

Gender mainstreaming in South Korea – a critical analysis through discursive institutionalism around the issue of childcare

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Abstract

The paper aims to reflect critically on the impact of the gender mainstreaming movement upon the issue of childcare in South Korea. To achieve this, I build on data generated from in-depth interviews with key policy actors who participated in relevant policy implementations as well as policy documents collected and analysed through a discursive institutionalism approach. The paper explores two aspects of gender mainstreaming discourse in South Korea and is especially related to the transfer of childcare duty from the Ministry of Welfare and Health to the Ministry of Gender Equality; how it was interpreted in front of politics (*'discourse as content'*) and formulated at the back of it (*'discourse as process'*). I argue that the discourse of gender mainstreaming around the transfer decision was variously approached by different policy interests and constrained by the dominant gender role regarding childcare (rhetoric policy dependency).

Key words: gender mainstreaming movement, discursive institutionalism, South Korea, childcare

Introduction

The paper aims to reflect critically on the impact of the gender mainstreaming movement especially with consideration of the limitations remaining around the issue of childcare in South Korea. Gender mainstreaming movement is a strategy to bring gender sensitive perspectives into the policy decision making processes in order to pursue gender awareness and, as a result, advance gender equality in all policy agendas (Daly 2005; Squires 2007; Walby 2005). This ambitious and rather ambiguous sounding intent has been challenged by questions regarding how to adopt this transnational policy discourse into each nation's domestic policy decision making processes (Kim and Ma 2005). Although there have been a number of methodological tools and operational frames introduced to apply the concept into policy implementation processes, such as gender analysis, gender based assessment and gender budgeting, challenges have revolved around the initial understanding of what

exactly is meant by 'gender mainstreaming' in politics. Nonetheless, significantly, the gender mainstreaming movement has brought a new policy discourse to many East Asian countries including South Korea (Kim and Ma 2005; Y-R Park 2005; T-H Kim 2011).

In South Korea, with the political democratisation of the late 1980s and earlier, attention to gender related issues and the commitment to gender equality became incrementally high profile. Women's issues, such as: the economic and political empowerment of women, women's health, and violence against women were addressed in all presidential elections as primary national tasks that needed addressing. Among these, the issue of childcare was significant, with particular attention being paid to the matter of the position of women in the labour market (Huh 2005; Ma 2005). President Roh (Feb 2003 - Feb 2008) was convinced (The Presidential Counsel of Policy Planning Committee, 2007) that the matter of childcare needed to be considered as a women's issue and decided to transfer the duty of childcare away from the Ministry of Health and Welfare (henceforth 'MHW') to the Ministry of Gender and Equality (henceforth 'MGE'). This transfer of childcare between these two ministries can be seen as the first step in initiating the reform of childcare policy during the Roh administration. It might be seen as a critical juncture bringing about a shift to the government perceiving the demand for childcare as being directly tied to women's issues. However, it can be also argued that the issue of childcare was still only being considered as a women's issue when the decision to make the transfer was made.

It might be true that assumptions about doing childcare in South Korea could not change very much after having been influenced by the gender mainstreaming movement. In fact, the gendered role of childcare responsibility in South Korea has been attributed to traditional Confucian ideas which are likely to lead to women having the unconditional obligation to take on the roles of housewives and/or caregivers in the family, rather than to become active workers in the labour market (Won and Pascall 2004; Sung 2003; Palley and Gelb 1994). The traditional idea of Confucianism has been pointed to when explaining the gendered welfare provision in South Korea, which rests on a 'strong male breadwinner' (Lewis 1992) wherein women have been regarded as having dependant status within the family as wives and mothers. Indeed, this is supported by An's (2008) survey of time spent on paid and unpaid care work which revealed that married women's mean participation (measured in time) in housekeeping was significantly longer compared to that of married

men and single women. The notion of gender equality carried with the gender mainstreaming movement can be contrasted with this Confucian-oriented assumption regarding women's roles.

The paper assesses the discourse development of gender mainstreaming movement upon the policy discourse change regarding the issue of childcare in South Korea. There are two concerns in this paper, firstly how did the gender mainstreaming movement bring the issue of childcare into the Korean politics to be raised as a main policy agenda? Secondly, how was the discourse formulated while the Korean government responded to it? In order to address these questions, I draw on discursive institutionalism (Grube 2016; Schmidt 2010) which will be followed by two aspects of the discourse development; firstly how it was interpreted in front of the politics (discourse as content) and, secondly how it was formulated at the back of it (discourse as process). This is because discursive institutionalism is a useful approach to explain how a policy discourse can lead policy actors to respond to new ideas in order to overcome entrenched policy interests, institutional obstacles and cultural impediments to change (Radaelli and Schmidt 2004). However it does not mean that a new policy discourse can change policy actors and institutions but it is hardly reverse due to earlier policy choices (Schmidt 2010; Finlayson 2007). I address not only how the discourse of gender mainstreaming was interpreted and formulated but also the constraints which obstructed the initial purpose of the gender mainstreaming movement in South Korea.

