

The logics of gender construction in Asian modernities

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Today, it is considered self-evident that gender and gender relations in East Asia are changing. The question, however, is how are they changing? Is East Asia following European and North American paths, going through almost the same changes as in those places? Or are there in fact salient differences between the regions? What are the differences within Asia? And what are the various logics behind the gender changes in Asia and in other parts of the world? We still lack the ability to answer these questions properly. Our knowledge of gender in Asia is still very limited and unstructured in spite of some remarkable developments in gender studies in the region.

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of the logics that create the reality and discourses on gender in East Asia and Asia at large, in the hope that this chapter may contribute to the construction of a theoretical framework that will do justice to East Asian and Asian realities instead of simply applying Western theories or merely providing an ad hoc list of various phenomena. East Asia will be placed in a wider Asian context in this chapter, as recognition of the diversity within Asia is salient for understanding East Asian reality.

Diversity in tradition

The Confucian virtuous woman in question

It is often thought that the family is relatively stable and women are submissive to men in East Asia because of the influence of Confucianism as a common cultural heritage throughout the region. This is far from the reality as illustrated by a case from my own family history: my great-grandmother married four times and divorced three times. My great-grandmother was not an exception. Historical demographic studies indicate that the divorce and remarriage rates in the north-eastern part (Tohoku) of Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were quite high. According to studies of the villages in present-day Fukushima prefecture, one in three marriages ended in divorce (Hirai, 2008: 162) and 70% of divorced or widowed women remarried. The average number of years to remarriage was 2.5 years (Kurosui, 2012: 46–45). The Confucian teachings that “A virtuous woman does not take a second husband” were widely ignored in the Japanese society. In addition, the decision to divorce

was not always made by husbands. Tadashi Takagi (高木侃), a legal historian who collected more than 1,300 divorce letters from the period, found cases where the wife's parents forced the husband to issue a divorce letter (Takagi, 1997). A short divorce letter called “*mikudari-han*” (三行半) or “three and half lines” without stated reasons were also beneficial for wives who wished to remarry. According to the stories told to me by older family members, my great-grandmother was one of those who wanted a divorce herself.

However, in the south-western part of the country, the custom called *yobai* (夜這い or 呼ばい)¹ or “night calling” was widespread amongst young men and women – and sometimes not-so-young married ones (Akamatsu, 1994; 2020 forthcoming; Ochiai, 2011; forthcoming) and resulted in around 10% of births outside wedlock (Nakajima, 2015, 2016). The proportion of births outside marriage was similarly high or even higher in the area near Nagoya in the central region (Tomobe, 2001). What this shows is that the Confucian teaching that “Boys and girls should be separate after age seven” was not practised, either.

In contrast, in China and Korea, young widows who did not remarry were praised and valorised by the state (Kang, 2009). Gate-like structures erected by the government to honour these virtuous widows are still seen in many places in China, Taiwan and Korea, but not in Japan. Not only was remarriage common in Japan after being widowed, with its high rates of divorce, it was also common after divorce.

As a researcher of family sociology and family history in Japan, it makes me uneasy when I come across descriptions that lump together East Asian societies as “Confucian societies”. Terms like “Confucian welfare states” or “Confucian capitalism” are often used to refer to East Asian, and sometimes Southeast Asian, societies (Jones, 1993; Sung and Pascal, 2014). However, it is a widespread view in Japanese academia that the penetration of Confucianism into traditional Japanese society was shallow, at least compared to the rest of East Asia (Kawashima, 1948; Watanabe, 2010). “Shallow” here means two things: first, in terms of social class, Confucianism only affected the higher strata, the *samurai* or warrior class, and second, the influence of Confucianism stopped at the ideological and political levels, and everyday life was not actually affected.

Two types of kinship structure and gender ideology

In order to learn why the effects of Confucianism in Japan were so shallow, we need to be aware of how Confucianism reflected the social structure of China, and in particular, Chinese kinship structure. China is a society with exogamous patrilineal kinship groups, and such societies determine attribution to kinship group through ties with the father. This means, in general, women's sexuality is strictly controlled, and women's inheritance rights are limited.

In contrast, the majority of Southeast Asian ethnic groups have a bilateral kinship structure, in which women occupy a higher social position, have inheritance rights and greater sexual freedom. Agricultural technology also affects the division of labour by gender. In the rice belt, from Southeast Asia to southern China, women provide considerable contributions to agricultural production, but in northern China, in the wheat belt where agricultural workers use cattle, men tend to take the central role in agriculture (Sechiyama, 2013).

The basic structure of Japanese society shared a great deal with Southeast Asia both in terms of kinship structure and agriculture technology. Confucianism arrived in Japan in the fifth or sixth century, but its influence was limited. The civil service examination system (*keju* 科举) did not take root, and the legal code (*luling* 律令) was modified to suit local context. There was a change in the seventeenth century, when the fledgling Tokugawa

Shogunate drew on neo-Confucianism for the core of its governing ideology; however, Japanese Confucian scholars were not successful in applying Confucian concepts to everyday life in Japan (Watanabe, 2010). Social institutions were less affected by Confucian ideology than political institutions. The Japanese family institution, known as the “*ie* (家)”, gained a male bias, but it did not become a pure patrilineal system. This allowed an eldest daughter to be the heir in the absence of brothers.² She had more power than in-marrying wives as an inheriting daughter who took her husband into her own household (*muko-tori* 婿取り). One in five marriages was a *muko-tori*-type marriage according to historical demographic studies (Kurosu and Ochiai, 1995). Thus, the *ie* is more like the family institution which Claude Levi-Strauss referred to as the “maison” or “house” (Levi-Strauss, 1983), a style which is found in Southeast Asia and certain areas in Europe (Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai, 2009), than it is like the Chinese family, *jia* (家).³ This “maison” is formed around property such as land and buildings, and not as a pure descent group.

The influence of Confucianism reached the entire population of Japan only after the 1868 Meiji Restoration, in Japanese modernity.⁴ The Meiji Government is usually believed to have followed strong Westernisation policies. However, at the same time, it mobilised Confucianism in a number of ways in order to create an ideology that supported the modern Japanese state, from the construction of the subject to the establishment of the modern emperor system (Ogura, 2012; Kojima, 2018).

Countries like Korea and Vietnam, positioned, like Japan, between East Asia and Southeast Asia, have a similar history. Korea had a system of partible inheritance amongst sons and daughters until the seventeenth century. However, women later lost their inheritance rights amidst the state’s increasing glorification of chaste women. Martina Deuchler, a German family historian of Korea, argues that this Confucianisation of the Korean society occurred through the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (Deuchler, 1992). In Vietnam, a country that came under the influence of Confucianism much earlier than Korea or Japan, it was, and perhaps still is, considered a virtue for women to sacrifice themselves for their husbands and families and even for the state under the socialist regime (Pettus, 2003) but, at the same time, as in other Southeast Asian societies, women have been economically quite active throughout its history (Khuat et al., 2013). Korean and Taiwanese men who marry Vietnamese women through matchmaking agencies often confess that they find Vietnamese women the best because they retain the tradition of “virtuous women” that they see as being lost in modern Korea and Taiwan, while at the same time, they do not depend on men economically (Ochiai, 2007).

