No. 560 SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

# The Argus

Since 1954

## Rising Agricultural Prices Threatening Chuseok Grocery Baskets

**Economic Mechanics Behind Supply and Demand in Agricultural Markets**

**South Korea's High Import Dependency and Vulnerability to Global Price Fluctuations**

**Climate Change and Negative Supply Shocks Triggering Price Instability**

**Toward a Balanced Agricultural Policy Ensuring Sustainable Supply Chains**

HANKUK UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES

The Argus

*ESTABLISHED 1954*

Published monthly except on school holidays by and for the students of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, The Argus, the campus English magazine, pursues the highest standard of campus journalism and academism.



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**Editorial**

# The Constant Beneath Change

Society is in constant flux, and none of us are immune to it. Yet how we respond to these changes, what we are expected to understand, internalize, and take ownership of, remains remarkably constant. When we fixate too closely on surface-level events, we risk missing the deeper, enduring demands that have been placed on us all along.

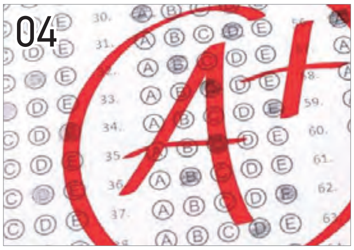
This September issue explores what holds steady while the world moves around us. We feel this tension even during a routine grocery run. A conflict on the other side of the globe can eventually show up on a receipt, just as climate change can contribute to higher prices around the holidays. The immediate triggers change, but the underlying outcome does not. Therefore, when prices rise, the useful question is not why this happens now, but what this recurring pattern is trying to tell us.

The answer is rarely new. The criteria for qualification may be redrawn every few years, yet individuals must still bear the burden of meeting them. Revising a policy clause can also reshape who holds power and who carries the cost. Our tools for preserving the past have evolved, but the human intent behind them has not changed. A seemingly trivial photograph can, years later, become one of few remaining records proving that a moment ever existed, and while technology can store that record, it cannot replace the process of dealing with the grief of a profound loss. Physical space follows suit. A neighborhood once dismissed as remote can eventually be hailed as promising, as perceptions of its value change over time.

Even as everything shifts, what we must focus on is what stays constant beneath it, because the forces driving the shift are rarely ours to control. What we can control is whether we trace it back to its underlying causes or stop at the first explanation in front of us. We do not get a vote on whether change happens, but we do get to decide how closely we examine it. Skim the surface, and we stay a step behind. Look for the structure holding it up, and we remain standing when the next thing changes.

**By Cho Subin**
*Editor-in-Chief*

조수빈



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## Cover Story

>> Ahead of the Chuseok holiday, rising agricultural prices have emerged as a pressing household concern amid growing living expenses. This article examines the fundamental economic mechanisms behind rising agricultural prices, focusing on the low price elasticity of supply and demand that characterizes agricultural markets. It also explores how abnormal weather patterns and climate change can act as negative supply shocks, disrupting agricultural production and driving prices higher. Furthermore, the article analyzes why South Korea is particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in global agricultural prices due to its high dependence on imports and relatively low grain self-sufficiency rate. Finally, it considers the structural changes and balanced agricultural policies that could help build a more stable and sustainable agricultural supply chain.

# HUFS Seoul Campus GSC Revises Offline Bulletin Board Operation System

The General Student Council (GSC) of HUFS Seoul Campus, Sunmyeong, has revised the application and operation procedures for the GSC's offline bulletin boards. This initiative aims to reduce campus clutter and improve information delivery by addressing the indiscriminate posting of promotional materials at the beginning of each semester.

Under the new system, students who wish to use the bulletin boards must submit an application in advance through Google Forms and receive approval before posting. The bulletin boards are located in several campus buildings, including the GlobeeDorm, the Social Science Building, and the Humanities Building. Posters may be displayed for up to 14 days, with one possible extension. The GSC has designated posters containing personal attacks, defamatory or hostile content, sexually explicit or violent material, advertisements related to illegal activities, and commercial advertisements as prohibited.


©Instagram @hufsstudent

▲ The GSC of HUFS Seoul Campus introduces its renewed online bulletin board.

The GSC representative said, "During the summer break, we removed the existing bulletin board equipment and introduced a new management system. The initiative will continue under this new system in the second semester of 2026," underscoring their commitment to the project's long-term success.

**By You Chae-hyeon**
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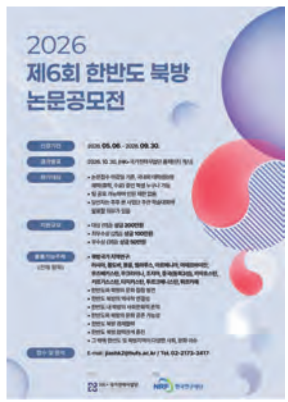
# The 6th Korean Peninsula and the North Paper Contest 2026 Accepts Applications

The 6th Korean Peninsula and the North Paper Contest 2026, which began accepting applications on May 6, 2026, will continue to accept them until Sept. 30. This contest is organized by the HK+ National Strategies Research Project Agency at the Center for International Area Studies, HUFS. Any student enrolled in, on leave from, or having completed a university or graduate school program worldwide may participate in this contest, subject to the paper submission deadline. Team applications are also possible, and there is no limit on the number of participants.

Its main purpose is to raise awareness of the northern region and the cultural identity of the Korean Peninsula, and to inspire enthusiasm for academic research. Eligible topics include research on the northern region, encompassing Russia, Moldova, Mongolia, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Georgia, China (the three northeastern provinces), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Turkiye. It is also possible to write on topics related to various social and cultural issues in the Korean Peninsula and the northern regions.




©HK+ National Strategies Research Project Agency at HUFS

▲ The HK+ National Strategies Research Project Agency at HUFS holds the 6th Korean Peninsula and the North Paper Contest 2026.

Byun Sung-eun, a sophomore majoring in Arabic, said, "Through this contest, I hope that diverse perspectives on issues currently confronting both Korea and the northern regions will be actively shared."

**By Kim Yewon**
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# Centennial Complex Lawn Field Under Renovation


©HUFS Historical Archives

▲ The lawn field at the Centennial Complex serves as a space for students' sports activities and classes.

HUFS Global Campus is renovating the lawn field at the Centennial Complex. The construction is expected to continue with completion targeted before Sept. 18.

The renovation aims to provide students with a safer and more comfortable environment for sports activities. During the renovation, the lawn field will remain closed to students until construction is completed. The construction has also affected graduation activities. The 2026 Summer Commencement took place as scheduled at the Conference Hall in the Centennial Complex. However, graduates were not allowed to enter the lawn field, a popular location for graduation photos.

The Student Council Emergency Steering Committee "Memory" emphasized the necessity of the renovation stating, "Although restricting access to the field for a certain period is unavoidable, we believe the renovation is a necessary process to provide students with a safer and more comfortable environment." The committee added that it will inform students of further details once the schedule is finalized.

**By Jang Yeseo**
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# HUFS, KHU, and UOS to Jointly Host Festival TROIKA

HUFS, Kyung Hee University (KHU), and the University of Seoul (UOS) will hold their joint intercollegiate festival, TROIKA, in September 2026, reviving the event after a three-year hiatus. Located in Dongdaemun Ward, the three universities aim to strengthen inter-campus exchange and establish the event as a representative youth culture festival for the local district.

The festival will feature three main purposes. The cultural section, "Akdongje," includes joint performances by university clubs, cheerleading showcases, guest artist concerts, and daytime booths. The academic section, "Gamdongje," presents debate competitions, policy hackathons, and student work exhibitions. The sports section, "Yeokdongje," features eight competitive and friendly sports matches across university facilities. Organizers also plan to collaborate with the surrounding commercial district in Dongdaemun Ward to stimulate the local economy.

In Han-bi, a sophomore studying public administration, said, "As a student who has rarely had a chance to interact with peers from neighboring universities, I am thrilled to experience TROIKA," with high expectations.

**By Lee Joon-woo**
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# HUFS GSC Launches Official KakaoTalk Channel to Streamline Campus Inquiries

The General Student Council (GSC) of HUFS Seoul Campus has launched its official KakaoTalk channel in preparation for the fall semester to handle student inquiries.

This follows high student engagement during the trial run at the spring festival and aims to address administrative demands. The platform features quick-access menus for frequently asked questions, including academic schedules, graduation credit waivers, and degree ceremonies, alongside multilingual options in English and Chinese. Furthermore, the GSC plans to analyze recurring inquiries as foundational data for policy reviews and for future negotiations with university administration.

"We established this platform to bridge the physical and temporal gap with students, ensuring that their feedback directly translates into real institutional changes," said Kim Ha-eun, president of the GSC. As the channel becomes the primary gateway for campus dialogue, it is expected to create a more responsive and student-centered academic environment.

**By Lee Joon-woo**
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# What HUFS' New Policy Reveals About a Changing Academic Landscape

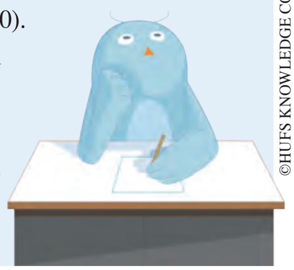
**By Lee Joon-woo**
*Staff Reporter of Social Section*

Starting from the second semester of the 2026 academic year, HUFS will comprehensively reform its grading system. The maximum quota for an A grade under relative grading will expand from 35 percent to 40 percent. Additionally, relative grading quotas will be calculated based on total enrollment, including students under absolute grading. The university has also eliminated both the C+ grade threshold for course retakes and the A0 grade cap on retaken courses. Furthermore, eligibility and criteria for the course credit abandonment system have been relaxed to foster flexible academic management. These changes reflect a broader trend across universities in South Korea (hereafter Korea), which are re-examining traditional evaluation methods to better capture students' learning experiences and diverse curricula. More institutions are expanding absolute grading, adjusting relative grading ratios, and refining Pass/No Pass (P/NP) and retake options. The Argus examines this policy reform at HUFS as a window into the evolving academic evaluation paradigm across higher education, exploring its implications for student learning, university instruction, and career development.

**[Before Reading]** HUFS Grading System

The grading framework at HUFS operates on a 4.5 maximum Grade Point Average (GPA) scale. Letter grades are categorized into A+ (4.5), A0 (4.0), B+ (3.5), B0 (3.0), C+ (2.5), C0 (2.0), D+ (1.5), D0 (1.0), and F (0), converted from percentage scores out of 100. Unlike universities such as Yonsei University and Korea University, which adopt a three-tier sub-grade system (-, 0, +) that includes A-, HUFS operates a two-tier sub-grade system (+, 0).

Evaluation methods for individual courses are divided into relative and absolute grading. Standard theoretical courses with 10 or more students adhere to relative grading by default, with maximum quotas for A and B grades strictly regulated by academic bylaws. Conversely, absolute grading applies to retake students, practical training, internships, small-scale seminars, and courses designated for international students, evaluating achievements against set learning criteria.



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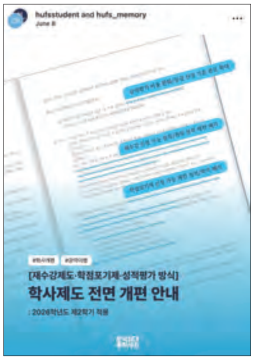
## What Has Changed at HUFS?

### Expansion of Relative Grading Quotas and Calculation Basis

The motivation behind reforming academic evaluation extends beyond facilitating higher grades. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education has promoted Project-Based Learning, interdisciplinary curricula, and participatory instruction through initiatives like the University Innovation Support Project. Consequently, universities have sought flexible evaluation systems tailored to course characteristics, balancing competition-oriented assessment with experience-focused learning. The primary change under the HUFS reform taking effect in the second semester of 2026 involves relative grading quotas and calculation methods. The allowable proportion for A grades (A+, A0) expands from 35 percent to 40 percent, while the cumulative cap for top grades, including B (B+, B0), increases from 70 percent to 80 percent. As a result, a larger proportion of enrolled students are able to earn A and B grades in relative-graded courses.

