Hypatia (2024), **39**, 597–615
doi:10.1017/hyp.2024.50

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Confucian Familialism and the Crisis of Care

Subin Lee

Institute of Confucian Philosophy and Culture, Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, South Korea
Email: subin.w.lee@gmail.com

(Received 10 September 2021; revised 2 March 2023; accepted 16 May 2023)

Abstract

This paper critically examines Confucian proposals for social welfare espoused by contemporary Confucian moral and political theorists, who promote a familialist, residual welfare state in which welfare provision should be the family's primary responsibility and public assistance be a last resort only available to the poor without family support. By investigating the situation in South Korea, a country whose welfare system bears a striking resemblance to the Confucian ideal, I argue that the Confucian scheme is inherently flawed. It considers poverty to be a personal failure, idealizes the family as a single unity of common interest free from power hierarchies, and lacks knowledge about social reproduction. Their proposal in actuality humiliates and excludes disadvantaged and marginalized people from social protection, abdicates the state's responsibility for the well-being of citizens, and colludes with capitalism in free riding on women's unpaid labor.

1. South Korea and Confucian familialism

South Korea is notorious for poverty among older persons. For example, its elderly poverty rate was 43.8 percent in 2017, the highest among member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), three times higher than the OECD average of 13.5 percent. Even compared to the poverty rate of 17.4 percent for the total population of Korea, this figure was exceptionally high (OECD 2019). To make matters worse, households consisting of an older adult alone or an elderly couple only, which are far more vulnerable to poverty (C. G. Lee 2016), have rapidly increased and are expected to reach almost half of all households in Korea by 2047 (Statistics Korea 2020a). Women seniors, facing the transformation of family units and the abnormally high incidence of poverty for an OECD country, have become even more vulnerable to extreme poverty. The relative poverty rate of households headed by older women in South Korea in 2016 was 64.8 percent, 1.7 times higher than those headed by older men, 3.3 times than those by working-age women, 11.4 times than those by working-age men (Seok et al. 2018).

This article begins by asking how contemporary Confucian theories would respond to this issue of elder poverty, especially that of women, in South Korea. To represent these perspectives, I choose Confucian moral and political theories published in

English since 2000. For ease of reference, I call them "Modern Advocates of Confucian Ethics" (hereafter MACE). MACE vary considerably in scope: some claim to be moral or political, politically meritocratic or democratic, feminist or non-feminist. However, despite their differing focuses and nature, when it comes to "family responsibility," MACE converge into Confucian familialism (interchangeably familism), a view that "the good life consists first and foremost of relationships of care and affection between family members, including elderly parents, with the political implication that the state has an obligation to promote profamily policies even if they place constraints upon individual autonomy" (Bell 2006, 253). Some MACE scholars employ creative interpretations of Confucian ethics to argue that individual autonomy and family relationality do not necessarily conflict (e.g., Tan 2004; Chan 2014; S. Kim 2014). But regardless of their intent, these scholars end up prioritizing the latter over the former and espousing familialism,[1] according to which the family should bear the primary responsibility for well-being of individuals, particularly that of older persons. They also argue for residual welfare states where social welfare provision exists only as the last recourse for those without families capable of supporting them.[2]

In the face of a rapidly aging population, Korea's welfare system has been increasingly appealing to the Confucian value of filial piety (孝 K. *hyo*, C. *xiao*) in tackling the problem of poverty among older adults, emphasizing moral and practical reasons to promote family responsibility.[3] Given that the rapid growth in the number of seniors living apart from their children accounts for most of the worsening poverty among Korean elderly over the last two decades (Ku and Kim 2020), it may seem necessary to revitalize filial piety to enhance people's commitment to family support, and MACE discourse on social welfare points precisely in that direction.

Unfortunately, the prospect for such a family-centered welfare model existing in Korea as supported by MACE is not promising. Not only does it misidentify the causes of the problem, but also potentially worsens the current situation due to its reliance on (1) the view equating poverty with personal failure, (2) the idealized notion of the family as a realm of love and affection that overrides power differences correlated with axes of social inequality, and (3) the ignorance of or disregard for social reproduction, i.e., the processes involved in maintaining and reproducing people on a daily and generational basis, mostly done by women for free in the home and community. These misleading assumptions about family responsibility, upon which MACE arguments are based, force the needy to declare and prove their financial and moral bankruptcy to receive social assistance, abdicate the state's duty to promote the welfare of its own citizens, and collude with capitalism in free riding on women's unpaid labor.

These serious deficiencies in MACE arguments may go unnoticed if one shares their assumptions. Hence, I choose not to directly engage in theoretical discussion of MACE assertions by reiterating their purportedly gender-neutral terms. Instead, considering their striking resemblance to Korea's welfare system, I will show actual social arrangements of family responsibility in South Korea; in other words, the Confucian-inspired family-based welfare model in reality, from the perspective of those whose experiences of "moral" life are not included in the Confucian vision. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the seemingly innocuous, non-coercive MACE scheme for family values develops in unexpected directions, endangering the very foundation of their own framework, the family.

2. Idealizations of family care

2.1. MACE idealization of family care

Care for family members, or simply "family care,"[4] is of great importance for MACE. In particular, serving one's aging parents with the utmost respect, that is, practicing filial piety, is believed to be necessary for cultivating virtue, generating family solidarity, and maintaining social stability. Therefore, MACE vigorously argue for the importance of the state encouraging people to fulfill their obligations towards their parents and other family members. For example, often citing filial responsibility legislation in East Asian societies such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea, MACE claim that public encouragement or paternalistic intervention aimed at promoting family support for the elderly is a legitimate manifestation of the Confucian values of filial piety in Confucian societies (Bell 2003; Tao 2004; Fan 2007; Chan 2014; S. Kim 2014). The common rationale behind these MACE arguments for filial responsibility arises from the notion of reciprocity: because parents have cared for their children when they were young and in need of support, children should return the care that they have enjoyed to their parents in a similar way. Hence, it is natural for adult children to assume moral and legal care responsibility owed to their aging parents, and for governments to impose these responsibilities upon children.

However, neither the reciprocity argument nor laws obliging adult children to care for their parents undergirded by the former are unique to Confucian societies, but have existed or still exist in places like some US states or Ukraine.[5] What differentiates MACE from the non-Confucian justification and enforcement of filial obligation is that the Confucian ideal not only demands adult children's financial support for parents, but also the former's genuine devotion to the physical, emotional, and moral well-being of the latter, thereby ensuring the provision of *hands-on care work* "as a spontaneous act of the moral heart that internalizes the needs of dependent and vulnerable others and hence can respond to it with utmost sincerity" (Rosenlee 2014, 327). MACE believe this type of care, practically home-based, has multiple advantages: it can "preserve and support community attachments, social ties, familial relations and personal histories in order to buttress dignity and to anchor identity" (Tao 2007, 480); it guarantees quality care as it "best responds to the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of every individual … through intimate everyday contacts and communications in a home environment" (Fan 2007, 505); it morally cultivates the public by avoiding "the risk of encouraging people to shirk their personal and communal responsibilities" (Chan 2014, 185); and it secures public resources by removing "the morally unfair and consequently undesirable social welfare programs that have been imposed on contemporary societies for taking care of elderly persons" (Fan 2007, 97).

When one is unable to look after family members due to personal problems like financial hardship, MACE urge the necessity of welfare programs. Yet these are not welfare rights of the individual citizen designed for "maximizing opportunities for individuals to choose their actions freely," but are intended to supplement the means for "relational persons to fulfill appropriately the demands of their roles beyond their own capacity to do so, most especially those roles to which family reverence [*xiao*] is central" (Rosemont and Ames 2008, 32). In other words, Confucians believe governments should provide socioeconomic conditions for everyone to morally cultivate themselves by fulfilling their family roles, and thus can accept some welfare programs that enable the needy to do so. Social welfare for MACE is meant to supplement family functioning as a last resort, not to ensure people can exercise their individual rights.

