

Sources of Conflict in South Korean Parricides, 1948-1963

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Abstract

Previous works on parricide have been primarily based on North American and European contexts, to the near exclusion of other nations, socio-cultural contexts, and time periods. Using newspaper accounts of parricide from the *Chosun Ilbo*, this paper aims to examine the sources of conflict between parents and their offspring in preindustrial South Korea. The findings reveal that arguments, financial disputes, and discipline are notable sources of conflict in South Korean parricides. Additionally, the results suggest that parricides in South Korea are shaped by Confucian value systems.

Keywords: South Korea, parricide, Korean culture, sources of conflict, homicide, Confucianism

Introduction

Parricides represent about five percent of the homicides in South Korea.¹ Although the term parricide has been used in the past and present to define the killing of one's biological and stepparents, prosecuted under general homicide law rather than specific statutory offenses², the term is still used to include the killing of superordinate and affinal family members in Korea.³ This study uses the term "domestic parricide" to refer to the killing of a mother, father, or superordinate elders such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, and in-laws by subordinate family members such as children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and sons/daughters-in-law. This expansive definition of parricide is consistent with other historical works that have included extended family members in their definition.⁴ This paper examines the sources of conflict between parents/superordinate family elders and their offspring/subordinates in pre-industrial South Korea.

In previous works, child abuse and mental illness have been proffered as causal factors in parricides.⁵ For example, Ahn et al. and Jung et al. attributed the prevalence of parricides in South Korea to the mental illness

of offenders, as well as the nuclear character of Korean households. That is, mentally ill offspring kill their parents because they are the default caretakers who reside with them, and the victimization is primarily explained as a function of co-residence. Even when parricides are examined in Korea and other Asian nations, explanations continue to be framed primarily from Western templates of judgement (e.g. the Capragas syndrome) rather than with specific social and cultural factors that might be pertinent to their understanding.⁶

An exploratory study of the sources of conflict is important because conflicts have a temporal beginning and a terminal resolution, even if their origins are historical or situational.⁷ Conflicts occur throughout the life cycle of parents/superordinate elders and their offspring/subordinates in ways that are also rooted in sociality.⁸ Every homicide is about something, whether the killing arises from a major disagreement about life decisions or a frivolous conflict.⁹ Rather than trying to impute a motive, it may be prudent to understand the dynamics of a homicide by examining the actual sources of conflict between victims and offenders.¹⁰ Although much is known about the potential conflicts between adolescents and parents in Western contexts, the effect of mental illness on legal disposition, and the punishment that parricide offenders receive in Asia¹¹, little is known about the type of domestic conflicts that occur between parents and their adult offspring that lead to parricides. It is this potential discord between parents and their adult offspring that may illuminate notable characteristics of parricides. This paper examines the sources of conflicts that lead to parricides in South Korea and applies a source-of-conflict model of parricide used in a previous study to South Korea.

The paper also explores the sources of conflict between parents/superordinate elders and their offspring/subordinates during the period from 1948 to 1963. South Korea underwent significant changes during this period, including the inauguration of the First Republic, the Korean War and its aftermath, the April 1960 student revolution, and the May 16th coup d'état. The military revolution ended the short-lived Second Republic, ushered in the Third Republic, and established the groundwork for the nation's transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy.¹² The changes brought on by the Korean War and the industrialization reconfigured the social organization of Korean families in significant ways.¹³ It is unknown how such social changes in Korean history may have affected the conflicts between parents/superordinate elders and their offspring/subordinates that resulted in parricides.

South Korea also provides a unique opportunity to examine how sources of conflict can be shaped by cultural belief systems. The Yi Dynasty that ruled Korea from 1392 to 1910 adopted Confucianism as the state ideology. Confucian influences, customs, and practices continued during the Japanese colonization and the U.S military government.¹⁴ Today, respect for elders, conformity to established traditions, patrilineal kinship ideologies, and the preservation of hierarchical relations permeate almost every aspect of socio-moral life in Korea.¹⁵ Expectations of filial piety in Confucian ideologies shaped the interactions between superordinate elders and subordinates, as the latter was expected to defer to the former.¹⁶ In a country where respect for tradition and elders is encoded into every aspect of social life, parricide represents the apogee of rebellion in a political, cultural, and moral sense.¹⁷ Such a belief system ought to militate against violence against parents and elders.¹⁸ Other works that have examined the intersection of Confucianism and parricide in Asia have primarily examined the ideology as a protective factor against violence.¹⁹ This project explores whether Confucianism can be viewed as a facilitator of violence against parents and superordinate family members.

