



So, why do we study English, class?

Is it to better ourselves?

To make money and get a better job?



To talk to other countries, like the USA?

<Hey Ji-seong, watch this.>



Min-su, did you have a question?



Yes, teacher.

I hate America. Because... because... they are rich-ee... and-du... they should gi-bu to Korea.

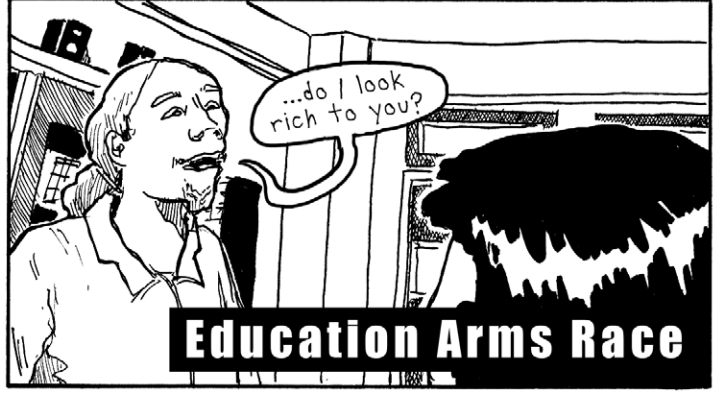


W-why would you say such a thing. Why should Korea take money from any other country!?!

Um.



Curious.



...do I look rich to you?

Education Arms Race



Aside from some of the bratty kids, I gotta say...

...life out here in the Far East ain't that bad.

I got an apartment all to myself in East Seoul, along with a sweet government job that pays well.

And while I'm still broke as all hell...

...rice, salt, and hot sauce have at least been sustaining me thus far.

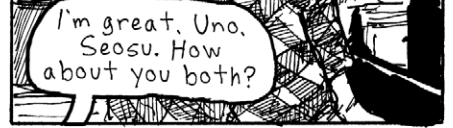
But the most important thing is that I have a roof over my head since August.

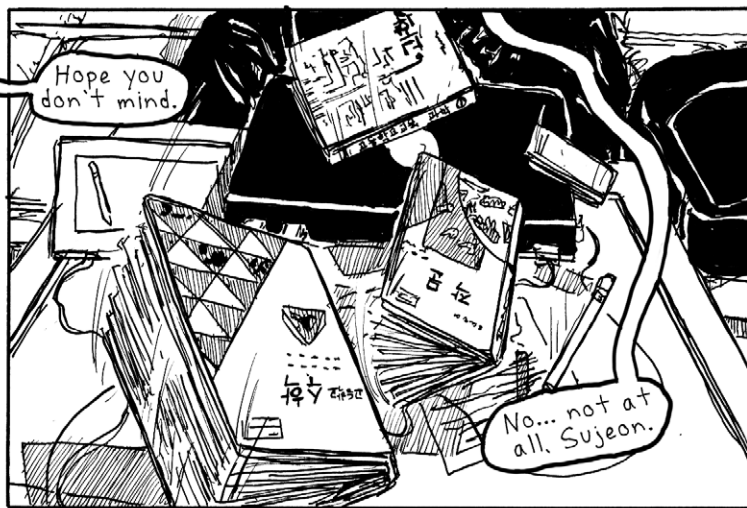
After the hell that I had to go through to get here, I'll take it.



cough cough Annyeong, kids!







The Suneung university exam.

A test where the entire nation comes to a standstill.

No airplanes are allowed to fly for two hours during the listening part of the exam...

...while businesses and other government buildings are closed in order to decrease traffic.

And if your kid can't make it to school, you can actually call for a police escort to pave the way.

In preparation for the academic battlefield...
...students pour into the multi-million dollar hagwon industry year after year to cram study.

All in order to get into SKY.

TOEIC 수능
영어 학원 퍼니 영어·수학
And by SKY I mean the top three universities in the country: Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University.
Where their future in employment, salary, marriage prospects, everything is decided upon.

Hagwon tuition doesn't come cheap; typically costing parents over \$1000/month per kid.

Yet families have been paying into this system for millennia.