Thus, welfare benefits and services are subject to an assessment of families' capacity to support their members, that is, family resources, with the assumption that those are pooled at the family level and shared equally within for collective welfare. This family orientation espouses a special kind of justice that holds "the appropriate units for distribution may be groups, beginning with families," so that "resources … can benefit more than those to whom they are distributed, as resources of personal cultivation effecting appropriate interpersonal relationships constituting harmonious communities" (Tan 2014, 504).

As if integrating all these Confucian-inspired ideas for welfare, Chan (2014) presents "a multilevel social system of provision in which … the family and commune (or social relationships and networks) provide familial care and mutual aid; and when they are not sufficient, the government steps in to provide direct welfare assistance" (22). Within this scheme, government-sanctioned welfare programs should only be considered as a fallback for two scenarios: "when the familial and communal tiers break down," such as "unfilial children and uncaring parents … [or] communities that lack strong ties and mutual concern" refuse to meet their support obligations, or "when the first two tiers cannot provide sufficient assistance," for example, adult children unable to take care of their parents because of strenuous workloads (184–85). Chan adds that "[w]elfare entitlements systems should avoid encouraging people to shirk their personal responsibility of caring for family members. … Confucians would be worried by the growing trend of people becoming reliant on the government" (185). Angle (2019) agrees with this proposal because "Confucians prefer bottom-up, voluntary solutions to social needs rather than top-down impositions by the government" and "the broader the involvement of the populace in caring for one another, the more we are likely to approach the Confucians' goals of individual and societal moral improvement" (230).

In sum, for MACE, the responsibility for individual welfare rests with the family, not only financial support but also hands-on care for its members, and everyone is expected to contribute to the collective well-being of the family by performing their assigned roles on the assumption of equitable pooling and redistribution of resources within the unit. Social welfare functions as a last resort when the "natural" channels of welfare break down, so that family resources are insufficient, or one has been unfortunately denied access to it. MACE believe such a welfare scheme can help people morally cultivate themselves and secure high-quality care and public resources.

2.2. Korea's idealization of family care

These Confucian-inspired plans for family care greatly resonate with Korea's family-centered welfare system, with its laws and regulations imposing filial responsibility. To name a few, the Welfare of the Aged Act (Act No. 5359, August 22, 1997), aiming to promote health and welfare of the aged, stipulates that "the government and people should make efforts to support and promote sound family systems based on the good morals and manners of respecting the elderly and loving their parents." The Framework Act on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society (Act No. 7496, May 18, 2005), which aims to strengthen national competitiveness by achieving a demographic balance and sustainable national development, also demands "central and local governments shall endeavor to ensure that senior citizens are respected at home and in society by encouraging filial piety." The Act on the Encouragement and Support of Filial Piety (Act No. 8610, August 4, 2008), whose purpose is "to resolve the problems faced in an aging society,

to spur the nation's growth, and to contribute to the development of global cultural heritage through the practice of filial piety by promoting filial piety at the national level," is more explicitly demanding of children's obligations towards their parents. Article 2 of the Act defines filial piety as "to wholeheartedly serve their parents and other relatives and provide related support to them." Long-Term Care Insurance for older adults (hereafter LTCI, Act No. 8403, April 27, 2007), introduced "to improve the health of elderly citizens and the stabilization of their livelihood during post-retirement life, to relieve family members from the burden of supporting them, and to enhance the quality of life of citizens by providing for matters concerning long-term care benefits," is advertised as "*hyo po-hŏm* ('filial piety insurance')" (Won 2017), and care workers under LTCI are named as "*hyo na-nu-mi* ('filial care helpers')" (B. Lee 2017). Last but not least, though the term *hyo* ("filial piety") is not mentioned, the National Basic Livelihood Security System (hereafter NBLSS, Act No. 11248, February 1, 2012), aiming to "ensure a minimum level of living for the needy individuals and help them support themselves through required assistance," indirectly but powerfully imposes support liability on adult children by disqualifying those who have family members capable of providing care from provision of social security.

NBLSS in particular epitomizes the spirit of MACE's Confucian-inspired social welfare scheme in its eligibility criteria:

(a) *A household's recognized income*: Household income, consisting of income and asset holdings, must be less than the minimum cost of living set by the Ministry of Health and Welfare.
(b) *The ability to work*: Those aged 18 to 64 assumed to have working capacity must participate in self-help programs as a condition of benefits, in which participants are given short-term jobs and get paid below the national statutory minimum wage, and their income from self-reliance programs is deducted from the total amount of assistance under NBLSS. If one fails to comply with these conditions, some or all the benefits can be suspended.
(c) *The possibility of assistance from family members*: Those assumed to have a family member liable for providing care for the person in need ("family support obligor") are excluded from benefits. Yet there are two exceptional conditions under which one can be a recipient despite the existence of family support obligors: (c1) if obligatory providers cannot render support; or (c2) if the obligee is unable to receive help from capable obligatory providers.

In (a) and (c), NBLSS postulates the family is the primary unit of care and support in which resources are shared and obligations are allocated, and thus needs to be assessed before receiving benefits. Conditions (b) and (c) stipulate that NBLSS is a safety net to be activated only if the poor cannot be better off in virtue of labor force participation and help from obliged kin, ensuring NBLSS applicants and their support obligors do not dodge their individual responsibility with compulsory work requirements, not-too-generous payments, and family support obligation.

More interestingly, despite condition (c), NBLSS allows the poor who have family support obligors to receive public assistance in two exceptional circumstances, (c1) when one's family cannot render adequate assistance, and (c2) if capable family members refuse to provide for the poor, meeting the criteria for when a Confucian perspective on social welfare would allow government-sanctioned welfare programs. To meet (c1), a prospective recipient should receive a consent to provision of financial

transaction information (K. *kŭm-yung-chŏng-po-che-kong-tong-ŭi-sŏ*) from her obligatory providers to prove that the latter's property and income are below a certain standard and that they therefore are incapable of supporting the obligee. For (c2), both the obligee and the obligor should submit a letter of justification, explaining why their relationship had broken down to the extent that support obligors are unwilling to provide for the obligee (K. *ka-chok-kwan-kye hae-ch'e-sa-yu-sŏ,* "a letter of justification for family dissolution" and K. *pu-yang-ki-p'i-sa-yu-sŏ*, "a letter of justification for evasion of family support obligation") with documents that can prove breakdown of the relationship, often with evidence of their estrangement from a third-party (H. Lee 2019).

Taken together, these features of the Korean welfare system show the government's vision of the ideal society: every citizen is morally and legally obligated to take care of their family members, especially adult children for their parents, so that people can ensure a good quality of life and strengthen family relationships; public assistance is targeted to reach the "truly" needy lacking family support obligors to rely upon or to partially alleviate care burden of families. Consequently, the state can encourage people not to evade their personal responsibility, while rendering social welfare programs affordable and sustainable. Such a family-based welfare system is expected to deal with impending problems posed by rapid socio-demographic changes, such as burgeoning public expenditures on health care and social services for the elderly. I consider the Korean government's vision the same as MACE's Confucian ideal of family care in that both (1) advocate familialism, a reliance on the family as the main source of care provision, (2) maintain a residual welfare state in which social welfare is regarded as performing a remedial and ameliorative function for society only after the "normal" channels of meeting needs break down, (3) appeal to the Confucian value of filial piety and encourage people's commitment to it. Therefore, it is reasonable to test MACE by examining Korea's situation regarding social welfare.

