

Senior Welfare in Korean Confucian Society

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Abstract

This paper explores modern approaches to senior welfare by considering specific characteristics of senior welfare in pre-modern Korean Confucian society, in particular, that society's emphasis on mental wellness. The paper also attempts to propose specific methods and characteristics from that approach which are applicable to public policy on senior welfare in contemporary South Korean society. An ideal society in Confucianism is referred to as *datong* 大同 (great unity) society, a social organization based on familism and communitarianism which takes the cosmology of *wanwu yiti* 萬物一體 (the unity between all things) and *xiushen* 修身 (moral self-cultivation) as its theoretical bases. In a Confucian view of the family, seniors are considered to be guides for children and the cornerstones of family unity. The notion of *xiaoti* 孝悌 (filial piety and fraternal love) is regarded as the foundation of senior welfare both in societies and in families. In addition, the state institutionalized various means to actualize the practice of *xiaoti* 孝悌. The welfare system in traditional Confucian society in Korea was distinctive in that it did not view the senior citizen as a socially and biologically disadvantaged individual. Rather, the notion of human dignity was a key consideration in establishing the system of senior welfare. Today, we need to develop a win-win approach to caring for our seniors which both strengthens the family bond and restores local communities. Doing so will require us to adapt the notions of *xiushen* 修身 and *xiaoti* 孝悌 to our lives in modern society. In this respect, this paper argues that we should develop specific policies at a state level to support senior welfare based on the principles of *xiushen* 修身 and *xiaoti* 孝悌.

Keywords: senior welfare, Confucianism, philosophy of welfare, familism, *xiaoti* 孝悌 (filial piety and fraternal love), *xiushen* 修身 (moral self-cultivation)

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1. Preface

Concern for senior welfare in South Korea is a growing concern, especially since Korea has already become, in many respects, an aged society. As senior welfare has become an issue of greater public concern, Help Age International (HAI), an international senior rights organization, recently announced that the South Korean senior welfare system exhibits marked deficiencies in both financial and psychosocial aspects. According to the statistics published by HAI, South Korea's overall senior welfare system ranks 50th in the world, a ranking which places it behind the less economically developed countries of Sri Lanka (43rd), the Philippines (44th), Vietnam (45th), and Kazakhstan (49th). Of particular worry are the facts that the poverty rate of the elderly is 47.2% and the income of South Korean elders ranked 80th in the world, indicating that many seniors in Korea face serious economic difficulty. Furthermore, South Korea was ranked 42nd in senior healthcare, with a distressingly high suicide rate among the elderly of 64 out of 100,000.¹

These statistical markers show that the wealth distribution is uneven, highlighting, in particular, the social welfare system for poor and socially disadvantaged groups has failed to keep pace with the rapid economic growth of South Korea. Many would be rightfully dismayed to see that according to this metric the senior welfare level is lower in South Korea than it is in developing countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka.

It might be fair to say that the pre-modern Confucian Korean society, in some ways, had a higher level of senior welfare than is present modern Korean society. Even though material poverty was common in pre-modern societies, material difficulties were not a big obstacle to the development of the senior welfare system in Korean Confucian society. This is because Confucianism values moral principles more than material wealth.² Furthermore, the status of seniors in both the family and in broader society was very high. Elders in Confucian culture received high respect and enjoyed a great deal of decision-making power because they were considered to possess practical wisdom. They were also highly esteemed since they played a pivotal role in consolidating familial and societal bonds.

However, elderly people in modern Korean society suffer various material and social difficulties. There are several contributing forces which

1 This statistic is from the "2014 World's Senior Welfare Indicators" presented by the Help Age International (HAI), on October 1st, world senior day. In HAI's survey, Norway was in first place, with other major developed Western nations such as Sweden, Switzerland, Canada, and Germany also ranking near the top.

2 *Lunyu* 16.1: "Do not worry about insufficiency but uneven, and do not worry about poverty but discomfort, In general, if it is even, there will be no poverty, if it is harmonious, there will be no insufficiency, if there is comfort, there is no inclination" (不患寡而患不均, 不患貧而患不安, 蓋均無貧, 和無寡, 安無傾).

help explain why the living condition of the aged, especially for the poor seniors, is deteriorating in modern Korea. The first reason is that the economic status of the aged now tends to have low values due to their low productivity in the capitalist society. Second, the notions of filial duty and respect for the aged have been diminishing over decades because Confucian values have been weakened. Third, although economic and social conditions have changed dramatically, most Koreans still hold that support for seniors is primarily a family issue rather than something which warrants action at the social or state level.

Scholars have pointed out that mental wellness is the most important issue in the welfare policies in those European countries which have relatively well-developed systems of senior welfare.³ Communal values, which once were regarded as outdated, have once again become of critical concern as modern citizens have started to cherish such values as sharing and the establishment of communal psychological bonds. It should be noted that the welfare system and policies are almost always established based on how a society understands the nature of human relations. Many Western countries now seek viable solutions to their social issues from communitarian values in no small part because their societies have witnessed in recent memory some of the more socially destructive *limitations* of individualism and liberalism.⁴ Meanwhile, Korean society is suffering from deformed or distorted “liberalism,” “familism,” and “communalism.”⁵ This article will also examine the characteristics of senior welfare in traditional Confucian society, where familism and communalism were highly influential. There is a difference between Confucian familism and communalism, which supported senior welfare in traditional society and undermined so-called “family-egoism” and “pseudo-communalism.” This paper attempts to provide some practical directions for social welfare policy in modern

3 Park Seung-hee points out that the approach to senior welfare in developed countries such as Sweden illustrates how they try to achieve psychosocial welfare after achieving material welfare, and tries to find parallels between this approach and the way of life advocated by Confucian communalism. “Yugyojeok gwanjeom-eseo barabon seuweden sahoe bokji,” 385-410.

