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Politics of Defamilialisation: A Comparison of Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain¹

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Abstract

This article investigates the politics of “defamilialisation of care” in four familialist countries—Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain—during the past fifteen years. By “defamilialisation of care,” we refer to those public policies, which aim at reducing the care responsibility of the family—both for the young and the old. We build upon the existing literature on new social risks by highlighting the role of those macro-political institutions such as electoral systems and government types in order to demonstrate there are, at least, two types of politics of defamilialisation: election-oriented versus problem-oriented. We attribute different policy outcomes in the four familialist countries to their

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specific institutional configurations rather than to partisan government compositions or different cultural orientations.

Key Words:Childcare, Elderly Care, Familialism, Gender, Welfare, Italy, Spain, Japan, Korea, New social risks

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the politics of “defamilialisation of care” in four familialist countries—Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain—during the past fifteen years. By “defamilialisation of care,” we refer to those public policies, which aim at reducing the care responsibility of the family—both for the young and the old. For our purpose, we consider policy decisions to provide care services publicly and/or to publicly subsidize market-based provision of care services to be equally defamilialising. Childcare and Long-Term Care for frail elderly (LTC hereafter) have been two important areas of recent welfare state expansions related to new social risks (NSR hereafter). The existing European scholarship on NSR highlights important transformations that have occurred in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, but downplays the changes in Southern Europe and rarely refer to East Asia (Bonoli 2013; da Roit and Sabatinelli 2013; Knijn and Saraceno 2010; Morgan 2013; León and Pavolini 2014; Palier and Martin 2007).

Our four-country comparison enables us to identify previously overlooked policy variations and to put forth a new causal argument to explain them. There have been more dramatic policy changes in Korea and Spain relative to Italy and Japan. Interestingly, these policy shifts in Korea and Spain were also accompanied by other family and gender equality policies beyond social policies. What factors enabled these big shifts in Korea and Spain? Does the absence of such factors explain why policy changes were slower in Italy and Japan? Japan provides a further puzzle. While it lagged behind other countries in childcare expansion, it successfully implemented a big policy shift in LTC. In contrast, Italy had seen very little policy change in childcare and LTC. In sum, we want to understand what conditions promote the defamilialisation of care in countries with very strong familism. This is an important question also because understanding how

care regimes, which institutionalize specific gender relations, change is of crucial importance from a feminist perspective (Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Daly and Lewis 2000; Knijn and Ungerson 1997; Lister 1994; Michel and Mahon eds. 2002; Orloff 1993; Pfau-Effinger, Flaquer and Jensen 2009; Saraceno 1994).

We build upon the existing literature on NSR by developing a more nuanced institutional argument. We explain how specific combinations of past social policies and political institutions give rise to very different politics—“election-oriented” versus “problem-oriented.” We argue that the specific institutional configurations account for the pattern of defamilialisation of care in our four cases. In countries, where political institutions generated majoritarian political dynamics as in Korea and Spain, voters know that the winning party sets policies for several years to come. This encourages more intense policy-based competition between the parties at every election cycle. When the Prime Minister (or President) has strong agenda-setting power, electoral pledges are more likely to become policies as in Spain and Korea. Such “election-oriented” policy shifts did not occur in Italy and Japan, where the institutional preconditions for majoritarian politics were absent. Japan, however, managed to implement a major LTC reform through “problem-oriented” politics. The specific designs of the pre-existing social policies turned the shortage of formal elderly care services into a severe policy issue in Japan, while the Italian pre-existing policies and the availability of cheap migrant care workers had the opposite effect. The formal policy consultation process in Japan, which included all the stakeholders, facilitated a more “quiet” but long process of negotiations which led to a big “problem-oriented” policy shift in LTC.

The rest of the article proceeds in four sections. Section II documents the cross-national variations in childcare and LTC for the elderly in the four countries, which this paper seeks to explain. Section III reviews and evaluates the relevant literatures. Section IV presents our causal argument. Section V applies it to the four country cases. Section VI briefly concludes.

II. Defamilialisation of Care in Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain

The four familialist countries—Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain—have gone through phases of “defamilialisation” at different times and to varying degrees (see also Saraceno’s article on this issue). Figures 1 and 2 visualize the recent policy developments in formal childcare for 0-2 year-olds and LTC, respectively, by situating our four countries in a comparative perspective. As Figure 1 shows, during the 2000s, Korea has dramatically increased its formal childcare enrolment rates for infants in absolute terms—well over the OECD average. Although Spain lags behind Korea in the absolute levels, the relative change in Spain has been significant: the enrolment rates in Korean during the period covered here expanded nearly 300% while the rates in Spain expanded slightly less than 400%. In contrast, the changes have been more limited in Italy and Japan. Japan has been the most stagnant country in this respect despite numerous government plans to increase the enrolment rate. Interestingly, Italy experienced expansion between 2003 and 2007, but its expansion was very modest in absolute terms (León and Pavolini 2014; Sabatinelli 2010). It is worth noting that the childcare enrolment rates in Italy and Japan for Under 3s are more favorable than those in Germany, which so many scholars consider as a successful case of the “Swedish turn” in its work-family reconciliation policies.

