

The Trilemma of Child Care Services and the Korean Policy Choice: Private Provision and Demand-side Subsidy

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Abstract

Child care policy has developed rapidly in Korea since the late 1990s. Public discourse on Korea's low utilization of female human capital and its low fertility rate led to high social concern for the nation's child care system. This drove the Korean government to redesign its policies in order to expand child care coverage faster than other countries. In spite of the government's success in increasing coverage, there continues to be widespread dissatisfaction and anxiety for parents when it comes to the quality of child care service. This study argues that this issue is the result of policy choices made by the Korean governments and policy makers regarding the trilemma of the child care service. In Korea, child care services have been primarily developed by the private sector. The government chose the private facilities as the main suppliers as a quick solution to meet the increasing demand for child care service, and private companies have entered the market easily. However, lack of regulation has led to the overgrowth of for-profit private centers (which pose as non-profit centers as per legal requirement), lowering the overall quality of available services. This was the consequence of giving up making substantial investments into the quality of child care, such as expanding the national and public services (public sector), placing the management and supervision system under the public responsibility, and fostering the skilled child care workers. In addition, cost-sensitive (and 'consumer-centered') policies pushed forward by the conservative governments, reinforce the negative effects of privatization. The child care policies focused on private provision and vouchers to consumers (demand-side subsidy), with the aim of direct political gains, are now backfiring on financing and budgeting. To resolve this situation, private provision-consumer subsidy policies must be re-examined and efforts must be made to expand the role of public providers of child care services.

Keywords

trilemma, free child care, private centers, public provision, cost subsidization, child care

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Introduction

The free child care policies established by the Park Geun-hye administration are currently in their third year. Park Geun-hye won the 2012 presidential election with an electoral platform that included a pledge, *State-responsible No-anxiety Child Care*, to develop more comprehensive child care policies than those of the opposing Democratic Party. Indeed, after her election as president, she expanded the scope of child care policies to include all three- and four-year-old children (an expansion of the Nuri Curriculum policy) as well as the scope of the home care allowance policies to include all children age five and under. As such, it seemed that Korea's child care services had become a truly universal system, providing free services for all children aged 0-5 and cash benefits to families opting out of the free services. However, despite these policy changes, parents were still frustrated with the lack of safe and reliable child care places.

There have been numerous debates over the various issues surrounding Korea's child care service policies. Major debates include the designation of child care service as public goods (Kim Hyeon-sook, 2006; Hyeon Jin-kwon Jeon Heui-kyeong, 2010), the role and outcome of child care policies established by previous administrations (Baek Seon-heui, 2009; Yoon Hong-sik, 2014a), gender effects of home care allowances (Hong Seung-a, 2011; Song Da-yeong, 2010; Choi Eun-yeong, 2010), and the definition of child care publicness (Kim Jong-hae, 2004; Ahn Hyeon-mi, 2014; Baek Seon-heui, 2011). However, research so far has focused on the characteristics and limits of specific programs such as child care and home care allowances themselves. There has been no discussion on the characteristics of the overall child care environment and structure or on specificity of Korean child care regime. By law, child care services in Korea are provided by non-profit companies prohibited from pursuing profit. Furthermore, a price cap on services has been set. However, the majority of these supposed 'non-profit' centers run their services for profit. Korea is the only country worldwide with this issue while having established free universal child care services under a conservative government, and while having expanded both child care services and home care allowances simultaneously. This raises the question: how can these seemingly-incompatible phenomena coexist in Korea's child care system?

This study focuses on the choice structure and the path dependency of Korea's child care policy over the last two decades. To that end, it first analyzes the child care service trilemma based on the study by Iversen and Wren, 'The Trilemma of the Service Economy' (1998) which analyzed the difficulties welfare states faced while transforming their manufacturing economy into a service economy. Although their analysis is based on labor market-employment growth and wage inequality, it is still of worth as a theoretical background for analyzing the policy shift of welfare states during their transition to a service economy (Wren, Fodor and Theodoropoulou, 2013; Ansell, 2008; Ansell and Gingrich, 2013).

Not much research has been conducted on the structure of Korea's child care services and policies. The most relevant studies include one by Estevez-Abe and Kim Yeong-soon (2014) which compares child care services from Korea and Japan and one by Song Da-yeong (2014). The former one focuses on the quantitative expansion of Korea's child care service and compares its development with the services

available in Japan, which did not have a similar expansion of services. The study compares the two with respect to the political opportunity structure and the institutional actors. The study by Song Da-yeong states that child care policy has failed and the attainment of welfare state status has been 'delayed' based on the unsatisfactory quality of child care services and the low female participation in the labor market. This study aims to demonstrate that these contrasting interpretations can coexist under the trilemma of child care service reform.

This study is comprised of four parts. The first part, by invoking research on the trilemma of the service economy, introduces the trilemma of child care service reform (section 2). The second part examines the current status of Korea's child care services in comparison with that of other OECD countries before looking into their development history (section 3). The third part, from sections 4 to 7, addresses the development and expansion of the child care service supply structure led by the private sector and the delay in quality improvement despite the provision of subsidies for child care services and the expansion of the scope of recipients by both the progressive and conservative governments. In the last part, all the points addressed in the previous sections are summarized and a conclusion is presented.

Trilemma of Child Care Service Reform

Care services for children and long-term care services for the elderly are the two major yardsticks used to measure the social services provided by a welfare state. In spite of the 'welfare state crisis', social services have grown continuously in many countries since the 1990s. However, child care services experienced a belated growth compared to other welfare states' programs. In the 1970's, countries in Northern Europe including Sweden first began to organize child care policies to encourage women's participation in economic activities and to support the cognitive and social development of children. However, it was only after the 1990s that these policies were put in place and expanded.

