

Neoliberal Governmentality at Work: Post-IMF Korean Society and the Construction of Neoliberal Women

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Abstract

This paper focuses on a chain of closely knit social phenomena in the post-IMF Korean society that has complex and interesting effects on Korean women and their responses, both passive and active. The terrain for these phenomena is permeated by neoliberal governmentality. First, the paper presents a review of theoretical frameworks based on Foucault's later works on biopower and governmentality, especially his interpretations and criticisms of American neoliberalism. Foucault's framework seems to work quite efficiently in treating the phenomena discussed here, but leaves something to be desired. Especially conspicuous gaps can be seen in its gender blindness. This paper argues that these gaps can be more or less remedied by resorting to works by other feminists and Foucauldians. Next, general descriptions of gender issues in the labor market and social welfare system are given to show that the post-IMF Korean society has been transforming to a neoliberal system. To reveal the salient features of this transition, the phenomena of increasingly booming body care and cosmetic surgery, private marriage matching service, and efforts of students both in secondary schools and colleges to raise their human capital for better jobs in future are introduced and interpreted from the aforementioned theoretical viewpoint.

Keywords: biopower, technologies of governmentality, neoliberalism, technologies of self, welfare state biopolitics, women's new body practices

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Introduction

Korean society saw widening social and economic gaps caused by unemployment and labor flexibility after the IMF crisis¹ of 1997. In the labor market, the percentage of female nonregular workers and the number of married women fired as a result of restructuring started to increase rapidly. During this period, the divorce rate and average age at marriage began to rise, while the birth rate stayed at a record low. The Korean government's adoption of market friendly social insurance policies focused on welfare of workers exacerbated the woes of those female nonregular workers ineligible for social insurance, and full-time housewives excluded from the labor market, leaving them without any direct social welfare.

Meanwhile, as the post-IMF Korean society was trying to rapidly reorganize itself into a form optimized for the neoliberal system, interest in the body began to grow. Ranging from lifestyle fads to diet foods, fitness to body care and cosmetic surgery, they have flooded Korean society in every direction with interest in and discourse over the body. These changes of interests no longer remain as mere fads, but are likely to stay. The deployment of the body in gender-specific forms contributed to widespread dieting and cosmetic surgery booms among women, regardless of their class status.

In this context, a healthy body, regular self care, and sexual attractiveness serve as major factors constituting a source of self-empowerment or human capital, to borrow neoliberal idioms. This implies that the source of self empowerment is no longer based on the womanly virtues of traditional ethics, but on measurable and quantifiable factors such as height, weight, and BMI index. Thus women's self-empowerment derives mainly from a body with high

1. As a part of the Asian financial crisis started in Thailand in July 1997, Korea suffered severe economic difficulties leading the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to step in. Though there is still no consensus on the appropriateness and efficacy of the mainly neoliberal economic prescriptions called the Washington Consensus, they left indelible marks in every aspect of the Korean society. In Korea, the crisis is commonly referred to as the "IMF crisis."

competitiveness in the labor or marriage market. Images of motherhood rarely remain in this self-empowerment process of women in the realm of new body practices.² These phenomena are the result of each individual woman being subjected to the technologies of biopower, whose operating modes have become ever more imperceptible and inexorable in the era of American neoliberalism. However, this transformation of women into subjects of neoliberal governmentality may, as an unexpected byproduct, belie one of the fundamental requirements for the survival of a nation-state; that is, the reproduction of life.

This paper focuses on a chain of closely knit social phenomena in the post-IMF Korean society, which have complex and interesting effects on Korean women in particular and their responses, both passive and active. The terrain for these phenomena is permeated by neoliberal governmentality. First, a review of theoretical frameworks based on Foucault's later works on biopower and governmentality, especially his interpretations and criticisms of the American neoliberalism will be given. Foucault's framework seems to work quite efficiently in treating the phenomena to be discussed in the following but leaves something to be desired. Especially conspicuous gaps are its gender-blindness. It will be remedied by resorting to the works by other feminists and Foucauldians. Next, the issues of gender in and out of labor market, gender, and biopower in social welfare regime will be discussed. Then, the phenomena including increasingly booming body care and cosmetic surgery practices, private marriage matching services, and efforts of students both in secondary schools and in colleges to raise their human capitals for better jobs in future will be introduced and interpreted from our theoretical viewpoint. A summary and discussions of remaining problems will be given in the conclusion.

2. "New body practice" denotes an interest in the body that has been growing in Korean society since the IMF crisis. Healthy lifestyles, foods, beauty care, cosmetic products, body care, dieting, fitness, and cosmetic surgery each have their own logic and area, some overlapping. However, in this paper, all these practices will be treated in common manners, thus will comprise the new body practice.

Foucault on Governmentality and Neoliberalism

In his book, *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978, 136-145) claimed that modern society had moved out of the era of juridical forms of sovereign power to the era of power over life. Starting in the seventeenth century in Europe, this biopower was deployed around two linked poles: the disciplines of the body, effected through the anatomo-politics of the human body, and the regulation of the population through biopolitics of the population. These two poles were later joined in the technology of power, which served as an indispensable element in the development of capitalism in the eighteenth century when life entered into history (Foucault 2008). Accordingly, this biopower is exercised over subjects as members of populations where issues of individual sexual and reproductive conduct interconnect with issues of national policy and power (Gordon 1991, 5).