Geography of Asian patriarchy

It would be naïve to assume that Confucianism is a common tradition shared throughout East and Southeast Asia. There are at least two different social and cultural traditions in this region. One is a tradition based on a society with exogamous patrilineal kinship groups, and other has its roots in a society with bilateral kinship groups. Confucianism, the ideological expression of the social order of the patrilineal kinship society, later penetrated into the bilateral kinship societies in the periphery. Confucianism is not simply a tradition, but has been imported, reshaped and used to suit the aims of the rulers of the era in the bilateral kinship societies. Gender historians of China argue that the same process is demonstrated in Chinese history with a close examination of documents from different regions over different time periods (Kohama et al., 2018).

By expanding our geographical scope to include South Asia and Western Asia, we can obtain a more comprehensive view of gender in Asia. As Figure 1.1 shows, Asia can be divided

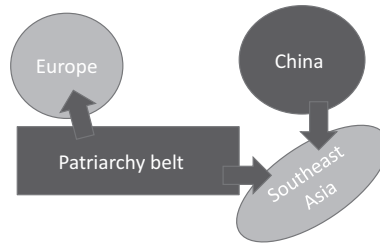


Figure 1.1 Geography of Asian patriarchy

into two regions, which could be named “Patriarchal Asia” and “Bilateral Asia”, the former being areas with patrilineal decent groups, and the latter being areas where bilateral kinship groups dominate. There are three major centres of Patriarchal Asia: China, India and the Middle East. The latter two form a continuous geographical area, which could be termed the “Patriarchy Belt”. Bilateral Asia covers Southeast Asia, with Vietnam, Japan and Korea as its periphery. Vietnam, Japan and Korea are, in a way, at the periphery of both East Asia and Southeast Asia. They belonged to Bilateral Asia but they have received influence from Patriarchal Asia. The centres of Patriarchal Asia are also the centres of great civilisations. The ideological and institutional influence of these great patriarchal civilisations gradually penetrated into Bilateral Asia, in historical trends called Sinicisation, Sanskritisation and Islamisation. If the scope is expanded even more to cover the whole Eurasian continent, Europe is another area with bilateral kinship groups. It can be argued that Europe was affected by ideological influences from the Middle East, via Christianity, long before the Middle East was Islamised. Eurasian gender history has been the confrontation between Patriarchal Asia and Bilateral Asia (or Eurasia), leading to a gradual domination by the former.

Another major trend that influenced gender structure of receiving societies was modernisation. King Rama VI, who ruled Thailand in the early twentieth century, ordered the creation of surnames for Thais following his return from England, where he had come to believe that the creation of surnames was necessary for building a strong nation-state (King Rama VI, 1972; 2020 forthcoming). Ordinary people in Thailand didn’t have surnames before his reform, just as in premodern Japan. Despite the matrilineal rule of co-residence in Thailand, these newly invented surnames in Thailand were to follow the male line. Pseudo-patrilineality was thus fabricated in a bilateral society due to Western influence. It was the same in modern Japan, where the Meiji Civil Code established that a child belongs to the *ie* 家 (house) of his or her father (Close 733). It necessitated the adoption of the son-in-law in the case of *muko-tori* type marriage. Modernisation also reinforced male dominance in bilateral societies.⁵ Studies of Thai judicial records have demonstrated that women’s legal and economic rights became restricted in the same period (Hashimoto, 2003). While similar to the effects of earlier patriarchal civilisations, the logic behind them was different. Something other than the logic of kinship structure was behind the trends we see in modernisation.

Similarity in discourse

Western modernity as the origin of Asian identity

Asian tradition is diverse, even within East Asia. However, we do encounter similar discourses on gender and family throughout Asia. Common discourses are “Asian women are

domestic”, “Asian women are caring”, “Asian families are warm and strong” or “Asian societies are familialistic”. The word “Asian” is replaceable with “Indian” or “Thai” or “Chinese” or “Japanese” or any other place in Asia. While this similarity has been attributed to Confucianism, the same discourses are seen about Thailand, where Confucianism had little influence, and areas like India where it had none. Historically, a cultural tradition common to all of Asia never existed. Thus, these similarities in discourses on gender in Asia are an intriguing phenomenon.

The intellectual history behind the concept of “*ryōsai-kenbo*” (良妻賢母), or the “good wife and wise mother”, suggests a key to solving this puzzle by unravelling the intertwined relationships between gender, modernity and tradition. The term “*ryōsai-kenbo*” was often used in Japan to model the ideal role for women, as well as in China, where it was “wise wife and good mother” (*xianqi liangmu*: 賢妻良母), and in Korea, where it was “wise mother and good wife” (*hyeonmo yangcheo*: 賢母良妻), and had generally been considered an ancient precept that came from Confucianism (Jin, 2006).

However, research in the 1980s corrected this view. A Japanese historian, Shizuko Koyama (小山静子), discovered that the phrase “*ryōsai-kenbo*” was not to be found anywhere in records from the Edo Period. Its first appearance was at the end of the nineteenth century, and actually emerged due to the influence of European ideas about women in the early Meiji period (Koyama, 1991, 2012).

One of the key roles of the “good wife and wise mother” was to take the lead in educating her children. In contrast, the Confucian view of women in the Edo Period did not rate the intelligence of women highly, and there was no expectation that mothers would actually educate their children. On the contrary, they were believed to harm their children’s education because they were too permissive (Koyama, 1991, 2012). It was Masanao Nakamura (中村正直) who promoted the role model of “*ryōsai-kenbo*” in the early Meiji period following his return from England, where he had been impressed by the role played by mothers in educating their children. He believed it to be the foundation of a strong state with well-educated people (Koyama, 1991, 2012). The concept of the “good wife and wise mother” was thus fabricated based on the role model of mothers in modern Europe. Girls who were educated to become good wives and wise mothers in girls’ high schools at the time were taught to be proud to fulfil their new role of contributing to not just the family, but also to the formation of the state (Koyama, 1991, 2012). This role of women as good wives and wise mothers was also exported to nearby countries in Asia including China, Korea and Thailand from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries (Jin, 2006). Japanese female educators were invited to these countries to establish women’s schools (Aoyama, 1990). In these societies, the concept of the “good wife and wise mother” was accepted as a modern, advanced role for women (Jin, 2006). A study by Yongmei Wu (吴咏梅) of Chinese magazines in the early twentieth century provides us with the evidence of the sort of modern, fashionable images of housewives and mothers that were shared by people in this period (Wu, 2013).

Traditionalisation of modern gender roles

The intellectual history of the good wife and wise mother does not end here. Some interesting twists are demonstrated in the discourse following the First World War. Increasing women’s employment after the war widened the concept of the good wife and wise mother. Contribution to the state and the society through work outside the home was added (Koyama, 1991, 2012). Also, in China, with the impact of the May Fourth Movement in

1919, an image of “new women” as “independent individuals” “à la Ibsen’s Nora” (*A Doll’s House*), became popular (Jin, 2006). This was followed, however, by an increasing criticism of the unthinking Westernisation of China in the late 1920s, and the *xianqi liangmu*, wise wife and good mother, made a comeback, with a new emphasis on the woman’s role in the household and connections with traditional Confucian ideas (Jin, 2006).