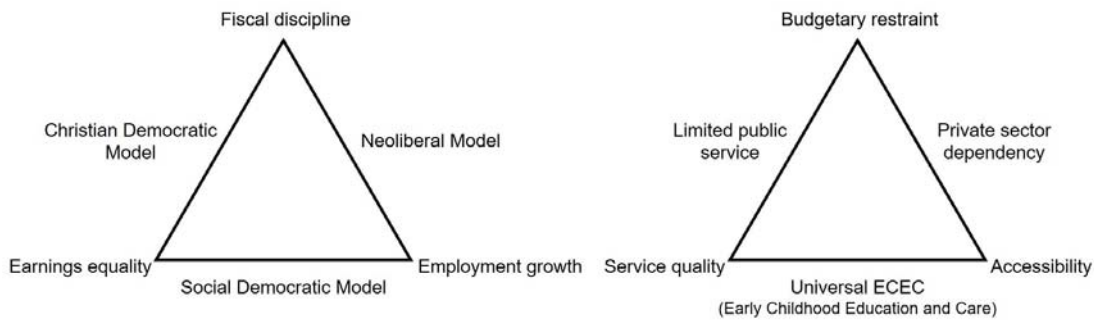
After the economic crisis of the late 1990s and the growing debate over the country's low fertility and aging society in the 2000s, Korea expanded its child care services, seeking to resolve the low fertility issue and to encourage female participation in economic activities. For the last decade, child care services have seen a rapid growth in terms of budget, number of facilities, and number of service users. Indeed, it has been one of Korea's fastest growing policy areas. Just as women's organizations and progressive governments were the driving forces of the expansion of public child care services in Western countries, in Korea, women's organizations and civic groups were the key players working with the welfare-friendly progressive administrations such as the Kim Dae-jung administration and the Roh Moo-hyun administration (Estevez-Abe and Kim, 2014). It is surprising, however, that this trend continued even under the following conservative administrations. Indeed, during that period, the child care budget continued to increase. To understand this puzzle, it is necessary to dig deep into the structural development of Korea's child care services.

According to Iversen and Wren (1998), during its transition and reform into a service economy, a welfare state must confront trilemma - budget reduction, wage

(income) equality, and employment growth. It is possible to pursue two of the three points simultaneously. However, thus far, no government has been successful in pursuing all at once. Employment growth in private services results in wage inequality, and prioritization of wage equality imposes the burden of employment growth solely onto public services. The latter case inevitably leads to a heavy tax burden and a budget limit issue (see Figure 1).

The choice structure of the trilemma corresponds to the three types of welfare regimes as suggested by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999). (1) A liberal welfare state pursues cost reduction while meeting service demands and raising employment, but during this process, the marketization strategy exacerbates wage inequality and increases low-income laborers in bad jobs. (2) The corporatist welfare states of Central Europe are reluctant to expand services. In those countries, the basic concept of welfare is that social services are provided by communities, religious groups, and families, and the government plays a subsidiary role only. The financial burden from the mature social insurance system restricts the government’s role as well. These countries have a passive stance in providing services and in creating jobs, and they tend to apply protective labor conditions for services, at the same time aiming to reduce increased wage inequality, which results in restraints in the growth of the service sector. (3) The countries of Northern Europe chose a third way of expanding service employment by the public sector, reducing wage inequality, and guaranteeing quality of services. However, the economic consequence of this strategy is increase in budget due to the high financial costs of these measures.

Figure 1. Trilemma of the Service Economy **Figure 2.** Trilemma of Child Care Service Reform



The macroeconomic trilemma of the service economy is applicable in each individual policy area. Ansell (2008) described the trilemma of political choices in mass enrollment to universities in Europe. University education which initially was considered an elite education in the 1950s was faced with a political choice as mass education spread. Since the budget was limited, there was a trade-off between coverage and subsidization. European countries were forced to choose only two from among the three choices - budget reduction, coverage expansion, and subsidization. The countries of Northern Europe set up a universal higher education system in which the government provides full financial support for higher education. As a result, in those countries government's expenses for higher education account for 1.5% or more of the GDP (mass education system). The UK, Japan, and Australia

chose to shift more than 50% of the burden to private financial resources for coverage expansion and by doing so reduced the financial burden (partial market education). In contrast, Germany, Austria, and France control the budget by limiting the number of enrollments while maintaining a high level of subsidization (elite education).

This policy trilemma above can be applied to social services such as child care (Figure 2), since the expansion of a social service, in particular the expansion of beneficiaries, inevitably results in an increased financial burden. However, before applying the trilemma to a social service, one must note that the analysis by Ansell of higher education in European countries assumes that the quality of higher education services is properly controlled for based on the given choice structure. However, in the choice structure of child care service, the quality of service itself is a key factor in political choice. Unless quality is guaranteed, user satisfaction will remain low and the requirements as 'a service' will be hardly met.

Bahle (2003) defined four characteristics of a social service. First, it is a personal service, not a service related to the production or distribution of goods. Second, a social service meets a social need rather than the physical or intellectual needs of an individual and thus it is differentiated from medical, educational, or psychological support. Third, a social service is performed through direct social interaction and forms a relationship of trust and power between a provider and a client. Fourth, the provision of a social service is affected by social values and norms such as the roles of women or families and recognition of welfare rights and has a 'social' context. As described above, a social service is distinguished from other welfare benefits, and the quality of the service performed through a personal, face-to-face, and social interaction is the essence of the benefit.

Although it is not easy to index the quality of a service in an objective manner, in the case of child care service, quality can be measured through indicators such as minimum qualification required and working conditions of nursing teachers, staff to child ratios, and the group size. In most cases, the quality of national or public services provided by the public sector is better and more 'reliable' than the services provided by the profit-pursuing private sector.

Most welfare states launched selective and residual child care services for vulnerable and special needs populations, which served as the origin of public provision of the service in the postwar period. In contrast to social insurance which seeks operational efficiency by direct cash payment, a social service requires three parties - service providers, consumers, and the government. Social services also require initial costs for facility investment and fostering of human resources for service provision. The expansion of child care services thus takes time and increase of public provision is even more difficult in the private sector-led policy environment. In other words, it is difficult to lower the burden of the service users and guarantee service quality (through provision of public services) completely and universally. Especially under economic recession, high unemployment rates, and financial retrenchment, service expansion is not easy. In a bid for inducing and 'compensating' for the needs, the countries of Central Europe such as Germany, France, and Belgium are widely adopting home care allowance policy (limited public service) (Morel, 2007).

The second option for developing child care services is the combination of providing quality services through the public sector and expanding accessibility to

child care as a universal right. This is the most expensive choice. The countries of Northern Europe manage to achieve quality and accessibility of services by providing universal public child care services for children but their budget for child care reaches almost 1.5 to 2% of the GDP. The choice to expand the public employment and to guarantee child care as universal rights creates a promising cycle of raising tax revenue by increasing the employment of women but at the same time has a relatively expensive structure. Finland gives households home care allowances for children who do not use public child care services as an attempt to reduce the financial burden for child care (universal public service).

