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Provider, Helper, or Free Rider?: Gender Structure and Gender Inequality in Household Labor in East Asia

Pi-chun Hsu

Abstract

This study examines how gender is embedded in existing structure and daily interaction, creating gender inequality in household labor. Based on a qualitative study of married men and women from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, I illustrate how various relational interactions create such gender inequality. Relational interaction between sons and mothers or sons-in-law and mothers-in-law conforms to the traditional gendered division of labor, freeing men from responsibility for household labor. Interaction between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law is regulated by hierarchical kinship and Confucian gender ideology. A daughter-in-law is generally expected to be the major provider of household labor while her mother-in-law assumes the role of housework helper. The roles of major household labor provider and helper are flexible, however, and can be interchanged between a mother and her daughter. Although mothers and mothers-in-law can ease the burden of housework for both men and women, they ultimately reinforce the traditional gendered division of labor in East Asian households.

I. Introduction

Previous studies related to household labor in industrialized Western countries and East Asian countries have shown that women generally perform the bulk of household labor. For instance, studies in the United States found that women, regardless of their employment status, perform most of the housework (Bianchi et al. 2000; Brines 1994; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989). Even in the Scandinavian countries of Sweden and Norway, where comprehensive policies were made to enhance gender equality, women perform 74 percent of the housework in Sweden and 77 percent in Norway (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990). Similarly, studies have shown that women in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan perform the majority of the housework (Chen 2005; Hsiao 2005; Lee 2004; Lu et al. 2000; Tsuya &

Bumpass 2004; Ueda 2005). To explain this gender inequality, social scientists have developed several theoretical approaches. The three major approaches taken—the relative resources approach, the time availability approach, and the gender role attitudes approach—have since the 1990s been viewed by many gender scholars as limited insofar as, it is argued, the division of household labor reflects more than time availability or the relative resources of husbands and wives. To enrich the theoretical framework these scholars argue that it is important to incorporate gender theories into the analysis of household labor.

There is an increasing consensus among gender scholars that gender is more than a static identity or internalized trait. Instead, “gender is a social structure that is the basis for sexual stratification” (Risman, 1998:152). Conceptualizing gender as a structure having consequences at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels, Risman (1998) argues that “interactional pressures and institutional design create gender and the resultant inequality, even in the absence of individual desires” (1998: 29). To identify the key components of gender structure, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) emphasize that “cultural beliefs about gender and their effects in what we call ‘social relational contexts’ are among the core components that maintain and change the gender system” (2004: 511). This article therefore addresses gender inequality in household labor based on the theory of gender structure. I argue as well that gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels has a greater effect on gender inequality than gender structure at the individual level. Institutional gender structure is conceptualized in terms of cultural beliefs that define the distinguishing characteristics of men and women in this article—specifically, Confucian gender ideology. This ideology has been embedded in the cultural beliefs that regulate hierarchical relationships between men and women and between generations (Rozman 1991). In addition, social relational contexts are developed to analyze interactional gender structure in this research. “Social relational contexts include any context in which individuals define themselves in relation to others . . . the process of defining self in relation to others evokes hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender” (Ridgeway & Correll 2004: 511-512). Social relational contexts constitute the most important arena within which gender structure is enacted, and therefore are the focus of analysis in this paper.

An extended family consists of married couples and their parents or married couples with their parents and children (United Nations 1998). In China, about 22 percent of family households in 1995 were extended families (Yi 2002). In Japan, extended family households constituted 16 percent of all households in 1995 (United Nations 1998). Data from the censuses indicate that extended families accounted for 11 percent of all households in South Korea (United Nations 1998). In Taiwan, censuses show that extended family households made up about 34 percent of all families in 1997 (Ministry of the Interior 1998). Extended family households constituted about 10 percent of all households in the United States over the past three decades (Glick et al. 1997). The statistics above have shown that in the Asian countries under study a higher proportion of married men and women live with their parents or parents-in-law, in comparison with practices in the United States. Such co-residence with

parents or parents-in-law provides a platform on which married men, married women, and their parents interact.

Certain studies related to household labor in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (Chen 2004; Chen 2005; Tsuya & Bumpass 2004) have suggested that help from parents or parents-in-law reduces the amount of time men and women spend doing household labor. Although these studies have proved that help from parents or parents-in-law can decrease the amount of time men and women spend doing housework, there is scant evidence to determine whether such help reduces housework time more for married men than for married women.

Household labor generally denotes “unpaid work done to maintain family members and/or a home (Shelton & John, 1996: 300). Studies of housework in the United States often distinguish between time-consuming household tasks¹ and occasional household tasks² (Blair & Lichter 1991; Coltrane 2000). In addition, other studies divide household tasks into three groups: traditionally female tasks,³ gender-neutral tasks,⁴ and traditionally male tasks⁵ (Kroska 2004; Presser 1994; Twigg et al. 1999). In this study, household labor is defined as unpaid household activities that sustain the daily functions of a household.