[Figures 1 and 2 around here]

Figure 2 shows how coverage has increased in the LTC services since the early 2000s. Because of our interest in defamilialisation, we look at services-in-kind and not at cash allowance, which can be used to reward family caregivers. Japan introduced a new social insurance scheme for LTC in 2000, and today provides coverage rates well above the OECD average, while Italy, Korea and Spain fall below (Campbell and Ikegami 2000; Peng 2002). The cut-off year of the early 2000s in Figure 2 results in an underestimation of coverage growth in Japan, because the coverage rates for home help were well below 1% before the introduction of the LTC Insurance.² Hence the coverage rates in Japan grew more than 10 times. Korea also introduced a new LTC Insurance (Choi 2014; Lee and Cho 2012; Estévez-Abe and Kim 2014). Although its coverage rates are not high in absolute terms, they increased 20 times during the 2000s. Italy and Spain, in contrast, show modest increases during the same period. Legally speaking, Spain is different from Italy. Spain made a big leap by introducing tax-financed universal access to LTC care (*la Ley de Dependencia* in 2006). However, the financial crisis has delayed its full implementation (León and Pavolini 2014). As Oliver and Matzke (2014) point out, the Italian policy landscape was far from “frozen.” In both elderly care and childcare, there have been numerous legislative initiatives and attempts at all levels of the government—including initiatives at regional and local levels in what has been labelled as a process of “modernization from below” (León and Pavolini, 2014;

² Own calculations based on the 1995 data taken from Aging Society White Paper (Cabinet Office 1997), Tables 1-2-2, 3-2-7, 3-2-9.

Ferrera and Maino, 2014). However, Oliver and Matzke fail to show that some regions significantly expanded care provision.³

Table 1 summarizes the cross-national variations discussed so far.

[Table 1 around here]

III. Beyond Existing Theories—Unresolved Puzzles

It is important to state outright that most studies of care do not necessarily frame the issue as “politics of defamilialisation.” Childcare has been treated as a subset of family-work reconciliation policies that include paid leaves for parents, although not all such policies promote defamilialisation (Saraceno and Keck 2010). Very few have concurrently studied the politics of childcare and LTC together (see Schoppa 2008 for an important exception). Below, we have summarized existing causal arguments about expansions in childcare and LTC into three camps.

(i) The Magnitude of Policy Pressures

The literature on LTC tends to emphasize the magnitude of policy pressures as the main reason for policy shifts (Campbell, Ikegami and Gibson 2010; Pavolini and Ranci 2008, 2013; Theobald and Hempel 2013). Many governments face immense pressures as the number of frail elderly increased as a result of improvements in longevity. This emphasis on policy pressures is also seen in the literature on welfare reforms (Häusermann 2012, for instance). If the magnitude of policy pressures were the main causal factor, we would expect more significant reforms and care service expansion in Italy and Japan, which face the acutest demographic problems. In Japan 25% of its

³Their own data (Table 1 in their article) show a very stable level of childcare provision across all regions in Italy.

population are 65 or older 2013, followed by Italy's 20.9%, Spain's 17.9% and Korea's 12.2 % (OECD Statistics online). However, while Japan dramatically reformed its LTC policies, Italy did not. Neither did these two countries expand childcare in a significant way. In contrast, the biggest change occurred in a demographically much younger Korea.

Of course, demographic aging is not the only factor that matters. We thus pay close attention to the programmatic differences in the pre-existing policies across our four cases. While they all shared strong familialism—meager care services by the welfare state—the pre-existing policies for frail elderly care were far from being identical in our country cases. As we will demonstrate, some programmatic designs of pre-existing social policies exacerbate cost pressures related to demographic aging—as in Japan—while other designs dampened them—as in Italy. Once we take past policies into consideration, we can see that “the magnitude of policy pressures” is indeed an important causal factor in explaining Italy's inaction in LTC reforms. That said, however, past policies do not explain cross-national differences in childcare (ages 0-2) since they were more similar across cases.

As Ferrera (2005) notes, policy problems do not automatically mean that solutions will be enacted, and many scholars have explored different political mechanisms.

(ii) Female Voters' Attitudinal Shifts and Party Competition

In contrast to studies of care, most studies of recent expansions in childcare and family-work reconciliation policies pay close attention to the interaction between party competition and the growing political importance of women in politics (Bonoli and Reber 2009; Fleckenstein and Lee 2014; Morgan 2013). However, authors vary in the causal emphasis given to the political role of women versus party competition. Bonoli and

Reber (2009) link the presence of women in the parliament with specific policy outcomes, but fail to explain why. Other scholars emphasize the causal importance of party competition to respond to female voters' attitudinal shifts (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015; Fleckenstein and Lee 2014; Morgan 2013). Similarly, Häusermann (2006, 2010) suggests that interest and values might play out differently in reforms of "old social risk" programs and for the introduction of "new social risk" programs.