The third option is to focus on expanding both child care coverage and purchasing power. The direct way to expand coverage is to grant purchasing power to consumers and enabling them use services in the private market. The growing number of recipients inevitably increases financial burden, but dependency on the private sector, rather than on the public system, may reduce the relative burden. Korea chose to expand child care coverage through private provision and to provide financial support for child care consumers. As a result, public services decreased while the private sector grew to dominate the child care market. Although Korea's private welfare facilities are not typical market players as they are bound to a maximum price limit and are legally defined as non-profit organizations, they are in reality acting as profit seekers whose basic break-even point is the child care subsidy they receive from the government and who create profit through other activities (private sector-centered service).¹

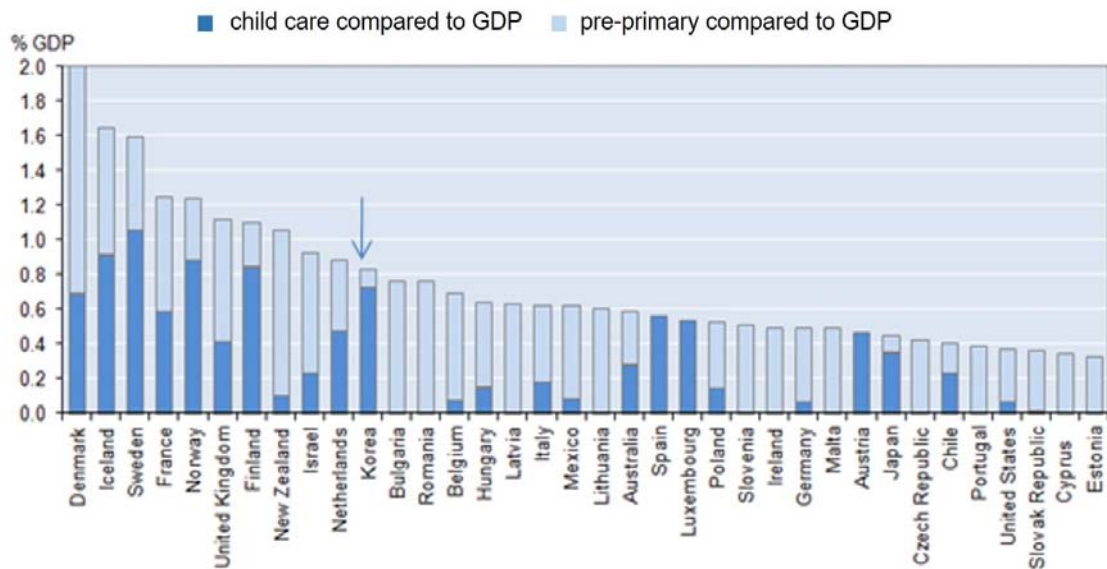
In terms of participation of women in economic activities and children's cognitive and social development in a service economy, the political importance of child care services is more than simply an investment in human capital. OECD countries attempt to meet these political needs in various ways based on their budget. However, it is still difficult to achieve all three key points - service quality, accessibility,² and budget reduction. The problem is how to build a demand and supply structure and what kind of an ecosystem to create.

Current Status of Child Care Service

The social expenditure of Korea is far below the OECD average, but in terms of overall percentage of public spending, the amount invested in child care services and preschool education is quite high (Figure 3).

1 The main target of this research is Korea, stated as a private sector-centered system. However, there are countries which have introduced actual market mechanisms, such as Australia. Typically, private facilities refer to all facilities which are not national or public. However, in Korea, child care facilities which are entrusted operation by the local government to corporations are considered national or public. Private facilities with strong market orientation are private child care centers or home child care centers, not the corporate-operated facilities entrusted by the local office.

2 Accessibility does not mean geographical proximity in a narrow sense. Rather, accessibility here is used in a broad sense including availability in supply for using social services and affordability in price. Therefore, the term includes both coverage and generosity.

Figure 3. Public Spending on Early Childhood Education and Care (% of GDP, 2011)

Source: OECD Family Policy Database

Korea ranks high in terms of portion of spending on early child care and education to national GDP. Denmark's spending on child care is the highest at 2.0% of its GDP, followed by France and the UK. Korea invests 0.9% of its GDP in child care services, similar to Netherlands, which is even greater than Germany (0.5%), Japan (0.4%), Italy (0.6%), and the US (0.4%). In particular, when considering child care expenses not including pre-primary education, Korea is one of the biggest spenders from among the OECD countries. Given that such a big increase in spending has been achieved over the course of just one decade (the proportion was 0.1% in the early 2000s), Korea's investment in child care services is particularly noteworthy.

When it comes to the care coverage by age of the child, Korea's advancements are even more astonishing. Compared to the countries in Northern Europe where child care services have been well-developed, Korea's child care coverage among preschool children quite high. Indeed, its coverage is higher than that of Finland. Furthermore, while child care coverage among infants age 0-1 is relatively low in Northern European countries, Korea's child care coverage for newborns and one-year-old infants is as high as 32.5% and 71.7%, respectively. Coverage for three- to five-year-old children is nearly 90%.³

³ The reason for the low rate of child care utilization for newborn babies (under 12 months of age) in Northern European countries including Sweden is due to their well-developed parental leave policy which allows for parents to take time off work to care for their children themselves. In contrast, in Korea where the portion of housewives is large, the child care ratio of newborn babies is as high as 32.5%, raising the child care coverage of 0-2 year olds.

Table 1. Child care-Education Ratio of Newborns to Five-year-old Children, as of 2009 (Unit: %)

Age	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	Korea(2013)
0	15.1	0.90	4.40	0.00	32.5
1	88.0	29.0	69.8	49.5	71.7
2	92.4	50.3	85.8	90.9	83.1
3	97.6	67.1	96.1	95.0	89.5
4	97.5	73.5	97.0	97.7	92.7
5	95.1	77.1	97.9	98.0	90.7

Source: Quoted from Meagher and Azebehely (2012: 92)

Data: Nordic Statistics (2010). Data for Korea is as of 2013 by Kim Eun-jeong (2014).

However, despite Korea's high child care budget and service coverage, the level of satisfaction of service users is low and the working conditions of nursery teachers are poor. Furthermore, safety issues and children's rights in the facilities are of great concern. These issues have been continuously raised since 1995 by women's organizations, civic groups and academic experts who denounce them as the 'chronic illness in Korea's child care policy' (Song Da-yeong, 2014:130).