In the following sections, I investigate the realities of Korea's welfare system, and by extension possible outcomes of MACE scheme, to unveil their hidden foundation. I begin with some stories of Korean families living below the national poverty line.

3. Realities of family care

3.1. Family responsibility and family poverty

On February 26, 2014, a 61-year-old woman was found dead alongside the bodies of her two daughters in their 30s, in a semi-basement home in Songpa District, Seoul. They left an envelope that contained 700,000 won (US$550); on the front was written "Dear landlord, we are so sorry. The money is for the last rent and utility bills." The woman's husband, who did not have a stable job, died in 2002 of bladder cancer and left his family with substantial debts. The daughters became credit delinquents. They struggled to eke out a living, while the mother worked at a restaurant and the second daughter worked part-time irregularly. The first daughter had diabetes and hypertension but could not receive proper treatment. About a month before the incident, the mother broke her arm on the way back home and the injury forced her to quit her job, cutting off the family's only source of income (S. Lee 2014).

Their death, later called the "Songpa Mother and Daughters Incident," attracted great public attention as it revealed the fragility of the social safety net in Korea. Despite the hardships they went through, the family did not receive any government aid, nor was there any record of the family applying for subsidies for lower income households. The then-President said "if they had applied for benefits from NBLSS,

or if the district office or community service center was aware of their situation, they could have received public assistance" and asked to reduce blind spots in the social welfare system (S. Park 2014). The then government announced it would proactively "dig up" people in need by mobilizing big data, collecting information such as late payment of utility bills, and dispatching local welfare officials to their homes (Oh 2014). Multiple changes in the social welfare system followed, including the "Songpa Mother and Daughters Law" enacted in 2015, a move aimed at expanding the scope of beneficiaries of NBLSS and the Emergency Aid and Support Act, and creating a law to actively identify and reach out to people in need (K. Lee 2014).

Despite these institutional changes, similar incidents have continued to happen. In January 2019, an 82-year-old woman with dementia and her 56-year-old daughter were found dead in a semi-basement home in Seoul's Jungnang District, presumably by suicide. Their only income was the Basic Old-Age Pension of 250,000 won (US $195) on behalf of the mother (Hah and Kim 2019). In July 2019, a 42-year-old North Korean defector and her 6-year-old son were found dead in their 90,000 won (US$70) a month apartment in Gwanak District, Seoul, two months after they died, presumably of starvation. The son had epilepsy and needed round-the-clock care but the mother could not find a childcare center that would accept him. Their only income was a homecare allowance of 100,000 won (US$78) granted to preschool children who do not use childcare facilities (Choe 2019). Afterwards, the government—a different administration from that in 2014—announced it would run a program to make the local authorities proactively reach out to low-income households and provide catered welfare service information (Bahk 2019).

Likewise, in November 2019, a 49-year-old woman, her son and daughter in their 20s, and the daughter's friend were found dead in a rental unit in Incheon's Gyeyang District, leaving a note describing health and economic difficulties. The son was jobless and the daughter was a college student taking time off. The family suffered from financial problems after the mother, the family's breadwinner, who used to work in a cafe, lost her job due to hand tremors. Their only regular income was a housing benefit of 240,000 won (US$188) (H. Park 2019). In December 2020, a woman in her 60s was found dead in a unit of a multiplex house in Bangbae-dong, Seoul, and had presumably died several months prior due to chronic disease. After splitting with her husband in 1993, she had lived with her son who had developmental disabilities but was not registered as disabled. She had a record of surgery for brain hemorrhage in 2005 and had not paid into national health insurance since 2008. Her last recorded income was 1,240,000 won (US$971), which she received after working to fight mosquitoes in a public works program for two months in 2019. As she died, the son was left unattended for months and became homeless, and her death was discovered when a social worker approached the son on the street (M. Hah 2020).

One may justifiably wonder why such miserable incidents have been happening in Korea, the fourth-largest economy in Asia and tenth in the world. As mentioned above, there is NBLSS, Korea's last-resort social safety net intended to guarantee livelihood protection for the needy, and it has been improved upon and complemented by other policies in the wake of the unfortunate deaths of destitute families. Yet the victims of these stories who were unable to earn their living above the income and asset criteria of NBLSS could not get substantial, if any, help from the system; they were part of the 930,000 people who make less than the standard but cannot be protected by NBLSS, mainly due to the work requirement and family support obligations (Yeo 2017).

In order to understand what happened to them, we need to go back to the eligibility criteria of NBLSS. Recall that to be a NBLSS recipient, one must meet the requirements

based on (a) the household's recognized income, (b) work capacity, and (c) the existence of family members who are liable to support the person. Returning to the Songpa Family Incident, even if the family had survived, they would not be able to receive NBLSS benefits despite the multiple changes in the social welfare system in the wake of their deaths. The mother was a non-standard worker in the service industry, a typical example of women-dominated occupations prone to low-paid, precarious forms of employment that are excluded from social protections associated with regular work, and was thus forced to quit her job without any support when she became unable to work. The mother's injury and the older daughter's health problems would not be perceived as legitimate reasons to receive welfare assistance, since the mother's injury occurred only a month before the incident and the daughter did not have medical records. Even if they were to meet the requirements, they would still be unable to get full NBLSS benefits because of the second daughter's presumed ability to work and responsibility to support her family. The family of three, in the end, would fail to escape the poverty trap, either because they would not qualify for benefits at all or would receive only 470,000 won (US$368), the remainder after legally required deductions, less than their monthly rent (Y. Kim 2014).

The Gyeyang family in 2019 were entitled to a monthly housing benefit of 240,000 won (US$188), as the family support obligation rule in housing benefits under NBLSS was abolished after the Songpa Family Incident. They were, nevertheless, not much different from the latter. The mother of the Gyeyang family, who was a non-standard worker in a café, was likewise excluded from social protection and immediately fell into extreme poverty as she lost her job. Furthermore, the family support obligation rules in other benefits and the eligibility criterion of NBLSS remained intact. News reports found that the mother of the Gyeyang family was informed about NBLSS livelihood and medical care benefits when she visited the community service center of her district, but gave up after being required to submit written consent to the provision of financial transactions given by her support obligors, her ex-husband and her parents (H. Park 2019). The North Korean defector who died with her 6-year-old son could not receive NBLSS benefits as she was required to submit proof that her relationship with her support obligor, her ex-husband in China, was irretrievably broken (Kang 2019). In the case of the Bangbae-dong woman found dead in 2020, her obligatory provider was her daughter, with whom she lost contact a long time ago, while the son's was the woman's ex-husband, whom she split from in 1993 (Chang 2020).

These cases show that having a family is not necessarily an asset or resource that one can rely on, and it could even be a liability. Unwaged dependents, whether due to infancy, frailty, injuries, illnesses, disabilities, or social isolation, can be a huge burden that may pose a great threat to one's already endangered livelihood. For people bound by care and domestic duties at home, earning a meager income in the labor market can be a luxury, while working hard for exploitative wages in unstable conditions cannot guarantee one's economic security. The existence of family members assumed to have work capacity may become an obstacle that cuts one off from social protection, although individuals cannot control the insecurities inherent in the labor market, or if their family relationships had dissolved years ago. Many Korean NGOs and welfare scholars have pointed out these problems and have called for complete abolition of the family obligation rules in NBLSS. Such a move would be an important step, but a feminist perspective demands more than just an abrogation of family support obligation rules. Talking about "poor families" may only end up appealing to people's sympathy and merely create more "pitiable welfare free-riders." Instead, we must acknowledge

that the family is an institution embedded in progressively larger social systems and pay heed to its gendered dynamics.

In the following section, I will demonstrate how women's family responsibilities in Korea cause women's poverty. The family as a gendered social institution comes at a cost and requires structural societal changes.

