rational response to changes in the labor market. In contrast, the chapters on Japan (Chapter 4), Korea (Chapter 5), and Taiwan (Chapter 6) do so in a way that puts the emphasis on policymakers alone: functionalist accounts were promoted by bureaucrats engaged in “manpower planning” keen to “invest” in human capital in ways that would keep up with industry’s needs for engineers, scientists, and skilled workers.

Marxist

Marxist accounts departed from functionalist accounts by placing politics and the needs of elites at the center of the analysis. Whereas functionalists viewed expansion as a rational response to the scientific advance, industrialization, and the growing complexity of occupational skills, neo-Marxists read expansion as a means of social control and socialization into the capitalist system (Katz, 1971; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). This socialization included inculcating a particular occupational discipline needed to function in the capitalist wage economy: being on time, respect for authority, compliance, political acquiescence among others. Here schools functioned less to meet the skills needs of the new labor market or socialize workers into urban living, more to ensure that they would become a docile workforce and pledge allegiance to a political system controlled by (capitalist) elites. Schools inculcated in students, then, a false consciousness (Gramsci, 1971) that prevented the emergence of class-consciousness among non-elites and thus furthered elite hegemony.

While a Marxist perspective is increasingly unfamiliar to a new generation of scholars today, it retains its legitimacy in the eyes of many older scholars. Functionalist accounts cannot explain, Marxist proponents held, periods of rapid expansion of schooling following major political ruptures. That is, expansion predated the needs of the diffusion of technology or industrial expansion. One example from East Asia is the Meiji Restoration, where primary school enrollments reached nearly 100 percent by 1907, a time when agriculture still accounted for 60 percent of the labor force. A similar disconnect, where school expansion moved far in advance of labor demands, can be found in numerous places worldwide, not only in East Asia, but also across greater Europe, adding weight to Marxist accounts that political forces were the primary driver of expansion. Space does not permit a full treatment of the rich work done in the 1960–1970s on these themes.

Still, Marxist critiques have been subject to considerable critique in turn. One such response, particularly strong in Marxist-adverse America, is that the expansion of public schooling was indeed driven by politics, but those forces were not capitalist schemes, but instead the fulfillment of democratic and humanitarian vows. That is, schooling was extended to advance benevolent political goals: democracy. Green (1990) has argued against this frequent American hymn, however, asserting that:

Even in the USA, where education was more closely entwined with democratic ideas than anywhere, it still had a contradictory function and wore a Janus face. On the one hand, an ally of democratic forces, including working-class aspirations and, on the other, a powerful instrument of political conformity and an essential element in the construction of an individualist, capitalist hegemony.

Finally, Marxist accounts have come under attack for being unable to explain the active participation of large swaths of the population in public education, even when there was lax enforcement of compulsory school legislation. In other words, the Marxist account does not convincingly elaborate the mechanisms that political elites utilized to bring the working class into schools (Walters, 2000), leaving open the possibility that demand (and expansion) arose from “the masses” themselves. These critiques gave rise, in part, to the two positions below which focus on demand.

Before turning to those, however, it is surprising to note how little Marxist and elite control arguments have featured in educational research in East Asia generally, despite very strong, top-down expansion as seen in Meiji Japan, post-1949 China, and Japanese occupation-era Taiwan. As the contributions to this volume show, there is little awareness or interest in how capitalist forces impact education policy. No author, even those from post-socialist countries, draws attention to the entanglement of private interests and public policy. A critical, Marxist-inspired reading of the empirical chapters would ask, for instance, which actors and forces installed “human capital” and economic growth as the polestar of policy in many East Asian countries (e.g., why was heavy industry so influential in Korean education policy in the 1960s?)? It would ask why private and/or vocational schools became the favored policy option, rather than an increase in tax revenue to fund public expansion. The lack of a Marxist theoretical lens leaves questions about political influence and power differentials unpacked—quite a difference from the flavor of scholarly discussions taking place prior to the end of the Cold War.

Status-competition (including historical institutionalism)

Status-competition accounts posit that school expansion is caused by increasing competition and credential “inflation” among a growing number of school-aged
youth seeking advantages in the labor market. Like Marxists, proponents of this view highlight the mismatch between labor market needs and observed increases in education levels to make their departure from structural-functionalist accounts. However, distinct from Marxists, status-competition advocates focus not on the social control functions of schooling nor presuppose tight political control-educational linkages. Instead, they highlight the way that competitive advantage is conferred by educational credentials, specifically how these diplomas come to function as "cultural currency" that is then deployed as a resource in ongoing inter-group conflicts. That is, youth compete to enter occupational groups whose entry-point is linked to formal educational credentials (as opposed to real skills or know-how). Credentials are thus bestowed with status borrowed from the level of educational returns it may be exchanged for on the labor market. As more students attempt to enter through this door, however, this status-competition moves up to progressively higher levels. The consequence is the continued expansion of the system and a never-ending inflation of credentials: year after year the same credentials deliver increasingly fewer returns in the occupational realm.

The status-competition lens arose in the 1970s to challenge the inherent "monocausal" premise of both structural-functionalism and Marxism. Randall Collins, a chief proponent of the theory, instead follows Max Weber in highlighting a "multicausal view of society" (Collins, 1979, 74). Here technological change is deemed important but primarily as a generator of additional resources over which different groups compete and may mobilize for continuing inter-group competition. Marxist attention to class conflict is welcomed, but instead of a simple dichotomy between open struggles over resources between capitalist and workers, the focus is on how education as "cultural currency" becomes the point of struggle, as well as how this foils attempts for a collective class consciousness and produces a proliferation of interest groups: "the difference is that a cultural currency makes the conflict irreparably multisided, each occupational group against the other, and tends towards increasing fragmentation rather than toward consolidation into two opposing blocs" (Ibid., 72).