Expansion of Child Care Led by the Private Sector

Quantitative Growth of Private Facilities

Korea's child care services cannot be separated from the private child care provision. While countries with an advanced child care system, such as Northern Europe, have realized the expansion of child care through public child care services, Korea has depended on the private sector for faster expansion. The establishment of the Infant Care Act in 1991 allowed entrance of private facilities, which was previously prohibited by the Child Welfare Act.⁴ Furthermore, the government's three-year child care expansion plan launched in 1995 further increased participation by the private sector, exceeding original projections.⁵ In addition, the change in the child care facility authorization system to a reporting system in 1997 led to the full-scale quantitative expansion of child care facilities.⁶

4 In 1991, the Infant Care Act lifted restrictions on the establishment of child care facilities placed by the Child Welfare Act, and excluded child care facilities from the category of child welfare facilities.

5 The three-year child care expansion plan (1995-1997) performed beyond projection. The original plan was to increase the total number of facilities to 7,590 - 3,150 public child care facilities (41.5%), 1,440 workplace child care facilities (19.0%), and 3,000 private child care facilities (39.5%). The actual number achieved was 8,928, 117.6% of the original goal. Looking into the number by facility type, the achievement ratio was 53.1% for public child care facilities, 8.4% for workplace child care facilities, and 237.8% for private child care facilities, indicating that the expansion of child care facilities was achieved largely within the private sector (Yu Heui-jeong, 1999).

6 The Kim Young-sam administration exerted full effort to enter the OECD. At the time, the

As stated previously, the economic crisis in the late 1990s and the low fertility issue raised in the early 2000s acted as the main impetus for child care expansion. Public debates on these issues highlighted the necessity for child care services capable of supporting the economic activities of women and reducing the burden for child care. The Kim Dae-jung administration which came into power in 1998 and the following Roh Moo-hyun administration, totalling ten years of progressive party leadership, established an environment which considered child care services as core services for the continued growth of society. This eventually led to the support for free universal child care services. The Roh administration in particular focused on child care policy as a core driver of 'social investment welfare state', claiming for the first time in Korea that child care is a universal right, not only for the vulnerable or special needs populations. It was at this time that the first full-scale financial investment was made. Nevertheless, the Roh administration showed a lukewarm attitude towards the expansion of national and public services, which are the key points for achieving service quality. This was largely due to the financial burden required to supplement national and public facilities. As such, the Roh administration instead attempted to utilize the existing private child care centers which had already grown to some extent. By providing subsidies for the facilities and differential child care subsidies for low-income families, Roh attempted to establish a 'private-based publicness' in child care. At last, how to secure the quality of child care services remains as an incomplete task achievable through administrative regulations on the working conditions of nursery teachers and establishment of a child care facility accreditation system, rather than through direct public child care services.

Looking in to the number of the child care facilities and the number of children using the facilities for each time frame, the number of facilities has increased significantly from 1,919 to 43,770 since 1990, but this increase is largely found within the rapid increase of private child care facilities and home child care centers. The number of infants receiving child care services increased from 48,000 in 1990 to 1.5 million in 2013. During the same period, the number of national and public facilities and the number of children using those facilities increased as well, but the portions of these numbers were only 5% and 10%, respectively, of all facilities and children.

requirements for entering the OECD included clauses on labor rights and labor-management relations by the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELSA). In detail, the clauses included requirements concerning women's participation in the labor market. According to the 'Directorate's Recommendation for Labor Policy as Tool for Economic Growth' and 'Directorate's Recommendation for Labor Policy' from the OECD, the member countries had to meet set requirements for continuous execution of the progressive labor policy, close ties between the general economic policy and the labor and employment policy, equal provision of educational opportunities for men and women, and the employment of women including expansion of employment opportunities for women ('Deliberation on OECD's 11 Regulations Related to Competitive Policy', Foreign Economy Division in the Economic Planning Board, 15th July, 1994). According to Lee Hye-won (2014:35), the shift to the reporting system for the establishment of child care facilities was to meet the social standard required for entry to the OECD.

Table 2. Growth in Number of Facilities by Child Care Facility Type (1990-2013)

Year	Total	Public	Social Welfare Organization	Non-profit Organization	Private	Home	Parent Association	Work place	Public ratio
1990	1,919	360	-	-	39	1,500	-	20	18.8
1992	4,513	720	425	14	1,369	1,957	-	28	16.0
1997	15,375	1,158	1,634	150	6,388	5,887	-	158	7.5
2002	22,147	1,330	1,633	575	10,471	7,939	-	199	6.0
2008	33,499	1,826	1,458	969	13,306	15,525	65	350	5.5
2013	43,770	2,332	1,439	868	14,751	23,632	129	619	5.3

Source: Data in 1990 and 1992 are from the Child care Statistics 2007. Data from the later years are from the Child care Statistics 2013.

Note: The years listed are the enactment of the Infant Care Act (1991), the Kim Young-sam administration (1993. 3 - 1998. 2), the Kim Dae-jung administration (1998.2 - 2003.2), the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003. 2 - 2008. 2), the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008.2 - 2013.2), and the Park Geun-hye Administration (2013.2 -). (-) means not specified.

Table 3. Growth in Number of Children by Child Care Facility Type (1990-2013)

Year	Total	Public	Social Welfare Organization	Non-profit Organization	Private	Home	Parent Association	Work place	Public ratio
1990	48,000	25,000	-	-	1,500	20,000	-	1,500	52.1
1992	89,441	37,017	-	-	36,099	15,613	-	712	41.4
1997	520,959	89,002	123,567	6,727	227,951	68,467	-	5,245	17.1
2002	800,991	103,351	142,035	30,289	425,647	90,939	-	8,730	12.9
2008	1,135,502	123,405	113,894	53,818	615,647	210,438	1,491	16,809	10.9
2013	1,486,980	154,465	108,834	51,684	770,179	364,113	3,226	34,479	10.4

Source: Same as Table 2.

Profit-Seeking of Non-profit Private Centers

Rather than investing in national and public services themselves which would result in a heavy financial burden, Korea chose to support private child care service suppliers to meet families' demands. To quickly enable this growth in facilities, the government lowered the entry barrier for the private sector. The 'Three-year Child Care Facility Expansion Plan' executed from 1995 to 1997 during the Kim Young-sam administration led to the domination of the market by private child care facilities. The plan eased requirements for facility establishment and provided long-term low-interest loans using pension funds, enabling private businesses to easily enter the market.⁷ In 1997, the Ministry of Health and Welfare further lowered the

⁷ The long-term low-interest loans using the pension fund (the annual interest rate was 8%, the term of the loan was five to eight years, and the repayment period was three to ten years), which was an

entry barrier by changing the existing licensing system for child care facilities into a reporting system⁸ and focused on supplying facilities by providing financial support for establishments even to individuals lacking child care business experience so long as the individual had security solvency (Human Rights News Today, 1995.11.23.).