3.2. Women's responsibilities and women's poverty

Let us begin with a social phenomenon statistically proven to be typical among Korean women; after high school or college they begin working, but drop out of the workforce after having children, and then return to work when their children grow up, very often in lower quality jobs than those they held before their retreat from the labor market. As this pattern of career interruption is so common among Korean women, when their employment rate is charted on a graph, an M-shape appears. It is a unique pattern only found among women in Korea and Japan but no other OECD countries, while Korea shows a steeper and lower curve, which means Korean women experience breaks in their careers more seriously and frequently than in any other OECD country (see Figure 1).

Another set of statistics worth mentioning concerns gender disparities in the labor market; whereas Korean men's employment rate has generally been higher than the OECD average, women's employment, despite significant increases in their higher educational attainment levels,[6] has been lower than the average of OECD countries over the past 20 years.[7] Aside from the employment rate, Korean men and women significantly differ in the kinds and quality of jobs they hold. In Korea's highly segmented labor market, in which regular employment jobs tend to be associated with seniority-based remuneration, social protection coverage, and job stability, and non-regular employment with low pay, limited or no access to social protection, and fixed-term contracts, the share of non-regular jobs for men and women were 29.4 and 45 percent, respectively, in 2019 (Statistics Korea 2020c), while the hourly wage rate for regular women workers was 70 percent compared to men and non-regular women workers 77 percent compared to men (Statistics Korea 2021). Consequently, Korean women earn substantially less than men; in 2019, they earned 32.5 percent less than men, the widest gender wage gap among OECD countries (the OECD average was 13 percent, and between 5 and 8 percent for northern European countries) (OECD 2021b).

The disadvantages that Korean women face in the labor market are directly reflected in the gendered allocation of Korea's pension system. For example, the old-age pension of the National Pension Scheme (NPS), Korea's income security program to provide lifetime pension benefits as protection against economic hardship after retirement, requires at least ten years of contribution, and the more and longer one has contributed, the greater benefits one can receive after turning 60. Considering that men are more likely to be employed in full-time positions, to be paid more, to take no career breaks for caring responsibilities,[8] and their earnings usually increase until they reach their fifties, it is no wonder there are large gender differences in the participation rate, contribution level, and thus benefit level of the NPS and other occupational pension schemes (C. G. Lee 2015).[9] As a result, Korean women experience poverty in their later life more frequently and severely. The poverty rate of women aged over 65 is four times higher than their men, even for women employed on a permanent basis (J. Lee and Kim 2020).

All these statistics show that women in Korea systematically experience disadvantages in the labor market, effectively hindering them from securing favorable

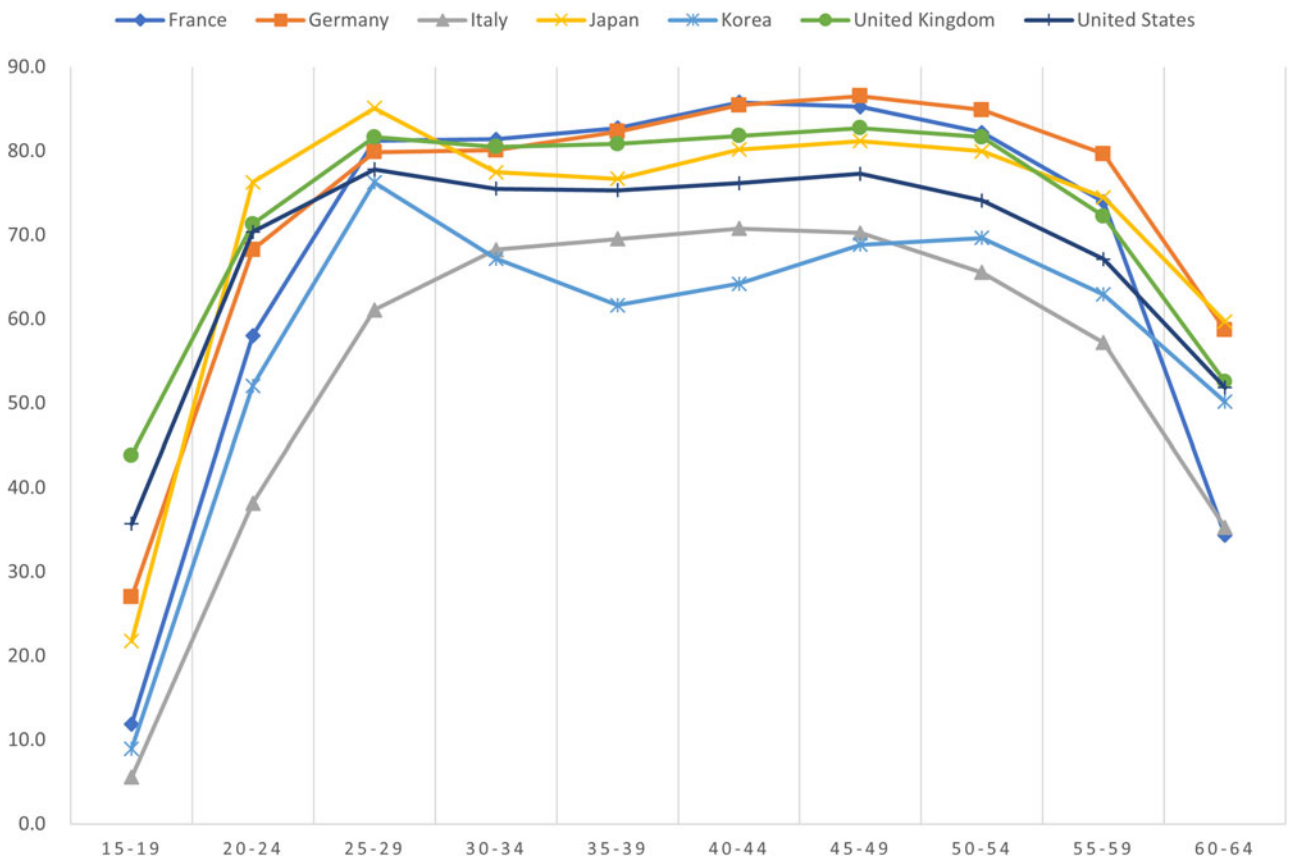

Figure 1. Labor-force participation rate by age, women aged 15-64, 2019. Source: OECD data.

socioeconomic resources, and thereby rendering them much more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life than men. Even "lucky" women who do not worry about meeting their basic survival needs may suffer from gender-based poverty beyond material deprivation, such as physical and emotional insecurity, social exclusion, political marginalization, and voicelessness.[10] Women's lack of financial independence may render them vulnerable to the demands of their primary breadwinners, often their husbands or other men with authority over them. It reduces their bargaining power vis-à-vis their male partners and creates problems when their relationships break down. Women's role as family caregivers may also impose significant restraints on their choice of career, social networks, and political participation. Due to their multiple responsibilities in the reproductive, productive, and community spheres, women frequently experience more restricted access to rest and leisure, and contend with the double burden of productive and reproductive work. This "time poverty" of women is a significant source of disadvantages for women, reducing their capabilities and substantive freedoms to choose their own lifestyle and engage in other activities, thereby compromising their well-being.[11]

Returning to Figure 1, the persistence of the M-curve in Korean women's employment pattern can be understood as one way of alleviating such work–family conflicts. Another way of circumventing some of these conflicts is to avoid having children. Korea's fertility rate, which measures the average number of children a woman is expected to have during her lifetime, dropped to a new record low of 0.92 in 2019, making it the lowest among OECD countries (the OECD average was 1.63). It is far below the replacement level of 2.1 that would keep Korea's population stable at 51 million; Korea's population fell for the first time in the nation's history in 2020 (McCurry 2021). The plummeting fertility rate also drives the fastest population aging among OECD countries, which directly leads to a rapid decline in the working age population, consumption, industrial production, and national finances (OECD 2018).

