

The Logic of Compressed Modernity

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PRODUCTIVE MAXIMIZATION, REPRODUCTIVE MELTDOWN

7.1 Introduction

The condensed capitalist economic development in South Korea and other East Asian societies has been accompanied by the astonishing trends of social withdrawal and displacement (Lie, J. 1998) – namely, epidemic suicide, extremely low fertility, widespread postponement, denial and breakage of marriage, pervasive poverty of elderly and youth, excessive rural exodus, rampant dismissal and withdrawal from industrial work, and radical cultural and normative self-isolation (particularly among youth), etc. For such trends, both in scholarly and public discourses, the conservative ideologies, policies, and actions of the oligarchic political, administrative, and industrial leaders of the region's developmental political economies are often criticized in relation to the deficient and defective welfare programs, the generalized pro-business socioeconomic policies, the systematized exploitation of labor and women, and so forth. While largely agreeing to such criticisms, I propose to probe further the disturbing social trends from a social systemic perspective on the relationship between economic production and social reproduction as a critical aspect of the region's compressed modernity.¹

Social reproduction involves preparation and maintenance of everyday livelihood, preparation of social and occupational participation, courtship and marriage, procreation and rearing of children, care-giving for spouses and parents, and a range of other, mostly family-based activities that are deemed indispensable for the maintenance and enhancement of human and social conditions (Laslett and Brenner 1989).² To simplify, social reproduction is the entire range of individual, familial, communal, corporate, and administrative

activities for generating and managing human life (population) and labor (class). Social reproduction enables these action units to accomplish the securing, maintenance, and improvement of constitutive members essential for their immediate as well as long-term survival and development. Among others, the growth/reduction of population, the quantitative/qualitative change of labor force, and the securing and recruitment of constitutive members are the essential collective outcomes of social reproduction activities. While capitalism is often defined in terms of the organizational principles in the production system, social reproduction has to be managed effectively and stably in order to achieve the smooth and sustained development of capitalist firms and local and national economies. Sociologically, diverse lines of modernity involve correspondingly diverse regimes of social reproduction. As argued in this chapter, theoretical and analytical attention to social reproduction (and its relationship with economic production) is particularly crucial under the condition of compressed modernity.

In East Asia – particularly in South Korea – compressed modernity is to a critical extent the process and outcome of the developmental(ist) political economy that has been forcefully initiated from above (i.e. by the state) and actively propelled from below (i.e. by ordinary citizens). East Asians framed modernity in a fundamentally developmentalist or productionist manner, so modernization principally became the politico-social project of achieving time-condensed economic development and thereby joining the world rank of “advanced nations” (*seonjinguk*).³ Such purposeful approach to modernity in terms of condensed national development has been substantiated by various policies, actions, and attitudes that are designed to maximize economic production and, not coincidentally, to systematically sacrifice the conditions and resources of social reproduction.⁴ To take a simple example, South Korean workers have been forced to labor for far more hours annually than most of their counterparts in other societies, however only by chronically skipping enough sleep.⁵ In fact, sleeplessness is no less problematic among South Korea’s future laborers – namely, students who cannot go to bed until well after midnight due to study burdens. Across the country, in another serious example, rampant ecological predation by industries, developers, and local governments – often in some supposed developmental(ist) alliance – has subjected innumerable rural and urban communities to critically hazardous conditions of human livelihood or social reproduction. The list of no less serious examples is nearly inexhaustible.

The developmental outcomes of such productionist political economy (i.e. new or modern types of industries, (urban) spaces, family forms and relations, lifestyles, etc.) in turn would justify various social ramifications of sacrificed social reproduction (i.e. demise of subsistence economic sectors, socially gainful laboring processes, culturally autonomous families and communities, ecologically embedded lifestyles, etc.).⁶ After decades of successful economic development, this asymmetrical approach to economic production and social reproduction seems to have critically lost its instrumentality. In spite of their enviable façade covered with hyper-advanced industries, physical infrastructures, services, and lifestyles, the civilizational and even economic progress of East Asian societies is now crucially impeded by the disenfranchisement, shrinkage and/or demise of those classes, spaces, communities, cultures, and wisdoms that have been treated practically as *disposables* (unworthy of social reproduction) under the narrowly focused developmental political economies.

