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COVID-19, Disgust, and Public Policy: Focusing on Anti-Chinese Sentiment in South Korea

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brings about deep impacts in human society. One of the noticeable impacts is a rising xenophobia all over the world. In particular, the anti-Chinese sentiment (Sinophobia) is observed in many countries, and South Korea (hereafter Korea) is not an exception. The main objective of this article is to explore the characteristics and origins of the anti-Chinese sentiment that has been widely spread among the Korean youth. It has been acknowledged that there are many causes of Sinophobia in Korea – such as fine dust problem and the roles of media. I put forward another reason of Sinophobia while drawing on the concepts that Martha Nussbaum (2019) suggests. According to her, fear leads to errors and also drives other emotions such as anger and disgust. Furthermore, the concept of projective disgust that Nussbaum suggests is connected to the "othering" process. It implies that some groups are demonized and wrongly blamed in the context of pandemic. Furthermore, fear grows when life is unstable, and projective disgust also grows out of insecurity. Therefore, I propose that an insufficient social safety net of Korea may play an important role in shaping mass attitudes toward outsiders and minorities. Specifically, an insufficient social safety net for the youth and labor market dualism lead to fear and anxiety among the Korean youth. In order to lessen vulnerability and insecurity that drive fear and anxiety among the Korean youth, more government's actions are required to provide a facilitating environment for the Korean youth.

Keywords: *Fear, Projective disgust, Othering process, the Korean youth, Public policy*

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COVID-19, 혐오, 그리고 공공정책: 한국의 반중 정서와 관련하여

전승봉

국문요약

코로나19는 인류사에 많은 영향을 가져오고 있으며, 그러한 영향 중 하나로 전 세계적으로 목격되는 외국인에 대한 혐오를 들 수 있다. 특히 중국인에 대한 혐오는 많은 국가에서 관찰되고 있으며 한국도 예외는 아니다. 본 연구의 주 목적은 한국, 특히 한국의 청년층에 광범위하게 퍼져있는 반중감정의 원인에 대해 마사 누스바움이 제시한 개념을 사용하여 그 특징과 원인을 살펴보는 것이다. 누스바움에 따르면 두려움은 오류를 낳고, 분노나 혐오와 같은 연관된 감정을 유발한다. 나아가 누스바움이 제시하고 있는 투사적 혐오감은 '타자화'라는 개념과 밀접한 연관성을 가지고 있다. 전염병이 만연한 현재의 상황에서 '타자화'란 일부 (소수) 집단들이 악마화되고 잘못된 비난의 화살을 받게 된다는 것을 의미한다. 두려움은 사람들의 삶이 불안정한 상태일 때 사회에 만연하게 되며, 투사적 혐오감 또한 유사한 원인에서 비롯된다.

따라서 삶의 불안정성을 충분히 감소시키지 못하는 수준의 사회 안전망은 외부인, 그리고 소수자를 향한 우리의 태도 형성에 있어 중요한 역할을 한다고 볼 수 있다. 특히 노동시장의 이원화와 불충분한 수준의 사회 안전망으로 인해 한국의 청년들이 느끼는 두려움과 불안은 더욱 심화되고 있다. 청년들이 느끼는 두려움과 불안의 근본적인 원인이 되는 취약성과 불안정성을 해소할 수 있는 정부의 정책적 노력이 필요한 시점이다.

주제어: *두려움, 투사적 혐오감, 타자화, 한국 청년, 공공정책*

I. Introduction

We are living through the unprecedentedly frustrating and dangerous times. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed our everyday life, institutions, and social structure. Friedman (2020) has referred to the contemporary world as being divided into two eras: the world B.C.—before Corona—and the world A.C.—after Corona. The pandemic has raised various practical issues related to abrupt changes as caused by the spread of virus, with the long-term impacts not yet fully understood.