4 Chang Eun-joo points out that communalists (McCann Tires, Sendel, Walzer) debate trying to graft onto communalism. This does not discard liberalism under confrontation, but makes an assumption based on the approval of the liberalistic foundation of freedom and rights for individuals. Also, the discussion on communalism in the West has arisen from a critical desire to implement a better democracy in the context of the cultural pluralism. In other words, the most important thing for the discussion is not the sameness but difference, particularity, and pluralism. “Ingwon-gwa minjujeok yeondaeseong,” 297.

5 Lee Seung-hwan points out that individualism and liberalism have never been properly settled in South Korea. He argues that the concepts of “freedom,” “family,” and “community” have been mobilized and distorted merely for the monopoly profit of tycoons and for the maintenance of power by an authoritarian government. The ideas of pseudo-individualism, pseudo-familism and pseudo-communalism are just as entangled in current Korean society. “Hanguk-eseo jayujuui gongdongchejuui nonjaeng-eun jeoksilhaeng?,” 101-149.

Korean society by considering the social institutions and social efforts developed for seniors in traditional Confucian society.

2. Confucian Approaches to Senior Welfare

1) *Datong* 大同 Society as an Ideal Confucian Community

Scholars usually understand *datong* 大同 (Great Unity) society as an ideal form of Confucian society. In the *Liji*, *datong* is described as follows:

The world belongs to the public where the great virtue was conducted. They recruit a wise and talented man and he leads with trust, and lets people cultivate the virtue of harmony. Thus, people not only respect their parents but also for others, and do not care only for their children but also for others. They help seniors rest in peace, help the young find things to do, help children grow well, and help widowers, widows, orphans, the childless, and the sick get support. Man is able to get a job; woman is able to get married. They do not like to waste wealth but do not save for oneself, do not like not trying to do their best but do not try to do their best for oneself. Thus, schemes disappear and do not arise, and theft and robbery do not occur. Therefore, they do not lock the gate. This is called *datong* 大同.⁶

Confucianism promotes the gradual expansions of moral virtues such as *zhongshu* 忠恕 (being loyal to innate morality and expanding moral actions to others) and *tuijijiren* 推己及人 (reflecting my mind and extending it to others) in terms of the practice of *ren* 仁 (benevolence, or the perfect virtue). It also comprises ideas in cosmology and ontology, such as *wanwu yiti* 萬物一體 (unity between nature and humans). *Qian* 乾 (heavenly force) and *kun* 坤 (earthly force) are recognized as the fundamental forces to produce all things in the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes). From this perspective, humans and all things are viewed as brothers and sisters generated from the same sources. Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077) developed this cosmology in a more detailed way as seen in the “Ximing” 西銘 (Proverb on the West Wall):⁷ “Heaven is called as

6 *Liji*, “Liyun” 禮運: “大道之行也，天下為公。選賢與能，講信，修睦。故人不獨親其親，不獨子其子。使老有所終，壯有所用，幼有所長。矜寡孤獨廢疾者皆有所養。男有分，女有歸。貨惡其棄於地也，不必藏於己，力惡其不出於身也，不必為己。是故謀閉而不興，盜竊亂賊而不作。故外戶而不閉，是謂大同。”

The translation is modified based on Legge’s translation.

7 Cheng Yi 程頤 interpreted Zhang Zai’s 張載 “Ximing” as a gradual progressivism moving forward from *fenshu* 分殊 to *liyi* 理一 in terms of practice of benevolence (*ren* 仁). Zhu Xi 朱熹 added the meaning of ontological sameness, (i.e. various things have the same basis), to Chen Yi’s interpretation. Thus, *liyi fenshu* 理一分殊 means that all things are one ontologically, while, at the same time, the method for achieving this is gradual in terms of moral self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身).

father and earth is called as mother and I am an insignificant being among them……people are my brothers born from the same parents, and all things will go together with me.” The description of the *datong* cited above reflects Zhang’s stance: “They respect not only their parents but also parents of others, and care not only their children but also the children of others.” The passage reflects the cosmological concept of *wanwu yiti* 萬物一體. In addition, they adhere to the paradigm of *yin* and *yang* which envisions an individual entity in terms of interrelation with others as an essential part of each individual being.

