



# Diversity of Household Employment Patterns in East Asia: A Comparative Study of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan

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## **Abstract**

This study analyzes household employment patterns in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and their differences between countries and within countries. Based on couple-level analyses of married women aged 27 to 47 and their spouses, the analysis revealed a divergence in household employment patterns in East Asia in terms of their distribution and determinants. In Japan, moderate male breadwinner households are prevalent, while full-time dual breadwinner households are dominant in Taiwan. On the other hand, male breadwinner households are still prevalent in Korea. The extent to which the traditional male breadwinner model weakens shows a significant variation by educational groups in each country. The strong corporate internal labor market in Japan and Korea, exerting negative influences on female employment, and particularly for highly educated women, is considered to be an important structural condition producing between- and within-country differences in household employment pattern in East Asia.

## **Keywords**

East Asia female employment pattern, household employment pattern, breadwinner model, internal labor market, intersectionality, Korea

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The increased participation of married women in economic activities is considered the most important change observed in the labor markets of industrialized countries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Esping-Andersen, 2007). Such change is also happening in East Asia, where the deep-rooted traditional ideology of gender division of labor is believed to remain intact. Comparisons of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan show that the rate of women's labor force participation has been steadily rising since the 1980s to the current point where the employment rate of women aged 15 to 64 has reached around 50%, and that these three countries are experiencing major changes such as the decline of male breadwinner-only families and the rise of dual-earner families. These changes have raised the need to reconsider the discourses on East Asia's gender regime as existing research only describes the region as a society in which male breadwinner households are dominant. One should note that while the decreasing number of households with a male head being the sole provider for the family is a common phenomenon in the East Asian countries, the composition and percentage of dual-income families might greatly vary from one country to another. Most industrialized societies show little difference in the employment types of male workers (Anxo et al., 2007). Therefore, possible country-specific variations in household employment patterns will be determined by married women's employment rates and types. Given the differences in women's employment situations in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, which have been identified in existing comparative studies (Brinton, 2001, Yu, 2001; 2005), it can be assumed that the three countries would show substantial differences in household employment patterns. The main objective of this paper is to describe the divergence in household employment patterns which is taking place in East Asia.

What is interesting is that the heterogeneity within the region is a development that cannot be easily explained by the social policy factors highlighted in the existing comparative studies centered on the Western world. The international comparative studies that include the existing welfare regime theories have traditionally emphasized institutional factors, particularly the impact of national policies, based on the comparisons of countries. However, a number of studies pose a question to those policy-centric approaches in that cross-national comparisons have revealed inconsistent impacts of welfare and family policies on societies (Mandel and Semyonov, 2005). In addition, some argue that, when it comes to women's socio-economic accomplishments, more attention should be paid to societal conditions, such as the structure of the labor market and gender norms, than the country's policies. In this paper, we take note of the effects of skill formation systems that are theorized as macroscopic conditions that impact women's employment from the perspective of the Varieties of Capitalism theory (Estevez-Abe, 2005). When analyzing the effects of skill formation systems in relation to the structure of labor markets, East Asia presents favorable features for comparative research. This is because the region has little variation in social policies and gender norms but displays stark differences in the structure of labor markets from one country to another. This research will discuss what impacts those structural differences have on cross-national differences in the household employment patterns in the region.

The differences in the structure of labor markets lead to differences in women's employment among East Asian countries, but these differences also determine which group of women will have more difficulties with employment in each country. The intersectionality of gender and class where women's opportunity for employment

differs depending on their socio-economic status is a new area of research in which empirical analyses have begun to be accumulated (McCall, 2005). There have recently been attempts to conduct international comparative studies of cross-national variation in intersectionality of gender and class (Shalev, 2008; England et al, 2009; Korpi, 2000). The second objective of this study is to conduct a micro-level analysis from the perspectives of such comparative studies of intersectionality. Specifically, it aims to analyze how the effects of the factors that shape women's employment types differ depending on the structural conditions of a country. In short, I will look into how women have different employment opportunities depending on their socio-economic status and particularly education level by country. Which group of women shows a higher possibility to be economically active: the low-educated or the high-educated? Which group displays a higher possibility for full-time employment? This research will discuss how the cross-national difference in the skill formation system impacts women's employment opportunities in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and how such impact is more negative according to different groups by educational level. By doing so, this study intends to contribute to identifying the structural conditions of intersectionality taking certain shapes in each country, namely the conditions that lead to differences in women's employment among groups.

## **Diversity of household employment patterns: limitations in policy-centric discussions and the importance of labor markets**

Comparative research of women's employment is an area where a substantial number of empirical studies and theories have been accumulated to date. Steiber and Haas have broadly divided the existing studies of reasons for cross-national differences in household employment patterns into two sections: institutional approach and culturalist approach (Steiber and Haas 2012). According to them, the institutional approach depends on a micro-economic explanatory framework for women's employment and views that the varying levels of the government's support for women's continued employment opportunities are the major reason for differences in women's employment among countries. On the other hand, the culturalist approach, based on a socio-psychological explanatory framework for women's employment, sees that the dominant gender norms in a country lead to differences among countries. However, can these approaches, mainly developed in comparative studies mainly of Europe and the United States, be valid for explaining the reality of women's employment in East Asia?