In the following section, in order to build an analytical framework, I discuss how women's issues especially care and gender have been omitted from main stream political studies, which then leads to a discussion of how the gender mainstreaming movement can offer an insight regarding bringing the issue of care and gender into politics. However, it is also important to address that how the issue of gender can be embraced to explain the change in institutions (Bacchi and Rönnblom 2014). In order to highlight this, discursive institutionalism is adopted as it gives deeper attention to ideas and interactive processes of conveying ideas (Schmidt 2008) compared to other approaches such as historical and rational choice forms of institutionalism. After presenting my research methods, the ways in which the discourse of gender mainstreaming was interpreted and formulated are discussed. I posit that the discourse of gender mainstreaming was constrained by the different policy

interests between the MGE and MHW and the dominant gender assumption regarding childcare in South Korea.

Gender and politics dimension

Early feminists claimed that mainstream political theory often excluded women's issues and underestimated the value of women's caring work (Lovenduski 1981; Pateman 1989). Indeed, during the so-called Golden Age after 1945, welfare regimes in many European developed countries had clear gendering effects that followed as a direct consequence of relying on the male breadwinner as the citizenship norm (Hernes 1988). This perspective was underpinned by the acceptance that a welfare state should be based on the assumption of gender differences between men and women. For example, women should be given the responsibility of caring for their family, whereas men were to hold the rights of the family that were subject to public and rational assessment, which resulted in a heterosexual family with a male-breadwinner and female-housewife (Pateman, 1988). Lovenduski (1981) claimed that the dominant conception of political studies at the time was bound to exclude women, since the assumption was that women usually were not disposed to public power, did not belong to political elites nor hold influential positions in government institutions. Similarly, Pateman (1989) pointed out that for the vast majority, women's issues were outside the proper concerns of political study, as their private matters had been systematically excluded from general theorising by the patriarchal constructions of the time. This perspective leads to the conclusion that mainstream political theory has been masculinised and women's issues have been undermined, thus largely ignoring the gender and politics dimension.

In general, the dimension of gender and politics could be found in the theoretical analysis of the relationship between 'gender' and 'state', called 'state feminism'. This, as Howell (1988) explained, referred to the activists and policies of structures within the state, which were set up officially for the purpose of promoting women's interests and rights. However, Carver (1999) contended that this should be broadly conceptualised as 'gender politics' and co-defined with other concepts for example, class, race, ethnicity and localised cultures. In fact, during the 1990s, gender politics came to the fore over the issue of care, and was intensely debated in Western European welfare states. With the increasing recognition of care and

gender, it became a norm to integrate care and gender into politics (Siim 2000; Squires 2000). In all Western democracies, the various feminist movements put gender equality with respect to care on the political agenda, challenging the divisions between public and private, paid work and care and between equality and difference.

These new movements emerged as supranational forums, involving transnational NGOs, international forums and networks, shaping the discursive resources and various types of claim into new social movements. For example, the gender mainstreaming movement emerged after the 1995 United Nations conference in Beijing, followed by the United Nations World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975. The gender mainstreaming movement is primarily focused on its ability to facilitate women's substantive representation by introducing a gender perspective into the policy making process (Squires 2007). It remains extremely hard to assess the impact of gender mainstreaming on women's substantive representation by relying on information derived from data such as sex disaggregated statistics. Nonetheless, gender mainstreaming represents a platform which can pursue and/or promote distinctive 'women's issues' within the relevant policy context for its aim is to advance gender equality to become an integral part of all public policy-making process (McCrudden 2001:75 cited in Squires 2007).

Gender politics and political opportunity structure

Shifts of gender mainstreaming into the main political arena were explained by Sperling (1983) as 'gender politics' using the 'political opportunity structure' for women's movement organisations in Moscow after the beginning of perestroika (Sperling 1998; 143). Sperling (1998) defined political opportunity structure as a multi-dimensional concept enabling the analysis of some of the reasons for a social movement's success or failure, by drawing on work by McAdam (1996:27). This author's work included four elements; 1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system, 2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity, 3) the presence or absence of elite allies, 4) the state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996 cited in Sperling 1998: 144). Gender politics, accordingly, could be defined as presenting the relationship between women and the state as a mutual engagement or interrogation, in which, to a certain extent, women have power or influence circulate (Waylen 1998). More

practically, Squires (2007) identified three key strategies (quotas, policy agencies and mainstreaming) that have come to represent the increasingly widespread commitment to gender equality within the political sphere, being concerned with parity of political equality of women. In general, these three strategies focus on presence, voice and process, respectively (Squires 2007; 12). Even though these are clearly different, they have generally been advocated as mutually reinforcing ways of securing greater political equality between women and men and they represent a distinctive approach towards gender equality (Squires 2000).

Orloff and Palier (2009) extended this perspective by setting out to identify the ideal dynamics in policy development so as to provide a deeper understanding of the policy-making processes that had previously illuminated by interest- and institutional-based analysis. Regarding this, these authors contended that intellectual processes, in particular, the role of knowledge in politics, are important for influencing change in the policy paradigm. Padamsee (2009) and Beland (2009) also posited that the current change within welfare systems are of a paradigmatic nature, and therefore it is important to include how new policy ideas and discourses are understood and reflected when analysing policy changes and advancements. Feminist approaches for analysing social policy have tended to focus on women in one of two institutional sites: the national parliament or women's policy agencies, defined as 'institutional arrangements inside democratic states devoted to women's policy questions' (Stetson & Mazur, 1995 cited by Annesley 2010; 51).

