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Future Public Conflicts That Aging Will Bring in Korea: *A Comparative Analysis of Korea and Japan*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze Korea's aging society in terms of public conflict, to analyze the conflict issues that aging will bring, and to present a pre-emptive response. Methods adopted to this end include a literature review and comparative case analyses involving Korea and Japan. Three issues of public conflict were selected in the literature review: (1) increased demand for cremation facilities, (2) expansion of elderly care and dementia facilities, and (3) job competition between the young and elderly due to the extended legal retirement age. Then, by applying the conflict process frame of Ralf Dahrendorf and Lewis Coser, the two countries were analyzed in terms of structural situations, deepening awareness of these situations, and mobilization of organizational-political power. The study thereby deduced implications regarding the differences between the two countries. Korea and Japan are experiencing similar social phenomena or problems due to aging. However, there are some differences between the countries in how these phenomena are perceived and how the problems are solved. The background of these differences can be summarized as (1) long-standing ideological confrontation in Korea, (2) differences between Japan and Korea in the cultural perception of conflict, and (3) differences in governance in terms of social consensus and institutional acceptance.

Keywords: aging, public conflict, Korea, Japan, cremation facilities, dementia-treatment facilities, retirement age

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Introduction

Korea's demographic structure is rapidly changing, with unprecedented low birth rates and aging. In addition to its negative effects on society, such as slowing economic growth and increasing welfare burdens, aging is expected to bring critical changes in the understanding and decision-making of various social actors (S. Kim 2014). This process entails confrontations or conflicts of interest among numerous actors regarding the problem of intergenerational financial resource allocation, an eventuality that is highly likely to lead to intergenerational conflicts (Dumas and Turner 2009). As the aging of Korean society progresses, there are clear signs of conflict in the political, economic, and social sectors, and there is a growing possibility that this conflict will expand into "public conflicts" (Jeong 2011). Therefore, it is urgent that discussions be held on the prevention and mitigation of the future public conflicts that aging will bring.

Social awareness of how members of a society perceive conflict has important implications in determining the nature of conflict and that society's future development. Numerous studies on conflict awareness over the past decade have shown that conflict in Korea is at a very high level. According to several surveys, about three-quarters of the Korean population is seriously aware of conflicts in Korean society (NRC Korea 2005). According to Korea's Institute of Social Research, 89.6 percent of individuals surveyed in 2007, 78 percent of individuals surveyed in 2010, and 75.2 percent of individuals surveyed in 2014 responded that conflicts across Korean society are serious (Institute of Social Research 2007; 2010; 2014).

Conflicts are usually triggered by an absence of, and imbalances in, information, as well as differences in the interpretation of that information. These differences then become a *value conflict*, which is heightened by disagreements over ideology, values, and perceptions of priorities. If a social problem or conflict develops into a *public conflict*, it will fall into stalemate, and it will be difficult to manage the conflict simply by adjusting interests. The stalemate in these conflicts comes with huge social and policy costs. Therefore, it is urgent that a discussion be held on the prevention and mitigation of the future public conflicts aging will bring.

The discourse on conflicts triggered by an aging population has mainly focused on conflicts between the elderly and the young (Park et al. 2017). However, the impact of aging will not be limited to generational relationships. New conflicts beyond generational relationships may emerge, and existing conflicts may lead to further intensification. The West has already noted conflicts arising from demographic changes that have taken place since the 1980s. Studies in this regard largely divide conflicts into cultural conflicts, power conflicts, and conflicts in resource allocation (B. S. Turner 1989; J. H. Turner 1997; Riley 1987).

While existing studies deal with the conflicts that aging will bring in various areas, most of this research focuses on social issues. The conflicts resulting from aging that are to be addressed in this study, however, have to do with public conflicts arising in government or the public sector. Methods employed to this end include a literature review and comparative case analyses involving Japan and Korea. Japan has been experiencing aging ahead of Korea and is now the world's most aged society. Therefore, a comparative analysis of Japan and Korea can provide insights into the public conflicts that aging will bring to Korea. The selection of comparative cases involving Korea and Japan is mainly based on the report, "Prospect of Future Conflict Issues for Preemptive Conflict Management," published by Korea's Office for Government Policy Coordination (Gungmu jojeongsil) in 2020.

The current study is based on the following assumptions. First, due to aging, Korea and Japan are experiencing similar social phenomena or problems. However, there will be some differences between the two countries in how these phenomena are perceived and how the problems are addressed. These differences may be attributed to historical and cultural differences and whether the relevant policies are implemented according to the degree of progress in aging in the two countries. Second, Korea's public conflicts will be more severe than Japan's, due to the ideological confrontation between the conservatives and progressives that is widespread in contemporary Korean society. This ideological confrontation is making it difficult for Korea to reach social consensus. Third, when social problems or conflicts become public conflicts, they fall into stalemate in which it is

difficult to manage the conflicts simply by adjusting interests. Therefore, preventive conflict management will be needed for the *stage of awareness of the structural situation* before the conflicts turn into an ideological confrontation.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

The Aging Trend in Korea and Japan

Japan experienced aging ahead of Korea and is now the world's most aged society. Figure 1 shows the changes in the population structure of Japan from 1950 to 2010. The population under the age of 15 peaked in 1950, accounting for 35.4 percent of the total population, and has since declined steadily. On the other hand, the number of people aged 65 or older increased from less than 4.9 percent to 23 percent between 1950 and 2010, reflecting the continued increase in life expectancy and the transition to a *super-aged society*. According to the 2018 *White Paper on Welfare and Labor*, Japan's population has been on the decline since it peaked at 128.08 million in 2008 (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2018). According to Japan's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Japan's population is expected to fall to 88.08 million by 2065, and its aging population[1] is expected to reach about 38 percent of the total population.

1. Most countries, as well as the United Nations and international organizations, define an aging population to include all those aged 65 or older.