First of all, according to the institutional approach, social policies and institutions are the key factors that explain the differences in women's employment among countries. (Lewis, 1992; Gornick et al., 1998; Henau et al. 2010). It is because public policies designed to reduce time and monetary restrictions that married women experience in relation to childbirth and childcare can address maternity penalties. Therefore, in countries with better social policies such as public childcare

services, paid maternity leave, tax benefits, and cash allowances, women have a bigger possibility of gaining employment, which leads to the dominance of dual-earner families where both spouses work full-time. It is quite obvious that social policies and institutions for women influence the women's economic activity but this appears to be of limited use in explaining the differences in women's employment types across the East Asian region. In fact, all these three countries - Korea, Japan, and Taiwan - have an underdevelopment of family policies, childcare support policies, and welfare policies for women, all of which facilitate the participation of married women in labor markets (Ma, Kyoung-Hee and Lee, Jae-Kyung, 2007; Pascall and Sung, 2007; Kim and Shirahase, 2011)<sup>1</sup>.

The culturalist approach is also not appropriate to explain intra-regional differences in women's employment. What is emphasized in this approach is the societal acceptance of gender ideology, which is a social condition that affects both labor supply and demand simultaneously. In a society where there is a prevailing positive attitude towards gender-based labor division, where men are providers and women are child rearers, women might have a fixated preference between jobs and caregiver roles, and bias-based discrimination against women is likely to happen more frequently. Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are indeed close to conservative societies in terms of gender notions, including the attitude towards the sexual division of labor (Eun, Ki-Soo, 2009). This can be an important factor that explains the difference between East Asia and other regions, but it is difficult to explain cross-national differences within the region.

There have been theoretical attempts to find reasons for cross-national differences in women's employment in areas other than social policies and gender norms. Estevez-Abe theorized the impact of the labor market structure on women from the perspective of the Varieties of Capitalism theory (Estevez-Abe, 2009). The theory criticizes the notion that capitalism is a universal structure, and it holds the position that the capitalist production system can be largely divided into the two categories of liberal market economies (U.S., UK, etc.) and coordinated market economies (Germany, Japan, etc.), depending on whether coordination in the process of production is based on market mechanism or non-market mechanism (Hall and Gingerich, 2009). In analyzing the reasons for a relatively strong gender division in a coordinated market economy, Estevez-Abe argues that women in societies like Germany and Japan, with well-developed training systems for firm-specific skills, experience more difficulties in employment than those in societies such as the U.S. and the UK and their more advanced general skill training systems. Special skills customized for a certain company, which are more firm-specific, can be achieved on the premise of a continuing long-term employment relationship between the employer and employees. The businesses, which are dependent on customized skill training, will inevitably sustain a substantial economic loss if their employees quit,

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<sup>1</sup> Among the social policies of the three countries, there are differences that are believed to affect women's employment. For example, unlike Korea and Taiwan, Japan has a tax system for married couples' combined income. Whether the system directly affects the breadwinner model per se is a controversial subject, and existing studies on the effects of tax systems evaluates that the independent effect of Japan's tax system on married women's part-time employment is not meaningful (Dingeldey, 2001). The fact that the percentage of female part-time workers is high in some countries where married tax filing systems exist is the result of labor market regulations and public childcare conditions combined with the tax systems.

take a leave of absence or intermittently participate in labor. In such cases, there is a high possibility for employers to engage in statistical discrimination against women who are more likely to intermittently participate in labor activities. On the other hand, general skills obtained under the general skill training system have high transferability (or portability) between companies, increasing the possibility of movement of employees across companies and leading to more frequent turnover of employees. Under this skill system, companies suffer less loss from workers' short-term labor participation, which means that employers have less motivation to discriminate against women.

Estevez-Abe used the effects of skill formation systems to explain differences in the gender division of labor among countries, but the same logic can be applied to explaining the difference in women's employment patterns<sup>2</sup>. In a society where a firm-specific skill formation system is well established, the labor demand side is likely to discriminate against women, and the labor supply side is also likely to avoid economic activity. If workers' leaving incurs greater negative costs in the production system, there is greater motivation for employers to have statistical discrimination against women when recruiting and promoting employees, making it difficult for women to join the labor market, particularly the full-time labor market. In addition, if strong discrimination against women is widespread within the labor market, it can impact women's choices in a way that women avoid jobs, such as full-time jobs, where discrimination is expected, but instead prefer jobs that are socially regarded as feminine jobs where discrimination against women is less likely. For example, women are more likely to choose part-time jobs if such jobs are presented as choices. As a result, we can estimate that the possibility for women to gain full-time jobs will be more constrained under the firm-specific skill formation system than under the general skill formation system.

