

## **CHANGING GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH KOREAN HIGHER EDUCATION : EXPLORING SOME IMPACTS**

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### **Introduction**

Higher education systems are in a state of flux everywhere. In particular, the changes in the socio-economic contexts resulted from the globalized economy have inevitably led to changes to the university sector.<sup>[1]</sup> For the last decade, changing governance in higher education reform through innovation at the university level has been a major concern of the South Korean government. The low level of academic competence of Korean universities assessed by international standards drew intense attention from the government and hence the South Korean government has come to direct its efforts to university level innovation.<sup>[2]</sup> The primary motivation for university innovation is establishing an underpinning for the 'knowledge economy'. A knowledge economy produced by high quality human resources is a crucial means of economic growth, and South Korea has been trying to transform its universities into 'world-class' ones.<sup>[3]</sup> The rise of the knowledge economy has generated new global infrastructures that information technology has played an increasingly important role in the global economy, the popularity and prominence of information technology has unquestionably changed the nature of knowledge, and is currently restructuring higher education, research, and learning.<sup>[4]</sup>

Education reform and *governance change* being launched in South Korea have touched upon not only the design of the curriculum but also management and governance of universities.<sup>[5]</sup> 'Altbach insists that universities cannot be bought 'off the shelf,' and it takes time and thorough thinking. In particular, Altbach suggests that Asian countries should keep a fine balance of institutional autonomy and a sense of public interest in the processes of university innovation'.<sup>[6]</sup> However, a number of Asian countries have already made impressive initial progress. For instance, the 'Brain Korea 21' (BK21) project of South Korea is designed to enhance the academic competence of universities in South Korea. It is a project geared toward providing funds to higher education institutions for restructuring the overall education system to meet the challenges of the new era.<sup>[7]</sup> This is an unprecedented policy in terms of its scale and planning, ambitious in its attempt to reform and develop Korean higher education.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **Governance and higher education**

Due to different pressures from globalization, knowledge-based economy, information society, technological change, population pressure, the retreat of government from its conventional role of *controller towards facilitator* has been prominent. Governance focuses on the interdependence of governmental and non-governmental forces in meeting economic and social challenges. It is thus about relationships between the state and civil society, rulers and ruled, government and the governed.<sup>[9]</sup> Governance, a process of coordinating of public and private interests, is about the capacity to get things done in the face of complexity, conflict and social change,<sup>[10]</sup> so governance goes beyond the government. It is now an established argument within political science that we live within a pattern of governance than government.<sup>[11]</sup> Government is used to refer to the formal institutional structure and location of authoritative decision-making in the modern state.<sup>[12]</sup> It also embraces the legislative and executive branches of the state apparatus and those who control them.<sup>[13]</sup>

South Korea has started a series of higher education reforms in order to improve its global competence. Realizing the old education governance model inappropriate in the global policy context, the government has started to review its education system and comprehensive reform strategies have been adopted since 1993 to make its education systems more responsive to changing social and economic environment.<sup>[14]</sup> The colleges and universities offer four-year undergraduate programs and bachelor's degrees while in medicine, oriental medicine, and dentistry, however, offer six-year programs. Most higher education institutions allow a maximum of 24 credits to be earned in a semester, and a minimum of 140 credits are required for graduation from undergraduate. Each university has its own academic regulations for the completion of each credit. The curriculum is composed of general and professional courses and each is again divided into compulsory and elective courses.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Internal governance within university**

Internal governance within the university is generally composed of three levels (Figure 1.2). In this type of governance structure the faculty has had a powerful

role in the administration of the national higher education institutions. More recently however, the emergence of collective student and staff entities such as student council or staff union has challenged faculty power. However, the private universities have a similar, three-level organization of governance.<sup>[16]</sup> The government in Korea has always declared its support for the autonomy of private higher education. The government outwardly claims to stand for autonomous decision making by each institution on the adoption of the new division system, creating new professional schools, and so on. But, in practice, no institution has resisted such steps. The private institutions in Korea in their long history have grown so accustomed to accepting government suggestions as a way of protecting themselves from any potential unfair treatment from government. Such a pretense of autonomous uniform policy among private institutions extends throughout all parts of institutional management such as tuition policy, faculty recruitment, admissions, curriculum development, and internal governance. The authentic restructuring of private colleges and universities requires authentic autonomy of higher education institutions.<sup>[17]</sup>