In brief, this research aims at analyzing how gender structure helps maintain gender inequality in household labor in East Asia. It is gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels that creates gender inequality in household labor. I argue further that gender structure at the interactional levels also helps to perpetuate gender inequality in household labor. Social relational contexts, therefore, are developed in this paper to analyze gender structure, and are the focus of analysis in this research. The data is based on interviews with married men and married women from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Each of the four countries under study has long been under the influence of Confucian gender ideology. In addition, the abovementioned statistics have shown that the extended family is still an important type of family in the four countries under study. Therefore, it is of considerable interest to investigate how gender structure strengthens gender inequality in household labor in the four East Asian countries exhibiting these macro-level similarities.

Women generally assume greater responsibility for housework than men do in the four countries under study. I argue therefore that it is important to disclose the nature of the interactions that characterize relations among married men, married women, mothers, and mothers-in-law. Through an analysis of these relational contexts, we can better understand how gender is embedded in existing structure so as to create a gendered division of household labor. To achieve this goal, I first discuss Confucian gender ideology from various historical and cultural perspectives and changes in Confucian gender ideology in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Rather than consider Confucian gender ideology as an internal static identity, I view it as a dynamic gender structure constructing daily interactions and creating gender inequality. Therefore, the analysis of this paper is directed towards various relational interactions, and to investigating how these interactions maintain gender inequality in household labor in East Asia.

II. Data and Method

This research is based on interviews conducted over the period of February to August 2007 with 42 married Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese women and men living in Ithaca, New York. This study focuses on the respondents' experience relating to housework in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Therefore, only Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese citizens were interviewed. In addition, the respondents had to have been married and living together in their home countries for at least six months before they came to the United States. The sample for the present study was further limited to individuals who had come to the U.S. less than three years earlier; this allowed respondents to recall their experience of doing household labor in their home countries as accurately as possible. The sample included at least ten interviewees from each country.

A snowball method was used to locate respondents. I first contacted some friends from the four East Asian countries and asked them to introduce me to their friends for interviews. In addition, I attended activities held by the student associations representing the four countries at Cornell University and found some respondents at these events. I also conducted interviews with citizens of the four East Asian countries outside the Cornell community. The interviews were carried out in empty classrooms, respondents' houses, or quiet restaurants in Ithaca, New York. Each interview lasted for about 40 to 80 minutes. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The interviewees comprise 22 women and 20 men. The age range of the interviewees is from the late 20s to the late 40s. The mean age for all interviewees is 34 years. Sixteen of the interviewees have college degrees and 26 of them have graduate-level degrees. Interviews with Chinese and Taiwanese respondents were conducted in Chinese, but interviews with Japanese and South Korean respondents were conducted in English.

The interview questions cover work histories and work experience; information about the time respondents, their spouses, and their parents or parents-in-law spent doing housework; the time spent doing housework on a typical weekday and weekend; attitudes toward the gendered division of labor; and demographic information.

The analysis of this study is divided into five sections. First, I discuss the Confucian gender ideology in East Asia, and then describe the practice of co-residence with parents or parents-in-law in the four East Asian countries. Second, I discuss how a married man benefits from his mother's help with housework when living with his mother after he marries. Third, I argue that a son-in-law, considered a "family member" by his mother-in-law, also benefits from such help with housework contributed by his mother-in-law, freeing him from the responsibility of housework. Fourth, I analyze how Confucian gender ideology is transmitted from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law through everyday interaction and how this interaction creates gender inequality in housework. Finally, this part of the study compares help with housework offered by mothers-in-law with that offered by mothers and considers

how gender structure at the interactional level produces and reproduces gender inequality in housework.

III. Confucian Gender Ideology and Co-Residence with Parents or Parents-in-law

As far as history and culture are concerned, Confucianism has a long term effect on the thought and behavior of people in East Asian countries—including China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. A main idea of Confucian thinking is that men and women should be treated differently. It plays an important role in defining the gendered division of labor between husbands and wives in these countries, with husbands being defined primarily as breadwinners and wives as caretakers. That is, women were encouraged to stay home and take care of the family and housework when their husbands went to work. To understand this gendered division of labor in East Asia, it is necessary to discuss Confucian gender ideology briefly, from the perspectives of various historical and cultural traditions, and to examine changes in Confucian gender ideology in each of these countries.

In Japan, the ideology concerning gendered division of labor appeared during the Meiji Restoration in the late nineteenth century, when the authorities propagated the ideal of “good wife and wise mother” (Hirao 2001:192). The expectation that women should be good housewives and mothers was intensified during the economic growth and structural change of the post-war period (Uno 1993). Having a full-time housewife and mother at home is a symbol of prosperity for middle-class families in Japan. The gendered division of labor remains prevalent in Japan if compared to other advanced industrialized countries (Stockman et al. 1995), but the challenge of this gender ideology has at present become a public issue.

During the Choson dynasty from 1392 to 1910, the Korean society created strict rules of sex segregation for men and women and for husband and wife. “Obedience, chastity, perseverance, and women virtues” were regarded as women’s characteristics (Yoon 1986:42). This East Asia country has industrialized and economically modernized over the past three decades, but the gender ideology confined to women has changed tardily (Palley 1990). For example, the relatively low employment rates among married South Korean women are consistent with the traditional cultural norms that have recognized being good wives and wise mothers to be the virtues of women (Lee 2001), in spite of the increase of higher education for women. It is widely believed that since the 1980s, the development of women’s rights movements, the enactment of Equal Employment Opportunity Law, and the amendments of Family Law have brought about changes to the traditional gender ideology of South Korea.