In traditional Confucian society, welfare was understood as a social system which could be achieved through proper politics by the ruler. The common definition of welfare can be understood as follows: a social system which ensures that people receive the material and mental comfort which enables them to keep their dignity as a human being. The ruler was required to internalize the virtue of *neixing waiwang* 內聖外王 (inner sagehood and outer kingship). Within Confucianism, Mother Nature was recognized as an entity with a virtue of begetting and nurturing all things in the universe,⁸ and was expected to provide essential yardsticks for the ruler. Rulers were also expected to ensure that every person could enjoy a good life thanks to their good policies. The following description of the *datong* society reflects the view above: “They help seniors to rest in peace, help the young to have things to do, and help children to grow well.”⁹

The *datong* society seeks emotional and moral well-being based on material support. Kongzi said that if he were able to expand his ideas he first would satisfy needs for food, clothing and shelter, and then would foster cultural and moral education.¹⁰ Mengzi said, “If material support is stable, they can have a stable mind; if not, they cannot maintain a constant mind.”¹¹ These statements show that the early Confucian thinkers envisioned moral communities based on material comfort.

In addition, the records of the *datong* society suggest that the crucial point of Confucian welfare depends on the selection of competent and virtuous rulers. Sovereign power was not hereditary but handed over to whoever had both moral virtues and political talents.¹² Confucianism tends to hold that political success or failure depends on the virtues and capabilities of rulers. Therefore, introspection and self-cultivation were regarded as important virtues rulers should practice.

8 *Yijing*, “Xicizhuan” 繫辭傳: “天地之大德曰, 生.”

9 The record of *datong* society in *Liji*, “Liyun.” See footnote 7.

10 *Lunyu* 13.9: “子適衛, 冉有僕。子曰。庶矣哉! 冉有曰, 既庶矣, 又何加焉? 曰, 富之。曰, 既富矣, 又何加焉? 曰, 教之。”

11 *Mengzi* 1A.7.

12 This is called *shanrang* 禪讓.

2) Familism

Familism has evoked a lot of controversy in recent decades in Korea, and is still something of an ongoing hot potato. Meanwhile, egoistic familism, favoritism, nepotism, and groupism have been regarded as the side effects of extended familism, and have thus been criticized heavily in last decades. In this regard, inequality among family members is fiercely criticized. All of these social issues have been criticized as negative remnants of Confucian culture. By contrast, there have also been attempts to stress the positive function of Confucianism, familism, or family relationships despite the fact that the rapidly growing divorce rates, family breakdowns or domestic violence, senior issues, and distant family relationships are emerging as social problems.¹³ Some also argue that the secret of East Asian rapid economic growth is largely ascribed to Confucian-capitalism in which many companies are managed by family members of the company owners.¹⁴ In general, Confucianism is faced with the following questions in contemporary Korea: Do we need to distinguish between true Confucianism and distorted Confucianism?¹⁵ Is it fair to say that the many forms of modern familism that are ascribed to Confucian culture are really Confucian?¹⁶ If not, what is Confucian familism, really? As these questions suggest, Confucianism and familism-related discussions are ongoing topics and require more in-depth studies. In short, it is true that Confucianism is strongly linked to familism; it is likewise true that senior welfare in Confucian society is based on a strong sense of familism.

13 To give a few recent examples of such attempts in the areas of social welfare, sociology, Eastern philosophy, and women's studies see Choi Young-jin, "Hanguk sahoe-ui yugyojeok jeontong-gwa gajokjuui"; Kim Ki-hyun, "Yugyo-ui sahoe bokji jeongsin"; Kim Mi-kyong, "Noin bokji-e daehan gajok sahoehakjeok jeopgeun"; Lee Hyun-ji, "Yugyojeok gajok gwangyegwan, hyeondae gajok wigi-ui daean-inga"; Lee Myung-hee, "Hanguk munhwa: yugyo sahoe-ui yeonbokji munhwa-e gwanhan misijeok gochal."

14 Family-ism management considers an enterprise to be extended family-ism in the discussion of Confucian capitalism. However, it can be criticized that family-ism like this combined with authoritarian and patriarchal family-ism is sometimes used as the logic for business owners to monopolize profits.

15 Lee Seung-hwan insists that there could be a Confucian society outside of the Confucian spirit, just as there have been Christian communities administered outside of the Christian spirit. He contends, for example, that the administrative and political behavior of the late Joseon dynasty was very anti-Confucian. "Hanguk gajokjuui-ui uimi-wa giwon, geurigo byeonhwa ganeungseong," 45-66.

16 Kim Ki-hyun points out that Korea has gone through drastic changes during the Japanese colonial period and the military regime over the past 100 years and questions whether applying the modifier 'Confucian' to Korean culture today is still appropriate. "Yugyo-ui sahoe bokjij eongsin," 218-219; Lee Seung-hwan thinks that it is hard to say that family enters into a cause and effect relationship with Confucian family-ism directly because family was mobilized as a symbol to justify despotic power and groupism and was little more than a mobilized slogan used to pacify labor discontent. "Hanguk gajokjuui-ui uimi-wa giwon, geurigo byeonhwa ganeungseong," 60.