To summarize, gender norms within the family which have associated women with domestic and caring responsibilities are further reinforced within the larger societal context of the public domain and market, and lead different genders to different career and life outcomes. Consequently, women from impoverished economic backgrounds are highly likely to remain poor or become even poorer, while those above the poverty line also struggle to juggle multiple responsibilities and overcome gender-based discrimination and violence that men do not face (at least to the same degree). It is against this backdrop of pervasive gender inequality and lack of social protection that Korea's familialist, residual welfare system makes women particularly vulnerable to challenges in life. It is therefore not surprising that young women in Korea tend to perceive marriage and childbirth as "risky" life events that threaten their survival as workers (E. Kim et al. 2019), and that 67.4 percent of women in their thirties choose *not* to marry when economic circumstances allow, whereas 76.8 percent of men in their thirties make the opposite choice under the same conditions (D. Lee 2020).[12] The meaning of getting married and having a family greatly differs for women and men, as is the cost they must pay for it. However, in the aggregate, society as a whole is paying the price.

4. Women in a Confucian political economy

Looking at the realities of a family-based welfare system in South Korea wherein MACE's vision is actualized, we have seen that their rosy picture is not realistic at all, and is not merely unable to succeed but is essentially harmful to society for the following reasons.

First, a serious issue for MACE is their attribution of poverty to personal failure and its detrimental effects on the needy. Remember how the family support obligation rules in NBLSS operate: in accordance with the rules, the deprived under the Korean welfare system must shoulder the burdens of supporting each other, prove their impoverished status, obtain consent from their family support obligor to allow the latter's "incompetence" to be examined, or attest how the obligee–obligor relationship is broken beyond repair and find witnesses who can testify that the deprived and their obligor are not dodging their family responsibilities. If the obligee is unable to get all the required documents to prove their abject status, if they cannot demonstrate their destitute situation to and persuade their obligor—whom they might be unable to reach or who might be indifferent or even hostile to the obligee—to help them, or if the obligor does not cooperate with the obligee and denies charges of financial incompetence or failure to honor family responsibility, the social safety net of the world's tenth largest economy does not offer protection to the poor. This debilitating procedure repeatedly signals that benefit claimants suffer due to their own personal failure not only in procuring resources to satisfy their basic needs, but also in maintaining a good relationship with their support obligors who were their family members. Given that women have traditionally been taught to take responsibility for maintaining connections, especially kin relationships, demanding women in need prove they have no family support obligor to rely upon is equivalent to forcing them into publicly declaring moral bankruptcy.

Some might argue that these are procedural problems of any bureaucratic welfare system, but in fact they are inevitable corollaries of entrusting one's fate to personal relationships. Public welfare authorities, who by definition have no capacity to understand a claimant's intimate life history, entwined with social inequality and "family secrets" such as parents' divorce or remarriage, or support obligors' abuse, adultery, or disappearance, are compelled to prevent fraudulent applications and abuses to the welfare system. Thus, even if the central government advised local authorities not to require additional supporting documents from benefit claimants, welfare officers continue to demand stigmatizing, traumatic personal information as much as possible from applicants, to check whether they are invoking welfare entitlements as a *last* resort (H. Lee 2019). Additionally, insofar as the welfare system is preoccupied with the assumption that "[a]ctive governmental involvement runs the risk of encouraging people to shirk their personal and communal responsibilities" (Chan 2014, 185), state welfare provision will be hardly sufficient because giving more than "necessary" will cause moral hazard, enticing people to be "too dependent" upon the state. It is not difficult to imagine why potential and current "recipients repeatedly find themselves in situations where they are exposed to shaming practices that include being treated with a lack of respect, interrogated under the presumption of guilt, subjected to the abuse of power or being rendered powerless and voiceless" (Jo and Walker 2014, 78). Even after becoming a recipient of stigmatizing, parsimonious welfare benefits, it is impossible to escape the poverty trap and to live a life beyond mere subsistence.

MACE also naïvely or willfully misconstrue the family as a unitary entity with common interest in which no power dynamics distribute resources, privileges, and obligations along axes of social inequality. MACE believe that in "ordinary" families, the interests of all members are protected and well-balanced, while everyone contributes to and benefits from "family resources" in accordance with one's capacities to fulfill the needs of all, and that performing one's family roles equally contributes to one's personal material and moral well-being and the common good of the family. Consequently, when MACE champion filial care, they seldom mention that it is *women's reproductive*

labor that sustains the Confucian ideal of intergenerational (read: patrilineal) family unity.[13] By commingling men's waged work with women's unpaid reproductive labor and rendering them collectively as "family care," MACE effectively obscure the hierarchy between "care commanders" who have power to delegate primary domestic and care tasks to others and "care footsoldiers" who do the unavoidable, essential work, and such distribution of responsibility results in profoundly different outcomes for men and women.[14] From MACE's standpoint, these gendered allocations of family responsibility are merely part of family roles that people *naturally* possess and through which they can pursue the Confucian good life. Work done by women in the home and community is, as is the case with all other family roles, defined as a moral duty that does not require monetary reward, social recognition, public service, or even equal sharing with the adult men in their families. For MACE, the gendered division of labor is something women may need to personally cope with, not a matter of justice.[15]

These assumptions are, unfortunately, neither necessarily nor universally true. As an example, recall that NBLSS eligibility is based on *household* income and assets, and it excludes people who are assumed to have family support obligors. Also note that those who have multiple disadvantages in the labor market due to their domestic and caring responsibilities are more likely to have lesser, more precarious, or even no income, to be left with their dependents, and to be excluded from the social safety net because of their assumed access to "family resources." Women as "the prisoners of love" (Folbre 2001), whose commitment to care work is socially imposed, have greater difficulty in withdrawing caregiving from those whose survival depends on their labor. Thus, in bargaining over the allocation of resources and responsibilities, women are unlike men who are relatively free to disentangle themselves from care burdens and consequently women become more vulnerable to constraint and violence in family hierarchies. In a moral evaluation system that ignores this important fact of life in a non-ideal world, those whose moral agency is mainly constituted by domestic and caring roles typically find it difficult to achieve and exercise "virtue" due to overwhelming burdens and lack of resources. Given that family relationships are so important in MACE arguments that the moral self can emerge only through one's family relationships and ethical diminishment is almost inevitable in breaking them,[16] those whose family responsibilities do not enhance but undermine their own flourishing will be likely susceptible to a sense of guilt, low self-esteem, condemnation, or even punishment, when up against conflicting needs, desires, and inclinations stemming from the unjust system of moral values.[17]

Last but not least, MACE's ignorance of or willful disregard of social reproduction allows them to uncritically accept the capitalist system of production that "relies on —one might say, free rides on—activities of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds, although it accords them no monetized value and treats them as if they were free" (Fraser 2016, 101). Social reproduction is the processes involved in maintaining and reproducing people on a daily and generational basis (Laslett and Brenner 1989, 382–83) and the work includes "biological reproduction of the species," "the reproduction of the labor force," and "the reproduction of provisioning and caring needs" (Bakker and Gill 2003, 32). From food preparation and house cleaning to giving birth and taking care of chronically ill persons, such laborious *work* places heavy demands on the performer's time, energy, and skills, and does not just serve the needs of physically or mentally vulnerable persons but also enables society's functioning. For example, without someone doing activities necessary for replenishing existing labor power and producing new generations of workers, the current

economic system simply cannot exist. Yet capitalist societies have separated this work of social reproduction from that of economic production and "have remunerated 'reproductive' activities in the coin of 'love' and 'virtue', while compensating 'productive work' in that of money," meaning "those who do this work [of social reproduction] are structurally subordinate to those who earn cash wages, even as their work supplies a necessary precondition for wage labour" (Fraser 2016, 102).