Finally, status-competition places heavy emphasis on historical legacies in cultural and political formations. Here the inspiration comes from Max Weber and has considerable overlap with historical institutional perspectives: inequalities in cultural and material capital bequeathed to the present are now wrapped up and legitimated with education credentials. As Collins relates:

Past traditions continue to complicate present societies because groups struggle to carry on institutions shaped in the past. History calls no time out; people living at any point in time continue to use whatever advantages they have inherited, whether in the form of cultural, organizational, or material property.

(Ibid., 75)

Given this perspective, status-competition theory as expounded by Randall Collins is the only one of the four theories in North America that opens the door for deeper explorations of culturally or historically specific patterns of expansion. Perhaps this is why Collins explicitly highlights the importance of Asian education, as cited at the outset of this chapter.

Empirical studies testing a status-competition hypothesis peaked in the 1970s and early 1980s (Boudon, 1974; Collins, 1979; Mare, 1981), arguably driven by the severe mismatch between the rapid upward growth in advanced educational credentials and a stagnant labor-market following the oil shocks of the early 1970s. Among these studies, Collins is again the most insightful on issues of secondary expansion. Examining the case of expansion of elementary and secondary levels in the United States, Collins suggests that there are crucial differences that emerged between sponsored mobility systems in countries such as England, Germany, and France and contest mobility systems such as the United States. In the contest mobility system of the United States professional identification only happens at the end of the schooling sequence, leading—in theory—to a never-ending rise in credentials. Collins writes of the United States, "This end point has changed continuously as once-elite high school degrees have become near universal, common undergraduate training has been supplanted by graduate level education, and the for the lucrative specialties, increasingly by postdoctoral specialized training" (1979, 91). Collins places the growth of free secondary schooling in the United States almost entirely at the feet of a diverse coalition of "upper class and middle class professionals, especially ministers, educators, and lawyers" (105) interested in securing their social position by enshrining their own cultural in the "cultural currency" represented by educational credentials. Accordingly, for this coalition, "every political crisis and issue was seized upon as indicating a need for more public education" (109). Ultimately, once established, "the educational system, like other organizations, struggled to extend its size, resources, and influence" (109) and educators gradually realized that even though "their teachings were irrelevant to the lives of many of their students ... instead of relinquishing them by giving up on compulsory attendance, they sought for a rationale to justify keeping them in school" (115). Although Collins follows Weber in placing a great emphasis on the "examination," since Collins only focuses on the United States it is uncertain how these ideas might relate to secondary expansion in an exam-prominent East Asian context (as outlined in the next chapter by Hirofumi Taki).

Several contributions on this volume subscribe to status-competition theory in a mild form, with particularly focus on demand and competition found in Japan (Chapter 4), and to a lesser extent Taiwan (Chapter 6) and China (Chapter 9). Meanwhile, the account of Korea (Chapter 5) gives us, albeit mostly implicitly, the closest approximation of the synthesis of status-competition and historical institutionalism envisaged by Collins: culturally driven demand leading to intense exam competition structured by the modern bureaucratic system, eventually leading to expansion and stratification (thereafter addressed through equalization policies, however).
World culture theory (neo-institutionalism)

Another account of school expansion nominally informed by Max Weber is world culture theory (a particular strand of neo-institutionalism). Here too the emphasis is on culture as drivers of expansion, as distinct from technologically advanced, economic-labor determinism, or elite control argument assumed in functionalist and Marxist accounts. Noting not simply the mismatch between labor market demand and educational expansion within a given society, world culture theorists innovated by drawing attention to similarities in expansion across multiple societies worldwide, even those with different historical legacies and political arrangements (Meyer et al., 1997). Suggesting that such similarities could be explained neither by the legacy of Western colonization nor different positions with the global economy (what Marxists inspired by Wallerstein called the “World System”), world culture proponents instead posited that expansion of education could be located in a shared, consensual move toward a single global cultural script—world culture (Ramirez, 2003). Schematically, the approach was visualized as in Figure 2.1.

Here moves towards educational expansion arise simultaneously from (i) nation-states seeking to fulfill a shared global “script” of what it means to be a nation-state and (ii) human identities now formulated in relation to this global script. This script valorized Western-style education, individuality, human rights, and so on because it initially emerged from the Western world, but since it has “gone global” it is no longer a Western phenomenon but part of a shared global social reality (Ramirez and Boli, 1987; Ramirez, 2003). In other words, the expansion of schooling is read as the dual enactment, by both national political elites and national citizens, of a common, global cultural set of norms. World culture theorists stake out their case that the drivers come from the wider world, not from any constellation of nation-state configurations on these two points: rates of expansion are simultaneous across nations and the forms of education are broadly familiar. Any deviations can be understood as “loose couplings” of a single model. As such, any attempt to locate constellations of variables within a particularly national context to explain expansion will emerge empty-handed.

Although world culture proponents would later expand this cultural analysis into different domains of sociological inquiry, explaining educational expansion remained the central focus of this theoretical school (Meyer et al., 1992; Meyer and Ramirez, 2000). Specifically, the central thread of theory development has been woven around the empirical fact of a rapid and simultaneous expansion of mass education systems from 1950 to 1970, what its proponents call the “World Educational Revolution” (Meyer, 1977; Baker, 2014). Multiple studies on the expansion of secondary education have been undertaken as part of this project (Kamens et al., 1996; Benevot and Reznik, 2006; Kamens and Benevot, 2006).

