
Locating social reproduction at the centre of a study on youth unemployment in South Korea

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Abstract

Existing studies of South Korean youth unemployment do not place focus on social reproduction, including the reproduction of labour power. This is despite youth unemployment in South Korea being often ascribed to oversupply of college graduates. The latter is a result of the college establish boom to meet clerical labour demand of South Korean capitalism during the era of rapid economic growth and (2) the scarcity of good jobs, which satisfies the standard of labour power reproduction. This paper, hence, introduces social reproduction as a core category in analysing youth unemployment in South Korea. It is argued that the lack of emphasis of social reproduction has resulted in insightful but fragmented analyses and misleading solutions. The paper outlines a combination of phenomena that characterises South Korean youth unemployment issue, such as the high tertiary education rate, higher unemployment rate of college graduates than that of high school graduates, low youth employment-to-population rate at a time of labour power shortage in some sectors and occupations. This paper explains these phenomena by focusing on how they have originated in the history of South Korean capitalist development and through which institutions or mechanisms they have been reproduced.

Keywords: youth unemployment, South Korea, social reproduction, reproduction of labour power

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