This literature assumes that increases in female education and employment rates, female political representation cause female attitudinal shifts. Japan and Korea perform worst in every measure of gender equality—in education, employment, wages, gaps and political representation—among OECD countries (Estevez-Abe 2013; Ikemoto and Han 2014). Thus, we would therefore expect care service expansions to be smallest in Japan and Korea. However, on the contrary, Korea has expanded childcare services most of the four countries.

Figure 3 shows cross-national variations in the percentage of women who strongly agree that maternal work is harmful to pre-school children. Unfortunately, Fig. 3 only captures two time points with 20 years in between, because the question was only asked in two waves in Korea. However, we use it here because it is the variable used by Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015), who argue that it has a strong effect on expansion of family-work reconciliation policies. The cross-national variations in attitudes do not explain why Korea has expanded care services so much more dramatically than the other three countries. Later in the article, we will use a different but similar variable, for which multi-year data are available, in order to show that a cultural shift in Korea did not precede policy changes.

[Figure 3 around here]

(iii) Economic Concerns/Strategies as Drivers of Policy Shifts

A number of scholars attribute the expansion of LTC and childcare to the shifts in the national economic and employment strategies. As Morel (2007) argues, “care policy reforms have been very closely linked to specific employment strategies”(see also Bonoli 2005: 441). By employment strategies, she is specifically referring to the need in Bismarckian welfare states—Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands—to create jobs and labor market flexibility. She thinks that this strategy results in a mixed strategy of public provision and publicly-subsidized private provision of care in Europe. Research by others corroborates this view. Case studies show how employers welcome mixed strategies and the economic rationale used to justify service expansion (see Theobald and Hampel 2013; Leitner 2010; Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen 2011; Fleckenstein and Lee 2014).

Of the three groups of causal arguments considered here, the economic strategy thesis is the only one that does not contradict the cross-national patterns we seek to explain. The Japanese and Korean LTC insurance schemes as well as Korean childcare expansion all adopted the mixed strategy of public and publicly subsidized private provision of services. In both countries, the defamilialisation of care was perceived as a good strategy for creating new jobs (Campbell and Ikegami 2000; Fleckenstein and Lee 2014; Lee and Cho 2012; Yang 2015). In Spain, too, the LTC reform was explicitly framed as something that would create jobs (Rodríguez and Marbán 2013). However, we are still left with two questions: Why didn’t Italy adopt the same economic strategy, which was so successful in the other three countries? Why, in Japan, the economic

strategy, which worked to push for a dramatic policy shift in LTC, did not work in childcare?

These three groups of causal arguments all capture some aspects of the political dynamics of “defamilialisation of care.” However, each, on its own, fails to account for the variations we are seeking to explain here (see Table 1). While providing helpful insights, they leave too many questions unanswered. We call for a new approach that embeds party competition in a macro- institutional context.

III. An Alternative Argument—Embedding Party Competition in an Institutional Context

We claim that there exists more than one type of “politics of de-familialisation of care.” We identify two sets of politics, and call them “election-oriented” politics and “problem-oriented” politics. The former is more top-down and consists of a highly “visible” competition among political parties, while the latter is more bottom-up and entails more “quiet” negotiations among stakeholders and the government. We argue that defamilialising reforms occurred as “election-oriented” political shifts in Korea and Spain, where political parties competed to win voters’ support. In Italy and Japan, where the institutional preconditions were absent, no “election-oriented” political shifts took place. Japan, however, had the preconditions that enabled a major “problem-oriented” policy shift in the LTC arena. This section discusses institutional preconditions for these two types of policy shifts.

Majoritarian Politics and “Election-oriented” Policy Shifts

We argue that even when political leaders face similar socio-economic conditions—such as increases in women’s education and labor force participation rates,

and demographic aging—their responsiveness will differ depending on macro-political institutions surrounding them. By “election-oriented” policy shifts,” we mean more politicized policy shifts that occur when political leaders take up a particular issue to mobilize voters and follow through their electoral promises once they seize power. This type of politics is most likely to occur when: (i) electoral results determine which party forms the new government; (ii) the winning party is capable of legislating its electoral promises; and, importantly, (iii) there is a credible threat that the opposition party might win the election. These conditions, in turn, are most likely to be met when a country has: (i) majoritarian electoral rules; (ii) political party system is not too fragmented; (iii) agenda setting power is centralized in the hands of the Prime Minister (her Cabinet) or President in the case of a presidential system; (iv) government is stable, and (v) single party majority governments rule (Laver 2008).