### **Funding and provision**

Government expenditure on education has been generous after the economical successes of the 1970s. In 1975 the allocation for education was W220 billion, the equivalent of 2.2 percent of the gross national product, or 13.9 percent of total government expenditure. By 1986, education expenditure had reached won 3.76 trillion, or 4.5 percent of the GNP, and 27.3 percent of government budget allocations. Still, most private universities (80% of all Korean universities are private) are basically self-supporting, and have to charge quite expensive tuition fees.<sup>[18]</sup> Private institution and public institution received 80% budget and about 45% respectively from the student tuition and fees. The government regulates the institutions by financial aid system, which is a regulatory tool. The government provides the aids to the universities and colleges on the basis of their performance since 1990.

### **A retrospection**

South Korea, with a population of about 50 million and almost hundred percent literacy rate, has undergone tremendous political, economic, and social changes over the past hundred years. Colonial authorities (1990-1945) forcibly closed more than half of the pre-colonial schools and the rest were [more] reserved for the Japanese. When United States military forces occupied the southern half of the Korean Peninsula in 1945, they established an education system based on the American model. The government of Syngman Rhee, the first president, reversed many of these reforms after 1948. Militarization of education followed colonial patterns for all students beginning from the secondary school level, military training was obligatory. During the years when Park Chung Hee and his successors were in power, the control of education was gradually taken out of the hands of local school boards and concentrated in a centralized Ministry of Education (MOE, thereafter). A democratic election held in December 1997 resulted in a transfer of political power, giving rise to a "government of the people". In 1998, 50 years after its independence, Korea witnessed a landmark shift in politics, particularly transition of political power to the opposition party for the first time.<sup>[19]</sup>

### **Pattern of government control on higher education**

Education policy and development under a strong state like South Korea has long been significantly shaped by the state through its executive arm, the MOE. Before the government initiatives reform in higher education systems in the mid-1990s, the high education sector in South Korea had been strictly regulated and governed by the MOE.<sup>[20]</sup> There has been two major channels of government control of higher education institutions, legislative and administrative (Figure 1.3). Major policies on higher education in Korea are determined by government authorities through salutatory provisions, particularly laws and presidential decrees.<sup>[21]</sup> The followings are approved by the government authorities according to the Presidential decree. (i) Establishment of higher education

institution; (ii) institutional regulations; (iii) Faculty personnel; (iv) students; (v) programmes and academic standards; (vi) financing, budgeting and facilities; and (vii) Reporting and auditing. The government has tightly regulated many aspects of higher educational management.<sup>[22]</sup> Long been organized and operated with rigid restrictions and uniform control, there is no denying that education systems in South Korea have not been able to respond to the changing socio-economic and social-political contexts. With power being centralized in the hand of the MOE, local initiatives and autonomy have been deprived, while individual institutions have lacked the enthusiasm for a creative and rational approach to their operation.<sup>[23]</sup>

### **Changing pattern of governance in higher education**

In March 1985, the establishment of the Presidential Commission on Education Reform (PCER) under direct supervision of the president has begun the reform process in higher education governance.<sup>[24]</sup> Corresponding to the latest challenges posted by either globalization or knowledge based economy; the governments of the selected East Asian societies like Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Main Land China have conducted reviews of their higher education systems to make its higher education more responsive to the changing socio-economic environments in the global economy context.<sup>[25]</sup> The Korean government proposed a 'shift from a materials-oriented manufacturing economy to a knowledge-based economy' as one of its 'six major policy goals' in 1998. The MOE formulated a five-year plan for educational development in March 1999 to prepare for a knowledge-based society and is currently gathering opinions from diverse social sectors.<sup>[26]</sup> In line with the Constitution and the Fundamental Law of Education, which designates the promotion of lifelong education as one of the nation's responsibilities, the government revised the existing Continuing Education Law entirely and announced the Lifelong Education Law aimed at realizing an open education and a lifelong learning society. The closed system of social education that privileged the suppliers of education is to be transformed into an open system of lifelong education centering on the consumers.<sup>[27]</sup> In 1999, the government legalized teachers' unions to

improve the working conditions and welfare of teachers while increasing teacher participation in the education reform process. Above all, the government aimed to enhance the functional diversification and specialization, operational autonomy in student quotas, academic affairs, and accountability as well.