Perhaps today world culture theory should be recognized as the dominant theory in the North American context, displacing functionalist, Marxist, and status-competition accounts. Nonetheless, recent critiques of the position have raised several points that remain unanswered to date. First, the world culture account posits a single causal driver to expansion: shared consensus around a single cultural script. It actively excludes any possibility of coercion, most apparent in its denial that colonialism had any impact on the rise of modern mass schooling along Western lines (Carney et al., 2012). Empirically the theory has come under scrutiny for relying on policy texts that yield a stitced view of the complexities of national contexts: a similar policy text is imputed with shared meaning, then used to suggest that the driver for this comes from enactment of the same cultural script (Rappeye, 2015). In short, the account fails to explain how the Western cultural script went global or convince many that the “shared meaning” world culture theorists propose actually exists. It remains blinkered by a stitced account of history, particularly when applied to East Asia. For example, in trying to explain the expansion of secondary education in East Asia specifically, world culture is silent on how Chinese Hong Kong and Singapore came to enact a Western cultural script via schooling, i.e. without a discussion of British colonialism. It has not addressed the possibility that once the Western scripts were implanted by colonizers or modernizing elites navigating a colonial world system, status-competition processes took hold pushing the system towards universal expansion. These critiques become important when we return to explore Archer’s account of “takeoff” and Koto Yusuke’s externally driven modernity hypothesis.

In the current volume, the account of Hong Kong (Chapter 8) is the only one gesturing towards world culture theory. It attempts to mount an empirical case that secondary expansion was not marching to the cadence of economic needs, as the number of persons engaged in manufacturing declined rapidly from the late 1980s. The authors point out that the institution of education remains unproblematic while people craft new meanings for it and the government enacts reform it to gain legitimacy.
Where to locate Martin Trow? Hybrid of structural-functionalism, status-competition

Trow is another name widely associated with analyses of educational expansion. His most recognizable contribution is a three-stage classification of secondary and higher education. Phase I is an Elite Stage where enrollments of the age-grade cohort remain under 15 percent, as was the case for secondary school enrollment until roughly 1910 and higher education until 1940 (Trow, 1961). Phase II is the Mass Stage where enrollments of the age-grade cohort exceed 70 percent. America reached this threshold for secondary enrollments by 1940 and for higher education in the mid-1980s. Phase III was the Universal Stage where enrollments approach 100 percent of the age-grade cohort. Trow’s scheme has been widely utilized as a heuristic device, providing a conceptual language to help researchers locate key moments in the expansion of national education systems.

But does Trow’s work represent a distinct theoretical position? Probably not. Trow seemed less interested in theorizing the causes of expansion, more interested in describing the transformations that take place during expansion. This makes sense since his classification scheme came at a time when structural-functionalism was the dominant (only?) theory available to explain expansion. A close reading of Trow reveals his debt to Talcott Parsons (who he quotes explicitly), leading him to suggest that: “the growth of the secondary school system after 1870 was in large part a response to the pull of the economy for a mass of white collar employees with more than an elementary school education” (Trow, 1961, 145). To support his argument, Trow lists figures for the increases in engineering, professional, and technical workers (Ibid., 154). Only in one place does Trow anticipate arguments about changing “public sentiments” about the value of educational credentials elaborated by Randall Collins. Trow writes:

the immediate force behind these [expansion] trends in both secondary and higher education are changes in public sentiment ... Where most Americans have come to see a high school education as the ordinary, expected thing for their children, they are now coming to think of at least some time in college in the same way. Behind these changes are ... change in our occupational structure...

(Ibid., 153–154)

In this sense, Trow is theoretically unoriginal. If there is a case for originality to be made for Trow, it would revolve around his insights that the transition from Elite to Mass secondary systems, when underpinned by growth in higher education, transforms the function of the secondary system. In this case, the secondary system diversifies its function, splitting into a terminal system linking to the occupational world and a preparatory system for increasing numbers of students who want to go to college. To the extent that a secondary system divides these streams and new schools are built to house these different functions, this might explain some part of expansion. Yet, in the American case, the comprehensive ideal meant both functions remained within existing schools: “American comprehensive high schools contain all this diversity within themselves, providing different streams or tracks for students with different educational or vocational intentions” (Ibid., 165). Here then, Trow points to changes as more qualitative after mass enrollment has been reached, rather than quantitative.

In the chapters that follow, several authors apply Trow to describe changes in secondary enrollments, most notably the chapters on Taiwan (Chapter 6) and China (Chapter 9). Both these chapters have some affinities with Trow’s theoretical commitments, but remain engaged with Trow only at the conceptual level.

Existing theories II: United Kingdom

Given different historical realities than North America, theoretical work on educational expansion out of the United Kingdom has a different set of emphases. Broadly speaking, these place the focus on political conflicts leading to expansion, are sensitive to change over time, and highlight the negative effects of expansion—a dimension that does not feature much in the American context.

Margaret Archer’s morphogenetic approach

Archer’s dual starting points are (i) mechanisms of educational expansion change over time, and the insight that both (ii) corporate action (supply side) and primary action (demand side) must be explained. She reminds us that describing only one factor is insufficient. In this sense, her morphogenetic approach differs greatly from the four theories outlined above that all read the same driver of expansion across time. As shown in Figure 2.2 below, Archer contends that in the Takeoff Phase, expansion is largely driven by competitive conflict among corporate actors (church groups, etc.). At first, individuals meet this institutional expansion largely with indifference. In the subsequent Growth Phase, corporate actors largely negotiate the shape of the system within a state legislative apparatus, whilst individuals are positively motivated to participate in the new system, persuaded by more “money, authority, expertise and time” (Archer, 1982, 24).

Archer notes that “this second phase is predominantly the period of secondary expansion” (Ibid.). In the third Inflation Phase, the Mass State system emerges, but here individual actors are less motivated by gains, more motivated by the need to have such credentials: “completing a particular level is no longer done to secure any benefit, but is endured in order to avoid penalization” as “dispositions towards education shift from positive to negative” when credential inflation becomes evident (Ibid., 52). Archer’s complex interactions between corporate actors through “communicative transaction” is too detailed to summarize here (Ibid., see 43–48).