Confucian thinking has long been very influential in Taiwanese society. All the students in senior high schools in Taiwan have been required to study the *Analects of Confucius*, which constitutes an essential element of the course of Chinese language. Gender stereotypes such as women as major caretakers and men as breadwinners are still commonly

seen in Taiwan. With the development of a democratic regime and capitalist modernization in Taiwan, women have benefited from an increase of equal education and employment opportunities. Although Taiwanese men are still regarded as major breadwinners, married Taiwanese women have started to serve as the supplementary providers (Yu 2001).

Among the four East Asian countries, China is the only country that experienced the rejection of Confucian gender ideology during the Cultural Revolution and then the resurgence of the relevant ideologies after the end of the 1970s. During the Cultural Revolution, the family life was devalued, “where ‘private’ was equated as selfish” (Wang 1999:26). Therefore, traditional gendered division of labor was recognized as an obstacle to women’s liberation. The Chinese government manipulated the relevant discourse, making an effort to convince men that they should share some housework when their wives are engaged in political activities (Wang 1999). After the Chinese state opened the door to the world in 1978, the perception of a crowded labor market, unemployment, and underemployment has driven the resurrection of the Confucian ideal of virtuous wife and good mother (Pimentel 2006). The Chinese government therefore has played an important role in transforming gender ideology through value regulation.

The gendered division of labor has created a family and social order in which men assume a status that is superior to that of women (Rosenlee, 2006). In addition, Confucian thinking places great emphasis on the hierarchal kinship system in which the senior members of any hierarchy have more power than the junior members do. For example, according to the hierarchal kinship system, a mother-in-law occupies a higher status than a daughter-in-law does. Moreover, Confucian thinking emphasizes the importance of the familial virtue of filial piety, which involves respecting and supporting the senior members of a family. Confucian gender ideology must therefore be understood not only in terms of the public-private sphere in which relations between men and women play out, but also as a hierarchal gender arrangement that crosses generations. However, Confucian gender ideology has been challenged and changed in East Asia owing to modernization, economic development, and social movements. The change of Confucian gender ideology is believed to have brought impact on the societies and the families.

The age at which women first marry is relatively advanced in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan compared with practices in Western industrialized countries (Brinton 2001), and this age has continued to advance in each society during the past decade. Women in the three Asian societies also show similar declines in birthrates. The average number of children is now below two (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2008; Ministry of the Interior 2008; National Statistical Office 2008). A full exploration of low birthrates in the three societies is not a central theme of this paper, but conventional explanations are attributed to such factors as a lack of support for childcare on the part of government and employers and the difficulty women face in balancing their family and work responsibilities. However, it is worthwhile analyzing the linkage between low birthrates and the living arrangements between couples and their parents or parents-in-law in the four countries.

Women in East Asia customarily join their husbands' families after marriage. It simply is expected that the eldest son and his wife and children will live with his parents. If co-residence with the eldest son is not possible, most parents still prefer to live with one of their sons. In practice, this living arrangement is changing because of the influence of Western culture, generational differences in employment opportunities, and the like (Kamo 1990; Rindfuss et al. 2004). In Japan, the census showed that in 2005, households consisting of married couples had increased only 9.1 percent from 2000, while those consisting of married couples with their children had decreased 1.8 percent compared with 2000 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2005). These data suggest that older Japanese people are increasingly living alone. In Taiwan, although intergenerational coresidence is still the major living preference for older people, census data have indicated that the proportion of those living with married children has been declining steadily (Ministry of the Interior, 2005).

In addition, there is some evidence that Japan is experiencing an increase in maternal co-residence (Rindfuss et al. 2004). A substantial proportion of couples live with the wife's parents in Japan. This trend can be seen in a series of national opinion surveys on family planning. In 1977, 4 percent of married Japanese women lived with the wife's parents (Rindfuss et al. 2004). This had increased to 7 percent in 1990 and 9 percent in 1994 (Rindfuss et al. 2004). This may be because birthrates have continued to decline and the proportion of older people without sons has increased accordingly.

When married women live in extended family settings with their husbands and parents-in-law, they are expected to show respect and filial obedience as they would to their own parents. Still, many women in the four countries have attained higher levels of education and enjoy greater economic independence than ever before. It is believed that women of the four East Asian countries have benefited from increasing equality in education and financial independence. Confucian gender ideology in East Asia has also been challenged. I argue therefore that it is more important than ever to understand how the hierarchical relationship among men, women, their parents, and parents-in-law, interacting with their gender beliefs, influences the division of household labor. The analysis below is divided into four sections that illustrate four types of relational interaction (son and mother; son-in-law and mother-in-law; daughter-in-law and mother-in-law; daughter and mother) and examines how these relational contexts help maintain the gendered division of labor.