In this way, both China and Japan came to show what could be called a “traditionalisation of the good wife and wise mother” after the First World War, driven by what could be termed the “cultural geopolitics of Asia”. The superiority and threat of the West led to the introduction of the European good wife and wise mother idea, but at the same time, the spirit of resistance to the West required the creation of an Eastern image of women. With the appearance of the “new woman”, an independent individual who was equal to a man, this “new woman” was recast as a Western model of women, and the “good wife and wise mother” idea was recast as part of Eastern tradition. This shift perhaps owed less to shared traditions such as Confucianism than to a sort of identity politics. In a previous work, the author proposed calling this phenomenon “self-Orientalism” (Ochiai, 2014a).⁶ While Orientalism is the construction of the Other as the opposite of the characteristics of the Self, “self-Orientalism” is the construction of the Self as the opposite of the characteristics of the Other. People in Eastern societies are supposed to hate Orientalism as an expression of the superiority of the West (Said, 1978), but in reality, they sometimes embrace “Orientalist” images of themselves and make them the core of their identity.

What occurred in the transformation of the “good wife and wise mother” was a little more complicated. Both the “new woman” and the “good wife and wise mother” were modern gender roles of women imported from the West. But the modern domestic role of women was transformed into an “Asian tradition” when the individualistic “new woman” was labelled as Western. Through this very intricate process, Asian people started to justify the modern division of labour by gender in the name of “cultural tradition”, or sometimes, Confucianism. This is the mechanism that we named the “traditionalisation of modern gender roles” or, simply, the “traditionalisation of modernity” (Ochiai and Johshita, 2014), one that presumably functioned in many Asian countries.

Multiple paths to modernity

The modern family and the model of modern gender changes

What, then, are the modern gender roles? The “male breadwinner” model or the “male breadwinner/female housewife” model proposed by Jane Lewis (1992) is the term often employed to address the modern gender roles in academia today. The suggestion here is embedding Lewis’ gender model into a broader concept of the “modern family” to shed light on its wider social context. The concept of the “modern family” was developed in the fields of family history and feminist theory, both of which flourished in Europe and North America⁷ in the 1970s. The research of Philippe Ariès and others on family history served to historically relativise and deconstruct the until-then unquestioned assumptions of the family, and the results of that research were quoted in Marxist feminist works as their theoretical basis. The concept of the modern family can be summarised as follows (Ochiai, 1997):

- 1 Separation of the domestic and public spheres.
- 2 Strong emotional relationships amongst family members.

- 3 The centrality of children.
- 4 A gender-based division of labour, with the public sphere assigned to men and the domestic sphere to women.
- 5 A strengthening of the group solidarity of the family.
- 6 A decline of social interaction and *sociabilité*, and the establishment of privacy.
- 7 Exclusion of non-relatives.
- 8 Existence as a nuclear family household.

The concept of the modern family makes it clear that the “male breadwinner/female housewife” type gender roles are closely connected to the increased value of children and emotions in the family, and it premises the separation of the domestic and public spheres. It also tells us that women have become isolated in the domestic sphere, losing *sociabilité* and kinship ties. The emergence and decline of the modern family are key to understanding gender changes in the modern era.

To operationalise the concept, fertility rates and female labour-force participation can be used as indicators of the modern family as a mass phenomenon (Ochiai, 1997). In the same way as the Industrial Revolution modernised the production of goods, the demographic transition modernised the reproduction of people. The demographic transition, which was completed in the first few decades of the twentieth century in Europe, created the conditions needed for the formation of the modern family. The number of children per couple declined to two or three. This made it possible for parents to expend an unprecedented degree of affection and resources in raising their children. A standard life course with an ordered series of life stages and an almost lifelong marriage became possible with lower mortality (Ochiai, 2014a).

Following the demographic transition, fertility remained at the population replacement level. Most men and women married and had two or three children. At the end of the 1960s, however, fertility began to drop once again, this time to below replacement levels. Along with this came a rise in divorce rates and in cohabitation outside marriage, along with a growth in the proportion of children born outside marriage. This change became known as the second demographic transition (van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 1991). Its effect was to erode the foundations of the modern family.

Capitalist countries such as those in Western Europe and North America have experienced a decline in female labour-force participation rates. This refers to a phenomenon that can be called the “housewifisation” of women, a term coined by Maria Mies. It refers to the creation of couples made up of husbands – the breadwinners – and wives, who, despite being responsible for reproductive labour, are not seen as performing such, but as supported by their husbands through the division of capitalistic labour (Mies, 1986: 110). Mies argues that the concept of the housewife was invented to remove from the concept of “labour” the work involved in the reproduction of life – birth, childrearing and housework – and make it invisible (Mies, 1986: 4).

The Indian economist J. N. Sinha (1965) analysed data collected by the United Nations to hypothesise a U-shaped relationship between economic development and the labour-force participation of married women. In the early stages of development, diminishing of agriculture and other traditional industries leads to fewer employment opportunities for women. In addition, greater family income reduces the need for women to work. However, starting in the 1970s, West European and North American countries experienced a major growth in female labour-force participation. In contrast to the previous phenomenon, this can be called “dehousewifisation” (Ochiai, 2008a: 4–5, 2014).

The demographic transitions and changes in gender roles also correspond to the first and second modernities proposed by Ulrich Beck (Ochiai, 2014a). Beck does not state this explicitly, but the two core phenomena of the second modernity, “individualisation” and the “transformation of intimacy”, are direct consequences of these changes. These relationships are shown schematically in Figures 1.2 and 1.3.

My recent works have proposed the concept of “The 20th-Cetury System of Social Reproduction” to embed the modern family within a larger social context, together with certain political and economic systems that flourished in the period between the two demographic, gender and modernity transitions, which can be called “the short 20th century”.⁸ The 20th-Century System is sustained by the following three pillars (Ochiai, 2018: 99).

- 1 A Keynesian welfare state.
- 2 A Fordist production system and mass consumption.
- 3 A modern family with the “male breadwinner–female housewife” type gender division.

The Western path of modern gender changes has been embedded in the great transformation of the modern social system. It should be noted that the first- and the second-wave feminist movements occurred when the 20th-Century System was being formed and transformed. Social movements occur when social norms are changing.

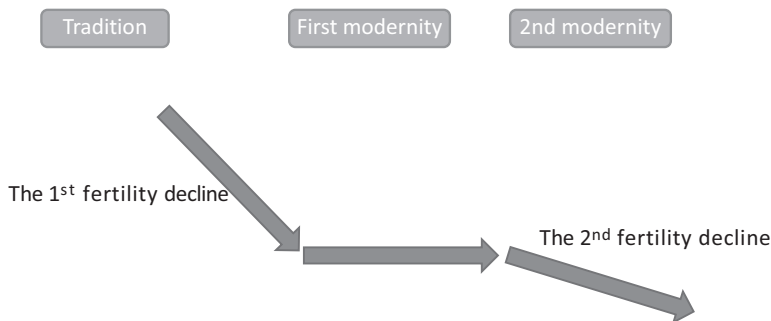


Figure 1.2 Fertility decline and modernities

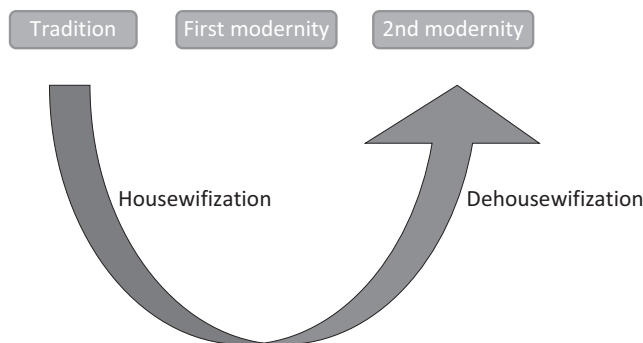


Figure 1.3 Housewifisation, de-housewifisation and modernities

Compressed modernity and semi-compressed modernity

In contrast to the assumptions of modernisation theory in the 1960s that all societies follow the same path to modernity, resulting in convergence at the end, the idea of “multiple modernities” assumes that societies follow different paths and that these different paths might create longstanding differences in the future due to the effects of path dependency. The model of modern gender changes discussed earlier has mainly relied on the historical experiences of Western countries. However, we will now see how these play out in Asia.