Among many changes triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of racism (or xenophobia) is a noticeable social and political change. As COVID-19 has spread across the U.S., so has xenophobia, discriminatory acts, and crimes against Asian-Americans (Le et al. 2020). The outbreak brought about increased levels of fear and an outburst of strong emotions, leading to xenophobia and violence (Ziems et al. 2020). For instance, when new COVID-19 cases peaked in the U.S. in March 2020, the volume of searches for the term "chink"—which is used to disparage Asians—also reached its highest point. The fact that the number of mentions of "coronavirus" paired with "China" skyrocketed in *The New York Times* at the same time reveals that media framing was poured out into mass behavior (Reny and Barreto 2020, 3). Hate crime rooted in racism also seems to upsurge. According to a recent survey conducted by "Stop AAPI Hate," 3,795 cases of racially-motivated incidents occurred from March, 19, 2020 to Feb. 28, 2021 (Bae 2021; Kuk 2021). Furthermore, 81% of Asian respondents in a research conducted by Pew Research Center say that violence against them is increasing (Ruiz, Edwards, and Lopez 2021). This means that Asia-Americans have been living in an increased state of anxiety after the outbreak. In addition, some more right-leaning politicians such as former President Donald Trump and Texas Senator John Cornyn shaped public sentiment and reactions through the use of racist and xenophobic rhetoric. Trump demonized Chinese and other Asian-Americans by labeling COVID-19 as the "Wuhan virus" and the "Kung Flu" (Boyer 2020). Public attitudes and opinions on COVID-19 are influenced by some elites' use of blame rhetoric that arouses racism and xenophobia, and which subconsciously persists in the minds of the public.

Although the rise of xenophobia and racism appears frightening, the association between disease and xenophobia (and racism) is not entirely new in U.S. history (Le et al. 2020). For instance, "yellow peril" ideology thrived in the late 19th century across the U.S. and led to the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—this, in turn, fueled perceptions of the Chinese and other Asians as threats and being infested with infectious diseases (Le et al. 2020). Sadly, this stereotype is still alive (Reny and Barreto 2020, 6). It is no surprise that the racialization of disease is a deeply rooted perception, and this has been used politically in the U.S. context.

Blaming or scapegoating is found everywhere. If we observe public reactions against the COVID-19 pandemic in South Korea (hereafter, Korea), the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment (Sinophobia) is noticeable, especially among Korean youth. The anti-Chinese sentiment observed in Korea is difficult to explain,[1] as there is no deeply rooted anti-Asian sentiment or

[1] Banning Chinese nationals from entering Korea at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be counted as groundless Sinophobia, as the patients at that point in time were mostly mainland Chinese and most countries blocked flights to and from China. This action stemmed from a rational calculation meant to block the spread of the infectious disease.

noticeable demonization of the Chinese by politicians (although some conservative-leaning politicians have attempted to make use of this tactic). China's Northeast Project and China's reaction to THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) might provide a plausible explanation.

I suggest that the argument offered by Martha Nussbaum, which highlights the role of emotions, provides valuable insights into understanding anti-Chinese sentiment in Korea. In addition, her account of emotions can subsequently be extended to the public policy arena. Consequently, problems in public policy have reinforced hatred against China and the Chinese.

The main objective of this article is to provide an overview of the account of emotions by Nussbaum and to apply it to explain the anti-Chinese sentiment apparent in Korea. In addition, policy-oriented solutions are suggested. To do so, I begin by mapping out those of Nussbaum's ideas that emphasize the association between emotions and phobia. In the context of pandemics, this provides us with an explanation of the mechanism of merging phobias with diseases. Although I agree with many of her important claims, there is a lack of terms in one area of importance. Nussbaum searches for the origin of fear in childhood experience, building on Winnicott's concept of the "facilitating environment." The purpose of this study is to clarify what Nussbaum briefly alludes to. I propose that the social safety net prepared by public policies should be included in the realm of the "facilitating environment." Finally, I conclude that feelings of security are a precondition for not being trapped in groundless fear, anger, and disgust.

II. Martha Nussbaum's account on emotions

In her book, *The Monarchy of Fear* (2019), Nussbaum delves into emotions that are crucial to understanding human society. Her main argument is that fear leads to other emotions that can cause problems, such as phobia or misogyny. She also shows how fear is related to, and drives, other types of emotions—such as anger and disgust. In essence, fear is a central emotion of human life and originates from vulnerability and helplessness. Emotions such as disgust, hate, envy, and aggression are all rooted in fear—which, in turn, brings about scapegoating and exclusion.

According to Nussbaum, fear is a fundamental, durable, and asocial emotion. To begin with, she draws from Aristotle's definition of fear, as found in his *Rhetoric*. Fear, in this case, is defined as "pain at the seeming presence of some impending bad thing combined with a feeling that you are powerless to ward it off." (Nussbaum 2019, 24). Almost all human emotions involve informational processing concerning an animal's well-being (Nussbaum 2019, 23). Fear comes from the perception that our well-being is threatened, which we cannot avoid because of our vulnerability and powerlessness. Drawing from the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott's ideas, Nussbaum (2019) insists that fear originates from infants' helplessness. This implies that fear is a deeply-seated emotion and is connected to the concern that our basic needs cannot be met. In short, fear arises from one's existential concerns. As fear is related to the sense that something bad can threaten or harm our well-being (even our life), it is an entirely self-focused emotion. An infant who experiences fear can only concern him/herself with his/her own situation and not the situations of others. It can be said that fear seriously hinders one's ability to understand others.