This chapter purports to look into the factors, processes, and nature of South Korea's social reproduction crisis from a social systemic perspective on the relationship between economic production and social reproduction under compressed modernity. Specifically, the class (labor) dimensions of South Korea's social reproduction crisis will be discussed in the current chapter, whereas most of its demographic dimensions will later be touched on in Chapter 9. I will systematically appraise the asymmetrical relationship between economic production and social reproduction as a key structural factor for both the country's compressed capitalist development and instantly concomitant crisis in social reproduction of class members of farming villages and urban industries and neighborhoods.

7.2 Varieties of Productionist Systems and Reproductive Crises

It should be noted that the systemic crisis in social reproduction is not limited to productionist capitalist political economy. In fact, a much more formalistic regime of asymmetrical relationship between economic production and social reproduction used to govern a great mass of modern states under Stalinist socialism. Productionism was a national political manifestation of Marxist materialism in which the class primacy of producers (i.e. laborers) was transposed into the statist rule of mobilizational economic development. State economic planning served as a formalized or bureaucratized framework for

maximizing economic production, with its emphasis on heavy industrialization automating the minimization of people's consumption (mostly for social reproduction activities) (Kornai 1992). On top of economic productionism (or economic bias against social reproduction), Marxist materialism also spawned a hostile politico-cultural approach to social reproduction in general. The revolutionary social transformation, or socialist system transition, supposedly required a complete break to feudal and/or capitalist elements in the economy and society, so that social reproduction (conceived in terms of social relations of production) became a critical area of direct state intervention. The Stalinist solution for this social transformation was to completely subdue social reproduction to the industrial production system, as symbolized by the formalistic reconfiguration of the social statuses and mutual relationships of socialist citizens in terms of ranks and functions in the state-controlled production units.⁷ Through these economic and social arrangements, most state-socialist countries initially achieved astonishingly rapid economic growth and social transformation. However, such productionist development was unsustainable precisely due to the structured limit of its social reproduction basis. When the Stalinist economic systems came to an abrupt halt, not only was national economic production arrested, but also people were totally devoid of self-supporting capacities due to their subjection for decades to state intervention against autonomous social reproduction. In one of the twentieth century's greatest paradoxes, such crisis was experienced more seriously by more developed state-socialist countries.

Ironically, or conversely, post-socialist transition has been most successful both in economic and social terms in those countries where the earlier socialist transformation of the economy and society had been most retarded because their underdeveloped status had required them to maintain in varying degrees the traditional and/or indigenous social framework for economic production and social protection. The prominent examples include China and Vietnam. In particular, China's People's Communes (*renmingongshe*) were no less local communitarian than state-socialist because natural village members – frequently including common-family-name kin members – worked together for largely subsistence-oriented agricultural production, relying often on traditional social norms and relations.⁸ In embarking on post-socialist reform, the Deng Xiaoping leadership went further to reinstate family-based rural production and social protection and, concomitantly, strengthened familial autonomy in social reproduction (Chang, K. 1992). The immediate economic outcome in privatized

agricultural production (as stimulated by drastic upward adjustments in state procurement prices for crops) was astonishing, but even this became dwarfed by the totally unexpected explosive growth of rural industrial and tertiary sectors which were autonomously initiated by rural people as familial or communal ventures. Not surprisingly, Chinese villagers' economic success was immediately accompanied and buttressed by their intensified desire for social reproduction – in particular, having more sons, even against the state's stringent birth control policy.⁹

In China's capitalist neighbors in East Asia, diametrically opposite trends in social reproduction have been observed these days. The sequential achievement of compressed capitalist industrialization and economic development by Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea has paradoxically been accompanied by the failure and/or avoidance by individuals, families, communities, and corporations to sufficiently reproduce and maintain constitutive members of families, communities, industries, and, ultimately, nations (national populations). Like in many other aspects, South Korea appears particularly extreme in such trends. In South Korea, the productionist state's biased approach to social reproduction has been framed through what is explained below as *developmental liberalism* in social policy – that is, the developmental state's social policy liberalism (Chang, K. 2018, 2019). This approach has induced and intensified such practices by citizens and firms as to maximize economic production by purposely sacrificing social reproduction.