The conflicts that entangle parents and offspring in pre-industrial South Korea may or may not be similar to the ones reported in other Asian countries that share Confucian roots. It remains unknown how ideologies such as Confucianism may affect the pattern and character of violence against parents/superordinate elders. Although this paper does not test hypotheses, it analyzes the sources of conflict in qualitative ways as a way of generating testable propositions and theories about parricides, and discusses the notable sources of conflict that shaped parricides in South Korea.

Literature Review: Parricides in the West and East

For the past 30 years, the discord between parents and their offspring that leads to parricides has been primarily framed as one related to child maltreatment in the context of nuclear family relations or mental illness in adult offenders.²⁰ In the West, the term “parricide” has been used synonymously with “adolescent parricide,” reflected in the enduring typological construct used to differentiate the various types of offenders who kill their parents.²¹ Aside from adolescents who kill their parents to escape prolonged abuse, suffer from mental illness, or are motivated by their own selfish desires, a systematic study of adult offenders and adult victims in their own right has been absent in the existing literature. When

adult parricides have been examined, however, they have been framed solely in relation to mental illness.²² Previous psychiatric studies of parricide offenders in the West have found that the most commonly diagnosed mental illness in parricide offenders is paranoid schizophrenia, followed by psychosis, personality disorders, and impulse disorders.²³

Recent historical works have argued that parricide ought to be examined across the entire life cycle of offenders and victims rather than just childhood and adolescence. This emerging body of work has shown that changes in leisure patterns, modes of economic production, patterns of alcohol consumption, and gender relations affect how parricides unfold,²⁴ thus mirroring larger patterns of homicide in society. Just as importantly, it has been shown that parricides ought to be examined in relation to other homicides.²⁵ By no means is a continued neglect of adult-on-adult parricides justifiable. In order to move away from adolescent-centered analyses in parricide studies, the reasons that parents/superordinate elders and offspring/subordinates become mired in conflicts must be examined.

Previous works on parricide in the East have been primarily legalistic and psychiatric rather than criminological. For example, Ahn et al. and Jung et al. attributed the prevalence of parricides in Korea to the mental illness of offenders as well as the nuclear character of Korean households.²⁶ Victimization is primarily explained as a function of co-residence. Finch's study found that Japanese parricides involved a disproportionate number of male offender matricides, largely explained as a function of the post-war work patterns of Japanese fathers.²⁷ That is, sons disproportionately killed mothers while fathers were away at work due to "insanity" or "hatred."

Other historical works that have examined the intersection of Confucianism and parricide have primarily examined the punishment that offenders received. Gabbiani's examination of Chinese legal codes indicated that the punishment for parricides, intentional or not, was death.²⁸ Moore's study of punishment in China revealed that lack of filial piety was treated harshly by legal authorities.²⁹ In the preceding historical works, mental illness was explored as a way of explaining the variations in legal punishment. Moreover, historical works on homicides in Asia relied on a handful of exceptional cases, legal codes, and precedents for analyses, as a way of generalizing about the characteristics of social life in the periods under study.³⁰ In nations that codify filial piety and punish its

violations, it is possible that Confucianism may shape the sources of conflict between parents and their offspring.

Shortcomings in the Parricide Literature

Previous literature has examined the sources of conflict in parricide primarily in a Western context, imbued with Western sensibilities and framed in relation to child maltreatment or mental illness, which thereby ignores other potential sources of conflict throughout the life cycle of victims and offenders. For instance, historians have implicitly attributed the rarity of parricides to the fact that children were sent away to work in the service of other households.³¹ However, if domestic servants are included in the figures, the percentage of domestic homicides increases slightly.³² Moreover, it has been shown that disputes about inheritance³³ and alcohol-fueled fights that culminate in lethal violence were important contexts behind parricides throughout history.³⁴ Previous criminological and psychiatric studies have neglected to provide a historically and culturally sensitive analyses of parricides, focusing instead on individual-level variables. It remains unknown if ideological systems such as Confucianism affects violence against parents in meaningful ways.³⁵

There are also notable shortcomings that exist in the parricide literature in the East. First, the discourses of child maltreatment and mental illness permeate the analytical strategies of scholars who examine parricides in Asia.³⁶ Rather than exploring the sources of conflict between parents and offspring in their own right, a Western template of interpretation is presupposed. This presupposition is problematic, for the very definition of parricide in a Korean context is different from the one used in Western-based research.