According to Nussbaum (2019), fear leads to errors because our tendency to avoid disaster

makes us measure our well-being, along with whom or what is threatening it. Unfortunately, as Nussbaum points out, errors are more likely to occur in this process when we are caught up in a state of fear. One common source of error induced by fear is that of the "availability heuristic," a psychological concept that suggests that, if we experience an issue as particularly salient, we tend to overestimate its importance (Degerman et al. 2020, 5). Although a heuristic is a mental shortcut that allows rapid problem solving based on past experience, overuse of a heuristic has the potential to increase the likelihood of errors and fortify our bias. A prejudice linking Muslims to acts of terror is a noticeable example of a heuristic that leads some to reach irrational conclusions. Although only relatively few Muslims might be involved in acts of terror, certain populations have bought into rhetoric of Islamophobia. Similar logic can be applied to anti-Asian sentiments via extended forms of fear: disgust and anger.

Anger, which Nussbaum refers to as the offspring of fear, is also connected to a sense of helplessness (Nussbaum 2019, 68). Anger is related to judgments concerning who did the bad thing, how significant it was, and whether it was inflicted wrongly. We expect our needs to be fulfilled—but this is beyond our control. We can say that anger creeps in when we feel that something has gone wrong, but we cannot do anything. When we feel that something is out of order, a tendency to blame others for failing to meet our expectations can be seen. Nussbaum's example is the response to economic woes. Although the causes of economic troubles are uncertain, we confer blame onto groups that are easily demonized (Nussbaum 2019, 83).

In the context of COVID-19, understanding public reactions to infectious diseases becomes an important task. Emerging infectious diseases may trigger disgust and fear (Kam 2019). There are two competing perspectives on attitudes toward contagious diseases. First, it is explained that our fear and disgust of diseases are the result of an evolutionary urge to survive. This is referred to as a "behavioral immune system." In this line of argument, the origin of fear and disgust concerning contagious diseases is rooted in a disease-avoidance mechanism that protects us from harm (Kam 2019; Schaller and Neuberg 2012). Disgust is the working of a vigilant defensive mechanism protecting one from potential dangers. Another theory regarding public attitudes toward diseases is the "othering" hypothesis. "Othering," in a broad sense, refers to "that process which serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself" (Weis 1995, 18; cited from Kam 2019). If the othering process is more specifically defined in the context of pandemics, it comes to mean that groups defined as different from the majority can be framed as responsible for the disease (Reny and Barreto 2020, 5).

The concept of projective disgust is what Nussbaum suggests is connected to the othering process. According to Nussbaum, people are more likely to deny their animality and mortality—aspects which are not actually detachable from the essence of humanity. The solution to overcome this problematic situation is to attribute animality to other people, labeling them as inferior and unpleasant. This type of disgust is called "projective," in that some disgusting properties of human beings are (wrongly) attributed to some people. Exclusion and subordination based on race, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are common examples of projective disgust. Nussbaum (2019, 110), in light of this, points out the following:

> [H]ere's the "bright idea": what if we could identify a group of human being[s] whom we could see as more animal than we are, more sweaty, more smelly, more sexual, more suffused with the stench of mortality? If we could identify such a group

> of humans and subordinate them successfully, we might feel more secure. Those are the animals, not us. Those are dirty and smelly, we are pure and clean.

In this quote, designating some (unwanted) properties to others requires the identification of a group of people as the (different and inferior) others. In general, vulnerable and/or minority groups are the targets appointed as the "others." Images overlaid on African Americans as sources of contamination and as threatening animals (Nussbaum 2019) illustrate how othering, racism, and disgust are tightly intertwined. The Japanese philosopher Yoshimichi Nakajima (2018) also points out that the delusion that we are clean and good, and outsiders are dirty and bad works as a root of disgust, fear, and discrimination. This idea is similar to the concept of projective disgust and the othering process.

Throughout human history, othering has been common in times of epidemics, whereby specific groups have been implicated in the development or transmission of a disease. Following Nussbaum's reasoning, the process of "othering" can be understood as an exercise in projective disgust which is activated in the context of a pandemic, given that we are witnessing the merging of prejudice toward a specific racial group and a perception of COVID-19.