The combination of plurality rule with single member districts (i.e. first-past-the-post systems) are known to produce majoritarian parliaments, whereby two parties compete over power.⁴However, proportional representation rules can favor large parties when district magnitude is sufficiently small as it used to be the case in Spain until voters turned against the two biggest establishment parties (Hopkin 2005). When the party system is not very fragmented, electoral competition comes down to a race between the two largest parties. In a parliamentary system, this gives voters a clear choice of next government. This institutional context motivates the two largest parties to make specific policy promises and to follow up on them when they become the ruling party. The

⁴Not all first-the-past-post systems produce majoritarian governments as it also depends on the effective number of parties. However, given the limited space, we proceed with a simple version of our analytical framework.

failure to deliver the promises carries a risk of punishment in the next round of national elections especially when a credible opposition party exists.

For the winner to be able to follow through with the promises, it is important that the party leader control the policy agenda. The three factors listed above as (iii)-(v) are of critical importance. Even when the Prime Minister or President holds the *de jure* agenda setting power, if the government duration is uncertain, we can expect her *de facto* agenda setting power to be limited. It is thus important that government is stable in between national elections in order to honour the link between the winner's electoral mandate and the policy outcome. The government type is also important. When Prime Minister presides over a single majority government, *ceteris paribus*, her policy capacity is greater than under a single minority or coalition governments (Budge and Laver 1992; Debus 2008; Laver 2008; Müller and Meyer 2010). Since the frequent government type is a function of the electoral rules and the number of effective parties, most party leaders are aware of whether they can expect to form a majoritarian government or will need coalition partners. Hence this factor also forms part of party leaders' calculation of pay-off from a successful electoral bid.

In short, we think that political leaders in such systems are more incentivized to bring up new policy issues and also are better capable of implementing them when they win the election. The upshot of our argument is that these systems are more suited to producing big policy shifts. Let us now show how Korea and Spain fit the bill while Italy and Japan do not.

[Table 2 around here]

Korea and Spain have experienced more decisive and stable alternations of power. A party, once in power, enjoys longer periods of uninterrupted rules (Table 2, Columns I, II and III). Note that Korea is the only presidential system in our sample, where President is elected directly from popular vote for one five-year term (re-election is forbidden). Although political parties in Korea are not centralized, and often split and merge and change their names, the Presidential election is a highly majoritarian competition, because there is only one winner. Two candidates often fight in the final race, and, constitutionally, the winner is endowed with the agenda setting power—unlike the US President (Estevez-Abe and Kim 2014). In Korea and Spain, as Column II indicates, government changes only when the President/Prime Minister ends its term or loses a national election.

Italy and Japan, in contrast, have been quite different: each government was much more short-lived (Columns, I and II). Governments tended to be coalition-based and changed more frequently (Columns I and III). Yet, there are important differences between Italy and Japan. During the 2000-2013 period, the conservative coalition ruled Japan except for a two and a half year-interruption between 2009-2012, while Italy experienced more frequent alternations in power between center-left and center-right coalitions. A credible threat to the dominant conservative party's hold on power rarely existed in Japan except for a brief period in the latter half of the 2000s. Even if we extend the period coverage and include the 1990s, the overall picture does not change. Although the Italian party system is more fragmented than in Japan (see Column IV), the practice of pre-electoral alliances in Italy has allowed political parties to form two camps for

electoral purposes since the electoral reform in 1993 (Bardi 2007; Katz 2005; Bartolini et al. 2004).

We argue that these differences are responsible for producing very different policy outcomes in our four cases. In Korea and Spain, voters know that the winning party sets policies for several years to come. This encourages more intense policy-based competition between the parties at every election cycle. Government stability and the concentration of agenda-setting power in the hands of the government means that electoral pledges are more likely to become policies in Korea and Spain. In contrast, in Italy and Japan, even when an intense policy debate arises at the election time, frequent government changes and the coalitional nature of most governments weakens the link between electoral promises and policy outcomes. Furthermore, much lower unionization rates in Korea and Spain compared to Italy and Japan also means that the more left-leaning parties had to mobilize unorganized voters further intensifying policy competition (see Introduction in this issue).

Institutional Channels of Deliberation and “Problem-oriented” Policy Shifts

Problem-oriented policy shifts occur when stakeholders come to share the same view of a policy problem, and, eventually, the same solutions. It thus involves a more bottom-up process than a top down decision making in “election-oriented” policy shifts. The specific programmatic designs of pre-existing social policies are critical because they shape the constellation of stakeholders and their interests (Palier ed. 2010; Pierson 1993). If the majority of stakeholders see no policy problems, there will be no “problem-oriented” policy shifts. However, the shared understanding of policy problems per se is not enough to produce a solution. A formal policy arena where the stakeholders come

together and deliberate and negotiate on possible solutions is another precondition for “problem-oriented” reforms.