The production system-based perspective is meaningful in that it departed from policy-centric viewpoints and placed an emphasis on the fact that gender bias might be embedded in the labor market structure itself. In addition, such a perspective might usefully reveal diversity among countries that used to be evaluated as homogeneous. However, Mandel and Shalev emphasize that the true significance of the production system-based perspective lies in the fact that it provides a framework that helps consistently explain the issue of women-class intersectionality (Mandel and Shalev, 2009). That is, the production system-based perspective offers a theory that provides consistent explanations of the empirical realities where the impact of

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<sup>2</sup> Mandel and Shalev (2009) criticized the work of Estevez-Abe, pointing out that the division of the production system into just two - a coordinated market economy and a liberal market economy - has empirical adequacy in explaining the cross-national differences in occupational segregation by gender, which is one aspect of gender inequality, but it fails to effectively explain another aspect of gender inequality, that is cross-national differences in women's employment rates. They went on to say that countries classified as coordinated market economies show extremely large differences in women's employment rates and criticized that it is because the analysis framework for production systems fails to incorporate the level of the public sector's development as a source of jobs for women and factors such as political power that makes such development of the public sector possible. Such criticism is meaningful to a certain degree, but the three countries (Korea, Japan, and Taiwan), the subjects of this research, do not have a large-scale public sector, and, therefore, the impact of the public sector on women's employment is minimal in each country. Therefore, it is viewed that it would not be unreasonable to apply to these countries Estevez-Abe's arguments that focus on differences in the skill formation system.



the labor market structure is not consistent between men and women. Under the firm-specific skill formation system, women's full-time economic activities are generally expected to be more constrained than those under the general skill formation system. In particular, such differences are expected to be relatively more striking within the sphere of highly educated women. This is because in the firm-specific skill formation system, the more skilled the positions are, such as managerial positions and professional technical jobs, the higher the penalties are for short-term and intermittent participation in the labor market, resulting in greater discrimination against women. Therefore, highly educated women who are preparing to land highly skilled jobs will face far more restricted job opportunities compared to those women under the general skill formation system, which inevitably results in constrained participation of women in economic activity. The next chapter will explore the differences in the labor market structure of Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and discuss how the structural differences lead to differences in women's employment and household employment patterns among the three countries.

## Labor market in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan

Categorizing Korea, Japan, and Taiwan from the perspective of the production system theory is a very ambitious and challenging task. In recent attempts to identify the characteristics of the East Asian production system (refer to Carney et al., 2009), many scholars seem to agree to a certain degree on categorizing Japan and Korea as coordinated market economies, more specifically group-based coordinated market economies, in that the coordination is performed not at the industry level but at the corporate group level (Brinton, 2001; Jung, EeHwan, 2012; Song, Ho-Keun, 2000), however such argument needs further elaboration. In this paper, we will not discuss the characteristics of the overall production system in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan but instead look at each country's attributes with a focus on skill formation systems and labor market structures which have been well documented in existing studies.

The institutional extension of the skill formation system is the corporate internal labor market. Previous research (Brinton, 2001) identified differences in labor markets among the three countries by the percentage of large companies and the size of the public sector, however the key differences in the labor market structures between Korea, Japan, and Taiwan lie in whether or not a corporate internal labor market exists<sup>3</sup>. The biggest difference among the three countries is that Korea and

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<sup>3</sup> Brinton (2001) attributes the differences in women's employment among the three countries to the ratios of large companies and small and medium enterprises, size of the public sector, and commute time due to locations of companies in rural communities or urban areas. For example, Taiwan is a country favorable for women to be employed because there are many small and medium companies that allow women to flexibly adjust their labor hours; its public sector is large enough for many job opportunities for women; and the location of many companies in rural areas makes for a not long commute time. However, when looking at the status of women's employment in Korea in 2000s, the ratio of women employed by small and medium enterprises is not smaller than that of Taiwan, and there is not much difference in the ratio of women working for the public sector between the two countries. The flexibility in employment practices does not even explain the differences between Taiwan and Japan. In Taiwan, it is true that married women can benefit from the flexible employment

Japan have a well-established internal labor market for companies, while this market has not developed in Taiwan (Jung, EeHwan, 2006).

Japan and Korea have a lot in common in terms of employment schemes. The three pillars of the Japanese employment scheme – lifetime employment, seniority-based salary, and labor unions for individual companies – are all found in Korea as well to varying extents, even though those three elements are on a gradual decline. From the institutional perspective, the biggest common denominator between Korea and Japan is the fact that corporate internal labor markets exist in the two countries (Jung, EeHwan, 2012). The internal labor markets are created centering on firm-specific skills to bolster the production systems. Particularly, those markets are intensively institutionalized centered on large companies in Japan (Estevez-Abe, 2005). It is well known that these labor markets are male-oriented (Mari Osawa, 2007). Companies' recruitment and promotion systems were created centered on male workers, and private large companies seldom hire women for key responsibilities. The representative example is hiring men for supervisory positions and women for general positions. Compared to supervisory positions, promotions are limited in general position lines. Even without such a division between position categories, women are unfavorably treated in evaluations under the job qualification system. In general, it is hard for women to work at a company as regular employees for a long time even if they choose to remain employed without promotions. The seniority-based wage system, adopted by most Japanese companies, is based on the premise of the male breadwinner family model. Regular employees see their wages increase in tandem with increasing living costs as they get older, but they have to endure long working hours, extended work, and long-distance transfers. Unless they choose to remain single, such working conditions are not feasible for most women. As a result, most female workers retire upon getting married or giving birth to a child and later rejoin the secondary labor market as irregular workers.