IV. Son and Mother: "I feel I almost didn't do any housework."

When a couple lives with the husband's mother, she usually helps with housework. The amount of time the husband's mother spends doing housework varies depending on whether the wife has a full-time job. Consider the case of a married Taiwanese man who lived with his mother after he married. The man and his wife both had full-time jobs, so they were busy on weekdays. Even though the husband's mother had a full-time job when they lived

together, she still did a greater share of the housework than either member of the couple did. The man described his mother's contributions to housework thusly:

My mom was in charge of preparing meals, bringing cooked food home, and doing some cleaning work. [How much housework did each of you share?] My mom did about 80 percent of total housework. My wife did 15 percent of the housework and I did the remaining 5 percent. Honestly, I feel I almost didn't do any housework. My mom never asked me to do anything.

A Chinese man, living in Beijing, described a similar experience when he lived with his mother. The man's mother usually lives with his older brother in another city in China, but she visits them every year and stays with them for a couple of months to half a year. When his mother lives with them, she helps do most of the housework:

When my mom lives with us, she prepares three meals for us every day. Breakfast is usually simple—like bread, soy milk, or milk. My house is very close to my workplace, so I usually go home to have lunch. My mom likes to prepare lunch for me every day. She also prepares dinner for us every day. She washes dishes, mops the floor and cleans the furniture often.

When asked if he helped to do any housework, the Chinese man answered that his mother thought he should devote his attention to his work and "shouldn't come into the kitchen" (in his own words). It is obvious that the mother of the Chinese man still accepts the gender ideology that men should work outside the home while women should take care of the family and housework. Therefore, the kitchen is a woman's place and a man should stay out. When asked if his wife shared housework, the Chinese man complained that his wife works full time and does not like to do housework. His mother therefore frequently visits them and helps do housework. Although the Chinese man's wife shows no interest in doing housework, she still did about 30 percent of the housework and his mother did about 60 percent. Apparently the Chinese man did very little housework when his mother lived with them.

A South Korean man also emphasized his mother's great help with housework. He lived with his parents for about half a year after he married. Before he was married, his mother did all of the housework because she was used to being a housewife. After he married, his mother and his wife shared the housework duties and he still did not do any of it:

For me, I almost didn't do any housework before or after I married. But my wife had to do some housework. My mom did all of the housework you could imagine besides gardening and repairing the house. These two types of work were my dad's job. My mom prepared three meals for my family. She washed dishes, cleaned up the house, did laundry, and lots of housework. I can't really remember. After we married, my wife shared some housework

like helping my mom prepare meals, cleaning up the house, and doing laundry.

It is obvious that the wife of the South Korean man, as a daughter-in-law, is expected to do housework while he is completely exempted.

According to interviewees who live with men's mothers, mothers generally think that women should be responsible for housework, and therefore mothers and the daughters-in-law share in performing the bulk of the housework. Nonetheless, men tend not to change their level of participation in housework whether they are single or married. Men therefore benefit the most from their mothers' free help with housework when they live with or near them after they are married. The gendered division of labor is thus maintained through a social system that presupposes that women perform most housework while men avoid it.

V. Son-in-law and Mother-in-law: "My mom-in-law treats me like her son."

Given the strong patrilineal family system in East Asian culture, there is a cultural expectation that married sons, their wives, and their children will co-reside with the sons' parents. This expectation, however, is changing in East Asian society. Studies have found that China and Japan are experiencing an increase in co-residence with the wife's parents (Pimentel 2006; Rindfuss et al. 2004). This section focuses on discussing interaction among married men, their wives, and their mothers-in-law and examining how this interaction shapes the gendered division of labor in East Asian society.

A Chinese man and his wife lived with his parents-in-law during the first two years of marriage. He explained that his wife's house is much closer to both of their offices and they were saving money for studying abroad at that time. He and his wife both worked full time during the two years of co-residence with his parents-in-law. His mother-in-law was accustomed to being a housewife, so she was responsible for the vast majority of housework. The Chinese man said that his mother-in-law performed about 80 percent of the housework and his wife carried out about 10 percent. He and his father-in-law shared the rest. When asked to describe the interaction between him and his mother-in-law, he emphasized that:

My mom-in-law treats me like her son. She always prepared the food I like. When my wife and I would have an argument, she usually helped us deal with it. My wife sometimes even complained that my mom-in-law was nicer to me than to her.

A Taiwanese man stayed with his parents-in-law for about one year before he purchased his own house. He stressed that his parents-in-law regard him as a "*family member*" (in his own words), so they provide him with great support whenever he needs their help. The Taiwanese man and his wife both were busy with work. His mother-in-law therefore performed all of the housework, as he and his wife did almost none. He mentioned that:

I really appreciate what my parents-in-law, especially my mom-in-law, have done for me. They are very nice to me My mom-in-law did all of the housework, but my wife and I almost didn't do anything. What I did is only to wash my own dishes. She is really considerate. I would not have had such a quality life at that time without her cordial help.

A Japanese man lived very close to his parents-in-law. After his second son was born, his wife was totally occupied with taking care of his two sons and doing household tasks. To provide her with some relief from this burden, his mother-in-law frequently came to their house and helped do housework. He considered his mother-in-law a “*super savior*.”