Although universalistic childcare for the very young children and LTC were similarly absent in our four familialist countries. When nursing homes and social care services existed, they were namely selective social services. However, the specific designs of relevant programs such as health care and disability programs varied to a much greater degree. Demographic aging pushes up the health care cost in any country, but, in familialist countries, the shortage of nursing care often leads middle class families to use hospital beds for the care of their elderly parents. Among our four countries, Japan is the only country with a highly fragmented social insurance-based health care system with a complicated fiscal transfer scheme. The other three countries, in contrast, have much more universalistic health care systems: Korea is more contribution-based than Spain and Italy, and Italy has the most universalistic health care system. The fiscal reliance on employers’ and employees’ social contribution in Japan affected the degree to which unions and employers would be sensitive to health care costs in ways that they would not be in universalistic healthcare systems funded by general tax revenues(Kato 2010). Different health care designs meant that cost sensitivity was highest in Japan followed by Korea, Spain and lastly Italy.

Furthermore, other related programs mattered too. Italy had introduced a non-means-tested care allowance scheme for the disabled (*indennità di accompagnamento*) as early as the 1980s (Da Roit et al. 2007). Today about 70% of the recipients of this cash benefit (around 508 euro a month in 2014) consist of frail elderly who require assistance in their daily life. As there is no restriction on how the money is spent, this allowance

encouraged a reliance on cheap migrant care workers (van Hooren 2012). In sum, the differences in pre-existing social policies created very different situations in Italy and Japan: the shortage of LTC—and the medicalization of care—became a big cost issue in Japan, while the Italian cash allowance eased the pressure on the government to intervene into LTC.

Of the four countries under study here, Japan was the only one with the long tradition of having formal deliberation councils (*shingikai*) within the government—and to a lesser extent in Korea (Schwartz 1998; Yang 2011). Deliberation councils involve stakeholders and serve the purpose of getting their approval on potential legislative proposals. When participating stakeholders are key constituent groups of the ruling party, their veto power grows. However, if they all agree on a solution, the agreement has a better chance of becoming a policy without much political drama. We argue such an agreement was formed in the case of LTC in Japan.

V. Evidence from Process Tracing

This section traces the policy developments in the four countries to support our claim that defamilialisation of care in Korea and Spain took the form of election-oriented policy shifts, while this type of policy shifts were absent in Italy and Japan for institutional reasons. The Japanese LTC reform provides evidence to our claim about yet a different set of institutional factors give rise to a more “problem-oriented” policy shift.

Electoral Mobilization and Politics of De-familialisation in Korea and Spain

The first Korean president from the opposition party, Kim Dae-Jung (1998-2003), won by mobilizing voters’ discontent in the post-Asian financial crisis (note that the last name comes first in Korea). He rode to victory by promising more welfare benefits and

services (see Sacchi and Rho in this issue). In addition to strong support from his region, he had the support of progressive voters and activists (many of whom had fought for the democratization of Korea in the 1980s). After he came to power, Kim Dae-Jung created a Ministry of Gender in 2000, and brought feminists—his supporters—into the policy circle (Estevez-Abe and Kim 2014). The direct mandate from the President provided these new so-called femocrats with political capital. As a result, gender issues and NSR particularly pertinent to women gained bureaucratic attention. It is worth noting here that innovative and highly symbolic policies such as gender quotas were also legislated during this period—although the law was not strictly enforced (Yoon and Shin 2015). We can see that policies that promise big societal change were effective electoral tools in Korea.

Yet it was another progressive President, Roh Moon Hyun (2003-2008), who introduced path-shifting policies in favour of defamilialisation of care (Baek et al. 2011; Song 2010). Roh, who lacked the strong regionally based support of his predecessor, saw policy-based electoral mobilization as a necessity (Fleckenstein and Lee 2014). During his presidential bid, he promised to expand childcare as well as LTC services (Yang 2015: Chap 6). Once elected, he introduced a very ambitious childcare-doubling plan (Saessak Plan), and legislated a new LTC insurance (for childcare, see Estevez-Abe and Kim 2014; Fleckenstein and Lee 2014; and for LTC, Choi 2014; Lee and Cho 2012).

While President Kim was the first to set up a Presidential Commission to consider a major LTC reform, his main reason for doing so was to contain health care costs (Lee and Cho 2012). Yet, under Roh's Presidency, the LTC reform was not merely treated as "problem-oriented" policy shift as it was in Japan. As Soma (2012:89-92) demonstrates, the defamilialisation of care in both childcare and elderly care were embedded in Roh's

broader “The First Healthy Family Plan” (2006), which considered gender equality within and outside of the family to be an important component of a better family life. In fact, President Roh’s agenda was to mobilize support against, as it were, the Old Korea. We can see that the Roh Government’s Family Plan also called for eliminating patriarchal elements from the civil law (Soma 2012). Moreover, the gender quota was revised and effectively implemented in the national elections in 2004 during Roh’s presidency (Yoon and Shin 2015). The percentage of women in the parliament began to increase after 2004. While Fleckenstein and Lee (2014) attribute expansion of care to women’s attitudinal shifts, that is not what happened in Korea. As Figure 4, which compares the percentage of women who think being a housewife is as fulfilling as working for pay, indicates that a big shift came after—and not before—Roh’s Presidency.

