

Division of Labor, Gender Ideology, and Marital Satisfaction: A Comparative Analysis of
Mainland China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

Yue Qian
The Ohio State University
qian.85@buckeyemail.osu.edu

Liana C. Sayer
The Ohio State University
sayer.12@sociology.osu.edu

Draft: September 21, 2012

Abstract submitted for consideration at the 2013 Population Association of America Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA. Address correspondence to: Yue Qian, 238 Townshend Hall, 1885 Neil Avenue Mall, Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, qian.85@buckeyemail.osu.edu.

Abstract

Using data from the 2006 Family Module of the East Asian Social Survey, we examine moderating effects of gender ideology on links between the division of labor and marital satisfaction across four East Asian societies—Mainland China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Despite their cultural similarities, they differ substantially in gender inequalities and economic and political institutions. Hence, we conjecture these will produce macro variation in associations of housework and gender ideology on marital satisfaction. Descriptive results indicate housework is the least egalitarian in Japan, where individuals held more egalitarian gender ideology but also report the lowest marital satisfaction, compared with China, Korea, and Taiwan. Ordinal logistical regression models will be used to examine whether the relationship between the division of housework and marital satisfaction is stronger for individuals with egalitarian gender ideology and whether associations are more pronounced in China and Taiwan compared with Japan and Korea.

[word count: 148]

Women continue to do more housework than men across the contemporary world, despite the dramatic influx of women into paid employment and demographic dominance of dual earner couples (Sayer 2010). An emerging literature documents similar determinants and consequences of housework gender gaps in Eastern and Western industrialized countries (Chen 2005; Fuwa 2004; Hsu 2008; 2010; Iwama 2005; Kamo 1994; Nishioka 1998; Sayer 2010; Tsuya, Bumpass and Choe 2000; Tsuya et al. 2005). Relative resources, time availability, and gender role attitudes collectively influence housework levels and gender gaps, although the explanatory heft of each varies across countries by their historical and contemporary conditions of specialization in reproductive and productive labor (Baxter 1997; Coltrane 2000; Cooke and Baxter 2010; Fuwa 2004; Van der Lippe et al. 2011). In Western countries, a more egalitarian division of household labor is found to be associated with women's, but typically not men's, increased perceived fairness and marital satisfaction, but associations vary by gender ideology (Coltrane 2000; Greenstein 1996; Lavee and Katz 2002). Moreover, influences of an egalitarian gendered division of labor on relationship dissolution vary across Western countries, ranging from positive in West Germany to negative in the UK, Australia, and USA (Cooke and Baxter 2010). This suggests distinct macro economic and cultural configurations may influence subjective and objective dimensions and consequences of household labor. This possibility has not been examined in Eastern countries; a gap we address in this analysis

East Asia is an unparalleled context for investigations of housework, gender ideology, and marital satisfaction. East Asian societies have long been influenced by the traditional value of familism and gender specialization within marriage (Slote and De Vos 1998). They have also experienced dramatic social, economic, demographic, and political changes over the past few decades. Yet societies within East Asia differ in socioeconomic development level, political, educational and employment arrangements, and gender dynamics within and beyond families (Entwistle and Henderson 2000; Tang and Parish 2000; Tompkins 2011).

Variations in how cultural and institutional systems articulate with the gendered division of labor and marital satisfaction have traditionally motivated comparative research on Western countries. Research shows complex associations between gendered family and employment roles, gender ideologies, and social welfare policies (Cooke and Baxter 2010). In general, housework is more egalitarian in countries with high aggregate levels of full-time employment of mothers, extensive provision of early childhood education services, and brief maternity leaves (Hook 2010; Gornick and Meyers 2008). Additionally, marital satisfaction appears to be greater in societies where individuals espouse more egalitarian beliefs about gender roles, although some research indicates it is the fit between gender ideology and the gendered division of labor that matters (Yodanis 2010).

In contrast to this abundant cross-national literature, comparative research on housework, gender ideology, and marital satisfaction across East Asian societies is scarce. This is despite economic, demographic, and ideological shifts that theoretically should generate fault lines in conventional gendered marital roles. These include women's adoption of more egalitarian gender attitudes, their increased costs of quitting employment due to higher education, and delayed transitions into marriage and parenting. Additionally, scholars have identified women's continued responsibility for housework and childrearing as major contributors to delayed and forgone marriage and very low fertility trends in Japan, Korea and Taiwan (Jones 2007). Marriage and fertility, as well as gender equality, are not only associated with individual

well-being (Kohler, Behrman and Skytthe 2005), but also of great importance to societal economic well-being and sustainability. Therefore, it is important to understand the implications of gender ideology and the division of household labor for marital satisfaction in East Asian societies. Drawing on a unique dataset, the 2006 East Asian Social Survey (EASS), this is the first comparative study to examine the moderating effects of gender ideology on the link between the division of labor and marital satisfaction across four East Asian societies—Mainland China (China, hereafter), Japan, South Korea (Korea, hereafter), and Taiwan.