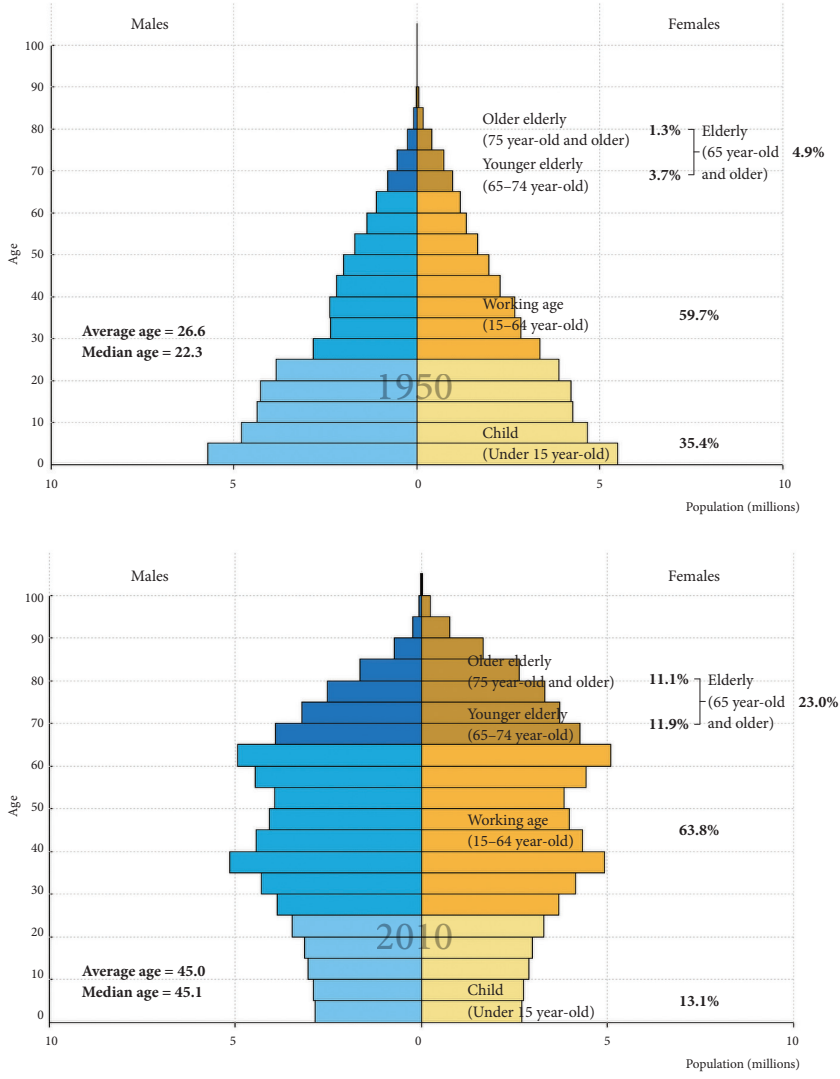

Figure 1. Japan's population pyramid (1950 vs. 2010)
Source: United Nations (2019a). Available at https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/.

The percentage of Korea's population over the age of 65 has been steadily increasing, from 730,000 (2.9%) in 1960. In 2000, Korean society became

an *aging society*.[2] According to the Korean Statistical Information Service's (KOSIS) 2020–2060 prediction index, the proportion of Korean senior citizens aged 65 or older is expected to increase from 15.7 percent of the total population in 2020 to 25 percent by 2030, and 43.9 percent by 2060. Moreover, the total support ratio (i.e., the number of people that 100 production-age persons will need to support) is expected to more than quadruple, from 21.7 in 2020 to 91.4 in 2060 (Statistics Korea 2020; MOEF 2019b).

It took 36 years from 1994 for Japan to transition from an aged society to a super-aged society, while Korea, which officially became an aged society in 2000, is expected to transition to a super-aged society by 2025, 11 years sooner than it took Japan for the same transition. Although the aging of Korean society is progressing faster than Japan's, it is proceeding in a similar trajectory as Japan's, as shown in Figure 2.

2. According to the United Nations, if the population aged 65 or older accounts for more than 7 percent of a country's total population, that country is classified as an aging society. If the population aged 65 or older accounts for more than 14 percent of the total, the country is termed an aged society, and if it rises to more than 20 percent, the country becomes a super-aged society (United Nations 2017).

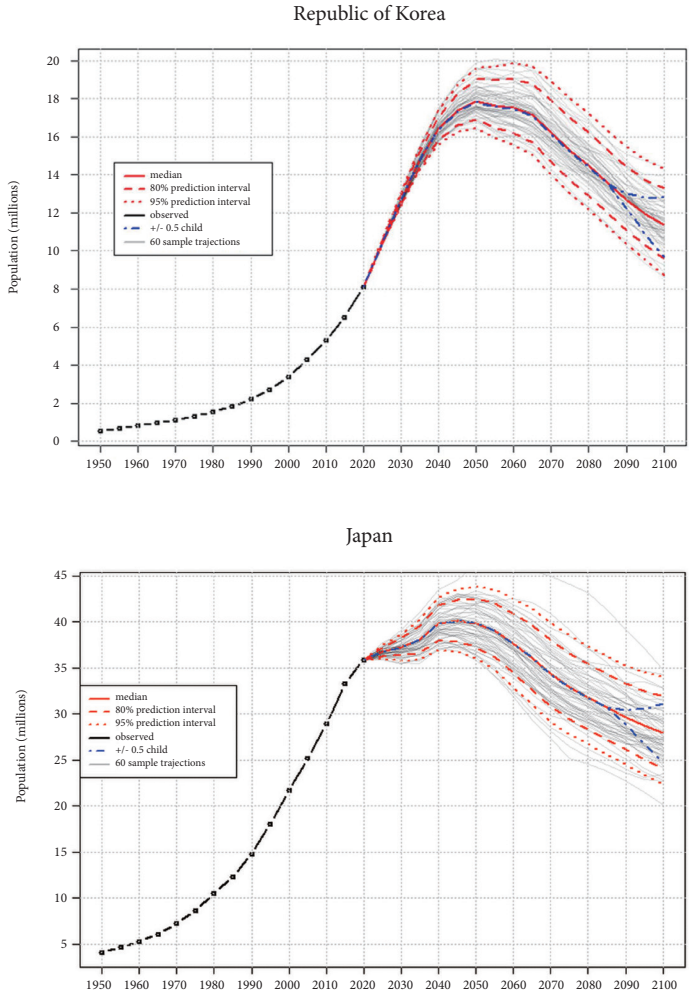

Figure 2. Population by broad age group (65+)
Source: United Nations (2019b). Available at http://population.un.org/wpp/.

Aging and Conflict

Since the early 2000s, when aging became a serious social problem, various discourses and research on this issue have been undertaken. The discourse

surrounding aging primarily focuses on the negative effects of aging (Kim et al 2005; Kumar and Baldacci 2010). A number of studies have analyzed the impact of increased welfare and medical expenses on tax burdens and pension schemes (Bongaarts 2004; Ohtsu and Tabata 2005; G. Park 2011; Lee and Moon 2017). There are also numerous studies on the political effects of aging (Ruddick 2003; J. Park 2010; Yongseok Seo 2017), and its effects on the labor market, industrial structure, and consumption (Masson and Tryon 1990; Shin and Han 2016; Hong 2016; Nam 2018; S. Lee et al. 2019). In addition, Jang Mi-Hye et al. (2014) studied the social risks that married and unmarried women may encounter depending on their age. Kang Eunna et al. (2014) analyzed the future social risks facing families and the elderly in a super-aged society.