Archer does not engage explicitly with the North American theorists, but is particularly unimpressed by functionalist analyses that try to link expansion to “GNP, indices of modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and political
developments" which "tend to be weak, for they are necessarily enfeebled by the undulations intrinsic to both processes producing growth. In brief the neglect of mechanisms and processes must mark and mar the correlational approach" (Ibid., 15). From this starting point, Archer proposes a divergent hypothesis about these intrinsic mechanisms and their effects: that corporate competition at the Takeoff Phase can take the form of either substitution or restrictive approaches. A visual sketch is found in Figure 2.3.

Substitution is defined as an attempt at “devaluing the existing monopoly by competition on the educational market” (Ibid., 10) by building new schools and staffing them with new teachers. In contrast, restriction “involves using the legal machinery to deprive the ownership group of its educational facilities, through the appropriation of buildings, confiscation of educational funds and proscription of teachers” (Ibid., 10). Depending on the strategy that prevails, the composition of the state-led mass education in the latter growth phase differs: substitution leads to a plurality of schools that are later incorporated into a single system, whereas restriction gives way to development of a single system (and continued restriction of alternatives). It is clear that Archer is interested in describing both quantitative expansion and qualitative differences within those trajectories, spotlighting both conflict and dynamic interactions between structures and actors.

No chapters in this volume engage with Archer. The reasons for this are not clear, although perhaps it is the editors’ explicit focus on secondary education in the post-1945 era placed a discussion of the "pre-state system" too far back in the past. Another possibility is that East Asian countries had no viable corporate body that could compete or conflict with the modern state (i.e., nothing equivalent to the Church).

Green’s neo-Marxist state theory approach

Andy Green spends considerable time critiquing Archer, thus clearing space for his original contribution. Conceding that “Archer’s account provides the most powerful comparative framework that has yet been produced” (Green, 1990, 73),
he nevertheless calls is merely a “descriptive typology” that neglects the deeper social and economic structures that give rise to the conflicts Archer flags. More
directly, he points out that Archer’s account pays little attention to different types of states—there is “no comparative theory of the state”—which does not allow her to locate differences between groups or between specifically assertive groups and the rest within a particular class.

Largely against Archer’s account, Green formulates his own theory arguing that development and expansion of public education systems can only be understood as part of the state formation process. In his account, state formation refers to both the historical processes through which states were constructed and the ideologies and beliefs that underpinned them, such as nationhood and national “character” (Green, 1990, 77). Drawing heavily in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Green first explores “absolutist” Prussian and French states, followed by changes wrought by the French revolution, Napoleon, and the Bourbon Restoration. He then turns to examine the expansion of American education, focusing on the interaction of a decentralized state, civil society, and class conflict. Last, he explores the liberal state of England, asking why England could have been so late in developing a national system of education. He answers that “the liberal market order and the doctrine of the minimal government which shaped the relations between society and state ... was inimical to systematic educational development” (Ibid., 332).

Although Green does not offer a mono-causal explanation of development or an easily visualized typology of educational expansion, he does call attention to the historical factors and class makeup of particular societies that impact upon these processes. Given that state formation processes in East Asia varied widely, from an arguably absolutist Japanese state nominally modeled on Prussia, to colonial outposts of England in the city-states of Hong Kong and Singapore, to Japanese colonial state building in Korea and Taiwan, it is an open question how state formation, class conflict, and educational systems might vary accordingly in East Asia. The question remains open, despite this volume, as no authors offer an elaborated theory of the state and none engage explicitly with Green’s account. As mentioned earlier, the appeal of Marxism has apparently faded and discussions of social class, inequalities, and power have migrated from the wider political-economic arena to a more narrow focus on the public/private balance.

**Ronald Dore’s theory of credential inflation**

Archer’s discussions of a final Inflation Stage in educational expansion is, in some senses, elaborated more fully in the work of Ronald Dore (although Dore’s work predates Archer). Dore contends provocatively that educational expansion, in an era when education certification served as qualifications on the labor market, reduced education to a ritual of earning qualifications. Yet, given that these qualifications were a relational good, increased competition led only to increased expansion but without any qualitative gains in education (in the sense of learning). There are many similarities here with Collins’ status-competition theory, but Dore arguably emerges as more pessimistic. He highlights the educated unemployment and deteriorating educational quality that results from the education-qualification-occupational linkage: “the so-called educated unemployed have not, in fact, been educated. Nor indeed have the educated unemployed. They have certainly been schooled but they are victims of a system of schooling without education” (Dore, 1976, 7).

Unlike Green and Archer whose analytical gaze remains confined within Europe and North America, Dore elaborated empirically by drawing on the cases of England, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Kenya. He sought to show that the “later” a country developed, the more intense the diploma disease: the more widespread educational certificates were used in selection for jobs, the faster the rate qualifications inflated, and the more the education system came to be focused on the exams, gateways to the coveted credential and thus employment. Dore clearly opposed functionalist perspectives, suggesting that the drive for “education” was in the competition for jobs in which tests and certificates were a proxy war. He was not Marxist, but Dore still believed that this system served political and economic elites well, serving to deliver them the most intelligent and persistent, while legitimating the exclusion of the rest. Of note is Dore’s reflections on Japan, whose systemic expansion and Exam Hell of the 1980s seemed to be a precursor to similar processes across East Asia:

> It works; provided one thinks of it as an enormously elaborated, very expensive intelligence testing system with some educational spin-off, rather than the other way around ... one suspects that Japan’s more conservative leaders, though they are prepared to shake their heads over the system with those who deplore it, are secretly well satisfied. The examination hell sorts the sheep from the goats; a man who can’t take psychological strain would be no use anyways.