Second, although parricide has been defined as crimes against superordinate elders in Asia, recent works emphasize the nuclear orientation of families—biological parents and stepparents—while excluding the presence of other family members who may affect patterns of violence in the household.³⁷ By examining parricide in preindustrial South Korea, the variations in the character of violence against parents that have occurred due to technological and socio-cultural changes may provide invaluable insights into means to reduce violence within the family. A study of the sources of conflict that lead to typical parricide incidents, rather than analyses of exceptional legal cases, may yield findings that illuminate the patterns of social life in the years following the establishment of the Republic of Korea.

Data and Methods

For this paper, the *Chosun Ilbo* was used for data on parricide cases. Established in 1920, the conservative paper was suspended frequently during the Japanese occupation. However, it has been published daily since the liberation, including during the 15-year period for this research, January 1, 1948 through December 31, 1963. Newspaper copies available in microfiche were digitized and publicly available on a commercial website, and a registration fee was paid to obtain access. A research assistant identified and located articles related to parricides by sifting through the digitized copies of the newspapers, and the author then scoured the digitized microfiches looking for the appearance of general terms such as “homicide” and “murder” in the initial stages of case selection. A more refined search was carried out if the Korean word for murder appeared in the text of the article. Cases were selected for inclusion if the term “ancestor” appeared next to the term murder or its lexical/sentential equivalents. The term can be literally translated as “elderly superordinate murder,” which is the English language equivalent of parricide. Table 1 contains the terminology used to search the *Chosun Ilbo* and National Archives of Korea (NAK).

Table 1: Search Terminology and Translations

English	Korean	Chinese	Phonetic
Murder	살인	殺人	<i>sal in</i>
Ancestor	존속	尊屬	<i>jon sok</i>
Parricide	존속살인	尊屬殺人	<i>jon sok sal in</i>
Manslaughter	치사	致死	<i>chi sah</i>
Attempted	미수	未遂	<i>mi soo</i>
Wounded	진상 상해	眞傷 傷害	<i>chin sang sang hae</i>

Source: Developed by the author.

The author selected articles directly related to the killing of a parent or other superordinate family elders, which resulted in a total of 102 newspaper articles on 92 completed or attempted parricide incidents. After the cases were selected, a coding instrument containing 18 variables was

used to further refine the data for analytical purposes. The data was then entered into a data management software.

According to historians, information in newspapers should be cross-checked against multiple sources.³⁸ To this end, the author obtained a list of all the documents related to crimes committed against superordinate elders that occurred between 1948 and 1963 through on-site access at the National Archives of Korea (NAK). According to Korean law, offenses against superordinate elders received a special designation, *jon sok*, which functions as an aggravating factor. The author visited the NAK and obtained a list of all official records that had the designation *jon sok*. There were 473 offenses committed against superordinate elders that were reported, investigated, and adjudicated during the 15-year period covered by this research. This figure constituted the universe of violent offenses against parents/superordinate elders. There were 19 distinct offenses that received this special designation according to the record list created through on-site record searches.

The NAK records facilitated further validity checks. Of the 19 aggravating offense categories contained in the list, examining the four most serious possible charging offenses for *jon sok* categories—murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, and wounded—yielded 124 offenders contained on the NAK records. This figure represented the universe of attempted and completed parricides. The *Chosun Ilbo* reported 92 attempted and completed parricide incidents by 95 offenders.

It was not feasible to cross-check the names of offenders in the NAK record list as the middle names were redacted; similarly, newspapers sometimes omitted the middle names of offenders and victims in order to preserve the anonymity of the accused. In the end, the primary source of data for this project was the 92 cases that were found in the *Chosun Ilbo*. While this figure is by no means an exhaustive list of all parricide cases during the period examined, it comes close to the actual number of cases found in the archives. Other researchers have found that when newspapers are matched against official sources using the capture-recapture technique, the newspapers contain 75 to 80 percent of homicides that appear in official records.³⁹ In this sense, the total number of cases found using only newspapers in the current study mirrors those figures found by prior researchers.