Foucault's arguments on the techniques of biopower became more concrete in his Collège de France lectures in 1978 and 1979 (2007, 2008). Here, he explored the topics of "governmental rationality" or "governmentality." Governmentality is "a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what government is; and what or who is governed), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it is practiced" (Gordon 1991, 3). This is a meeting point of technologies of domination and those of the self. In his characteristic way, Foucault explores four historical and contingent forms of governmentality associated with pastoral power, *raison d'état*, liberalism, and neoliberalism. He summarized the characteristic property of this development towards government intent on simultaneously totalizing and individualizing, as "*omnes and singulatim*" (1979) or the "conduct of conduct" (Gordon 1991, 3).³

3. Foucault emphasizes that these historical concepts or forms of governmentality are not such as those of evolutionary processes with the last one being enthroned as best. None of them can secure more legitimacy than the others, and each has

Foucault's discussions of American neoliberalism is almost exclusively centered on the works of the Chicago School, especially Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker (2008, 220). Focusing on their analysis of the concept of labor in economics, which allowed them to apply economic analysis to areas traditionally believed to be part of sociology, anthropology, and politics, and interpreting their analysis through his own theoretical perspective, Foucault laid bare the logic of American neoliberalism. Foucault's interpretation and criticism of neoliberalism will serve as the main theoretical tool to interpret the topics and phenomena this paper is interested in.

In Foucault's interpretation of neoliberalism, the labor of a worker can be broken down into capital, composed of individual abilities or skills, and income, earned as a result of the input of the capital (2008, 224). A worker's skills comprise their human capital, which shares many characteristics with machines, though inseparable from the worker. Foucault refers this concept of labor as a return to *homo economicus*, though an almost unrecognizably transformed one. These *homo economicus* are entrepreneurs of themselves, "being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (Foucault 2008, 226).⁴ According to Becker, as quoted by Foucault, even a worker's con-

opportunities of realization depending on contingency and historicity. Rather they are co-present at any given time, and interact in varied ways (Foucault 2007, 107; 2008, 313). For example, a government mainly characterized by its neoliberal governmentality may resort to measures characteristic of sovereign or disciplinary powers, such as police or military actions. Good examples are the case of "graduated sovereignty" noted by Ong in her work on globalization and sovereignty in South-East Asia (Ong 2005). As can be seen in the observation of Castel, as quoted in Ong (2005, 86), this tendency of states to mix different tactics depending on populations, spaces, or times to optimize the efficiency of their technologies of population follows a logic akin to American neoliberalism. In this work, those characteristics best explained by neoliberal governmentality will be our main concerns.

4. Here Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desiring machine meets the concept of an individual as entrepreneur as interpreted by Foucault. The desiring machine shows the characteristic behavior of continually producing production through bricolage, the use of a diverse range of materials and tools which happen to be available depending on circumstances (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 7).

sumption should be thought of as production, in that it is production of his own satisfaction. Thus, consumption is “an enterprise activity by which the individual, precisely on the basis of the capital he has at his disposal, will produce something that will be his own satisfaction” (Foucault 2008, 226).

This extension of economic logic to the totality of human behavior means this neoliberal *homo economicus* is ready to respond to all kinds of manipulations, and hence subject to technologies of governmentality. In fact, Becker even claimed that economic analysis can be not only applied to rational conduct but extended even to “any conducts which responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environments, in other words, any conducts, as Becker says, which “accepts reality” (Foucault 2008, 269). According to Foucault, this means that Becker’s *homo economicus* is “precisely someone eminently governable” responding “systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment” (Foucault 2008, 270). This means that this *homo economicus* is completely subjected to the governmentality which acts on his or her environment to systematically modify its variables. As emphasized by Foucault, this *homo economicus* is a stark contrast to the *homo economicus* of the eighteenth century, who is the subject or object of the *laissez-faire system* with certain aspects impervious to the exercise of power.

It can be said that Foucault’s representation of modern society, especially the neoliberal one, permeated by the network of subjugating biopower, seems to preclude any individual freedom or counter-movements. However, the very act of governing is possible on the condition that it is credible or offers some form of rationality to the governed as well as the governing. In other words, the government can make its own case for rationality to the governed, as long as the latter are engaged by the propositions and provisions of government (Gordon 1991, 48). This could be described as “an ‘agonism,’ a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation” (Foucault 1983, 208; re-quoted from Gordon 1991, 5). Here the subject itself is in the process of construction by

biopower; this implies that a part of it remains fluid and amorphous, allowing freedom and even surprises for governmentality. This does not cause a gap or hole in the closely knit grid of biopower, but small interstices, which can serve the purpose of initiating counter-politics.⁵

Though Foucault had great insights into neoliberal governmentality, gender is peculiarly absent,⁶ and his treatment of neoliberal governmentality seems to confirm his gender-blindness.⁷ If an individual subject has its own active role, then surely gender will help determine their strategies and counter-strategies. Thus, the process works in both directions. Technologies of governmentality, whether they originated from government, simple commercial purposes, or other sources, operate on the individual by presenting a norm and applying various regulations or social pressure to approximate it. In our case, the norm is gender (Butler 2004, 40). The governed will react by rejecting, refracting, or transforming it.