The baseline for calculating relative grading quotas has also shifted. Previously, grade distributions were calculated solely against students subject to relative grading. Under the revised rule, the relative grading quota is calculated based on total course enrollment, including those evaluated under absolute grading. Consequently, the number of top letter grades available in a course will now depend on total class size rather than the subset of relative-graded students alone.



▲ The HUFS General Student Council announces comprehensive academic system reforms effective for the second semester of 2026.

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Park Seong-mi, a professor in the Department of Japanese Interpretation and Translation at HUFS, noted, "Under a rigid relative grading structure where decimal points determine grade cutoffs, instructors faced significant difficulty fitting students into strict quotas at the end of each semester. Expanding the grade ceilings and including absolute-graded students in the calculation denominator grants instructors greater evaluative autonomy while reducing hyper-competitive stress among students, thereby increasing the likelihood of classroom engagement."

Elaborating on the administrative background, Kim Hyun-sook, team leader at the Academic Support Center and Registrar, stated: "We thoroughly reviewed and adopted the academic improvement requests continuously raised by the General Student Council (GSC). Our core objective was to alleviate excessive competition, align with an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven educational environment that prioritizes collaboration and growth, while also expanding faculty grading autonomy."

### Sweeping Relaxation of the Retake System

The retake provides students with an opportunity to re-enroll in completed courses to improve academic understanding and GPAs. Starting in the second semester of 2026, HUFS will abolish both the eligibility threshold and the grade cap for retaking courses. Previously, retakes were restricted to courses with earned grades of C+ or lower, and the maximum achievable grade was capped at A0. Under the revised policy, students may retake courses even if they previously earned a B grade or higher, with the potential to achieve up to an A+ based on their actual performance.

Highlighting the intent behind this adjustment, Team Leader Kim emphasized, "Rather than acquiring grades through simple competition, we aimed to develop student competencies through growth-oriented evaluation focused on course learning objectives. This is an attempt to foster a creative and innovative academic culture where students set ambitious goals and overcome challenges." As a result of these changes, course retakes shift from a remedial tool into a self-directed academic mechanism.

### Improvements to Course Credit Abandonment

The operational framework for course credit abandonment has also been overhauled. This system allows students to permanently remove completed course grades from their official transcripts under specific conditions. First introduced at HUFS in the first semester of 2026, the policy underwent major revisions after just one semester in response to student feedback regarding academic planning and career shifts.

Under the previous rule, credit abandonment was limited to courses with grades of C+ or lower. The new policy permits students to remove up to six credits regardless of the original letter grade earned. Additionally, eligibility has been expanded from students in their seventh registered semester or higher to those who have completed at least three registered semesters. This change allows undergraduates to utilize credit abandonment earlier in their academic path. The reform is expected to benefit students who are adjusting their academic trajectory due to dual majors, transfers, or altered career goals.

Team Leader Kim explained, "Students can now remove up to six credits to improve their academic standing. By supporting students in achieving stronger academic records, the university aims to enhance their practical competitiveness for graduate school, law school, and employment entry."

## The Shift in Grading Across Universities

### Diversification of Evaluation Methods

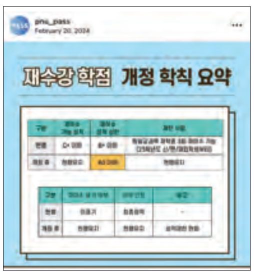
Following experience with remote learning and absolute grading during the pandemic, universities have increasingly adopted varied assessment methods tailored to course objectives. Supported by Ministry of Education initiatives such as *Basic Plan for University Remote Education Support* (2021) and the University Innovation institutions have expanded project-based learning and interdisciplinary coursework. Consequently, non-exam evaluations – including discussions, presentations, group projects, and research – have grown in prominence. Among these approaches, P/NP records credit based on meeting designated criteria, while Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) marks performance without impacting cumulative GPA.

In line with this trend, Seoul National University has expanded absolute grading and S/U evaluations across various disciplines. Similarly, Yonsei University has incrementally increased absolute grading and P/NP designations, particularly in general education and career exploration courses. While implementation scope varies across institutions, the adoption of diversified evaluation models tailored to subject matter continues to grow.

### Varied Retake Regulations Across Campuses

Retake policies across Korean universities are undergoing various changes to accommodate student academic planning and curriculum design.

Pusan National University (PNU) raised its maximum retake grade cap from B+ to A0 starting in the first semester of the 2024 academic year. This adjustment addressed student concerns regarding competitive grade disadvantages when applying for jobs or graduate programs against peers from other universities. However, PNU retained its eligibility limit restricting retakes to courses graded C+ or lower, and excluded P/NP courses from retake eligibility. Meanwhile, Incheon National University raised its retake cap from B+ to A0 to expand grade improvement opportunities. Under its revised policy, students who previously earned a B+ grade can achieve up to an A0 if they retake the course after the rule change, with the specific application timeline varying by admission cohort. These developments illustrate how universities aim to balance flexible re-enrollment opportunities against grade reliability and institutional equity according to their respective administrative priorities.




©The 56th PNU GSC "P:New"

▲ The GSC of PNU summarizes the revised academic regulations on course retakes, raising the upper grade limit for repeated courses from B+ to A0.

### Re-emergence of Credit Abandonment Schemes

Course credit abandonment has re-emerged as a major topic amid the movement toward academic flexibility. Following the 2010s, many Korean universities abolished or severely restricted credit abandonment to prevent grade inflation and maintain transcript reliability. However, the Ministry of Education's *Plan for Improving University Academic Operations* (2016), which emphasized institutional autonomy and student-centered curricula, created momentum for reconsidering credit cancellation options.

To support flexible academic pathways amidst rising student mobility across majors, select institutions have reintroduced limited credit abandonment. For example, PNU reintroduced a restricted credit abandonment scheme in 2024. Graduating seniors registered for seven or more semesters may permanently discard up to six credits from discontinued courses with no designated replacement subjects, providing targeted flexibility for academic transcript management.

## Beyond GPA

### Easing Relative Grading and the Burden of External Credentials

While the easing of grading standards aims to reduce academic stress, it also introduces systemic challenges. As absolute grading expands and relative quotas loosen, public concerns regarding grade inflation have intensified. Grade inflation refers to a scenario where average student GPAs rise due to relaxed institutional grading standards rather than measurable increases in academic mastery, thereby diminishing the signaling value and distinctiveness of university grades. The quota expansion and methodology changes at HUFS may contribute to upward grade shifts, adding to broader grade inflation pressures.

When grade differentiation weakens, employers and institutions often require additional external credentials – such as official language test scores, professional certifications, extracurricular activities, and competition awards – in order to evaluate candidate capability. This credential escalation imposes significant financial strain on students. According to a survey published by Yonhap News Agency in July 2026, more than seven in 10 university students and job seekers reported utilizing private employment coaching or test preparation services, spending an average of over 2 million won (US$1,480) annually. Consequently, relaxed grading policies may shift student burdens from maintaining course grades to accumulating external qualifications and private education expenses.

Addressing concerns over grade reliability, Team Leader Kim offered an alternative perspective: "While university grades were paramount in past employment markets, hiring in the

AI era prioritizes practical job competencies over GPA alone. Given that relative grading quotas at major private universities in Seoul were already broader than our previous standards, we anticipate that our students' grade differentiation will remain competitive relative to other institutions."

### Unintended Consequences of Uncapped Retakes

Removing eligibility limits and grade caps on course retakes at HUFS provides unlimited academic retries, but it also creates potential friction. Uncapped retakes can encourage grade-repeating behaviors, in which upperclassmen re-enroll in previously completed courses in which they earned B or B+ grades primarily to boost their cumulative GPAs for job applications.

This dynamic can place first-time enrollees at a disadvantage. When upperclassmen with prior course exposure, familiar exam patterns, and completed readings compete in the same grading pool for top marks, the baseline for assessment shifts. First-time students may face structural imbalances when competing against peers re-taking the material. According to research on Self-Determination Theory by Psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan published in "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being" in *American Psychologist* (2000), intrinsic motivation decreases when learners experience a disconnect between effort and controllable outcomes. When perceived fairness in grading diminishes, student academic engagement and classroom momentum can be negatively affected.

For these reasons, several Korean universities maintain strict retake restrictions to preserve academic rigor. Kyung Hee University tightened its retake eligibility from B- or lower to C+ or lower starting in the first semester of 2026, while lowering the maximum attainable retake grade from A+ to A0. Similarly, Korea University restricts retakes to courses graded C+ or lower, caps retake performance at A0 (and B+ for second retakes), and explicitly denotes retaken courses with an "R" on official transcripts to maintain record transparency. These policies highlight ongoing efforts to balance student flexibility with academic rigor.

### Credit Abandonment and the Shift Toward Practical Competencies

Allowing students with three or more registered semesters to abandon up to six credits regardless of the original letter grade eases academic strain during major changes or curriculum adjustments. However, flexible credit abandonment can also risk reducing course commitment. If students anticipate using credit cancellation as a safety net, course engagement toward the end of a term may decline. This risk of moral hazard and transcript manipulation was a primary reason major universities curtailed credit abandonment in the 2010s.

As GPAs become more standardized across institutions, recruitment and graduate admissions paradigms are increasingly evaluating practical professional and research capabilities directly. These technical and corporate hiring practices demonstrate this evolution, including software capability tests at Samsung, developer portfolio reviews on GitHub at IT firms like Naver and Kakao, and practical portfolio assessments at Hyundai Motor Company. Similarly, science and engineering graduate programs place greater emphasis on Undergraduate Research Program (URP) outcomes, journal publications, and technical portfolios than GPA metrics alone.

Emphasizing this transition in evaluation paradigms, Team Leader Kim, advised: "We hope students utilize the revised academic policies not merely as a convenient means for grade acquisition, but as a framework for active academic and career planning. We encourage undergraduates to explore disciplines freely, acquiring deep knowledge and practical experience to thrive as professionals in an evolving society."

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Reforming academic grading systems represents more than an administrative adjustment to grade distribution. It reflects a transition in higher education from outcome-focused grade competition toward evaluating learning processes, personal growth, and practical competencies. The policy revisions at HUFS and peer institutions reflect shifting standards regarding how university education is delivered and assessed. Navigating this evolving landscape requires students to treat flexible academic policies as opportunities for intellectual exploration and skill development, proactively building personal capability for their future careers.

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# What Does a Photograph Remember?

## The Era of Ordinary Life Documented by Martin Parr

**By Jang Yeseo**
*Staff Reporter of Culture Section*


©Photography Seoul Museum of Art

**Before Reading** Who Is Martin Parr?

Martin Parr (1952–2025) was a British documentary photographer and a member of Magnum Photos* who documented tourism, consumer culture, family, and class through vivid colors, humor, and satire. Through photographic series created over extended periods, he turned everyday life into a record through which society and its era could be understood.

What remains with us after a trip ends – the scenery or the photographs? Every year, September 27 is designated by the United Nations as World Tourism Day. As smartphones and social media have become part of everyday life, tourism now involves not only experiencing places but also photographing and sharing them. British photographer Martin Parr observed such behavior decades ago, documenting modern society through tourists, families, and people at social gatherings. "Martin Parr: We Are Martin Parr," currently on view at the Photography Seoul Museum of Art, is the first retrospective in Asia since Parr's death in 2025 and surveys approximately 50 years of his work. In celebration of World Tourism Day, The Argus examines how Parr's major series turn ordinary life into a cultural record of an era and considers what today's overlooked moments may become as memories tomorrow.