As compared to the late or “catch-up” industrialization of state socialist countries, that of capitalist developing countries has been a much less programmatic, or even “peripatetic,” experience.¹⁰ The formation, operation, and transformation of the developmental political regimes or governance systems that have successfully orchestrated late but condensed capitalist development have drawn intense and zealous scholarship in political economy, political science, and comparative sociology. These studies have collectively shown that, while not sustained or framed by any deductively acquired schemes for developmental governance, many of the successful national cases of late capitalist development have been ruled by what is often called “the developmental state.” Unfortunately, in researching various developmental states which, as implied above, are overwhelmingly productionist, these studies themselves often remain productionist and fail to pay sufficient attention to social reproduction and to its structural relationship with economic production as crucial components of developmental(ist) political economies. That is, the stance

and impact of the developmental state on social reproduction still need to be scrutinized as a nearly fresh subject. This subject, in turn, has to be approached in conjunction with the broad issue of the general social policy orientations of the developmental states.

In South Korea – or in capitalist East Asia in general – the state’s active developmental pursuit of catch-up industrialization and condensed economic growth has been backed up by what can be characterized as *developmental liberalism* in its social policy front (Chang, K. 2019). State policies regarding, among others, labor, welfare, and education have been generally considered conservative and/or liberal in terms of both spending levels and institutional configurations, but the state’s developmental proactivism has frequently effected a systematic harnessing and/or sacrificing of social policy and grassroots livelihood for the sake of maximum economic growth. In this milieu, the South Korean state has been *developmentally liberal* in social policy.

The main concern of the developmental state has no doubt been rapid industrialization and economic growth, but social policy has not been delegated to a different political body. The developmental state itself has also been accountable to the basically liberal doctrine of social policy partially coated with culturalist ideologies (in particular, Confucian familialism) and, more recently, covered up with the (Continental Europe-style) conservative programs of social insurance (Chang, K. 2019, ch. 4). We thus need to document any systematic relationship between economic developmental goals and liberal social policies, both of which are attributes of the developmental state. That is, there is a pressing academic as well as practical need for more systematic analysis of the structural relationship between economic developmentalism and social policies and practices, instead of dwelling on a supposed zero-sum relationship between them. Particularly with respect to the suppressing or sacrificing of social policy concerns, the motivations, conditions, manners, and outcomes of such actions should be systematically documented in order to explore any possibility that they are *developmentally liberal*, as opposed to being *liberally liberal* as has been the case in the United States and, to lesser extents, other settler colony societies.¹¹

As to social reproduction, the developmental liberal state has shown several traits as follows:¹² (1) as revealed in regard to the abrupt demise of family farming and labor-intensive manufacturing, the public necessity of supporting social reproduction of labor in those sectors excluded from the state’s developmental priorities has been bluntly denied in order to enable the maximum mobilization

of public and private resources into sequentially selected strategic industries (dubbed “the leading sectors”); (2) the responsibility and expenses for social reproduction have been attributed to workers and their families as much as possible, and even the infrequent public assistance for social reproduction has usually taken the form of repayable finance, instead of social wage; (3) as revealed with regard to housing, health care, and education, the market-commoditization of basic social reproduction goods are practically endorsed and, not infrequently, even encouraged tacitly, and, in conjunction, various types of *social reproduction loans* have been devised and provided for these matters; (4) as revealed particularly in the area of public education, the nature and contents of social reproduction have been arbitrarily manipulated in order to justify and facilitate economic productionism or the developmentalist political economy in general. With these traits combined, developmental liberalism can be seen as a social policy regime that functions in order to systematically reinforce the asymmetrical relationship between economic production and social reproduction and thereby intensifies the productionist nature of compressed modernity.