Some feminists (Chodorow 1978; Rich 1976; Ruddik 1989) have already pointed out the mother's immense role in the process of subjectification of others. Foucault (1997) tried to found the aesthetics of existence on the technologies of self or "care of the self" going back to the later ancient Greek period that he envisages as an alternative to current forms of subjection. Surely the subjectifying power of women as caretakers "offers the most concrete models of power as empowerment, constituting initially helpless infants as autonomous adults" (Simons 1996, 180). However, in all forms of governmentali-

5. Again, refer to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the war machine with a self-organizing character separate from a central system of controls. However, whether this separation will take a creative line of flight, the composition of a smooth space and of the movement of people in that space, or take a line of destruction turning into a plane of organization and domination cannot be predicted in advance (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 422-423).

6. This has left many feminists nonplused on the implications of Foucault's work on feminism (Hekman 1996).

7. See, for example, his complacency in citing and describing the mother's role as a caretaker of children (Foucault 2008, 243-244).

ty, this powerful role occupied by the mother is instituted as part of the techniques of biopower deployed to impose individual care in a patriarchal family. Thus, we are immediately faced with two feminist strategies: either a rejection of mothering because it sustains patriarchy, or a re-conceptualization of mothering along women-defined lines (Trebilcot 1983, 1). However, as Simons (1996, 180) pointed out, each of these approaches is extremely problematic. Foucault's project of developing ethics based on technologies of the self, where the subjectifying power is enabling and not oppressive, can be extended by incorporating the subjectifying power of the mother. The kind of care given, "in friendship, which is exchanged between two people who constantly reverse their roles over the course of time" can be one model of such extension (Simons 1996, 204-205). For an alternative strategy of deploying the subversive performance of mothering, Simons advises against "too close an identification with domesticity and subjectivities" which has backfired in previous attempts by women acting in the political arena (Simons 1996, 203).

We will see several phenomena in the post-IMF Korean society that can be subjected to this kind of interpretation quite naturally. Whether Korean society has gone through a historical development of governmentality similar to the one in Europe is not clear yet and needs more research.⁸ However, the history of social and economic development in Korea since the mid-twentieth century seems to make the careful application of these theoretical tools quite plausible. In gender-related issues, motherhood is one of the main differentiating factors that determine women's reactions and newly transformed or modified gender. For this problem, the theoretical framework developed in the latter part of this section will be helpful.

8. For example, see Hahm (1998) and references therein.

Neoliberalism and Gender Divide in Post-IMF Korean Society

Gender in and out of Labor Market

The labor flexibility policy adopted by the Korean government since the IMF crisis led to the wide spread of nonregular jobs over all industries and labor markets (Shin 2009, 8), which has continued and even accelerated, irrespective of age, educational level, and marriage status. This brought about changes in gender and class systems. As can be seen in Table 1, the old pattern of male regular workers and female nonregular workers still persists. The majority of female wage workers still hold nonregular jobs, and the absolute number of female nonregular workers is larger than the one of male nonregular workers. However, as the entry of women into the labor market accelerated and female regular workers increased, even if by a small amount, job instability for male workers has persisted, reducing the gender gap. On the other hand, polarization of the female labor market became more apparent. Whereas the increase of female nonregu-

Table 1. Number and Percent Distribution of Waged Worker by Gender and Regular/Nonregular Work Type, 1996-2008

(Unit: 1,000 (%))

Year	Male			Female		
	Total	Regular	Nonregular	Total	Regular	Nonregular
1996	8,104 (100)	5,404 (66.7)	2,700 (33.3)	5,096 (100)	2,095 (41.1)	3,001 (58.9)
1999	7,639 (100)	4,574 (59.9)	3,065 (40.1)	5,025 (100)	1,562 (31.1)	3,463 (68.9)
2002	8,325 (100)	4,894 (58.8)	3,431 (41.2)	5,857 (100)	1,968 (33.6)	3,889 (66.4)
2005	8,794 (100)	5,479 (62.3)	3,315 (37.7)	6,391 (100)	2,439 (38.1)	3,952 (61.9)
2008	9,338 (100)	6,053 (64.8)	3,285 (35.2)	6,868 (100)	2,954 (43.0)	3,914 (57.0)
2008-1996	1,234 (100)	649 (52.6)	585 (47.4)	1,772 (100)	859 (48.5)	913 (51.5)

Note: Regular worker means full-time worker, while nonregular worker includes part-time worker, temporary worker, day laborer, and those employed by temporary labor service agencies.

Data: Economically Active Population Survey, 1996-2008 (Korea National Statistical Office, <http://www.kosis.kr>).

lar workers decreased job stability overall, the percentage of professional female workers increased, furthering division of the job market into the one for professional and managerial workers, and the one for service and sales workers (Shin 2009, 8).

Changes in the gender structure of the labor market and the trend of polarization of the female labor market are directly reflected in women's lives. After the IMF crisis, there was a sudden realization of the unsustainability of relying solely on men as bread-winners compelled married women to enter the nonregular labor market. This accentuated the importance of economic contributions of women in this turbulent social upheaval. Among unmarried women, there was a widespread consensus that in life, getting a job is essential but marriage is optional. Especially during the company restructuring process after the IMF crisis, married women and pregnant women were first to get fired, thus forcing the women entering labor market to delay marriage (Cho S. 1999). The average age at the first marriage rose from 25.5 in 1996 to 28.3 in 2008. Also, the percentage of unmarried women between the ages 25 and 29 almost doubled from 22.1% in 1990 to 39.0% in 2008, and the percentage of unmarried women between the ages 30 and 34 rose 6 times from 2.7% in 1990 to 17.9% in 2008.⁹

Delayed marriage played a major role in driving the fertility rate into a free fall. Fertility rates started to fall from 1.65 births per woman in 1995 to 1.08 in 2005, the lowest in the world, rising back to 1.25 in 2007 before falling to 1.19 in 2008. The dominant factors that contributed to the fall in fertility rate were birth control among married women in the 1960s and 1970s, and a rise in the average age at marriage since the 1980s. However, the falling fertility rate is more due to these factors' influence among college-educated women rather than to their influence among women overall (Choi K. 2004). Cho Uhn (2009, 25) pointed out that this should be called a reproduction crisis in the middle class rather than a national crisis.