### Viewing Information

**Location**
Photography Seoul Museum of Art (six-minute walk from Exit 1 of Changdong Station)

**Period**
2026. 06. 16 - 2026. 10. 18 (Closed every Monday and during the Chuseok holiday)

**Opening Hours**
10 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Last admission: 7 p.m.)

**Admission Fee** Free

**Docent Tours** 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m.

**Special Programs**
International symposium "Why Martin Parr?," documentary film screenings, and conversations with the audience

*Magnum Photos: An international photographic cooperative and photography agency founded in 1947 and a leading organization in contemporary documentary photography.

## Why Do Tourists Take the Same Photos in the Same Places?

Gallery 1 features *Small World* (1980–2025), in which Parr documented tourism around the world, and *The Establishment* (2010–2016), which captured the rituals of Britain's upper class and established elite. Although the series deal with different settings, both document behaviors people create within society. *Small World* shows globalized tourism, while *The Establishment* observes class and authority through British high society, politics, and royal culture. Both focus not on architecture or power itself, but on people acting within those settings.

▲ Acropolis, Athens, Greece (1991)

In "Acropolis, Athens, Greece" (1991), the Parthenon occupies the center of the frame, but the tourists taking photographs draw the viewer's attention. Groups pose in front of the ruins while a man in the foreground photographs them and Parr, in turn, captures the entire scene. The Parthenon becomes both a historical monument and a backdrop for a group photograph. For each traveler, it is a special moment, but within the series, it appears as a collective behavior repeated at tourist destinations worldwide.

Rather than mocking tourists, Parr shows how similarly people behave at tourist destinations. *Small World* ultimately asks, "What do people look at when travelling?" It questions whether leaving behind an image proving that a place has been visited has become more important than experiencing the place itself, and whether travel involves encountering a new world or reproducing images already seen. The series documents how people repeat surprisingly similar behaviors even in different places.

▲ The Queen Visiting Drapers' Livery Hall, 650th Anniversary of the Grant of their Royal Charter (2014)

▲ Toast to the Queen, Swan Upping, Near Eton, UK (2015)

The exhibition then continues with *The Establishment*. In "The Queen Visiting Drapers' Livery Hall, 650th Anniversary of the Drapers' Livery, London, UK" (2014), Queen Elizabeth II stands surrounded by security personnel and staff while a crowd raises phones and cameras to photograph her. In "Toast to the Queen, Swan Upping, Near Eton, UK" (2015), people in matching clothing stand in orderly formations on boats and raise their glasses. The repeated clothing, postures, and positioning suggest that authority and tradition are maintained through established rules and performances. Even within such formality, Parr captures ordinary gestures, bringing authority back to the level of human behavior.

In this respect, *The Establishment* connects to *Small World*. Just as tourists perform "tourist-like" poses, members of high society perform roles expected of them at formal events. Through Parr's camera, society appears through repeated gestures, gazes, and clothing. Although the two series portray different groups, individual behavior becomes a record reflecting society when multiple photographs are viewed together. Parr thus uses photographic series to show broader social patterns through everyday behavior.

## How Does Ordinary Life Become a Record of an Era?

The next space features *The Last Resort* (1983–1985) and *The Cost of Living* (1986–1989). Both focus on ordinary life but are connected to social and economic changes in 1980s Britain. New Brighton, once a leading seaside resort, declined as overseas travel became more common and industrial structures changed. In contrast, *The Cost* *of Living* documents the aspirations for upward mobility among the middle class under Thatcherism,* as well as the consumer and social culture of the period. Together, the series show how different classes experienced the same era differently.

▲ New Brighton, Merseyside (1984)

*The Last Resort* depicts working-class families vacationing at New Brighton. In "New Brighton, Merseyside" (1984), an older couple eats on a red bench beside a child in a stroller. A trash bin overflows with disposable containers, while litter covers the ground. Bright sunlight, the red bench, and blue sky create a lively seaside atmosphere but do not conceal the rusted structures, garbage, and aging facilities. Parr repeats these contrasts throughout the series, placing vacation pleasure and regional decline within the same frame. As the photographs accumulate, one family's vacation becomes a record of working-class leisure and regional decline in 1980s Britain.

▲ Midsummer Madness, Conservative Party Social Event (1986-1989)

▲ Wedding Preparation (1986)

*The Cost of Living* observes the middle class and its desire for upward social mobility. In *Midsummer Madness, Conservative Party Social Event* (1986–1989) and *Wedding Preparation* (1986), these aspirations appear through clothing, interiors, beauty routines, and social interaction. In one scene, formally dressed guests socialize in a garden; in another, women receive beauty treatments in an ornate interior. Formal clothing, carefully arranged spaces, and rituals of socializing and beauty become visual clues to social status. Rather than openly criticizing his subjects, Parr records how people use objects, spaces, and manners to construct the image of the social class to which they wish to belong.

Both *The Last Resort* and *The Cost of Living* document 1980s Britain but examine different classes. Working-class life amid industrial decline contrasts with middle-class consumption and social aspirations. Parr neither takes one side nor idealizes either group. By placing their everyday lives side by side, he suggests that individual life can become a mirror reflecting broader social structures.

## { Between Photographs That Document and Photographs That Are Consumed }

▲ Martin Parr: Photobooks 90

Upon entering Gallery 3, visitors encounter "Martin Parr: Photobooks 90," a collection of Parr's photobooks displayed on a red table. Parr was not only a photographer but also a photobook editor and collector. He emphasized their importance, once saying that "a photobook is another exhibition space." Organizing multiple photographs under one title helps communicate an overarching message and reveal the character of an era more clearly than a single photograph.

The exhibition continues with *Common Sense* (1994–1999). What matters is not one photograph but the accumulation of hundreds of images. Small photographs densely cover a wall, repeatedly showing food, body

*Thatcherism: The neoliberal economic policies pursued by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher from 1979 to 1990, including privatization, deregulation, and restrictions on trade-union power. Critics, particularly on the political left, have argued that these policies, along with industrial restructuring, contributed to widening class disparities and change in consumer culture.


▲ Common Sense (1994-1999)

parts, toys, souvenirs, wrappers, flags, and household goods. Individually, they are fragments of ordinary moments. Viewed together, their bright colors, plastic textures, exaggerated expressions, and consumer goods create a shared visual rhythm of mass consumption and desire. Through repetition and accumulation, *Common Sense* conveys aspects of consumer society that a single photograph cannot.

In *Death by Selfie* (2018), the tone becomes more serious. The series tells stories of people who fell or were involved in accidents while trying to take dramatic photographs. At tourist attractions, roads, beaches, and cliffs, people hold selfie sticks and smile at cameras even in dangerous locations. As smartphones and social media have become part of everyday life, photographs serve not only to preserve memories but also to prove experiences to others. Parr does not criticize selfies themselves. Instead, the series warns of situations in which creating an image begins to replace actual experience and even safety.

*Common Sense* and *Death by Selfie* should not be read in the same way. *Common Sense* suggests patterns of consumer society through accumulated images, while *Death by Selfie* directly captures moments when photography takes priority over experience and safety. Yet both reveal the habits of an era through behaviors repeated across multiple photographs. For Parr, a series is a method of documentation that allows viewers to discover social patterns beyond individual moments.

## { Similar Systems, Similar Days }


▲ Pyongyang (1997)

"People live similar lives wherever they are."

The final section features *North Korea* (1997), *South Korea* (1998–2007), and *Self Portrait* (1991-2005). According to the official exhibition description, Parr visited both South and North Korea from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. Although they have different political systems and cultures, his camera focuses on everyday life rather than grand ideologies. North Korea shows citizens walking through Pyongyang, taking photographs, and spending leisure time, while *South Korea* similarly features tourists, office workers, and people moving through markets.

In "Pyongyang" (1997), citizens gather in front of a large stone building. Some stand beside bicycles or talk to one another, while a man checks his wristwatch and a person carrying pink flowers walks past. Rather than focusing on monumental architecture or political symbols, Parr captures everyday gestures – waiting, checking the time, moving, and talking. Through his camera, even difficult-to-access North Korea appears as a

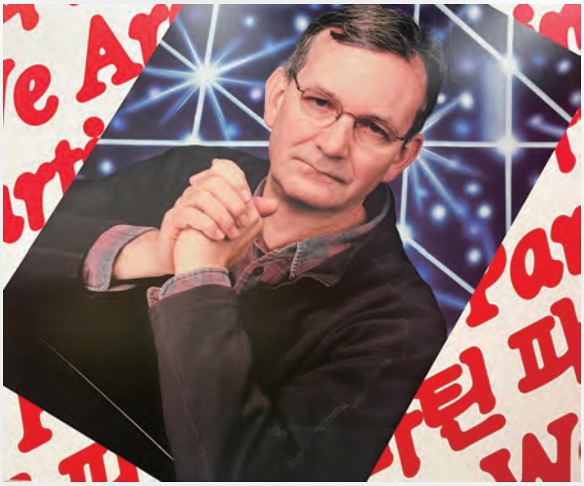

▲ Ilsan Shopping Center (2004)

place where people spend their days in ordinary ways.

In "Ilsan Shopping Center" (2004), two students rest in front of a huge food advertisement. One looks at a mobile phone while the other squats beside a locker. Images of pizza and noodles dominate the background, yet the students remain largely indifferent to them. The contrast between commercial imagery and their quiet gestures shows shopping centers not simply as places of consumption but also as meeting and resting spaces for teenagers.

South and North Korea differ greatly in their political and economic systems and urban landscapes. Yet Parr focuses on streets, tourist destinations, clothing, and everyday behavior rather than grand ideologies. Without erasing differences between the societies, he shows people eating, moving, taking photographs, and spending leisure time. His subjects appear not merely as symbols of their countries but as individuals living their daily lives.

These scenes also resemble university campuses. Students lean against hallway walls, share snacks on the steps, or look at their phones while waiting for a shuttle bus. Such scenes are so familiar that people may never think of photographing them. Parr's photographs, however, suggest that familiarity does not mean worthlessness. The character of an era is often preserved in scenes people encounter every day but rarely stop to notice.


▲ Self Portrait (1991-2005)

In *Self Portrait*, Parr places himself within the conventions he spent decades observing. In one work, his face appears inside a huge glass surrounded by tropical plants, star effects, and roses; in another, it is inserted into a scene with a shark. These artificial compositions resemble kitschy souvenir photographs. After observing tourists and consumer culture for decades, Parr himself participates in the image-making conventions he documented, humorously asking, "How do I want to turn myself into an image?" Viewers are thus encouraged to recognize that they, too, participate in Parr's world when they photograph themselves and consume images.

Photos above are taken by Jang Yeseo

Martin Parr turned repeated scenes of ordinary life into cultural records of their eras. Yang Seung-wook, a visitor in his 40s who lives in Seoul said, "At the time a photograph is taken, it may simply be an everyday image that is put aside and forgotten. But as time passes and a place or a person disappears, it can most vividly show that the person and the situation existed at that time." His observation captures Parr's central message: ordinary moments gain significance with time. Ultimately, an ordinary day becomes a memory of an era through what people choose to notice and preserve.

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# Does AI Bring Back Memories or People?

## – Grief in the Age of AI Through Black Inferno

**By Jang Yeseo**
*Staff Reporter of Culture Section*

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What if people could talk again with someone they love after losing them? Generative artificial intelligence (AI) can now learn a deceased person's voice, way of speaking, photos, and videos to create an entity that interacts with those left behind. Oh Sung-eun's novel *Black Inferno* (2025) and Yeon Sang-ho's film *Paradise Lost* (2026), based on the novel, explore this emerging reality by bringing together an AI recreation of Jaden and the real Jaden, who returns after 13 years. By examining Megan's grief, her interactions in "Paradise," and the gap between real and AI Jaden, The Argus considers how memory and grief may change in the age of AI.