Since 1995 in the earlier stage of child care expansion, the private child care facility associations acted as strong interest groups to protect the private market. When the Seoul Metropolitan Government announced in March 1995 the 'Improvement Plan for Child Care Facility Operation' to put each public child care facility, operated by private organizations through outsourcing, under the direct management of each borough office, the Seoul Child Care Facility Association resisted the plan and led an opposition campaign (Seo Yeong-suk, 1995). In addition, even though the loans based on pension funds were suspended in 2002 due to their low return on investment, private child care facilities which received pension fund loans lobbied actively for relaxing loan requirements. They succeeded in their goals, reducing their interest rates and extending the principal repayment period. In addition, the private child care facilities were willing to carry out organized actions to protect their profits such as the group action against the reform of the Infant Care Act (2004), the collective closing of the child care centers against the reinforcement of accreditation (2012), and the collective strike for increase of child care subsidies.

Private child care centers and home child care centers are legally non-profit social welfare facilities in which facility investors cannot use the profits exclusively,⁹ and as non-profits, they enjoy various tax benefits in business taxes, acquisition taxes, property taxes, etc. However, the business owners are responsible for developing and investing in the facility, getting loans, and managing operations, which makes it difficult for them to act as a true non-profit organization.

The characteristics of a child care center as a private asset is well demonstrated by the fact that a child care center as well as its license can be traded and is fundamentally a place of business with a business license registered under its director. In contrast to a kindergarten which is legally prohibited from being sold, a child care center can be traded with a premium (Cho Seong-yeon, Choi Hye-yeong, Shin Hye-yeong, 2013: 415). Anyone who wants to run a child care center in a region where new licenses are not being distributed may buy an existing child care facility even with a premium and can take over the facility from the current representative or director.¹⁰ Ownership of the facility itself serves as a private asset, so inevitably

incentive for market participation, was the momentum for the explosive increase in the private child care facilities.

8 The authorization standards for a child care center were reinforced in 2004 when the Infant Care Act was fully reformed by establishing the authorization system from the existing reporting system.

9 The surplus generated during the operation of a child care center should be used for wage increases for child care employees, payment of incentives to child care employees, purchase of teaching materials and teaching aids, and improvement in facility environment (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2013, Child Care Business Guide).

10 The premium is a price paid for the geographical advantage, facility investment, license, etc. and increases in proportion to the expected future profits (Yoon Hui-suk and others, 2013, Kim Hye-won, 2014: 37). The trade of a child care center with premium overtly happens. The premium of a child care center located in the Geumchen-gu borough and with a maximum number of 60 children and a current registered number of children is 30 is 170 billion won. The premium of a child care center located in the Seodaemun-gu borough and with a maximum number of 99 children is over 200 billion won (Kukmin Daily News, 4th March, 2010).

leads to profit pursuing according to the theory of market economy. The profit-pursuit within Korea's child care facilities is reflected in the opinions of child care facility owners. Indeed, the leader of the Private Child Care Facility Association insisted in an official forum that private child care facilities are private property and emphasized the injustice of prohibiting a private facility from pursuing profits (Park Cheon-yeong, 2013; requote from Yoon Hong-sik, 2014b).

Even though profit pursuing is prohibited, this is in fact done aggressively through additional bills for extra activities such as English, physical education, Korean traditional music, ballet and so on (Kim Yeong-mi, 2013). The average cost for special activities is about fifty to sixty thousand won across Korea, with an average maximum cost of 180 to 190 thousand won. Kindergartens collect 220 thousand won on top of government subsidies on average across the country, and some private kindergartens collect about a million won per month on average (Yu Hui-jeong, 2014). In other words, under the regulations prohibiting profit pursuit, private facilities do not pursue profits 'openly' but instead create a structure for seeking additional profits, through special activities and classes, in order to circumvent the protective and prohibitive regulations. Furthermore, as revealed through child care center inspections, there are a considerable number of illegal acts being conducted such as illegal receipt of child care benefits through false registration of children or false attendance book keeping and giving/receiving of rebates through collusion with parents. Between 2009 and 2011, 2,893 child care centers faced administrative measures - 739 in 2009, 924 in 2010, and 1230 in 2011, showing an increasing trend (Lee Yeo-jin, 2013). In 2013, within Gyeonggi-do Province alone, a total of 137 administrative sanctions were imposed to child care centers, and more than 60% were due to wrongful receipt of subsidies (Baek Seon-jeong, Kim Na-eun, 2013).

The private child care facilities have pursued profits under their contradictive legal role as 'profit-seeking non-profit facilities' and have formed their own organizational ecosystem in which they receive governmental subsidies while simultaneously seeking additional profits through other activities.

Combination of Private Provision with “Universalism”

Korea's child care services have depended on the private sector since its earliest stage, a trend reinforced during and after the progressive administrations. In 2004, the reform of the Infant Care Act by the Roh Moo-hyun administration expanded the scope recipients of child care from the selective groups defined as 'infants whose guardians cannot protect them due to work or diseases' to all infants and claimed a universal service for protection and education of all infants, not just service for low-income or single-parent families.

The Roh administration focused significant attention to child care policy, paving the way for universal child care by expanding the coverage to all children while establishing a comprehensive child care support framework.¹¹ It took Korea's low

11 Roh Moo-hyun presented his political interest in child care in his presidential election pledges,

birth rate and aging society issues as critical parts in its agenda, and announced a series of plans including the '1st Child Care Support Policy Plan' in June 2004, the '2nd Child Care Support Policy Plan' in May 2005, 'Saromagi Plan 2010 (1st Basic Plan for the Low Fertility and Aging Society)' in June 2006, and 'Sassak Plan (1st Middle- and Long-term Child Care Plan)' in July 2006. By doing so, the administration established a systematic foundation for child care services and increased financial support by expanding the fiscal spending for it. The budget for child care reached 1043.5 billion won in 2007 from just 210.3 billion won in 2002, recording a remarkable increase of 396% during the Roh administration.

This rapid increase was largely a result from public shock regarding the nation's low birthrate. The total fertility rate which started to decrease in the mid-1990s fell to a record-low of 1.08, in 2005. Social awareness about the reproduction of labor power arose, and political demands for an active childbirth grant and comprehensive child care support increased. This further increased the momentum for widening the coverage of welfare services from just low-income and vulnerable populations to the entire society. As the parental burden of raising infants and toddlers were considered the first and foremost cause of the low birth rate, it seemed that the solution was to provide greater subsidies for child care services.