The first marker of the modern family is declining fertility. Figure 1.4 shows the long-term trends in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for a number of East and Southeast Asian countries, plus selected European countries. The two declines in Figure 1.2, one as part of the first demographic transition and the other as part of the second, are thus demonstrated by actual statistics.

An interesting fact is that, with very few exceptions, societies within a single region – i.e. Europe or East Asia – experienced their fertility declines almost simultaneously. The first fertility decline occurred in most European societies between the 1870–80s and 1920–30s, and in most East Asian societies in the 1970s–80s. Japan experienced it in the 1950s, exactly halfway between these two regions. In those two regions – with the exception of Japan in Asia – there is a gap of about half a century in the timings of first fertility declines.⁹

The next question is when did the second fertility decline take place? In Europe, it started at the end of the 1960s, and from the mid-1970s in Japan. Thus, while there was a quarter-century gap between Japan and most countries in Europe for the first fertility decline, the gap was less than a decade for the second fertility decline. Latecomers thus had their modernity not only delayed but “compressed”, as the South Korean sociologist Chang Kyung-Sup has noted based on how that country experienced modernity (Chang, 2010, 2014).

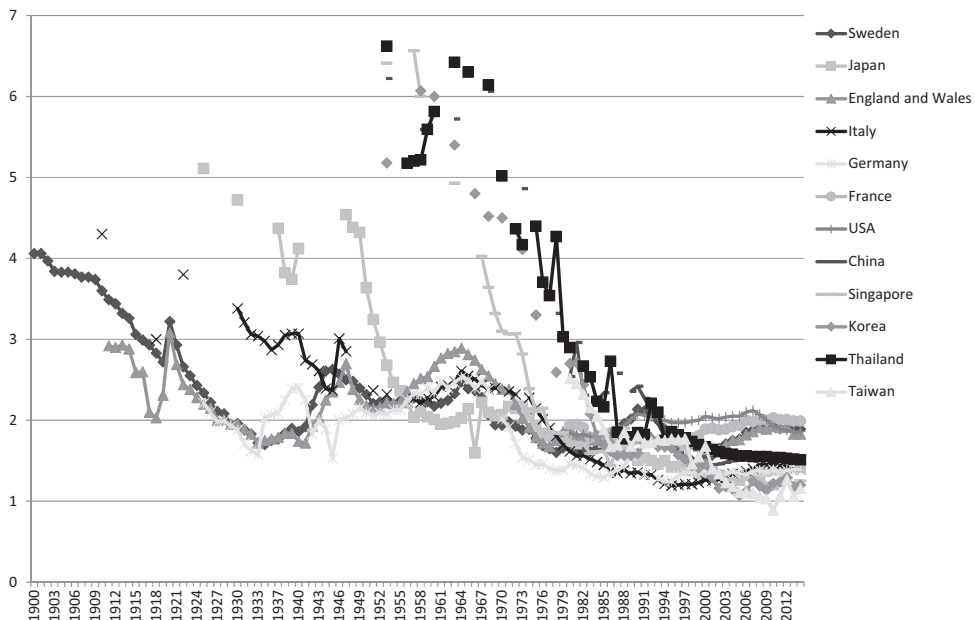


Figure 1.4 Long-term trends in TFR in Europe and Asia

Source: OECD Stat

When, then, did the second fertility decline take place in Asian countries other than Japan? Figure 1.4 shows the fertility decline as continuing in Asia; we cannot see any boundary between the first and second fertility declines as we could for Europe or Japan. We need to operationally define a decline below replacement levels as a second fertility decline. This means that the second fertility decline started in Singapore in the mid-1970s, only a few years after Japan, and in South Korea, Thailand and China at the beginning of the 1980s, in the second half of the 1980s and in the 1990s, respectively.

If we think of the period between these two fertility declines – when fertility was stable and at around the replacement level – as the “golden age” of modernity, then the length of this period was about 50 years in Europe and America, 20 years in Japan and almost nonexistent in the rest of Asia. What that means for Asia outside Japan is that they never experienced a stable period of “first” modernity; instead, they plunged headlong and directly into “second” modernity.

From the demographic point of view, we can see very clearly this compression of modernity that Chang Kyung-Sup has noted. Chang defines

[c]ompressed modernity [as] a social situation in which economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner with respect to both time and space, and in which the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements leads to the construction and reconstruction of a highly complex and fluid social system.

(Chang, 2014)

In addition, I would argue that we should pay attention to the different degrees of compression. In contrast to countries like South Korea that have gone through this “compressed modernity”, Japan has had what might be termed a “semi-compressed modernity” (Ochiai, 2014a), and this difference provides an explanation for the experiences these regions would undergo.¹⁰

The compression of modernity characterising East Asian modernity affects gender role changes in the region. Figure 1.5 compares long-term trends in female labour-force participation rates for Europe, America and Japan during the twentieth century. In the first half of the twentieth century, the female labour-force participation rate in America and Europe, particularly in countries like the U.K. and Sweden, can be observed as starting out at the 20% level and then rose gradually. However, according to Nyberg (1994), if we correct the data for the underreporting of female labour in the agricultural professions in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a U-curve pattern appears as in Figure 1.3 in, for example, Sweden, with rates declining from the end of the nineteenth century, reaching their lowest levels between the 1920s and 1930s, and then beginning to rise again. Japan is distinguished by its maintenance of a high female labour-force participation rate, in the upper 40% level or above, throughout the twentieth century. This is because the decline represented by the left half of the U-curve (i.e. housewifisation), and the increase represented by the right half (i.e. de-housewifisation) progressed at nearly the same time, thus cancelling each other out.