[Figure 4 around here]

When Roh’s term ended, his conservative successors also adopted pro-defamilialisation policies. Lee Myung-bak, the conservative presidential candidate, pledged to provide universal childcare for all preschool children during the presidential election campaign. While President Lee (2008-2013) only implemented the first step (universal care for 0-2 year-olds and 5 year-olds), his successor, another conservative President, Park GuenHye implemented universal childcare for all preschoolers. Universal childcare was a big electoral issue, which both Park and her opponent made the pledge to implement. We see how the majoritarian electoral dynamics combined with the President’s strong agenda setting power motivated and facilitated Korea’s push for defamilialisation of care.

Of course, this is not to say that the Korean Presidents ignored societal and economic groups. Defamilialisation of care was framed in such a way as to cultivate political support. It was not a coincidence that Korea opted for the private provision of formal care services in both childcare and LTC. The government used the economic rationale of creating new service sector jobs and of activating female labor in the context of a shrinking population—something that was supported by businesses and economic bureaucrats as well (Fleckenstein and Lee 2014 for childcare). This is similar to what Morel (2007) has observed in Europe.

We find similar election-based policy shifts in Spain. For most of the period under study here, Spain was characterized by majoritarian electoral and party dynamics. The two major parties—Socialists (PSOE) and Conservatives (PP)—alternated in power (Hopkins 2005). The PSOE (in power 1982-1996 and 2004-2011) played a critical role in seizing upon gender equality as a value issue to mobilize voters against the conservative PP. In 1988, PSOE, in its attempt to remain in power, adopted an offensive strategy: it implemented a gender quota to contrast itself to PP. The PP responded to the challenge by also embracing a gender quota in its attempt to signal a break from its authoritarian predecessors under General Franco's regime. Consequently, the percentage of female politicians in Spain reached almost the Nordic levels. Felipe González's PSOE government (1982-1996) also created the *Instituto de la Mujer* (Women's Institute) at the national as well as local levels, and institutionalized "femocrats"—in a similar way as President Kim in Korea.

When the PP led by José María Aznar seized power in 1996, it did not roll back PSOE's gender equality policies. Instead, it pursued defamilialisation policy with a

conservative touch by publicly subsidizing private care services. Recall that the Korean conservative Presidents opted for similar policy tools. Aznar's National Plan for Family Support aimed at promoting women's entry into the labor market. In 2002, Aznar introduced a monthly tax-benefit for formally employed mothers with children under age three as a way of subsidizing childcare costs. The sum of tax subsidy was around 100 euros a month, which is equivalent to around 1/3 to 1/4 of the price of a full-time childcare place with a meal service (León 2011). This policy specifically targeted working mothers, who tended to be better educated than non-working mothers.

The big push for defamilialisation occurred when the PSOE (led by Zapatero) came back to power (2004-2011). The Zapatero government pledged to create a National System of Care for Dependent People (Sarasa 2011: 249; Rodríguez and Marbán 2013). Again the process was very similar to Korea. Under the contributory health care insurance in Spain, the use of medical services in lieu of nursing services was proving to be very expensive and some form of cost containment was needed (Rodríguez and Marbán 2013: 205). The reform of LTC had been on the agenda from the 1990s, and the PP government had kept it on the agenda but as a low priority issue (Rodríguez and Marbán 2013). The abrupt change came when, in its effort to seize the power back from PP, PSOE included it as a high priority issue in the 2004 elections (ibid.). The PSOE advocated both a tax-funded design—as demanded by the employers, who did not want to shoulder any more social security contribution—and formal care services over cash benefits—as demanded by the unions who wanted to create jobs (Rodríguez and Marbán 2013). The ambitious LTC reform, *La Ley de Dependencia* (2006), had a social democratic touch of promising universal access to formal care services. In addition, 2008

the national government created the *Plan Educa3* with an aim to increase public childcare services for children aged 0 to 3 year (León 2011).

As in Korea under Roh, the overall policy agenda aimed at making a big political splash. The big LTC reform and the childcare expansion were legislated as Zapatero introduced a series of high profile policies to change the legal system surrounding the family such as legalization of gay marriage (2005) and the National Equality Law (2007) (León 2011: 67-68). León (2011:69) interprets the LTC reform in 2006 as the first official recognition of the gendered nature of care. However, regardless of the government intention, both the new LTC and the childcare expansion policies were not fully implemented because of the Eurozone crisis that severely limited the government expenditures in Spain (León 2011; León and Pavolini 2014; Aguilar Hendrickson 2014).