While most of these studies have addressed various threats and opportunities presented by aging, the discourse has been largely lacking in terms of social conflict. While there are studies dealing with conflicts associated with an aging population, the focus of the discourse is mainly on international conflicts, retirement age, job conflicts, and intergenerational issues (Clarke et al. 1999; G. Park 2011; Yongseok Seo 2013; B. Lee 2014; S. Kim 2014; Park et al 2017). However, studies of social problems and their attendant conflicts caused by the aging of society are still lacking.

Public Conflict

Conflict arises when there is a disagreement between individuals or groups over the distribution of resources. In the broad sense, conflict refers to antagonistic and confrontational interaction among actors (Oh 1990), or the pursuit by different parties of mutually exclusive goals. Conflicts can occur if there is a difference in the level of satisfaction with a current equilibrium and in the thinking about what that equilibrium should be. Generally speaking, in human psychology losses outweigh benefits, and humans seek to avoid losses. This is called "loss aversion." This inclination toward loss aversion makes conflict inevitable in human life (Tversky and Kahneman 1986; 1991).

Recently, there has been much discussion on public conflicts beyond

social conflicts. There are various definitions of public conflict. First, Lan (1997) approaches public conflict from a more comprehensive perspective as conflict arising from various social problems, including decentralization of power, globalization, and poverty. Carpenter and Kennedy (2001) explain public conflict as a conflict that goes beyond the scope of stakeholders in the social conflict to affect the public. In a similar vein, Stephenson and Pops (1989) describe public conflict as a process in which social conflict is discussed and resolved in the government's policy-making process. Dukes ([1996] 2006), on the other hand, defines public conflict as a conflict arising from public problems, among the many social problems arising in modern democratic societies.

To summarize the above discussion, public conflict is related to groups or individuals performing public functions. These are conflicts that arise in the process of different civilian actors, such as the central government, local government, public corporations, and the National Assembly, performing their public-sector duties. In addition, if conflicts between private actors directly or indirectly affect other members of the community, they may turn into public conflicts. The scope of public interest includes not only political, economic and social interests, but also conflicts linked to identities arising from organizations, groups, races, regions, generations, and social classes that require government mediation or arbitration (Jeong 2011).

Some conflict theorists have focused on the development of the conflict process and considered ways to prevent latent conflict before it becomes a serious public issue. In this regard, conflict theorists like Ralf Dahrendorf summarized objective structural factors as well as various other factors affecting practical conflicts (Turner 1997). According to Dahrendorf and Coser's conflict process theory, structural conditions, such as changes in resource distribution, are a leading factor inducing awareness of objective interests. As the perception of objective interests deepens, conflicts intensify along with the emotional escalation, frustration, and anger of the deprived. Through the process of organizing and politicizing conflict groups, the process of conflict development that eventually leads to *substantial conflict* will also be organized. In other words, there are structural conflicts of objective interests in which social factors intervene to raise awareness and

emotions, followed by the organization and politicization of conflict groups. In this process, *latent conflict* becomes *substantial public conflict* (S. Kim 2014).

Research Frame

We conducted a wide literature review to investigate the major conflict issues that the aging of Korea and Japan will bring. Through this literature review, we first perceived three issues: a lack of crematorium-related facilities, the expansion of nursing and dementia-treatment facilities, and the extension of the statutory retirement age, all of which are expected to be the most serious of the various future conflicts that an aging population will bring. These three issues are common in Japan and Korea (though they will experience them at different times), and they are getting worse. Then, by applying the conflict process frame of Dahrendorf and Coser to these three issues, an analysis of the two countries is undertaken based on (1) the structural situation and objective reality of each; (2) the deepening and spreading awareness of the structural situation by stakeholders; and (3) the mobilization of organizational-political empowerment by stakeholders. We then examine the commonalities and differences between the two countries through an analysis of three major conflicts in Korea and Japan. In particular, we look into how the organization and political empowerment of conflicts, which can be called the beginning of *collective public conflict*, are formed in the two countries. Figure 3 illustrates the overall research process of this study.

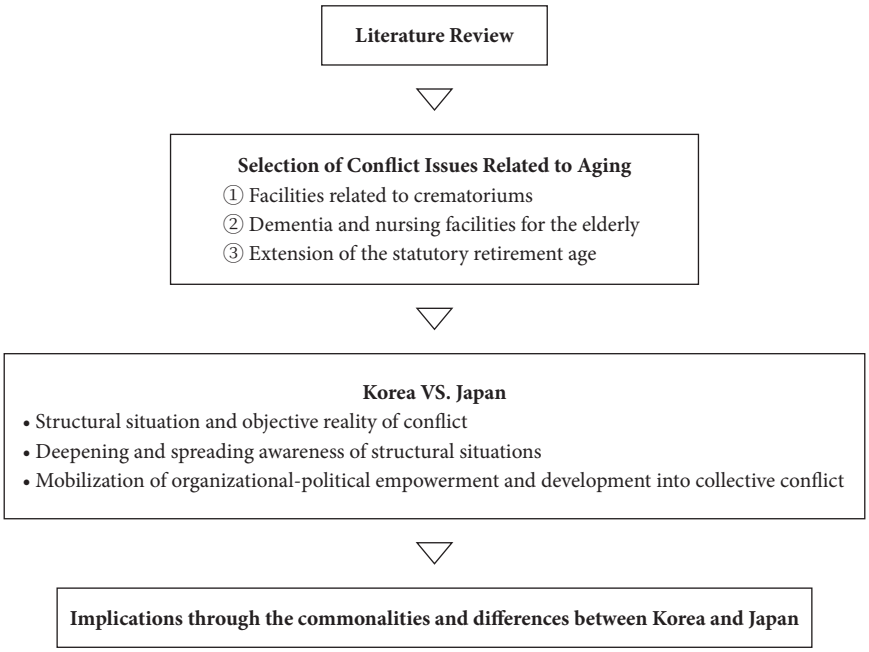

Figure 3. Research and analytical process
Source: Author.

Comparative Analysis of Public Conflict Regarding Aging in Korea and Japan

This selection of comparative cases between Korea and Japan is based primarily on the report titled "Prospect of Future Conflict Issues for Preemptive Conflict Management" published by the Office for Government Policy Coordination (Gungmu jojeongsil) predicted a total of thirty future conflict issues that South Korea will face under three themes: demographic change, technological development, and climate change and energy transition. The report pointed to expanding facilities related to the elderly and increasing participation in economic activities by the elderly as future conflict issues that will arise due to an aging population (Office

for Government Policy Coordination 2020). Facilities related to the elderly are a point of conflict due to questions about where to locate these new elderly care, dementia-care, and crematorium facilities. Conflict related to the increasing participation in economic activities by the elderly concerns employment conflicts between the young and elderly due to the raising of the standard age defined as *old* and the change in mandatory retirement age. In other words, the Korean government identifies the expansion of elderly care-related facilities and crematoriums and job competition between the young and elderly as areas of serious public conflict in the future.