Acknowledging the important role of higher education in the increasingly globalized economy and the significance to make its higher education system more creative and adaptive to rapid socio-economic changes, the government has decided to allocate more public fund to finance higher education in recent years.<sup>[28]</sup> As such, the number of higher educational institutions continued to grow in an unprecedented pace (Figure 1.4).

### **Brain Korea 21: a breakthrough in governance change**

The "Brain Korea 21" (BK21) is a major higher education reform aiming at cultivating creative and high quality human resources necessary for the [forthcoming] knowledge-based society. The major objectives of the BK 21 are to: foster world-class research universities which function as infrastructure in producing primary knowledge and technology, and promoting specialization of local universities; introducing professional graduate schools to cultivate professionals in various fields; and transform the higher education system to facilitate competitive growth among universities based on the quality of their students and academic productivities. To accomplish these aims, the government decided to invest W1.4 trillion in universities over seven years.<sup>[29]</sup> Three-quarters of the budget for investing to support graduate schools in certain fields in the natural and applied sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Selected graduate schools and universities will be developed into leading world-class universities; the remaining institutions will become regional universities that will create the human resources required by local industries.<sup>[30]</sup> The graduate students in the selected graduate schools are the direct beneficiaries of the project. Research funds do not go directly to professors in the form of grants and a large part of the budget is used to provide a supportive educational environment for graduate

students in the form of stipends, financial support for overseas study, and research infrastructure.<sup>[31]</sup>

### **Financial allocation**

BK21, with a total projected budget of \$1.2 billion for a period of 1999-2005, is made up of three major parts. Part I is to upgrade graduate education to attain excellence in teaching and to remote local universities. It focuses on three specific areas: science & technology, humanities and social science, and local universities. A total of \$170 million for investing annually for this purpose. Part II is to enhance the research capability of graduate schools, with a total budget of \$41 million to be invested. Part III is to build infrastructure for academic research and is to provide financial support to all academic areas, with a particular emphasis on basic disciplines. A total fund of \$42 million is reserved for this purpose. Funding for each task area is provided through a rigorous evaluation process of the applications submitted by universities and colleges. In order to match government's funds, every unit of BK21 projects at the selected university is expected to raise funds from research foundations, industries, and other private sectors.<sup>[32]</sup>

### **Credit Bank System**

In response to the call for 'lifelong learning' government adopted a measure to diversify the provision of higher education by introducing credit bank system (CBS).<sup>[33]</sup> Educational welfare guarantees the right to lifelong learning, the expansion of the country's education as well. The CBS aims to provide all citizens (who are studying at post-secondary institutions and adults seeking additional education and training) with access to a variety of educational opportunities and to foster a lifelong learning society.<sup>[34]</sup> Previously, the value and authority of non-formal higher education was underestimated i.e. were not given credit which created excessive competition among students. The introduction of the CBS was proposed by the PCER as a concrete way of developing an open and lifelong learning society. The CBS gained government endorsement taking the form of a legal act, which was passed on January 13,

1997. Between May and December 1997, the accreditation system and standardized curriculum were developed.<sup>[35]</sup>

### **Marketization and privatization**

Higher education developments in these East Asian societies have been affected by the strong tide of marketization and privatization.<sup>[36]</sup> In order to make the delivery of higher education more efficient and effective, there has been an increasingly popular trend of marketization and privatization in the higher education sector in the region.<sup>[37]</sup> It is clear that private institution is a main form of higher education in contemporary Korea. This reveals that expansion in Korean higher education was mainly driven by rapid increase in private institutions for both junior college and university.<sup>[38]</sup> Today higher education is a market and it's a global market. By learning to trade means that one must manage the global market in higher education in a way that is faithful to the long academic traditions and values of universities and helpful to students themselves.<sup>[39]</sup>