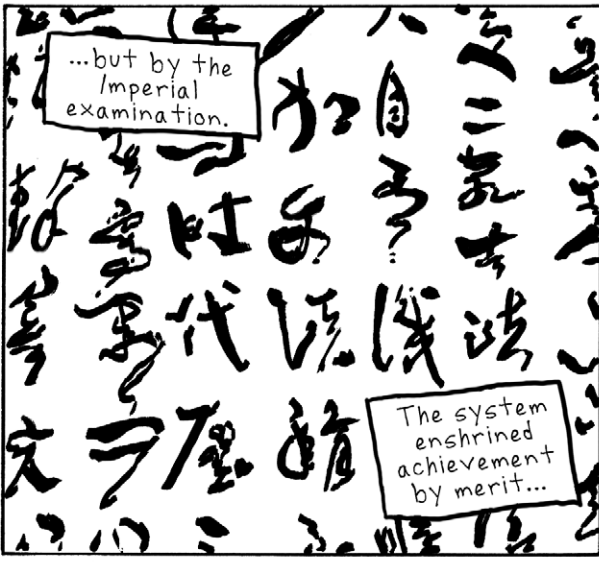


Most of this testing culture dates back a long time ago, around 600AD.

Ancient China.

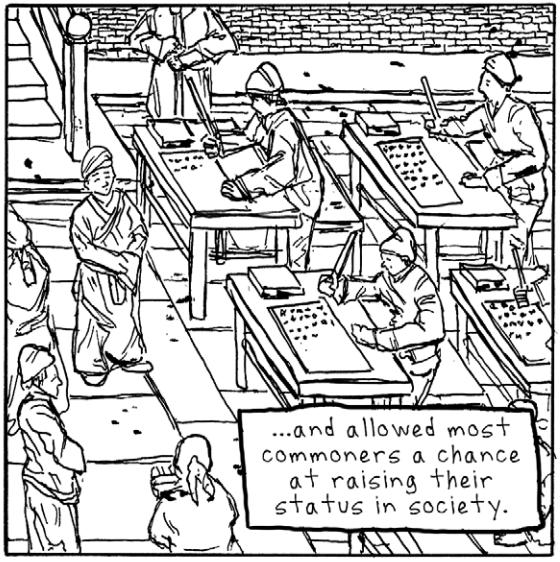


Entry into state bureaucracy was not based on class or wealth...



...but by the Imperial examination.

The system enshrined achievement by merit...

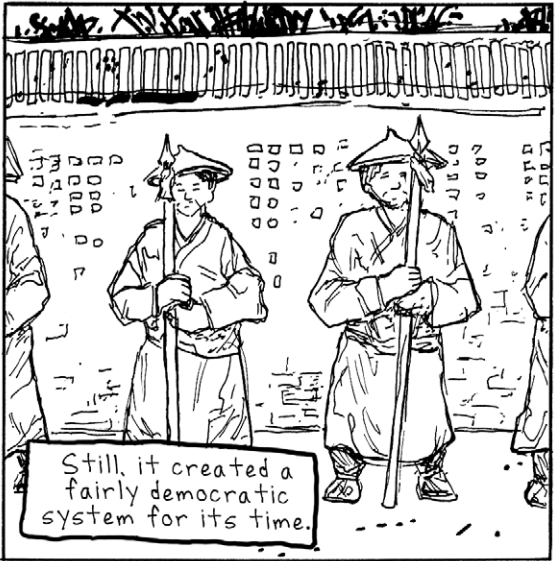


...and allowed most commoners a chance at raising their status in society.