According to *zongfa zhidu* 宗法制度 (paternal clan system) in the Zhou dynasty 周 (c. 1046–256 BCE), the feudal lords shared the same last name with Zhou kings, the world was understood as a type of family, and the practice of ancestral worship was maintained to reinforce their solidarity. As the term *tianxia yijia* 天下一家 (one family under heaven) suggests, the state was regarded as an extended family in Confucian society, and family management was regarded as a foundation for the successful management of the state. In the *Daxue*, we read the following:

It is not possible for one to teach others, while he cannot teach his own family. Therefore, the ruler, without going beyond his family, completes the lessons for the nation. There is filial piety (*xiao* 孝); therewith the sovereign should be served, there is fraternal submission (*ti* 悌); therewith elders should be served, there is parental love (*ci* 慈); therewith the multitude should be treated.¹⁷

If family members care each other, the whole people in the state become caring for each other. If family members respect each other, the whole people in the state become respectful for each other.¹⁸

As shown in these passages, in Confucian societies governance was regarded as a practice of family ethics, and social ethics is also regarded as an expansion of family ethics. The *Mengzi* instructs its readers to “Treat your elders as elders, and extend it to the elders of others; treat your young ones as young ones, and extend it to the young ones of others.”¹⁹ This admonishment shows the process of expanding one’s ethics from the scope of the family to the broader society. Love for the family is thus recognized as the basics of social ethics in Confucianism. According to this logic, love for the family can be extended to all humanity, and even to all things in the world. At least, the familism found in Confucianism should not be understood as egoistic familism in which people do not care about other people except their own family members. Rather, familism in Confucian society helps build a strong sense of community thanks to a strong sense of social and psychological family-like bonds.

We can say that the fundamental driving force to sustain senior welfare in Confucian familism can be found in its emphasis on filial piety (*xiao* 孝). The *Lunyu* says that filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and fraternal love (*ti* 悌) form the basis for benevolence (*ren* 仁), the most ideal moral virtue in Confucian teaching. Filial piety can be understood as the care and respect for parents and ancestors. It is viewed as more fundamental than fraternal love, because fraternal love refers to familial duty toward brothers and

17 *Daxue*, chap. 9.

18 *Daxue*, chap. 9.

19 *Mengzi* 1A.7: “老吾老，以及人之老；幼吾幼，以及人之幼。”

sisters which is supposed to stem from the practice of filial piety. In some respect, filial piety should be understood as a concept which embraces the ontological dimension of Confucian ethics. This is why parents and ancestors in Confucian culture have highly been emphasized as the roots of family members and even of self-existence. It is no surprise, therefore, that seniors would be considered the most respected object in Confucian society. Senior welfare in Confucian society has been developed not merely as a protection of the biological weak or disadvantaged, but as a practice to assure the dignity of seniors. Ancestral worship, in some sense, was practiced not only as a custom which reminds practitioners of the source of the self, but also as a mechanism to maintain and consolidate the ethics of *xiaoti* 孝悌 (filial piety and fraternal love). In short, senior support in Confucian culture has been developed as a manifestation of respect for seniors and ancestral worship.

3. Methods and Characteristics of Senior Welfare in Confucian Society

1) Senior Support at the Family Level

Senior support in Confucian societies was understood mainly as a family issue, and though material support was an key factor of senior support, the mental support provided through reverence (*gongjing* 恭敬) was perhaps even more important. Kongzi said, “Filial piety today usually refers to material support for one’s parents. But dogs and horses also get material support. Therefore, if we take care of our parents without reverence, how can we distinguish serving out parents from serving animals?”²⁰ This suggests that mental and psychological concern is more essential than material support in serving one’s seniors.

Mengzi also illustrated an appropriate way of supporting one’s parents through a story about Zengzi 曾子 and his father Zeng Xi 曾皙. Mengzi said,

Zengzi took care of his father, Zeng Xi. He would always give him wine and meat, and when he was about to clear the table, Zengzi would ask to whom the leftovers should be given. When Zeng Xi asked him whether there were any leftovers, he would always say, ‘there are.’ After Zeng Xi died, Zengzi was cared for by his son, Zeng Yuan 曾元. He would always give him wine and meat, but when he was about to clear the table, he did not ask to whom the leftovers should be given. If Zengzi asked him whether there were any leftovers, he would say, ‘They are completely gone,’ planning on serving the leftovers to his father later. This is what is meant by

²⁰ *Lunyu* 2.7: “今之孝者，是謂能養。至於犬馬，皆能有養，不敬，何以別乎。”

'caring merely for their mouth and limbs.' Someone like Zengzi can be said to have satisfied his father's wishes. To serve one's parents as Zengzi did—only that is really acceptable.²¹

Using the story above, Mengzi attempted to show that to comfort the mind of one's parents by following the will of one's parents is morally right conduct. In other words, happiness for seniors depends on psychological and mental support rather than on purely material care.

In traditional Confucian societies, the family was viewed as a whole, rather than as a collection of individuals. This entailed that discussions on individual freedom and rights in the family were not encouraged. In fact, familism in Confucian society is based on patriarchy: the beneficiaries in such a society were usually male family members from the paternal side. In contrast, female family members were asked to devote themselves for male family members and they were treated as lower and inferior members of the family.²²

It is true that most pre-modern societies were deeply patriarchal, in both the East and in the West. Confucian familism also reflects patriarchal customs. Again it should be noted that patriarchy, like most traditions or theories, also has both bright and dark sides. Confucian familism holds that elders of the family should be models of moral self-cultivation for younger generation in the family. Mengzi said, "If a man does not walk on the right path, it will not be walked on, even by his wife and children. If he orders according to the wrong way, he will not be able to get the obedience of even his wife or children."²³ This quote shows that the moral self-cultivation and initiative moral conduct of the family male head are very important as a moral role model of family. Let us look at the case of Yulgok 栗谷 Yi I 李珥 (1536-1584). He wrote *Jageongmun* 自警文 (Self-Cultivating Words) in his early

21 *Mengzi* 4A.19: "曾子養曾皙，必有酒肉，將徹，必請所與，問有餘，必曰，有。曾皙死，曾元養曾子，必有酒肉，將徹，不請所與，問有餘，曰，亡矣。將以復進也。此所謂養口體者也。若曾子，則可謂養志也。事親若曾子者，可也。" The translation is based on Van Norden's translation.