(Ibid., 50)

It is unclear whether Dore’s description still applies to Japan (for a critique, see Rappleye and Komatsu, 2018). Nor is it clear whether the rest of East Asia confirms Dore’s hypothesis, particularly where expansion arrived rather “late.” Overall Dore provides only a weak, under-elaborated theory of expansion, often suggesting that what drove expansion was the “rush to get degrees” (1976, 47). Yet, this only leaves the supply-side question completely underdeveloped. As such, his is more of a conceptual schema of what occurred and a description of the effects, somewhat like Archer, where the deeper drivers of expansion are not deeply discussed. Perhaps this is one reason, alongside Dore’s pessimism that most of the times seems overstated, why so few authors in this volume engage his work. The exception is the account of Taiwan (Chapter 9) where Liu argues: “status competition leads to diploma disease as qualifications become disconnected with returns on the labor market.” But perhaps Dore is also missing given that few chapters extend the discussion of expansion to some of its more unintended and negative outcomes.
Theories of public/private balance

Theories about what drives educational expansion reviewed above have considerable overlap with sociological theories about the shifting balance of public and private within those systems over time. Below is a brief review with a focus on this dimension.

Structural-functionalism

As a mass education system approaches universal secondary enrollment, there occurs a natural diversification of the system. This diversification may take the form of differentiation within the public system or differentiation through privatization of some aspects of the system. The deepest driver of this change is diversification of the labor market and occupational structures of a given society. Put simply, a centrally directed, uniform system of public education cannot easily keep pace with the complexity of society. This forces education systems, first at the secondary, then at the tertiary level, to diversify and produce graduates with different competencies, stocks of knowledge, and occupational pathways. Shift towards educational privatization is an inevitable and logical strategy so that evolving labor market and occupational needs are more directly reflected in educational provision. Such is the perspective of structural-functionalism.

One interesting dynamic in this process is flagged by Trow (1961). Trow highlights that as functional requirements of the economy—"immense growth in demand for more highly trained and educated people of all kinds" (154)—pushed the American system towards rapid expansion of college enrollment, the secondary system was transformed into a "mass preparatory system" (154). Yet, this transition entailed the "transformation of a huge existing institutional complex," i.e., remaking the existing secondary system originally built as a terminal system. This is no easy task. Trow argues that it is "almost always easier to create new institutions to perform a new function than it is to transform existing institutions to meet new functions" (154). Through this functionalist lens, the shift to private provision of secondary education can be seen as an inevitable response to the difficulties of "transforming" the existing secondary system. Following this logic, policy preferences shift to private provision at the universal stage because of the immense difficulties they face in remaking the system: it is easier politically to create new institutions that might pressure existing institutions to change. Still, the ultimate driver of this shift lies in the functional needs of the society; the shift to private provision is only a strategy of "least resistance" to achieve this.

Marxist

Unsurprisingly, Marxist-inspired accounts would view the shift to private provision in a different way. Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives would highlight how once mass schooling was firmly embedded in a particular society through government intervention (i.e., expansion had been achieved), the government can then pull back from public provision, shifting the financial burden of obtaining education to private resources (e.g., households). Since Marxist accounts hold that schooling is only important insofar as it serves the needs of those in power, the shift away from public provision of mass education must be read as a retreat to maintaining privilege for the wealthy. To support their case, Marxist-inspired accounts would suggest that, at least in Western countries, this link between the needs of those in power (wealthy) and the public/private balance is abundantly clear. As Green (1990) has shown, campaigns for national education failed in England because of the "traditional liberal hostility towards the state ... its origins lay in the nature of gentry capitalism and its corresponding state forms as they emerged after 1688 and its persistence into the nineteenth century" (262). In other words, the preference for private provision in some systems carried through from an earlier, premodern period. In East Asia specifically, this historical evolution is arguably less strong, but still shows up in enclaves of private provision tied intimately to the legacy of Western colonization (e.g., elite schools in Hong Kong and Singapore; missionary schools in multiple countries).

More immediately, Marxist accounts would point out that the shift to private provision in secondary and higher education has only come recently: the shift to a neo-liberal state from the 1980s onward. They hold that faced with budget deficits induced by the oil shocks of the 1970s, policymakers representing the needs of the privileged opted for privatization, thus allowing them to continue providing for the demands of the capitalist labor market, but avoid redistribution through taxation and expansion of public provision. Marxist critiques hold that had the neo-liberal policymaking turn not occurred, it would have forced governments to increase public outlays to education and clarify public spending priorities.

Nonetheless, it is not clear how much this Marxist account fits countries in East Asia, particularly because (i) the definitions of public and private differ from ordinary Western usage (see Chapter 1) and (ii) not all systems pursued privatization. Timing is critical in this account: How much does the shift from public to private coincide with the emergence of new political configurations that represent the preferences of the wealthy? The viability of the Marxist account arguably stands or falls on this point.

Status-competition

A status-competition account shifts the focus to the upsurge in demand that potentially alters the public/private balance. As competition for educational credentials (that bestow status and privilege on the labor market) accelerates, competition spills outward and upward: expanding the system towards full enrollment as all participants seek to gain this advantage and pushing the system progressively upward as participants pursue superior credentials (i.e., a longer number of years in school). In this context, policymakers are faced with providing for a system that is continually growing, inevitably straining dwindling
public budgets. Policymakers have little choice but to shift the balance from public to private provision to meet these demands. Shifting to private provision has the added advantage of allowing those who seek extra advantages in competition to enroll their children in private providers (provided they have the resources to do so).

World culture

World culture accounts for a difficult time explaining a shift in the public/private balance. Arising in the late 1970s, to explain the rise of modern mass education systems, world culture theory is more interested in confirming the emergence of a similar "cultural script" across nations, rather than explaining changes in that script. It cannot explain, for example, why an increasing number of countries around the world have, since the 1970-1980s, shifted the balance in public/private provision of education, except to say that this confirms the overall belief in education itself. Conceivably, world culture theorists might argue that a universal cultural script has become so powerful among national populations that governments are forced to respond. Yet, facing budgetary shortfalls they must opt for private provision to meet the demand. From this angle, world culture is quite close to status-competition theory, but emphasizes that demand arises from enactment of a global script, rather than status-competition within a given national society. Perhaps the best evidence that world culture theory cannot explain a shifting public/private balance in education, either globally or nationally, is that in three decades since privatization policies first emerged in the United Kingdom and spread globally, world culture writers have yet to publish a single article attempting to explain this phenomenon (see Silova and Brehm, 2015 for a critique).