Such passive or conservative stance of the developmental liberal state toward social reproduction has inevitably imposed serious economic and social burdens on the everyday livelihood and family relations of its citizens, which in turn constitute a serious factor for social discontent and political upheaval. In particular, the interfamilial differentials in social and economic resources can be translated into different likelihoods of successful social reproduction and thereby systematically amplify unequal conditions in social and economic competition. However, most South Koreans used to do their best in social reproduction as familial responsibilities, in a great part thanks to the broad improvement in their income levels amid rapid economic growth. More critically, instead of resisting the developmental (liberal) dogma of the state, most of them have tried to *manage their family relations and personal lives developmentally* and thereby have actively adapted to the conservative political economic order.¹³ For instance, their intensity in educational investment for children has been nearly unparalleled across the world, the financial support for the economic activities of their children and siblings has often been taken for granted, and their prompt withdrawal from the declining industries such as farming has been linked to the exploration and undertaking of newly promising industries by their siblings and children (Chang, K. 2010a; also see Chapter 8 below). By contrast, their concern and preparation for the long-term stabilization of social

reproduction have been as deficient as those of the developmental liberal state. In the worst example, the almost generalized and protracted indifference to the preparation of old-age security by both South Korean workers and their developmental liberal state has led to the widespread poverty and personal desperation among aged people – as infallibly evidenced by the world’s highest level of elderly suicide in this country.¹⁴ In sum, the developmental state and *developmental families* have colluded with each other in maintaining a social reproduction system full of speculative or gambling characteristics. While private families may not allocate a fundamental value to macro-level developmentalism and behave accordingly, they nevertheless function as the most basic unit of the developmental systemic order by internalizing such macroeconomic order into their microsocial space of everyday life and by reacting very sensitively and adaptively to the accompanying material opportunity structures.¹⁵

As indicated above, the class (labor) dimensions of South Korea’s social reproduction crisis will be discussed in the following sections; whereas most of its demographic dimensions will later be touched on in Chapter 9. Under the extremely rapid industrial restructuring narrowly focused upon a few strategic sectors and the indiscriminate trade liberalization for assisting the export-based growth of such strategic sectors, conventional industries such as agriculture and simple manufacturing have instantly been abandoned one by one. As a consequence, an overwhelming majority of the population that used to be engaged in these sectors became subjected to a fundamental crisis in their economic management and social reproduction, and this in turn began to aggravate the instability of the macroeconomic and social conditions. In the following, I will systematically appraise the asymmetrical relationship between economic production and social reproduction as the key structural factor for both the country’s compressed capitalist development and instantly concomitant crisis in the social reproduction of class members of farming villages and urban industries and neighborhoods.

7.3 Dissolution of the Farm Family Reproduction Cycle

The traditional family-based peasantry, which organically integrates both farm production and social reproduction on the basis of the patriarchal familial organization (Chayanov 1986), had survived into modernity as the most universal microsocial system not only in South Korea but also through the entire human history. After a half century

of industrial capitalism, however, South Korea is now faced with the potential extinction of familial peasantry, as evidenced by the fact that its proportion of the peasant population is now one of the lowest in the world, with a great majority of them being elderly persons left behind by their city-dwelling children. The fundamental collapse in the social reproduction of peasant families is demonstrated more systematically by the distribution of farm households across the different stages of the family reproduction cycle (Chang, K. 2018, ch. 6). That is, among the remaining farm households, only a small minority are in the stages of familial formation and expansion, whereas other farm households are in the stage of familial reduction or dissolution. Therefore, there is a fundamental limitation for peasant families to function as the basic unit of economic production and social reproduction in rural South Korea.

This trend of the extinction of peasant families has been induced mainly by the fact that peasants themselves have pursued, as a familial developmental strategy, the education and employment of their children and/or siblings in urban areas wherein most of the handsome economic opportunities accompanying industrial capitalism have been found.¹⁶ In this way, *most of peasant families have virtually functioned as the social reproduction organizations for the urban economy*. However, peasants' adaptive behavior as such has also reflected a kind of defeatism amid their structural subordination to the "acyclic" or "rush-forward" capitalist industrialization promoted jointly by the developmental state and its client business community. Instead of rising up collectively as a social class, most peasants have surrendered themselves individually to the developmental state that, on the one hand, has refused or failed to acknowledge the complex set of economic, social, cultural, and ecological values embedded in agriculture, peasant, and village and, on the other hand, has not bothered to hide the presumption that farming cannot but be sacrificed, particularly in the latest era of global free trade, to accomplish the maximum growth of export-oriented capitalist industries.