9. Population and Housing Census, Korean Statistical Information Service (<http://www.kosis.kr>).

Divorce rate also rose explosively from 1.5 in 1995 to 2.5 in 1998, just after the IMF crisis, reaching the highest point of 3.5 in 2003 before falling to 2.5 in 2007.¹⁰ The rise in divorce rates led to change in family systems. Whereas the percentage of female householders continuously rose from 14.7% in 1980 to 15.7% in 1990, to 16.6% in 1995, and then to 19.9% in 2007, the percentage of female householders due to divorce rose even more rapidly from 3.9% in 1980 to 5.6% in 1990, to 7.5% in 1995, to 11.6% in 2000, and then to 14.4% in 2005, causing accompanying transformations in the terrain for the families headed by women (Shin 2009, 12).

All these changes, including increasing average age at marriage, free-falling fertility rate, rapidly rising divorce rate, and increasing percentages of female householders and the single-member householders, imply that the average period Korean women stay unmarried during their lives has increased. Single householders appear in increasing number across all stages of life, from unmarried young women and men to the never married and divorced middle-aged and older men and women, a phenomenon already appearing in developed countries and the rest of the world. This means both the time and space for men to wield their patriarchal authority are constantly shrinking (Castells 1997, 134-138).

As the firm grip of patriarchal heterosexual family's loosens, the sexuality system detaches itself from the gender system to form its own realm. As the sex previously subjugated to romantic love, marriage, and family is liberated, gender relations begin to transform to pursue heterosexuality itself (Cho J. 2005). Rampant individualism and the logic of unlimited competition dominating the post-IMF society led to a deepening desire for intimacy and individual appropriation of sexuality. In the 2000s, when love emerged as a savior discourse and sexuality became a project, sexuality transformed into personal assets representing a woman's identity, and the body, where sexuality is revealed and manifests itself, emerged as the only remaining niche to count on in this insecure reality (Kim 2006, 24).

10. Per 1,000 population per year.

It is in this socioeconomic and cultural milieu that a self-help book that persuades unmarried young women in their 20s to declare themselves to be money-loving snobs ready to grab any opportunity to raise their social status and promises to teach them how to achieve their goals became a bestseller. The book titled *Yeoja-ui modeun insaeng-eun isip dae-e gyeoljeong doenda* (Everything in a Woman's Whole Life Is Determined in Her 20s) offers three strategies for young women: to develop high-class tastes in consumption, to sculpt a beautiful body, and to set up and execute a well-planned marriage strategy. Developing high-class tastes in consumption is "to acquire a discerning eye for a shopping item that becomes all the more tasty and brilliant when it is in harmony with you, and to train oneself for such an ability by window-shopping and consulting fashion magazines regularly" (Nam 2004, 50). Readers should craft their bodies to be beautiful to gain the many benefits offered by the society that "always tends to be more generous with beautiful girls. Hence, girls should not be afraid of the commercialization of sexualities, or become halfhearted and neglect beauty and body care" (Nam 2004, 153). Setting up and executing a well-planned marriage strategy is "an absolute necessity to marry men with higher social or economic status to make ends meet, for women are severely disadvantaged in the marriage market in Korea from the start" (Nam 2004, 216).

The fact that this book sold near a half million copies seems to show that the kind of advice offered in it touched on a sore spot for women in their 20s, already severely hampered by social insecurity. As the subject made transition from "citizens" in the 1990s to "consumers" in the 2000s (Joo 2009), consumption and body-care emerged as a new code for young women revealing their identities. In this changed social reality, these kinds of self-improvement books provided a convenient logic for women to transform themselves from "citizens" to "consumers" without guilty feelings. Or, more exactly, neoliberal entrepreneurs, having internalized the neoliberal rationality with help of self-help books, experts, mass media, schools, etc., "freely" choose from diverse available options in their lives that have been constrained, shaped, and constituted by neoliberal governmen-

tality. They have been liberated from one form of domination (patriarchal heterosexual family system) to enter strategic relations which were possible through the exercise of neoliberal governmental technologies (Foucault 1997, 281). The latter strategic relations where “endless calls to ‘do your own thing’ or ‘be all you can be’ stream forth in every direction” are clearly not those of aesthetics of existence envisioned by Foucault (Hamann 2009, 57). There, “our social environments, institutions, communities, work places, and forms of political engagements” have been transformed for optimal production and reproduction of neoliberal *homo economicus*, and acts of self-fashioning, including the burgeoning search for true self or identity, Foucault’s “Californian cult of the self” are “merely” instances where women are “encouraged to be little more than self-interested subjects of rational choice” (Hamann 2009, 57-58). At least, among unmarried young women in their 20s, there are few signs of resistance to or escape from these relations.