Likewise, Korea also has well-developed, male-oriented corporate internal labor markets. Consequently, high-level positions in large and mid-size companies are dominated by men, while women land jobs in the secondary labor market as irregular workers. Korea is similar to Japan in that long working hours are expected for men on the condition of seniority-based salaries provided for them, and companies demonstrate a very weak practice of ensuring work-life balance. The fact that Korea has a wide gender gap in wages and working conditions is another thing in common with Japan. Of course, there are also differences between Korea and Japan. The size of the Korean corporate internal labor market is smaller than that of Japan, and Korea has more vulnerable employment security in the corporate internal labor market than in Japan (Yokota Nobuko, 2007). However, both countries share in common that their labor market is generally divided into the corporate internal labor market and the secondary labor market, and such division overlaps the gender division of the labor market.

As for Taiwan, its labor market has been described to be similar to that of the United States rather than Japan (Song, Ho-Keun, 2000; Jung, EeHwan, 2006). Most of all, Taiwan's corporate internal labor market is underdeveloped. The corporate internal labor market does exist in Taiwan, mainly with large companies and state-

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practices (of SMEs), but Japanese married women are not really in unfavorable situations compared to Taiwan in terms of working hour flexibility since they are employed in large numbers as part-timers.

owned companies, but it is vulnerable compared to that of Korea and Japan for the following reasons: First, the wage system in the country is not seniority-based but more of a merit-based pay system. Therefore, the wage gap is not as wide between long-tenure employees in companies and workers in the external labor market, or between large companies and small companies. The fact that the wage system is close to the performance-based pay system means that (large) companies have a weak sense of responsibility to pay male workers salaries that are sufficient to provide for their families.<sup>4</sup> Second, Taiwan has less employment security in the corporate internal labor market than Korea and Japan. Taiwan does not have norms of lifetime employment, and it does not have powerful labor unions organized in large companies like Korea. The Taiwan Labor Standards Act stipulates provisions on dismissal of employees, but they are rarely observed.

In Taiwan, where exclusion tools such as the internal labor market are not fully developed, gender discrimination in recruitment, promotion, and wages is not as serious as in Korea and Japan (Jung, EeHwan, Kim, Young-Mi, Kwon, Hyeon-Ji, (2012). In this country, a number of women advance to managerial positions. Such a fact is well indicated in the statistics. Several studies have already demonstrated that Taiwan has a smaller gender wage gap compared to Korea and Japan (Chang, Chin-fen and England, 2011). The percentage of women in managerial positions is higher than that in Korea and Japan. The three countries' statistics on the economically active population - Japan's *Labor Survey*, Korea's *Economically Active Population Survey*, and Taiwan's *Human Resources Survey* - show that the share of managerial positions in the number of employed people in 2009 breaks down into 3.6% for men and 0.5% for women in Korea and 4.1% for men and 0.7% for women in Japan, but in the case of Taiwan, the percentage is as high as 6.2% for men and 1.9% for women. Taiwan has higher percentages of managerial employees for both men and women compared to Korea and Japan because the country's job classification is different from the other two countries. Therefore, we cannot compare the figures themselves between the countries but when taking into account the relative ratio of men and women in each country, the percentage of managerial positions held by men is approximately 6-7 times higher than those held by women, while it is just three times higher in Taiwan.

As seen above, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan have substantial differences in labor market structures. Korea and Japan have corporate internal labor markets which are institutionally set in place to a varying extent by country, and the corporate internal labor market divides the country's labor market into internal and external markets, namely first and secondary markets. In contrast, Taiwan has a weak custom of internal labor markets. Such a difference in the labor market structure is expected to cause divergence in household employment patterns among the countries as it results in substantial differences in women's employment opportunities. In addition, it is also expected to create differences in household employment patterns

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<sup>4</sup> This aspect can be a factor that explains the high rate of women's participation in economic activities in Taiwan. Since living wages are not given to men, women are actively entering the labor market, but this is limited in explaining the fact that the participation of Taiwanese married women in their mid-40's and above in economic activities is lower than that of Korean and Japanese married women and that, in Korea where men's function of providing for their families is weak, the participation of married women in economic activities is not high compared to Japan.



depending on the female household member's education level. Ultimately, the declining trend of households that depend on male breadwinners is projected to be different from one country to another and by societal class within each country.