The Roh administration established a universal ECEC system upon the overgrown market-based private child care services. Supplementation of national and public child care centers was declared an important need for providing child care several times, but in reality, the actual result was a wide-scale financial support system for the child care subsidies which would increase the purchasing power of low income families (Baek Seon-heui, 2008; Ahn Hyeon-mi · Kim Song-I, 2012). The majority of the child care budget was spent on differential child care subsidies for low-income families, and the results of efforts to national and public facilities by 30% were poor. Use of national and public facilities actually decreased to 5.5% due to the increase of the private child care facilities.

The child care policy of the Roh Moo-hyun administration is meaningful in that it established regular financial support by adopting subsidies in the form of differential child care benefits based on income level in Korea's child care system. The support was mainly for low income families initially, but it followed that the system would eventually be expanded in scope and depth. Indeed, the service coverage increased from 30% to 50%, and then again to 70%, activating a self-reinforcement mechanism.

telling constituents, 'Just give birth to babies. Then I will take care of them' (Baek Seon-hui, 2009) and set up a comprehensive child care support policy.

Conservative Way to Free Child Care

Beginning with low income families, the coverage of child care services widened year after year. In response to the expected growth in need, the market increased its supply rapidly. As in Table 4, that expansion trend continued regularly during both the progressive and the conservative administrations. In fact, the conservative administrations were even more aggressive in expanding child care coverage. The Conservative Lee Myung-bak administration established free child care services to include five-year-old children as well as newborns to two-year-old children for the first time, taking credit for establishing universal child care regardless of income level.

Table 4. Expansion of Child Care Subsidies

(unit: %)

Income level	Subsidy ratio by year											
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Poor (on social assistance)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Near poor	40	40	60	80	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
50% or less of the average income of city workers			40	60	70	80	80	80	80	100	100	100
70% or less of the average income of city workers				30	40	50	60	60	60	100	100	100
100% or less of the average income of city workers*						20	30	30	60	100	100	100
Bottom 70% or less of the income of families with infants									30	100	100	100 (3-4)
All income level										100 (5)	100 (0-2)	100

Source: Indexes to 2010 are from Baek Seon-heui (2009, Table3-12), and those from 2011 are from each year's child care administrative guide.

Note 1: Shaded parts are during the ruling by the conservative administrations.

Note 2: From July 2009, the income distribution is based on families with infants only, not on the average income of city workers. 100% of the average income of city workers is similar to the bottom 60% of the income of families with infants.

Given the high level of social support for child care, narrowing coverage or reducing child care subsidies were not an available option. During the conservative administrations, it was a matter of primary concern to make sure the benefits of expanding services were actually felt by the parents. As coverage of child care services expanded beyond low income families to the middle class, the conservative administrations became more aggressive in harvesting political gains and as part of these efforts adopted a voucher system as a political tool for credit claiming (Pierson,

1996).¹²

The voucher system is an efficient political tool for promoting competitions among facilities, allowing easy checks on the facilities, and reinforcing responsibilities for a choice while maintaining the market-based child care system (Nam Chan-seob, 2008). However, given the non-existence of any tools or regulation for accountability and quality of service, and of competition between facilities, consumers are given not many options. The fact that geographical proximity is one of the critical conditions for parents to choose a child care facility fundamentally limits the available options.

The Lee Myung-bak administration which took office in 2008 claimed 'consumer-centered child care services' and adopted an electronic voucher system for the child care services while inheriting the Roh Moo-hyun administrations' child care expansion policy. Policy makers under the Lee administration transformed the child care subsidies - which were used to provide differential child care benefits and basic subsidies to facilities - into electronic vouchers, focusing on the gains of making the parents check how much they are given from government during credit card payments. At the time, Jeon Jae-hui, the Minister of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs, explained the expected outcomes of the voucher system in the reform plan for the Infant Care Act in October 2008. She stated that "as the child care benefits are given directly to the facilities, not through parents, the recognition of the benefits is low" and thus "the introduction of a electronic child care voucher system is expected to raise the recognition of the child care subsidies among parents, induce participation and interest in child care, and reduce the burden of child care facilities and local governments in processing complex administrative matters related to child care subsidies" (Yeoseongsinmun, 2008.11.21.).

The voucher system, on top of the goal of showing the benefits of subsidies, also provided the firm foundation for Korea's 'consumer subsidy based' child care policy. The voucher system stopped supplementation of public services in the service supply by leading the needs towards existing private facilities and limited the role of the government to support the purchasing power (Kim Jong-hae, 2008). Also, the child care subsidy issue brought in by the voucher system made the children who do not use child care facilities to be defined as disadvantaged consumers who 'cannot receive benefits' If a state decides to provide financial support for consumers with child care needs, payment of home care allowances is essential in terms of reducing the "benefit gaps".

Home care allowances were adopted as a compensation for children who do not use child care facilities, in case the expansion of the public child care facilities did not meet needs due to geographical scattering in Northern Europe, or as an extension of a parental leave in efforts to resolve the unemployment issue in France.¹³ On the

12 Nam Chan-seob (2008) noted regarding the introduction of the social service voucher system and decentralization of social services to local governments, that the voucher system was an attempt by the Ministry of Welfare, which was worried about losing the control authority, to set up centralized control. Child care is the same as the four social services as it is under the application of the voucher system, but it is required to be separately considered from 'social services' of which the size as well as the number of recipients are relatively small. Further research is required on the comparison of the institutional contexts of the introduction of the voucher system in child care services versus in other social services.

13 Home care allowances have been provided as a supplementation for public supply since 1985 in

other hand, in Korea, the home care allowances could be adopted as policy makers took women support for children at home for granted, and also thanks to the cost reduction for consumer policy. Under the consumer subsidy child care policy, the issue of equity between consumers who use the services and who do not is inevitable.