Relative Absence of Election-Oriented Policy Shifts in Italy and Japan

In Italy, two broad alliances—Center-Right and Center-Left—competed against each other under the post-1993 electoral system, which had introduced a majoritarian element into Italian politics (Bardi 2007; Bartolini and D’Alimonte 1995; Katz 2006,). This led to the emergence of various important policy initiatives. The Center-Left governments (1996-2001) introduced new innovative family policies giving regions and local level institutions more resources for children’s development (Act 285/97), bringing third sectors in social service provisions (Act 328/2000), and establishing fathers’ individual entitlement, in principle not transferable, to parental leave (Act 53/2000) (Naldini and Saraceno, 2008; Da Roit and Sabatinelli, 2013; León and Pavolini, 2014). Clearly, there was an attempt to mobilize along new social values. The Center-Right government by Berlusconi (2001-2006) also responded to childcare needs, but in a

different way. Instead of expanding governmental investment in early childcare facilities for children aged 0-2, it opted for a legal reform to lower the entry age into pre-schools from 3 down to 2 as a way of extending the statutory childcare coverage (Léon and Pavolini, 2014). It also promoted the role of enterprises (employers) in providing childcare for children under age 3 thereby supporting working mothers. Another Center-Left government, albeit short-lived (2006-2008) introduced a National Extraordinary Crèches Plan—a plan to invest about 800 million euros (with one-third of it to be co-funded by regional authorities) (Riva 2015). The target was to create 65,000 childcare places—equivalent to an increase of roughly 4% of the number of places for children under 3 (Sabatinelli 2010). The subsequent Center-Right government (2008-2011), however, chose to pursue a different policy path.

In sum, we observe the germs of election-oriented mobilization in Italy, even if this mobilization never took off. It certainly fell short of the kind of election-oriented politics that occurred in Spain. Unlike in Spain, where one party could claim political credit, Italian Center-Left governments were multi-party coalition governments. In that context, making high stake policy shifts would not generate clear electoral gains for any specific party in the next round of elections. Furthermore, the Prime Minister's policy capacity was more limited in Italy when compared to Spain as its governments changed much more frequently than in Spain, and its strong constitutional court could overturn government's decisions. For instance, when the Italian Center-Left pushed for a gender quota in politics, the constitutional court in 2003 struck it down as unconstitutional (Montalti, 2003).

Compared to the other three cases, electoral mobilization was weakest in Japan. The dominance of one party—the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)—had a lot to do with it: the opposition parties were rarely credible contenders to power except for a few years in the late 2000s. That said, when a group of LDP members split the party, ousted the LDP government by means of a successful non-confidence vote, and formed the first non-LDP multi-party coalition government in 40 years in 1993, politics did change (Reed and Thies 2001; Estévez-Abe 2006). The first non-LDP government, although very short-lived, put new gender equality and childcare issues on the agenda in its attempt to seek electoral support from those voters who were frustrated with the long conservative LDP rule (Peng 2002). However, the non-LDP government fell apart before its first budgeting season was completed. The LDP came back to power by successfully forming a LDP-led coalition. Different LDP-led coalition governments that followed absorbed some of the non-LDP government policies, including the Council of Gender, the Gender Equality Plan, the Gender Equal Society Plan and a childcare expansion plan called the New Angel Plan—named after the previous government’s Angel Plan (Peng 2002). However, this was done more out of coalition dynamics and not as a result of majoritarian policy contests as in Korea and Spain.

Like Italy, Japan too reformed its electoral system in a majoritarian direction by introducing a mixture of proportional representation and first-past-the-post system in 1994 (Reed and Thies 2001). However, it took a long time for the fragmented opposition parties to form a common front against the LDP. Because the Italian-style pre-electoral alliances did not exist in Japan, competition between two major alliances—Center-Right versus Center-Right—that emerged in Italy soon after the electoral reform did not emerge

in Japan until much later. The delay in the emergence of a credible contender party to the LDP meant the LDP remained the only viable option as a governing party, thereby reducing the impact of policy contestation during elections. Frequent changes in Prime Ministers and frequent reshuffling of cabinet positions also blurred the link between electoral pledges and government policies.

A real competition only emerged in the mid-2000s, when a number of opposition parties merged to create the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), a Center-Left party. Electoral competition became more policy-focused (Estevez-Abe 2008). When the DPJ finally seized power in 2009, it tried to cut the generous tax deductions for male breadwinner headed families in order to fund NSR programs. However, yet again, this non-LDP government only lasted for three years. Its electoral defeat in 2012 and the subsequent fragmentation of the party system yet again significantly reduced political competition in Japan.