Shortage of Facilities Related to Crematoriums

1) Structural Situation

In Korea, the mortality rate is expected to rise in 2020 as the aging of society progresses. The number of deaths in 2018 was 298,820, up 4.7 percent (13,286) from the previous year, and the highest since 1983 when related records began to be kept. The number of annual deaths has been increasing for five years since 2013. At this rate, conflicts are expected over the lack of crematoriums and the location of new cremation facilities. Traditionally, burial has been the accepted mode of funerals in Korean society. However, since the 1990s, cremation has become increasingly common. Due to the change in attitude and recognition of the advantages of cremation, in 2005, for the first time cremation ranked first as a funeral option among Koreans (52.6%). As of 2017, the domestic cremation rate stood at 84.6 percent, up 1.9 percent from the previous year. This is approximately 4.4 times higher than the 19.1 percent cremation rate in 1993 (MHW 2019a). In particular, the rate of cremation in the greater Seoul area (GSA, 89%) is higher than in areas beyond the capital (81.7%). As of December 2018, a total of 59 cremation facilities with some 350 crematoriums were operating in Korea. To keep up with its daily demand, Seoul requires 3.3 cremation furnaces, Busan, 4.5, and Gyeonggi-do province as a whole, 14.5. In 2017, there were about 38,000 requests for cremation in Seoul, but only about 34,500 were processed. About 3,500 bodies had to be cremated in areas outside Seoul.

The annual demand for cremation in Gyeonggi-do is about 50,000, but the capacity is only about 34,000. More than 15,000 cremations from Gyeonggi-do are actually being processed at facilities in Incheon or in Chungcheong-do province (MHW 2019a). Most of the 17 cities and provinces across the country have sufficient cremation facilities. However, the population centers in Seoul, Gyeonggi-do province, Busan, and Daegu have failed to expand their facilities in a timely manner, resulting in a chronic shortage of cremation facilities.

The lack of cremation facilities is aggravated by the funeral culture of Korea. Korean funerals basically last for three days, with the procession of the coffin beginning on the morning of the third day. When the procession reaches the cremation facility, the body is cremated and the remains are laid to rest. For convenience, many people carry out cremations early in the morning. As demand for cremations is concentrated in the morning, the shortage of cremation facilities is intensifying. About 40 percent of deaths in Korea are concentrated in the GSA, and almost 90 percent of deaths in Seoul are followed by a cremation (MHW 2018). At this rate, 91.7 percent of those who die in Seoul are expected to be cremated in 2020. This is expected to reach 92.7 percent by 2025, and 92.9 percent by 2030. Based on the current cremation rate (84.6%) and the number of annual deaths in Korea as of 2017 (290,000), there is a need for at least 30 percent more cremation facilities (cremation furnaces), as annual deaths are projected to reach 400,000 by 2028.

What's more, there are currently approximately 15 million tombs in Korea. In situations where it is difficult to manage and maintain a cemetery due to dwindling family size and low birthrates, calls for the relocation or elimination of cemeteries are expected. The increased demand for the cremation of excavated remains could further exacerbate the shortage of cremation facilities.

Recognizing this critical situation, the "2nd Comprehensive Plan for the Supply of Funeral Facilities, 2018–2022" was established in the Moon Jae-in administration. The core policy objectives of the plan include the installation of additional cremation facilities, the narrowing of the gap in facilities by regional and operating entities, and the provision of facilities according to regional and community preferences. However, this plan

does not adequately reflect the increase in demand as mortality rates rise. This is partly due to the fact that thus far there remain sufficient cremation facilities for the number of deaths. The future implementation of this plan is likely to cause various conflicts between stakeholders over the feasibility of individual projects, the capacities of planned facilities, procedures for stakeholder participation, information disclosure, and compensation for land expropriation.

Japan's annual death rate stood at around 700,000 by the 1970s. However, since the 1980s, as the population began to age, the death rate began to rise, surpassing a million deaths a year in 2003. The death toll in 2020 is expected to exceed 1.4 million, the highest since World War II. According to Japan's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Japan's annual death toll is expected to exceed 1.6 million by 2030 and 1.67 million by 2040 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2017). Japan's high death rate is due to the country's aging population. In particular, the number of people aged 75 and older in Tokyo is expected to increase to 5.72 million by 2025 and to 6.02 million by 2040.

As of 2018, Korea's cremation rate stood at around 87 percent, but Japan, with its deeply rooted Buddhist culture, has reached nearly 100 percent. This has led to a shortage of cremation facilities throughout Japan, with the most severe shortages in the Tokyo province (to include Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, and Saitama). In some parts of Tokyo, families have to wait seven to ten days to cremate the deceased. Due to the shortage of cremation facilities, the use of storage facilities for the temporary storage of bodies is also increasing. However, even these are in short supply.

Along with the increase in the number of deaths, the decrease in cremation facilities every year is also a major cause of the shortage of cremation facilities in Japan. According to Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the number of cremation facilities nationwide fell by half, from 8,481 in 1996 to 4181 by 2016 (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2017). Urban mergers (*shikuchoson gappei*), which have been implemented throughout Japan from the 2000s, have contributed greatly to this decline. As local governments became integrated, cremation facilities have also been consolidated. The reduction of existing cremation facilities

is a problem that can be solved through the addition of new facilities. However, due to the local community opposition, the construction of new cremation facilities is sluggish. As in Korea, the main reason residents oppose the construction of new cremation facilities is their adverse effect on the surrounding image and the resulting lower real estate prices. Other reasons include the smell of smoke from the cremation furnaces, air pollutants, negative effects on the surrounding cityscape, and the mental stress of seeing people in mourning on a daily basis.

2) Deepening Awareness of the Structural Situation

Koreans express from a strong hatred to non-preference toward graveyards and charnel houses, whether they are in cities or rural areas. This is due to the so-called *not in my backyard* (NIMB) phenomenon. Communities have a strong negative attitude toward cremation facilities for their dreary image, high chimney stacks, and the smell and yellow smoke they emit. Other reasons for opposing the installation of cremation facilities include traffic congestion and loss of property value. Conflict over the expansion of cremation facilities is already apparent across the country.

In December 2018, the residents of Hwaseong city in Gyeonggi-do province pressed charges against civil servants who planned to establish a cremation facility in their city. In the city of Donghae in Gangwon-do province, there was a clash between local residents and the municipal government with regard to the relocation of the city's cremation facility. The county of Haenam lacks cremation facilities, leaving the bereaved no choice but to use cremation facilities in the neighboring cities of Mokpo, Gwangju, or Yeosu. To ease this inconvenience, the county government made plans for the establishment of Haenam Public Memorial Park, including cremation facilities. However, even this facility faces opposition. Some predict that such difficulties in installing new cremation facilities will lead to a serious shortage of cremation furnaces by 2025, which is ahead of the emergence of Korea's super-aged society.