The compression of modernity also reinforces the traditionalisation of modernity mentioned earlier. The first and second modernities are demarcated clearly in Western modernity and also in Japanese semi-compressed modernity. However, as we have seen, they are continuous in other Asian countries. Researchers in these countries tend to regard modernisation as one single process without distinguishing these two stages. It is also likely that tradition and

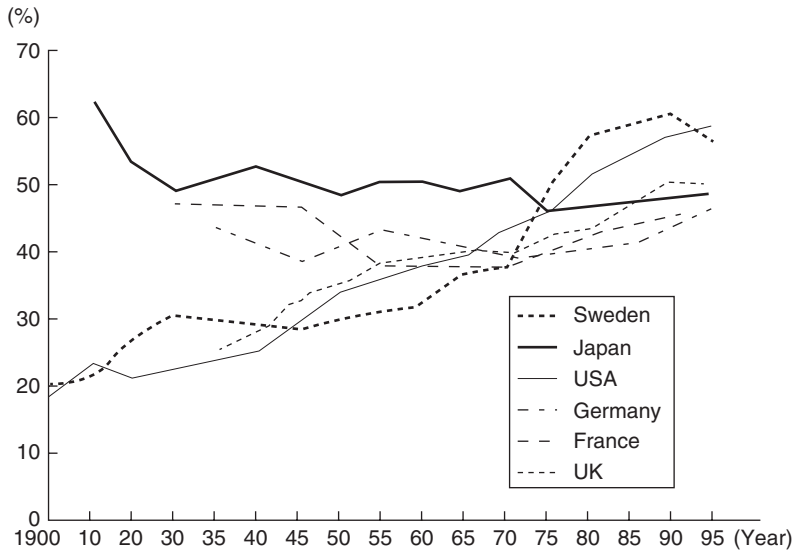


Figure 1.5 Long-term trends of female labour force participation

Source: Economic Planning Agency of Japan, 1997, *White Paper on National Life*, Figure 1-1-16.

first modernity are not clearly distinguished in these societies, particularly so if they belong to “Patriarchal Asia” with its lower participation of women in the labour force, as they have not gone through the left half of the U-curve gender change or housewifisation in the process of modernisation. This applies to Korea's compressed modernity.

Another point to be mentioned here is the effect of the population bonus, the demographic dividend. In the process of demographic transition, a transitional cohort with a larger sibling size at adult age appears due to their mothers still maintaining high fertility amidst lowered mortality. They experience a unique demographic condition that enables them to benefit from a large and strong sibling network. In compressed modernity, this unique cohort is generated only over a few decades, resulting in a sharp increase and decrease in sibling size by generation. This cohort can create an ideal household structure and enjoy strong mutual support via kin networks, strengthening the belief in the strong family within their tradition, but this unique condition is lost by the next generation. This happened in Japan (Ochiai, 1997), and is inevitable in other Asian societies that are going through a more compressed modernity.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that the 20th-Century System that supported modern gender roles has been dismantled. As we will see soon, housewifisation is now happening in some Asian societies that are not supported by a Keynesian welfare state or a Fordist production system: the social context is completely different, and what this difference means for the future is not yet known.

Socialist modernity in transition

The East Asian region includes societies with another path to modernity: socialist modernity. From the beginning, socialist ideologies included the emancipation of women. Reproductive labour became socialised, or turned into social labour, thus liberating women from domestic tasks. Socialism proposed a contrasting path to Western European capitalism, which

promoted modern gender role division through housewifisation. In China, the socialist path was demonstrated by Mao's famous phrase that "women hold up half the sky".

The former socialist countries in Europe are today considered to be "post-socialist societies" or "transitional societies", and are experiencing major changes. Within family and gender, Saxonberg and Sirovatka have noted trends towards "retraditionalisation" and "refamilialisation" (Saxonberg and Sirovatka, 2006). As part of the transition to a free market, public childcare facilities have been closed, and the "traditional" household role of women has been emphasised, leading to a decline in their workforce participation. The only social institution which people can rely on is the family, so familialism is strengthened and feminism is forced into the background (Dupcsik and Tóth, 2008). Without public support and social safety nets, people's lives became harder, and this hardship is evident in the ultra-low fertility rates in this area.

The current situation in Asia shares some similarities with Europe, but the differences are also significant. One being that there are a number of countries in the region that are still socialist. Nevertheless, these countries are also changing both economically and in terms of gender.

The changes in gender roles in China started with the "women return home (*funu huijia* 婦女回家)" debates in the 1980s. To solve the problem of excess labour that Chinese companies faced, certain economists urged women to leave work and stay at home (Ochiai, 1989). This shift never happened at the time, thanks to opposition from the All-China Women's Federation (*Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui*), and the tide of "reform" was suspended following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Actual changes began surfacing from the middle of the 2000s as China's economic growth continued. A study conducted in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, in 2002 has shown that middle-aged women who had lost their jobs due to the downsizing of state-owned companies called themselves housewives as a way to accept their fate (Ochiai, 2008b: 161). Women were far more vulnerable than men to the widespread unemployment resulting from China's embrace of market economy. Another type of new housewife in China that appeared then was the upper-class housewife driven to support her children's education. There was a growing view that one could not entrust one's child to its uneducated grandparents (Ochiai, 2008b: 162–163). Interviews with women of more average economic status in 2004 in Fushun, Liaoning province, revealed that for some, when their children were old enough to need them to be more intensely involved with study (from the first year of middle school), they would consider whether to quit their jobs and devote themselves to helping their children. But in actuality, there were few such cases as they lacked enough economic leeway (Ochiai, 2008b: 163). While the number of housewives was a tiny fraction compared to the total population, the "housewife" (in Chinese: 全職太太 *quanzhi taitai* or 家庭主婦 *jiating zhufu*) was becoming a reality (Zheng, 2013). The closing down of workplace daycare facilities starting in the 2000s is another change that is making it harder for women to balance work and home (Zhang and Maclean, 2011).

The results of comparative family surveys conducted in 2006 in four East Asian societies (China, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan) show that, although women's participation rates in the labour force are the highest in China (nearly 80% amongst the 20–40 age group) and the proportion of men doing housework is also the highest in China, China also had the highest ratio of people in the 20–40 age group who agreed with the statements that "The husband should work outside the home, and the wife should look after the home" and "For a wife, it is more important to help your husband's work than to do your own job". In the other three countries, the ratios agreeing with the aforementioned statements were smaller amongst the younger age groups, but in China, there was almost no variation by age. So we see a sort of reverse-course phenomenon whereby Chinese are the

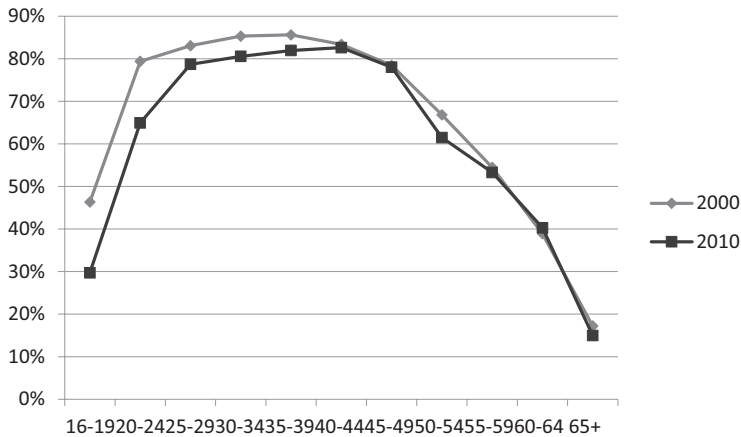


Figure 1.6 China's female labour force participation rates by age group

Source: Demographic Census of China, 2000, Table 4-4 and Demographic Census of China, 2010, Table 4-2.

most pro-gender equality amongst those over 50, but for those under 40, they are the least (Iwai and Yasuda 2009: 21, 22, 25, 63).