Such individualized surrender by rural citizens has been particularly prevalent among young women, who have tried to cast off the social pressure from the patriarchal production-cum-reproduction system of peasant households (Kim, J. 1994). As detailed in Chapters 6 and 9, this in turn has brought about a marriage crisis to rural bachelors. In the social policy front, the (developmental liberal) national state does not seem to have felt a serious necessity to make much public investment and support for the social reproduction of rural population and localities that have supposedly lost strategic developmental values.¹⁷

If anything, the recently reinstated local autonomous governments are trying hard, despite their fundamental budgetary limitations, to stabilize the social reproduction of rural population for the sake of their own politico-administrative survival. Most recently, the neo-liberal globalization drive of the state and its industrial partners has explicitly intensified the agriculture-sacrificing nature of the economic development policy – as exemplified by the almost indiscriminate pursuit of FTAs with agricultural exporter countries such as the United States, Chile, Australia, Canada, Vietnam, and so forth.¹⁸ Ironically, as detailed in Chapters 6 and 9, in another aspect of this globalization process, international marriages have rapidly increased for the remaining peasant bachelors as their last resort in social reproduction (Kim, H. 2012, 2014). Those rural elderly without any willing successor in farming, if they are aged 65 years or older and have farmed for at least five years, are now encouraged to participate in the farmland pension (*nongjiyeongeum*) program that provides monthly income in exchange for mortgaged farmland (<https://www.fbo.or.kr/contents/Contents.do?menuId=0400100010>).

7.4 Industrial Working Life History and Social Reproduction

The rush-forward economic development strategy has also disrupted the social reproduction system of a majority of urban proletarian families. As has been debunked by now, lifetime employment has been an exceptional privilege confined to fairly limited scopes and numbers of workers in South Korean industries, whereas the working life histories of most other workers have been filled with frequent interruptions and sectoral complexities (Choi and Chang 2016). In the early industrialization period, the corporate requisite of cheap labor-based export competitiveness did not allow industrial labor to become an ideal career even to industrial workers themselves (Koo, H. 2001). The industrial structural upscaling led by a handful of export-centered industrial conglomerates (called *chaebol*) in the later stages of development has been less “the social evolution of the producer classes’ community based upon the employees’ improved skill levels than the business restructuring and/or expansion based upon technological outsourcing” (Kong, T. 2012).

In this process, a staggering proportion of industrial workers have been laid off during their companies’ technological transition and factory automation. Furthermore, since the national financial crisis in 1997 to 1998 regulated by the International Monetary Fund

(popularly dubbed, among South Koreans, “the IMF crisis”), many companies have refused regular employment to a majority of new employees often regardless of their skill levels (Chang, K. 2019, ch. 4). Moreover, the labor policy that has been fundamentally subordinated to the business-centered industrial policy has not focused upon the human capital improvement of the existing employees, unless demanded otherwise by export-oriented *chaebol*. Tat Yan Kong (2020) offers a highly suggestive warning that, unlike Germany or Japan, South Korea may not be able to leap into a socially advanced economy as long as it adheres to the industrial system in which industrial development is not systematically embodied into the workers’ human capital.

Such structurally frequent interruptions in most industrial workers’ employment histories, as combined with their suppressed wage levels, kept presenting a serious obstacle to the stable fulfillment of their role as family provider. More fundamentally, in a situation where industrial workers cannot perceive their jobs as the human embodiment of national economic development, there is no social reproduction of industrial labor sustained by the workers’ intention to hand their jobs down to the next generations in families.¹⁹ In quite an interesting paradox, union members of a globally successful auto manufacturer, Hyundai Motors, once demanded that their regular employment status should be inherited by their children as a corporate guarantee (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, April 14, 2011). This incident, as heavily publicized by media, dealt a critical blow to the already damaged social reputation of large corporate unions, which comprise the main body of the nation’s organized labor.