©Kyobo Book Centre

### Plot of *Black Inferno* (2025)

In a forest near the Canadian-U.S. border, a camping bus carrying 13 children disappears. Only some of their bodies are later found beneath a massive cliff, and the tragedy becomes known as the "Black Inferno incident." A company collects the children's photos, videos, voices, school records, and surveillance footage and develops an AI program called "child-13." Through it, bereaved parents enter a virtual space called "Paradise" and talk with AI recreations of their children. Megan, Jaden's mother, continues her relationship with an AI recreation of 10-year-old Jaden.

Thirteen years later, the real Jaden returns as an adult after surviving kidnapping, abuse, and years under the kidnapper's control. While real Jaden carries trauma, anger, and guilt, AI Jaden retains his 10-year-old appearance, voice, and preferences. Toward the end, Megan and real Jaden return to the Black Inferno forest and confront their memories. Megan does not completely remove AI Jaden from Paradise, but she stops regarding the AI-preserved child as her only "real son." Instead, she accepts the wounded adult who has returned and begins a new relationship with him.

## Megan's Grief That Began at the Black Inferno Cliff

©AI - generated (GIGAZINE)

▲ A preserved child's bedroom shows how belongings and spaces can become tangible sites of continuing bonds.

After Jaden disappears, Megan repeatedly returns to the Black Inferno cliff, leaves lilies, hears what seems to be Jaden's voice, and suffers from nightmares and suicidal urges. The cliff becomes both the site of Jaden's absence and a place where Megan maintains her bond with him.

Her behavior can be understood through British psychoanalyst John Bowlby's four stages of grief: "Shock and Numbness," "Yearning and Searching," "Disorganization and Despair," and "Reorganization." Megan's repeated visits and search for Jaden's voice particularly reflect the first two stages.

Oh Sung-eun, author of *Black Inferno* and an assistant professor in the Department of Media Content Creation at Semyung University, said, "Bowlby's attachment theory can be applied to the protagonist's inability to let go of her son for a long time after losing him and to the process through which she comes to accept her son recreated by AI." Megan's behavior can therefore be understood not simply as obsession, but as the continuing operation of attachment after loss.

A similar pattern appears in the research by Professor Jeon Ji-yeol of Korea Counseling Graduate University and Director of Sungkyunkwan University Traumatic Stress Center & Korean Trauma Association, "A Qualitative Study on the Continuing Bonds Experience of Parents Who Lost Their Children in the Sewol Ferry Disaster: Focusing on the Implications for Grief Counseling Applying the Two-Track Model of Bereavement" (2022). The study examined 15 bereaved parents who preserved belongings and memorial spaces, encountered their children through dreams or inner conversations, and continued rituals of remembrance. These practices helped them reorganize their relationships with their children rather than simply deny their deaths.

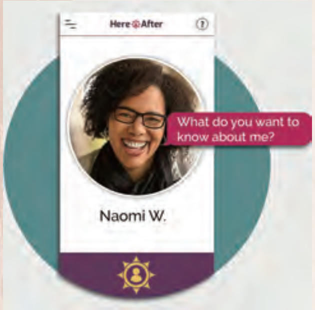
The Two-Track Model of Bereavement considers both changes in psychological functioning and changes in the relationship with the deceased. Continuing bonds could provide meaning while also reactivating pain. Similarly, Megan's visits to the cliff maintain her connection with Jaden while forcing her to confront his absence.

Yoon Hyun-sook, a researcher in the Department of Family Counseling and Therapy at the Graduate School of Integrative Psychological Therapy at Sangmyung University, also examined grief through Virtual Reality (VR) in her master's thesis, "A Study on the Experiences of Two Bereaved Families Participating in Metaverse (Using VR) Family Grief Counseling" (2024). The study found that sharing photographs, videos, letters, and memories through VR-based counseling helped family members express different forms of grief and improve communication. Importantly, VR functioned not as a way to bring the deceased back to life but as a medium through which families could reflect on loss and strengthen relationships in reality. Megan's grief can likewise be understood as a process of adapting to a changed relationship rather than simply failing to let go.

## AI Bringing Relationships After Death Into the Present

Megan's grief changes when she enters Paradise. AI Jaden appears as the 10-year-old boy she remembers, allowing them to share meals, conversations, and ordinary moments. Instead of remembering Jaden alone, Megan can ask questions, hear

©HereAfter AI




▲ HereAfter AI presents an interactive profile that allows family members to ask questions and hear recorded memories.

©Re;memory / DeepBrain AI

▲ DeepBrain AI's "Re;memory" demonstrates a life-size digital recreation used for memorial interaction.

answers, and once again act as his mother.

Similar AI grief services are already emerging. HereAfter AI in the United States allows family members to hear memories through a person's recorded voice, while DeepBrain AI's "Re;memory" in South Korea recreates a deceased person's appearance using photographs, voice recordings, and videos. Although these services differ from Paradise technologically, they illustrate a shift from one-way remembrance toward interactive memorial experiences.

Such interaction may help address "unfinished business." The study "The Role of Unfinished Business in the Relationship Between Attachment Style and Grief: A Two-Wave Longitudinal Study" (2026), by Professor Suqin Tang of the School of Psychology at Shenzhen University, Professor Jingjing Huang of the School of Psychology at Beijing Normal University, and Researcher Zifeng Yang of Shenzhen University, studied 206 bereaved Chinese adults. It divided unfinished business into "unfulfilled wishes" and "unresolved conflicts," both of which predicted later grief. The findings suggest that addressing words left unsaid or experiences never shared may play an important role in grief intervention.

Paradise provides Megan with such an opportunity. She can revisit conversations and everyday experiences that Jaden's disappearance abruptly ended. Professor Oh explained, "Healthy grieving does not necessarily mean completely ending one's relationship with the person who has died. People can continue their relationships with those who have passed away in new ways through memories, inner conversations, habits, and rituals." In Paradise, however, this continuing bond becomes external, taking on a face, voice, and ability to respond.

*Black Inferno* therefore does not present AI itself as healing. Instead, it asks whether interactive technology can help bereaved people express unfinished emotions while remaining connected to their families and lives in reality.

## When Paradise Replaces Reality

©MBC

▲ Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) documentary *I Met You* shows a mother encountering a computer-generated recreation of her deceased daughter through VR.

Paradise becomes risky when Megan grows increasingly absorbed in it. AI Jaden remains the familiar 10-year-old she remembers, while real Jaden returns as an unfamiliar adult shaped by 13 years of trauma. Megan consequently feels more comfortable with the predictable AI version than with her living son.

Lauren, appearing as a psychological counselor in the story, repeatedly reminds Megan that Jaden in Paradise is not her real son but an AI created to help her grieve. Her advice establishes a boundary between using AI for comfort and allowing it to replace relationships in reality.

Professor Oh similarly said of AI recreation, "It is more likely to be an entity constructed from the data and memories left behind than the actual person himself." He explained that real people change in unexpected ways, whereas AI may remain fixed in the form remembered and selected by others. He also raised the ethical question of whether someone's voice, appearance, and personality should be recreated without consent. The contrast between AI and real Jaden therefore demonstrates how AI may preserve memory while fixing a person at a particular moment.

Researcher Jung Ji-young, who majored in Artificial Intelligence Humanity Convergence Education at the Graduate School of Education of Seoul National University of Education, addresses this issue in the master's thesis "A Study on the Ethical Meaning of Digital Resurrection in the Age of AI" (2023). The study categorizes digital resurrection by its "purpose" and "continuity" and describes long-term digital entities maintaining relationships with family or acquaintances as "continuous-personal role digital resurrection." As these entities remain in everyday life, they may become perceived not merely as memorial objects but as beings that form relationships with the living.

Paradise represents an extreme form of this situation. AI Jaden can continuously talk with Megan and call her "Mom." The ethical problem becomes particularly visible after real Jaden returns and both the AI child and adult survivor simultaneously occupy the role of Megan's son. Questions arise over who has the right to recreate Jaden, which stage of his life represents him, and how long AI should be permitted to speak on his behalf. Researcher Jung's study also identifies digital legacy management, privacy, and the right to be forgotten as major issues. Comfort for the bereaved, therefore, does not automatically justify indefinite reconstruction.

More specific safeguards are proposed in "Design of a KoGPT-based Korean Griefbot Conversational Simulation System with Ethical and Legal Considerations" (2025), by Researcher Lee Ju-hyung of Department of Computer Engineering, Researcher Si Jong-wook of the Department of Computer and AI Convergence Engineering, and Professor Kim Sun-gyoung at Kumoh National Institute of Technology. The researchers propose obtaining consent, specifying the purpose and retention period of data, removing directly identifiable information, and guaranteeing access and deletion rights. They also recommend clearly informing users that they are interacting with AI, limiting session frequency and duration, introducing protections for vulnerable users, and providing a "digital funeral" procedure through which the relationship can be ended.

These safeguards resemble an institutional version of Lauren's advice. Users must remain aware that AI is a generated entity and retain the ability to end the relationship. Prior consent, data use, responsibility for generated statements, protection of vulnerable users, and procedures for ending services therefore require broader ethical and regulatory standards.

*Black Inferno* ultimately does not argue that AI should be prohibited. Instead, it asks where the boundary between comfort and replacement should lie. Paradise helps Megan endure her loss, but counseling and ethical intervention become necessary when the virtual relationship begins to replace reality.

*Black Inferno* goes beyond asking whether AI can allow people to meet the deceased again. If AI helps people express grief and reconstruct relationships, it may become a new medium for mourning. However, when memory begins to replace reality, clearer boundaries are necessary. The central question of grief in the age of AI is therefore not simply how vividly technology can bring someone back, but whether it respects the dignity of the deceased while helping those left behind continue living in the real world.

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▲ A white rose at a memorial symbolizes how memories of the deceased remain part of the lives of those left behind.

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# The Economics Behind Chuseok Agricultural Prices

**By You Chae-hyeon**
*Staff Reporter of Social Section*

As Chuseok, a national holiday in South Korea (hereafter Korea) approaches, consumer interest in agricultural prices is growing alongside rising demand for seasonal holiday foods such as fruits, vegetables, and seafood. However, factors beyond holiday demand, such as heat waves and heavy rainfall, increasingly affect agricultural production and supply of agricultural products. As the effects of climate change become more pronounced, harvest periods have become less predictable, while the volume of produce reaching the market has also fluctuated significantly.

In 2026, for example, the July heat wave hindered the growth of leafy vegetables such as lettuce, reducing supply and driving retail lettuce prices up by approximately 35.6 percent in just one month. A bag that had sold for around 3,000 won (US$2.13) rose to more than 4,000 won (US$2.84). Against this backdrop, the government plans to pilot an artificial intelligence (AI)-based agricultural and livestock price comparison service starting in September, allowing consumers to easily compare prices at nearby retailers. While consumers will have easier access to price information, understanding why prices rise and fall requires a closer look at the market's supply and demand structure. The Argus examines how agricultural prices are determined and how supply shocks caused by extreme weather affect Chuseok food prices.

## How Agricultural Prices Are Determined

Ahead of Chuseok, many shoppers have been surprised to find agricultural prices significantly higher than last year. So, how are agricultural prices determined? Prices are determined by the interaction between consumer demand and producer supply. Economists illustrate this relationship with demand and supply curves, whose intersection determines the market equilibrium. Their responsiveness to price changes is measured by price elasticity. The slopes of the curves reflect how demand and supply respond to price changes, as measured


©Jnilbo

▲ Fruit gift sets are displayed at a supermarket ahead of Chuseok, when demand for agricultural products typically rises.

by price elasticity. Technological improvements and subsidies lower production costs, shifting supply right and reducing equilibrium prices. Higher raw material and labor costs shift supply left, raising prices and reducing quantities.