Where to locate Archer, Green, and Dore?

The discussion above has not detailed Archer, Green, or Dore's potential views on a shifting public/private balance. The major reason is that none of these authors deal deeply with the dynamics of the public/private shift. For example, Archer would be prone to show this shift as not driven by anyone or even intentional:

...the growth of the educational system is what nobody wanted. It is the irrational and unintended consequence of a parallelogram of forces (the polity, the profession, external interest groups, and parents) with different interest and divergent values. The growth displays regularities but does not embody logic.

(Archer, 1982, 58)

For his part, Green is likely to see the shift as a British, liberal state model "gone global," as hinted at above. Yet if we accept this line, it still requires us to understand why countries without a liberal state would so readily adopt a liberal ideology. Last, Ronald Dore does discuss how the size and prestige of the public sector is closely linked to how "early" a country developed a mass education system. The larger and more prestigious the public system (in other words, the earlier its development) the more it is likely to resist the shift to credential inflation. Yet, Dore does not tell us much about government's willingness to dismantle or supplement the public system with private provision, although we can well imagine it is for reasons very similar to those outlined by status-competition theory: the linking of formal educational credentials to prospects for work leads to credential inflation, thus requiring greater and greater expansion, then budget shortfalls and privatization. But such a logical chain is not found explicitly in Dore, most probably because he wrote in the 1970s, when mass education systems, particularly at the lower levels, were still largely public in character.

In the empirical chapters that follow, most authors initially lean towards a structural-functionalism explanation. Across the diverse contexts of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, and Singapore, we see policymakers attempting to actively adjust the overall ratio of academic to vocational schools at some point in the expansion process. Several chapters explicitly point out the industry-bureaucracy linkages driving this intervention-turned-diversification (in particular, see the discussion of Korea’s 1990 Industrial Labor Supply Measure and Singapore’s Vocational and Industrial Training Board established in 1979). Notably, these are not read through Marxist lens as a distortion of preexisting aims of education. Nonetheless, several chapters also go on to complicate the picture: pointing out that despite government policy goals, the goal of increasing vocational training failed. In the case of Japan, Kagawa states that "high school expansion cannot be fully explained by whatever theories the national policy is based on, be it the economics of education or human capital theory, and it needs to be explained by some other means." Indeed, the picture that emerges in relation to (a) what drove shifts in the public/private balance, and (b) how this relates to the overall academic/vocational ratio is far from straightforward. In the volume’s final concluding chapter, we return to attempt to sort out the theoretical resonances.

Possibilities for an original theoretical contribution?

In each of the theories reviewed above, the presumption is that the explanatory potential of each model is widely generalizable across geographical space. That is, what applies in the West, also applies to the rest. In the case of theories originating in England, this assumption is more implicit; embedded in the notion of a finite number of ideal-type modern state formations (Green) or in similar constellations of actors, interactions, and ideal-type patterns of expansion over time (Archer). In theories originating in North America, the universality assumption is more often explicit. Structural-functionalist and Marxist theories confidently suppose that any society touched by either technology or capitalism, respectively, will evolve similar educational forms. Status-competition theory, although
somewhat more sensitive to historical specificity and the legacy of pre-modern patterns, still asserts educational expansion globally can be explained by a never-ending, inflationary cycle in credentials and certification (Collins). Yet, by far the most explicit reach for universality is made in world culture theory with its confident proclamation of a consensual, global enactment of the same cultural script which drives convergence and continued expansion of educational systems worldwide.

The reasons behind the assumption of generalizability are not altogether clear. One possible reason is similarities in outer forms. Mainstream studies were developed from a combination of historical experiences of Western countries (France, UK, America, Germany), the geographical origins of educational modernity. When such similarities in outer forms are witnessed in the non-West, the assumption is that the mechanisms and meanings underneath these forms must also be the same. A second possibility is that the theorists reviewed above have simply borrowed the assumption of global generalizability from the “founding fathers” of Western social theory—Marx, Weber, Spencer, and Durkheim among others—who assumed that the pattern of Western civilization was, indeed, the ideal-type standard by which all other modern trajectories could be judged (Connell, 2007). Whatever the reasons, contemporary theories, like their classical predecessors, have been either lazy, overly confident, or blind to realities beyond the European and American historical experience. Rather than investigate underlying mechanisms, they have been all too ready to simply avoid the trouble of engagement with difference by unthinkingly transferring explanatory models to non-Western contexts.

Unfortunately, implicit in such a move is a foreclosing of any possibility for making an original theoretical contribution; one smelted from different historical and social patterns in non-Western countries. At the same time—and more insidiously—unthinking theoretical transference entails an active erasure of the historical specificity of the non-Western experience. In world culture theory, as one example, the whole legacy of Western colonization is expunged from the analytical frame in order to consolidate a consensual cultural argument that can “fit” the model of mass educational expansion found in Western countries (Rappleye, 2015).

Indeed, among myriad specificities of the non-Western experience of modernity and education, the colonial legacy is paramount. Not only was colonialism the chief driver of the formation of modern nation-states, it was also the starting point for modern educational forms in the image of the West. Of course, colonialism was not a unitary phenomenon, unfolding very differently according to the colonizing Western power (UK, USA, France, Spain), region, historical epoch, and response of the-to-be-colonized (i.e., war and subjugation in China versus surface acceptance and acquiescence in Japan). Yet, notwithstanding variation, Western colonization was nonetheless a chief point of divergence between the modernity experience of the West and non-Western world.