Gender and Biopower in Social Welfare Policy

The social welfare regime in Korea was strengthened during the IMF crisis, required by IMF and World Bank rather than by innate political forces in Korea or class movements (Shin 2009, 13).¹¹ However, it has been mainly based on the concept of workfare, in which the welfare recipients are required to do work of some kind. The Korean government was more concerned with economic recovery through investments in the economically important sectors than establishing an efficient welfare system.¹²

11. During the IMF crisis, IMF required unemployment insurance be extended to companies with five or fewer employees, and World Bank required Korean government to establish public assistance programs, to reform the medical welfare system, and to increase the budget allocated to the poor class in order to help eradicate or reduce poverty (Shin 2009, 13).
12. The percentage of welfare budget expenditure among GDP in Korea nearly doubled from 4.76% in 1995 to 8.92% in 1999, which was still far less than that typical of neoliberal countries such as the United States (14.99%) and Japan (15.88%) in 1999 (Shin 2009, 14).

The social welfare regime in Korea consists of two main parts: market-oriented programs and programs for dependents of a male bread-winner. The former can be further divided into contribution-based social insurance programs for those with stable job status and need-based public assistance programs mainly for the rest of population that have failed to safely fit in the labor market. Though these programs proclaim to be gender-neutral, their main effects appear divided in a characteristically gendered form in that men and women mainly rely on social insurance programs and public assistance programs respectively. On the other hand, programs for dependents of a male bread-winner support the “proper” working of family systems by paying bread-winners to support their dependents.

In this social welfare regime, women are left more vulnerable in social insurance programs due to the gender divide in the labor market. As for female nonregular workers, their chances of receiving social welfare benefits in any form as an individual recipient are slim unless their status in the labor market starts to improve quickly.¹³ Meanwhile, the benefits guaranteed by derived rights in programs for dependents of a male bread-winner cannot serve the purpose of supporting elderly women effectively due to the rapid rise of the divorce rate and the growing number of unmarried women (Ryu et al. 2007, 116).¹⁴

Here, missing between the individual recipient system and the derived-right recipient system is the realm of family care work, usual-

13. In fact, an examination of the income and payouts of the National Pensions Scheme in 2007 reveals that 33.6% of men and only 11.1% of women over 60 years of age receive national pensions. Since the total amount of insurance contributions paid by woman on average is 40%-50% of male contributions, their benefits will be also similarly lower than men's. This is due to the fact that many women can contribute to the National Pensions Scheme for periods shorter than male counterparts mainly because of interruptions for childbearing and rearing in their 30s and 40s (Ryu et al. 2007, 105).

14. Begun in 1960, the Occupational Pensions Schemes target government employees, school teachers, and the military as beneficiaries. The Occupational Pensions Schemes and the Industrial Accident Insurance have the longest histories and relatively high payments among programs for dependents of a male bread-winner. Other programs are substantively less beneficial (Ma 2003, 93-109).

ly done by women. In the present welfare regime, women's care work is remunerated in three ways: paid maternity leave and paid childcare leave, dependent status in the male bread-winner system, and direct support for low-income female householders. In none of the three cases, however, are the benefits for a woman sufficient for full compensation of her family care work (Ma 2005, 53).¹⁵ The status of women faithful to the patriarchal family system as full-time care workers has become increasingly perilous. The market economy intruded into family matters, and motherhood, no longer able to count on patriarchy for support, has no option other than market/class.

Class polarization after the IMF crisis placed motherhood at the forefront rather than under patriarchy. The poverty of women and motherhood is at the center where neoliberal globalization (unemployment induced by labor flexibility), the gendered neoliberal labor market (allowing the number of female nonregular workers to increase), and the Confucian patriarchy (women as a primary caregiver for their dependent children) intersect (Cho U. 2009). Whether or not we should move toward a strong male-breadwinner regime by accepting motherhood and maternal rights and thereby maintain gender division remains the central question. This question is based on the assumption that endeavoring to facilitate women's access to the wage labor market will lead to diminishing the perceived value of

15. Female workers eligible for paid maternity leave and paid childcare leave are only about half of them (Ma 2003, 114). Paid childcare leave on average lasts 10.5 months for women and 12 months for men. Though the amount of pay during paid childcare leave was raised to 400,000 won per month in 2004, it is rare for men to take paid childcare leave since it pays still too little. The percentage of men among those taking paid childcare leave was 2% in 2002-2004 (Ma 2005, 47-48). For a woman to be qualified as a low-income female householder, she must have a child under 18 years old (or under 20 years of age if the child is a student) under her care and be a qualified recipient of the National Basic Security Law, or meet certain requirements on income and assets depending on the number of household members. A qualified woman will be paid 50,000 won per month for each child under six years of age, along with entrance fees and tuition for each child in secondary school (Ma 2005, 51).

caretaking in the family realm as private matter, whereas emphasizing care works will bring some appreciation but the right of motherhood will still remain secondary (Ma 2003).

There is currently no united opinion on whether future efforts for women's pension rights should be directed to securing individual pension rights (Ryu et al. 2007, 116) or to securing sufficient benefits by remaining in bread-winner's dependent system (Ma 2003, 2005). However the current direction of social policies, already having been set toward individual pension rights, seems to place motherhood right at the collision between patriarchy and the market economy. Korean motherhood is not only a strategic focal point where global neoliberalism encounters Confucian patriarchy head-on, but also a point of fissure. This implies that neoliberalism may no longer remain mere resistance and revolt against patriarchy, but starts to engender ever widening and deepening disruptions in Korean society (Cho U. 2009, 36).