Background

The socioeconomic similarities and differences among China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan make them an ideal setting to investigate and compare relationships between the division of household labor, gender ideology, and marital satisfaction. They share a common cultural heritage in Confucianism that emphasizes patriarchy and gender specialization in marriage (Lebra 1998). In the past half century, however, they have also experienced tremendous political, socioeconomic and demographic transformation, characterized by the rapid industrialization, urbanization and economic growth, drastic declines in fertility, and reduced yet persistent gender inequality (See Table 1; also Chen and Yi 2005; Entwisle and Henderson 2000; Lee 2005; Morgon and Talyor 2006; Sheng 2005; Tompkins 2011). Nonetheless, China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan continue to be distinguished by variation in expectations and behavior of women's and men's adult work and family roles. Women's increased levels of education and employment – and links with marital expectations and behavior – are of particular relevance to our analysis.

Compared with the other three East Asian industrialized societies, China appears to have achieved the greatest gender equality in employment and the highest level of endorsement of women's participation in paid work, despite it being the only [still] industrializing society among these four. Like most socialist states, China explicitly made gender equality a policy goal, and women's participation and equal treatment in the labor market was regarded as essential to the realization of gender equality (Zhou, Moen, and Tuma 1998; Zhou 2004). The party state encouraged women's employment by providing legal, institutional, and ideological supports. Legislation was implemented to ensure equal pay to men and women doing the same job (Bauer et al. 1992). Generous maternity leave was implemented in all organizations with more than 100 employees (Zhou, 2004). Work unit-sponsored childcare facilities were available, and nursing mothers were allowed breaks to feed their babies (Shu and Zhu 2012). Although the Chinese state in the post-Maoist reform period has retrenched policies and ideologies promoting gender equality, nonetheless, more than 90 percent of Chinese married women are in the labor force and bring comparable wages with their husbands to the household (Bian, Logan, and Shu 2000; Oshio, Nozaki, and Kobayashi 2011). Additionally, egalitarian decision making within marriage is common among urban Chinese couples (Pimentel 2006).

In contrast, a high proportion of women tend to quit jobs after marriage and particularly after childbearing in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, all of which are highly industrialized societies (Chen and Yi 2005; Shirahase 2007). The drop-off in women's labor force participation during childbearing years is greater in Japan and Korea than in Taiwan (Tompkins 2011). Gender inequality in the workplace is particularly pronounced in Japan and Korea. Although

employment has increased among Japanese mothers over the past 50 years, most are segregated in part-time or irregular jobs (Chang and England 2011). Mothers have a discontinuous pattern of work after childbearing, wage gaps are high and persistent, despite women's and men's similar levels of education, and few women hold managerial positions (Chang and England 2011; Fuwa 2004; Shirahase 2007; Tompkins 2011; Yu 2009). Women workers in Japan and Korea also face very similar cultural and institutional barriers to combining work and family, including emphasis on gender specialization in marriage, a culture of intensive motherhood, lifetime employment system, weak enforcement of equal employment laws, exhaustive work hours, and limited social services for childcare (Boling 2007; Tompkins 2011; Yu 2009). In Taiwan, however, where light industries and small- to medium-size businesses prevail, women with career interruptions associated with marriage and childbearing can easily reenter well-paying jobs with relatively few penalties (See Table 1; also Yu 2009; Tompkins 2011). Additionally, Chang and England (2011) report higher gender wage gaps in Japan and Korea than in Taiwan. Hence, Japanese and Korean women are less likely to be economically independent after marriage compared with Chinese and Taiwanese women.

Separate country analyses indicate women do more housework than men in each of our four countries. Direct comparison of the size of the gender housework gap is difficult however, because the studies report on different time periods and use different measures of housework. In general, China appears to have a smaller housework gender gap, trailed by Taiwan, Korea and Japan. (e.g. see Tsuya et al. 2000; Tsuya et al 2005; Oshio et al. 2011; Pimental 2006; Xu and Lai 2004).