22 Some people have criticized Confucian familism for being structurally sexist in its demands for the unilateral self-sacrifice of women in the care of other family members, including the support and care of seniors. In Confucian society a woman was depicted as a loving mother and as a personification of endless love and sacrifice. The virtue of "take upon the ancestral worship, treat guests with hospitality" (奉祭祀，接賓客) was always emphasized as a women's duty. This was a driving force to back up the ethics of *xiaoti* 孝悌. The virtue of *xiaoti* 孝悌, which emphasizes carrying out ancestral worship and treating guests with hospitality, played a key role in sustaining traditional Confucian society. And women were asked to do most of the work. On one hand, this fact explains the value of the existence and meaning of women in Confucian society. But it became the cause of the disintegrated notion of Confucian welfare based on patriarchal familism. People say that it is important to have freedom and rights for all family members in a family relationship based on today's individualism. How to achieve equal and mutually beneficial relationships for members of both genders politically is an issue.

23 *Mengzi* 7B.9

twenties. The work read, “If I cannot come up to a stage of sagehood, my works are not yet finished” and “If there is anybody who is not yet morally awakened, it is because my moral-cultivation is not yet good enough to influence him/her.”²⁴ This quote implies that Confucian patriarchs did not merely enjoy a high and powerful status in the family by virtue of their maleness alone; rather, they tried to retrain themselves as a role model of other family members.²⁵

The *Daxue* (Great Learning) represents it like this:

What is meant by making the whole world peaceful and happy depends on the government of his nation? When the sovereign behaves to his aged should be behaved to, the people bring on filial duty; when the sovereign behaves to his elders as the elders should be behaved to, the people bring on respect; when the sovereign treats compassionately the young and helpless, the people will not betray him.²⁶

The “Toegye eonhaengnok” 退溪言行錄 (Sayings and deeds of Toegye) is the record of how Yi Hwang 李滉 (1501-1570) took care of his household. In that text, we find the following passage:

No one could see him scold his servants carelessly. If they made a mistake, he just talked to them softly, saying words like “this thing should be done in this way,” but never changed his look. Someone asked, “If there is something wrong between siblings, should they tell each other?” He replied, “They should just make them impressed by their sincerity. Doing other than this may hurt affection. If they scold louder without sincerity, they will often become estranged from each other. Therefore, there’s an old saying, “be temperate to siblings.” Indeed, this is why it is.”²⁷

Therefore, if Confucian familism works normally, each family member is required to do his or her duty followed by the responsible initiative of the head of the household.²⁸

24 *Yulgok haengjang* 栗谷行狀, written by his disciple Kim Jang-saeng states: “Because Yulgok devoted himself to take care his father’s concubine, she changed her savage temper at last.”

25 Communal sharing requires individual moral self-cultivation, called *weijizhixue* 爲己之學. The term stands for a certain sort of academic attitude by which one is aware of oneself as an autonomous and ethical being and applies this awareness to other matters of real life. It is the awakening that I am located in the innermost of the concentric center that expands from myself into family, country, humankind, and the universe. Moreover this awakening has to rise from community leaders; such is the unwavering claim of Confucianism. However, this cultivation is not only applicable to high-level leaders. As the *Daxue* 大學 said, “Everyone from the emperor to commoners must regard the moral cultivation of the self as the root of everything.” Moral cultivation is encouraged for everyone, but especially, strongly recommended for community leaders.

26 *Daxue* 10: “所謂平天下在治其國者，上老老而民興孝，上長長而民興弟，上恤孤而民不倍。是以君子有絜矩之道也。” The translation is modified based on Legge’s translation.

27 *Toegye jeonseo* 退溪全書, “Eonhaengnok” 言行錄 2.

28 The idea of emphasizing “enjoyment (as opposed to possession)” and “public righteousness

In addition, Confucian family ethics were designed to be interactive rather than one-sided. According to Yulgok, *fuzi youqin* 父子有親 (parents and children should have intimacy), the first item of *wulun* 五倫 (five moral norms), means that parents should take good care of their children while children respect and follow their parents. And *xiongwu digong* 兄友弟恭 (the elder brother cares for the younger, the younger brother honors the elder), another Confucian moral norm, shows the importance of mutual care between siblings. Hence, the influence and power of the elderly in Confucian society were not given automatically, but was connected to a prior expectation that these elders should first be morally self-disciplined.