The working of fear and other related emotions in the process of othering is as follows. First, as mentioned earlier, fear is the most basic and primitive emotion, stemming from human vulnerability and helplessness. Second, humans need a strategy to overcome the negative emotions that they may feel when something goes wrong. Third, a common strategy is that some groups are chosen as targets, and are subsequently stigmatized and become objects of revulsion and shame. This is the "othering" process. Fourth, a group-based prejudice emerges, sowing seeds of an attitude that can be amplified by crises and uncertainty.

The rise of anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. exemplifies the machinations of the othering process as described above. Asian-Americans are unreasonably demonized as disease carriers, and have thus become a target of discrimination, exclusion, and physical violence. Asian-Americans are falsely accused of being the source of COVID-19—a conclusion which is, needless to say, scientifically ungrounded and illogical. However, the American public's attitude toward Asian-Americans demonstrates how blaming and scapegoating a minority group works in times of crisis. In short, fear, anger, and disgust lead us to become more susceptible to errors. Some noticeable social problems, such as racial discrimination, originate from such errors driven by our emotions.

A similar logic underlies Sinophobia in South Korea. Although the anti-Chinese sentiment found in Korea seems different from the anti-Asian attitudes apparent in the U.S., the similarities lie in that a wrong target is chosen in both contexts. Koreans may believe it is justified to block Chinese nationals from entering the country (Korea) so as to protect the community or to blame Chinese nationals for the COVID-19 pandemic. Preventing contamination often requires "othering," which inevitably leads to exclusion and discrimination against the vulnerable and/or minority groups who are appointed as "them." The framework of a polluted "them" and a pure "us" seems to operate through the mass attitudes concerning COVID-19. Simply put, every society is home to groups that are stigmatized. Asian-Americans are victims of circumstances, having become a symbol of risk. In this situation, compassion based on human commonality and rational thinking seems too far a way to go.

III. The root of insecurity

An unfavorable view of China is not a specific phenomenon observed in Korea. Negative evaluations of China are observed in most advanced economies (Silver, Devlin, and Huang 2020). Media outlets in Korea have recently paid attention to this phenomenon (Lee 2021). Sinophobia seems to have come to characterize the New Normal.

However, Sinophobia in Korea has been investigated in detail due to its importance and peculiarity. First, age is inversely correlated with holding unfavorable views of China in Korea. The remarkable trend of anti-China sentiment is that younger generations (20- to 30-year-olds) show higher levels of anti-China sentiment than older generations. Although anti-China sentiments have become a worldwide phenomenon, Korea is unusual, in that the younger generation exhibits a greater degree of negative perceptions of China than the older generations. In terms of political orientation, there is no significant relationship to Sinophobia in Korea. Second, there is a possibility that this peculiarity seen in Korea can be explained by Nussbaum's account of emotions. Needless to say, negative perceptions of China are influenced by a multitude of aspects: China's comments and reactions on THADD, fine dust from China, China's Northeast Project, and so on. Many Koreans consider China and the Chinese to be heavy-handed, arrogant, and forcing their attitudes and behaviors upon Korea (Lee 2021). In addition, the ways in which the Chinese are represented in popular culture and media outlets have contributed to shape distorted images of the Chinese (or Korean-Chinese). Ryu (2018) points out that some Korean movies, such as 'Youth Police' and 'The Outlaws', were full of prejudice in describing the Korean-Chinese people. These images mirrored in movies reinforce the distinction lines between us (pure) and them (dirty). A study on news topics related to Chinese international students residing in Korea reveals that the news about them in 2020 were intensively linked to reports on the COVID-19 situation in which these students were described as potential virus carriers (Choi and Jin 2021). Sinophobia, especially among the Korean youth, might stem from the various reasons described above.

Nonetheless, I suggest that fear and anxiety stemming from insecurity might be the bedrock of anti-China sentiment among Korean youth. Korean society is swayed by exaggerated levels of fear and incorrect information. Some might propose that an unfavorable view of China stems from a real threat from China, not from fear and anger. However, one can notice that a heuristic is at work, exaggerating the threat posed by China and the Chinese. The debate revolving around real estate purchases made by Chinese people provides a good example of fear and anxiety about China and its citizens. The perception that China has economically invaded Korea has particularly stoked the flames of anti-China sentiments. Many people think that the Chinese people who came to Korea for work are potential competitors (Hong 2021). Public sentiment commonly leads us to believe that the Chinese have purchased a great deal of houses and land (specifically on Jeju Island and in Seoul). However, this image is overexaggerated: only 0.6% of total real estate transactions in 2020 were conducted by Chinese nationals, while only 0.02% of Korean land has currently been bought by Chinese citizens (Kim 2021).