In section 3.2, we saw that Korean women collectively suffer due to their actual and assumed domestic and caring responsibilities in employment rate, salary level, career continuity, social protection, life choices, and vulnerability in family hierarchies. Privileged care commanders appear as rational, responsible, autonomous, and self-sufficient taxpayers and citizens. Women, on the other hand, take care of infants, the young, frail elderly, ill, disabled, or unemployed populations neglected by society, as well as care commanders, and as a result struggle throughout their lifetime. In other words, they are socially and legally forced to do reproductive labor with the home as their workplace, and they are doing it at their own cost. Korea's notoriously high poverty rate for the elderly women, the tragic stories of women discussed above, and Korea's plummeting fertility rate are all the clear result of women being depleted through social reproduction. When reproductive labor that places heavy demands on the performer's capacities is treated as the normal manifestation of human instincts or an endlessly elastic expression of love, the costs that are supposed to be paid by privileged individuals, capital, and the state are shifted to women instead. Completely ignoring such an exploitative system of social reproduction, MACE point fingers at "irresponsible" individuals and demand that the government promote personal responsibility through coercive regulations and parsimonious, punitive welfare measures to revive the family as a moral institution based on unpaid labor of love. As Federici (1975) famously pointed out decades ago, capital wants reproductive labor to be a natural attribute rather than being recognized as a social contract that requires fair compensation, and the unwaged condition of this work has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that this is not work. MACE merely play a Confucian variation of capital's scheme.[18]

5. Not a solution but the problem

By stipulating that individual welfare be rooted in "family responsibility" and government assistance be a last resort, Korea's family-centered welfare system attributes privation to one's personal failure and renders the family entirely dependent for its reproduction on wage incomes from the labor market. By sanctifying the status quo of "family roles" that allocate the responsibility of social reproduction solely to women, it marginalizes them within both private and public spheres and deprives them of their capacity to lead autonomous lives which would not rely upon benevolence of private or public patriarchs for survival. Between the capitalist system of production and the residual welfare state that both assume that people's basic needs are somewhat satisfied by unwaged work within households, it has always been women who bear the brunt of social reproduction, and now the individualized burdens of reproductive work are collapsing the very basis of social reproduction, and thereby society.

The pressing crisis of Korea suggests that MACE proposals for social welfare are doomed to failure. When MACE emphasize the moral and practical importance of family as the basic unit of care, the sacred "family responsibility" inherent in their vision blocks the borders that place the family beyond justice and hides the patriarchal system

of economic production that free rides on women's reproductive labor. MACE's appeal to individual morality naturalizes and privatizes the massive societal structure of oppression and domination invariably defining relations within and between family, market, and the state, in a way that depletes the capacity of those in charge of reproductive work in the name of "family care." MACE's misplaced, overidealized assumptions about the family and their disregard of social reproduction reveal that not only are their proposals not a remedy to social ills, but they are, in fact, an integral part of the problem itself.

Acknowledgments. This article is a substantially revised version of one chapter of my PhD dissertation at City University of Hong Kong, "Bracketing Women's Human Rights: A Feminist Critique of Contemporary Confucian Theories." I am very grateful for invaluable feedback on earlier versions of this article from anonymous referees. Their encouragement and insightful comments made me persist with publishing this paper. This article is funded by The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2021S1A5C2A02089018).

Notes

1 Here I use "familialism" as a notion used in feminist analysis of welfare states. By leaving service provision to individual families, it tends to enforce and reproduce traditional gender roles. For an overview of feminist work on welfare states, see Orloff (2009). The residual welfare model is characterized by minimum benefit levels, stigmatization, and population stratification. Gao et al. (2011) argue that basic social security systems in China and Korea share the core features of welfare residualism.

2 Such "Confucian" features in South Korea's laws and policies are often explained by "Confucianization" of Korean society during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) and its downward social effects. For the Confucian transformation of Korean society in the era, see Deuchler (1992); Duncan (2000); Haboush (1991). For arguments that the Confucian tradition formed during the period is still alive and exerting substantial influence in South Korean citizens' everyday lives, see Bell and Hahm (2003); Chaibong Hahm (2003); Chaihark Hahm (2003a, 2003b); S. Kim (2014, 2018).

3 Korean laws designed to promote filial piety will be discussed in section 2.2. of this paper.

4 By "family care" I mean the work necessary for ensuring both daily survival of family members and generational continuity of the family, including "biological reproduction of the species," "the reproduction of the labor force," and "the reproduction of provisioning and caring needs" (Bakker and Gill 2003, 32). This is adopted from the definition of *reproductive labor* by limiting its scope to the work done by one for family members within households. In this paper, family care is part of family responsibility, but the emphasis is on the *physical* labor in which one's body is essential, that involves creating, cleaning, and caring for the human body, its detritus, and its environments.

5 For example, filial support laws in the United States which require adult children to financially support their indigent parents can be traced back to the Act for the Relief of the Poor enacted in sixteenth-century England. Almost half of US states still have related laws on the books, but they have rarely been enforced for the last 50 years (Pearson 2013).

6 The college entrance rate of Korean women has outpaced men's since 2005 (So 2019).

7 For example, the employment rate of Korea in 2019 was 75.7 percent for men (OECD average 76.2 percent) and 57.8 percent for women (OECD average 61.3 percent) (OECD 2021a).

8 For instance, while 48.8 percent of older women reported that their longest job duration was less than 10 years (men 18.2 percent), 51.5 percent of older men's longest job duration was more than 20 years (women 21.6 percent) (Statistics Korea 2020b).

9 By way of illustration, 60.9 percent of elderly men report they are making or already made provision for their later years versus 39.3 percent of elderly women; 71 percent of elderly men have public pension incomes versus 35.9 percent of elderly women (Statistics Korea 2020a); and the average monthly pension benefit received by elderly men is 820,000 won (US$642), whereas for elderly women it is 420,000 won (US $329) (Statistics Korea 2020b).

10 Feminist research on poverty emphasizes the necessity of holistic conceptual frameworks that capture the multidimensional nature of gender-differentiated privations, not limited to lack of income. For an overview of the feminist literature on gendered privation, see Chant (2008).

11 For a study analyzing Korean women's poverty in regard to time use, see Noh and Kim (2015). They conclude that "rather than a lack of household income, a lack of time due to meeting the burdens and obligations for household survival represents a more serious poverty risk" (106).
12 It is noteworthy that practically all women in the Korean labor market experience severe discrimination, even without children or marriage (Jang 2020).
13 For instance, 71.7 percent of the family caregivers for the frail and sick in Korea are women (National Health Insurance Corporation 2018). Care for elderly men was provided by wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law married to the eldest son (in order), and care for elderly women was by daughters, husbands, and daughters-in-law married to the eldest son in the family (in order) (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs 2017).
14 This categorization is from Kathleen Lynch et al.'s (2009) discussion on "affective inequality," which refers to "inequality in the degree to which people's needs for love and care are satisfied, and inequality in the work that goes into satisfying them" (12).
15 For a typical Confucian-inspired defense of the gender division of labor, see Chenyang Li (2014, 111–14). A partial exception is Rosenlee (2014). Reflecting the insights of feminist care ethics on women's disproportionate burden in caring for others, she argues Confucian ethics must deal with "the inequity between men and women in performing actual caring labor" (328). However, her conviction about the *absolute* hierarchy between parent and child, which mandates the latter's responsibility to care for the former, seems incompatible with feminist care ethicists' aim of socializing care.
16 For example, Sungmoon Kim (2010) claims "[f]rom the Confucian standpoint, … [u]pon the termination of a relationship … especially in the family, I become nobody to myself, for thence I have lost a critical epistemological and moral backdrop against which to claim my own individuality and personhood. … Confucian individual agency is empowered when the relationships engaged in by the self are enhanced" (486).
17 I get these insights from feminist ethicists who are critical of traditional virtue theories that neglect forces of unjust power hierarchies and define virtue, vice, and good lives in ways that reinforce the systems of domination and oppression. For an overview of feminist approaches to traditional virtue ethics, see Dillon (2018).
18 It is not a coincidence that MACE's welfare provision scheme is akin to those of US neoliberals and neoconservatives who believe the "natural obligations" of family should serve as the primary source of economic security, rather than state-sanctioned redistribution, and that the state is authorized to enforce legal obligations of family responsibility and unfree labor to counter the demoralizing powers of the welfare state. As to how neoliberalism and social conservatism in the US both support family responsibility and workfare in the service of free-market mechanisms, see Cooper (2017).