Even though Confucian influence has been weakening in Korea for decades, most Koreans still think that supporting one's aged parents is the responsibility of their sons and daughters.²⁹ This implies that it is necessary to restore the positive values and teachings of Confucian familism to provide viable solutions to some difficult issues of senior welfare.³⁰

2) Support at the State Level

If we examine the senior welfare system of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), we can find many policies which were better developed and more advanced in that period than those enacted today. Senior welfare in traditional Confucian society was comprised of three parts. First, state regulations and policies were designed to promote psychological support for the elderly. Second, an institutional support program aimed at increasing the living conditions of

(as opposed to seeking personal profits)" is based on moral self-cultivation. And it aims at communal solidarity and harmony. The *Lunyu* says that "A nobleman is affable, but not adulatory; a petty man is adulatory, but not affable." Furthermore, "A nobleman seeks harmony but his is not the same as others; a petty man seeks the same but he is not harmonious with others." This shows that the Confucian community rejects standardization, collectivism, and factionalism. It is inevitable that Confucianism emphasizes the autonomous awakening of self-identity and pursues a harmonious community. Of course, the ideal Confucian community in the literature and historical Confucian-society shows diverse variations. However, we need to remind ourselves that intellectuals in Confucian society are devoted to criticizing and renewing the reality in the light of Confucian ideal. Rather, would not the right direction for a healthy sense of community lie in rectifying the distorted communalism in Korean society?

29 Choi Young-jin cites that 86% of respondents agree that supporting parents is children's responsibility and duty, and 80% agree that it can enhance family solidarity when they are filial. "Hanguk sahoe-ui yugyojeok jeontong-gwa gajokjuui," 197-213.

30 Confucian communalism must answer the following questions to be a realistic alternative today: Do the Confucian ethics of community accept cultural relativity and diversity in this context? Is this not a community of undeniable destiny rather than a voluntary choice? How will this fateful community make individual members participate and band together voluntarily to cultivate a meaningful life? These questions highlight critical issues which must be addressed and at least partially resolved if the Confucian ethics of family and community are to be reborn from pre-modern to post-modern ethics. Confucian communalism emphasizes autonomous personal-identity by the awakening of the conscious "I"; however, it faces a dilemma about duty and ideologies at the same time.

seniors at their own home. Third, policies existed which provided direct supported to poor seniors and seniors without direct family members.

The first development the Joseon dynasty should be credited for was the creation of honorary government positions for seniors in their seventies and eighties based on specific rules or qualifications. These positions, defined by state regulations, were designed to encourage reverence for elderly persons regardless of social classes, and did not exist in any comparable form prior to the Joseon dynasty. In the beginning of the Joseon dynasty, these honorary positions were given only to retired government officials. But the honorary positions were extended by King Sejong 世宗 (1418-1450) so that everyone, even members of the lowest social class, automatically received a government position when they turned eighty. In the 18th year of King Jeongjo 正祖 (1794), the total number of beneficiaries amounted to 75145 nationwide.³¹

Second, systems such as *sijeong* 侍丁 and *bokhoje* 復戶制 might be typical examples of institutional support programs. These systems allowed people who were responsible for taking care of their aged parents to get exemption from military duty and forced labor so that they could support their aged parents. This kind of systems were first established in the Goryeo dynasty 高麗 (918-1392) and were developed in the Joseon dynasty. One son was appointed as *sijeong* 侍丁 to take care of his aged parent(s) if the parent(s) were seventy years old, and two sons were appointed if their parent(s) were more than eighty years old. If parent(s) turned ninety, all of his/her sons became *sijeong* so that all the sons could look after their parent(s). This was also true for senior servants. In addition, a son who cared for his sick parents or even for those with incurable disease(s) were exempted from military service.

Third, in addition to the support programs mentioned above, the state, as part of state-level material assistance, provided five *mal* (a Korean unit of measure equivalent to about eighteen liters) of millet on a monthly basis for any elderly widower with no sons, and three *mal* a month for aged widows with no son.³² In addition to the senior welfare programs mentioned above, government officials could receive extra break days to look after their sick parent(s). As shown above, senior welfare was mainly conducted at the family level in Confucian society. The state, however, also had a great concern with senior welfare and tried to provide practical support to enhance the living conditions of senior citizens.

Each of these state-level support programs for senior welfare illustrate that senior welfare systems in the Joseon dynasty were established to satisfy both the material and psychological needs of senior citizens regardless of

31 The number includes aged people at the age of eighty or older, aged married couples at the age of seventy or older, and retired government officials at the age of seventy or older.

32 For support at the national level, see Jo Sung-lyn, *Joseon haengjeong-i seoyang haengjeong boda apseotda*, 305-309.

their social background in Confucian society.³³ The state did not view senior citizens as merely biologically weak people. Rather, the aged were respected and valued as role models of moral self-cultivation, which is one important reason why they enjoyed a relatively high level of social welfare in Korea's pre-modern Confucian society.