The hostility against China and the Chinese (based on wrong or exaggerated information) might be lessened if one feels that one's life is secure. Anti-China sentiments mirror the situation in which systematic fears and anxieties are not properly cared for in the society. In particular, a higher level of anti-China sentiment among those in their 20s and 30s might reflect precariousness and indicate a lack of support available to them.

It can be asked whether looking into the economic condition and precariousness experienced by the Korean youth is meaningful to investigate fear, anger, and disgust. Social conflicts we are witnessing, such as gender or generational conflict, also can motivate our negative emotions. Nonetheless, the feeling of insecurity seems to be a wide-spread, fundamental cause that can account for conflicts observed in Korean society. For instance, the lack of decent jobs and supporting policies are intertwined with gender conflict (Oh 2021). This implies that fear and aggressiveness related to the othering process are influenced by socioeconomic conditions. There is a historical example showing the importance of economic condition in understanding our emotions. Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man, was beaten to death in a racially motivated attack by two white men in Detroit in 1982. The two white men lost their jobs in car manufacture industry. These men thought that they were laid-off due to the economic invasion of Japan into the American soil (Bae 2021). Although Vincent Chin was not a Japanese descendent, he became a victim of hate crime. This case was the result of the sense of deprivation, fused with the othering and misrecognition. It has been pointed out that separating 'us' and 'them' by framing minorities as bad or inferior was a common phenomenon (Perry 2001; Weiss 1995). When people feel insecurity, they can attribute the root of insecurity to the minority group. Accordingly, we need to estimate the current socioeconomic conditions that can influence the levels of anger and disgust against minorities and foreigners. Although there can be other sources of fear, anger, and disgust towards others, it seems that poor economic situation and emotions stemming from this situation are the crucial factor in explaining phobia.

The important concept that Nussbaum (2006, 2019) frequently makes use of is that of "facilitating environment." This concept—originally coined by Winnicott—refers to what children need if they are to develop concern for others. It has been argued that there are conditions necessary for overcoming fear. According to Nussbaum (2019, 39), families that can provide loving stability and a warm atmosphere are included in the facilitating environment. Along with such a family, economic and social preconditions are also important. For instance, Nussbaum states that:

> [F]ear is running rampant in our nation [the U.S.]: fear of declining living standards, of unemployment, of the absence of health care in times of need; fear of an end to the American dream, in which you can be confident that hard working brings a decent and stable life and that your children will do better than you did if they too, work hard (Nussbaum 2019, 62).

As discussed above, fear grows when life is unstable. Projective disgust also grows out of insecurity (Nussbaum 2019, 132). Crises and uncertainty can become amplifiers of fear, anger, and disgust. The quote above is connected to the necessity of government policy in terms of reducing fear. As fear is a root cause of human errors and blocks compassion, government actions to nurture a facilitating environment are urgently needed. In short, public policy plays a crucial role in providing the power to manage the negative consequences of emotions.

Although Nussbaum (2019) informs us of the importance of public policy, her work does not extend to policy-oriented solutions. Furthermore, and for the purposes of this paper, policy solutions that can be applied to the U.S. may be slightly different from those needed for Korea. While grounding my inquiry in Nussbaum's account of emotion, I have focused on the

connection between emotions and the facilitating environment as it manifests in terms of welfare policy.

IV. Welfare policies in Korea

Many previous studies have discussed the characteristics of the Korean welfare system. In terms of policies and money spent on welfare, the Korean welfare state has improved enormously. The scope of social protection has broadened, and mandatory state-run social insurance schemes have become universal programs. In addition, social service programs such as childcare and long-term care for the elderly have been introduced (Yang 2013, 457). Korea seems to be on a similar track to that of advanced welfare states (Yang 2013). Since the 2000s, Korea's welfare spending has swiftly increased, largely in response to the country's rapidly-aging population (Kim Tae-il 2021).

However, we still need to consider Korea's welfare system in terms of quantification, coverage, and effect. The Korean welfare system is small in size and dualistic in coverage (Yang 2013, 459)[2]. In terms of money spent on welfare, Korea lags far behind other OECD countries. In 2019, public social spending amounted to about 12.2% of GDP, compared to the OECD average of about 20% of the GDP for the same year (OECD 2019). For Korea, this share sat at 2.61% of the GDP in 1990. Therefore, when considering other OECD countries, it can be concluded that the extension of the Korean welfare state, in terms of public social spending, remains insufficient. Only Chile, Mexico, and Turkey have spent less than Korea in terms of welfare.