Out of the 92 parricide incidents, this research examined information on the sources of conflict that were related to the killing of a

parent/superordinate. For this paper, the initial data on the sources of conflict were coded into the following categories:

Table 2: Categories of Sources of Conflict

Category	Explanation
Trivial Argument	Parricide originated from a verbal dispute related to domestic matters
Long-term Financial Dispute	Parricide originated during the course of an intricate plan to steal a parent’s property, obtain an inheritance, or acquire life insurance proceeds.
Short-term Financial Dispute	Parricide occurred during the course of a robbery or in response to a parent’s rejection of a demand for money.
Discipline	Parricide occurred in response to a parent disciplining his or her offspring.
Defense	Parricide occurred in order to defend another family member.
Mental Illness	Newspaper accounts identified the accused as mentally ill.
Other	Parricide originated from conflicts other than those listed.
Unknown	The source of conflict couldn’t be discerned from newspaper articles.

Source: Developed by the author from multiple sources.

The contexts in which parricide arose were inextricably tied to the way the crime originated, weapon used, and level of intent embedded into the offense. Hence a parricide was coded as being (1) “premeditated” if the offender planned the crime in advance; (2) “spontaneous” if the parricide was not planned; (3) “accidental” if the killing was an unfortunate accident; (4) “hit” if the offender used a hitman to carry out the attack; and (5) “unknown” if intent could not be discerned. The amount of detailed information collected was explained by the coverage a particular case received. For instance, parricides that contained salacious characteristics and bizarre details generated tremendous news coverage. Parricides that involved the mentally ill received a paragraph at best. In the following sections, the notable contexts of Korean parricides and the sources of

conflict are examined in greater narrative detail, with excerpts that best illustrate the analytical category used as examples.

Results

During the 15 years examined in this study, 95 offenders killed 116 victims in 92 parricide incidents. The majority of the offenders in the parricide incidents were men (85 percent), while women committed approximately 15 percent of parricides. Disaggregated by victim’s relationship to the offender, parents, uncles, aunts, and grandparents made up the bulk of the victims (73 percent). Stepparents constituted 6 percent of victims. Killings of mothers- and fathers-in-law by sons and daughters-in-law made up almost a fifth (19 percent) of the cases. Table 3 summarizes the sources of conflict in this study:

Table 3: Sources of Conflict in South Korean Parricides

N=92	#	Percentage
Trivial argument	24	26%
Long-term finance	7	8%
Short-term finance	8	9%
Disciplinary	9	10%
Defense	3	3%
Mental illness	14	15%
Other	20	21%
Unknown	8	9%

Parricides that were related to arguments of a domestic and trivial nature comprised a quarter (26 percent) of the cases, while conflicts that were rooted in financial disputes comprised another 17 percent of parricides; these can be further divided into long-term and short-term financial disputes, which account for 8 percent and 9 percent of parricides, respectively. Parricides that occurred in the context of administration of discipline made up about 10 percent of the cases, and defense related conflicts comprised 3 percent of the parricides. Each of these categories is examined in greater detail in the following sections.

Argument

The confrontational character of male-on-male Korean parricides is similar to other parricides reported in other historical contexts.⁴⁰ Consider

an example of how argument-related parricides in South Korea emerged and were ultimately resolved:

Case #30: 08301958

Kim Chang-whan (age 27) and his uncle, Kim Dong-gook (age 30s), got into a heated argument on the evening of August 27, 1958. During the argument, Chang-whan grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed his uncle in the upper chest, causing his instantaneous death.

Argument-centered parricides emerge from the ongoing social situation and materialize when one of the parties interprets an innocuous utterance as an affront.⁴¹ Case #30 illustrates the characteristics of typical South Korean parricides in several ways. While the victim-offender relationship between an uncle and a nephew, the terminology used in the article highlights the Confucian roots of the relationship. “Uncle” in Korean translates literally to “little father.” Furthermore, the hierarchical relations become less significant in the heat of an argument of trivial origin.⁴² However, aside from the nominal relations between victims and offenders, a much more significant interactional factor in parricides operates in a Korean context.

Argument-related parricides between superordinate elders and subordinates resemble the prototypical scenarios of confrontational homicides seen in other countries and historical periods.⁴³ Arguments cannot begin unless one of the disputants interprets the utterance as an offense, and this second turn response is what guides the trajectory of arguments across several turns in conflict discourse. Utterances that are interpreted as offensive acts turn into arguments, which escalate into physical fights. Fights between familial subordinates and superordinate relatives that culminated in death became classified as parricides. Such a transactional view of parricide bears a strong fraternal resemblance to the contours of masculine and domestic violence that historians and sociologists have described.⁴⁴ Korean parricides were not unique when compared to other homicide events in that regard.