Hypotheses

According to Greenstein (1995; 1996) individual-level gender ideology functions as a lens through which inequality in the division of household labor is viewed. It thus moderates the relationship between the division of housework and marital instability, conflict, or satisfaction. Moreover, individual-level gender ideology, the division of household labor, and the relationship between them vary by societal-level gender inequality (Fuwa 2004; Kunovich and Kunovich 2008). Two studies have examined housework, gender ideology, and marital quality in East Asia. Pimentel (2006) reports Chinese married women's attitudes towards egalitarian gender roles appear to have changed faster than the division of household labor, which in turn has significantly negative implications for their marital quality. Tsuya and colleagues (2005) argue that despite their increased employment, women's continued disproportionate burden of housework and child care is one explanation for a recent trend toward delayed marriage and non-marriage in Japan, because women's education and employment outside the home have broadened women's options and made the "marriage package" less appealing.

Drawing on the research about country level variation in gendered work and family patterns, we propose the following hypotheses:

1. According to the evidence of positive association between marital quality and gender equality in the division of household labor from the U.S., China, Korea, and Taiwan (Coltrane 2000; Oshio et al. 2011; Pimentel 2000; Xu and Lai 2004), we hypothesize that *more egalitarian division of housework is associated with higher marital satisfaction.*

2. The unfair division of household labor is more likely to be perceived as unfair by individuals with nontraditional gender attitudes, which in turn has negative impact on marital quality (Greenstein 1996). Thus, our second hypothesis is that *the relationship between the division of housework and marital satisfaction is more pronounced for individuals with egalitarian gender ideology*.
3. Given the substantial differences in gender roles and inequalities and economic and political institutions across these four East Asian societies, the emancipating effects of individual's egalitarian gender ideology are likely to be constrained in Japan and Korea where women have fewer options outside marriage. Thus, we propose the third hypothesis that *the moderating effect of individual-level gender ideology is more pronounced in China and Taiwan than that in Japan and Korea*.
4. Given the abundant evidence of gender differences in time use, gender ideology, marital satisfaction, and the relationships between housework, gender attitudes, and self-assessed marital quality (Coltrane 2000; Lavee and Katz 2002; Oshio et al. 2011; Pimentel 2000; 2006; Shu and Zhu 2012; Xu and Lai 2004) , we propose our fourth hypothesis that *the relationship between the division of housework and marital satisfaction and the moderating effect of gender ideology is more pronounced for women compared with men in each country*.

Data and Method

To examine the moderating effects of gender ideology on the relationship between household work and marital satisfaction, we analyze data from the East Asian Social Survey in 2006 (2006 EASS, hereafter). Launched in 2003, the EASS is a biennial social survey conducted by the participating institutions in China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The EASS administers questionnaires with the same core content and format in these four societies, which makes data from them largely comparable with one another. A multi-stage stratified random sampling method was used to generate a nationally representative sample of the adult population separately in each of the four societies. The topical module in 2006 is about family and thus ideally suited for our analysis. It includes information on respondents' gender ideology and marital satisfaction, both respondents' and current spouses' frequencies of household tasks, and data on their sociodemographic characteristics. The original sample size (response rate) is 3,208 (38.5%), 2,130 (59.8%), 1,605 (65.7%), and 2,102 (41.8%) for China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, respectively.

We concentrate on those aged 20–69, because of age restrictions in the Japanese (19 and below) and Chinese surveys (70 and above). Because we examine marital satisfaction, we further limit our sample to respondents who are currently married. Our analysis sample thus contains 2,582 Chinese, 1,526 Japanese, 1,049 Koreans, and 1,281 Taiwanese. Since all variables have less than 1% of cases with missing values, we will use listwise deletion to handle missing data.

We present and discuss descriptive results in this abstract. In multivariate analyses, we will use ordered logit models because the dependent variable is an ordinal variable with 5 categories. We will use the brant tests of the parallel regression assumption, and sensitivity analysis will be provided if the assumption is violated. According to the proposed hypotheses, we will run models separately by gender and society and do post-estimation tests of differences

in covariate effects.

Variables

The dependent variable is a single-item measure for marital satisfaction. It is created from responses to the following question on a five-point scale: “Considering all things together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that you are very satisfied or dissatisfied with your marriage?” This item is reverse-coded so that higher scores indicate greater marital satisfaction (1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied).