Respondent: After fighting with my two sons for a long day, my wife was totally worn-out. When I got home, she would ask my help with housework. I was also exhausted, so we turned to my mom-in-law for help. We were very lucky. My mom-in-law was happy to help us. She came to our house almost every day and prepared meals for us. She liked to give us lots of cooked food like meat, seafood, and side dishes She also helped take care of my first son. My mom-in-law sometimes looked after my two kids if my wife and I had to go somewhere and couldn't take care of them. I always regard my mom-in-law as a “super savior” of my family. When she showed up in my house, many problems were resolved.

Researcher: Did you do some housework?

Respondent: Yes, but honestly very little. I was very busy with work at that time. I always got home very late, so I was really tired. I looked after my first son on weekends.

The experience of the three above respondents illustrates the importance of relations by marriage in East Asian society. A mother-in-law tends to treat a son-in-law like “*a son*” or to consider him as a “*family member*” because of his marriage with her daughter. Under the concept of “*family member*,” the role of a son-in-law regarding housework differs little from that of a son. As discussed earlier, a married son tends to participate least in doing housework because his mother and his wife share virtually all the responsibility for household labor. Similarly, a son-in-law is the chief beneficiary regarding housework because of his mother-in-law's help with housework. A mother-in-law tends to do most of the housework when necessary. The daughter also participates while the son-in-law does the least. Women remain the major providers of housework while men enjoy free help from women under the relational interaction between mother-in-law and son-in-law. The gendered division of labor therefore is maintained through interaction between the mother-in-law and the son-in-law.

Since mothers/mothers-in-law and wives do almost all of the housework, part of the immediately following section focuses on discussing how gender ideology is constructed and maintained through daily interaction between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and

how it affects the gendered division of labor in East Asian countries.

VI. Daughter-in-law and Mother-in-law: “The first year of my marriage was more like a training period.”

When women in East Asia get married, they move out of their parents’ houses and join their husbands’ families, a new and unfamiliar setting for them. The initial period for newly married women is devoted to getting to know their new family members and adjust to living with a new family. For mothers-in-law, it is a time to teach their new daughters-in-law how to serve adequately as daughters-in-law and wives. Here the cultural expectation that daughters-in-law should perform housework is conveyed by the mothers-in-law. During this initial period, mothers-in-law tend to do more housework than their daughters-in-law do in order to teach them how to take on their role in the new family. After this period, they expect their daughters-in-law to gradually do more and more housework until they eventually do it all.

For example, a South Korean woman mentioned that the first year of her marriage was more like a “*training period*” (in her own words) when they lived with her parents-in-law. She and her mother-in-law shared all of the housework, so her husband did none. Her mother-in-law was in charge of household tasks such as preparing meals while she was responsible for other household tasks:

I feel like the first year we lived together is more like getting to know each other. I didn’t know how to prepare meals at that time, so my mom-in-law prepared the three meals. When she was cooking, I helped her wash vegetables and dishes and she taught me how to cook and some other things. I also vacuumed the house, mopped the floor, and did laundry.

Preparing meals is regarded as the most highly skilled household task. Newly married women generally lack the cooking skills that come with experience, so mothers-in-law assume responsibility for preparing meals and also teach their daughters-in-law how to cook. They expect their daughters-in-law to take over the cooking responsibility in the near future.

A Taiwanese woman who lived with her mother-in-law described a similar experience. She said that her mother-in-law was in charge of the main household tasks such as preparing meals in the first year of her marriage. After that, she started to take over the major housework responsibilities although her mother-in-law still helped with some housework. She explained how she and her mother-in-law shared housework when they lived together:

Before my son was born, I usually was in charge of buying groceries and preparing meals and my mom-in-law would do other housework like laundry, mopping floors, and cleaning bathrooms. After my son was born, taking care of him occupied all of my time. I sent my

son to the babysitter in the morning and then I went to work. I took him back home around 6 p.m. After a day of work, I couldn't do any housework besides taking care of my son. So my mom-in-law did most of the housework.

The role of carrying out household labor here is divided into two types, that of the major provider and that of the helper. In addition, the household labor is also divided into two distinct groups, major tasks and other household labor. Daughters-in-law are expected to be the major providers of housework and are responsible for taking care of children, preparing meals, and the like. Mothers-in-law regard themselves as helpers and therefore help daughters-in-law do some housework like cleaning up and doing laundry. Although mothers-in-law might take more of the responsibility for major housework during the initial period of marriage, it is still the daughters-in-law who have to be the major providers of housework in the long run.

“YOUR HOUSEWORK INCREASES WHEN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN YOUR HOUSE INCREASES.”

If married women have full-time jobs, their mothers-in-law generally do housework when they stay with their sons and daughters-in-law. Several married Chinese and Taiwanese women noted that their mothers-in-law helped do housework when the wives had full-time jobs. In these cases most of the mothers-in-law are retired or are full-time housewives. For example, a Chinese woman said that her mother-in-law helped her take care of her daughter:

My mom-in-law helped me care for my daughter so I could work full time. She also prepared meals for us. When I came back from work, I took care of my daughter and she prepared dinner. Sometimes I helped her prepare meals if my daughter was sleeping. [Did you do other housework?] Yes, I mopped the floor, did laundry, and some other housework on weekends.