In Japan, graveyards are a common neighborhood fixture, whether in large cities or rural villages. In stark contrast to the cultural view of Koreans,

the Japanese consider a graveyard in a residential area to be a natural thing without any feeling of disgust. Although some residents are opposed to the construction of cremation facilities, municipalities are addressing this problem through compromises with local residents. The city of Chiba has managed to obtain consent from local residents for the construction of a cremation facility through a sustained effort of negotiation and compromise. In the city of Hiroshima, instead of the municipal government unilaterally deciding candidate sites for a new cremation facility, the nine municipal districts each recommended suitable candidate sites, among which the final site was chosen. This approach helped prevent conflict among city residents over the location of the new facilities. Other ways of resolving conflict include engaging residents earnestly through undertakings such as regular soil contamination monitoring and expansion of roads to prevent congestion due to passage of funeral hearses and the accommodation of other such demands where possible.

3) Mobilization of Organizational-Political Power

Conflicts over the location selection of cremation facilities in Korea are mainly conflicts between the local government and local residents or between local governments.[3] In Korea, cremation facilities have been recognized as non-preferred facilities, and there have been many conflicts over them even before the aging of Korean society. Various cases testify that local resident stakeholders' solidarity and organization have worked to approve or oppose the installation of cremation facilities. In most cases, the collective solidarity and organization of local residents in relation to cremation facilities was related to the local political culture. For example, conflicts were politicized by the preference of local residents for certain parties, the party to which the head of the local government belonged, and the position of the head of the local government regarding the location of cremation facilities.

3. In Korea, the head of a local government is largely ambivalent about obtaining the support of administrative managers of local governments and residents.

In Japan, conflict also exists over the installation and expansion of cremation facilities, but the stakeholders in the conflict are mainly local residents and local governments or local residents and installation companies. Unlike Korea, no cases have been found of such issues being embroiled in ideological confrontation between the party to which the head of the local government belongs and the party favored by local residents.

Expansion of Dementia-Care and Nursing Facilities for the Elderly

1) Structural Situation

Facilities for the elderly elicit contradictory reactions, in that they provide a valuable service to local residents but are simultaneously unwanted. Moreover, such facilities are rarely located within a city, and it is naturally difficult to provide as many facilities as are required for urban centers. The accelerated aging of the population is causing a sharp increase in demand for senior welfare, dementia-care, and long-term care facilities. However, these facilities are considered undesirable to residents, and conflicts frequently arise during the course of their installation. With a sharp increase in the number of elderly dementia patients, both supply and demand of dedicated dementia-care facilities are increasing. Although the Korean government's direction for management of dementia in the elderly is shifting from conventional isolation to community care in everyday life, local communities are still opposed to community care facilities. Such opposition is expected to continue to cause future conflicts in the process of installing additional facilities.

As of 2018, there were an estimated 705,473 dementia patients among senior citizens aged 65 or older in Korea. The prevalence rate of dementia in seniors aged 65 or more stood at 10.16 percent in 2018, exceeding 10 percent for the first time. From 2018 to 2060, the rate of increase in dementia patients is expected to be greatest at 88.0 percent in the 85-and-above age group. Increases in dementia patients in other age brackets for the same period are as follows: 80–84 (67.7%), 75–79 (53.9%), 70–74 (44.8%), and 65–69 (36.7%). If this trend continues, by 2025, when Korea transitions

to a super-aged society, the population with dementia is expected to reach 1.079 million. This is forecast to increase to 2 million by 2039 and 3 million by 2050.

The National Responsibility Policy for Dementia Care, declared by the Moon Jae-in administration in 2017, is considered the most sweeping change to national insurance since the adoption of long-term care insurance in 2008. Before long-term care insurance, elderly dementia patients were taken care of at home or admitted into nursing homes for paid professional care. However, with the adoption of long-term care insurance, care for dementia patients was administered under a grade system. Once a dementia patient receives a certain grade, 70 to 80 percent of actual care facility fees are then covered by long-term care insurance. This greatly lessens the financial burden of using long-term care institutions like nursing homes or daycare centers. However, over the past decade, there have been recurring issues regarding the insurance scheme, including fraud. Moreover, the fundamental question is raised regarding whether facility-oriented management of old age-associated diseases such as dementia is appropriate given the strong desire of most patients to live out their lives in their own homes (MHW 2015). Accordingly, the national policy for dementia management in existing medical facilities is based on "community care" (MHW 2019b). However, in order to be able to provide services through community care, daycare centers and other facilities are necessary. Additionally, dedicated dementia care facilities must also exist to manage more severe cases. In reality, however, the infrastructure is seriously lacking.

In Japan, which is a super-aged society, the number of dementia patients that have gone missing exceeded 17,000 in 2019. This was the seventh time the record was broken in as many years. According to the Japanese police, 17,479 people with dementia went missing in 2019 (Japanese Police Department 2020). The cause of this increase can be attributed to the aging population. According to estimates by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2020), one out of every seven senior citizens in Japan is expected to suffer from dementia by 2025 (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2020).

However, it is difficult to find cases of conflicts over elderly care

facilities and dementia-care facilities in Japan. The Japanese government's preemptive and systematic policy approach ensured that senior-care and dementia-care facilities do not cause conflicts with regard to location. Japan became an aged society in the 1970s, and dementia among the elderly became a major issue from the 1980s. To solve this problem, the Japanese government established the Senior Dementia Response Headquarters and the Professional Committee on Senior Dementia Response in 1986, and a New Gold Plan was established in 1994 detailing a response to the rising population with dementia. This marked the beginning of Japan's full-fledged dementia-management system, and in 2012, the Five-year Dementia Response Implementation Plan, a national comprehensive response to dementia, was announced. In 2015, The Comprehensive Strategy to Accelerate Dementia Policy was proposed. These plans are called the Orange Plan and New Orange Plan, respectively, and call for the establishment of comprehensive care systems within local communities (J. Kim 2019).

2) Deepening Awareness of the Structural Situation

While there are many causes for the shortage of facilities for old-age-associated illnesses like dementia, the most obvious are the social perception of senior-related facilities as undesirable and the observable aversive behavior of locals with regard to such facilities (Yoo-seok Seo 2003). According to a study on the impact of the installation of unwelcome facilities on real estate prices, the higher the ratio of one's assets accounted for by real estate, the more sensitive one is to the installation of unwelcome facilities. In particular, the perception among residents of many areas is that dementia-care facilities are *dangerous*, in that accidents may occur if local residents cross paths with elderly dementia patients (Oh and Cho 2016). Conflicts over the installation of senior welfare facilities were triggered in Seoul, in the neighborhoods of Chang-dong of Dobong-gu and in Cheongpa-dong of Yongsan-gu, in May and July of 2014, respectively.[4] In Doksan-dong of

4. "Uri jip yeopen an dwae…ipju makin noin siseol" (Not Next to My House…Senior Citizens Facility Stalled), *Joongang Ilbo*, September 19, 2014. https://news.joins.com/article/15851184.