Not only is the amount of money problematic, but so is the issue of overemphasized social insurance. It is estimated that social insurance programs—such as those concerning pensions and healthcare—constitute a large portion of public social spending (Yang 2013; Yoon 2018a, 2018b). It is estimated that 70%–80% of public social spending is related to social insurance programs, with 20%–30% assigned to childcare and basic pensions for the elderly (Kang 2019). This indicates that the Korean welfare system is currently designed to be contribution-based.

Public welfare centered on social insurance programs implies that only people who can regularly pay their social insurance are eligible to be covered by the social safety net. Inevitably, a blind spot in the social safety nets appears. Under the current system—which emphasizes the role of social insurance programs—"only those who already have stable employment enjoy full access to the social security program" (Yang 2013, 459). As such, there remains a gap between the included and excluded, with this gap ever-widening. Yoon (2018a, 2018b) formulated the concept of "backward selectivity" in reference to such a situation. The needy are less likely to be protected by the social safety net.

Figure 1 (shown below)[3] represents backward selectivity and the related blind spot clearly. Compared to regular workers who have relatively stable positions within the labor market, temporary workers are more likely to be excluded from current social insurance programs.

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[2] It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze how the characteristics of the Korean welfare state have been formed. For detailed accounts concerning this issue, see An (2013), Kwon and Holliday (2007), Yang (2013), and Yoon (2018a, 2018b).

[3] https://dashboard.jobs.go.kr/index/summary?pg_id=PSCT030600&data2=SCT030600&ct_type=run (accessed Aug 19, 2021).

Positions in the labor market are highly associated with inclusiveness in the current welfare system. Regular workers working at large companies are more likely to subscribe to social insurance programs. The big-company-oriented economic structure accounts for the gap in income and social insurance. Yoon (2018a, 192) points out that different social positions result in differences in levels of risk preparation. This implies that enjoying a decent social safety net requires that you have a decent job.

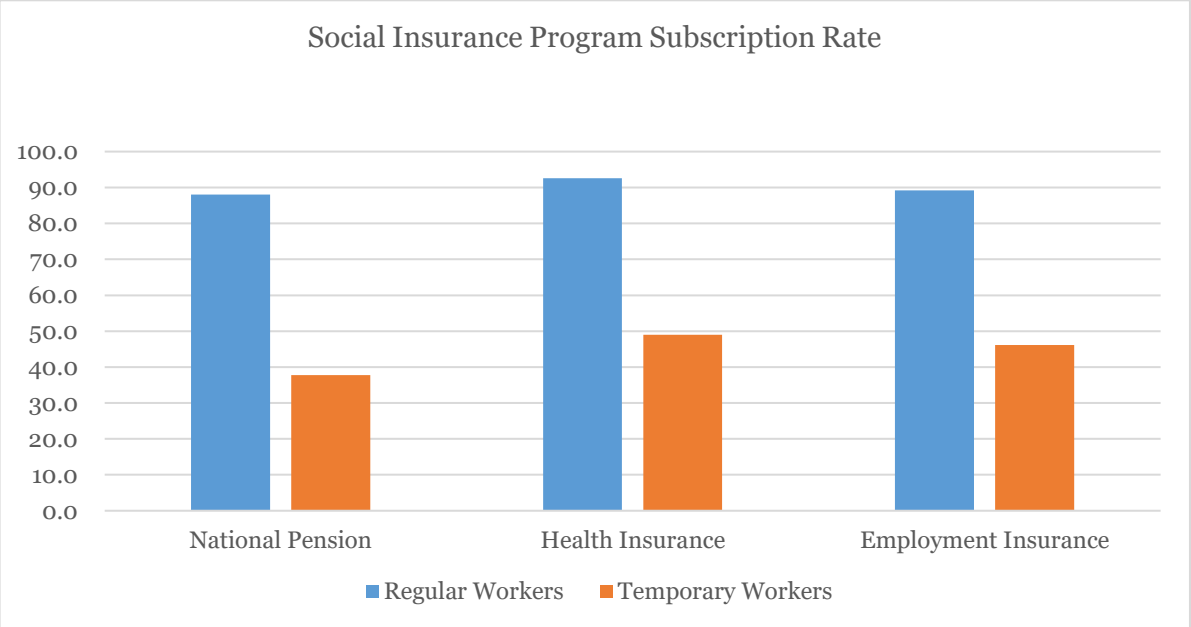

Figure 1. Social Insurance Program Subscription Rate

The functioning of public policies is also problematic. The main functions of welfare policies are to decrease poverty and improve income distribution. Nonetheless, it has been acknowledged that tax and public transfer programs do not effectively decrease poverty and income inequality (Kim 2014; Jeon, Jung, and Yoo 2016). The ineffective public transfer programs in terms of poverty and income redistribution imply that public transfer programs are less generous and that the Korean welfare system still does not fully function in terms of protecting all citizens from risks.