### **Decentralization**

Today, the MOE has begun decentralizing by delegating some administrative functions and powers to the KCUE and the individual universities<sup>[40]</sup> (Figure 2.1). Realizing the state has imposed too stringent control and regulation over the university sector in the past few decades, the government has begun to implement the policy of decentralization to allow individual universities to have more flexibility and autonomy to run their business.<sup>[41]</sup> In the recent years, the Korean government has been focusing on building an institutional base that enhances each university's autonomy. Power is particularly decentralized to individual universities in areas like the size of student enrolment and management of student affairs. In order to encourage diversification and specialization of universities, the government has played a supervisory role to assess performance of university instead of imposing too strict control over university governance.<sup>[42]</sup>



### **Globalization**

The tide of globalization has influenced educational governance everywhere and South Africa is not an exception. Korea joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as its 29<sup>th</sup> member nation in December 1996. Korea has actively participated in the educational programs organized by international organizations such as the APEC Education Forum, OECD Education Committee and CERl, and UNESCO.<sup>[43]</sup> For the APEC Education Forum, Korea has participated in all of its regular conferences held twice a year since 1992. In June of 1994, the Korean MOE hosted the 4th APEC Education Forum conference in Seoul. In the 4th meeting, Korea proposed a national project "Exchange Programme of Educational Officials" which was then accepted. In the 5th meeting in Beijing, Korea proposed another national project, "Utilisation of a Computer Network System for School Education," and received an APEC central fund. Korea is also participating in the projects of other APEC members: Improving and Expanding Education Statistics (Australia), Cross-member Investment in Education and Training (Australia), School-based Indicators of Effectiveness (People's Republic of China), and Performance Monitoring of Educational Systems (the U.S.).<sup>[44]</sup>

Today, students have been mobile across national borders since the earliest medieval universities. The Korean universities and graduate schools under the BK21 project are actively seeking ways to improve themselves by benchmarking with a dozen productive international educational institutions recognized in their specialized areas.<sup>[45]</sup> Beside the collaborative projects, university professors and students are given opportunities to pursue their professional development at overseas universities on a long-term (six months or more up to one year) or a short-term (six months or less) basis.

### **Impact of governance changes on higher education**

Governance changes have considerable impacts on the higher education system in Korea. Recent reforms have increased the participation of faculty in

university governance. For example, elections for the post of university president, in which faculty members have a right to vote, have become widespread. The student movement in Korea has tended to concentrate on wider political issues and has only recently begun to demand participation in university governance. The impacts have been discussed hereunder.

**BK 21:** In spite of many controversies, the BK21 has been successful in many ways: i) changes in university atmospheres and improvements in research activities of graduate schools; ii) attainments of the project goals; and iii) progresses in the university system reform. These accomplishments are based on the evaluation conducted in August 2000 regarding the first year of the BK21 project. There is a big difference in the number of publications in international journals by the Korean scholars between the periods before and after the inception of the BK21 (Figure 3.1). The number of articles by Korean scholars published in SCI journals has increased at a rate well above average. There was a worldwide increase of just 1.9% for articles by scholars all over the world. But after the inception of the project, the number of articles increased by 15.6%. Universities compete with one another in recruiting highly qualified professors and adopt incentive systems for professors having quality journal publications.<sup>[46]</sup> Among many other success stories of the BK21, it has also helped increase both national and international patents between the periods before and after BK21 (Figure 1.7).

**Credit Bank System:** The number of individuals who acquired Bachelors degrees and Associate Bachelor's degrees is increasing every year with the Credit Bank System. Most of the degrees were concentrated on information processing and IT fields related to multi media. As of 2002, the total number of individuals acquired academic degrees from the CBS was 7,963 (2,269 Bachelors degrees and 5,694 Associate Bachelor's degrees). The student population grew, particularly in 2001, after the stabilization of the after effects of the 1997 economic crisis. The part-time registration system at each university and/or college is designed to work with the CBS in awarding degrees. In 2000, the actual amount of part-time credits issued accounted for only 5.8%, or

19,610, of the total 337,073 credits issued. However, by April 2001, 1991 graduates had been admitted to other universities and 40 had gone on to graduate school. In September 2000, 115 people had been admitted to other universities and to graduate school.<sup>[47]</sup>