## Data and method

The data used in this research comes from the 2006 *Korea Labor Panel Study*, the 2006 *Japanese Panel Survey of Consumers* (JPSC), and the 2006 *Taiwanese Panel Study of Family Dynamics* (PSFD). The samples were restricted to married women aged 27 to 47 who are most engaged in economic activity and caregiver roles, and their spouses. After accounting for the sample restrictions, the number of valid cases (unit: household) was 2,020 in Korea, 1,245 in Japan, and 620 in Taiwan. Household employment patterns are determined by the employment status and employment period of husband and wife. In this research, they are divided into seven types: male breadwinner household, modified male breadwinner household, full-time dual-earner household, part-time dual-earner household, female breadwinner household, part-time single breadwinner household, and no-income household. The male breadwinner household is a family where the husband works full-time but the wife does not engage in economic activity. The modified male breadwinner household is the so-called '1.5 earner household' where the husband has a full-time job and the wife works part-time (Lewis, 2001). The full-time dual-earner household is a family where both husband and wife work full-time. The female breadwinner household is one where the wife works full-time but the husband is not economically active. The part-time dual-earner household is a family where both husband and wife work on a part-time basis. The criterion to determine whether the respondent is employed or not is the working behavior for the purpose of earning income. Therefore, salary-based workers, the self-employed, and paid/non-paid family workers are all included as respondents. Regardless of employment types subjectively reported by respondents, if weekly working hours are 30 or over, the respondent's job was categorized as full-time, and if they are less than 30 hours, the job was categorized as part-time in accordance with the OECD definition of part-time work (Refer to Haas et al., 2006).

For each microdata analysis per country, I formed a model with a focus on labor supply side factors. In this model, women's participation in the labor market is affected by their skills that can be traded in the labor market, economic necessity, and the level of demand for care labor within the family. Accordingly, I have modeled household employment patterns that will be affected by the personal attributes of the husband and wife, and the number of children (Refer to Evertsson et al. 2009).

Major independent variables are the education level of the wife, the husband's income level, and the number of children by age group of respondents. For the wife's level of educational attainment, I have defined three groups: those with a middle school diploma and below, those with a high school diploma, and those with a college degree and above. As for the husband's income, I have standardized differences in currencies and income inequality in the three countries and used

variables that are percentiles transformed from monthly average income so that those without income can be included in the research. The husband's income serves as a proxy variable for economic necessity. The age bands of children are broadly divided into three ranges: preschool age (0-7), elementary school age (8-13), and secondary school age (14-19), and the number of children in each age group was used as a variable.

## Results

Table 1 summarizes the technical statistics of the gender-specific rates of participation in economic activities, working hours, and income. For the sake of comparison, data on some European countries are present in the table. When looking at the rates of participation in economic activities, there is little difference in men's rates among the three countries of Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. However, women's labor market participation rates are substantially different across the three nations. For example, the rate of women's participation in economic activities is 47.4% in Korea, which is the lowest among the three countries, while Taiwan shows the highest rate of 69.5%. The difference in the rates of participation in economic activities between men and women is calculated by deducting women's relative participation rate (women's relative participation rate on the premise that men's rate is 100) from 100. Among the three countries, Korea has the highest difference, while Taiwan has the lowest. In terms of the rates of participation in economic activities, Taiwan has a high level of gender equality that is above that of Italy, though it is not as high as Denmark, the UK, or the Netherlands. Meanwhile, Japan's gender difference in the participation rate is at the level of Italy, and Korea's gender difference is higher than that. Accordingly, the percentage of dual-earner families where both husband and wife work to bring home income is the lowest in Korea as well at 43.7%, while Taiwan has the highest at 66.2%.

On the other hand, the differences in weekly average working hours between men and women was the smallest in Korea, in which all workers regardless of sex, work long hours of over 45 hours a week, and the gender difference in working hours stands at just 6.8 hours. Taiwan similarly shows a small gender difference in working hours. Meanwhile, Japan is the only country that shows a big gender difference in working hours among the three countries. This is partly because of a high percentage of women engaging in part-time work, but the fact that Japan's gender difference in working hours is far higher than that of the UK and the Netherlands is attributed to Japanese men working long hours on top of a high percentage of Japanese women working as part-timers. This shows how Japan's labor market has an extreme dichotomy between men working full-time for long hours and women working part-time for short hours.

As the gender difference in working hours is large, Japanese women's contribution to household income is much lower. In the dual-earner households, only 12% of Japanese families have a wife who contributes 45% or over to the combined income of husband and wife. The percentage was 26-27% for Korea and

Taiwan, which is above Japan but still lower than is the case for European countries such as the Netherlands and the UK. In Korea and Taiwan, the gender gap in working hours are far lower than the Netherlands and the UK, but women's contribution to household income is similar to these two European countries. This implies that Korean and Taiwanese women are concentrated in low-paying part-time jobs.