It is certainly important to put women's political activity in the context of the institutional configuration of a particular political system. This is especially demonstrated by Estévez-Abe and Kim (2014)'s study which questioned why South Korea responded to childcare needs much more vigorously than Japan. They argued that Korea has relatively an open political opportunity structure compared to Japan so that presidents in Korea can reverse policies more easily whereas it is hard to contain the strong bureaucratic resistance found in Japan. It is true when the duty of childcare was transferred from the MHW to MGE there was not much bureaucratic resistance within the government although there were civic organisations that were against the decision, but the Roh government was still able to pursue the decision.

Discursive institutionalism and rhetorical path dependency

The political opportunity structure is not sufficient to explain how a certain policy discourse cannot change existing institutions and policy actors' behaviours. Traditional institutionalism theories including historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism do explain how institutions are changed and/or are unlikely get changed by focusing on historical structure and policy agencies (Pierson 1994; Katzenelson 1997). This institutionalism approach to policy development might be able to examine policy interests and/or as the result institutional performances, yet it still does not explain fully how a certain policy idea can affect the policy interests and institution changes. In particular, in order to bring gender perspective into the traditional institutionalism approach, it is difficult to explore how a policy idea (gender mainstreaming in this study) has impacted on policy interest change as well as institutional changes. A policy idea can be subjective as a policy discourse (Bacchi and Rönnblom 2014), it does produce by itself policy interest and can even formulate policy actors' decision making. In order to explain policy dependency and even policy deviation, the approach should move from stressing the structure of historical legacy ('history matters') to how the ideas formulates policy interests and policy actors' decisions ('ideas matter').

This approach of 'ideas matter' is well argued by Grubes (2016) who explained how certain policy rhetoric can become sticker ('rhetoric policy dependency') by existing political features. More specifically, he argues that policy rhetoric which is more central to the concerns of voters is likely to have a higher policy dependency than policy rhetoric with lower political saliency. This means that a new policy idea that is not attractive for a citizen's vote is very unlikely to be chosen. He also added that the more specific the policy rhetoric the more likely it is to attract path-dependant effects but it is less likely sticker when a general commitment was made. Due to this, policy ideas and a rhetoric which is close to an election promise can become more sticker as an election promise. This election promise is important not only to the politicians but also the electorate who are the most engaged in paying attention to the rhetoric of political leaders. Under doctrines of relevant ministries' responsibility, leaders seek to frame their actions in certain ways to minimise blame but maintain their authority. Therefore, politicians can legitimately change path in response to

changing circumstances without being stuck with their earlier rhetorical commitments. In fact, this rhetoric policy dependency reveals that a policy idea can be subjective itself but also could be formulated by policy interests and policy actors' decision through 'interactive communication process' (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016).

In this sense, the key aspects that I highlight in this paper as my analytical framework were demonstrated by Schmidt. She argued that there are two political spheres which need to work together to shape and change institutions, firstly how things are and should be ('discourse as content') and the front of mind capacity to communicate those ideas by framing them in a particular fashion ('discourse as process') (Schmidt 2014: 4, cited in Grube 2016). As Schmidt put it, the approach to discursive institutionalism demonstrates how 'discursive interactions enable actors to overcome constraints which explanations in terms of interests, path dependence, and/or culture present as overwhelming impediments to action' (Schmidt 2010:4). This explanatory approach can be very useful to explain how policy actors reshape ideas in order to change institutions and even why they are often limited by their capacity to make a compelling case when advocating for change.

With respect to the case of gender mainstreaming in South Korea, the discursive institutionalism approach enables me understand how institutions (the government and the MGE in this paper) were primarily concerned with the idea of gender mainstreaming, in order to pursue their interests, values and institutional performance especially regarding the issue of childcare. Also it will allow me to explore the dynamic of how the idea of gender mainstreaming was drawn to the issue of women's caring work within the relevance of social, political and historical context in South Korea. Lastly it provides me with the insight of how the idea of gender mainstreaming was communicated within an interactive political process which conveys to the existing ideas around the gender role in childcare (rhetoric policy dependency).

I set out an analytical framework which gives two aspects of the policy discourse of gender mainstreaming, discourse as content and discourse as process, with specific discussion points for each, as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1 The analytical framework for the study

Discourse as content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What did the policy discourse initially aim for? ▪ How did the policy discourse become a main policy agenda? ▪ What factors were influencing? ▪ What was the most relevant issue and why?
Discourse as process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What were the relevant policy initiatives proposed? ▪ Who proposed it and what were the policy interests? ▪ How did the policy options reinforce or challenge exiting ideas?

The following section explains how I gathered the data in order to apply the discursive institutionalism approach to the gender mainstreaming movement. Then I move to explore how the gender mainstreaming discourse was formulated in South Korea and as the result how it impacted on the issue of childcare in Korean childcare policy.