Nevertheless, mothers-in-law tend not to do housework if their daughters-in-law are full-time housewives. As full-time housewives, the daughters-in-law are expected to perform most of the housework. For example, a South Korean married woman and her husband lived with her mother-in-law for several years. The Korean woman is a full-time housewife, so she is responsible for doing all of the housework. During the interview, she mentioned the experience of staying with her mother-in-law and highlighted that her mother-in-law created more housework for her to do:

My mom-in-law liked to cook for us sometimes. [Great, you could get some help.] Actually, I had to wash vegetables and prepare everything before she cooked. She only did the frying or stir-frying. After meals, I had to wash lots of dishes they created, so I didn't think she

was that helpful to me. In fact, I think living with my parents-in-law created more housework for me to do. Your housework increases when the number of people in your house increases.

Most family members expect a wife who does not work at all to be in charge of most housework. In such cases the others are less willing to share in doing housework. When the time the mother-in-law spends doing housework does not increase significantly but the number of persons in the house increases, it is not surprising that the Korean woman thinks that living with her parents-in-law only increases the amount of housework she does.

“SHE COMPLAINED ABOUT THIS IN FRONT OF ME IF I DIDN’T DO MY HOUSEWORK.”

In addition to teaching their daughters-in-law how to do housework, mothers-in-law also play a supervisory role. Under the influence of Confucian gender ideology, mothers-in-law, as senior members in relationships with their daughters-in-law, generally assume that they enjoy greater privileges than their daughters-in-law, the junior members, do. In addition, daughters-in-law are expected to show respect and filial obedience to their mothers-in-law, and doing housework is an important way in which daughters-in-law show such filial piety. The hierarchal kinship system interweaves with filial piety and regulates the interaction between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. This hierarchical relationship is not always prominent, yet it manifests itself when the daughters-in-law do not follow the gender expectations of their mothers-in-law. As we have noted, doing housework is a normative requirement of daughters-in-law. If they do not do the housework to the best of their ability, their mothers-in-law may criticize them or complain about their performance. A Taiwanese woman, working for a bank, lived with her mother-in-law and they usually shared the housework. She explained that she was exhausted after work and sometimes did not feel like doing any housework. When asked how her mother-in-law reacted to her unwillingness to do housework, she answered:

I knew she was not that happy with my behavior. She complained about this in front of me if I didn’t do my housework. I would turn a deaf ear to what she said. I was totally exhausted. [And then did she say anything?] No, she just wanted to let me know I should do what I was supposed to do. [Would you do the housework after she complained in front of you?] Not really. I know what I should do and when I really want to take a break. She can complain to me about my behavior, but I have my freedom.

The Taiwanese example above has shown us how important it is to ‘do gender’ in everyday social interaction. Doing gender theory has suggested that, once men and women are labeled as belonging to one sex category or another, they display gendered behavior on the basis of that sex category (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Here the wife is expected to do

housework and doing housework is a way in which she can show her competence within this sex category. That is, to do housework is to do gender. Not doing housework violates the gender expectation and brings criticism from others.

As Confucian gender ideology has been challenged in the four countries over recent decades, the authority of the mother-in-law has been changing gradually. Nevertheless, mothers-in-law still tend to assume that they have more power than their daughters-in-law have, so they feel justified in pointing out mistakes in front of their daughters-in-law. In the meantime, daughters-in-law are gradually gaining greater autonomy due to higher education, economic independence, and changing social norms. Therefore, we can see the emerging agency of the daughter-in-law in the Taiwanese case even in the face of the presumed power of her mother-in-law.

This section has examined how Confucian gender ideology is enforced through everyday interaction between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The interviewees described relationships in which mothers-in-law typically teach their daughters-in-law how to perform housework during the earlier period of a marriage. After that, mothers-in-law stop playing the role of major caretaker and provider of household labor, transferring that role to the daughters-in-law. Mothers-in-law may help to do housework, but the amount of housework they share in doing depends on whether daughters-in-law have full-time jobs. In addition to the role of helper with housework, mothers-in-law also assume the role of supervisor over their daughters-in-law.

VII. Daughter and Mother: “The help you get from your mom or mom-in-law is different.”

Expectations about a woman’s contribution to housework depend to some extent on whether she lives with her husband’s family or her own family. When living with her parents-in-law, she is expected to accommodate herself to her new family. However, living with her parents after being married means that she is still a daughter and she can be herself to a much greater extent. In other words, she does not necessarily play the same gender role when she lives with her own parents after being married as she would when living with her parents-in-laws. In addition, housework for a daughter is not the same thing as housework for a daughter-in-law. Therefore, many married women emphasize that the housework help they obtain from their parents and parents-in-law differs considerably. For example, several South Korean women indicated that their mothers know what they need and are more willing to help them with housework than their mothers-in-law. Therefore, if their mothers either live with them or live nearby, they can be the best *helping hands* in terms of housework. When a South Korean woman was asked to compare the help she obtained from her mother and mother-in-law, she commented that:

If I lived with my mom or nearby, I would say, yes, my mom can reduce my time on

housework because she is really helpful. But this is not the case for my mom-in-law. The help you get from your mom and mom-in-law is very different. Your mom knows what you really need and is willing to help you. But for a mom-in-law, you don't really know what she likes or dislikes. You hope you can prepare food they like, so you have to learn their ways of cooking. You hope they can feel comfortable when we live together, so you have to learn something they like.