Before leaving this topic, it might be appropriate to mention that there is a two-pronged prescription against the neoliberal privatization of care works by women, which is the main cause of these difficulties after all. One way to ameliorate defects of the original naive neoliberal logic without abandoning it is to introduce the concept of social capital, which incorporates the family as one of its most immediate examples.¹⁶ Some authors believe that its introduction will allow neoliberal *homo economicus* to go on maximizing her private interests, even after taking into account effects of social relations, with a few modifications.¹⁷ The other will be to gender-improve Fou-

16. Social capital can be defined as resources embedded in social networks enhancing the outcomes of actions (Lin 2001, 19), though this concept became too all-encompassing by numerous authors to be captured in a few paragraphs. However, some social scientists have raised serious doubt as to the efficacy of this definition. There are an array of related concepts, including cultural capital and intellectual capital, which are concepts used in such fields as economics, sociology, and cultural theory.

17. See Francis Fukuyama's "Social Capital and Civil Society" delivered at the IMF Conference on Second Generation Reforms in 1999, for example, and references therein (<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/1999/reforms/fukuyama.htm>).

cault's theory along the lines discussed at the end of section 2, and to participate in resistance against neoliberal governmentality.

Deployment of New Body Practices in the Post-IMF Korean Society

The transformations in post-IMF Korean society coincided with accelerated transition to a postmodern consumer society. An author proclaimed in 1999, "The present Korean society is a heaven for consumers" (Yoon 1999, 189), and the trend of consumption for self-distinction and expression of self-identities has been ever intensifying. Concerns over body in this "era of culture" became a widespread set of phenomena after the IMF crisis. Healthy lifestyles became a social trend in the 2000s when numerous self-help books were published to tell consumers how to pursue them. Women and men were increasingly drawn into consumption of beauty products and care services. More women, and to a lesser but increasing extent, young men, have been resorting to dieting, beauty care including skin care and body care, and cosmetic surgery to improve their appearances for which purpose smart or classy clothes and creative or original hair styles had been sufficient in earlier decades (Lee 2006, 73).

For women, especially young women, their gender and class statuses are estimated no longer primarily by their individual characters and resources, but rather by their appearance. Increasingly, Koreans of all ages and genders view their appearance as something that can be improved through ever-developing beauty and cosmetic surgery techniques. Nowadays, many young people believe that those with bodies in need of "improvements" but refusing to utilize modern body-care service, be it the one involving serious medical surgery, are considered either poor or negligent of her or his "humane duties." Taming the body is no longer just constructing the gender-divided liberal subject, but rather the gender-divided neoliberal subject. This construction is "a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effects of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (Butler 1993, 9). What we need to examine is what kinds of regulatory norms and discourses are imposed and produced in

constructing the neoliberal subject of women and the technologies, processes, and procedures of such a construction.

By 2009, the cosmetic industry in Korea has grown to around 7 trillion won or 5.5 billion dollars, with 9% marketed towards men (*Hankook Ilbo*, December 11, 2008).¹⁸ Korea boasts the highest number of cosmetic surgeons per capita in the world and the highest number of cosmetic surgeries per year in Asia. Korea has also become an exporter of cosmetic surgery techniques to other countries, including China and Japan, and welcomes cosmetic surgery tourists every year from these countries. Seventy billion won worth of Botox is imported each year (Choi O. 2005, 79). The number of breast enlargement surgeries is estimated to be around 10,000 cases each year (Chung S. 2006, 44).¹⁹ The growing number of women resorting to breast enlargement or enhancement surgery is just one aspect of the ever-increasing number of remedies recommended to women “to cure body problems” including cosmetic genital surgeries such as labial reduction, vaginal lip reduction, etc. The entire geography of the body is situated under the technologies of new beauty and body care regimes (Miller 2006, 9).

According to Choi Ok Sun’s (2005) analysis of advertisements placed by cosmetic surgeons in women’s magazines, women’s body parts are classified into three main categories of body, face, and skin, which are further partitioned into smaller categories of over 150 minute parts. Then, not only the exposed parts such as neck, shoulder, etc. but also the parts hidden by clothes such as back, breast, thigh, and even genitals are problematized as something that needs to be remedied or at least improved (Choi O. 2005, 79-91). For example, in case of eyes, the following 13 types of defects are listed, each with appropriate remedies including blepharoplasty: “small eyes with fatty eyelids; ugly eyes with fatty eyelids; upward slanting, small, and

18. <http://news.hankooki.com/ArticleView/ArticleView.php?url=economy/200812/h2008121102431321580.htm&ver=v002>

19. It can be compared to about a quarter million cases each year in the United States (Miller 2006, 13). The cost of surgery is typically between six and nine million won in the Gangnam district in Seoul (*Newsmaker*, October 1, 2003).

narrow eyes; droopy eyelids; eyes with different sizes; downward slanting eyes; upward slanting eyes; eyes with inner eyelids; puffy lower eyelids; narrow space between eyes and eye brows; eyes with thin double eyelids and fatty upper eyelids; eyes with distinct double eyelids; eyes with thin double eyelids and wide upper eyelids” (Choi O. 2005, 92).

The intention and logic of this kind of classification seems to be obvious. Above all, it is related to characteristics specific to the locality and temporality of the post-IMF Korean society, including the sudden rise in the number of doctors in practice, causing an increasing number to experience financial difficulties and pressing them to create new markets for medical services. However, the intensity and nakedness of the phenomena demands further inquiries of the neoliberal governmentality at work.