**Marketization and privatizations:** Almost 80% of the educational institutions in Korea are private and the rest are public.<sup>[48]</sup> The figures 1.8 and 1.9 also show an increase in the number of students from the year 2002 to 2003 in private institutions implying high demand for them. The difference in the number of students between the private and public universities is also very high (Figure 1.9) which implies that marketization and privatization of higher education have gained popularity over the past years. Due to the retrenched education budget, the drive for education reform faced difficulties in improving educational environments. The restructuring of the education sector began to unfold with the lowering of teachers' retirement age and a cutback in the number of supporting staff.<sup>[49]</sup> This rapid increase and predominance of private institutions for higher education, which usually require much higher tuition fees than public institutions, may have some important implications on inequalities of opportunity for higher education. Particularly, those private institutions for higher education heavily rely on tuitions as their main financial resource with very little financial support from the government.<sup>[50]</sup>

**Decentralization:** Although recent reforms of higher education are moving in the direction to allow colleges and universities more autonomy in determining enrollment quotas and student selections, the government still is a major actor in higher education policy.<sup>[51]</sup> Under the Education Law, all higher education institutions, whether national, public or private, come under the direct and indirect supervision of the MOE which has control over such matters as establishment of institutions, student enrolment quotas, required qualifications for teaching staff, curriculum and degree requirements and so on. With regard to other matters, universities comply with decisions made by a consortium called the Korea Council for University Education (KCUE). In the part, the autonomy of higher education institutions was seriously undermined due to the government's strict regulation on institutional management. In accordance with

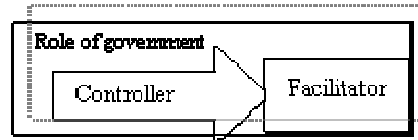
recent education reform, colleges and universities are now given full autonomy in decision-making on such important issues as establishment of institution, admission quotas, and other academic affairs.<sup>[52]</sup> Although the previous government had actively pushed for deregulation and autonomy in education, the degree to which it was actually put into the practices was less than satisfactory. However, the concept of a market economy put forth by the new government placed education in the hands of the marketplace and expanded the scope of choice for recipients of educational services (i.e. learners). It also greatly extended autonomy in school management.<sup>[53]</sup> The colleges and universities of Korea enjoy increased autonomy in academic affairs, while enhancing their competitiveness in the areas of specialization.

**Globalization:** The process of globalization has impact of governance in the increasingly interdependent world. The republic exports as many as 150,000 students to study abroad each year, while receiving 6,160 international students each year in exchange. The country's MOE and Human Resources aims to double the number of international students by 2003.<sup>[54]</sup> In concert with the new direction of the education governance, the government delegates more responsibilities to universities, the cradle of international competitiveness in order to establish and implement strategies for specialization and diversification.<sup>[55]</sup> Facing the era of increasing globalization, since the mid-1990s the government has begun to restructure higher education system. The most apparent direction for reform has been diversification and specialization of Korean higher education.<sup>[56]</sup> The number of Koreans applying to UK institutions through UCAS saw a large increase in 2000. The number of University and College Admission Service (UCAS) applicants accepted for undergraduate, Higher National Diploma (HND) or university diploma courses increased by more than a third on the previous year 235 in 2000 from 175 in 1999. Korean interest in studying in the UK is at its highest level ever and numbers are set to expand dramatically from 2000 onwards. The British Council has seen significant increases in enquiries over the last year in Korea and its introduction of a new cyber counseling service and web site. This increased enquiries activity aided by the recovery in the economy resulted in nearly 125,000 enquiries in 2000, nearly ten times the 1998 level.<sup>[57]</sup>