Geumcheon-gu, Seoul, the installation of a daycare center for senior citizens has been delayed due to opposition by local residents.[5] Delays are common even in infrastructure projects implemented by local governments, and the delays are even more severe for facilities installed by private enterprises. Despite having the required licenses and permits, many projects are unable to move forward due to objections from local residents. Accelerated aging in the Korean population is expected to cause a sharp increase in the demand for senior facilities where the elderly can receive high-quality services near their homes. However, if the installation of such facilities is delayed due to opposition from local residents, related conflict may intensify.

The Japanese dementia-management policy differs from that of Korea in two key aspects. First, the Japanese adopted the term *cognitive ailment* in 2004 as substitute for the negatively perceived term *dementia*. The Japanese government raised public awareness through a campaign, Ten-year Regional Campaign for Cognitive Ailment Awareness, from 2005 to 2015. Second, the goal of dementia management in Japan is to realize a society wherein elderly dementia patients are able to continue to live in familiar neighborhoods. Accordingly, local communities are more elderly-friendly. This includes creating convenient living environments (the hardware aspect) for the elderly, including dementia patients, and parallel living support (the software aspect). These methods helped minimize local opposition or conflict over the introduction of senior facilities.

3) Mobilization of Organizational-Political Power

In Korea, dementia-care facilities are still recognized as a non-preferred facility in a community, making it difficult to establish them. Recently, the construction of dementia-care facilities by various local governments, such as Yongsan in Seoul, encountered opposition from local residents. In addition, the construction of an elderly daycare center in Songpa-gu, Seoul,

5. "Apaeteu gap tteoreojindago…noin keeo senteo bandaehaneun jumin-deul" (Apartment Prices Dropping... Residents Oppose Care Center for Seniors), *Chosun Ilbo*, April 7, 2020. https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2020/04/07/2020040700166.html.

whose site was confirmed in 2017, has yet to commence. In addition, the construction of dementia-care and elderly facilities scheduled for Cheonan, South Chungcheongnam-do province, has also met strong opposition from local residents. Overall, what all opponents have in common is a negative perception of dementia-related facilities. However, elderly care or dementia-care facilities are not yet perceived as non-preference facilities to the same extent as cremation facilities. Therefore, the extent of the conflict is not yet serious, and there has been no solidarity among local residents in terms of opposition. However, as the number of dementia-care facilities is expected to surge in the future, the possibility of politicization cannot be ruled out as regional collective opposition is gradually organized.

Although the Japanese have some negative perceptions of elderly care and dementia-care facilities, there has been no extreme opposition to them. Therefore, there are only a few cases of organized solidarity or politicization in the community regarding the installation and expansion of such facilities. As in Korea, opposition banners are hung in areas where new facilities are to be located, and small opposition rallies by residents take place. Another important factor is that the Japanese government has already produced various measures to minimize opposition or conflict among local residents due to the expansion of dementia-care facilities for the elderly.

The Extended Legal Retirement Age

1) Structural Situation

Since the late 2000s, low birth rates and accelerated aging in Korea have brought to the forefront such issues as pension policy, elderly poverty, and the financing of welfare policy. Extending the statutory retirement age has been on the agenda since then. In 2013, the Korean National Assembly passed the Act on Prohibition of Age Discrimination in Employment and Elderly Employment Promotion (Retirement Age Extension Act), which stipulates a retirement age of 60 for the employed. Discussion on pushing the statutory retirement age even higher began in the Moon Jae-in administration. As part of a preemptive and active response to the ongoing shift in the demographic

structure of the country, the Moon Jae-in administration organized an inter-ministry population policy task force and set forth policy tasks aimed at maintaining and expanding the working-age population (MOEF 2019a). Whereas the Moon Jae-in administration intended to officially extend the statutory retirement age in order to maintain and expand the working-age population, it met the staunch opposition of the businesses who would have to shoulder heavier labor costs under the measure and from members of the younger generation who were having difficulty finding employment.[6]

The Korean Supreme Court ruled that the retirement age of physical workers was raised from 55 to 60 in 1989, and that the retirement age was raised to 65 again in 30 years. However, it is a matter for companies to decide autonomously through labor-management negotiations when to retire their employees. The major stakeholders are corporate management and employees (labor unions). Compared to other OECD member states, Korea has a higher wage increase rate due to years of service. If companies are required to raise the retirement age, it will pose a substantial financial burden. In particular, there is a high possibility of reducing employment by raising the retirement age (Korea Economic Research Institute 2019). The maximum wage system was introduced as a means of mitigating the burden of labor costs posed by the current statutory retirement age of 60, but as of 2018, little more than half (54.8%) of businesses with 300 or more employees had adopted the system (MEL 2019).

To cope with the extended retirement age and declining corporate productivity due to the aging population, the Korean government is seeking to reform the wage system in various ways. These include instituting a maximum wage system, shortening working hours, and reorganizing the job-based pay system. However, these reforms may face a variety of conflicts among stakeholders (labor unions, businesses, governments) regarding the scope of the maximum wage system, selection criteria, shape of the wage curve, peak age (or years of work), duration of maximum wage, method

6. "'Goyong yeonjang-eun jeongnyeon yeonjang anya' jinhwa naseon cheong" ('Employment Extension is Not an Extension of the Retirement Age,' Cheong Wa Dae explains), *Maeil Business News Korea*, February 13, 2020.

of wage adjustment, standing of persons subject to wage peaks, and other matters of method and procedure.

Under the Second Employment Master Plan (1973), the Japanese government enacted and revised related laws and statutes, instituted government support, and coordinated management-labor efforts with the aim of amending the Employment Stability Act for the Elderly in 1994. The amendment took effect in 1998, and set the statutory retirement age at 60. The Employment Stability Act for Middle Age and Elderly Workers of 1976 stipulated employment rates for the elderly, promoting hiring of the elderly. In the late 1970s, Japan's Ministry of Labor provided businesses with guidelines for reforming their seniority pay systems. Through improvements of the wage system and the redesign of human resource (HR) policies, companies and labor unions joined hands to create more favorable conditions, such as the seniority-based wage system. Further, age limits for certain positions, as well as preferential policies for early retirement, were also adopted. A joint labor-management committee was formed to discuss and coordinate opinions on reducing seniority-based wage increases, adjusting retirement rates, and improving HR policies (Korea Economic Research Institute 2019). As a result of these efforts, Japanese companies have rarely reported labor-management conflicts over the extension of the retirement age (H. Kim 2015, 78).

Recently, Japan became a super-aged society and created a bill to revise related laws to guarantee employment opportunities up to the age of 70. At the February 2020 cabinet council, the Japanese government approved a bill to revise the Employment Stability Act for the Elderly, prescribing its obligation for businesses to make their best efforts to ensure employees are afforded the chance to work until age 70, in effect extending the statutory retirement age to that age. The revision is based on serious manpower shortages due to the low birthrate and the need for extended working years in keeping with increased life expectancy.