A comparison of the women's labour-force participation rates in Chinese censuses in 2000 and 2010 proves that the re-housewifisation of Chinese women is actually taking place. Even though their overall level is still high, participation rates amongst those in their 20s and 30s declined significantly (Figure 1.6). This decline cannot solely be explained by the rise of women's educational attainment. The current changes are proceeding in tandem with revisions in the historical discourse. The liberation of women during the peak of socialism has come to be reinterpreted as hurting women by giving them a double burden. In other words, the idea now is that it is better to allow women to have the *choice* of becoming housewives. The past tends to be recast as a mirror of the present, and these days we can observe a use of the "politics of memory" for the socialist modernity.

This "socialist modernity" is not simply rejected in Asia, as it was in Europe, but has been transformed instead. While the ideal of gender equality has not been explicitly denied, in reality, the Confucian view of women and the modern gendered division of labour (the "good wife and wise mother") have been combined harmoniously, once again resurfacing to widen the gender gap. The question remains, however, whether we are witnessing the ideal of gender equality being passed on to the next generation or the start of modern gender division, merely delayed half a century.

Complexity in contemporary gender changes in Asia

Asian modernity is much more diverse than European or Western modernity. Traditional diversity within the region and the various paths to modernity – compressed modernity, semi-compressed modernity and socialist modernity – explain the complex trends in gender role change we are observing. Figure 1.7 shows an attempt at visualising the complex paths of gender role changes within Asian modernity.

As has been shown, there are two types of society in terms of traditional gender roles: those with a bilateral kinship structure, which also have higher female labour-force participation, and those with patrilineality, that have lower participation. Those with higher participation,

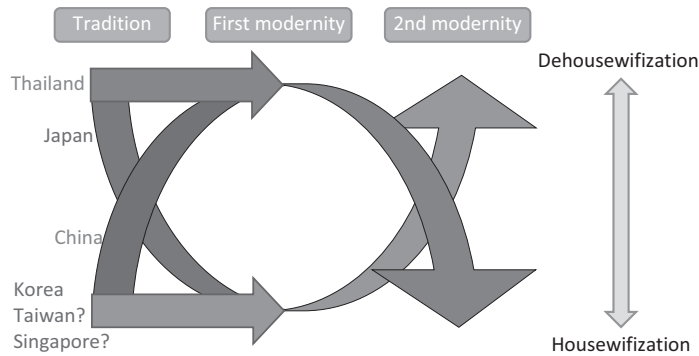


Figure 1.7 The complex paths of gender role changes in Asian modernity

which belong to the Southeast Asian tradition like Thailand and Japan, can theoretically follow the same housewifisation and de-housewifisation process as European countries. Japan experienced the housewifisation phase from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1960s, while Thailand has maintained a high participation rate until recently and is currently at the point where it may or may not take the route to housewifisation (Ochiai, 2008b). In both societies, however, the de-housewifisation phase has already started, if we define it by the increasing number of women in formal employment. Compressed modernity has caused these two phases to overlap.

However, there are societies with a tradition of lower female labour-force participation like China, Korea and possibly Singapore and Taiwan. Amongst them, those countries where the government promoted women's employment as state policy – China with its socialist modernity and Singapore with its developmentalism – experienced de-housewifisation earlier, while the others experienced it later. However, the socialist country that experienced state-driven de-housewifisation is now facing the reversed trend of housewifisation. The process China is facing might be called “re-housewifisation”. This falls along the same continuum as the refamilialisation and retraditionalisation that have occurred in post-socialist countries in Europe, although the change in China is relatively moderate. At the moment, re-housewifisation and de-housewifisation trends are occurring simultaneously. On the contrary, de-housewifisation trend is continuing in Singapore, where the government promoted women's employment to accelerate economic development, but working mothers are under pressure both from intensive work directly related to the global market and the high expectations for mothers in children's education (Ochiai, 2008b).

Some interesting contradictions are shown by the results of value surveys on gender. Women in many Asian countries respond differently than do women in Western countries to the question of whether they agree with a gender-based labour division where the man works and the woman stays at home (Figure 1.8). In Western countries, gender-based labour division has become old-fashioned, but in Asia, intriguingly, the higher the current labour-force participation, the stronger the converse support for gender-based labour division, as we see in China and Thailand. On the other hand, there are societies like South Korea where views on this matter are on par with those of the West, while the actual labour participation rate for women does not correspond to the beliefs. As attitudes affect future trends, the paths of gender changes in Asia would seem to be becoming increasingly complex.

Figure 1.9a and 1.9b compares the labour-force participation rates for women by age, according to the official statistics around 2000 and in 2017 or 2016 (except for China) for the

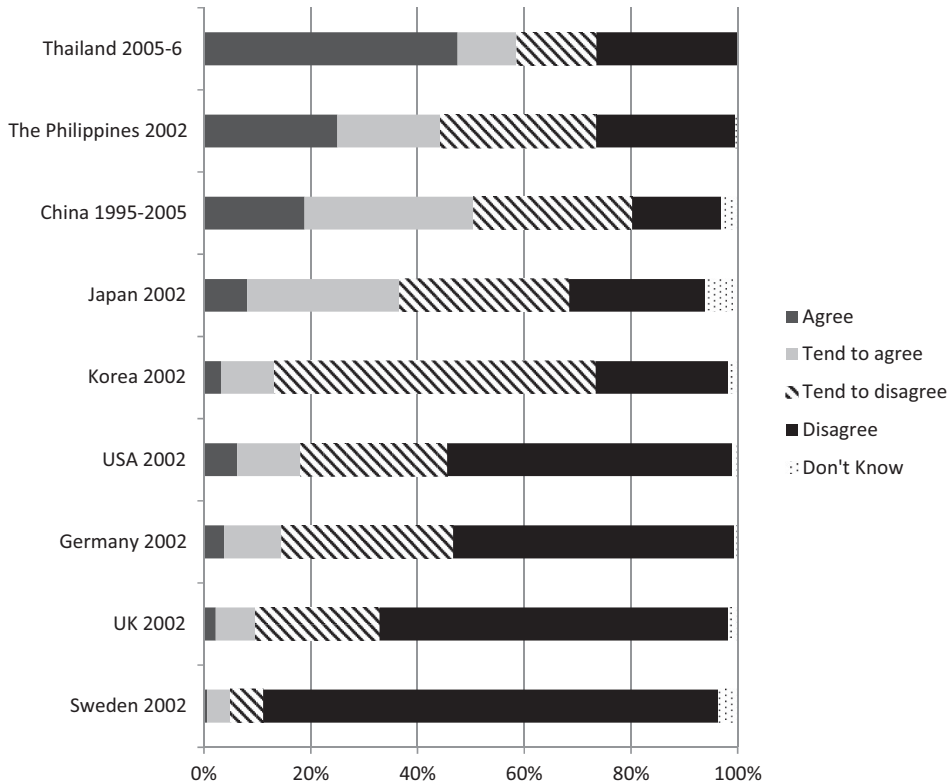


Figure 1.8 Women's attitude towards gender division of labour

Source: China: Gender Equality and Women's Development Report 1995-2005. Thailand: International Comparative Research on Family Education by NWECC, Japan. Other: International Comparative Research on Gender Equality by Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Japan.

societies in East and Southeast Asia. It seems clear that the patterns for age-specific rates of female labour-force participation in these societies are quite diverse. Note that there is no way to refer to "gender in Asia" in general. The patterns of labour-force participation for Asian women shown in the figures can be classified into three types. Type 1 societies are those in which high participation rates are maintained throughout the productive years. China, Vietnam and Thailand – two socialist countries and a country with Southeast Asian tradition – belong to this type. In Type 2 societies, female labour-force participation rates gradually decline. Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia belong to this type. Type 3 is where, after a temporary decline from the late 20s, the rate begins to climb again, thus showing an M-shaped curve. South Korea and Japan belong to this type. Women in societies belonging to the first two types continue to work during their childbirth/childcare period without intermission.