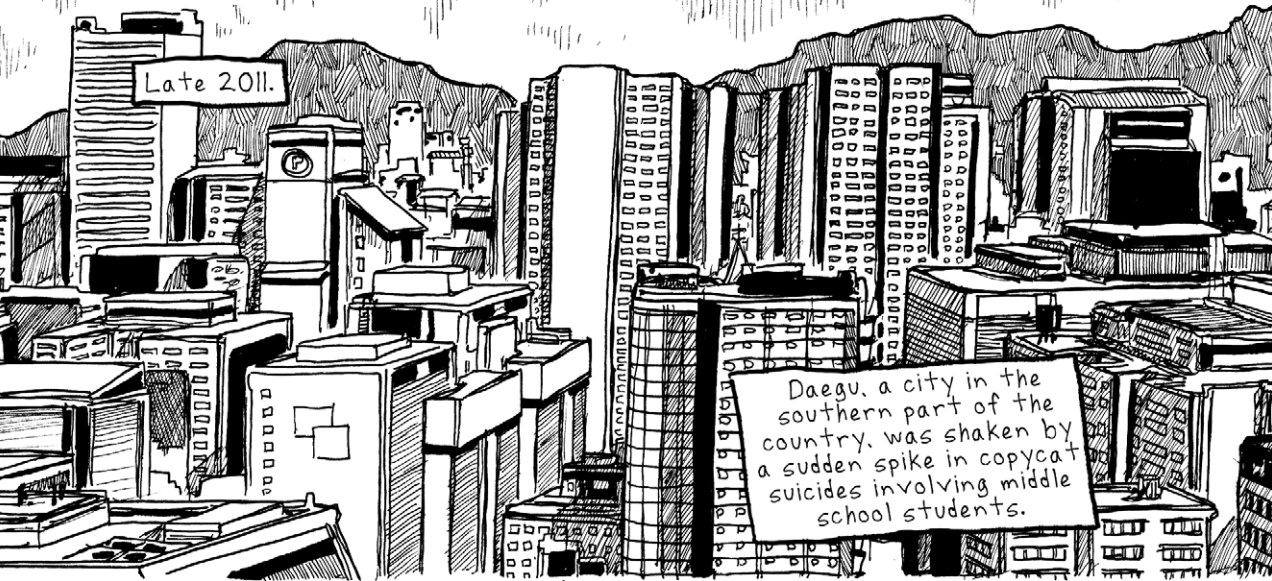


Unfortunately...

The exams promoted a culture where people invested heavily in private tutoring just for the opportunity to achieve their dreams.



Still, it created a fairly democratic system for its time.

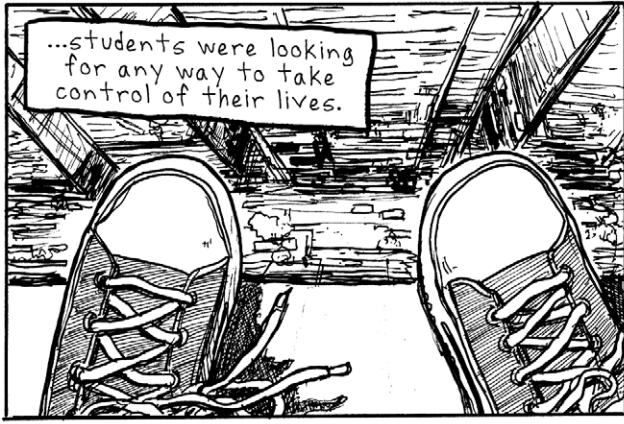


Late 2011.

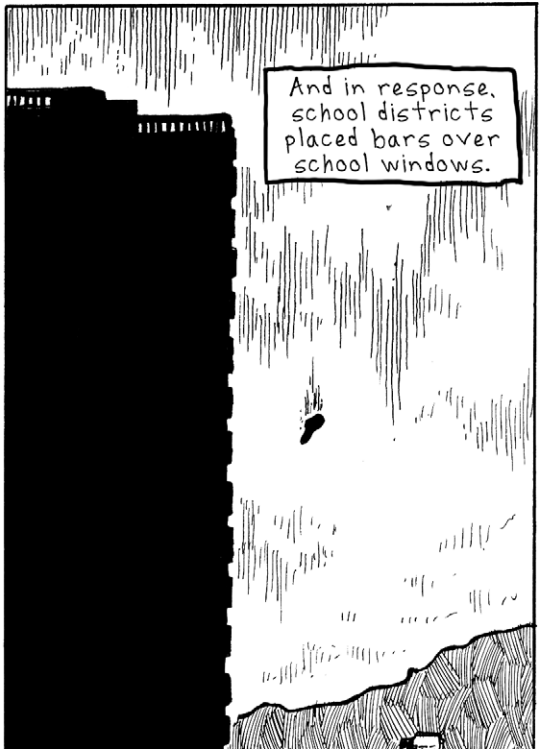
Daegu, a city in the southern part of the country, was shaken by a sudden spike in copycat suicides involving middle school students.



Faced with pressure from society to push their studies past midnight, along with rampant bullying within the classrooms...



...students were looking for any way to take control of their lives.



And in response, school districts placed bars over school windows.



In a recent survey, four out of ten students stated that they no longer had interest in continuing school.