2) Deepening Awareness of the Structural Situation

Effectively, concerns are rising that the extension of the retirement age could

erode employment opportunities for the younger generation and lead to generational conflicts over jobs. According to the Korea Economic Research Institute, in the youth employment index for OECD countries for the ten years from 2009 to 2019, Korea's unemployment rate for young people (aged 15–29) increased by 0.9 percent (from 8.0 percent in 2009 to 8.9 percent in 2019), while the OECD average decreased by 4.4 percent over that same period. Conversely, in Japan for 2009–2019, youth unemployment decreased significantly, from 8.0 percent to 3.6 percent (Korea Economic Research Institute 2019).

The rise of the youth unemployment rate is cited as a key factor that could lead to generational conflicts, along with an increase in pension and medical expenses. In particular, the implementation of an extension of the retirement age for the elderly could make it more difficult for young people to secure a job, given that the youth unemployment rate has not improved. With the rapid aging of the population, the elderly and young people are forced to express different views and positions on medical expenses, pensions, and jobs. A recent survey showed that these concerns are already becoming a reality. According to the "Comprehensive Report on the Rights of the Elderly," the result of a survey by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea in 2018, 80.9 percent of young people (aged 19–39) said they had a "negative prejudice against the elderly." In the report, 56.6 percent of young people responded that "they are concerned about the decrease in youth jobs due to the increase in elderly jobs." Up to 77.1 percent of the youth answered that "the expansion of welfare for the elderly is feared to increase the burden on the youth." The report attributed this negative perception of the elderly among young people to conflicts over jobs and welfare costs (National Human Rights Commission of Korea 2018).

As mentioned earlier, Japan has the lowest youth unemployment rate (3.6%) among OECD countries as of 2019. Japan's youth unemployment rate fell by over half between 2009 (8.0%) and 2019 (3.6%). Although Japan had already implemented the 60-year-old retirement age legislation in 1998, it is believed to have had little impact on youth unemployment. Rather, the drop is interpreted as the result of a sharp decline in Japan's working-age population. In Japan, even when the youth unemployment rate reached 8

percent, significant generational conflicts over jobs did not emerge. Retired older generations, represented by the *dankai* (baby boomer) generation, often gave up regular jobs to young people and later worked as irregular workers. There is a weak perception in Japan of conflict between youth and elderly over jobs.

However, Japan's younger and older generations remain at odds over how to use social resources. In particular, Japanese young people in their 20s and 30s are perceived to be poorer than their parents and grandparents. This is because the older generation, which experienced a period of high economic growth, enjoyed all the benefits of that growth while only passing on a long-term recession to the younger generation. In fact, in Japan, members of households in their 60s and older own 65.7 percent of all household financial assets. The reality is that these older generations are overwhelmingly wealthy compared to the younger generations aged between 20s and 50s. In addition, 70 percent of Japan's social security resources are concentrated on the elderly, leaving young people dissatisfied with the fact that only senior citizens receive financial resources (Takanori 2016). Reflecting this phenomenon, the newly made term *genro*, meaning *old-age hatred*, has been in vogue for a few years. Young Japanese people, who have to spend a lot of money to support the elderly generation, are reluctant to become elderly people beyond negative views on the elderly.

3) Mobilization of Organizational-Political Power

As of 2020, the current Korean young generation's antipathy toward the elderly cannot be dismissed. As the population continues to age, economic, political, and social interests among generations are in increasingly fierce conflict. Disparaging comments regarding the elderly are commonly found on the Internet. The negative view of the elderly is leading to an abhorrence of growing old. The economic interests among generations, such as the national pension distribution, the obligation to support elders, and limited job opportunities, will inevitably lead to the increase in hatred of the elderly among young people.

A representative case of inter-generational conflict is the petition

campaign for the abolition of free subway rides for senior citizens, which was organized mainly by young people after the 2012 presidential election in Korea.[7] After the election of Korea's 18th president, support began to spread among young people for the abolition of free subway rides for seniors and the basic old-age pension. This was the first time that the younger generation has rebelled against welfare policies targeting the elderly. Following upon this, the National Youth Union (Jeonguk cheongnyeonhap) was formed in 2013, and in the same year, groups advocating youth interests, such as the Part-time Worker Solidarity (Alba yeondae), appeared (Koo 2014). These youth groups carry out various activities to promote the practical interests of the young generation, including minimum-wage hikes and half-price college tuition. However, conflicts related to minimum-wage hikes, half-price college tuition, and basic pensions can be said to be ideological conflicts rather than conflicts between generations. Various opinion polls do indicate support or opposition to these issues as a question of age, but rather as emerging ideological confrontations between the political left and right, as seen in the debate over selective welfare or universal welfare.

The issue of extending the retirement age remains controversial in Korea. Its proponents argue that extending the retirement age to 60 or older could increase the income of the middle-aged and senior population, thereby relieving poverty and easing the shortage of skilled workers. On the other hand, opponents argue that mandatory retirement age extension will reduce the number of young workers, which will intensify job competition between generations. In particular, the opposition to the extension of retirement age prevails among young people, and it is argued that the damage caused by the extension of the retirement age will have negative repercussion on young

7. The free subway ride program for the elderly has its origins in the 50 percent discount that began to be offered to seniors (aged 70 and older) starting from May 8, 1980 (Parents' Day). In 1982, the Welfare of the Elderly Act was enacted and the age of the elderly was lowered to 65. In 1984, the Enforcement Decree of the Elderly Welfare Act was revised to adjust the discount rate of subway fares for senior citizens, and the full free ride system began to be implemented for senior citizens aged 65 and older. Seven out of ten Koreans think that the current free ride system should either be "abolished" (22.3%) or "changed" (46.3%), with many youth saying that older people should not benefit as they do now (*Yonhap News*, November 19, 2020).

people seeking to enter the job market. The problem is that political parties are moving to politically exploit the generation gap. Ahead of the recent Seoul mayoral election, candidates were offering pledges in favor of either the younger or the older generation. This could further deepen generational conflict. The more selfish political parties or politicians attempt to win votes by sowing inter-generational conflict, the wider that gap between generations will become.

Since the 1990s, Japan has been divided into groups of beneficiaries and providers as pension and medical issues have emerged due to the country's prolonged economic recession. The beneficiaries of pensions and medical services are the elderly, while the burden of providing for this falls to the younger generation. Because of this, the divide between the elderly, who are beneficiaries, and the burdened younger generation has continued to widen. Since the 1990s, progressive forces such as the Socialist Party have degenerated in Japanese politics, and as the overall *conservatization* of the country has continued, progressive parties have not played major roles.