Comparing the patterns in the two time periods, the overall increase is remarkable for Type 2 and Type 3 societies. On the contrary, amongst Type 1 societies, a clear decrease is observed in China as we have already seen, while the decrease is very subtle in Thailand and the level is almost maintained in Vietnam. As a result, the differences in the level by Type are closing, whereas the diversity amongst the societies in the same Type is becoming more visible. Vietnam provides evidence that not all the transitional societies are following the same path of re-housewifisation. South Korea still demonstrates the gap between the attitude and practice.

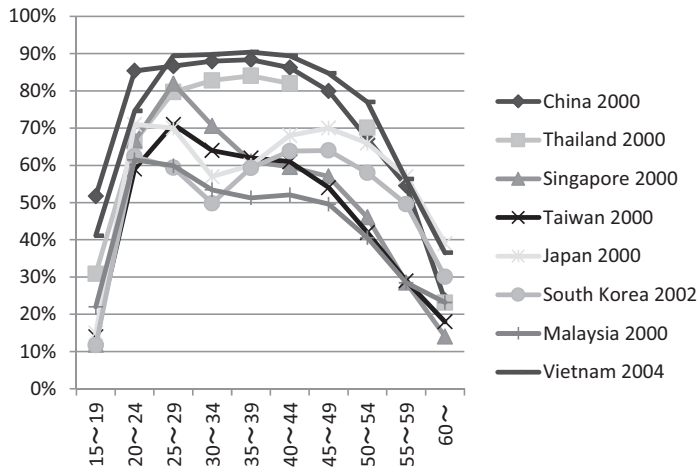


Figure 1.9a Female labour force participation rates by age group in selected Asian societies
 (Source) China: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 Census; Thailand: National Statistical Office, Report of the Labor Force Survey; Singapore Dept. of Statistics, Census of Population 2000; Taiwan: Executive Yuan, Human Resource Survey; Korea: National Statistical Office, Economically Active Population Survey; Japan: Statistics Bureau, Labor Force Survey.

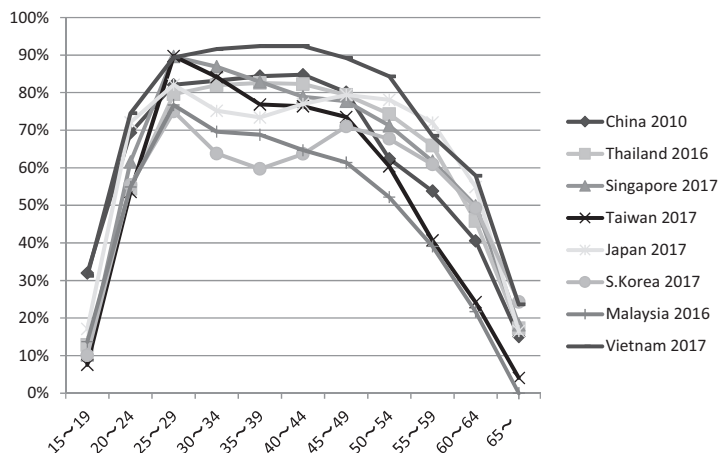


Figure 1.9b Female labour force participation rates by age group in selected Asian societies
 Source: Taiwan: Executive Yuan, Human Resource Survey.
 Others: Statistics Bureau of Japan, World Statistics 2019.

There are no simple answers to questions about the impact of modernity on gender in East Asia. Modernisation/modernity contributed to housewifisation in Japan, de-housewifisation in China and Singapore, and no changes in Thailand. Recently, there have been further changes in societies like China and Thailand, where women continue to work following childbirth. Whether due to job losses, a lack of childcare facilities or parental focus on children's education, more women are voluntarily or involuntarily becoming housewives (Ochiai, 2008b). It seems that an admiration for the "housewife life" is emerging in these countries (Zheng, 2013; Pongsapitaksanti, 2017). On the other hand, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea show

a trend towards de-housewifisation. In the Asian context, the trends of housewifisation and de-housewifisation did not occur separately in different time periods as in Western societies, but occurred (and are occurring) simultaneously, while also displaying patterns of reversal.

Policy decisions

Familialist reform in Japan

Paths of societies are not determined naturally. The future of a society partially depends on the paths it has taken and partially on its social environment, but the society can also choose and change its own paths. Policy decisions play particularly important roles in determining the path a society takes. Gender policies usually appear in the area of economic or social policies (including care policies).

People often say that Asian societies are “familialist”, and that the family is the core unit of society and women are assumed to be responsible for taking care of the family members. But it would be naïve to see familialism as a simple reflection of Asian culture. The combined effects of compressed modernity, and the policy decisions made under the social conditions created by it, have caused Asian societies to develop a stronger familialism than in Europe, while at the same time creating varieties of Asian familialism (Ochiai, 2014b).

The question remains, however, how are the policy decisions made. For Japan, we should understand the importance of the policy reforms of the 1980s. Japan was ahead, in the Asian context at least, in the construction of a social security system: Japan’s system got its start in the early twentieth century, following the model presented by Bismarck in Germany. However, social security only had a peripheral role until the 1960s, because growth was considered to be the best way to improve people’s well-being. It was only when substantial economic growth had been achieved in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the government recognised the need to revise the existing welfare system to construct a more appropriate welfare state. This is why 1973 was named “Welfare Year 1”.

Unfortunately, “Welfare Year 1” was hit by oil crisis. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party became wary and set a new agenda it called the “Japanese-style welfare society” that emphasised “traditional” Japanese virtues of “self-help and mutual support within the family and the community”. While this could be considered an early example of welfare retrenchment, at this stage, Japan did not have such a well-developed welfare state to retrench. Rather, led by state bureaucrats, social expenditure increased in size starting from the 1970s. Thus, under compressed modernity, actual development of welfare and retrenchment discourse happened at the same time.

In actuality, economic and demographic conditions concealed this contradiction. Growth rates remained high even after the oil crisis. Compared to Europe and North America, the “affluent society” lasted 20 years longer in Japan. Japan was also still enjoying a demographic dividend in the 1970s. These favourable conditions allowed Japan to continue “workfare” for two more decades.

In 1980s, the government made the “family” a policy issue as a way to create the foundations of what they termed a “Japanese-style welfare society”. Flattered by the cultural explanations of Japan’s economic success, the government had a self-Orientalist desire to protect the Japanese family, the core of its national identity, from contamination by a Western culture-induced “family crisis”. In other words, this policy was a reaction to the second demographic transition that started in Europe and North America. Laws known as the “protection of the housewife’s throne” were implemented in 1980s, including an increase in the

legal inheritance amount for the wife (1980), pension reform that waived premiums for the wives of employees of large companies (1985) and the creation of a special tax deduction for those with dependent spouses (1986).