7.5 Urban Poor Families: Women under Old and New Social Risks

It was pointed out earlier that the peasant family is a social system for organically combining economic production and social reproduction. Such complex functionality is also found in the individual wives of urban poor families. Although women’s lifelong employment, especially among the high education-based professional occupations, is rapidly increasing as a new social trend, the long-term, albeit frequently interrupted, economic participation of married women has been a class-wide phenomenon among the urban poor. Many middle-aged employed women from this class have contributed to the social reproduction and income maintenance of their families through

the so-called “M-curve” working-life path, consisting of premarital employment, post-marital temporary retirement for childbirth and childrearing, and middle-age reemployment (Chang, K. 2010a, ch. 5). Under a strong trend of intra-class marriages, however, their spouses have been distributed mostly in unstable and low-income occupations, while their own jobs have been concentrated in menial service jobs.²⁰ This implies that their dual income has rarely enabled them to climb the class hierarchy within their own lifetime, or to see their children achieving serious intergenerational mobility, particularly through privately financed educational competition. Since the “IMF economic crisis,” such class immobility has been pretty much fixated, as believed by a majority of contemporary South Koreans.²¹

While the lives of urban poor housewives have always required combative commitment, they have recently been exposed to the so-called “new social risks” and, as a result, have to go through aggravated personal burdens and pains (Yoon, H. 2008).²² Above all, under South Korea’s compressed population aging, the rapid elongation of the lifespans of their already old parents(-in-law) has necessitated urban poor housewives to take up a sort of *third shift* as the main caregivers for the aged familial dependants – on top of “the first shift” of wage labor and “the second shift” of household management (cf. Hochschild 1990). These elderly people, after living through middle age plagued with overwork and excess financial contribution for family, have often been inflicted by multiple chronic diseases and are seldom prepared with sufficient stable financial resources for old age. More recently, the postindustrial-cum-neoliberal economic hazards in terms of adult children’s failure in employment and concomitant demand for further education and husbands’ chronic occupational instabilities have helped worsen these women’s multiple shift lives.²³ As detailed in Chapter 9, grown-up children’s increasingly unstable employment status and the resultant rapid increases in late marriage, non-marriage, and divorce imply that middle- and old-aged women nowadays cannot expect easily a leisurely and fruitful life based upon the timely transfer of their familial roles to the next generation family members (*Chosunilbo*, January 14, 2011). Most of these women, hoping that their daughters should not live like themselves, would not frontally object their hiatus from marriage under a confession, “I don’t want to live like you, Mother!” (KimGoh, Y. 2013). The continual thinning of the stable middle class implies that such intergenerationally shared pessimism about marriage is constantly increasing.

7.6 Debt-Sustained Livelihood: Financialization of Social Reproduction

In past agrarian societies, if the distorted structure of land ownership deprived peasants of opportunities for normal economic activities and forced them into poverty, many of them had to rely on landowners' usuries and, in the end, dispose of their means of agricultural production and social reproduction (such as livestock, farmlands, household goods, and houses). Some of them even had to sell their children and wives. This meant that their individual and familial lives were ruined through a process describable as *financialization of poverty* (Chang, K. 2019, ch. 5).²⁴ In the twenty-first century's South Korea, the explosive increase in household debts, over which even the conservative administrations have kept expressing serious concerns time and again, also attests to the widespread financialization of poverty, accompanying the chronic structural crisis in ordinary South Koreans' work and livelihood. The excessive burden of debt repayment has been driving rapidly increasing numbers of individuals and families into horrible experiences of persecution and ultimately into such ruinous incidents as family dissolution and suicide. Many such suicides have been preceded by desperate parents' killing of little children before removing their own lives under an assumption that their children would be subjected to extreme misery if left behind without parental material protection (Lee, H. 2012).