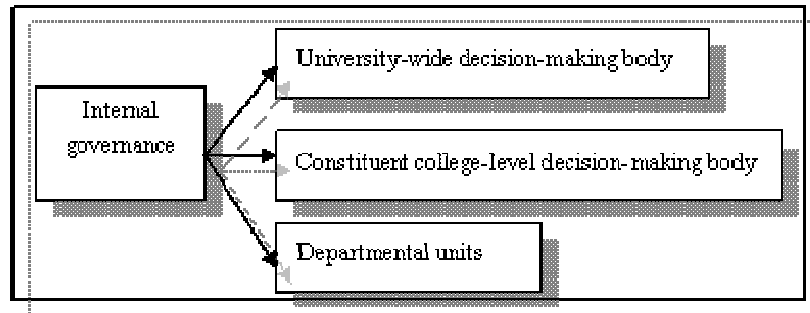
### **Conclusion**

During the past few decades, higher education in Korea has enormously expanded, shifting the nation from the lowest proportion of population with tertiary levels of education to the highest proportion in the world. To respond to the changes in the global economy Korean government has brought about many changes in their higher education governance. Introduction of BK21 and Credit Bank System; decentralization of power by delegation to individual university; marketization and privatization of higher education; response to globalization etc all have contributed to the expansion of higher education in Korea. While with many successes of the governance changes they are not beyond controversies, for example, for the case of BK21, universities, faculties and students not included in this project feel demoralized since they feel that they are deprived and the main sticking point of BK21 may lie in the potential for losing institutional autonomy due to the over-dependence on government funding. However, most prominent in higher education governance change is the 'privatization' resulting in the high increase in the number of private educational institutions. The government might use the government aid policy for the private institution to improve the general condition of private higher education institution and to encourage their diversity and to raise the quality of them. The impact of governance change in the higher education in South Korea is vividly visible.

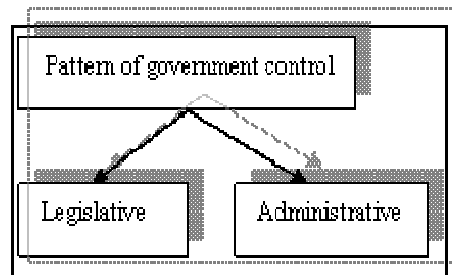
**Figures**



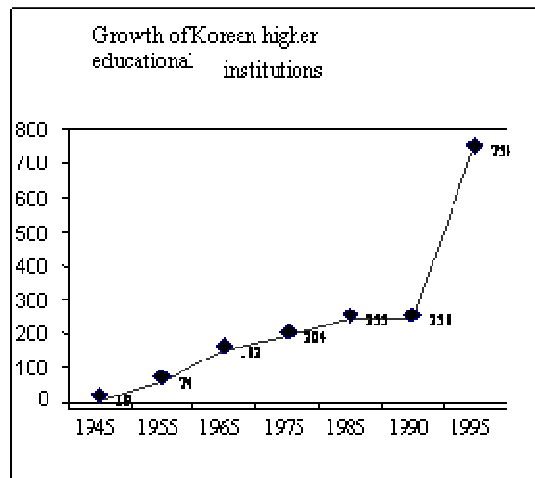
**Figure 1.1: Change in government's role**



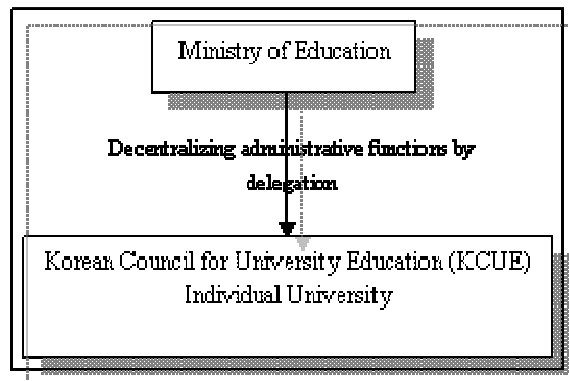
**Figure 1.2: Internal governance in university. Source: Kim, 2000 (modified)**



**Figure 1.3: Government's control pattern.  
Source: Kim, 2000 (modified)**



**Figure 1.4: Growth of higher educational institutions**  
Source: Ministry of Education, 1996 (from International Comparative Higher Education)



