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**The Political and Social Economy of Care:
Republic of Korea Research Report 3**

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Introduction

In this paper I apply the idea of the “care diamond” (Razavi 2007), a conceptual framework used to understand how societal care is produced and provided by the state, market, family, and community, to the political and social economy of care in the Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea). I argue that the institutional arrangements making up the care diamond in Korea have changed quite noticeably since the 1990s in response to the country’s evolving political, economic, and social contexts. Using the case of family-work harmonization policy reforms, I discuss the reconfiguration of the care diamond and what this means for gender. The paper is divided into three sections. Section 1 describes the social policy regime in Korea and how this relates to the idea of the care diamond. Section 2 highlights key findings from our Time Use Survey analysis based on data from 1999 and 2004,¹ showing that despite increased state support for family care, women continue to take on a large share of unpaid care work within households, and that the total value of this work represents a significant percentage of Korea’s GDP. Finally, Section 3 provides an in-depth examination of the changing dynamics of the care diamond in Korea since the 1990s and considers implications for gender.

1. Social Policy Regime

Esping-Andersen’s familialistic welfare regime and Lewis’ male breadwinner model can both fruitfully be applied to Korea’s social policy regime (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Lewis, 1992). If we follow Esping-Andersen’s classification, Korean social policy regime, as in Japan and the Southern Mediterranean countries of Italy and Spain, can be categorized as “familialistic” – that is, a welfare regime “that assigns a maximum of welfare obligations to the households” (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 45). Lewis’ framework, meanwhile, places it within the category of strong male breadwinner welfare regimes, aside Japan, Germany, and Ireland. Traditionally, Korean social policy regime devolved individual welfare and care responsibilities upon households (thus particularly impacting women) by providing almost no alternatives to family care. Unlike Social Democratic welfare states where public provisions of care services are available for children, the elderly, and the disabled, and unlike Liberal welfare states such as the US and Canada, where private-market based personal-care services are available to middle and higher income households, in Korea the absence of both public and private market sources of care has rendered the family the only viable site of personal care. As a result, women have performed much of the care work within the family in an un-commodified form.

¹ This section will be brief because a separate report on the Time Use Survey in Korea is available through UNRISD Political and Social Economy of Care Project (www.unrisd.org).

It is important to point out, however, that the fundamental logic of Korean social policy regime is both deeply gendered and filial. Welfare obligations are imposed not only on daughters but on sons and other male offspring as well. Hence, the notion of the male breadwinner family in a Korean context needs to be overlaid with the concept of familialism – intergenerational obligations and interdependencies that are gender and generation specific. Even so, men are able to escape *doing care by facilitating care* through the provision of material support and by delegating women to the task of caring. Korea's dualistic employment system privileges male workers through employment protection and welfare benefits; it is, therefore, an institutional structure developed to sustain men's indirect and women's direct familial care obligations.

This tight institutional interlock is changing, however. While maintaining a familialistic male breadwinner orientation, the Korean social policy regime, as in Japan, has been remodelling itself since the 1990s, from what may be considered an *extensive familialism* premised on women's un-commodified care work to a *modified familialism* through the partial commodification of women's care work.² In short, the state's preference for assigning maximum welfare obligations to individual households is being modified by attempts to lessen women's care responsibilities through social care expansion. The process of shifting some of women's care burdens, such as child and elderly care, out of the family has resulted in the commodification of some of women's hitherto un-commodified care work at home.

In what follows, I outline Korean social policy regime using Esping-Andersen and Lewis' welfare regime models, but I add a layer of complexity – late developer phenomenon – to explain the residualism and inconsistencies that so often confound the Korean welfare mix. I also illustrate key components of the Korean social policy regime and identify recent changes.

Korean Social Policy Regime – Familialism, Male Breadwinner, and Late Developer Phenomenon

Korea's familialistic male breadwinner welfare regime is displayed in the state's extensive reliance on the family for individual welfare and personal care – leading, as noted above, to women's un-commodified labour.³ A familialistic welfare regime is residual in that many (if not most) welfare obligations are assigned to the family.⁴ Until recently, Korean residualism took shape in minimal state support to the family, limited means-tested social welfare, and a strong bias in favour of male

² See Leitner (2003) for a discussion of different forms of familialism

³ This is evocative of other familialistic welfare regimes such as Japan and Southern Mediterranean countries, where the state's reliance on the family has led to a lack of family support programmes and personal social services.

⁴ Unlike a liberal welfare regime, the residualism of a familialistic welfare regime stems from the state's welfare responses directed to family failures rather than market failures.

breadwinner household arrangements supported by extensive employment protection legislation and stratified social insurance systems that favoured and protected full time male workers.