Table 5. Expansion of Home Care Allowances (2009 - 2014)

	Scope	Amount	No. of children (thousands)	Budget (hundreds of millions)
2009	Near poor or lower, 0-1	100,000 won per month	68	324
2010	Near poor or lower, 0-1	100,000 won per month	51	667
2011	Near poor or lower, 0-2	0 200,000 won 1 150,000 won 2 100,000 won	89	898
2012	Near poor or lower, 0-2	Same as 2011	92	1,026
2013	All, 0-5	0 200,000 won 1 150,000 won 2-5 100,000 won	1,060	8,910
2014	All, 0-5	Same as 2013	1,012	12,150

Source: Child care Statistics by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (2013:486), Summary of 2014 Fund Operation Plan of Budget of Ministry of Health and Welfare

The home care allowances introduced in July 2009 started as “selective” benefits for children who do not use the government-supported child care facilities for “equity” (100,000 won per month for infants less than two-year-old in the near poverty or lower groups). Then, during the discussion for the 2nd Basic Ageing Society Preparation Plan, home care allowances were increased, so that children younger than two years old of low income families in the bottom 70% of families were to receive the allowances 200,000 won per month, twice the previous amount of 100,000 won. The expansion of the home care allowances was not easy. The Ministry of Strategy and Finance worried about the increase to the budget opposed the expansion of the home care allowances. The Budget Deliberative Committee of the National Assembly indeed once cut the entire budget for home care allowances in 2011 (Lee Seung-yun and others, 2013). As the criticism against the ‘snatching budget processing’ increased and public opinion requesting the return of the welfare budget rose, the Cabinet met on January 11, 2011 to expand home care allowances to children younger than 36 months old in disadvantaged families. The number of recipients of the home care allowances increased from 68,000 in 2009 to 92,000 in 2012, and the budget also increased from 32.4 billion won to a hundred billion won level (Table 5). Although the portion of the home care allowances was relatively low

Finland, since 1998 in Norway, and since 2008 in Sweden. The cash payment of the home care allowances are appropriated by the finance of the central government and executed by the local governments (Ellingsaeter, 2012).

under Lee Myung-bak government, the home care allowances, going through the presidential election in 2012, became the most differentiated child care support policy of the conservative governments and developed to a big business of spending 1.2 trillion won in 2014.

Financial Crisis of ‘Free Child Care’

At the beginning of the conservative administrations, the baseline for welfare policy did not seem to establish all-class free child care services and all-class home care allowances. The ruling conservative party was reluctant to adopt universal welfare while maintaining the so-called ‘70% welfare framework’ and sought to limit services to the ‘bottom 70% of the families with children’. However, social discourses over free school meals and the election results of local governments in 2010 showed that welfare was one of the biggest issues for the voting public which increasingly demanded universal welfare. As the opposition parties won in the local government election in 2010, the ruling party sought to appease the public by releasing several welfare-related pledges. In addition, the failure in the local referendum over free school meals brought up by the mayor of Seoul city, Oh Se-hoon, and the election of Park Won-soon as mayor demonstrated the impact of the welfare issue in the election-based politics (Ma In-seop, 2012; Jeon Yu-jeong, 2014). As a result, both the Saenuri Party and the Democratic Party presented the welfare expansion pledges competitively in the election for the members of the National Assembly and the presidential election in 2012. The welfare pledges eventually reached the peak in the 18th presidential election platforms.

During the 19th election for the members of the National Assembly in 2012, the Democratic party promised “three freebies and one half” (free school meals, free child care services, free medical care, and half tuition) and expansion of home care allowances. The fact that the institutional logic of the home care allowances includes patriarchy assuming the home care of children by women and the home care allowances may deprive children of low-income families from the chance of child care is likely to result in gender and class inequity. As such, progressive welfare scholars have opposed the introduction of home care allowances as they serve to increase inequity between low-income and higher-income families (Yoon Hong-sik, 2014a; Song Da-yeong, 2010; Mahon, 2002). The expansion of child care services and the expansion of home care allowances cannot coexist as they are based on different policy philosophies, and the position of the Democratic Party before the election did not provide much support home care allowances but instead gave support towards child allowances. However, in preparing for the upcoming election, the Democratic Party changed their pledge to expand the scope of home care allowances to appeal to the electorate.

The Saenuri Party which had criticized universal welfare in favor of financial sustainability and selective welfare sought justification in its change of stance towards welfare expansion. Why is it against free school meals but in favor of universal free child care? Why provide free universal child care now after not supporting universal welfare for so long? The alleged logic behind the change in

stance was that free child care was a 'solution for the low birth rate issue' while free school meals were the result of 'populism' (Lee Jin-suk, 2012). In other words, universal free child care is essential and exceptional considering the low birth rate crisis, but other welfare points such as school meals, universal welfare will result in financial waste. Eventually, Park Geun-hye who had promised welfare reinforcement by securing 135 trillion-won financial resources for welfare won the presidential election and realized free child care and home care allowances for newborns to five-year-old children.

Six months after the inauguration of Park Geun-hye as a president, the issue of the financial burden regarding child care exploded. The full-fledged execution of free child care for newborns to five-year-old children and home care allowances surfaced the dormant financial issue. In 2013, the first year of the child care policy established by the Park Geun-hye administration, dissent arose over the financial burden distribution (matching grants) between the central government and the local governments. As such, a financial crisis arose regarding the 'child care chaos' and 'free child care default'. The rapid expansion of the target population imposed financial difficulties on local governments which had to pay child care expenses and home care allowances using state subsidies. Due to free child care, the financial burden of the local governments increased for child care expenses as new recipients in the upper income level families were added to the existing bottom 70% income level families and for home care allowances to be granted to the expanded age bracket, but the Ministry of Strategy and Finance did not reflect the increase into the budget 2013. The financial crisis of the local governments, known as the 'free child care default', was a result of the central government promoting free child care services without establishing an agreement on the target scope of home care allowances or on the method for sharing the financial burden between the central and the local governments. Although the issuance of municipal bonds seemed to resolve the crisis temporarily, the financial burden for free child care was still on the local governments, producing difficulties in their financial operation.

The conflict over the budget for the Nuri Curriculum, known as the 'the second child care chaos', in 2014 was a predicted event. The Nuri Curriculum for 3-5 year olds was supposed to be covered by local education subsidies, and for five-year-old children, the local education offices were already paying for the curriculum. The problem was that even though the new government decided to provide full financial support for the service of three- to four-year-old children, that expansion was not reflected in the education budget plan for 2015. The Ministry of Strategy and Finance again imposed an additional financial burden of as much as 500 billion won on the local education offices by forcing them to issue municipal bonds. The 'welfare without tax increase' by the central government shifted the burden of child care expansion for newborns to two-year-old children to the local governments and the burden of child care expansion for three- to four-year-old children (child care centers, kindergartens) to the local education offices.¹⁴

The distribution of the fiscal decentralization for welfare with the local governments began with the Roh Moo-hyun administration which aimed to transfer

14 Kim Jin-seok (2015) insisted that the two free child care conflicts are fundamentally identical as they are the result of the central government's evasion of the financial responsibility although the leading authority has changed from the city or provincial governors to the local superintendents of education.

welfare measures to the local governments, a move to allow for the so-called decentralization of social services. It is based on the theory that the local governments are more appropriate for designing and executing services by reflecting the preferences of the local residents and for improving the efficiency by utilizing the local public goods in diversified and customized manners. However, child care is a uniform national public good where the curriculum and expenses are standardized and a large amount of financial resources is required. Therefore, it is more desirable to place the child care measures under the financial control of the central government, rather than the local governments, for stable supply of services (Park Ji-hyeon, 2014). Although the crisis was diverted through the issuance of municipal bonds, it remains to be seen how to make up the growing welfare financial resources and how to share the burden between the central and the local governments.