Problem-Oriented Policy Shifts: The LTC Insurance in Japan

Japan's major policy shift that resulted in the LTC insurance did not happen as an election-oriented policy shift as in Korea and Spain. For the reasons already mentioned earlier, the Japanese highly fragmented contributory health care system made unions and employers highly conscious of rising costs of medicalization of elderly care. The Ministry of Welfare, aware of the systemic policy pressure, began to seek ways to promote nursing and home care services in the early 1990s (Campbell and Ikegami 2000; Nichii Soken 1997, Estévez-Abe 2008: 247-251). The Ministry used its deliberation councils (*shingikai*) to build and share a particular understanding of the care crisis. These councils involved all stakeholders in elderly welfare and health care policies and served

as an arena where they met and deliberated on the ministerial proposals. Stakeholders included: municipal welfare agencies; municipal governments; municipal healthcare insurance funds; occupational health care funds; employers and unions—all of whom were negatively affected by the rising health care cost of the elderly. The goal was to introduce a new insurance scheme, which also the elderly would contribute to as a way of sharing the burden of aging society.

Governments changed so frequently from one coalition to another, but the Ministry used these councils to keep the negotiations going. The Ministry predicted that prime age workers—even men—would need to interrupt work to care for their parents. For the business world, the Ministry framed the problem as an opportunity to promote the growth of new industries—private care services and related care equipment industries (Estévez-Abe 2008: 247-251). The Ministry was very keen on promoting private services as a way of getting businesses interested in the economic prospects of “LTC industry,” which was beginning to grow (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* March 9, 1995, 38; April 7, 1995, 27). The Ministry, fearful that cash allowance to family care would stifle the growth of formal services and be too costly, preferred not to provide such cash allowance (Campbell, Ikegami and Gibson 2010). The negotiations among the stakeholders continued for several years as different governments came and went until the new LTC Insurance became a law in 1997, which was implemented in 2000.

In Italy, no major reform in LTC took place. Since the 1990s, governments attempted to retrench the pre-existing carer’s allowance and divert the resources to build public service provisions for LTC. In 1997, for instance, the Onofri Commission recommended the introduction of a LTC system (León and Pavolini 2014). The

retrenchment of a popular non-means-tested cash benefit is always difficult (Ranci et al. 2008; Da Roit and Naldini, 2010; Da Roit and Sabatinelli, 2013).

VI. Conclusion

This paper put forth a novel institutional argument in explaining why the four familialist countries—Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain—pursued very different policy trajectories in the past fifteen years. Big policy shifts in care regimes have happened outside the Northern Continental European countries that the NSR literature generally focuses on. This “unusual” comparison has enabled us to reveal puzzling cross-national variations that do not emerge from North-South comparisons within Europe. While North-South comparisons tend to highlight attitudinal and the role of social democracy, we have demonstrated how specific configurations of political institutions fundamentally condition the contours of politics—making bold policy shifts more likely in some countries but less likely in others.

We do not argue that attitudinal shifts and partisan politics do not matter since socio-economic changes have brought about an important change in party systems (Mair et al. 2004). Instead, we claim that political institutions condition how political leaders respond and whether they can implement policies decisively. We have demonstrated that Korea and Spain possess political institutions that promote majoritarian politics—where two largest parties compete selling new policies to voters, and have the institutional capacity to implement them once they gain power. For the sake of convenience, we have named this political dynamic “election-oriented.” Despite being located in the opposite sides of the planet, similar institutional dynamics produced big policy shifts in the two

countries—although the Euro-crisis dramatically stalled Spain’s capacity to implement legislated changes. This is a similarity that no existing work has ever noted.

We have also shown the existence of multiple “politics of defamilialisation of care.” As Japan’s major innovation in LTC shows, the politics of de-familialisation can also take place in a less visible “problem-oriented” way. Here, there is no majoritarian policy contests or mobilisation of voters. What matters for “problem-oriented” politics is the existence of institutional channels, which involve all stakeholders in policy negotiations in a sustained manner regardless of government turnovers. Certainly, as the contrast between Italy and Japan in this article indicates, pre-existing social policies filter socio-economic changes making policy pressures bigger in some countries and smaller in others. They also shape the constellation of stakeholders and their interests in specific ways (Palier, 2010; Pierson, 2014). However, it is the institutional structure that ultimately affects if a government can impose some losses in exchange of some gains. Japan could but Italy could not.

Studies that focus on political institutions have debated on whether coalition-based consensus democracies or majoritarian democracies favoured bigger welfare states or not (Bawn and Rosenbluth 2006; Crepaz 1998; Persson, Roland and Tabellini 2007). Theoretically, this article contributes to the institutional literature of welfare politics in a novel way. It explores very different effects of similar political institutions examining specific causal mechanisms that affect political leaders’ actions. As an excellent review article by Häusermann, Picot and Geering (2013) highlights, there is a new wave of institutional analysis of welfare states developing today. This new wave pays close attention to electoral rules and party systems—something that the old comparative

welfare state research did not. Our article constitutes another important contribution to this burgeoning literature.

Finally, we want to close this article with a call for more studies that go beyond the geographical confines of Europe. Once we go beyond North-South comparisons within Europe, the old “usual suspects” lose much of their explanatory power as most of the advanced industrial countries in Asia lack social democracy. In this article, we hope to have shown that the intellectual merits of cross-regional comparisons.

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