The effect of this anachronistic familialist reform was enormous. The increasing full-time employment of women since the 1950s had ceased after the 1970s energy crisis, and the only expansion in women's employment from the second half of the 1970s to the present has been in part-time employment. This new gender division of labour – what Jane Lewis calls a “one-and-a-half earner model” (Lewis et al., 2008) – became fixed by law, and remains entrenched today. The gender role change that occurred simultaneously to the second demographic transition in most European and North American countries did not occur in Japan because the familialist reforms of the 1980s had consolidated the gendered division of labour. While in the 1990s Japan lost the economic and demographic conditions it had enjoyed in the 1980s, the consolidated familialistic structure resisted change, resulting in what has become called the “lost decades”.

The government introduced new policy measures beginning in the late 1990s that aimed to socialise care. The introduction of the LTCI (Long-term Care Insurance) in 2000 relieved women of some of the burdens involved in elderly care for family members (Tamiya and Shikata, 2010; Ochiai et al., 2012). Women spent less time in elderly care and caretakers' risk of death due to overwork in caregiving (*kaigo karōshi* 介護過労死) was reduced. However, the socialisation of childcare has only recently become a policy target. The employment rates finally increased in the 2010s, of women with small children (Ochiai, 2019). The current government's agenda includes providing enough daycare spaces as well as financial support.

Liberal familialism in other Asian societies

Other Asian societies have had different experiences to Japan. Modernity is even more compressed in these other societies, forcing them to undertake the paradoxical task of constructing a welfare state while simultaneously retrenching welfare (Miyamoto et al., 2003: 301). For example, South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung (1998–2003) was faced with this contradiction despite the forced application of neo-liberalism and globalisation after the IMF Crisis, which created a concept of “productive welfare” that would construct social welfare as a social investment, or in other words, as the foundation of economic growth.

One significant finding in our field research on the patterns of care provision was the key role the market sector played in certain societies, especially for childcare and elderly care in Singapore, and for elderly care in Taiwan (Ochiai, 2009). This reflects the employment of foreign domestic workers and care workers in the home. Interestingly, those families who hire care services from the market usually profess the familialistic idea that a family should take care of its elderly parents at home. Yet, the reality is that it is migrant care workers who perform these care tasks. To put it another way, these families “subcontract filial piety” (Lan, 2002). We have called this approach “liberal familialism” (Ochiai, 2009). It is important to underline the fact that liberal familialism has been developed as a state policy to fill the gap between the increasing care needs and the restricted state welfare in compressed modernity.

Compared with societies like Singapore or Taiwan, Japan has remarkably strict restrictions regarding any solutions that involve hiring foreign workers. Japan's immigration policy does not allow visas for unskilled foreign workers, so there are almost no foreign domestic or care workers in the country, save for the small number through EPA and other programs. Just as in the consolidation of the family, Japan holds fast to its 1960s system and resists any changes, despite the thorough transformation of its society. During its “semi-compressed modernity”, Japan just managed to build a structure resembling Western modernity by the

1960s. However, there was not enough time to reconstruct it to suit the changing circumstances. In contrast, other Asian societies had even less time in their much more “compressed modernity” to achieve stability. This situation functions as a positive factor for promoting constant change. For example, hiring household help was common in earlier stages of modernity, which allowed other Asian societies to accept foreign household help as they had not yet lost their collective memory of hiring domestic help, while in Japan’s case, its carefully constructed private sphere or modern family remains an obstacle.

Asian familialism is diverse. However, even with liberal familialism, where the family receives care services from the market, the financial responsibility for care is usually borne by the family. This is why liberal familialism is still called familialism, and why fertility in these societies is also low. The economic burden is particularly heavy for people who occupy an economically disadvantaged status. This is why the impact of the economic crisis in and after 1997–1998 was more severe in liberal familialist societies.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has found several logics behind gender construction in Asia in the quest for a theoretical framework that will do justice to Asian realities.

The first section has gauged the impact of culture, particularly Confucianism. The idea that the common cultural tradition in East Asia, with its roots in Confucianism, has generated the conservative attitudes towards gender found in this region appears to be a very plausible theory initially. However, the cultural traditions of the Asian region are too diverse to accept such a simplistic view. The Asian region can be divided into “Patriarchal Asia” and “Bilateral Asia”. The ideological and institutional influence of the former penetrated into the latter through the historical trends of Sinicisation, Sanskritisation and Islamisation.

The second section has focused on the impact of Western modernity. Asian societies received decisive influences from the West right from the beginning of their modernity. Careful attention must be given to the tricky process, one that can be called the “traditionalisation of modern gender roles” or “traditionalisation of modernity”, which functions in many Asian countries. Asian people often believe that modern gender role divisions are a part of their tradition due to an ideological mechanism that has been termed “self-Orientalism”. This is the logic behind the similarities in discourse on Asian gender in spite of its diverse realities.

The third section is on the different paths to modernity. Asian societies did not follow the same path as the Western model of modern gender change. Some of them experienced “compressed modernity” and “semi-compressed modernity”, and others, “socialist modernity”. As a result, the paths of gender changes in Asian modernity are quite complex. The trends of housewifisation and de-housewifisation did not occur separately in different time periods, as in Western societies, but they occurred and are occurring simultaneously, while also displaying patterns of reversal (re-housewifisation).

The fourth section delineates the important roles policies play. The combined effects of compressed and semi-compressed modernities and the policy decisions made under such social conditions create familialistic social structures, while at the same time creating varieties of familialism. The ideological factor of self-Orientalism played a role in Japan’s semi-compressed modernity, and the employment of foreign workers through global market is essential in liberal familialist societies.

All these logics combine and work together to generate the current diversified realities of gender in Asia, and its related discourses.

Notes

- 1 The former is widely used but linguists and experts in folklore studies agree that the latter captures the original meaning of the term.
- 2 Even an absolute primogeniture regardless of sex (*ane-katoku* 姉家督), where the eldest daughter became the heir even when she had younger brothers, was practised in some areas in the north-eastern region (Yamamoto, 2006, Forthcoming).
- 3 See Guan (2005, 2017) for the comparison of Japanese and Chinese families and kinship structure in history.
- 4 However, interestingly, the emergence of a national family model is observed prior to the Meiji Restoration according to historical demographic researches (Ochiai, 2015, Ochiai and Hirai, forthcoming). The momentum to unite the nation was created by the market and media rather than the impact of Confucianism.
- 5 Male dominance was also imposed to matrilineal societies in the process of modernization (Awaya, 1994).
- 6 “Reverse Orientalism (Sakai 1996)” is sometimes used to address the same phenomenon but the author proposes “self-Orientalism” instead to avoid the ambiguity the term “reverse” entails.
- 7 In this article, “the West” refers primarily to Europe and North America, and not to post-socialist eastern and central Europe, unless specifically indicated.
- 8 Eric Hobsbawm defined the term “short 20th century” as the period between 1914 and 1991, the years of the beginning of the First World War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Hobsbawm, 1994). My “short 20th century” ends two decades earlier than his.
- 9 France was the exception in Europe, starting its first fertility decline soon after the French Revolution.
- 10 It has to be noted that the “compressed modernity” seems an adequate model for describing the East Asian path to modernity but not for all the paths of latecomer societies. The Indian path might be termed “prolonged modernity” according to Fumiko Oshikawa, a Japanese Indologist. Dependency Theory scholars held that former colonies experienced “underdevelopment” rather than delayed or compressed development (for example, Frank, 1978).

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