Research methods

As with institutional approaches, including Schmidt (2010), I take a constructionist view of the social world, that is, my epistemological perspective considers social phenomena to be constructed by people or their actions. This also relates to my research method approach as an epistemological basis; how concept and/or theory are generated to interpret social phenomena and there are extensive debates as to whether a researcher can be objective and produce objectivity in a study (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). With respect to this, the studies that engage in qualitative investigations more usually involve an inductive stance. This differs from undertaking that are from the quantitative paradigm in that these start with a theory or proposition which is relied on to shape loosely the subsequent data collection (Silverman 2011). The qualitative epistemological approach tends to allow theory to emerge from the data that has been gathered. Proponents of constructionism look to external social structures and institutions and consider the ways in which these shape social reality as they contend that the world is socially constructed through different forms of knowledge (Goodman 1978, cited in Flick 2009).

Thus given my adopted epistemological foundation of constructivism, which largely lies within the qualitative paradigm, qualitative tools are appropriate as they allow me to capture the actions and interpretations of people during their social interactions (Flick 2009; Silverman 2011). Because of the nature of the study, qualitative research tools can capture individual policy actors' emotions and other subjective aspects associated with the evolving lives of policy interests as well as policy groups (Becker 2004; Berg 2007). In particular Nelson (1990) delineated that in-depth interviews are the best way to gather information that is somewhat sensitive and subjective. These advantages prompted me to employ in-depth interviews as a technique with the aim of exploring the policy discourse change around the issue of care while the duty of childcare was transferred from the MHW to MGE.

In Table 2 below, I present details regarding the sixteen interviewees recruited through purposive sampling with whom I held in-depth interviews and who responded to semi-structured questionnaires. Each interviewee played an important role as a key policy actor during the period of interest. Over time, many of them held different positions within the policy making arena and hence, were deemed well equipped to provide insights regarding the focal interest, i.e. the transfer of the duty of childcare from MHW to MGW.

Table 2 Background information on the selected interviewees

Interviewees	Position and role	Main activities
1	Political appointee	A chairperson in a presidential advisory body in the Blue House ¹
2	Governmental researcher	A senior researcher on childcare and family in the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs
3	Academic consultant / Professor	A main actor who worked on the revision of the Childcare Act in 2004 and a professor in a department of Social Welfare
4	Women's group organisation leader	A secretary general in the Korean Women's Association United
5	Parents' group organisation leader	A secretary general of the parental corporation association
6	The first minister of the Ministry of Gender and Equality	Previously the representative of the Korean Women's Association United
7	Senior civil servant	A head of department of childcare in the Ministry of Gender and Equality
8	Governmental researcher	A senior researcher in the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education under the Prime Minister

9	Parliamentary member	The Director of the Bureau of Women in Democratic Party
10	Academic consultant / NGO group leader / Professor	The leader on the issue of childcare in the Committee of Social Welfare in the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy
11	Political appointee	A public official in special services in social policy in the Blue House
12	Senior civil servant	A leader of the planning team on childcare in the City Hall of Seoul
13	Academic consultant / Professor	A professor in a department of Economics and currently the President of the Korean Association of Public Finance
14	The second minister of the Ministry of Gender and Equality	Previously a professor in a department of Sociology and previously the director in the Korean Women's Development Institute
15	Academic consultant / Professor	A professor in a department of Children and Family
16	Governmental researcher	A senior researcher on childcare and family in the research department in the City Hall of Seoul

Note: 1. The Blue House is the Korean presidential residence and is called 'Cheongwadae'

In addition, documentary analysis was undertaken in order to establish the policy environment and to provide the context to the in-depth interviews. Yanow (2000) claimed that document analysis can provide background information for conversational interviews with key actors. Thus, the matters covered in the relevant policy documents could supply me with background information for the interviews with the selected key policy actors (Scott 1990). The relevant policy documents were deemed to serve as the principal artefacts from which I could understand how, according to the documentary records, a policy issue was conceptualised and evaluated (Freeman & Maybin 2011).

Before employing the qualitative data in the analytical framework, the following section introduces the background of the gender mainstreaming movement in South Korea, especially focused on the Kim (Feb 1998 – Feb 2003) and Roh (Feb 2003 – Feb 2008) governments, which were politically committed to bringing gender equality into politics.

Gender mainstreaming movement in the Korean governments; the Kim and Roh administrations

The gender mainstreaming movement in South Korea was accepted as a key strategy for achieving women's empowerment followed by the United Nations issuing their statement on gender mainstreaming in the Platform for Action at the fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (Huh 2005; Ma 2005). This transnational policy discourse had brought substantial awareness in policy decision making process to South Korea. For example, a gender sensitive policy-making process was pursued in order to recognise different policy impacts on gender. Moreover, the Korean government passed the 'Basic Act on Women's Development' at the end of 1995 as one of the most noticeable efforts was to realise a gender equal society. In fact the awareness of gender was assisted by the creation of the Presidential Commission on Women's Affairs in 1995, subsequently made into the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2001 under President Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003). In fact, this initiation of the MGE had been long awaited by women's associations such as the Korean National Council of Women (KNCW) and the Korean Women's Association United (KWAU). Under initiatives of the lead agency, the MGE especially from 2001 to 2006, there were great number of technical tools which had been developed to enhance awareness of gender, such as gender impact assessment, gender sensitive budgeting and gender awareness training as the key ingredients of gender mainstreaming. The Roh government which was in the power at the time embraced the notion of gender mainstreaming as a new tool which could be used to transform the whole policy making process.