The main independent variables are the division of housework and gender ideology. We first describe our measure of housework. The 2006 EASS asked respondents how often they and their spouses prepared evening meals, did laundry, and cleaned the house, respectively. These three household tasks are the everyday, routine household tasks that are the most time-consuming and least pleasant, in contrast to more discretionary household tasks such as gardening or house repairs (Coltrane 2000). Respondents answered from seven options: almost every day, several times a week, about once a week, about once a month, several times a year, about once a year, and never. Following Oshio and colleagues (2011), we allocate 7, 3.5, 1, .25 (1/4), .1 (5/52), .02 (1/52), and 0, respectively, to weight each category. These measures indicate how many days a week, on average, individuals cook evening meals, do laundry, or clean. We then take the mean value for the three household tasks. The Cronbach’s alpha of the combined housework items is 0.81 for male respondents, 0.69 for female respondents, and 0.80 and 0.85 for male and female respondents’ spouses, respectively, indicating high reliability. We use two ways to measure the division of household labor—the absolute frequency of doing housework and the share of the respondent’s frequency relative to the couple’s total frequency to investigate whether the absolute housework burden or the relative contribution is more closely associated with marital satisfaction. There are two points worth noting. First, we rely on respondents’ report of both their and their spouses’ frequencies of doing household tasks and calculate the relative division of household labor for male and female samples separately. To be specific, for a male respondent, we use his self-reported frequency divided by his self-reported frequency plus his wife’s frequency reported by him. Similarly, for a female respondent, we use her self-reported frequency divided by her self-reported frequency plus her husband’s frequency reported by that female respondent. Thus, within each society, the sum of men’s average share and women’s average share does not necessarily equal 100. Second, since housework tasks surveyed in the 2006 EASS are all feminine-typed, we may overestimate women’s frequency of doing housework and underestimate men’s.

The other key variable in our study is gender ideology. We create a composite measure of gender ideology based on four items. The original wordings for the four items are as follows.

- 1) It is more important for a wife to help her husband’s career than to pursue her own career.
- 2) A husband’s job is to earn money; a wife’s job is to look after the home and family.
- 3) During economic recession, it is all right for women to be laid-off prior to men.
- 4) If husband’s family and wife’s family need help at the same time, a married woman should help husband’s family first.

The responses are all on a seven-point scale, with 1 representing strongly agree and 7 representing strongly disagree. Factor analysis shows that the four items reflect a single

underlying concept (Rust and Golombok 2009: 113). The Cronbach's alpha for the four items is 0.71, indicating high reliability. Therefore, one composite gender ideology variable is created by averaging the four items. This measure reflects respondent's perception of women's versus men's status in a society.

In addition to composite gender ideology, we also use a measure indicative of respondent's attitude towards the division of labor. It is created from responses to the following question on a seven-point scale: "Men ought to do a larger share of household work than they do now." This measure is different from the perceived fairness measure widely used in previous research, because the question asked here is more about what "generalized others" instead of what respondents and spouses should do. Although it is somewhat of a mismatch with literature, we include the measure because it is directly relevant to ideas about the division of labor and thus may reflect respondents' attitudes towards a more egalitarian or traditional division of housework. In preliminary work, we combined the item with the composite gender ideology measure, but it decreased the Cronbach's alpha to 0.60 indicating it taps a different dimension of gender ideology. The item is reverse-coded so that higher scores indicate a more egalitarian attitude toward the division of housework (1 = very disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

To account for possible confounders associated with both marital satisfaction and the division of housework, we control for respondent's age, education, health, employment, logged income, wife's share of household income, whether the family is a dual-earner family, number of children, presence of children aged 6 and below in the household, co-residence with parents/parents-in-law, age at first marriage, whether this is respondent's first marriage, and duration of current marriage.

Descriptive Results

Men reported significantly greater marital satisfaction than women across four societies, although gender differences are greater in Japan and Korea. Chinese men and Taiwanese men reported slightly higher levels of marital satisfaction (3.95 and 4.1 respectively) than Japanese and Korean men (about 3.9), while Chinese and Taiwanese women reported much higher levels of marital satisfaction (about 3.9) than Japanese and Korean women (3.5 in each country). ANOVA tests indicate significant variations in marital satisfaction across societies.

In each of the four societies, women did housework more frequently than men, and gender differences in the division of housework are statistically significant comparing genders and countries. Greater gender gaps are observed in Japan and Korea: both Japanese and Korean women's share of housework was around 90%, but Japanese and Korean men contributed only 12% and 18%, respectively. Compared with men and women in the other societies, the frequency of housework was the lowest for Japanese men and highest for Japanese women. As anticipated, China has a more equal housework division, with men contributing 31%; nonetheless this leaves married women doing a disproportionate amount of housework.