The same principles of supply and demand apply to agricultural markets, but agricultural products have characteristics that distinguish them from other goods. One of the most important is the low price elasticity of both supply and demand, which stems from the unique characteristics of agricultural production, distribution, and consumption.

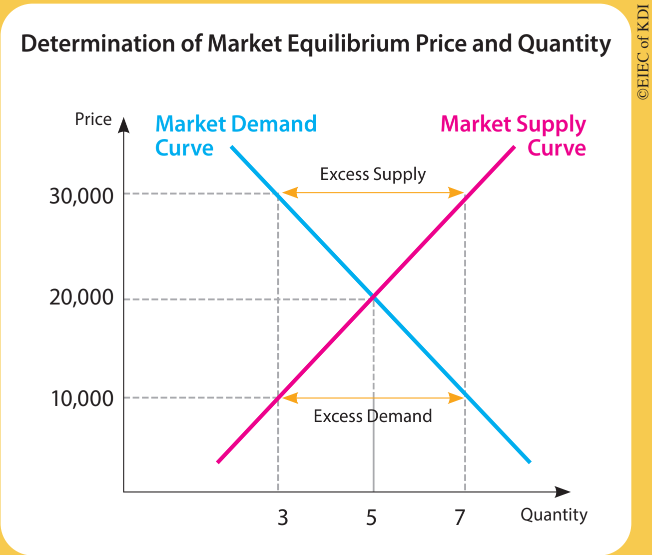
First, agricultural production is difficult to adjust and highly uncertain. Unlike manufacturers, farmers cannot quickly increase output when prices rise because crops require time to grow from planting to harvest. Production is also vulnerable to weather, pests, typhoons, and other disasters that affect crop quantity and quality. Hwang Seong-hyuk, an associate professor in the department of agricultural economics at Jeonbuk National University, explained, “No matter how hard farmers work, unfavorable weather conditions or natural disasters such as typhoons can significantly affect both the quantity and quality of their crops. This is because agricultural production is difficult to control and inherently uncertain.” For these reasons, the short-run price elasticity of agricultural supply is very low.

Distribution further limits supply adjustment. Manufacturers can store excess output, but agricultural products are often perishable. Vegetables, fruits, and livestock products lose value during storage, forcing farmers to sell quickly even when prices are low.

Moreover, many agricultural products are harvested around the same time, causing supply to become concentrated during certain periods. Because producers have limited ability to regulate supply through storage, even a small increase in production can lead to a significant decline in prices.

Agricultural products also differ from ordinary goods in terms of consumption. Products such as cabbage, rice, potatoes, and eggs are essential goods, so consumers cannot significantly reduce consumption when prices rise. Agricultural products are therefore essential goods with low price elasticity of demand. Agricultural markets therefore have relatively inelastic supply and demand. Because production is difficult to adjust, agricultural products are perishable, and many are essential goods, even small changes in supply can cause large price fluctuations.

## Sudden Changes in Supply: Supply Shocks




▲ A supply and demand graph shows the determination of equilibrium price and quantity in a market.

Unexpected factors such as extreme weather, natural disasters, wars, and rising raw material costs can shift supply or demand and disrupt market equilibrium. In economics, a sudden change in supply conditions caused by such external factors is known as a “supply shock.” When extreme weather damages crops and reduces yields, the amount of produce available to the market decreases. Graphically, this is represented by a leftward shift in the supply curve. If demand remains unchanged, a decrease in supply raises the new equilibrium price while reducing the equilibrium quantity. In other words, a deterioration in market supply conditions caused by a supply shock can lead to higher prices and lower transaction volumes at the same time. A negative supply shock reduces production or raises costs, shifting supply left and increasing prices while reducing quantities traded. A positive supply shock, such as a bumper harvest or lower production costs, shifts supply right, lowering prices and increasing quantities.

Korea has recently seen several examples of supply shocks caused by extreme weather. According to the Korea Meteorological Administration (KMA), 2025 recorded an annual average temperature of 13.7°C, making it the second-hottest year on record since weather observations began in Korea. Heat waves persisted for five consecutive months from June through October, with monthly average temperatures ranking among the top two highest on record. Extreme weather also continued, with hourly rainfall exceeding 100 millimeter recorded at 15 locations across the country. These conditions have continued into 2026. In its *Summer Disaster Prevention Weather Measures Press Release* (2026), the KMA described heat waves and torrential rain as increasingly severe climate disasters and introduced new heat-wave emergency warnings and tropical-night advisories in response. Such extreme weather can affect crop growth and shipment volumes, contributing to instability in agricultural supply.

According to data from Korea Agricultural Marketing Information Service, operated by the Korea Agro-Fisheries & Food Trade Corporation (aT), lettuce prices in 2026 rose 35.6 percent from the previous month and 22.2 percent from a year earlier. Pear prices also rose sharply, increasing 37 percent from the previous month.

Supply shocks can also arise from factors other than natural disasters. For example, following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, international fertilizer and energy prices surged, significantly increasing agricultural production costs in Korea. The Korea Rural Economic Institute (KREI), in its July 2026 International Grain Outlook, projected that international grain futures prices would rise in the third quarter from the previous quarter, citing military tensions in the Black Sea region and the Middle East, concerns over crop conditions caused by high temperatures in the U.S. Midwest, and China's purchases of U.S. corn. According to the Ministry of Data and Statistics (MoDS)' *Farm Household Economy Survey* (2022), agricultural operating expenses increased by 13 percent in 2022 from the previous year, largely due to higher fertilizer, feed, and fuel costs. When production costs rise, some farmers may reduce production or delay shipments, potentially reducing market supply and driving prices higher.

Supply shocks can also occur when supply increases far more than expected. A typical example is oversupply following a bumper harvest. When favorable weather significantly improves crop conditions, the volume of produce entering the market can increase sharply, causing prices to fall substantially. According to MoDS's *2019 Onion Production Survey* (2019), onion production reached approximately 1.594 million tons in 2019, a 17.8 percent increase from the previous year. As supply exceeded demand, wholesale prices fell below production costs, prompting the government to isolate the market and dispose of excess onions. When the price of a particular crop rises sharply, farmers may interpret the increase as a signal that growing the crop could generate higher income and consequently expand the area planted with it the following year. If favorable weather then produces an unexpectedly large harvest, oversupply can drive prices down again. Professor Hwang explained this cycle as such "A rise in prices signals to farmers that they can receive higher returns by growing a particular crop. However, if the cultivated area expands at the same time the following year and weather conditions are favorable, the resulting oversupply can cause prices to fall sharply again, creating a recurring cycle." A supply shock is therefore an external change that rapidly alters market supply, price, and quantity. When supply decreases, prices rise and transaction volumes fall. Conversely, when supply increases sharply, prices fall and producers' incomes may decline. Ultimately, supply shocks affect not only consumers' purchasing behavior but also producers' financial stability and the overall balance between supply and demand in the market.

## The Economic Impact of Agricultural Supply Shocks

### (1) What Happens in the Global Agricultural Market?

Supply shocks affect countries differently. For agricultural exporters, higher international prices can improve terms of trade and export revenues. However, if droughts or heat waves sharply reduce production, exporters may have less produce to sell and may not benefit fully from higher prices. In such cases, farm incomes can decline and a country's export performance can deteriorate. Brazil is the world's largest coffee exporter. In 2024, however, high temperatures and drought in major coffee-growing regions raised concerns about Arabica coffee production. The World Bank's report *Commodity Markets Outlook* (2024) noted that these extreme weather conditions heightened concerns over global coffee supplies. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations also reported that global coffee prices rose by an average of 38.8 percent in 2024 from the previous year, as production disruptions affected major producers such as Brazil and Vietnam. The case shows that even exporting countries may fail to fully benefit from higher prices when production declines significantly. In some cases, lower output can instead lead to weaker export performance and lower farm incomes.

Agricultural importers can bear a direct burden from rising international prices. Higher grain import costs raise food production costs and eventually consumer prices. Egypt provides a notable example. The country relies heavily on food imports, particularly wheat, with Russia and Ukraine accounting for about 85 percent of its wheat imports before the Russia-Ukraine war. When the war disrupted grain supply chains in the Black Sea region, international wheat prices rose from around US$317 per ton in November 2021 to approximately US$500 between February and April 2022, according to the World Bank. The resulting supply shock pushed Egypt's food inflation to 31 percent in November 2022, while overall inflation rose from around 6 percent in January to 19 percent in November, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute. Agricultural importers are therefore directly exposed to supply shocks in global markets and may face economic losses through rising food prices and declining real purchasing power.

### (2) Why Is Korea Vulnerable to Global Supply Shocks?

Korea relies heavily on imports for major grains such as wheat, corn, and soybeans. As of 2024, Korea's grain self-sufficiency rate stood at just 21.6 percent, meaning that the country relies on international markets for most of the grain it needs. This dependence exposes domestic prices and inflation to global agricultural markets. However, agricultural production requires a certain amount of time for crops to grow and livestock to be raised, making it difficult to expand domestic supply in the short term. When a supply shortage occurs, sourcing additional products from overseas therefore becomes an important means of stabilizing prices.

When imported agricultural products enter the domestic market, total supply increases, shifting the supply curve to the right. As a result, the equilibrium price falls while the quantity traded increases. This benefits consumers by helping stabilize prices and expanding their range of choices. Domestic producers, however, may face stronger competition from imported products, leading to lower selling prices and reduced incomes. Expanding agricultural imports is therefore not simply a policy aimed at lowering prices. Rather, it involves balancing consumer welfare, the domestic agricultural production base, and food security.

For a country like Korea, which relies heavily on agricultural imports, global supply shocks can quickly pass through to the domestic economy. Key sources of supply shocks include declining crop yields overseas due to climate change, wars and international conflicts, exchange-rate fluctuations, and rising international shipping costs. When overseas production falls or

©Hankyoreh

▲ A cargo ship is docked at Incheon Port, highlighting the role of maritime trade in Korea's agricultural supply.

transportation costs increase, import costs rise, putting upward pressure on domestic food prices. A weaker Korean won can further amplify this pressure because importers need more won to purchase the same quantity of agricultural products.

Imported grains are key inputs for processed foods such as flour and cooking oil and are also widely used as animal feed. When international grain prices rise, milling companies and food manufacturers face higher raw material costs, which can push up the prices of processed foods such as bread, instant noodles, and snacks. Higher feed costs also increase production costs for livestock farmers, affecting the prices of pork, chicken, eggs, and other livestock products. Ultimately, global supply shocks can trigger cost-push inflation by raising consumer prices through their effects on food manufacturing, the restaurant industry, and livestock production.

A study by the KREI, *Analysis of the Impact of Imported Grain Price Fluctuations on Domestic Consumer Prices* (2020), used a nonlinear autoregressive distributed lag (NARDL) model to examine how changes in global grain prices affect Korea's consumer prices. The study found that a 10 percent increase in global grain prices was associated with an approximately 0.39 percent increase in Korea's overall Consumer Price Index. By contrast, declines in grain prices did not have a statistically significant effect on domestic inflation, indicating that increases in global grain prices are transmitted to domestic prices asymmetrically.

### (3) How Should Korea Respond?

Rising prices of agricultural and fishery products reduce consumers' real purchasing power and place a particularly heavy burden on low-income households, which tend to spend a larger share of their income on food. If inflation persists, it can also influence the Bank of Korea's decisions on the benchmark interest rate and the government's price-stabilization policies. In response, the government has used various measures to mitigate supply shocks, including releasing reserve stocks, applying tariff-rate quotas, and diversifying import sources.