According to the data, argument-related parricides were also shaped in significant ways by the intent embedded in the offense:

Table 4: Intent in South Korean Parricides

N=92	#	Percentage
Spontaneous	42	46%
Premeditated	28	30%
Accidental	1	1%
Hitman	0	0%
Unknown	21	23%

Almost half of the parricides were not planned. Offenders in spontaneous parricides used weapons of opportunity such as knives, axes, sickles, and hands and feet because the killing emerged as a chance outcome during moments of unplanned verbal conflict in the course of mundane family life. Consequently, ordinary household tools became weapons used to kill. Weapons that were highly suggestive of premeditation (e.g., guns, poison) occurred in a less than 15 percent of parricide cases in the current study. In the preceding excerpt, Kim and his uncle become embroiled in an argument about something. Those types of accusations and arguments are not unique to Korea; they are likely to occur in countries where parents, elderly relatives, offspring, subordinates, and in-laws cohabitate and routinely interact, thus amplifying the intensity of conflicts.⁴⁵

Argument was the most common conflict that mired parents and offspring together, for it represented a full quarter of all parricides. This finding is most likely explained by the fact that parricides occur between parents and their adult offspring. Despite the difference in age and status, domestic conflicts lead to the experience of intense emotions that erupt in violence: violence that travels upwards against superordinate elders. Confucian ideologies shaped the appearance of various characters in scenes of parricide, but did not necessarily contain the emotional pressures of domestic life, offensive accusations, and enduring disputes and other tumultuous emotions that bubbled underneath the surface of filial piety.

Finance

Long-term financial disputes revolved around inheritance, insurance claims, property, and wills occurred in 7 of 92 incidents (8 percent) while short-term financial disputes revolved around spending money and

allowances took place in 8 of 92 incidents (9 percent). Together, finance became a source of conflict in 17 percent of the parricides. Consider the following case:

Case #5: 04061954

Lee Jong-eon (age unknown) was known to be financially prudent. His son, Lee Min-soo (age 21), was said to have disliked his father's miserly ways. He planned to kill his father so that he could receive his inheritance and spend it freely as he wished. On May 27, 1954, Min-soo went to a local pharmacy and purchased some poison. On May 30, he mixed the poison with his father's supper. However, Min-soo's sister-in-law witnessed and foiled his plot. He was turned over to the police.

In pre-industrial South Korea, inheritance was particularly important, as grooms were expected to establish their marital residences. In rural areas, a daughter-in-law established residence in her husband's home, along with his relatives reflecting the patrilocal customs of Confucian practices. For those who were establishing residences in the city, securing housing was tempered by rising real estate prices as emigrants poured into Seoul from rural areas and the capital rapidly urbanized.⁴⁶ Seed money, therefore, became an important component of entry into adulthood via marriage for men, as well as for women in the form of *honsu* (dowries). This became a notable source of conflict between offspring and their parents.⁴⁷ Some adult offspring also wanted unbridled access to their fathers' inheritance money to engage in unfettered spending sprees, thus resembling the behaviors of self-centered, profligate sons described in the historical literature.⁴⁸

This dangerously antisocial character was especially evident in the offense characteristics. Long-term finance-related parricides were usually premeditated, and involved some amount of planning. In case #5, the acquisition of poison occurred prior to its administration. It was purchased days before the murder, and the perpetrator carried out the attempted killing in a beguiling manner, under the guise of pro-sociality. This type of behavior was commonly found in rural settings, as pesticides and other

household chemicals were readily available. Lee failed only because his ploy was discovered in the midst of the plan's execution.

Finances as sources of conflict intersected with offender behavior and entitlement ideology in the following ways. Inheritances were imbued with expectations of reciprocity. Historians have shown that inheritance distributions were contractual agreements that parents negotiated with strangers and kin alike.⁴⁹ South Korea was no exception. Inheritance customs, according to Confucian ideology, awarded significant portions to the eldest biological son (primogeniture), and sometimes adopted sons. In return, the recipients had a moral duty to carry out annual ancestral rituals. Sons who killed their parents for their inheritance sought to circumvent this contractual and moral duty by deceitfully and violently taking what they desired.