Given such institutional developments in progressing gender equality promoted by these global movements during this period, the Korean government already had fertile ground in which to sow the seeds of further action on promoting equality of opportunity (Y-h Kim 2001; C-B Park 2005). This opening up of the Korean political arena towards equal opportunities may have been significant in providing space for bringing gender issues into politics and assisted in setting up structures for promoting women's interests and rights (Siim 2000; Sperling 1998; Squires 2000).

Gender mainstreaming discourse as content

There is no doubt that this gender mainstreaming movement was radically driven through the two governments of Kim and Roh. Especially President Roh, who was the successor of Kim reshuffled his cabinet with a fair number of female politicians. This was a completely

new departure from previous governments even from the Kim. To being with, President Roh appointed Mrs Myeong-Sook Han as Prime Minister. The appointment of Mrs Han as Prime Minister could be a critical point which the Korean government actively started to appoint femocrats within the government. Mrs Han previously had worked for women's empowerment and rights, especially for marginalised women, in feminist activist groups such as the 'Korean Women-link' and 'Korean Women Association United' (KWAU). Following her, Mrs Gum-Sil Kang was elected as the minister in the Ministry of Justice. She had worked as an NGO lawyer protecting basic human rights and for social justice for minority groups. Most daily newspapers, at that time, reported her appointment as being 'sensational and a ground-breaking initiation' with comments¹ that remarked on the fact that she was the first female minister in the Ministry of Justice and the youngest to date. Under Minister Mrs Hwa-jung Kim in the MHW, there were a number of female chairpersons of committees appointed, including Professor Hye-kyoung Lee to the Presidential Committee on Social Inclusion, one of the presidential advisory bodies. In fact, the increasing place of women's representation in politics is one of key strategies which the gender mainstreaming discourse presents (Squires 2007).

I propose that these increased number of female politicians within the cabinet truly helped the government to be relatively more open-minded towards gender matters as compared to the situation under previous administrations. An interview I held with the former minister in the MGE demonstrates that the higher numbers of female politicians had contributed to the active public discussion of diverse gender issues, and in so doing, they helped to bring these to register at the centre of the policy agenda.

I was quite lucky to be with other female politicians in my ministerial period. For example, the Prime Minister, Mrs Han, the two ministers, Mrs Kang in Justice and Mrs Kim in the Ministry of Health and Welfare and some female bureaucrats as well. Surprisingly, there were some female members in the Cabinet as well, who had feminist perspectives. That was not all. In the National Assembly too, you know. I reckon there were a fair number of female members in the Congress. I think these environments worked with me very well, especially to bring the issue of caring work into the public arena. They were actually willing to discuss this and never asked why it was important, which is a surprise, as male politicians often do. (Interviewee 6, the first minister of MGE)

¹ The article is available from <http://www.sisapress.com/journal/article/132238> [accessed 13rd August 2016]

Within this gender friendly landscape forming the policy making environment, it can be said that the decision to transfer the duty of childcare from the MHW to the MGE was not a casual decision. That is, the decision to take this responsibility away from the MHW can be termed 'a critical point' which the government started taking the issue of childcare with the perspective of gender equality as the name of MGE represented. Indeed, the Presidential Counsel of Policy Planning Committee within the Blue House clarified the key decision underlying that 'the view of caring work, especially that for children, needed to be approached by taking into account the woman's perspective, women being the main carers in the home' (The Presidential Counsel of Policy Planning Committee, 2007).

Study indicates that in fact the decision was driven by President Roh and his strong commitment to childcare can be found as one of his election pledges, declaring that 'Once you give a birth, the Government will strongly support all childcare' (Congratulatory address given in the Women's Week Celebration, 4th July 2003). This presidential promise was also directly connected to addressing the policy agenda of childcare being considered to be a national undertaking and demonstrates the intention to share responsibility for childcare between the family and the state. Moreover, this address emphasised how determined President Roh was to achieve transfer of the matter to the MGW, as revealed in the interview with a senior civil servant within the MGE:

I had doubt saying that the transfer was achieved by the President's strong will. As long as the President kept saying that the duty should be transferred to the MGE, who could have been against him? (Interviewee 7, senior civil servant)

This decision to transfer responsibility for childcare was also actively driven by appraisals criticising that while it had been within the MHW it had been administered without any specific gender perspectives. One interviewee (interviewee 3, academic consultant / professor) confirmed that there had been little discussion of why the issue of gender mattered to childcare and how to improve the service quality. Moreover, the proportion of the total budget available for the ministry to allocate to childcare had historically been fairly small compared to its other welfare spending allocations. Further, childcare provision was only available to low income families without sufficient resources to look after their own children whilst the parents were working (H-J Yoo 2002). The service was, therefore, not

universal and it is little wonder that the matter of childcare was not taken as a priority within the MHW, according to interviewee 4, they also had to manage major social security systems such as those for national pensions, health insurance and employment. Similarly, interviewee 7, a senior civil servant who had worked for the department of childcare in the MHW summed up the lowly status of the work:

The task of childcare used to be regarded as a very trivial business within the MHW, and it was not popular at all. No one wanted to have this job in their role, because of the fairly small budget and even smaller political kudos it attracted. All the documents relating to this job were always put at the bottom of the pile in their in-tray. (Interviewee 7, senior civil servant)

From such developments, it appears that President Roh strongly believed that the issue of childcare should be resolved in ways that considered both women's career demands and their responsibilities as carers. One respondent, a senior civil servant, gave testimony that Mr Roh studied the diverse debates around care and gender, and another the minister said he had been willing to take on board the arguments made by feminists and advocates of change located in the progressive camp (interviewees 7 and 6). Likewise, one of the senior governmental researchers revealed in the interview that 'President Roh strongly convinced himself that the issue of childcare needed to be categorised as a women's issue'. This appreciation of the relation between caring work and women's issues appears to have prompted the President's decision to transfer childcare between the MHW and MGE, as soon as he came into power. He publicly announced that childcare should be a more urgent and significant issue for working mums than any other matter (The Presidential Counsel of Policy Committee, 2007).

Thus, with President Roh's strong commitment to gender and childcare, the achievement of the transfer can be the critical point which emphasised the issue of women as vital in relation to the business of childcare. The next section more specifically focuses on what were the relevant policy initiatives proposed, who proposed them and what were the policy interests and how did the policy options reinforce or challenge exiting ideas.

Gender mainstreaming discourse as process

If so, who were deeply involved with this transfer process? The following brings forward two dynamics of policy interest; one it between the Korea Women's Association United (henceforth 'KWAU') and the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (henceforth 'PSPD'), the other is between The Korea Edu-Care Association (KECA) and the Korean Private Nursery Education Association (KPNEA).

Policy interest between KWAU and PSPD

Facilitating the decision to the transfer the responsibility for childcare to the MGE was arduous owing to bitter opposition from social welfare professions which included practitioners in social welfare and scholars from the academic community who reacted strongly against this decision. Together they organized protests in front of the national assembly to object to the transfer of childcare responsibility from the MHW to the MGE (interviewees 7 and 10, a senior civil servant and an NGO group leader, respectively). One of these informants, a senior civil servant, described the situation at that time as their 'being surrounded by enemies on all sides'. In fact, their response was not so surprising considering that up until that time, the main work of social welfare professionals, including childcare professionals, had been handled by the MHW and they did not want it to be handed over to the MGE. The social welfare interest group plausibly claimed that childcare policy needed to be approached with children's well-being and development as the priority rather than women and gender matters being put to the fore (interviewee 10, NGO group leader). He added that 'there was no matter of gender in understanding childcare, even in the civil organisation PSPD (People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy) that was representing the professionals at that time'.

The issue of the transfer of childcare away from the MHW was a concern to one particular civil organisation, the PSPD. The insistence that child wellbeing should be prioritised was shared by this civil group. To date, they have been working on promoting people's participation in governmental decision making processes and socio economic reforms, as well as on strengthening social security and securing minimum living standards. This civil organisation apparently could not help but take up the role of advocating on behalf of the social welfare professionals and the scholars who were opposed to the transfer (interviewee 10, NGO group leader). It transpired that the PSPD's subcommittee which dealt with general

affairs of social welfare, their 'Social Welfare Committee', had been working in support of social workers in the field and most of the committee members were professors in relevant university departments.

It might therefore be taken for granted that this civil organisation would take up the fight on behalf of social welfare workers and scholars, given the PSPD's background and its membership, but it appears that, in the end, regarding the transfer, its position was rather unclear. On the wider matter of childcare, the PSPD had been working with the KWAU which was in favour of the governmental decision on the transfer. Often, both these organisations tended to share opinions regarding childcare policy directions, announcing similar statements. However, at around the time of the governmental decision, when statements by the KWAU which advocated for the transfer were made public, the group leader of PSPD admitted that 'the name of the PSPD was dropped from the list of its supporters'.

The KWAU is a long standing representative NGOs for women's rights and empowerment in South Korea. They have been very active in monitoring and developing progressive childcare policy and have constantly argued that the issue of childcare should not be separated from issues of the family and the nature of caring work as this is mainly undertaken by women in the home (interviewee 4, women's group organisation leader). The interviewee from the women's group explained that 'the KWAU aims to stand for women's working rights so that the socialisation of care could not be more important than from this point of view'. With regard to the transfer of childcare out of the remit of the MHW, they had argued that the duty of childcare had to be given to the MGE when this was first established under Kim's government in 2001. When the issue of the transfer became a public debate, they reiterated how the policy setting for childcare matters was closely related to women's situations in the labour market and the improvement of gender equality. With this perspective on childcare issues, the KWAU was a significant critic of the ways in which the MHW had dealt with childcare policy. In fact, one of their main points of contention was that the MHW focused only on the suppliers providing childcare services in the market place whereas they argued that the services should, in fact, be centred on the needs of service users (Namyoon 2005).