References

Angle, Stephen C. 2019. Confucianism: Confucian perspectives on the morality of economic inequality. In *Economic inequality and morality: Diverse ethical perspectives*, ed. Richard Madsen and William M Sullivan. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Bahk, Eun-ji. 2019. Gov't to strengthen social security net to cover blind spot. *Korea Times*, September 5. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/09/119_275180.html.

Bakker, Isabella, and Stephen Gill. 2003. Ontology, method, and hypotheses. In *Power, production and social reproduction: Human in/security in the global political economy*, ed. Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bell, Daniel A. 2003. Confucian constraints on property rights. In *Confucianism for the modern world*, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Chaibong Hahm. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bell, Daniel A. 2006. *Beyond liberal democracy: Political thinking for an East Asian context*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Bell, Daniel A., and Chaibong Hahm. 2003. The contemporary relevance of Confucianism. In *Confucianism for the modern world*, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Chaibong Hahm. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chan, Joseph. 2014. *Confucian perfectionism: A political philosophy for modern times*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chang, Woo-ri. 2020. Bang-bae-dong mo-ja bi-geug-e … bu-yang-ui-mu-ja gi-jun i-jen pye-ji-hae-ya [Bangbae family tragedy, no more famiy support obligation]. *Yonhap News*, December 16. https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20201215162700004.

Chant, Sylvia. 2008. The "feminisation of poverty" and the "feminisation" of anti-poverty programmes: Room for revision? *Journal of Development Studies* 44 (2): 165–97.

Choe, Sang-Hun. 2019. She fled famine in North Korea, then died poor in a prosperous land. *New York Times*, September 21. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/21/world/asia/lonely-deaths-of-a-refugee-mother-and-her-son-unsettle-south-korea.html.

Cooper, Melinda. 2017. *Family values: Between neoliberalism and the new social conservatism*. New York: Zone Books.

Deuchler, Martina. 1992. *The Confucian transformation of Korea: A study of society and ideology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dillon, Robin S. 2018. Feminist approaches to virtue ethics. In *The Oxford handbook of virtue*, ed. Nancy E. Snow. New York: Oxford University Press.

Duncan, John B. 2000. *The origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Fan, Ruiping. 2007. Which care? Whose responsibility? And why family? A Confucian account of long-term care for the elderly. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine* 32 (5): 495–517.

Federici, Silvia. 1975. *Wages against housework*. Bristol: Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press.

Folbre, Nancy. 2001. *The invisible heart: Economics and family values*. New York: New Press.

Fraser, Nancy. 2016. Contradictions of capital and care. *New Left Review* 100: 99–117.

Gao, Qin, Jiyoung Yoo, Sook-Mee Yang, and Fuhua Zhai. 2011. Welfare residualism: A comparative study of the basic livelihood security systems in China and South Korea. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 20 (2): 113–24.

Haboush, JaHyun Kim. 1991. The confucianization of Korean society. In *The East Asian region*, ed. Gilbert Rozman. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hah, Min-ji. 2020. Sa-lam jug-eo-do an-ba-kkwi-neun je-do, bu-yang-ui-mu-ja gi-jun [Family support obligation rules never change even if people die]. *BeMinor*, December 31. https://www.beminor.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=20528.

Hah, Sung-hee, and Jae-hee Kim. 2019. Mae-dal son-e jwin geon i-sib-o-man-won-ppun … tto deu-leo-nan wol-se-bang mo-nyeo-ui bi-geug [Monthly income 250 thousand won, another tragedy of mother and dauther]. *Donga Ilbo*, January 22. https://www.donga.com/news/Society/article/all/20190122/93801155/1.

Hahm, Chaibong. 2003. Family versus the individual: The politics of marriage laws in Korea. In *Confucianism for the modern world*, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Chaibong Hahm. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hahm, Chaihark. 2003a. Constitutionalism, confucian civic virtue, and ritual propriety. In *Confucianism for the modern world*, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Chaibong Hahm. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hahm, Chaihark. 2003b. Law, culture, and the politics of confucianism. *Columbia Journal of Asian Law* 16 (2): 253–301.

Jang, Jin-Hee. 2020. Hon-in-gwa ja-nyeo-ga seong-byeol-im-geum-gyeog-cha-e mi-chi-neun yeong-hyang [Effects of marriage and infant children on gender wage gap]. *Ewha Journal of Gender and Law* 12 (1): 179–212.

Jo, Yongmie Nicola, and Robert Walker. 2014. Self-sufficiency, social assistance and the shaming of poverty in South Korea. In *The shame of it: Global perspectives on anti-poverty policies*, ed. Erika K Gubrium, Sony Pellissery, and Ivar Lødemel. Bristol: Policy Press.

Kang, Hye-min. 2019. Tal-bug-mo-ja bu-yang-ui-mu-ja gi-jun ttae-mun-e bog-ji mos-bad-a [NGOs memorial for North Korean mother and son, no benefit due to family obligation support rules]. *BeMinor*, August 23. http://www.beminor.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=13758.

Kim, Eun-Ji, Hyo-Jean Song, Ho-Jung Bae, Bo-Young Sun, Jin-Hee Choi, and Jeong-Mi Hwang. 2019. Jeo-chul-san dae-eung-jeong-chaeg pae-leo-da-im jeon-hwan-yeon-gu (1) [Paradigm shift in policy responses to low birthrates (I)]. Korean Women's Development Institute.

Kim, Sungmoon. 2010. Beyond liberal civil society: Confucian familism and relational strangership. *Philosophy East and West* 60 (4): 476–98.

Kim, Sungmoon. 2014. *Confucian democracy in East Asia: Theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kim, Sungmoon. 2018. *Democracy after virtue: Toward pragmatic confucian democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kim, Yoon-yeong. 2014. Song-pa se mo-nyeo-ui jug-eum, ga-nan-han i-e-ge kal gyeo-nun jeong-bu [Gov't responsible for death of Songpa family]. *Pressian*, March 3. https://www.pressian.com/pages/articles/115018?no=115018.

Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs. 2017. 2017nyeon-do no-in-sil-tae-jo-sa [2017 analysis of the survey of living conditions and welfare needs of Korean older persons]. Sejong: Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs.

Ku, Inhoe, and Chang-O Kim. 2020. Decomposition analyses of the trend in poverty among older adults: The case of South Korea. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 75 (3): 684–93.

Laslett, Barbara, and Johanna Brenner. 1989. Gender and social reproduction: Historical perspectives. *Annual Review of Sociology* 15: 381–404.

Lee, Bang-hee. 2017. Gug-min-geon-gang-bo-heom-gong-dan yo-yang-bo-ho-sa myeong-ching hyo-na-nu-mi-t-lo gyeol-jeong [Care worker under LTCI Named as "filial care helper"]. *Chonbuk Domin Ilbo*. https://www.domin.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=1169429.