During the interview, the South Korean woman repeated several times that her mother is always supportive and willing to help her do housework, but her mother-in-law is not as willing to help.

Another South Korean woman described a similar experience. She decided to enter a Ph.D. program in South Korea when her son was three years old. She talked to her parents-in-law and asked for their help with childcare and housework. Her parents-in-law thought she would be sacrificing her family duty to get her Ph.D. degree; they thought she should spend more time taking care of her family and doing housework instead of developing her career. For these reasons, they were not willing to help her with housework. She then turned to ask her parents for assistance. Her parents were very happy to help her, so she moved in order to live close to them. She recalled how her parents helped her do housework:

My parents usually went to my house before my son got home. On their way to my house, they went to buy some groceries. My dad usually helped take care of my son when my mom was cooking. He also took my son to the gym. After dinner, my mom washed their dishes. [Did your mom do any other housework?] Yes, she also mopped the floor and did laundry about twice a week. She washed bedding whenever she thought it was necessary. My parents went back to their house when I got home.

The woman emphasized that she could not balance her family duties and research without such wholehearted help from her parents. When asked if her husband helped with housework, she answered that he was too busy to help with housework, which is why she asked her parents to help. Although her parents' help can relieve her to some extent of the double burden, it is still the Korean woman and her mother who are responsible for the majority of the housework. Her husband did almost none of the housework. Therefore, the help of her parents with housework still maintains the gendered division of labor.

These two cases above have shown that the implications of being a *daughter* differ considerably from the implications of being a *daughter-in-law* with respect to housework. First, when living with their parents married women are still regarded as daughters and are not necessarily expected to learn new gender roles because they do not need to adjust themselves to a new family lifestyle. That is, they can still be themselves. In addition, living with their parents means that their mothers are more likely to help with housework. They

can have reliable helping hands and be relieved of the burden. Therefore, married women can enjoy greater freedom from housework when they live with their mothers. Living with mothers-in-law, however, means that married women are expected to play the role of daughter-in-law and fulfill the associated responsibilities. In other words, they are expected to do as much housework as they can. Furthermore, most, if not all, mothers-in-law are less likely to help their daughters-in-law do housework in comparison with the help typically offered by married women's mothers. For these reasons, the women interviewees depicted a situation in which living with mothers-in-law may not really help them reduce their time doing housework. These factors all explain why married women think the help with housework they get from their mothers is different from the help they get from their mothers-in-law.

"MY MOM DID LOTS OF HOUSEWORK ON WEEKDAYS, SO I SHOULD DO SOME HOUSEWORK ON WEEKENDS."

When women work full time and live with or live nearby their mothers, mothers tend to be the major providers of household labor while daughters are likely to be the helpers of household labor during weekdays. The roles of major providers and helpers of household labor can be interchanged easily between mothers and daughters. A Japanese woman researcher who worked full time in Japan was busy with her research on weekdays. To balance her work and family duties, she asked her mother's help with taking care of her daughter and doing housework. She described how her mother carried out most housework on weekdays:

My mom liked to buy fresh food before she cooked, so she shopped for groceries every day. She prepared dinner for my family on weekdays. She also did most housework like washing dishes, doing laundry, taking trash out. The most important thing is my mom could take care of my daughter before I came back from work. [Did you share some of the housework after you got home on weekdays?] Yes, I checked my daughter's homework, helped her take a shower, and read stories to her.

The Japanese woman's mother performed the majority of household tasks while she carried out some of the housework on weekdays. Because her mother is the major provider of household labor during weekdays, the Japanese woman researcher saves a lot of time on household labor during weekdays. But she would take over the major housework responsibility and her mother would become the housework helper on weekends. She told me in the interview how she performed housework on weekends:

My mom did lots of housework on weekdays, so I should do some housework on weekends. I liked to prepare a special breakfast like French toast and scrambled eggs for my daughter on weekends. My mom usually prepared Japanese breakfast for my dad and her-

self. I vacuumed and cleaned up the living room, the bathroom, and my daughter's bedroom. I also prepared some simple lunches for my family on weekends. If we went grocery shopping, we usually had dinner at restaurants on weekends. If not, I prepared dinner for my family.

When asked if her husband participated in any household tasks, she explained that her husband did not do any housework because he "does not know how to do housework" (in her own words). From this interview we learn that the Japanese woman and her mother shared all of the household tasks, freeing her husband completely from household labor. Her mother's help relieves her of the burden of housework on weekdays. She is expected, however, to assume the role of major provider of housework when she is available on weekends. Therefore, the roles of major caretaker and housework helper can be exchanged flexibly between mothers and daughters.