In the 2000s, such accumulated grievances manifested themselves in the form of inter-generational conflict. *Speeding old man* or *dankai monster* is a newly coined term used to ridicule the older generation, to include the *dankai* generation—Japan's baby boomers. In addition, expressions that reveal hostility toward the elderly generation, such as, "retirees who live in delusion," "unavailable veterans," and "childlike old men," often appear online. Some members of the younger generation are raising their voices to complain that the elderly enjoyed the full feast of high growth, but it is the younger generation, who never saw the food, which is washing the dishes. Some younger Japanese are trying to establish their power in politics, claiming that unless they transform the nation's politics, inter-generational conflict and inequalities will not be resolved.

However, the solidarity and organization of young people in Japan are less advanced relative to Korea. In the case of Japan, not only is there no power for political innovation but also there is weak ideological confrontation or competition among political parties that can support the solidarity and political empowerment of young people. Even if Japan's young generation tries to become a political force, it will be difficult to overcome

the elderly generation, which already exceeds 40 percent of the voting population. This is because Japan has already become a silver democracy, dominated by the elderly.

The Difference between Japan and Korea

The first reason for the difference in the way public conflicts are expressed in Japan and Korea is the culture of ideological confrontation firmly rooted in Korean society. Ideological confrontation disrupts balanced perspectives and attitudes in national and social issues, and leads to hostility when there is a lack of coordination and compromise between conservatives and progressives (Im and Eun 2020). As confirmed in the case related to the establishment of a new crematorium, conflicts have been politicized by local residents' preference for a particular political party and the party to which the head of the local government belongs. Therefore, in Korea, reaching social consensus on contentious issues is becoming difficult as the party system becomes extremely ideologically polarized. Political elites and political parties strategically spark hostility as a means of maximizing their political interests (Chae 2014). In other words, even though certain issues are not the source of ideological conflicts, these conflicts become politicized and turn ideological due to the intervention of political and civic groups and excessive media coverage. For this reason, stakeholders cannot reasonably judge conflicts, and it is difficult to adjust conflicts or find reasonable solutions. In the end, essential problems are weakened and the additional problems are added to prolong conflicts, often consuming unnecessary social and policy capital.

The second reason is that Korean and Japanese cultures have different attitudes to conflict. The Seventeen-Article Constitution by Prince Shotoku (574–622 CE) was the first written law in Japan. Articles 1, 10 and 17 of this document emphasize the spirit of harmony. In particular, the beginning of Article 1, which states "harmony should be valued," had a profound impact on Japanese society. The character "wa" literally means soft, gentle and flexible, but as an ideology, it stands for the exclusion of hostile reasoning, the pursuit of harmony, and strengthening internal cohesion (Yeon 1998, ch.

5). While practical interests in Wang Yangming's doctrine, pre-coordination and behind-the-scenes maneuvering are common in Japan, honor and reputation play major roles the doctrine of Zhu Xi (orthodox Confucianism) that was adopted in Korea, wherein compromise is sometimes considered a betrayal of principles.

Cultural differences over public conflict between Korea and Japan are evident in the number of lawsuits between the two countries. In Japan in 2019, about 35 percent of civil suits were resolved through arbitration or reconciliation without a formal court ruling. In Korea, only 6.5 percent of civil suits were resolved through arbitration or reconciliation in 2019, and even in these cases most were almost forcibly referred to arbitration by the bench. In 2009 in Korea, a mere 9216 cases (0.7% of the total) applied for arbitration In Korea, there were 514,000 cases filed with the prosecution in 2010. This increased to 594,000 in 2015 and 651,000 in 2019 (Supreme Court of Korea 2019).

Third, there is a difference in governance between the two countries. Implementing policy in a democratic country requires a process of understanding and persuasion among many stakeholders. Since democratization, Korea has established policies in terms of a five-year, single-term presidency, all under two-party competition. This has led to frequent policy changes in line with the inauguration of a new president or head of a government agency (Kang 2018). Therefore, Korea's political system is not effective in dealing with long-term and structural changes such as aging. It is also true that in terms of governance and public administration, Korea is lacking in efforts to persistently persuade its stakeholders regarding policies due to the lingering effects of long-time authoritarian rule (Kim and Eom 2016).

Finally, cultural, social, and institutional factors work together to differentiate the two countries. The Japanese perception of death is quite different from the Korean. In Japan, many cemeteries exist in the middle of cities and villages. Japanese are not as afraid of death as are Koreans. Therefore, residential spaces and cemeteries coexist with villages, and residents believe that they will be buried there someday (Yoo 2016). In Japan there has been little conflict over the installation of elderly facilities

due to strong consensus on the success of the public awareness campaign and the broad understanding of the need to manage dementia patients in local communities. Regarding the extension of the statutory retirement age, Japanese private operators voluntarily extended the retirement age first, and then the government followed with institutionalization. These principles were adopted during the economic boom in Japan, allowing them to become stably established without major conflict between the elderly and younger generations. By contrast, the Korean government mandated an extension of the retirement age to 60 in 2016, and is currently pushing to extend the statutory retirement age to 65. Conflicts are escalating due to worsening labor costs for private enterprises and increased youth unemployment.

Conclusion

Korea is now experiencing aging-related social phenomena similar to what Japan experienced about twenty years ago. Given the rapid aging of Korean society, the trajectory of social change due demographic transition may continue to mimic the Japanese experience. Both countries are facing or have faced the same problems: augmented demand for cremation facilities due to increasing natural deaths, the need to add nursing and dementia-treatment facilities for the elderly, and the extension of the legal retirement age to cope with a decrease in the working-age population. While the two countries are experiencing similar social phenomena and problems due to aging, we can see that their responses and outcomes are quite different from the perspective of national conflict.

This difference can be attributed to historical and cultural differences between the two countries, and whether the relevant policies are implemented in accordance with the degree of aging. Most of all, however, the reason Korea's public conflict is more intense than Japan's is the ideological confrontation between conservatives and progressives that is widespread in Korean society. In Korea, confrontation between conservatives and progressives has emerged as a form of conflict between groups on various issues. Such ideological confrontation is an obstacle to rational problem-

solving, as it is linked to a failure in communication, growing prejudice, a reproduction of fixed behavior patterns, an expansion of emotional bias, and heightened anger in the course of the conflict. Eventually, discourse and action to justify collective action are reproduced within the group, and political mobilization is achieved through a combination of ideological frames. When the conflict enters this stage, it becomes difficult to manage by merely adjusting interests based on formal logic, and the struggle becomes deadlocked. Therefore, preventive conflict management is required for the *stage of awareness of structural situations*, which is the stage preceding ideological confrontation.

The structural situation of aging is considered a fundamental driver of conflict, but it does not spread to public conflict of its own accord. In other words, although the structural problem of aging may be the gunpowder that guarantees the possibility of a confrontation between stakeholders, it is not the detonator that causes that conflict. Therefore, it is necessary to proactively manage the stages (data, perception, and values) of the detonator before the gunpowder explodes into public conflict.

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