3) Support at the Local Community Level

During the Joseon dynasty, *hyangyak* 鄉約 and *chon-gye* 村契 can be singled out as the most significant senior welfare systems at the local community level. *Hyangyak* was a set of self-government rules established and led by the members of the *sadaebu* 士大夫 class (scholar-gentry class) in rural communities. *Chon-gye* can be understood as a set of regulations set by commoners to solve issues important to their community. Influential Neo-Confucian scholars including Yi Hwang and Yi Yi attempted to spread the practice of *hyangyak* for moral edification and disaster relief.³⁴ Some regulations of *hyangyak* reflect a strong sense of community, which include *deyixiangquan* 德業相勸 (encouraging virtuous activity each other), *guoshixianggui* 過失相規 (correcting misconduct of each other), *lisuxiangjiao* 禮俗相交 (encouraging good customs each other), and *huannanxiangxu* 患難相恤 (helping each other in times of difficulty).³⁵ These regulations imply that all the community members should do their own part to build their local community as a society in which mutual care and broadly-initiated moral behavior are encouraged.³⁶

33 Benevolence (*ren* 仁), one of the basic concepts of Confucianism, contains the meaning of the "relationship between various people" as a combination of person (*ren* 人) and two (*er* 二, two; various in this context). One of the Qing dynasty 清 scholars viewed two (*er* 二) as a combination of the sky (the upper stroke) and the land (the down stroke). This explains benevolence (*ren* 仁) as a harmonious relationship between sky, earth, and humans. Since the Song dynasty, benevolence (*ren* 仁) has been extended to have a cosmological meaning and has been understood as the value by which the sky and earth give birth to and save all things. The *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) further posits that individuals are in the presence of a relational net of the universe. We can find out the standard model for humans through the change in natural phenomena in the book. The book claims both that "The great attribute of heaven and earth is the giving and maintaining of life" and that "production and reproduction is what is called change (*yi* 易)." According to the *Yijing*, "begetting and nourishing life means exactly benevolence (*ren* 仁), and if a wise man learn benevolence, he can be enough to lead others." This recognition leads to a spirit of communal sharing. What is known as the principle of *yumintongle* 與民同樂 says that we should enjoy benefits, but we should do so only with others.

34 *Hyangyak* was prevailed mainly in the 16th century, but it gradually declined afterward. It can be criticized that there was a purpose to exercise *sadaebu's* stable dominance.

35 Yun Sa-soon, "Yulgok hyangyak-ui sasangejeok seonghyang," 28.

36 Society is deemed to be held not only by the legal relationship but also by the moral order in the discussion of contemporary communalism. A formal social-relationship without any shared value cannot guarantee any identity of the individuals, while atomized individuals are unable to be happy. This means that democracy can be reproduced, and a person can be happy when a member of society has a co-directed value and ensures the autonomy of

Chon-gye is a set of regulations developed somewhat naturally among villagers to collectively cope with difficulties of their village. It was not developed just for senior welfare; rather, it was formed to maintain their village as a family-like community, but support for senior welfare was one of their common concerns in practicing the regulations of *chon-gye*. Widows and the sick, for instance, could get support through *chon-gye*. *Chon-gye* also promoted the actual practice of filial piety as seen in the regulation *sangseonbeolak* 賞善罰惡 (to reward good and punish evil).³⁷ If an old woman could not get married due to poverty, villagers were supposed to help her to get married. They also worked together to provide funeral services. They were also expected to do their part in raising orphans of their village and tried to arrange their marriages as well. These activities were also practiced in the system of *hyangyak* led by Confucian scholars.

The regulations of *hyangyak* and *chon-gye* have many areas of overlap with those of the *datong* society, most notably in that the *datong* society also encourages mutual effort among community members to establish an ideal society, despite challenging material conditions. In the 19th century, the French priest Charles Dallet (1829-1878) wrote in *Histoire de l'Église de Corée* (History of the Church in Korea):

The great virtue of Korean people is to know how to love others naturally and put it into practice every day. We witnessed how Koreans worked together and got along with each other in a very smooth and collective way to protect, support, rely on, and help each other. However, this kind of Korean national sentiment is expanded and goes beyond the boundary of kinship. Mutual assistance and delightful hospitality to everyone are one of the characteristics of the Koreans. Speaking frankly, these national traits of Korean people might be understood as being superior to the modern civilization which aggravates self-interested life styles.³⁸

Dallet's claims that "this kind of Korean national sentiment is expanded and goes beyond the boundary of kinship" and "delightful hospitality to everyone," show that Confucian ethics and regulations were based on the idea of *wanwu yiti* 萬物一體 and these Confucian principles were influential within the daily life of ordinary members of the Joseon society in the 19th century.

these values. The personal identity can be made up by communication with other people in a community, and true personalization can be built up by the community as well. The idea that personal identity can be built up in social relationships is just a meeting point with Confucian values.

37 Academy of Korean Studies, *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*.

38 Kim Ki-hyun, "Yugyo-ui sahoe bokji jeongsin," 224.

4. Conclusion

Western European countries with relatively developed welfare systems have taken different approaches from those embraced by South Korea in terms of senior welfare. It is commonly said that after Western nations achieved a higher level of material well-being based on their individualist social systems, they started to emphasize mental welfare based on a communal lifestyle. In South Korea, welfare at the state level is not well institutionalized, and support for seniors remains largely regarded as the responsibility of individual families.³⁹ It should be noted that senior welfare systems in South Korea need to be systemized and reinforced at the state level, rather than simply continuing to emphasize family roles in the care of the elderly. In fact, researchers on the subject of social welfare indicate that current South Korean laws about senior welfare are impeded by the concept of familism. They have also found that some seniors do not receive any actual support even though they have children under the prevailed notion that “Protection of seniors [should be done] at the family level first, then at the social level.”