For the West, modernity arose over a span of 500 years from fundamental changes within thought, society, and economy. For the non-West, modernity arrived as a “package” of institutions, ideas, and models, wheeled down in an instant from the galleys of Western missionary vessels, merchant ships, and gunboats. In the case of East Asia alone, only two countries (Japan and Thailand) avoided full-blown colonization (as in Vietnam, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, or semi-colonial status (China). This means, in effect, that the apparatus of state, class composition, cultural scripts, and economic configurations were subject to a different logic from the evolutionary trajectory of the West. Rupture, not evolution.

What are the implications of this fundamental rupture for educational form? What were the consequences for later patterns of educational expansion? None of the existing theories emanating from scholars situated in the West have attempted to answer these questions, nor could they: the assumptive transfer of mechanisms to the non-West serves to erases the very differences that would underpin new theoretical constructs.

A possible alternative? Koto Yusuke’s externally driven modernization thesis

By contrast, Japanese sociologist Koto Yusuke (2006) proposes situating these differences at the very center of sociological analysis. His vision draws a clear line between “internally evolving” and “externally driven” cases of modernity. These different ideal-type models of modernity become, in turn, the basis for enduring cultural patterns that also shape a later phases of high modernity, late-modernity, and “globalization.” Although Koto does not draw explicit links to education, his vision does imply clear differences in how modern education and its expansion took off in the non-Western world.

Internally evolving modernity

Koto’s account begins with a brief review of modernity in the Western historical-cum-theoretical account. Here is less an original contribution, more of a synthesis of existing Western theory. Like Marxist accounts, Koto pays particular attention to class differences and conflicts, locating the driver of modernity in the rise of the capitalist middle classes (bourgeois), yet he also shows sensitivity to the ways that change unfolds over time. That is, Koto divides modernity’s evolution in the West into three phases, as shown in Figure 2.4.

Phase I signifies the strengthening impact of “modernization” on the middle classes in an existing premodern society. This is driven by changes in the nature of production, technological advance, and the additional resources this generates. Phase II is the Revolutionary Stage of Modern Society, marked by a divergence, then standoff between the modern middle classes, on one side, and elites and traditional laborers, on the other.

Phase III is Modern Society Embedded with Duality. Here a society moving towards modernity is split along an axis of modernism/traditionalism. On the side of traditionalism, the “discovery of tradition” attempts to neutralize the
Figure 2.4 Three phases of modernity's evolution.

Koto emphasizes that in a "save costs of control" and "attempt to create control" society, modernization is often a response from the bottom up, driven by the need for self-protection. In the case of externally driven modernization, the impact and push for innovation comes from the outside, often through military force or colonization, as seen in the Black Ship scenario in the case of Japan and China. The demands were not on the local elite, but on the native society, with the potential for resistance and conflict. This leads to the idea of "signaling" or "choreography of colonialism" where treaties and agreements are used to control or influence the native society.

In contrast, internally induced modernity is driven by the internal desire for change, often through the desire to modernize and compete with other modern societies. This can lead to a more chaotic and unstable period as the native society is forced to adapt to the new modern standards. The hybrid modern society, a blend of both externally and internally driven modernity, faces the challenge of integrating these two different approaches, often leading to conflict and resistance.

Archer's work on the transition to modernity also highlights the importance of understanding how different social and cultural factors contribute to the development of new forms of society. The "modernity" of a group or society is not simply a linear progression, but rather a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political forces. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analyzing the evolution of modernity and its impact on different societies.
but it is also arguably far more than that: it is about how the arrival of modernity reconfigured existing relations of power, knowledge, and culture throughout the modern era.

Phase II emerges when pre-modern elites begin to “modernize” (read: Westernize), creating divergence and an axis of conflict with the “native” society below. Koto posits that after a long period of “repeated attempts to resist” the new order, the native elites “ultimately realize that the only means to survival is to actively push forward modernization. Thus, they become the active bearers of modernity” (172). That is, facing an existential threat from Western powers if they could not deliver the image, if not the fruits of modernity, but yet hemmed in by existing structures, culture, and thought in the “native” base, these non-Western elites had to embark on ambitious projects to “modernize” the base to avoid the clear contradiction of their position. Koto thus terms this period the “Acceptance and Resistance Period of Modernity”—elites accepting and the native base resisting. Koto remarks on Japan that from this angle it is certainly no coincidence that photos of the Meiji Emperors dressed in Western dress and atop a horse looked so much like the German Emperor. In fact, all of the Emperors of the modern era—Meiji, Taisho, Showa, Heisei—all belonged to this Westernized group.

Koto’s point is less the Emperors themselves, more the idea that the upper elite strata all had to take on and roll out Western forms and this dynamic took on a historical inertia that far outlived the initial colonial moment in which it arose. It became, in effect, an enduring aspect of culture. One way to think about this theoretically is through similarities with historical institutionalism, but not one carrying forward tradition, but instead one enshrining Western form as a cultural legacy of a conflict-ridden political imposition. Here Western cultural form is indivisible from modernity itself.

In Phase III, this axis of conflict between modernizing (Westernizing) elites and the native base subsides. Instead, the focus becomes a double movement. First there is the gradual immigration from the “native” social formations for the new modern social structures set up by modernizing elites. Unlike in internally evolving modernity where political-cum-social structures lag behind cultural change, here political-cum-social structures exist in advance of cultural change. This is highly significant for education and educational expansion, as we examine below. The key question here is why would the native base make this transition. Koto answers:

The masses start to believe that modernity can make their own personal lives richer and start to accept modernity. The trigger for this “transition” at the level of the native base are the fruits of “success” demonstrated by the elites or from the elites drumming up of the “myth” of this success.

Here we see both a resource allocation argument—that modern structures can make those inside of it “richer”—and a cultural-control argument—that elites can either display or dramatize success. Koto writes that as masses come to feel the appeal of this “effect” of modernity, they are willing to walk away from the familiar base and move to the side of modernity.

