



Feminist Politics to Family Politics? Childcare Policy Debates in South Korea

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Dulles Hall 168

230 Annie and John Glenn Ave.

Abstract: In 2003, in response to Korea's dramatically low fertility rate, the administration of President Roh Moo Hyun began to develop policies to provide families with childcare and lessen the financial burden of having children. Childcare policy became a sharply contested arena as conflicting visions of quality, fairness, and access struggled for dominance. On the one hand, Roh's leftist allies advocated a policy of broad access to publically funded childcare as part of an agenda of fairness and equality, while other groups supported a neoliberal market-based approach which built on existing commercial providers who were able to provide innovative programs, but at high cost and only to those who could afford them. In the end, the neoliberal group prevailed and the vision of publically funded high-quality childcare was abandoned. This paper traces the recent childcare policy in South Korea and examines the surrounding debates.

Bio: Seung-kyung Kim is the Korea Foundation Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, and Director of the Institute for Korean Studies within the School of Global and International Studies. Her scholarship addresses the participation of women in social movements as workers and in relation to the state; the processes of transnational migration in the context of globalization and the experiences of families in that process, especially with regard to education; and feminist theories of social change. Besides numerous journal articles and book chapters, she is the author of *Class Struggle or Family Struggle?: Lives of Women Factory Workers in South Korea* (Cambridge University Press, 2009/1997) and *The Korean Women's Movement and the State: Bargaining for Change* (Routledge, 2016/2014), and co-editor of *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (Routledge, 2016/2013/2009/2003).

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