Discipline

Cases were coded as being related to “discipline” if the newspaper used terms such as “berate” or “chastise” to describe the behaviors of the parents. In South Korea, discipline often appeared as a source of conflict between adult offspring, as the following case demonstrates:

Case #65: 30091961

On September 27, 1961, Choi Weol-sun (54) berated her son Bae Jang-saeng (34) for drinking excessively. He came home drunk, and she chastised him again for drinking too much. Bae grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed her in the stomach, killing her instantly.

The age of the offspring (34) differs from the tacit expectation that the words “discipline” and “punishment” constructs: they imply an adult berating a chronological child, at least according to Western sensibilities. However, that expectation is unfulfilled. Bae Jang-saeng came home after a night of excessive drinking, but was disciplined as if he were a child. Bae did what grown men routinely do, yet, his 54-year old mother chastised her adult son. Discipline-related parricides thus occurred when parents attempted to preserve their nominal identities as parents by berating their adult offspring.

In typical cases, adult offspring attempted to relate to their superordinate elders as adults, but were rebuffed by parents and

superordinate elders, who rejected such overtures and invoked their hierarchical authority. Adult offspring, despite their legal, social, and emotional standing, must relate to their parents as children, as adult-on-adult relations wane in favor of age-graded vertical relations. Such rigid hierarchical relations are possible due to the overly possessive view that Korean parents have of their children. Scholars have shown that Korean parents view their offspring's bodies as extensions of themselves, and view their own roles as that of life-givers.⁵⁰ During the course of children's upbringing, their indebtedness to parents is emphasized repeatedly.⁵¹ Perhaps this emphasis is a means of socializing and shaming their children into becoming caregivers in their parents' old age.⁵²

Defense

Killing in the defense of another family member occurred in 3 out of 92 incidents (3 percent). Moreover, such defensive parricides occurred in a particular direction: sons killed their fathers to defend their mothers during domestic conflicts. Korean sons rarely killed their fathers to defend their siblings or other family members from fathers' attacks, and similarly, sons didn't kill mothers to defend their fathers and other family members from their attacks.⁵³ Consider the following excerpt:

Case #6: 07061954

On June 2, 1954, Choi Deok-soo (age 40s) came home drunk around 8 pm and started arguing with his wife. The victim's son, Choi Young-shin (age 20s), attempted to intervene in the ensuing argument, but his father ignored him and continued to argue with his wife. Younger Choi punched his father which resulted in him being gravely wounded. The elder Choi died four days later. The son was charged with parricide by the police.

In the excerpt above, violence between intimate partners precedes the fatal violence against a parent. Similar to domestic violence in general, the aggressor in this case is a man.⁵⁴ In Case #6, the husband was verbally assaulting his wife, setting the initial scene of the parricide with a case of domestic violence between two marital partners. Alcohol remained a prominent factor, with the husband's drinking pattern⁵⁵ instantiating an

argument that turned into a lethal fight. The father's drinking unwittingly implicated other family members in the domestic violence and violence against children.⁵⁶

Lethal violence against fathers must be understood as one option from a welter of behavioral possibilities that are paradoxically facilitated and impeded during scenes of parental intimate violence. First, sons become unwitting third participants in the intimate partner violence between their fathers and mothers as witnesses to a crime. Second, they become targets of assault when fathers redirect their attack from their wives to their sons. Third, sons can kill their fathers in the course of defending their mothers or themselves during acute battering incidents.

In the excerpt above, the male-on-male patricide emerged as an unplanned outcome during the course of the mother's defense. The father's violence induced further violence. Moreover, the spontaneous character of defensive parricides can be substantiated in the weapons that are used to kill. Hands and rocks are weapons of opportunity and convenience, thus suggestive of an expressive attack.⁵⁷ Parricides that are similar to Case #6 can be explained by chance factors rather than malicious aforethought. Sons who killed their fathers did so as they attempted to defend their mothers from the father's domestic violence. Daughters rarely appeared as offenders in these types of defensive parricides, while sons who came to their mothers' defense represented the few remaining agnatic allies in the hierarchically organized Korean households. Ironically, in these cases, being a good son to one's mother meant being a bad son to one's father. This self-contradictory performance of perpetrators' roles as filial sons was one way that the paradox of Confucianism played out in households across South Korea.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined the sources of conflict between parents and other superordinate family members and their offspring and subordinates in pre-industrial South Korea in an exploratory way using newspaper articles as data. The findings in this study suggest that Confucian ideology shaped the patterns of parricide in notable ways. First, it broadened the class of victims who were represented in parricide cases, as varieties of hierarchical relations were represented in the current study. Second, the presence of stem families amplified conflicts across hierarchical relations. Patrilineal kin appeared as victims in Korean parricides because living arrangements were shaped by patrilineal kinship ideologies. The presence