The recent modification of the state's approach to the family is an improvement but is a long way from overturning a fundamentally familialistic and patriarchal welfare orientation. Despite the increase in social spending since 1990, the proportion going to the family remains low. The percentage of *total government expenditure* on the family was 0.9 percent in 2005, a noticeable increase from 0.16 percent in 1990 and 0.33 percent in 2000 (OECD, 2008),^{5 6} but is still far from that of Japan, Sweden, and the UK, which were, respectively, 1.7 percent, 5.7 percent, and 6.6 percent in 2000, and 2.8 percent, 5.7 percent, and 9.6 percent, respectively, in 2005 (OECD, 2008).

From the perspective of the care diamond, the family continues to play a significant role in welfare provision in Korea. Until recently, the family provided the bulk of child and elderly care and was the main insurance against social risks. The family is still an important source of old age security for the elderly. The high, though declining, level of co-residency amongst the elderly and their adult children allows multi-generation family members to share housing and pool incomes and other material resources, and to exchange child and elderly care services. As shown in Table 1, despite the substantial increase in the proportion of single generation and single person elderly households since 1990, about 30 percent of all households with older people are three-generational. The importance of intergenerational economic support is underscored by the high level of material transfer from adult children (i.e. sons) to their elderly parents. Again, despite the evident decline since the mid-1990s, a little over half of those over the age of 60 claim that they receive material support from their children (Table 2). Furthermore, despite the sharp drop in the proportion of the elderly claiming financial support from their children as *their main income source*, from 72.4 percent in 1981 to 44.3 percent in 1994, the Korean figure is considerably higher than countries such as the US and Denmark, where less than 1 percent of elderly people claim financial support from their children as their main income source (Kwon, 2001). Simply put, despite its declining importance, the family still performs an important role in old age security in Korea.

The family in Korea also plays a vital role in human capital investment. Despite the sizeable, and increasing, public investment in education and health, Korean families continue to

⁵ The OECD defines social spending on family in terms of three types of public expenditures: 1) child-related cash transfers to families, including child allowances, income replacements for parental leave, income support for single parent families, and public child care support through payments to parents; 2) financing and delivery of services for families with children, including child care and early education, residential facilities for young people and family services, and centre-based facilities and home help services for families; and 3) financial support to families through tax system, including tax exemptions for families, child tax allowances, and child tax credits.

⁶ Social expenditure on family and social welfare increased substantially after 2003, but no data are available.

spend a significant amount of money in both areas. For example, the public expenditure on education as percentage of GDP rose from 4.6 percent (8,524 billion Won) to 6.2 percent (48,258 billion won) between 1990 and 2004; however, the private expenditure on education as a percentage of total household consumption for urban households also rose from 8.1 percent to 11.5 percent during the same period (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2004).⁷ The household educational spending increased to 12 percent in 2007, the highest since Korean National Statistics Office (KNSO) began compiling the data in 1984 (Korea Times, 2008). Much of this rise is attributed to spending on private tutoring. Similarly, the proportion of spending going to private, extracurricular education increased from 36.3 percent of the total household educational spending in 1990 to 77.2 percent in 2004 (The Hankyorei, 2007). In the health care sector, the huge increase in the public share of the total health spending (35.7 percent in 1995 to 53.0 percent in 2005) is offset by a fairly high level household spending.⁸ In fact, because of the high co-payment rate, even with the rapid expansion of public health spending, the private share of health spending in Korea is amongst the highest in the OECD, after Greece (57 percent) and the US (55 percent) (OECD, 2007). In sum, while the public expenditure on social welfare and family support have increased in recent years, leading to a shift to a modified form of familialism, the family in Korea continues to play a major role in protecting individuals from social risks.

Late developer phenomenon is another important context of Korea's social policy regime. The Korean welfare state's developmental context makes its social policy regime hard to place within Esping-Andersen's welfare typologies, as its emergent welfare system often makes the welfare mix inconsistent. For example, although the modern Korean social security system began with a strong emphasis on occupationally based social insurance and employment protection legislation – features that would make it an obvious candidate for Esping-Andersen's conservative welfare regime – both systems changed quite markedly after 1987. The occupationally based social insurance systems – health, pension, employment, and workers' compensation insurances – had been gradually expanding since the 1970s, but the pace of expansion accelerated exponentially after the 1987 political democratization. Notwithstanding the universalization of health insurance in 1989 and pension insurance in 1999, other social insurance programmes were extended to most regular

⁷ The figures for rural households declined from 10.5 percent to 4.1 percent between 1990 and 2004. This can be accounted for by the combination of increased state support for rural families and the changing demographic composition of rural families.