In sum, stemming from labor market dualism and the social insurance-focused approach, there is a significant blind spot apparent within the Korean welfare system. People who do not have stable or decent jobs are less likely to be protected by the social security system. I believe that this insufficient welfare system plays a crucial role in raising fear and anxiety in the minds of Koreans. Deeply rooted fear and anxiety are not effectively attenuated by the welfare system in Korean society (especially among the youth).

V. The situation concerning Korean youth

The increasing vulnerability of the younger generation has attracted much attention in

scholarly discussions.[4] There is a consensus that the younger generation has been dropped into crises which can propel conflicts. Given that crises and uncertainty ignite fear, anger, and disgust, issues revolving around the youth should also be considered in the context of COVID-19 and Sinophobia.

Oh (2015, 466) insists that the current younger generations, pushed by cutthroat competition under a neoliberal regime, experience severe existential anxiety. Much of the previous literature points out the (internal) suffering of the youth and changes in their outlooks. For instance, a study conducted on the attitudes of the younger Korean generation (Kim et al. 2017) concluded that only a few young people (5.4%) were equipped with both authenticity[5] and self-confidence. As authenticity and self-confidence are important resources in overcoming anxiety, this result implies that many Korean youths are more likely to suffer from anxiety (Kim et al. 2017, 318). Another study (Kim 2015) concerning the mindsets of Korean youths illustrates the collective consciousness of the younger generation, concluding that survival through competition is a settled and accepted norm. To survive, the younger generation have to be experts in self-improvement and management, thus raising their abilities, requiring an extreme amount of effort. In addition, the aims and meanings of life become standardized: Win in competitions and achieve (relatively) good positions. This makes the mindsets of Korean youths desolate. A news article in *The Diplomat* (September 25, 2015) regarding the term "Hell Chosun," points out that the decrease in the sense of freedom of choice and control, coupled with an increasing sense of helplessness, are significantly noticeable among young Koreans (Denny 2015). According to this article, the idea of "Hell Chosun" captures a creeping sense of futility prevalent among young Koreans. All descriptions of the younger Korean generation indicate that their situation presents fertile grounds for feelings of fear, anger, and disgust.

With increasing futility and helplessness, the precarious living conditions of young Koreans have also been observed. Some important indices related to precarious youth are presented below.

[Table 1] The Precarious Situation Facing Korean Youth

	% aged 15–29	% total
Employment rate	43.5%	60.9%
Unemployment rate	8.9%	3.8%
Ratio of temporary workers among laborers	40.4%	36.4%
Ratio of NEET among youth	18.4% (2017)	13.4%
Ratio of people suffering housing deprivation	9.4% (age 20-34)	5.7%
People who have employment insurance	72.8%	84.5% (age 30-39)

(Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare 2019. The unemployment rate was sourced from The Korean Department of Statistics 2021)
NEET: Not currently engaged in education, employment, or training

[4] For a detailed account on the hardship of the youth in the labor market, see Lee (2019).

[5] According to Kernis and Goldman (2006, 294), authenticity can be defined as "the unobstructed operation of one's true- or core-self in one's daily enterprise."

The increasing insecurity among the Korean youth is mostly related to structural changes to the labor market (Lee 2019). Many college graduates in Korea cannot easily find decent jobs. Labor market dualism, combined with the characteristics of the Korean welfare system described earlier, result in severe insecurity for a swathe of young Koreans.

By comparing employment and unemployment rates in general (60.9% and 3.8% in 2019, respectively), the employment rate for the youth is relatively low, while the unemployment rate is relatively high. The number of temporary workers and people who have social insurance among the youth epitomize the problems that young Koreans normally experience. The youth are less likely to be included in the social insurance system than other generations and are more likely to take up posts as temporary workers. For instance, 84.5% of the 30–39 age group holds employment insurance, indicating a gap of more than 10%. This result implies that many of the youth work for small-scale businesses, and that there are insufficient decent jobs for Korean youths. From 2010 to 2015, the number of temporary workers increased (Lee et al. 2016, 373), corroborating the stand that the hardships facing the youth in the labor market are part of a long-term trend. Furthermore, the extant literature reveals that polarization of insecurity in the labor market among the youth has been observed (Lee 2019, 34). The proportion of young people who are not currently engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET) has reached 18.4%, with half of these individuals being holders of a university degree. The OECD average proportion of NEETs is 13.4% (Son 2019). In addition, youths living in a house that did not satisfy the minimum housing standard was measured at 9.4% in 2018.