of extended kin can be explained as a function of patrilocal marriages and residential customs. Thus, this proximate living arrangement led to ordinary conflicts that were punctuated with violence even amidst a family system that theoretically should have worked to suppress violence.

The exploratory findings in this paper suggest that arguments of a trivial and domestic nature, disputes over long-term and short-term financial issues, discipline, and defense were notable sources of conflict that led to parricides. The details reported in the newspapers regarding mentally ill offenders were thin, but mostly involved adult men, with daughters and adolescents were rarely involved in parricides related to mental illness contexts. Mental illness in a Korean context can be viewed as a self-evident explanation of the offender's behavior. The articles were short, based on journalists' impressions, and rarely included details or interviews with family members, neighbors, or witnesses. An offender's prior history of mental illness reported in the newspaper functioned as a *de facto* account of parricides in a South Korean context

That arguments of a trivial nature represented the most common source of conflict between parents and offspring is consistent with previous works on homicide and parricide, which have found that the latter resemble prototypical confrontational homicides between men.⁵⁸ Parricides in South Korea emerged in unplanned ways from on-going social intercourse. Thus, the findings of this study extend the applicability of scenarios of masculine violence in a parricidal context across national, cultural, and historical contexts. A source of conflict analysis suggests that nominal identities lose their significance as participants become engrossed in ordinary domestic squabbles that arise during family life.

This paper suggests that conflicts related to finances constitute another significant portion of parricides. This finding is consistent with previous works, which have asserted that disputes about inheritances lead to parricides.⁵⁹ However, this paper indicates that inheritance involves another dimension that previous researchers have overlooked. Being a legitimate recipient of inheritance in a Korean context involved a moral duty that was imposed even after parents' death in the form of *jesa* (rituals to appease one's ancestors).⁶⁰ The calculated ploys to steal inheritances by offspring circumvented this implicit Confucian moral contract. In addition, the findings suggest that short-term conflicts about money resemble robberies committed by self-indulgent offspring who kill out of a sense of entitlement. Such adult behavior mirrors the tendency of dangerously antisocial adolescents who kill their parents to satiate their

desires for unfettered spending. Having adult offspring demand money from their parents for profligate purposes, however, may be one unintended consequence of a Confucian social system that treats adult offspring as if they are children.

The sources of conflict noted in this paper also differ in notable ways from prior works. Although excessive punishment that parents administer to their offspring has been noted as a warrantable reason behind why adolescents kill their parents,⁶¹ this paper suggests that the very notion of “abuse” should be carefully considered in relation to history and culture. Koreans did not limit punishment, discipline, and abuse to those under the age of 18. Instead, they embodied a view of children and adults in ways that were marked by Confucian ideology. Korean parents assumed a proprietary view of their children, and attempted to exercise their authority even toward grown adult offspring. Such conflicts are aptly understood as discipline-related ones, not abuses according to Western norms. This difference in the cultural understanding of punishment and discipline does not mean that abuses did not occur, but rather implies the involvement of a different cast of characters.

The findings from this exploratory study suggest that there may be an alternative way to understand cultural ideologies such as Confucianism. Theoretically, belief systems that codify and encode respect for elders through deference and obedience suppress violence when viewed in historical ways. In one of the well-established theories of violence, scholars have shown that violence in the West decreased throughout a period of eight centuries as people realized their interdependencies, adjusted their public behavior accordingly, and became more civilized in the process.⁶² Although a comparable argument has not been made in the East, a corpus of works implicitly suggests that social behaviors commonly found in Asia, as well as belief systems such as Confucianism, may militate against violence.⁶³ The findings from the current study, however, suggest that Confucianism may actually facilitate violence against elders. Such a tentative conclusion proffered in this exploratory paper requires much more careful empirical validation.

Limitations

There are several shortcomings that remain in this paper, notably links to other homicides, weapons employed, geographical variations, and gender disparity that should be explored in future research.