A communal lifestyle was common in the Korean traditional society where rice-farming was one of main livelihoods. However, the traditional notion of familism has become an unsustainable way of life in the capitalist and industrial age. Nevertheless, family relationships and community life are still necessary since mental comfort comes mainly from interpersonal relationships, and family is one of the most important and essential institutions for creating and ensuring individuals’ psychological satisfaction. There are diverse human communities, such as religious groups and small societies and clubs where people share same interests. Yet although these communities are significant sources of happiness, they cannot be alternatives to the family. Ginanne Brownell has pointed out that “Increasing numbers of new-middle-class people in developing countries are looking for nursing homes, while the aged in Western countries want to leave nursing homes and spend their last years at home.”⁴⁰ This remark asks us to rethink the meaning of family in relation to senior welfare, and we should be able to accept an expanded, varied concept of family which might be different from the traditional sense of family.

Although senior welfare in the Joseon dynasty, one of the most prominent states governed by Confucian ideals, was the responsibility of family members, the state nevertheless provided a variety of institutional systems to support seniors. In addition, state policies promoted a social ethos which respect seniors and inspired greater self-esteem among the elderly. The state policies of the Joseon dynasty might suggest that today’s

39 Lee Myung-hee, “Hanguk munhwa: yugyo sahoe-ui yeonbokji munhwa-e gwanhan misijeok gochal,” 265.

40 Choi Young-jin, “Hanguk sahoe-ui yugyojeok jeontong-gwa gajokjuui,” 209.

senior welfare should also create a social consensus to support senior welfare on the basis of harmonious family relationships. As for one's psychological comfort and satisfaction, ensuring a fulfilling and stable family and communal life might be critical.

If we are in search of sustainable lessons we can learn from the Joseon policies on senior welfare might, we would do well to consider the following three points. First of all, the modern understanding of seniors needs to be changed. Current senior welfare perceives seniors as socially inferior people and focuses on protecting them. But the elderly should be considered human beings worth respect and honor. The government and our society at large need to put more effort to restoring a strong sense of self-esteem among the elderly of our society. Material welfare, such as public assistance, should also be extended for this purpose.

Second, it is necessary to approach the relationship between the young and the old in a way to promote harmonious and mutually beneficial family relationships. The practice of moral self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身) in Confucian tradition might need to be restored and exercised. *Xiushen* is a virtue all family members can practice regardless of age and gender. In other words, it is very important to reinforce the concept of human rights even in the family through *xiushen* to build mutually beneficial family relationships.

Finally, institutional support to strengthen family ties is necessary. For a better senior welfare system, the government must find practical ways to build up the bonds of family members. For example, the amounts of pension for the elderly should be adjusted to meet their needs, especially for low-income seniors, and efforts should be made to lighten families' financial burden for material support by expanding governmental medical support for the elderly. The government, for instance, can increase senior care centers and low-cost helper systems. In addition, legal systems which require employers to provide employees with paid holidays so that they can look after their sick parents might be instrumental in enhancing the family bonds and the importance of family role in senior welfare.

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韓國的儒家傳統和老人福利

李善慶

中文摘要

根據國際老人人權團體的研究報告顯示，目前韓國的老人福利政策嚴重落後於許多已開發和開發中國家，甚至比越南、斯里蘭卡等亞洲貧窮國家還要落後。以21世紀歐美先進國家的老年福利政策觀之，目前國際老年福利政策的發展趨勢已經從重視物質的層次轉為重視精神的層次。

筆者通過研究發現，傳統儒教社會雖物質條件惡劣，但卻能使老人們在精神層次上得到較高水準的滿足。因此筆者認為，探討傳統文化的儒家思想，能夠為當前老人福利政策提供既符合韓國文化傳統又較為符合國際發展趨勢的理論基礎，幫助政府訂定既符合傳統文化又能與西方先進國家同步的老人福利政策。為此，本論文將以考察傳統社會老人福利價值觀、政策內容以及特色為起點，闡釋儒家的老人福利理念。

儒家所推崇的理想福利社會乃是大同世界，建基於儒家萬物一體的宇宙觀，其實踐層面必須從個人的修身入手。若就西方理論觀之，大同社會的哲學理念類似於西方的大家庭主義(familism)或社群主義(communitarianism)的思想。就大家庭主義論之，儒家主張老人是後代子孫的生命根源以及家族和諧的中心，由此思想發展出一系列的孝悌倫理，並以此建構家族倫理與社會倫理。於是，孝悌倫理便成為儒家社會老人福利思想的根基，所有與老人有關的社會制度與福利政策莫不是為了發揚傳統敬老尊賢的孝悌精神。儒家眼中的老人既不是弱者的生物，更不是所謂的弱勢群體，而是家族生命的根源與家族和諧的仲裁者。因此，儒家老人福利的特徵在於恢復老人的尊嚴。目前韓國社會在逐漸開始重新重視家族關係與社群意識，但若要以以此發展韓國的老人福利政策，忽略或捨棄傳統文化的哲學思想，就會有文化斷層的不利影響。因為，孝悌倫理與個人修身才是實踐老人福利政策的核心。我們需重建以孝悌倫理與個人修身為核心的老人福利哲學，並以此發展具體可行的政策，這樣才能建立繼往開來且與時俱進的老人福利政策。

關鍵詞：老人福利，儒教，福利哲學，家族主義，孝悌，修身