Responding to supply shocks can involve proactive risk management rather than policies implemented only after prices rise. This requires strengthening the resilience of the entire agricultural supply chain, from production to distribution, through measures such as developing climate-resilient crop varieties, expanding smart farming, strengthening crop disaster insurance, improving agricultural market monitoring and AI-based supply-and-demand forecasting systems, and increasing reserves of major grains. The government's recent efforts to develop an AI-based agricultural price forecasting service can also be viewed as part of this approach. By using weather, production, and distribution data to forecast price fluctuations in advance, such a system could support decision-making by farmers and consumers while helping authorities respond proactively to supply shocks.

Price-stabilization policies involve balancing consumer and producer interests. Professor Hwang explained, "Releasing reserve stocks, lowering tariffs, and increasing imports should be used as short-term measures to address urgent price pressures. If the government artificially lowers prices whenever agricultural and fishery prices rise, farmers may lose the incentive to produce, weakening the domestic production base over the long term and potentially leading to even greater supply shortages." He added, "The key to stabilizing agricultural and fishery prices is not to suppress prices, but to establish a system in advance that ensures a stable supply by integrating production, distribution, reserves, imports, and farm incomes." Lee Kee-hyun, an associate research fellow of KREI, also noted, "For reserves to work effectively, regular inventory rotation, quality control, storage facilities, and clear release criteria must be in place. If reserves are released too late, they may coincide with the domestic harvest season and drive domestic prices down." He also pointed out that "increasing imports takes time because of quarantine procedures and logistics, and its effectiveness may be limited when consumers prefer domestic products or when international prices and exchange rates rise simultaneously."

©MAFRA

▲ The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA) plans to launch AI-based services to help consumers compare agricultural product prices.

Ultimately, agricultural and fishery prices are not simply numbers determined by the market. They reflect the combined effects of climate change, international affairs, exchange rates, and the structure of production and distribution. Korea remains vulnerable to global supply shocks because of its high dependence on imports. Rather than simply restricting or expanding imports, a balanced supply-stabilization system could allow global markets and domestic agriculture to complement each other.

This year's Chuseok food prices cannot be explained by holiday demand alone. Understanding why prices change requires considering the economic factors behind them. As supply shocks become an increasingly common part of the economic landscape, long-term supply stability may become as important as temporary price reductions. This may require a more sustainable agricultural supply system that can respond steadily to changing market conditions.

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# Who Is Responsible? Inside America's College Cost Reduction Act

**By Lee Joon-woo**
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To what extent can a single piece of legislation reshape an individual's life? In the United States, rising college tuition and student loan debt prevent young adults from building wealth. In response, policy measures have been pursued, including the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) plan in 2023 – an income-driven repayment scheme designed to ease monthly financial strain. However, because it generated massive debt forgiveness without explicit authorization from Congress, the plan faced lawsuits from state governments. Federal courts subsequently issued injunctions blocking its core provisions. This legal battle escalated into a constitutional clash over executive authority. Ultimately, Congress intervened in 2024 by introducing the College Cost Reduction Act (CCRA) to overhaul the federal student loan framework through legislation. As the CCRA takes effect in September 2026, American higher education policy shifts from executive rule-making to congressional lawmaking. The Argus examines this shift as an international legal case study illustrating how a statute redefines executive authority and institutional accountability, while affecting young people's lives.

**[Before Reading] U.S. Federal Student Loan System**

The roots of the U.S. federal student loan system trace back to the National Defense Education Act (1958) to cultivate talent in science, mathematics, and foreign languages. Later, under President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" vision, the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) was enacted, establishing federal financial aid as a universal welfare mechanism to guarantee higher education access. Following a 2010 overhaul that established the Direct Loan program and enabled the federal government to lend directly to students, the system operated through various mechanisms, ranging from the Standard Repayment Plan to Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) plans. However, near-unlimited federal loan guarantees spurred universities to raise tuition. The resulting debt burden left millions unable to repay, creating economic and political conflict.

## 1. Why Congress Stepped In: From SAVE to the CCRA

### 1-1. The Student Debt Dilemma and Executive Workarounds

The U.S. student debt crisis has evolved into a central debate over higher education and fiscal stability. According to the "Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit" (2026) published by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, total outstanding U.S. student loan debt reached approximately US$1.77 trillion in 2025. Furthermore, Federal Student Aid reported that approximately 43 million borrowers rely on federal student loans. This indebtedness forces young people to delay home purchases, marriage, and business ventures. A report, "Student Loans and the Class of 2020: How Much Will They Owe?" (2020), by the Brookings Institution similarly concluded that student debt remains a structural barrier restricting economic mobility. In recent years, the student loan framework has become the center of a power struggle between the executive branch and the judicial and legislative branches. The conflict began when the Biden administration rolled out a debt relief policy in 2023 via administrative procedures without new legislation.

Originally, the statutory foundation was the HEA, which granted the Secretary of Education delegated authority to administer direct loans. The Biden administration initially attempted to forgive up to US$20,000 per borrower under the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003 (HEROES Act) – a statute permitting the Secretary to "waive or modify any statutory or regulatory provision applicable to the student financial assistance programs." However, in 2023, after multiple states filed lawsuits, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the initiative as unconstitutional executive overreach. The administration then turned to delegated authority provisions governing IDR plans under the HEA.

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▲ U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the HEA into law, establishing the statutory foundation for modern federal student financial aid.

### 1-2. The Rise of the SAVE Plan and the Judicial Check

Under Section 455(e) of the HEA of 1965 the language governing IDR plans specified that the Secretary of Education could establish terms, fees, and procedures through rules. The executive branch interpreted this delegated authority broadly to redesign repayment parameters without passing a law. Relying on this provision, the Department of Education overhauled the Revised Pay As You Earn (REPAYE) plan*, promulgated the SAVE plan in the Federal Register in 2023, and implemented it.

Unlike REPAYE, the SAVE plan lowered monthly payments for undergraduate borrowers from 10 percent to 5 percent of discretionary income, covered unpaid monthly interest, and offered complete forgiveness after 10 years for initial balances of US$12,000 or less. The Department of Education maintained that these were lawful administrative rules. In practice, however, the measure functioned as a sweeping debt cancellation program costing hundreds of billions of dollars.

Consequently, seven Republican-led states, including Missouri and Kansas, filed suit in federal court, arguing that the Department of Education enacted debt forgiveness without statutory authority. The core legal arguments centered on "exceeding delegated authority" and the "Major Questions Doctrine." Delegated authority holds that under Article I of the U.S. Constitution, legislative power belongs exclusively to Congress; therefore, major economic policies cannot be unilaterally created by executive agencies.

The "Major Questions Doctrine" holds that when an agency claims authority over policies of vast economic significance, it must point to clear congressional authorization. This doctrine was established in the U.S. Supreme Court decision *West Virginia v. EPA* (2022). Plaintiffs argued that the HEA never delegated authority to engineer a repayment system that cancelled federal debt. In 2024, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit issued a preliminary injunction halting the SAVE plan, concluding the Department likely exceeded authority. The Department of Education placed approximately 8 million enrolled borrowers into interest-free "administrative forbearance," underscoring that executive rule-making alone cannot provide lasting legal footing.

*Revised Pay As You Earn (REPAYE) plan: REPAYE plan was established by the Department of Education in 2015 pursuant to Section 455(e) of the HEA. It set monthly payments at 10 percent of discretionary income above 150 percent of the federal poverty line and offered forgiveness after 20 to 25 years. It was replaced by the SAVE plan in 2023.


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▲ The U.S. Department of Education promotes the SAVE plan as an income-driven repayment framework designed to lower monthly student loan payments before facing extensive legal challenges.

### 1-3. Legislative Counteroffensive: Reclaiming Control Through the CCRA

On January 11, 2024, Representative Virginia Foxx, a Republican politician from North Carolina, Chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, introduced the CCRA to block arbitrary executive rule-making and restructure student aid. The bill passed the House committee on January 31, 2024.

The CCRA relies on the HEA as its statutory framework. Thus, it takes the form of an amendment bill designed to modify, replace, or insert specific provisions within the existing HEA text to enhance clarity and remove room for arbitrary administrative interpretation. Accordingly, the CCRA repeals scattered IDR plans created under the HEA – including the SAVE plan. In their place, the bill establishes a single scheme directly codified by Congress: the "Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP)". Furthermore, the CCRA includes provisions restricting the Secretary of Education's legal discretion, prohibiting rules that increase federal deficit costs.

©U.S. House of Representatives

▲ Representative Virginia Foxx, Chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, authors the CCRA to hold higher education institutions financially accountable for student debt.

Ultimately, the CCRA represents a drive to write student loan criteria directly into statutory law, transferring policy control back to Congress. This reaffirms the rule of law and the separation of powers. The "rule of law" dictates that the executive branch must act solely pursuant to statutes enacted by Congress. The "separation of powers" serves as a structural safeguard dividing power among brances to prevent overreach.

## 2. Inside the Law: Decoding the College Cost Reduction Act

### 2-1. Capping Federal Student Loans: Can Legal Limits Control College Costs?

Through the CCRA, Congress repealed the SAVE plan and legacy IDR options, consolidating repayment under the RAP. The primary mechanism of this overhaul is the statutory loan cap clause. Sections 221(a)(2) and (b) of the CCRA amend Section 455(a) of the HEA, drawing numerical ceilings on borrowing. These amended sections begin with: "Notwithstanding any provision..." Known in jurisprudence as a *non-obstante* clause, this technique overrides conflicting exception clauses or administrative discretion found elsewhere in the HEA. Under federal case law, this language strips the Secretary of Education of administrative waivers or flexible workarounds. Congress inserted this language to dismantle open-ended liquidity. Under the traditional HEA, Grad PLUS and Parent PLUS loans allowed borrowing up to the full Cost of Attendance (COA)* minus other financial aid. Economically, this open-ended funding reinforced “Bennett’s Hypothesis”* – the theory positing that when governments increase aid, institutions respond by raising tuition.

Comparing the legacy HEA framework and the CCRA reveals major shifts: first, the elimination of Grad PLUS and Parent PLUS loans; second, a cumulative borrowing limit of US$100,000 for general graduate students and US$150,000 for professional degree students; third, a unified US$50,000 cap for undergraduate students; and finally, an absolute lifetime cap of US$200,000 across all studies. By codifying these caps, the CCRA capped unchecked federal funding.

Policy experts remain divided over these limits. Conservative institutions, such as The Heritage Foundation, along with the Congressional Budget Office, support capping federal loans to curb tuition hikes and the deficit. Conversely, progressive organizations, including The Brookings Institution, the American Council on Education, and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, argue that rigid caps harm low-income students by pushing them toward high-interest private loan markets.

*Cost of Attendance (COA): A metric in U.S. higher education financial aid representing the total estimated cost for a student to attend an institution for one academic year, including tuition, fees, books, supplies, room, and board.

*Bennett’s Hypothesis: An economic theory proposed in 1987 by former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett, arguing that increases in federal financial aid enable higher education institutions to raise tuition costs.

### 2-2. Restricting Executive Power: Congress Draws the Line

Section 303 of Title III, Part A, Subpart 1 of the CCRA inserts a new Section 492A into the HEA, binding the Secretary of Education’s administrative rule-making authority. Under CCRA Section 492A, the Secretary of Education is legally prohibited from issuing any final regulation if doing so would carry a major economic effect or increase federal subsidy costs (Sec. 492A(b)). The statute defines an “economically significant effect” as an annual impact of US$100 million or more (Sec. 492A(d)). The phrase “The Secretary may not...” establishes a non-discretionary duty, blocking administrative rule-making such as the SAVE plan. While the Biden administration relied on procedural delegation clauses within the 1965 HEA, CCRA Section 492A explicitly bans regulations that incur an annual impact of US$100 million or more, or add to the deficit. In the litigation that halted the SAVE plan, federal courts relied on the “Major Questions Doctrine” established in *West Virginia v. EPA* (2022). CCRA Section 492A takes the core threshold of this doctrine – the US$100 million threshold and the ban on deficit expansion – and codifies it into statutory text.

Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court’s June 2024 ruling in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* provided judicial backing to Congress. In *Loper Bright*, the Court overturned *Chevron* deference – a 40-year-old doctrine under which federal judges deferred to reasonable agency interpretations of ambiguous statutes. Within this legal landscape, CCRA Section 492A stands as an example of using statutory text to narrow executive discretion and restore the separation of powers.

### 2-3. Risk Sharing: When Universities Become Legally Accountable

The CCRA reinforces the legal principle of “Allocating Responsibility” across higher education – determining how resources and risks are distributed among students, the federal government, and universities. Lee Dong-hoon, team leader at Kim & Chang, highlighted this shift: “The CCRA is not a routine welfare amendment. It fundamentally redefines who holds legal responsibility for educational outcomes in American higher education. By establishing borrowing caps, attaching legal liabilities to universities via risk-sharing provisions, and binding the Secretary’s rule-making authority, Congress used explicit statutory text to construct a comprehensive framework of institutional accountability.”

This reallocation appears in the CCRA’s risk-sharing provisions. Historically, student loans functioned as a two-party transaction between borrowers and the government, insulating universities from post-graduation default risks. The CCRA changes this: Title III, Part A, Subpart 1, Section 301 amends Section 454 of the HEA, creating shared liability among students, the government, and universities.

Specifically, Section 301 of the CCRA amends Section 454(d)(1) of the HEA by making it mandatory for participating institutions to pay annual risk-sharing payments based on the non-payment balances of their student cohorts. Section 454(d)(3)(A) establishes the formula as an institution's cohort risk-sharing percentage multiplied by its total outstanding non-payment loan balance.

Furthermore, Section 454(d)(3)(C) expands the definition of "non-payment loan balances" to include interest amounts waived under IDR plans or the new RAP scheme, as well as principal or interest forgiven under statutory programs. Consequently, if a university operates underperforming academic programs with low graduate employment rates, requiring government interest coverage, the institution must pay a proportional cash refund to the federal government.

To enforce these obligations, the CCRA outlines penalties: at 3 months of delinquency, late interest is assessed; at 12 months, the institution loses eligibility to issue new Direct Loans for the specific program where default occurred; at 18 months, the university cannot issue federal loans to any students and loses access to Pell Grants; at 2 years or more, the institution is barred from Title IV federal financial aid programs for at least 10 years. Because Pell Grants and Title IV programs form the financial bedrock of U.S. higher education, losing access severely threatens institutional survival.

## 3. When Law Reshapes Society: What CCRA Means Across and Beyond the United States

### 3-1. Human and Economic Toll: The Real-World Impact of Systemic Shifts

When court injunctions halted the SAVE plan, millions of borrowers who structured their financial plans around the administrative rules faced policy uncertainty. According to the report "Student Loan Servicing Supervisory Highlights" (2024) by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, field-level confusion escalated following the court injunctions. Concurrently, Federal Student Aid – an office of the U.S. Department of Education – along with contracted loan servicers, faced administrative backlogs as they placed roughly 8 million borrowers into temporary administrative forbearance.

This disruption caused economic damage. According to the report *Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit* (2024) by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and "Changes in U.S. Family Finances" (2023) by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, heightened repayment obligations reduce household disposable income. This strain forces young adults in the 20-30 age bracket to delay home purchases, business ventures, and marriage. Federal Student Aid data from 2025 indicates that approximately 42.8 million individuals hold federal student loans totaling US$1.77 trillion.

In the report *US Macro Outlook: Student Loan Resumption and Consumer Spending* (2023), Oxford Economics warned that resuming full repayments could reduce annual U.S. household consumption by over US$90 billion, shaving 0.2 to 0.3 percentage points off annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. Similarly, Morgan Stanley noted in its report "US Economics Perspective: The Return of Student Debt Payments" (2023) that accumulated obligations erode purchasing power, slowing retail sales and service sector consumption.

### 3-2. Domestic Outlook: Responsibility, Constitutional Law, and Structural Changes

Assessment of the legal and structural outlook in the U.S. highlights the constitutional tensions at play: "Looking ahead, the battle over student loan policy will likely center on congressional legislative debates and judicial review in federal courts. The sequence of events – where core provisions of the SAVE plan were halted by the judiciary and ultimately replaced by the CCRA – vividly illustrates how overreliance on executive rule-making across shifting administrations can compromise legal certainty and violate the principle of protecting legitimate expectations for young borrowers."

In U.S. constitutional and administrative law, legal certainty requires that statutes be clear and predictable. Relatedly, the principle of protecting legitimate expectations holds that when public authorities establish a framework, citizens who rely on that policy in good faith should be protected against arbitrary reversals. In the U.S. constitutional order, the rule of law rests on Article I – vesting legislative powers and the power of the purse exclusively in Congress – as well as the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause. The Biden administration's attempt to enact the SAVE plan through administrative rule-making underscored how executive expansion can destabilize statutory reliance, echoing precedents such as *A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States* (1935).

### 3-3. Global & South Korean Perspectives: Interconnected Educational and Financial Ecosystems

The CCRA carries ripple effects for the global economy and university students in South Korea (hereafter Korea). According to the report *World Economic Outlook* (2025) by the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. accounts for approximately 26 percent of global GDP. Consequently, increased debt repayment strain among 42.8 million American borrowers affects major Korean enterprises with exposure to the U.S. market, including Samsung, Hyundai, and LG.

A report by the Bank for International Settlements in its report "Quarterly Review: The Macro-Financial Implications of Household Debt" (2021) shows that a 1 percentage point increase in the household debt-to-GDP ratio reduces long-term private consumption growth by 0.1 percentage points, while a 1 percentage point rise in the debt service ratio cuts consumption spending by up to 0.35 percentage points. Empirically, resuming monthly payments, roughly US$200 to US$400, reduces household disposable income by 5 to 8 percent. Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund noted in its "Global Financial Stability Report" (2023) that reduced real income in major consumer markets lowers corporate operating margins by an average of 1.2 to 2.5 percentage points, increasing stock market volatility and destabilizing foreign exchange markets.

Beyond macroeconomics, the CCRA also affects Korean students planning to study abroad. According to the "Open Doors 2024 Report on International Educational Exchange" (2024), published by the Institute of International Education in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, international students in the U.S. reached a record high of 1,126,690, with Korean students accounting for 43,149. Data from the Korean Educational Development Institute in "Status of South Korean Students Abroad at Foreign Higher Education Institutions" (2025) confirms that the U.S. remains the top destination.

Section 221 of the CCRA eliminates Grad PLUS loans and places caps on graduate borrowing. As noted in the report "A World on the Move: International Student Mobility Trends" (2023) by the Institute of International Education, research grants and financial aid budgets at American universities are intertwined with federal policy.

With federal loan caps locked in place and universities facing risk-sharing liabilities, major U.S. institutions are likely to cut back on financial aid, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships previously awarded to international students, creating financial hurdles for Korean scholars preparing for U.S. graduate programs, Fulbright Grant Program applicants, and exchange students. Finally, the CCRA debate redefines the role of the government in higher education. It also signals a shift: rather than pumping capital into the market, the government adopts the role of a legal regulator enforcing institutional accountability and curbing executive overreach within statutory boundaries.

How far can a single piece of legislation reshape an individual's life? Foreign statutes provide frameworks for understanding how modern societies confront policy challenges. Ultimately, the CCRA extends beyond mere student loan mechanics: law determines how a society allocates its resources and liabilities – shaping educational opportunities, economic mobility, and societal stability. A law becomes real only when its provisions take effect in everyday life.

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# How Do Islands Connect the Ocean and Ensure a Sustainable Future?

**By Kim Yewon**
*Staff Reporter of Theory & Critique Section*

How do we perceive islands? Until recently, islands were viewed as territories separated from the mainland, receiving little attention in regional planning. But as their geopolitical, ecological, cultural, and economic value has come to the fore, South Korea (hereafter Korea) designated August 8, 2018 as "Island Day," aiming to raise awareness of islands as both a place where people live and a driver of future growth. In step with this movement, the "2026 World Island Exhibition Yeosu Korea," opening September 5, will bring countries together to discuss the future value of islands under the theme "Islands: Connecting the Ocean and the Future." The Argus explores that future value and the path to sustainable island development, with a focus on the role of international cooperation.

## Islands: Strategic Hubs for Marine Development

### How Should We Perceive Islands?

Among the numerous development models, why should we focus on "islands" at present? Before discussing their true value, we must first reflect on the perspective through which we perceive them. According to the report, *Islandness and the 5Ps: Rethinking Jeju's Development Strategies* (2021) by Professor Kang Kyeong-hee of the Department of Political Science and Diplomacy at Jeju National University and three co-authors, two key concepts — "insularity" and "islandness" — serve as representative frameworks in island studies. While both address island identity, "insularity," a traditional concept often translated as isolation and disconnection, has consistently defined islands strictly from a land-based perspective — one that perceives them not only as isolated but as spaces of deficiency, reflecting negative notions like "closed-off nature" and "underdevelopment."

The concept of "islandness" emerged precisely to overcome this land-centered perspective and view islands from their own, autonomous standpoint. According to a study by Hong Seok-jun, Director of the Institute of Island Culture at Mokpo National University, titled "Let's Change the Phrase "Dokdo Is Our Land" to "Dokdo Is Our Island" (2023), "islandness" — unlike "insularity" — reinterprets being surrounded by the sea not as a limitation but as the source of an island's unique identity and an irreplaceable asset. This perspective centers on two characteristics: a broad "inclusiveness that harmonizes with the ocean," which focuses not on spatial limitations like narrowness and isolation but on how to sustain that limited space over the long term; and "openness," which values the ability to accept and share external resources and cultures through the ocean rather than being bound by resource scarcity. Ultimately, islandness offers a convergent perspective — one that fully acknowledges islands' separation from the mainland and limited resources, while unifying their inclusiveness, connection to the mainland, openness to the outside world, environmental resilience, and capacity to sustain life independently into a single framework.

### The Value of Islands as Perspective on "Islandness"

Through the concept of "islandness," what value do islands hold when viewed this way? Their isolation gives rise to unique ecological and cultural value: by limiting the movement and spread of organisms, islands simplify ecological composition while their independent environment fosters high biological distinctiveness. According to the working paper "Global Policy Trends in Island Conservation and Sustainable Development" (2025) by Heo Nam-joo, a research fellow at the Korea Environment Institute, islands account for approximately 6.7 percent of the Earth's total land area but contribute more than 20 percent of the world's biodiversity.

## Blue Economy

### What Is the Blue Economy?

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▲ Blue Economy means "marine-based sustainable economic development" that harnesses the ocean's infinite potential.

Islands are increasingly redefined not as periphery to the mainland but as treasuries of ecological and cultural assets embracing the ocean. As they emerge as key spaces for sustainable development, conservation and economic growth are increasingly treated as complementary rather than conflicting — giving rise to the "blue economy," a strategy pursuing growth alongside marine ecosystem conservation through the sustainable use of marine resources.

The blue economy is a comprehensive term for economic activities related to the ocean, seas, and coastal areas that enable resource use while preserving marine ecosystem health. The term was coined by Gunter Pauli, a Belgian-born corporate executive and environmental activist, who first introduced it in 1994 at the United Nations (UN)'s request during preparations for the Kyoto Protocol (COP3) — the first international agreement defining greenhouse gas reduction obligations for developed countries. At the time, the "green economy" was gaining traction but drew criticism for its heavy investment costs and regulations, prompting Pauli to propose the blue economy as an alternative: a circular economy model mimicking nature's cyclical systems to generate no waste while creating jobs from local resources. In 2012, it became an official agenda item at the Rio+20 Summit — the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Brazil — where coastal developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) redefined it as a "sustainable marine economy" integrated with the sustainable development of oceans, which cover 70 percent of the Earth's surface. Since then, it has become firmly established as an international policy framework directly linked to SDG 14, Life Below Water, among Sustainable Development Goals*.