As mentioned above, the PSPD and KWAU tended to share similar opinions over government actions especially those on childcare issues. That is, the PSPD had been inclined to be on the side of the KWAU. However, regarding this issue of the transfer, the PSPD had struggled with finding their own voice. The interviewee from the PSPD revealed that they decided to have their name dropped from the KWAU statement on the issue of transfer and then, instead, they complained that the decision had been taken by the government unilaterally. They expressed their anger at this unilateral action, and even with the minister of the MHW who carried it out. The statement by the PSPD shows their anger:

We are unclear about what the transfer of the childcare duty from the MHW to the MGE will contribute to the current affairs on the childcare issue we have at this time. We also must ask the government why the decision had to be taken unilaterally without enough discussion to gather social consensus. (Statements by the PSPD, 1st Apr 2003)

The understanding of children's well-being and comprehension of child development were considered as the main principle among the social welfare groups, whilst concerns about parents' work-life balance and the extant imbalance in gender relations in caring work were strongly voiced by women's groups, particularly the KWAU at this time. These conflicting focuses placed on childcare policy eventually drove a split between the two groups, i.e. the group advocating for social welfare profession and their counterparts representing women. This divide was even felt in academia between the disciplines of social welfare and women's studies. Within this situation, the PSPD's position appears to be ambiguous regarding whether they were on the side of either the social welfare or the women's groups. In fact, the concern that they finally chose to voice in public statements was based on the argument that the decision for the transfer should have been through a full democratic procedure involving different opinions collected from many relevant parties.

Policy interest between KECA and KPNEA

On the other hand, the governmental trial to test run the idea of the transfer of the duty for childcare from the MHW to the MGE resulted in serious conflict emerging between these two associations. Previously, when the duty was managed by the MHW, the KECA members

(i.e. public sector providers) were supported by central and local governmental subsidies which were used to cover their operational costs, including paying for care workers' salaries. In contrast, there had been little money for the KPNEA members (i.e. private sector providers), since the MHW had followed a certain policy that prohibited this, thus illustrating central governmental support was only for public and national facilities (MHW, 2004). However, the MHW did announce that in special circumstances, they would support some private day-care centres but only when the private centres accommodated children from families that were below a minimal income threshold (MHW, 2004). This served to cut the waiting lists of poorer families who were often left waiting, trying to register their children at the more popular public facilities. Obviously, this additional clause did not provide any comfort to those private owners who remained excluded from receiving governmental aid. Moreover, children from low income families were prioritised when applying to attend public facilities and in fact these families, as well as many others not classified as being on low income, preferred their children to attend publicly run provision as it offered a better quality of service with lower service cost (MOGEF, 2006).

As indicated by one of the interviewees, resolving this unequal treatment by the government regarding the subsidy, meant the KPNEA was very keen on being placed under the MGE, when the transfer was up for discussion within the government (interviewee 7, senior civil servant). She explained the reason for this was because 'the KPNEA was poorly treated by the MHW while they were under the MHW'. Then she described the conflict between the KPNEA and the MHW during the period when it was responsible for childcare:

The private association (KPNEA) must have been upset about what MHW had done for them so far. At the beginning, when the government needed to build childcare facilities in the late 1980s, the government encouraged them to build and the government borrowed the money from the National Pension Fund. Then the number of childcare facilities dramatically increased and they (the private providers) were over the moon, imagining that they would get golden eggs within a short time. However, they must have felt that they were then abandoned by the MHW and must have been quite upset about the governmental unfairness in the way they were treated. (Interviewee 7, senior civil servant)

In contrast, the public association, the Korea Edu-Care Association (KECA) was against the decision regarding the transfer proposed by the Roh government. Another comment from this senior servant shows that they were truly worried that the subsidy for public childcare centres which they obtained from the government could be reduced and their preferential treatment by the government might be lost (interviewee 7, senior civil servant). She simply explained the reason for this, 'Of course they cannot be happy about this, because the size of the pie they get to share from the MHW will be reduced. Won't it?' The governmental decision to transfer the duty therefore brought about conflict between the KECA and the government, and possibly worsened the relation between the KECA and the private association KPNEA. According to the interview comments from her, these two childcare facilities associations could be described as the 'prominent range of mountains in the Korean care market, being staked out against each other as competitors wanting to have more children registered. The root cause of this competitive relationship started from the differentiated governmental subsidy which was only given to the public ones'.

The rhetoric policy dependency

Apart from these different policy interests between different policy agencies, it should be also noted that from the beginning, the discourse of gender mainstreaming itself was merely political rhetoric with an ambiguous meaning (Y Kim & Ma 2004). That is, following the Beijing World Conference on Women (1995), the terminologies of gender and gender mainstreaming had been used without any exact explanation. In fact, these terms were widely used among civil servants and lawmakers without ever being defined, even by governmental researchers (Han, Jang, Kim & Huh 2008; E-S Kim 2008; Ma 2007). Moreover, during my interviews it transpired that, in the opinion of one governmental researcher, the notion of gender mainstreaming was not fully embedded among civil servants and politicians.

We could make the foundations for the discourse of gender equality in our society through the gender mainstream movement. However, it is doubtful whether we reached compliance with the discourse in the policy making process. It might have been too early to have those gender perspectives in our society, particularly

when some male governmental bureaucrats were still not aware of gender sensitive policies. (Interviewee 2, governmental researcher)

For instance, this dominant idea of gender role can be seen in the several changes of the name of the Ministry of Gender and Equality. Regarding the name, it changed four times after the department was first established in 2001 with the name of the Ministry of Gender Equality, which was simply called, in Korean, the Ministry of Women (see Table 2 below). The name was changed to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2005, but was again actually called, in Korean, the Ministry of Women and Family, with the duties of family and childcare having been transferred to it in June 2004 from the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW). Next, it was entitled the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2008 and once again² was changed to be called the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2010.