⁸ During this time, the total health spending to GDP in Korea rose from 4.9 percent to 6.0 percent (OECD, 2007).

workers and employees.⁹ After 1998, the Employment Insurance coverage was extended to cover almost all *waged workers* in all workplaces, including most non-regular workers.¹⁰ Non-regular employees, the self-employed, and unpaid family workers were included in Workers' Compensation insurance (or Occupational Accident insurance) coverage in 2000. Finally, in 2000, the National Basic Livelihood Security Programme (NBLSP) decoupled the welfare entitlement from individual labour market attachment, making low income the sole criterion for receiving social assistance – a radical ideational departure from the previous social assistance system. Such a trajectory marks a shift from a conservative residual welfare model to a more universalistic welfare model. By the end of the 1990s, the main purpose of social insurance had shifted from its original aim, that of serving as a limited system of social risk pooling for core workers in key industries and professional groups, to that of a tool for social risk pooling and income redistribution. Thus, even if the *structure* of Korean welfare regime appears stubbornly unaltered, its *functional purposes* have changed quite significantly (for further discussion of changes in welfare regime structure and purposes, see Peng and Wong, 2008).

At the same time, despite the welfare expansion, the Korean welfare mix exhibits liberal and informal features. First, the state's total social spending remains low, despite the recent surge. We can arguably attribute this to Korea's developmental status: although the Korean government has made significant progress in doubling its total social spending from 3 percent of GDP in 1990 to 6 percent in 2000, it will take time to reach the OECD average. The new national blueprint for social and economic development, Vision 2030 (discussed later), proposes to raise Korea's social spending to the OECD average of 21 percent by the year 2030 (Vision 2030). If successful, this would be an incredible developmental feat. Unlike many western welfare states Korea's modern welfare state only began to take form after 1960, and more seriously after 1987. Given its relatively short development history and its stage of economic development, it is understandable that Korea's social expenditure is low compared to other OECD countries.

Second, and related to the first point, even with the expansion of most social insurances, an individual's labour market status makes a difference in his/her social security. While this is true in

⁹ Health care and pension insurance in Korea are universal, in that they are compulsory social insurance schemes. But despite their universal characteristics, there are status and gender-based differences. Individuals are insured through their employment or through their family/spouse's insurance coverage; given women's lower employment rate, many women are not directly covered, but are covered through spouses or fathers. The coverage rate for pensions is highly gendered because of women's low employment rate and the newness of the national pension scheme.

¹⁰ The 1998 reform expanded the coverage of EIP to all waged workers in all firms, except the following: workers over the age of 65 and new employees over the age of 60; part-time workers working less than 18 hours per week, or 80 hours per month; government officials; employees covered by the Private School Teachers' Pension Act; special postal workers.

other welfare regimes – in even the social democratic cluster of countries recent pension reforms have eroded the basic citizenship pillar – the issue of labour market status is more pronounced in Korea simply because of its large informal or non-standard employment sector¹¹ and its relatively early stage of welfare state development. For example, even though Workers' Compensation covers non-regular workers and the self-employed, the Employment Insurance coverage is limited to waged workers (i.e. formal sector employees). Over 30 percent of all workers in the Korean labour force are in the informal sector - self-employed, unpaid family workers, and own account holders – and the lack of Employment Insurance coverage makes them economically vulnerable (see Heintz 2008 for a comparative perspective). Even in 2003, only about 7.2 million out of a total 14.4 million workers (50 percent) in Korea were covered by Employment Insurance, the other half being without insurance coverage largely because of their status as self-employed and/or unpaid family workers. The gender breakdown of Employment Insurance coverage shows that 57.1 percent of all male workers and 40 percent of all female workers had coverage in 2003 (Kim, et. al., 2004).¹²

Thus, while formal social insurance programmes are in place, the large informal employment sector creates barriers to workers accessing these social insurances. In sum, Korean social policy regime exhibits characteristics of familialism and late developer phenomenon: its familialistic orientation causes gender bias and residualism, while its developmental status is evidenced in its high level of informality, early stage of welfare development, and its inconsistent and evolving welfare mix.

Income Equality and Poverty Outcomes

However, Korea fares rather well on orthodox measures of economic inequality and poverty. For example, although Gini figures for Korea vary depending on the data sources,¹³ there is general agreement that income inequality declined after 1960 and remained relatively low until the late

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