**Figure 1.5: Decentralization of administrative functions**  
Source: Kim, 2000; Mok, 2004 (modified)

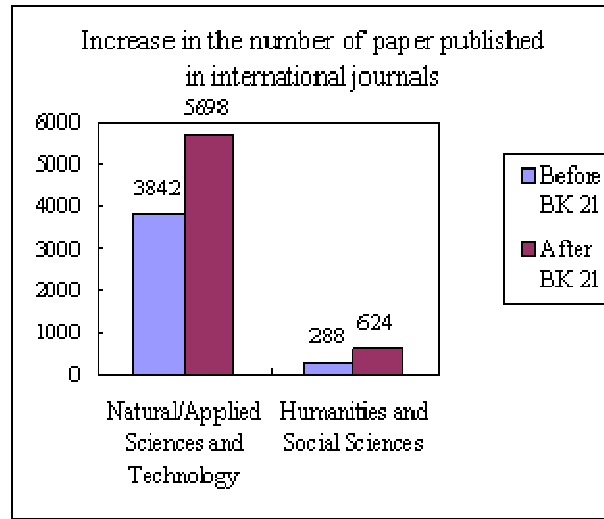


Figure 1.6: Paper published in Int'l journals  
Source: Kim, 2001 (modified)

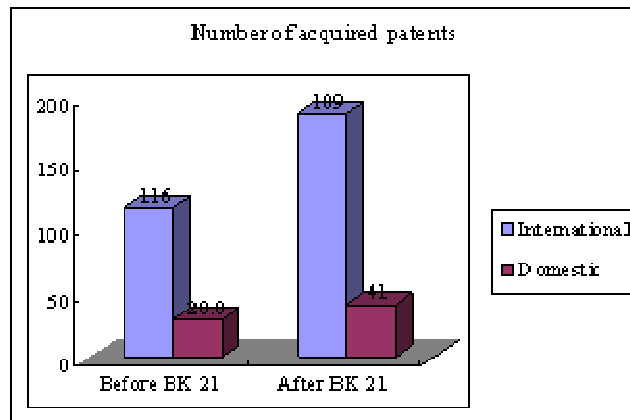
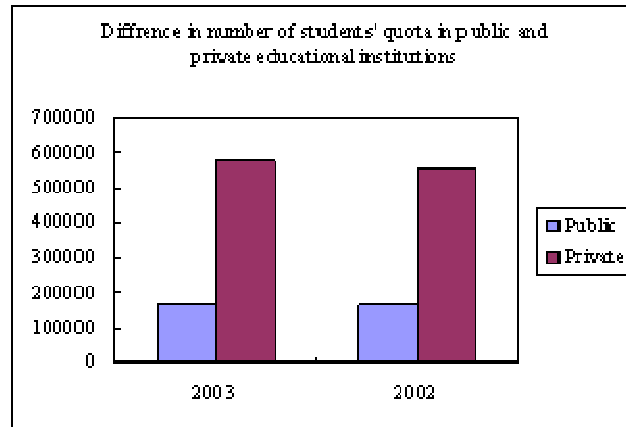
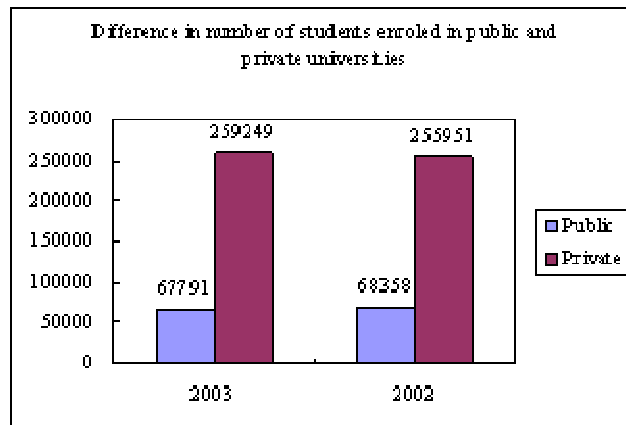


Figure 1.7: Number of patents acquired  
Source: Kim, 2000 (modified)





**Figure 1.8: Student's quota in public and private Institutions**  
Source: Ministry of Education, 2003



**Figure 1.9: Students enrolled in public and private universities**  
Source: Ministry of Education, 2003

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<sup>[26]</sup> Kim, 2001, *op. cit*.

<sup>[27]</sup> Kim, 2001, *ibid*

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<sup>[44]</sup> Ministry of Education, 1996, ibid.

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