"MY FULL-TIME WORK INCLUDED MY WORK AT OFFICE AND HOUSEWORK AT HOME, BUT MY HUSBAND'S FULL-TIME WORK MEANT ONLY HIS WORK."

The help given by married women's mothers undoubtedly can relieve them from the burden of the "second shift" (Hochschild 1989). However, women are still supposed to be the major caretakers when their mothers are not able to share housework and their family members need care. Although their mothers are willing to offer housework support, they generally think that wives are still supposed to take more responsibility for caring for their families. A South Korean woman who worked full time for eight years before coming to the US lived with her mother, husband, and two sons in South Korea. She said that her mother did most of the housework (about 65 percent) while she did some. Her husband, however, did not do any housework. She complained that her husband's lack of contribution to housework was unfair given that they both had full-time jobs. She said:

I often think it is unfair to me. My mom always called me when my sons were sick. I didn't have enough time to go out with my colleagues, but my husband could do everything he wanted to do. We both had full-time jobs before we came to the US, but the reality is we were not equal. My full-time work included my work at office and housework at home, but my husband's full-time work meant only his work. It is not fair. It is very hard for him to change his thinking and my mom also thinks like that.

Although her mother offers her support, the fact that her mother calls her when her sons are sick suggests that her mother still thinks that, as the wife, she should bear more responsibility for housework than her husband does. For this reason she is expected to take over the housework after coming back from work or on weekends. In addition, she is expected to assume more of the burden of caring for her family members when they need her. This implies that the help provided by mothers could relieve married women from a double burden;

nevertheless, it has not changed the nature of the gendered division of labor. To the contrary, it helps to maintain the unequal gendered division of labor.

VIII. Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to reveal how gender is embedded in existing social structure and daily interaction and helps maintain the gendered division of labor in East Asia. East Asian societies have long been influenced by Confucianism. As discussed earlier, Confucian gender ideology not only defines separate spheres for men and women, it also emphasizes a hierarchical kinship system and filial piety. I argue that it is important to integrate these relational kinship contexts into the discussion of the gendered division of household labor in East Asia. Through the analysis of various relational kinship interactions, we can better understand how Confucian gender ideology is transmitted through everyday interaction among married men, married women, mothers, and mothers-in-law and strengthens gender inequality in household labor.

My empirical analysis focuses on four types of relational interaction—son and mother; son-in-law and mother-in-law; daughter-in-law and mother-in-law; daughter and mother—and discusses how these relational contexts help maintain gender inequality in household labor. Married men living with their mothers or mothers-in-law are freed almost entirely from doing any housework because their mothers/mothers-in-law and wives do the vast majority of it. The relational interaction between son and mother and son-in-law and mother-in-law conforms to the gendered division of labor and creates gender inequality in household labor. In addition, the relational interaction between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law is, among the four types of relational interaction, particularly noteworthy. Mothers-in-law tend to assume that daughters-in-law should be the major providers of household labor while they are the housework helpers. In addition to acting as helpers, mothers-in-law tend to assume the role of supervisor over their daughters-in-law, particularly when the latter do not follow their gender expectations. This hierarchical relationship coexists with gender beliefs and regulates the interaction between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. In comparison with the clear hierarchical relation between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, the hierarchical relationship between mothers and daughters is less significant. In the meantime, the roles of major housework provider and housework helper can be interchanged flexibly between mothers and daughters. Married women enjoy greater autonomy and gain much help with housework when they live with or near their mothers. However, the gendered division of labor is still maintained through interaction between mothers and daughters. So, even though mothers and mothers-in-law can ease the burden of housework for both men and women, the findings suggest that ultimately they reinforce the traditional gendered division of labor in East Asian households.

Living arrangements between married couples and their parents have changed considerably in the four countries under study. For instance, the relative share of extended family

households among all households has been declining steadily while nuclear family households have been the most common family type. In addition, a substantial proportion of older people and younger people live alone. Married women do not necessarily live with their parents-in-law. All of these trends suggest that changes in living arrangements may affect the function of gender structure in the four societies. Future studies may explore the relationship between changes in living arrangements and the gendered division of household labor in East Asia.

This study has presented a dynamic picture of the embeddedness of gender structure that supports the gendered division of labor in East Asia. Gender inequality in household labor is maintained through gender beliefs in various relational interactions among married men, married women, mothers, and mothers-in-law. To change the gender inequality of household labor, the gender structure at the level individual selves, in everyday interaction, and at the institutional level should be challenged persistently.

Notes

¹ The five most time-consuming household tasks include preparing meals, washing dishes or cleaning up after meals, housecleaning, doing laundry, and shopping for groceries (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000).

² Occasional household tasks include paying bills, household repairs, garden and animal care, and driving other people (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000).

³ Traditionally female household labor includes preparing meals, washing dishes, housecleaning, and doing laundry (Kroska 2004; Presser 1994; Twigg et al. 1999).

⁴ Gender-neutral tasks refer to grocery shopping, paying bills, and driving other people (Kroska 2004; Presser 1994; Twigg et al. 1999).

⁵ Traditionally male tasks include automobile maintenance and repair, yard work, and household repairs (Kroska 2004; Presser 1994; Twigg et al. 1999).

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