**Table 1.** Gender-specific rate of participation in economic activities and contribution to income<sup>5</sup>

	Economically active population (%)				Weekly working hours (hours)			Income
	Women	Men	Difference*	% of dual-earner familis	Women	Men	Difference*	Equal contribution
Korea	47.4	93.2	49.1	43.7	46.3	49.7	6.8	26.1
Japan	58.9	97.8	39.7	57.6	32.7	53.4	38.7	12.1
Taiwan	69.5	94.5	26.4	66.2	44.7	50.3	11.1	27.8
Denmark	85	92	8	83	na	na	12	50
Italy	52	84	38	44	na	na	14	47
UK	74	89	17	70	na	na	22	29
Netherlands	71	92	23	67	na	na	27	23

\* 100-(women's participation rate relative to men's participation rate %)

\*\* 100-(women's average working hours relative to men's average working hours %)

\*\*\* The percentage of families where women's contribution to a combined household income is 45% and above in dual-earner households

The economic activities of men and women and the gender differences are gradually diverging across the three countries of Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. In Korea, women's economic participation rate is the lowest among the three countries, but working women stay at work for long hours, relatively concentrated in low-paying jobs. In Japan, the rate of women's participation in economic activities is higher than that of Korea, but the majority of women appear to be engaged in part-time jobs. Taiwanese women show the highest economic participation rate, but it is estimated that a significant number of them are concentrated in long-hour, low income jobs.

These differences among the three countries lead to differences in household employment patterns. Table 2 demonstrates substantial differences in household employment patterns between Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. In Korea, the percentage of male breadwinner families is the highest, which is followed by full-time dual-earner families, while the share of moderate male breadwinner families is extremely low. In Taiwan, the percentage of full-time dual-earner families is very high, and the share of male breadwinner families is the lowest among the three countries, while moderate male breadwinner families represent a very small portion. In Japan, the share of moderate male breadwinner families is strikingly high compared to Korea and Taiwan.

However, one should not overlook the fact that in Japan the majority of household employment patterns is not the moderate male breadwinner family but

<sup>5</sup> Warren (2000) is the source of data for gender difference in the participation rate, the formula to measure gender difference in working hours, and information on Denmark, UK, the Netherlands, and Italy.

the male breadwinner family. Even though many Japanese married women are employed in the form of part-time jobs, their percentage is not overwhelming. While the male breadwinner household is still dominant, the moderate male breadwinner family exists in a significant ratio. The share of these two types of households is as big as 77% of all households in Japan. This means that the percentage of full-time dual-earner families is relatively small. Japan shows the lowest portion of full-time dual-earner families among the three countries.

Another thing that should not be overlooked is the fact that the share of full-time dual-earner families is 35.5% in Korea, which is a number that cannot be easily ignored. The percentage is higher than Japan's 26.75%, and it is high enough to raise the question of whether it is still valid to define Korea as a male breadwinner family model. This will be discussed more in detail in the conclusion section.

**Table 2** Household employment patterns in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan (unit: %)

	Korea	Taiwan	Japan
Male breadwinner household	48.45	27.49	38.76
Moderate male breadwinner household	3.76	4.49	29.41
Full-time dual-earner household	35.57	58.60	26.75
Part-time dual-earner household	4.31	3.07	1.61
Female breadwinner household	3.36	2.85	0.89
Part-time single breadwinner household	1.40	1.31	1.85
No-income household	3.16	2.19	0.73
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Meanwhile, household employment patterns exist in different percentages across the three countries, but they are not randomly distributed at an individual level. Table 1 shows the distributions of household employment patterns by women's education level in each country.<sup>6</sup> In Korea, as the women's educational level increases, the percentage of male breadwinner households grows higher. The share of households that depend on the sole male breadwinner is just 31% in the group of middle school education and below, but it goes up to 50% for the high school education group, to 57% in the group of 2-year college diploma, and to 47% in the group of university degree and above. In contrast, the percentage of full-time dual-earner households was the highest at 47% in the group of middle school and below, but it was relatively low in the other groups with higher educational attainment at around 36-39%. The share of modified dual-earner households, where the husband works full-time and the wife works part-time, is minimal across the groups of all education levels.

In Japan, the share of male breadwinner households is the highest at 50% in the group of middle school and below, while it is 38% in the high school degree group

<sup>6</sup> The sum of the percentages of the four groups in Table 2 is not 100. It is because the table only includes the four groups out of the seven household employment patterns by excluding the groups of part-time dual-earner households, part-time single breadwinner households, and no-income households.

and 36% in the 2-year college group, but it increases to 45% in the group of university degree and above. Japan does not clearly show a positive correlation between educational attainment levels and the share of male breadwinner households, unlike Korea. However, it is necessary to note that both Korea and Japan show high percentages of male breadwinner households in the group of married women with university degree and above.