Signs of the neoliberal rationality playing a role in some Western societies began to appear about two decades ago. The cautious interpretation that the unexpected political acceptance of renewed mass unemployment may plausibly be due to the wide diffusion of the notion of individual as an enterprise or entrepreneur seems obvious now at least in the post-IMF Korean society (Gordon 1991). The “care of the self,” where each individual governs oneself according to what she takes to be true about who she is and assumes responsibilities for what she is, is vigorously commended by the government and in the discourses produced in various media, in self-help books, by CEOs advising college students searching for jobs, among others, and reproduced in infinite manners in the post-IMF Korean society.

Already in their freshman year, some students start to amass various certificates and skills²⁰ that will help them get their favored jobs after graduation. Of course, the private institutes professing to help those in need, especially young college students, are in full blossom, too. Private institutes, already having succeeded in taming these students in their high-school years with enormous profits rolling into

20. This kind of effort is called “amassing specs” with a little bit of self-mockery by them.

their pockets every year, enjoy this trend with their whole hearts. Flourishing private tutoring institutes for students of primary and secondary schools who are already guaranteed full and free public educations by law are the most vivid manifestation of the responses of a population subjected to the technology of self, deployed by the neo-liberal governmentality.

For female college students, there is one more option or requirement to take care of. The issues of beauty and body care, including cosmetic surgeries, loom large as graduation nears (Lim 2004). They loom even larger for female high-school graduates entering job market. Although it is forbidden by law²¹ to discriminate against women based on their appearance, almost every woman believes it is still one of the most important factors in job interviews (Lim 2003).

The meticulous classifications of “defects in need of remedies” described above reappears with a vengeance in the private marriage matching service market. For example, Sunoo, one of the oldest and best established marriage matching service companies,²² prepares a detailed profile for each member. An index quantifying one’s value as a future spouse is assigned to each member based on this profile. This “spouse index” consists of three main sub-indices: “social capability index” based on education, occupation, and annual wages; “body index” based on height, weight, attractiveness, etc.; and finally the “family environment index” based on the education, occupations, and assets of parents and siblings. Each factor contributing to each sub-index is classified into six to eight levels, each with an alphabetical scale assigned according to carefully systemized criteria. For education factors contributing to the social capability index, for example, all the colleges and universities in Korea are classified into seven cat-

21. The Equal Employment Opportunity Laws legislated in 1995.

22. Sunoo began in 1991, and claims to have arranged over 20,000 successful marriages. It operates its own research center, the Sunoo Marriage Culture Research Center. There are currently over eight hundred matchmaking services of various sizes. The size of the marriage matching service market is estimated to be around one hundred billion won (*Money Today*, November 18, 2008; <http://www.mt.co.kr/view/mtview.php?type=1&no=2008110711332201925&outlink=1>).

egories, mainly according to public fame;²³ the most famous ones including the medical schools belonging to the one with alphabetical scale A (*Weekly Hankook*, June 16, 2008).²⁴

The weight of each sub-index depends on gender. The body index holds greater weight in the case of female clients than male clients. Among factors contributing to this sub-index, height and weight, the two easily quantifiable ones, should be within a range of 177-182 cm and 68-85 kg respectively for men, and 163-168 cm and 45-50 kg for women to receive the highest score, with points being deducted as they deviate from this range. For the factor of attractiveness, after an interview and careful deliberation each member is given one of five grades: attractive, somewhat attractive, average, somewhat unattractive, and unattractive. Though Sunoo did not reveal the exact relative weight given to each sub-index for men and women, it did announce that among successful matches, the percentages of the cases where the man's social capability index was higher, similar, or lower than woman's are 55%, 30%, and 15%, respectively. Since the company tries to match men and women with spouse indices in the same range, this reflects the relative weight of the social capability index, hence those of "body index" assuming the last "family environment index" somewhat neutral (*Dong-A Ilbo*, December 29, 2006).²⁵

Lemke (2002, 61) summarized a key aspect of the neoliberal rationality as "the congruence it endeavors to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual." He further explained its main claim that individual-subjective

23. In the Korean education system, economic opportunity is increasingly defined by the college and its public fame that students enter, rather than by the learning that students obtain beyond high school. The public fame of each college is almost exclusively determined by the average score of entering students on the nationwide examination held once every year.

24. Most of other companies employ similar profiling and indexing methods. Another well-known company, Duo, has devised a similar index based on 160 criteria (http://weekly.hankooki.com/lpage/08_focus/200806/wk_20080619141941100090.htm).

25. http://news.donga.com/news/print_web.php?n=200612290142

factors, not social-structural ones, decide social problems, including unemployment, alcoholism, etc. “Self-esteem” thus has much more to do with self-assessment than with self-respect, as the self has to be continuously measured, judged, and disciplined in order to gear personal “empowerment” to collective yardsticks (Lemke 2002, 61). The meticulous classifications of problematics and the transformation of them into measurable and quantified data as encountered in cosmetic surgery and private marriage matching service discourses make this self-assessment convenient and efficient. As mentioned in the beginning of this work, the neoliberal subject is subjected to sovereign, disciplinary, and governmental powers operating all together, with the operation of sovereign power becoming less common. Disciplinary power works in a more sophisticated manner and often imbricates governmental power in its operation. It is thus no surprise that these features of classification and quantification are reminiscent of those of careful classification and documentation in schools, hospitals, military camps, prisons, etc. as discussed by Foucault in detail (Foucault 1978). Note, however, that these neoliberal counterparts appear in mass media, permeating women with their messages until they internalize them.