For example, this paper has not examined incidents in which parricides turned into other homicides (e.g., cases of mass murder). Prior works have shown that parricides are intricately linked to intimate partner homicides and mass murder. Future works should examine the way parricides in Korea may be related to other forms of homicide such as domestic homicides and mass murder. Additionally, while firearms are the most common ways in which homicides and parricides are committed in America, guns in Korea symbolized the embodiment of privilege, modernization, and advanced bureaucracy.⁶⁴ The differences in weapons used to kill therefore may be indicative of class differences. Future research should examine the weapons used in Korean parricides.

Secondly, subcultural theorists of crime have also found that confrontational homicides tend to be geographically clustered in Southern regions of the U.S., and the explanation for the source of such patterns has been lively debated for the past four decades.⁶⁵ It may be worthwhile to examine whether such geographical variations would be applicable to specific types of homicides such as parricides in future works. The migration patterns brought on by the industrialization in South Korea would enable an examination of the changes in the geography of parricides.

Lastly, Confucianism as a social and cultural system privileges men while contributing to the systemic oppression of women. This paper has not explored the specific ways in which violence affected women during this tumultuous period in Korean history. For future works, researchers ought to examine women as offenders and victims in the context of ordinary social and family life as well, for those findings will illuminate additional aspects of life in Korea.

In addition to the unaddressed research questions noted above, there are limitations and shortcomings in this paper that warrant a cautious interpretation of the study's findings. First, the potential coding errors that exist when attempting to classify the conflicts based solely on newspapers is problematic, for a comparative study of convergence validity between court records and newspapers indicated that the error rate for coding the sources of conflicts was approximately 25 percent.⁶⁶ This probability of coding errors therefore should be remedied by supplementing newspaper articles with other official records as validity checks. Second, although the use of newspapers as a source of data has permitted the social, cultural, and historical context behind the killings, this study was not able to examine the broader trends by time or year. The inability to calculate

parricide rates relative to general homicide rates is another major shortcoming that can only be remedied by supplementing newspapers with official sources. These two limitations of using only newspapers as data constitute warrantable potential criticisms that future works should take into consideration.

Notes:

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² Ann-Marie Kilday. "'Sugar and spice and all things nice?' Violence against parents in Scotland, 1700-1850," *Journal of Family History*, 41, no. 3 (2016): 318-335.

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⁴ Luca Gabbiani. "Insanity and parricide in late imperial China (eighteenth-twentieth centuries)," *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 10, no. 2 (2013): 115-141.

⁵ Kathleen M. Heide. *Understanding Parricide: When sons and daughters kill*. (New York:

Oxford University Press, 2013); Anu Liettu, Haanu Säävälä, Helina Hakko, Pirkko Räsänen and Matti Joukamaa. 2009. "Mental disorders of male parricidal offenders: a study of offenders in forensic psychiatric examination in Finland during 1973-2004," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 44, no. 2 (2009): 96-103; Carl P. Malmquist. "Adolescent parricide as a clinical and legal problem," *Journal of American Academy of Psychiatry & Law*, 38 (2012): 73-79.

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⁷ Pieter Spierenburg. "Faces of violence: homicide trends and cultural meanings: Amsterdam, 1431-1816," *Journal of Social History*, 27, no. 4 (1994): 701-716.

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- ¹⁴ Hyunjoon Park and Sangkuk Lee. "A survey of data sources for studies of family and population in Korean history," *History of the Family*, 13 (2008): 258-267.
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- ²¹ Kathleen Heide, *Why Kids Kill Parents: Child Abuse and Adolescent Homicide* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1992).
- ²² Liettu et al., "Mental disorders of male parricidal offenders"; Heide, *Understanding Parricide*.
- ²³ Roberto Cantanesi, Gabriele Rocca, Chiara Candelli, and Felice Carabellese, F. "Matricide by mentally disordered sons: gaining a criminological understanding beyond mental illness—a descriptive study," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, (2014) 1-14; Soraia Dantas, Agostinho Santos, Isabel Dias, Ricardo Jorge Dinis-Oliveira, R.J., and Teresa Magalhaes. "Parricide: a forensic approach," *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 22 (2014), 1-6; S. Raymond, A.S. Leger, and B. Lachaux, B. "A descriptive and follow-up study of 40 parricidal patients hospitalized in a French secure unit over a 15-year period," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 41 (2015): 43-49.
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