Table 2 The name changes of the Ministry of Gender and Equality

	English	Korean
Jan 2001	Ministry of Gender Equality Planning and complication of women's policies, prevention and relief of gender discrimination	Ministry of Women 여성부 (Yeosungboo)
June 2005	Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Dealing with women, family and infant care duties	Ministry of Women and Family 여성가족부 (Yeosunggajokboo)
Feb 2008	Ministry of Gender Equality Planning and complication of women's empowerment and status improvement	Ministry of Women 여성부 (Yeosungboo)
March 2010 - presence	Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Dealing with women, young people and family	Ministry of Women and Family 여성가족부 (Yeosunggajokboo)

Source: The website of the Ministry, which is available from http://www.mogef.go.kr/korea/view/intro/intro01_03.jsp [accessed 11th August 2016]

² The change in February 2008 happened with the new administration under President Lee who came into power after President Roh. With this change in the name, the Lee government handed the duty of childcare back to the Ministry of Health and Welfare. My interview with one political appointee/academic consultant commented on this transfer saying that 'the concern about gender issues in caring work was reduced after this transfer under the Lee government'.

There can be several reasons advanced for why these changes were made, but the key point is the instability regarding the Ministry's name. With respect to the Korean terminology of the phrase 'gender equality', this may not have been a comfortable phrase, even for policy makers to use and so the term 'women's policy' may have been adopted as being more acceptable. Also, the terminology surrounding the matter of gender equality in Korean politics shows that the issue of gender equality might have only been understood as women issues rather than understanding gender driven differences in opportunities between men and women. Moreover, as discussed earlier, the idea of childcare still remaining a women's role followed the traditional Confucian path.

Conclusion and discussion

So, what did we learn from the gender mainstreaming movement and what did we miss out? Through the lens of discursive institutionalism, it is apparent that the initial idea of the gender mainstreaming movement was sufficiently strong to bring an awareness of gender into the politics. As a result, a number of technical tools such as gender assessment and gender budgeting was made feasible and implemented. Moreover it inspired the President to appoint femocrats within the Korean political system and the interview data revealed that the political environment had become more gender friendly. Within this political arena, it must have been relatively open to the idea of gender with and finally, the decision to make a transfer of the duty of childcare from the MHW to the MGE was made which was consistent with President Roh's strong commitment to gender and care.

However, in this paper, I highlight two limitations of this state-oriented gender mainstreaming discourse in South Korea. Firstly, the discourse of the gender mainstreaming movement has largely remained as just political rhetoric with an ambiguous meaning rather than being absorbed into Korean politics as a fully-fledged direction of travel (Han, Jang, Kim & Huh 2008; Huh, 2005; T.-H Kim 2011, Ma 2005; C.-B Park 2005). Real political efforts were made to bring gender awareness into the policy making process especially in the area of childcare, but the interview data collected for this paper have shown that the terminologies of 'gender' and 'gender mainstreaming movement' were often used without any exact explanation even among civil servants and governmental researchers. The name changes of

the Ministry of Gender and Equality (MGE) indicate that the term 'gender equality' still had a long way to go in order to be absorbed seamlessly into the name of the ministry in the Korean language. Moreover, regarding the transfer of the duty of childcare from the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW) to the Ministry of Gender and Equality (MGE), it may have been that the social expectation of a woman assuming the traditional role as the main carer within a family was still dominant throughout the decision making over the transfer. Notwithstanding this, I argue strongly that the event of the transfer should be considered as a turning point when concern was being expressed about childcare along with women's issues in politics. At the same time, the transfer also shed light on the prevailing limited understanding of care and gender. Thus, moving the duty of childcare to the 'Ministry of Women' is consistent with the stereotyped view regarding the role of women as carers, which further underlines what the role of women was expected to be at the time of the decision to make the transfer.

Secondly, despite considerable political endeavour to bring gender issues into politics, a lack of maturity in understanding the relations between care and gender has been clearly revealed. The understanding of 'gender' in respect to undertaking caring work, does not only refer to the issue of women's roles as a caregiver, but also needs to include comprehension of the different structural limitations that men and women experience in employing care services in the care market as well as when they are participating in the labour market (Millar 2006). As long as women's position in the labour market is marginalised they will often have a dual role, and their roles are principally defined as those of caregivers at home, unlike men's (Huh, 2005; Y. Kim & Ma 2004; Ma 2005, Peng, 2009). More specifically these dissimilar conditions might bring about different impacts on decision making between men and women, particularly regarding whether to employ childcare services or to do the childcare work themselves, as well as whether a woman should take part time or full time employment, or not work at all (Connelly, 1992; Joshi, 1995; Joshi et al, 1999). Such potentially negative impacts on women should have been considered within the policy discourse context but the data in this study show very little evidence of an awareness of the dissimilar conditions between men and women with regards structural limitations.

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