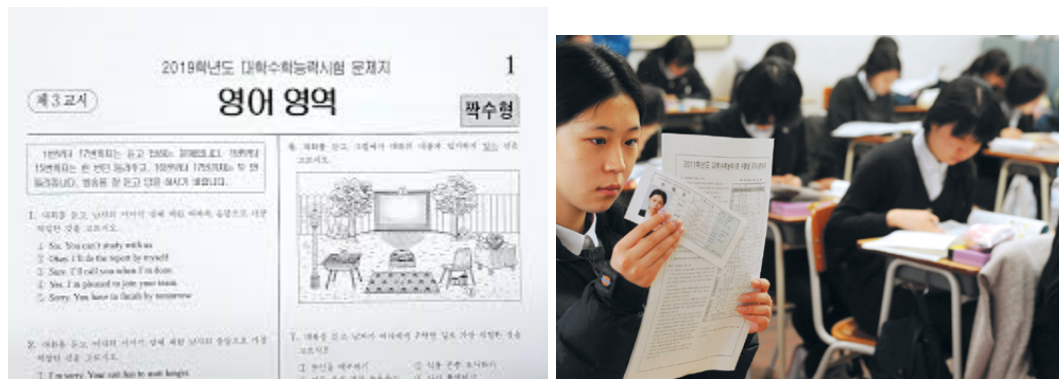


#### Cultural Artifact #4



The cultural artifact that I focused on this week was the College Scholastic Ability Test or CSAT, which is known as 대학수학능력시험 in Korean. It is also known as Suneung 수능. This test is the standardized test accepted by all South Korean universities and it only occurs once a year and all students prepare as if they only get one shot on this exam. The test is administered by KICE, or the Korean Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation, and it typically occurs on the third Thursday of November. However, due to COVID this year it took place on the first Thursday of December which happens to be December 3rd (for the first time in history) and just occurred last week which inspired me to choose this as my cultural artifact.

This single standardized test essentially determines the fate of every student that takes the exam because it determines what college you can go to and what career options are available to students as well. The subjects tested on the exam are all accumulated throughout all of schooling learned from elementary school until high school. These sections consist of Korean, English, mathematics, history, science, humanities, and second language. Because this exam is such a big event in the lives of students, all workplaces open late on that day so there is no traffic for students coming to school and everyone can take it on time. The number of buses and subways are also increased to make sure all students arrive on time for the exam. In addition, if students are running late then police vehicles will escort students from their houses to the testing center at schools to make sure they arrive on time. Police officers also will drive students back to their house before the exam if they happen to forget their student IDs in order to take the exam. Students are also sent to different schools from their normal schools to take this exam as well. In addition at 1 pm when the English portion of the test occurs, all planes are grounded and buses are on standby so that students can listen without any sound distractions.

Due to how important Suneung is it has actually given rise to study academies known as hagwons 학원, which are for profit cram schools that have students studying academics. These academy schools serve many purposes including serving as supplementary education for children to be able to keep up with the regular school curriculum, a source of remedial education for the children who fall behind in their work, covering educational training in areas not covered in

schools, and preparing students striving to improve test scores and do well on the Suneung. Every student actually goes to cram school for this exam because no one student can effectively study themselves for it and just because of the sheer weight of the exam. Because this exam is so big, parents will even go to religious places the day before the exam and during the exam to pray for their kids' success on the day of the exam. Parents and siblings will also stand at the entrance with banners and root for their children to do well on the exam as well. This is also not applicable now but when students took it in the 1980s-early 1990s students took the exam at the college they were applying for and wanted to go to.

Some big changes were actually made in order to accommodate the COVID-19 pandemic aside from being delayed two weeks. In order to allow the students to take the test this year, the schools had the support of the government to add new measures. This included making sure all students took body temperature checks before entering the buildings, sanitizing their hands upon entry, and wearing masks during the exam. In order to enforce social distancing, the desks were spread further apart with plastic dividers fixed to each desk and after each section the examiners will crack open windows for ventilation as a part of strict antivirus measures. Normally there would be time for breaks and to eat while talking with others if wanted but due to COVID-19 no gatherings are allowed and all students must bring in their packed lunches along with water since outside food is not allowed and water purifiers were removed as safety precautions. In addition, this year parents are not allowed to stand right outside the school to cheer their students on due to the pandemic. Students that also tested positive for COVID-19 were also accommodated for the exam as hospital beds were specifically set up for the exam and students in self-quarantine were placed in special test centers designated for them by KICE. All in all this week was stressful for the students and I hope all students did well on Suneung which they just took and are awaiting results for their futures!





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