In line with previous research, women showed significantly more egalitarian gender ideology than men. Contrary to the patterns of the division of labor, Chinese and Taiwanese held less egalitarian gender ideology than Japanese and Korean, regardless of gender, and the regional differences were statistically significant.

Women agreed with the statement that men ought to do a larger share of household work

than they do now to a larger extent than men, and the gender difference was insignificant only in Taiwan. Women and men in each country significantly differed in levels of endorsement to this statement, with Chinese men and women the least likely to indicate agreement.

Descriptive analysis have revealed very interesting results, indicating distinctive patterns of marital satisfaction, the division of housework, and gender ideology across societies. Next, we plan to turn to multivariate regression models to test our four hypotheses.

Table 1. Key Statistics indicating Socioeconomic Development, Demographic Patterns, and Labor Force Participation

Society	GDP per capital (US\$) in 2006	Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in 2006	Crude Marriage Rate (CMR) in 2006	Crude Divorce Rate (CDR) in 2006	Percent of Women Never Married at Ages 35-39 in 2005	Female Labor Force Participation in 2006	Male Labor Force Participation in 2006
China	2, 069	1.38	7.2	1.5	0.7	69	81
Japan	34, 102	1.27	5.8	2.0	18.4	48	73
Korea	19,676	1.17	6.9	2.6	7.6	50	73
Taiwan	16, 491	1.12	6.3	2.8	15.9	49	67

Note: The crude marriage/divorce rate is the annual number of marriages /divorces per 1,000 population. Female/male labor force participation rate is the percentage of females/males ages 15 and older that is economically active. GDP per capital is in U.S. dollars.

Source: GDP per capital for China, Japan, and Korea is from the World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?page=1>; accessed on 09/15/2012); GDP per capital for Taiwan is from Statistical Yearbook (http://eng.dgbas.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs2/yearbook_eng/y094.pdf; accessed on 09/15/2012).

TFR for China, Japan, and Korea is from United Nations Population Division: World Fertility Data 2008

(<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WFD%202008/Main.html>; accessed on 09/15/2012); TFR for Taiwan is from Statistical Yearbook

(http://eng.dgbas.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs2/yearbook_eng/y015.pdf; accessed on 09/15/2012).

CMR and CDR for China, Japan, and Korea are from United Nations Population Division: World Marriage Data 2008

(<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WMD2008/Main.html>; accessed on 09/15/2012); Taiwan data are from Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of China 2009

(Edited 2010) (http://eng.dgbas.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs2/yearbook_eng/y009.pdf; accessed on 09/15/2012).

The percentage of women never married at ages 35-39 in 2005 is from Jones 2010 Table 2.

Female/male labor force participation rates for China, Japan, and Korea are from the World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?page=1>; accessed on 09/15/2012); Taiwan data are from Statistical Yearbook (http://eng.dgbas.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs2/yearbook_eng/y021.pdf; accessed on 09/15/2012).

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation for Key Variables in the Analysis, by Gender and Society

	China			Japan			Korea			Taiwan			Test for differences across societies	
	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Marital Satisfaction	3.95	3.89	*	3.93	3.50	***	3.91	3.51	***	4.10	3.94	***	***	***
	0.66	0.68		0.82	0.95		0.91	0.97		0.79	0.83			
Division of Housework														
Frequency	2.39	5.79	***	0.79	5.89	***	1.39	5.82	***	1.50	4.91	***	***	***
	2.22	1.64		1.37	1.30		1.81	1.66		1.84	2.04			
Share of Housework	0.31	0.77	***	0.12	0.92	***	0.18	0.89	***	0.22	0.81	***	***	***
	0.25	0.21		0.19	0.14		0.21	0.16		0.24	0.22			
Gender Ideology														
Composite Gender Ideology	3.68	3.81	***	3.99	4.18	***	3.90	4.11	**	3.65	3.88	***	***	***
	0.87	0.94		0.87	0.94		1.17	1.26		1.07	1.23			
Men Should Do More Housework	4.37	4.62	***	4.51	5.05	***	4.86	5.15	***	4.70	4.78		***	***
	1.11	1.09		1.08	0.94		1.34	1.23		1.33	1.44			

Note: for each variable, the first row shows means and the second row shows standard deviations.

We test whether there is gender difference in each variable within each society. The results are shown in columns 3, 6, 9, and 12, respectively. We also use ANOVA to test whether there is difference in each variable across societies for men and women, respectively, and the results are shown in column 13 and 14.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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