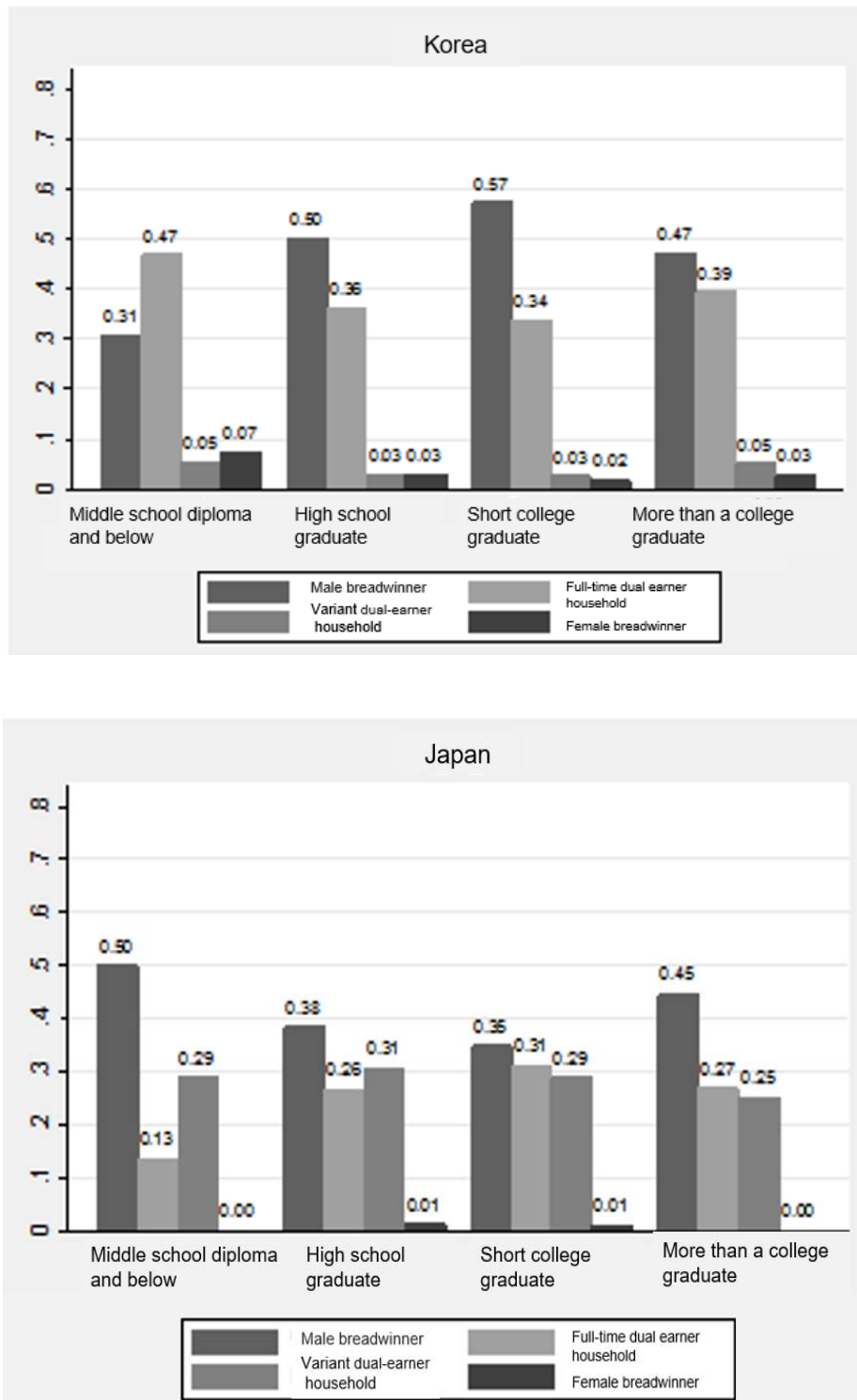
Interestingly, in Japan all education level groups show consistent ratios of household employment patterns, with the exception of both ends of the education level groups - the group of middle school and the group of university degree and above -, both showing opposite trends in terms of the percentages of male breadwinner households and full-time dual-earner households. In short, the distribution of household employment patterns is unrelated to the education levels of women. This means that women's education levels do not make much difference in job opportunities in the country's labor market, which can also be interpreted in terms of the gender effect in the opportunity structure of the labor market being large enough to overpower the effect of human resources.