In each case of these phenomena discussed in this section, the characteristic features of neoliberal governmentality at work can be described in the following ways: the elemental unit of this system is a self-entrepreneur, or variant such as family-entrepreneur intent on optimizing their total future income and human capital, considering the influence of diminishing but still alive Confucian patriarchy. These basic units respond to technologies of governmentality or economic forces, according to American neoliberal economists who will not flinch from extending their analytical tools to any social issues, as envisioned by Foucault.

The individual selves assume, internalize, and practice technologies of the self to maximize their human capitals and increase their future income. Their responses no longer remain in the realm of traditional consumers, simply manipulated by commercialism. They literally produce their satisfactions. Gender differentiation revealed in

these phenomena does not yet seem fundamental. Men and women both make best efforts to excel in their secondary school years by investing their capital in private tutoring services to increase their human capitals by amassing various useful skills and experiences and/or resorting to new body practices, including cosmetic surgery. These efforts are all directed at gaining favored jobs, and/or finding spouses capable of producing optimal satisfactions, including children with high human capital. The most successful self-entrepreneurs in this regime will be those who faithfully internalize the neoliberal logic, subjugating themselves to the techniques of biopower with no intention of activating their own critiques or initiating their own forms of subjection. However, whether or not the current form of neoliberal rationality or its modified version will establish its stronghold in Korean society remains to be seen.²⁶

Conclusion

By introducing the concept of governmentality, Foucault explained that the biopower in the era of neoliberalism operates through the anatomo-politics of the human body and through the biopolitics of the population. Through technologies of the self, the subject takes care of her body, soul, and mind by herself and assumes the responsibility for their care, thus largely relieving the state from its obligation to take care of problems like illness, poverty, and the welfare of the people. Therefore, it seems natural for an individual under neoliberal governmentality to be concerned with self care, and especially with care of the body. However, deployment of biopower reveals its gender-divided manner of operation, characteristically neglected by Foucault. A neoliberal subject concerned with self care

26. Candlelight demonstrations against imports of American beef in June of 2008, one of the fiercest protests in recent decades in Korea, showed that those docile individuals can initiate resistance to neoliberal governmentality starting from the issue of health, one of the objects of biopower, thus revealing the sites of resistance and changes in the future directions of civil movements.

subjugates herself to gender-specific processes of technologies of the self.

Changes in the gender structure of labor market and the trend of polarization in the female labor market begun by neoliberal labor policies brought about phenomena of increasingly delayed marriages, a free-falling birth rate, rapidly rising divorce rate, an increasing percentage of female householders and single households, and increasingly longer periods for women to be unmarried. These socioeconomic changes significantly altered the lives of women at all ages, in almost all classes, both in and out of the labor market and family system.

The Korean social welfare regime proclaims itself to be gender-neutral, but in reality it barely conceals its male-oriented aspects. In particular, the status of women faithful to the patriarchal family system as full-time care workers became increasingly perilous. In the neoliberal social welfare regime, care work is supposed to belong to the private sector, and thus to be the responsibility of each individual. Motherhood and maternal rights, thus denied the status of social rights and no longer able to count on patriarchy for support, have no option other than resorting to market/class.

In this kind of neoliberal system, women will naturally strive to survive in the labor market. Their positions in labor market counted foremost, which they tried to ensure by delaying marriages and child bearing. This, in turn, engendered weakening of patriarchal heterosexual family system and rapidly rising divorce rate.

Booming fads in beauty care and self care originate in this socioeconomic milieu. By improving their appearances utilizing modern beauty care techniques, women want to secure their social competitiveness and approval as women. The image of a self-caring woman in fitness and in control of herself in the 1990s gave way to the meticulously categorized list of problematics requiring beauty care services, including cosmetic surgeries. This new body practice would assure women stability in the labor market, or so they hoped. With the jobs in labor market divided according to gender, the self care of women will help produce the bodies optimized for labor mar-

ket; that is, young, healthy, commercialized bodies and accompanying discourses will serve technologies of the self efficiently.

However, with motherhood and maternal rights denied the status of civil rights and endowed with that of derived rights only, technologies of the self operating on women as the neoliberal subjects will inevitably cause conflict between the subjects required by market and those by motherhood. Naive neoliberal logic requiring competitiveness, self-responsibility, and rationality will necessarily exclude the power of a motherhood that is based on caring and communal interests. This leads to weakening of family systems and falling of birth rates, eventually threatening the sustainability of biopower operations and neoliberal systems.

As can be seen in Foucault's theory of governmentality, the ultimate aims of any form of governmentality are the happiness of population and sustainment of the state (Foucault 1991, 100). Both aims are rather fluid, and their actual implementation requires additional specifications, which will be determined by various processes, including political ones. What is particularly conspicuous in neoliberal governmentality revealed in the works of Foucault, Deleuze, and other authors is that this one operates imperceptibly and inexorably. Imperceptibly, because technologies of population do not operate directly on individuals, but rather in the form of technologies of the self, permeating society and internalized into each individual. Inexorably, because they feel and taste like outcome of free and rational choices based on pure self-interest, which so well in line with instinctive gut feelings of desire and greed lead many Koreans to concur with Margaret Thatcher admitting that there is no alternative. Neoliberal governmental power is the outcome of the multiplication of these individual rational choices. Thus, countermovement and resistance are all the more difficult to initiate and require detailed study of its operating mode and more patience. Securing a proper status for motherhood is no exception, and it seems that in this case we need more careful study of its operating mode, to which hopefully this work can contribute a little.

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