The average debt-income ratio for South Korean households has already exceeded that for the notoriously indebted American households. The radical economic restructuring in the post-IMF crisis period, focused on the quick revival and enhanced competitiveness of the key export industries of *chaebol*, resulted in the wholesale sacrifice of agriculture and labor-intensive light industries, as well as the overseas transfer of industrial production (and jobs), for the sake of maximum economic opportunities and profits of industrial enterprises (Chang, K. 2019, ch. 4). Those South Koreans deprived of their opportunities for economic activities in this process have had to supplement their lost wages or business incomes by disposal of household properties, financial support and loan guarantee among kin members, consumer lending, and so forth. In conjunction with this social trend, the government has endorsed and sometimes even encouraged, arguably in a new area of its developmental industrial policy, the rapid establishment of various new financial service commodities and the aggressive business expansion of financial industries

of various types (Chang, K. 2016). In particular, the credit card-based cash loans and housing mortgage loans began to increase explosively from the turn of the century.

As the minimum material resources for familial or individual social reproduction are often secured by financial services instead of production activities, this is tantamount to *financialization of social reproduction*. Under the excessive pressure of debt repayment, even if they resume economic activities against various difficulties, they cannot exercise normal bargaining power against their employers or business counterparts and thus become subjected to abnormally disadvantageous terms in their economic activities (Chang, K. 2016b). There are frequent cases where creditors, abusing their rights, demand economic activities that are virtually slave labor.²⁵ Some creditors have even coerced debtors to agree to human organ transactions (Minjushinmun 2011). In this way, financial indebtedness has become another defining basis for class status in the production system.

As the debtor status has become common among the general population, the successive governments have attempted to design and provide various forms of financial rescue programs (Chang, K. 2016b).²⁶ As shown by the state-backed introduction and expansion of various new commercial loan programs for education, housing, and so forth, a *de facto* financial service system for all dimensions of social reproduction has been in the making. However, given the developmental liberal government's near inaction on the rapid inflation of college tuitions, virtual protection of speculative profits earned through housing and land transactions, and other instances of excusing economic distortions in the supply of social reproduction goods, it is hard to tell whether the government-designed and/or encouraged commercial loan programs for easing poor people's access to social reproduction goods constitute, in effect, a genuine social policy or a disguised new industrial policy. (The current Moon Jae-In government has broadly inherited these socially targeted loan programs while being flatly unable to curb the trend of household debt bloating.)

7.7 Conclusion and Prospect: After Condensed Social Divestures

In South Korea (and other East Asian societies), modernity was conceived in a fundamentally developmentalist or productionist manner, so modernization principally became the politico-social project of

achieving time-condensed economic development and thereby becoming an “advanced nation” – *seonjinguk* in Korean – as swiftly as possible. Such purposeful approach to condensed national development has necessitated various policies, actions, and attitudes for maximizing economic production and, not unrelatedly, systematically sacrificing the conditions and resources of social reproduction. Under such asymmetrical approach to economic production and social reproduction, South Korea’s condensed national development has caused an inescapable decline or demise of subsistence economic sectors, socially gainful laboring processes, culturally autonomous families and communities, ecologically embedded lifestyles, and so on. With all the nation’s hyper-advanced industries, physical infrastructures, services, and lifestyles, its civilizational and even economic progress is now increasingly impeded by the disenfranchisement and demise of those classes, generations, communities, cultures, and wisdoms that have been treated practically as *disposables* – unworthy of social reproduction support – under the narrowly focused developmental political economy.

The above overview of South Korea’s various crisis tendencies in social reproduction associated with industrial and class restructuring, as well as those associated with demographic transformations as explained in Chapter 9, leads to a conclusion that its compressed modernity is the amalgamation of both condensed (economic) achievements and condensed (social) divestitures. The miraculous economic accumulation in the hands of mammoth industrial conglomerates has structurally required the radically abrupt and expansive divestitures in the agrarian, proletarian, demographic, cultural, and ecological foundations and components of the Korean civilization. While the long-term sustainability of the mega-industrial South Korean economy itself is a subject for serious disputes, the twenty-first century in this country should be lived or managed increasingly without stable agrarian life, gainful industrial work, secure household livelihood, sufficient demographic replacement, predictable life courses, and dependable national political economy and life world. Under such comprehensive and swift social divestitures, the post-compressed modern condition in this society is likely to be characterized by *radical liquidity* (cf. Bauman 2000) in the personal, social, cultural, demographic, as well as economic configurations of human life.