The response to the increasing financial burden for child care appears in efforts to change the combination of the systems itself. Home care allowances were introduced based on the theory of 'equity', but the government attempted to suppress child care demand by using home care allowances (Kim Eun-ji, 2013)¹⁵ In fact, the usage of child care centers decreased after the introduction of home care allowances. In the Seoul, as of September 2013, the number of newborns and one-year-old children who use child care centers fell by 7,000 compared to December 2012 (Kim Song-I, Lee Hye-suk, 2014). There are overt desires to reduce 'unnecessary' child care expenses by expanding home care allowances. In the presidential briefing in 2015, the Ministry of Welfare announced that it would raise the home care allowances to reduce the gap with child care subsidies for child care centers and review the "system that institutionally induces 'unnecessary' use of child care facilities" (Maeil Business Newspaper, 2015.1.22.). By interpreting the preference for quality child care centers of parents as a preference for cash benefits under the name of home care allowances, the government is exploring a policy combination which jeopardizes the fundamentals of the child care policy that a child care policy should support the economic activities of women and is an essential social service for the cognitive and social development of children.

15 In 2012 when the expansion of the home care allowances was planned, discussion among the members of representatives subcommittee of Health and Welfare Committee on Ways and Means well exhibited this sentiment: "It is good for children to stay home with their families by providing parents with home care allowances. It is even better for those children to be cared by their mothers by luring them with the home care allowances than being cared by the facilities." (Kim Myeong-yeon, Member of the National Assembly, Saenuri Party), "The same amount of money should be paid to the families as to the child care centers so that families can make a choice." (Lee Eon-ju, Member of the National Assembly, Democratic Party) (Meeting minutes of the Health and Welfare Committee in the subcommittee for inspection on budget and accounts held on 19th November, 2012).

Conclusion

In 1984, Olof Palme, the prime minister of the Social Democratic Party of Sweden at the time, strongly opposed to the introduction of the private child care market saying that the attempt to privatize child care would turn Swedish children into “Kentucky Fried Children” by exposing them to a low-quality instant child care market. Sweden chose to combine quality public services with universal provision although the combination is accompanied by the expensive financial burden for the service. On the other hand, Australia, which had stuck to the non-profit child care system under the responsibility by the local governments, introduced child care vouchers and allowed profit-making child care facilities in 1997. In the profit-seeking market, dominant business operators appeared. ABC Learning, one of the biggest child care chain businesses, had once grown to become the largest child care company in the world, accounting for 25% of the child care facilities in Australia. However, in 2008, ABC Learning went bankrupt and its bankruptcy was led to a big collapse. 120,000 children in Australia within a child care service lost places to attend and a lot of child care workers lost their jobs (Brennan and Oloman, 2009).

Korea’s child care system has stimulated demand creation and supply expansion by providing child care subsidies while giving up the provision of the public services. It instead depends on private provision. Child care policy in Korea since the beginning chose marketization dependent on the private facilities to resolve the issue of accessibility and to reduce the financial burden on the government. The role of the government was to supply consumers with a private market by guaranteeing them purchasing power through financial support. As a result, the private market has grown to a significant size. Although there is a maximum price limit for services and profit distribution is limited in a non-profit perspective, private child care service providers in reality serve as for-profit companies that receive financial support from the government.

Under the shade of the quantitative growth of the child care services is the lack of systematic design and investment which are the fundamentals of a social service. When considering personal service, a low-quality service is not acceptable. If this low-quality service is organized and provided at a social level, it will leave long-term negative impact on children. Women’s organizations and progressive civic groups continuously insist that at least 30% of centers should be public to control the quality of the service market. but such growth has not been realized in favor of private child care facilities.

This study analyzes Korea’s child care policy in terms of the trilemma of a child care service while tracking the process of the political choices in the 1990s. Korea’s child care policy gave up on direct public provision which require a relatively large amount of money but can provide quality services, and instead chose budget constraint and easy access. Accessibility is a matter of how close, how available, and how universal a service is. The private facilities met those requirements through quantitative growth, and the government’s child care subsidies lowered the price threshold. As a result, private-centered service provision and a cost-based consumer support model were settled.

The conservative administrations defined service users as ‘consumers’ and introduced the voucher system where ‘choice’ is the core value despite the clear

parental preference for national and public facilities. The voucher system operates well where there are qualitative differentiations of services through competitions among market participants and a consumer can make a choice based on sufficient information, but Korea does not meet the requirements. There are no big qualitative differences among the private facilities, and even if there is, users cannot know the differences and even if they know, it is difficult for them to change their choices. Nevertheless, the introduction of voucher system for the service made it clear that the child care policy is focused on financial support for the consumers and in the same vein, home care allowance was put into place .

Given the quantitative achievement in terms of budget, facilities, and service coverage, one may analyze Korea's child care as an exceptional success case of a familialistic welfare regime, or a failure due to the re-familiarization of women, the poor labor conditions of nursery teachers, and the low service quality. It is not a half-failure and half-success case, interpretable according to the interpretive perspective. Korea's child care policy stands at one side of the trilemma of a child care service. Korea spends more than 10 trillion won a year for child care, but the coverage of the public child care only accounts for 10% and about 20% of the child care budget of the central government is paid as home care allowances for those who do not use child care centers.¹⁶ The public child care facilities do not have enough supports to set standards for service quality, and parents are concerned about health and security of their children in this environment.

The discontent raised by the recent financial crisis in the free universal child care policy and the repeating child abuses in the child care facilities herald a change to the child care policy. That change may be a reform at a micro level such as adjustment of benefit levels and reinforcement of regulations. It is not easy to change the existing system due to the institutional lock-in and path dependency. However, improvement of labor conditions and treatments of child care teachers has been postponed too long. Now, it is definitely the time to shift the child care paradigm and explore a new route.

16 Even in Finland where the home care allowances are used as an alternative to the child care services, home care allowances accounts for only 15% of total child care budget as of 2012 (OECD, Family Policy Database).

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