The hardships that many Korean youths are now suffering can be ameliorated by public policies targeting younger Koreans. Due to the seriousness of the problems facing the youth in Korea, public policies helping this demographic have been discussed and implemented. Youth basic income in Kyonggi-do is an example of a policy designed with Korean youths in mind. Many public policies for Korean youths have been identified as mainly focusing on employment (Lee et al. 2016). This implies that public policies that are more comprehensive and which fit the needs of the youth remain insufficient. Issues related to the youth are often put on the back burner. In addition, the opposition's argument that populist policies—such as the youth allowance—ruin one's will to work has made policy development targeting problems faced by the youth lag behind.

Unemployment and the lack of decent job opportunities have become important social problems in Korea, having specifically hit this demographic group relatively hard. Labor market dualism has seriously damaged the younger Korean generation, which contributes to the formation of a negative worldview. Public policies supporting the youth are inadequate, although their importance has been acknowledged. Considering the fact that the lives of the youth are unstable due to labor market dualism and a lack of applicable public policies, it is difficult to expect a prevailing sense of compassion among the Korean youth. A facilitating environment has not yet been created in Korea. Thus, increasing vulnerability and insecurity, specifically among the youth, has partially contributed to Sinophobia among them.

VI. Conclusion

Winnicott emphasized two factors that help people cultivate concern for others and a mature interdependence. First, the function of families, which satisfy basic needs and provide love and care, is important. Second, a government must support families in order to make the

family unit conducive to providing a facilitating environment. This is not achievable without the government's policy actions. A government plays a crucial role in providing social and economic preconditions that are deemed to be prerequisites for allaying fear. For this reason, Nussbaum (2019, 60-61) suggests that making a nation a facilitating environment is an important concern. Simply put, a good family is possible only when it is supported by the government, and policy matters.

In her 2017 interview (An 2017), Nussbaum points out the importance of public policy more clearly. In this interview, insecurity and economic inequality were pointed out as the main causes behind the rising levels of disgust that prevail throughout many countries, and which have been manipulated by political elites. This also hinders people from having a cosmopolitan citizenship worldview. When a stronger social safety net that allows people to enjoy security and an adequate standard of living is provided, their irrational emotions are curbed. Furthermore, this can save society from the negative results triggered by feelings of fear.

Drawing on Nussbaum's account of fear, anger, and disgust, I shed light on the peculiarity of the Sinophobia observed in Korea. Young people have demonstrated greater negative attitudes toward China and Chinese nationals than older Koreans. I suggest that an insufficient social safety net might play an important role in shaping mass attitudes toward outsiders and minorities. In particular, the life of the Korean youth is in jeopardy. A combination of labor market dualism and the lack of public policy for the youth spreads fear and anxiety among the youth. In turn, Sinophobia, in the context of COVID-19, erupts as a presentation of fear and anxiety. Due to the backward-bias present in the Korean welfare regime, the deeply rooted fear and anxiety manifesting among the youth have not been effectively attenuated by public policy. When this fear and anxiety are combined with a deep-seated nationalism, this can be represented in the form of xenophobia. To break down the vicious circle of feeling insecurity and negative emotions, a more detailed comprehensive public policy for the youth is required. For instance, a study points out that the goal of youth policy should be the "improvement of current youth policies to realize inclusive nation and infusing them into future social policies." (Kim, Byun, and the National Youth Policy Network 2019). This implies new types of youth policies should reduce various social gaps and disparities. Furthermore, not only labor market-focused policies but also policies managing various types of needs suggested by the youth are necessary. Fear, anger, and disgust can be lessened down when new and efficient policies for the Korean youth are implemented.

The fundamental assumption of this article is that a nation should be a facilitating environment that reduces fear. To achieve this aim, the government should provide a proper level of safety for its citizens. Nonetheless, this aim is still far from being achieved in the Korean context. As mentioned above, this situation provides fertile soil for projective disgust and the "othering" of minority groups. In this pandemic era, we are witnessing a modern version of witch hunts—not only in the U.S., but in Korea as well.

The relationship presented between our emotions, public policy, and Sinophobia in this article is a speculative one. The aim of this study is, thus, to propose a theoretical outline connecting social conditions and emotions. Emotions can be influenced by both economic and social conditions. A more detailed, empirical analysis of the connection between emotions and public policy needs to be conducted in future research.

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