Lee, Chang Gon. 2015. For pension payouts, women getting just 60% as much as men. *Hankyoreh*, December 15. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/721936.html.

Lee, Chang Gon. 2016. Na-hol-lo no-in, ja-nyeo dong-geo no-in-bo-da 2.8 bae ga-nan-ha-da [Elderly living alone 2.8 times poorer than elderly living with children]. *Hankyoreh*, June 21. http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/749077.html.

Lee, Do-yeon. 2020. Sam-sib-dae nam-seong-eun gyeol-hon, yeo-seong-eun bi-hon seon-ho [Men and women in 30s want marriage and non-marriage respectively]. *Yonhap News*, September 24. https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20200924129400530.

Lee, Hyun-jeong. 2019. Mo-yog-bad-neun bin-gon-cheung…gi-cho-su-geub sin-cheong ttae ga-jog-hae-che je-sam-ja in-jeung-yo-gu [The poor being humiliated, required to prove family dissolution from third party]. *Seoul Shinmun*, August 19. https://go.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20190820014015.

Lee, Ju-mi, and Tae-wan Kim. 2020. No-in-bin-gon won-in-e dae-han go-chal: no-dong-si-jang gyeong-heom-gwa ga-jog-gu-jo byeon-hwa-leul jung-sim-eu-lo [A study on the causes of poverty in the elderly: Focusing on labor market experiences and changes in family structure]. *Health and Social Welfare Review* 40 (2): 193–221.

Lee, Kwi-won. 2014. Song-pa se-mo-nyeo-beob bon-hoe-ui tong-gwa, bog-ji-sa-gag an-jeon-mang gang-hwa [Songpa Mother and Daughters Law passed, strengthening social safety net]. *Yonhap News*, December 9. https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20141209161600001.

Lee, Seung-ho. 2014. 3 women found dead; suicide likely. *Korea Joongang Daily*, February 28. https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2985671.

Li, Chenyang. 2014. *The Confucian philosophy of harmony*. New York: Routledge.

Lynch, Kathleen, John Baker, and Maureen Lyons, ed. 2009. *Affective equality: Love, care and injustice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

McCurry, Justin. 2021. South Korea's population falls for first time in its history. *Guardian*, January 4. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/04/south-korea-population-falls-for-first-time-in-history.

National Health Insurance Corporation. 2018. 2017nyeon no-in-jang-gi-yo-yang-bo-heom tong-gye-yeon-bo [Long-Term Care Insurance statistical yearbook, 2017]. National Health Insurance Cooperation. https://www.nhis.or.kr/nhis/together/wbhaec07200m01.do?mode=download&articleNo=126935&attachNo=49614

Noh, Hyejin, and Kyo-seong Kim. 2015. Revisiting the "feminisation of poverty" in Korea: Focused on time use and time poverty. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development* 25 (2): 96–110.

OECD. 2018. *Working better with age: Korea*. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd.org/publications/working-better-with-age-korea-9789264208261-en.htm.

OECD. 2019. Old-age income poverty. In *Pensions at a glance 2019: OECD and G20 indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD. 2021a. Employment rate (indicator). 2021. https://data.oecd.org/emp/employment-rate.htm.

OECD. 2021b. Gender wage gap. 2021. https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/gender-wage-gap.htm.

Oh, Soojin. 2014. Jeong-bu, bog-ji-sa-gag-ji-dae il-je-jo-sa sil-si [Gov't launches emergency monitoring of low-income households in welfare blind spot]. *Yonhap News*, March 3. https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20140303125151017.

Orloff, Ann Shola. 2009. Gendering the comparative analysis of welfare states: An unfinished agenda. *Sociological Theory* 27 (3): 317–43.

Park, Hyun-jeong. 2019. In-cheon il-ga-jog bu-yang-ui-mu-ja gi-jun tas-e saeng-gye-geub-yeo sin-cheong-jo-cha mos-hae [Incheon family unable to claim benefits due to family support obligation]. *Hankyoreh*, November 22. https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/918161.html.

Park, Sung-min. 2014. Bag-dae-tong-lyeong se-mo-nyeo ja-sal ma-eum-a-pa [President Park "heartbroken" over sucide of mother and two daughters]. *Yonhap News*, March 4. https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20140304092853001.

Pearson, Katherine C. 2013. Filial support laws in the modern era: Domestic and international comparison of enforcement practices for laws requiring adult children to support indigent parents. *Elder Law Journal* 20 (2): 269–314.

Rosemont, Henry Jr., and Roger T. Ames. 2008. *The Chinese classic of family reverence: A philosophical translation of the Xiaojing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Rosenlee, Li-Hsiang Lisa. 2014. Why Care? A feminist re-appropriation of Confucian xiao 孝. In *Dao companion to the Analects*, ed. Amy Olberding. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Seok, Jae-eun, Yongha Kim, Hae-yeon Kim, Hye-jin Noh, Hee-joon Shin, Eun-jin Chang, and Insu Hong. 2018. Sa-hoe-bo-jang 2040 jen-deo-pyeong-deung jeong-chaeg-mog-pyo ji-pyo gae-bal yeon-gu [2040 Gender impact assessment of social security policy for gender equality]. Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.

So, Jae-hyeong. 2019. Nam-nyeo dae-hag jin-hag-lyul gyeog-cha choe-dae-tss-go-yong-lyul gyeog-cha-do jul-eo [Largeset gender gap in higher education, employment gap reduced]. *Yonhap News*, July 1. https://www.yna.co.kr/view/MYH20190701019600038.

Statistics Korea. 2020a. 2020 go-lyeong-ja-tong-gye [2020 older people statistics].

Statistics Korea. 2020b. 2020nyeon o-wol gyeong-je-hwal-dong-in-gu-jo-sa go-lyeong-cheung bu-ga-jo-sa [Additional economically active population survey for older workers, May 2020].

Statistics Korea. 2020c. The non-regular employment rate (in Korean). K-Indicator. 2020. https://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=4214&clasCd=7.

Statistics Korea. 2021. Wage and working hours by gender (in Korean). KOSIS. 2021. https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=118&tblId=DT_118N_LCE0002.

Tan, Sor-hoon. 2004. *Confucian democracy: A Deweyan reconstruction*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Tan, Sor-hoon. 2014. The concept of yi (义) in the Mencius and problems of distributive justice. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92 (3): 489–505.

Tao, Julia. 2004. The paradox of care: A Chinese Confucian perspective on long-term care. In *A handbook of comparative social policy*, ed. Patricia Kennett. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Tao, Julia. 2007. Dignity in long-term care for older persons: A Confucian perspective. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine* 32 (5): 465–81.

Won, Byeong-il. 2017. Saeng-hwal-sog hyo no-in-jang-gi-yo-yang-bo-heom-i ham-kke-hab-ni-da [Filial piety in daily life, LTCI with you]. *Kyongin Ilbo*. http://www.kyeongin.com/main/view.php?key=20170516010005057.

Yeo, Eugene. 2017. Bu-yang-ui-mu-ja gi-jun pye-ji-e tta-leun jeong-chaeg-gwa-je yeon-gu [A study on the policy implications of the abolition of the family support obligation rules]. Seoul: Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs. http://repository.kihasa.re.kr/handle/201002/29828.

Subin Lee is Senior Research Associate at Institute of Confucian Philosophy and Culture at Sungkyunkwan University. With a background in philosophy and public policy, she is interested in examining ethical and political theories within the broader context of systemic inequalities and power dynamics. Her work aims to envision more equitable and just social arrangements.

Cite this article: Lee S (2024). Confucian Familialism and the Crisis of Care. *Hypatia* **39**, 597–615. https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2024.50