Koto pays particular attention to the cultural dynamics of Phase III, centered on the term “Fuzokuza” (風俗化) which might be translated into English as “Becoming and Vulgarization.” The term encapsulates both the creation of “customs and manners” (fū) by the modernizing elites and the “study, imitation, and vulgarity” (soku) by the native base. The resulting society is one Koto calls “A Layered Modern-Native Society.” For the elites, modernity entailed not simply imitation, but almost becoming Western modernity: “Native elites could not stop at simple imitation. They had to become modernity, digesting it to become translators of culture” (174). In contrast, for the increasing number of non-elites who aspired to this “becoming,” they had to study this, attempting to replicate the cultural tradition passed down by the translating elites. Yet, without access to the original traditions—either because of language, travel, or chance—their studies inevitably “vulgarized” the “becoming” of elites. Elite translations of Western-modern form held the memorizing aura of elites and the resources it entailed, but it would always be a vulgarization. Cultural change was, in this sense, both bottom-up and top-down, whilst the resulting form was some combination of mixing between the premodern native base and the vulgarized modern cultural aspirations—with Koto employing the term “pastiche” with all its implications of borrowing and incongruity.

This brief description above must inevitably cut corners, leaving out various aspects of Koto’s conceptualization. Left out here, for example, are divergences in the case of fully colonized societies (e.g., Hong Kong, Singapore) and attention to the way that class mobility was initially almost nonexistent in the case of externally driven modernity, despite the rhetoric to the contrary. But the point here is to think through what implications this alternative theory might have for understandings of educational expansion. When the evolutionary basis of Western social theory is replaced with rupture of the East Asian experiences do new perspectives on secondary expansion open up?

Two possibilities immediately come to mind. First, when the drivers of modernity are located externally, the connections to industry and technological change and private bourgeois interests become secondary to a cultural process of constructing the modern state (i.e., nation-building). Expansion of the system runs out ahead of the needs outlined by structural-functionalists or private interests spotlighted by Marxists. Markets do not govern policies, but instead policymakers “govern markets” (Wade, 1990) in light of the larger cultural project. Although this might sound like world culture theory, the allegiance is not to the Western cultural script but instead the continuation (read: survival) of pre-modern/Western worldviews and, in some instances, power relations. As Green (1997) notes “state formation in at least three of the East Asian states has involved an effort of nation-building prompted by nothing less than the need for
national survival" (45), continuing "in each of these [East Asian] countries it would seem that the primary motivation behind educational development lies in the drive towards achieving national identity and cohesion" (50), whereupon he goes on to cite policies in South Korea and Taiwan as representative examples.

Second, the perspective of externally driven modernity gives rise to a second-order observation: How are empirical realities of expansion being understood theoretically? Given that elites in externally driven societies "had to become modernity, digesting it to become translators of culture" (Ibid, 174), it means that scholars of education have and continue to capture empirical realities in East Asia through Western/modern cultural forms, i.e., sociological theory. In other words, what was driving the expansion of education was the very portrayals of education scholars and other similar elites. In the case of Japan, for example, the rather consensual alliance of industrial leaders, teachers' unions, and policymakers for expanding "High School for All Those Who Desire It" (see Chapter 4) certainly bespeaks a common way of viewing empirical realities (second-order), rather than a "parallegorm of forces" as described by Archer, "with different interest and divergent values." In a different piece, I have elaborated how elites, including educational scholars, contribute to policy change by becoming "translators of (Western) culture" (Rappleye, 2018).

Conclusion

In providing a preliminary roadmap to existing theories of educational expansion, what becomes clear is that there has been a rich, sustained intellectual discussion on what is driving expansion and what happens to the public/private balance at the latter stages of this process. What is also clear is that existing theory has not, to date, deeply engaged "Asian education." In what ways do different economic, historical, cultural, and institutional arrangements in the region reflect themselves in the dynamics of educational expansion? In the chapters that follow, we have the opportunity to look closely at this question. We also have the chance to understand how each of the authors has met the challenge of working with theory: Have they merely used the theories to make sense of the empirical data they have collected? Or have they highlighted anomalies in the data to push for epistemic challenge? The latter stance is the more laborious, difficult work. But it is, at the same time, the only way that "Asian education" will become known in the West, as well as have any serious impact on a larger global conversation.

References


3 Upper secondary education in Asia

A quantitative comparison with Western countries

Hirofumi Taki

Introduction

Given the results of several large-scale international assessments, the academic excellence of students in Asian societies has become widely acknowledged. However, although the high academic performance of those societies has inevitably caught worldwide attention, it has been mostly interpreted as a peculiar cultural tradition such as Confucianism, which attaches great importance to education. This type of cultural reductionism tends to become tautological since it describes nothing more than high-achieving countries' ingrained cultures that produce high academic performance. Only a few exceptional studies based on detailed field research succeeded in capturing the characteristics of education in Asian countries (e.g., Cummings, 1980; Rohlen, 1983). Yet these were rather more descriptive than explanatory, and were primarily intended to introduce conditions in Asia to Western audiences. Thus, we are still unsure about the distinctive characteristics of Asian education as contrasted with the West, and thus at a loss to understand the potential contributions to general theories in sociology of education.

Recently, comparative studies in the field of sociology of education in Western societies have been changing, especially since 2000. This change is being partly induced by the implementation of periodic large-scale international comparative surveys on academic performance, but it also relates to the global trend of the international evaluation framework such as the Bologna process in Europe. Articles utilizing these international assessment data are on the rise, focusing not only on international rankings of academic performance, but also on the detailed institutional settings of the countries. Studies focusing on institutional differences are usually preferable to cultural reductionism because they are measurable to some extent and thus falsifiable. Moreover, taking into account institutional contexts makes it possible to understand actors' choices in given circumstances based on more rational grounds.

However, even though many Asian societies are participating and topping these international assessments, the number of studies focusing on Asian countries that concentrates on these institutional settings is still relatively few. In some studies, Asian countries are even excluded as the "exception." Although