Notably, the UN and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are among the organizations that have proposed and implemented the blue economy concept. The UN describes it as a development model pursuing both economic growth and social equity while sustainably using and conserving resources in aquatic environments, including oceans and coastal areas. The OECD's definition goes further, encompassing not just the economic activities of marine-based industries but also the assets and ecosystem services marine ecosystems provide — emphasizing the role of local governments and coastal areas where these activities actually take place, since industries like fisheries, shipping, ports, and marine tourism generate local growth and jobs while remaining closely tied to ecosystem health.

*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Global goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to end global poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people can enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030; they consist of a total of 17 goals.

### The Connection Between Islands and the Blue Economy

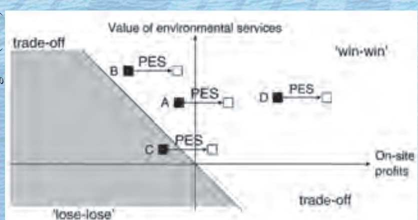
So why do islands serve as hubs for the blue economy? The key lies in their characteristics: life on an island is inseparable from the sea. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development notes that the sea is central to island nations' growth, livelihoods, food security, and culture, while the World Bank stresses that a healthy ocean underpins livelihoods, growth, and well-being — showing that island economies are tied not only to marine industries like fisheries, ports, shipping, and tourism, but to the health of the surrounding ecosystems. Dr. Kim Young-nam of the Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation stated, "From the perspective of the blue economy, Korea's islands possess unique appeal tailored to ecotourism. Furthermore, ecotourism has two key elements: first, education must be included as a major component of tourism so that visitors can enhance their awareness of the ecosystem; and second, a virtuous cycle must be established that actually contributes to the economic growth of the region."

## How Islands can Achieve a Blue Economy

### Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)

As we have discussed, islands and the ocean are inseparably linked — so how can a blue economy be achieved on islands? Reflecting the blue economy's emphasis on marine ecosystem sustainability, "Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)" could serve as a policy tool. According to the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries' 2024 plan to establish a systemic foundation for marine biodiversity conservation, the ministry is considering introducing PES to value marine ecosystem services and support residents' public-interest activities. The system operates on the principle that beneficiaries of ecosystem services compensate the managers who protect them, encouraging voluntary participation in conservation and restoration. Here, ecosystem services refer to what ecosystems provide to humans — functions like water purification, carbon sequestration, and climate regulation — which, as public goods that are hard to price, have historically been undervalued, contributing to their continued decline. PES was established precisely to correct this by enhancing the value placed on these services.

Accordingly, how might we describe the purpose of PES? It can be characterized as a sophisticated economic "incentive design" that encourages managers to voluntarily choose conservation. According to the OECD report *Paying for Biodiversity* (2010), the PES incentive system works by offsetting the "opportunity cost" managers bear when choosing conservation over development: voluntary participation occurs only when compensation for conservation exceeds the private profit managers could earn from logging, farmland expansion, or overharvesting — turning the act of protecting nature from a "loss" into a sustainable "source of income."



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▲ The framework analyzes the efficiency of PES.

Stefano Pagiola, a leading scholar in environmental economics, offers a framework for assessing PES' effectiveness, mapping land-use behavior along two axes — net private profitability for the manager, and the net value the activity provides to others. This produces four scenarios: the upper-right quadrant is "win-win," generating profit while also benefiting others; the lower-left is "lose-lose"; the lower-right is privately profitable but harmful to others; and the upper-left is unprofitable for the manager despite benefiting others. It is this last quadrant that PES specifically targets — making socially desirable but personally unprofitable practices profitable for the individuals who provide them, and thereby encouraging their adoption.

Dr. Kim mentioned the potential for the system's development, stating, "I hope PES becomes more widespread." He expressed his hope for the system's activation, noting, "While relevant systems exist for marine environmental protection, actual implementation has not yet gained momentum due to difficulties such as securing budgets." Furthermore, he expressed his hope that PES, which appears to be a system perfectly aligned with the concept of the blue economy,  will become more active and that awareness will be raised and platforms will be created to enable companies to participate more actively in marine environmental conservation projects as part of their ESG management.

### Blue Carbon

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▲ Blue carbon absorbs carbon 50 times faster than green carbon.

The second approach is "blue carbon." As a core natural asset of the blue economy, it drives both marine ecosystem conservation and economic growth. Carbon neutrality — achieving net-zero emissions by reducing $CO_2$ output and increasing absorption — relies on carbon sinks divided into green carbon, absorbed by terrestrial forests, and blue carbon, absorbed by coastal and marine ecosystems including shellfish, seagrass, halophytes, mangrove forests, salt marshes, tidal flats, and seagrass beds. Blue carbon absorbs carbon 50 times faster than green carbon and stores far more of it; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) currently defines its scope as mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrasses. Of the 21.8 billion metric tons of carbon absorbed globally each year, 57.6 percent is absorbed on land and 42.4 percent in the ocean — a striking share given that the ocean, at 360 million square kilometers, covers about 70 percent of Earth's 510-million-square-kilometer surface, yet blue carbon habitats occupy only a tiny fraction of that vast area. It is precisely this disproportionate absorption relative to habitat size that gives blue carbon such immense potential for achieving carbon neutrality.

Then how do ecosystems like mangrove forests and tidal flats absorb blue carbon? Coastal wetland plants grow rapidly, as tidal ebb and flow continuously supply nutrients, and draw large amounts of $CO_2$ from the atmosphere through their stomata — tiny pores on the leaves — to build their stems, leaves, and roots. Using solar energy absorbed during photosynthesis, the carbon from that $CO_2$ combines with water to form glucose, releasing oxygen; together, this glucose and oxygen make up the plant's tissue.

When these carbon-containing plants later die, they are buried in soil that tidal water then submerges. As water fills the gaps between soil particles, the pathways for atmospheric oxygen are blocked and the soil's oxygen is rapidly depleted, so plant matter no longer decomposes quickly via aerobic microorganisms but breaks down gradually through anaerobic ones instead. Because these anaerobic microorganisms must rely on substances like sulfate rather than oxygen for respiration, decomposition proceeds far more slowly and less efficiently — allowing the carbon to remain stored for hundreds of years.

Korea's tidal flats, in particular, are studied as a major source of blue carbon, accumulating carbon as seaweed, halophytes, and microalgae settle and deposit. Their absorption capacity depends on sediment type: the fine-grained silt and clay that make up most tidal flats have a large surface area, giving them a high carbon absorption rate and storage capacity. Ranking among the world's top five in area, Korea's tidal flats were the subject of a 2021 nationwide study by Professor Kim Jong-sung of Seoul National University, which assessed roughly 20 tidal flats and found they store approximately 13 million metric tons of carbon and absorb 260,000 metric tons of $CO_2$ annually.

## The Need for International Cooperation

### Why Does the Blue Economy Require International Cooperation?

No single country can achieve the blue economy's goals alone. Because the ocean is an interconnected ecosystem spanning borders, island regions face shared challenges — which is why the UN cites SIDS such as Seychelles, Palau, and Fiji as facing common issues like climate change, sea-level rise, and marine ecosystem degradation. The OECD likewise stresses that coastal and island regions are where the blue economy is actually implemented, making cross-regional policy exchange essential to sustainable development — a method that echoes SDG 14's view of the ocean as an organically interconnected system where cross-border issues like pollution, climate change, and fishery migration demand cross-border management.

How, then, can such an interconnected ocean be managed sustainably? The OECD's report *The Blue Economy in Cities and Regions* (2024) argues that this requires "multi-level governance" across national and local governments, businesses, research institutions, and civil society, unfolding in three stages: policy formulation, which defines roles, responsibilities, and institutional frameworks while building capacity and gathering data; policy coherence, which aligns those efforts across government agencies, recognizes how blue-economy sectors interact with issues like climate change, water security, and inequality, and strengthens ties among cities, regions, and watersheds; and policy implementation, which puts it all into practice through financial support, economic incentives, regulatory frameworks, and synergies among local stakeholders.

Palau, in Micronesia, exemplifies this: through initiatives like the "Micronesia Challenge," it shares its experience with other Pacific nations on marine protected areas, biodiversity conservation, and climate response, actively advancing SDG 14. Such policy-sharing shows that the blue economy runs on international governance rather than isolated national effort — which is why Palau's participation in the 2026 World Island Exhibition Yeosu Korea carries significance beyond mere national promotion.

*Blue Bond: This is a special-purpose bond issued to raise funds needed to support sustainable fisheries, including marine conservation, water resource protection, and marine industry projects.

The blue economy is a paradigm shift that must organically integrate ecosystem conservation and sustainability. Ultimately, a true blue economy can only be realized as an effective alternative when the autonomous community capabilities unique to "islandness," the active participation of residents, and responsible cooperation from the international community that transcends national borders are structurally intertwined, all grounded in strict ecological conservation principles.

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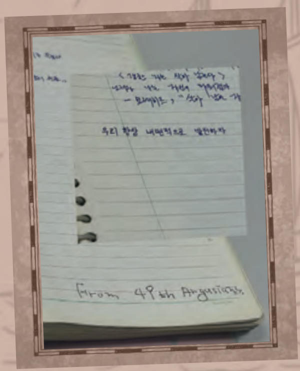
# Navigating External Shocks

**Cho Subin**

Unexpected blows easily shake me, but I find my footing just as quickly. My resilience comes from imagining and planning the next step. Around middle school, I learned life does not go according to plan. Rather than dwelling on reality, I focused on what I could control, imagining and preparing alternatives. I still stumble when facing a crisis, but instead of staying down, I get back up right away.



**Kim Yewon**

Whenever I encounter an unexpected variable, I simply try to enjoy it. When I was young, I was easily discouraged by even the smallest variable because of my perfectionist tendency. However, through the countless variables of life, I realized that life is a continuous series of unexpected obstacles. Now, whenever I face unexpected situations, I think, “An opportunity has come to become stronger.”

**You Chae-hyeon**

External shocks are often unpredictable, and we cannot always control how they affect us. What we can control is how we respond to them. When unexpected difficulties arise, I try to stay flexible, adapt to the situation, and focus on what I can change. I believe resilience comes from accepting uncertainty while continuing to look for a way forward.

**Lee Joon-woo**

Hardships and unexpected curveballs are bound to happen, but I have always faced them with a calm, analytical mindset rather than getting swept up in emotion. Thus, when I hit a major setback in the past, I took a deep breath and turned that overwhelming pressure into focus. Pushing through the chaos one step at a time, I stayed grounded until I finally succeeded.

**Jang Yeseo**

When I face an unexpected difficult situation, I try to take a step back and look at it objectively. I think it is easier to find solutions that I might not see when I am caught up in the situation if I look at it from a third person's perspective. Since I try to solve the problem as quickly as possible and move on from the negative emotions, I think I have fairly good resilience.

**Park Se-eun**

When I go through something difficult, I tend to focus on the things I need to do rather than dwelling on my emotions. As time passes, even things that once felt extremely difficult become easier to accept and eventually become valuable experiences. For me, resilience is not about recovering immediately, but about continuing to move forward and giving myself time to heal.

**Lee Seeun**

When I face difficulties, I tend to talk openly with people around me. Making rash decisions when in a precarious situation can make things worse, and stress often narrows my perspective and affects my judgment. Through conversations, I can understand my situation more clearly, make better decisions, and gradually regain my emotional balance.

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# 118기 수습기자 모집

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