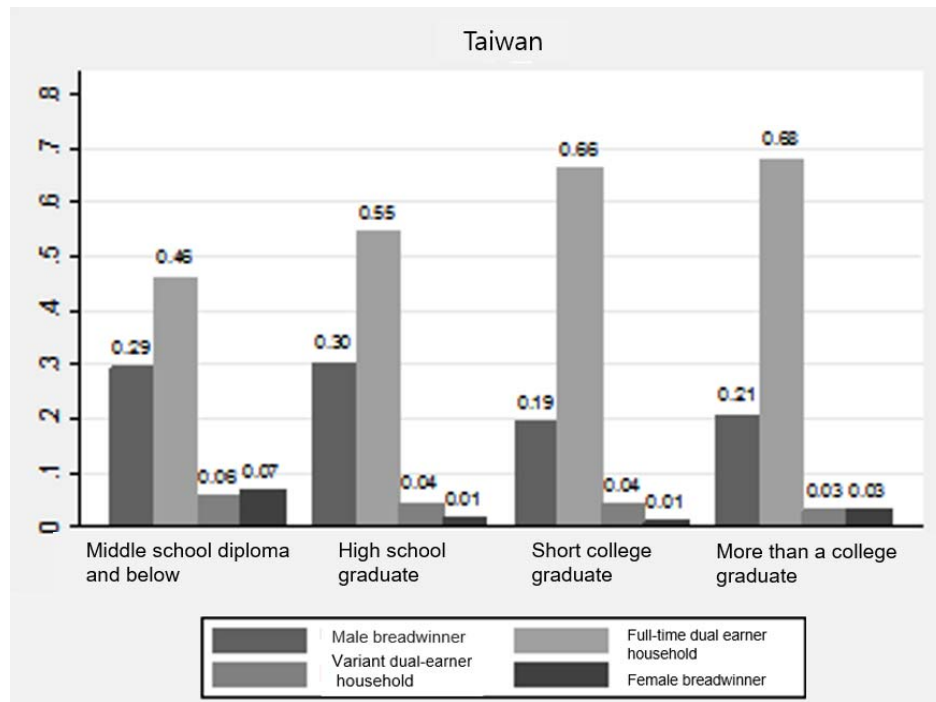
Taiwan shows the exact opposite trend to that of Korea and Japan. In this country, as the women's education level increases, the share of male breadwinner households lowers, with a correspondingly higher share of full-time dual-earner households. The percentage of households that depend on a sole male provider is the highest at 29-30% in the middle school and high school groups, and it goes down to 19-21% in the group of women with 2-year college diploma and above. The group of middle school diploma and below shows the lowest percentage of full-time dual-earner households, which is 46%, but it linearly increases as the women's education level goes up. In particular, in the group of women with a university degree and above, the percentage of male breadwinner households is merely 21% but the share of full-time dual earner households is as much as 68%. The percentage of modified male breadwinner households is minimal across all education level groups.

The household employment patterns found in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan coincide with the prediction that the group intensively subject to employment disadvantages will be different depending on the structure of the labor market. In Korea and Japan, which have strong internal labor markets based on the firm-specific skill formation system, highly educated women are particularly constrained in terms of employment opportunities, whereas in Taiwan, where the internal labor market does not follow exclusionary lines, highly educated women enjoy relatively greater employment opportunities. In this way, the male breadwinner family model is declining at different degrees per social classes.



**Figure 1.** Household employment patterns by educational attainment level of married women in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan





In this section, I will look into the effects of factors that determine household employment patterns at an individual level and how they differ by country. Table 3 lists shows the results of the multinomial regression analysis where the dependent variables are household employment patterns, and independent variables include the wife's educational attainment level, the husband's income, and the number of children aged 7 and below, 8 to 13, and 14 to 19. Through these microdata analyses, it is possible to identify similarities and differences among the observed countries.

Let us first find out the effects of individual-specific or household-specific variables that impact the relative probability of being full-time dual-earner households, by using the group of male breadwinner households as a baseline. First of all, the effect of the husband's income, among individual-specific variables, is similar across the three countries. In Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, the higher the husband's income is, the lower the probability that the household becomes a full-time dual-earner family than becoming a male breadwinner household<sup>7</sup>. That is, all three nations show the same trend in which women from households in greater need of a secondary income source due to insufficient income of their husbands are likely to choose to work full-time instead of remaining full-time housewives.

However, these three countries show meaningful differences in regard to the effects of married women's education levels. In Taiwan and Korea, the probability for the group of highly educated women with a 2-year college diploma and above to be employed as full-time workers is meaningfully higher than that of the baseline group (the high school graduates), while Japan does not show any meaningful effects per educational attainment. The effect of the highly educated group is biggest

<sup>7</sup> This income effect, in which the husband's higher income negatively impacts the wife's economic activities, has not been observed in empirical studies conducted on Europe and America. Rather, a meaningful inverse effect has been reported so far (Cohen and Bianchi, 1999; Evertsson et al., 2009). However, as revealed in this research, the income effect remains strong in East Asia.

in Taiwan among the three countries, consistently with the patterns of descriptive statistics discussed earlier. Meanwhile, in Taiwan and Japan, the higher women's education level is, the bigger the probability that their families become full-time dual-earner households, while Korea is characterized by the non-linear effect of women's educational level. In Korea, the fact that low-educated women with a middle school diploma and below are more likely to engage in full-time economic activity than the group of high school graduates, is a testament to the widespread low-wage labor market for women, and it is also suspected to be related to the high percentage of the self-employed in the country.

As for the effects of household-specific variables, in all three countries, as the number of children aged seven and younger increase, the chances that the families become households dependent on a sole male breadwinner are meaningfully higher than the probability that they become full-time dual-earner households. It can be easily predicted that the existence of preschool children in families will have a negative impact on women's economic activity in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, where public childcare services are not well developed. However, the size of such an impact varies among countries. The negative effect that a preschool child in the family has on the full-time economic activities of a married woman is smallest in Taiwan and largest in Japan. How should these cross-national differences be interpreted? A follow-up study is required to clearly identify whether East Asian countries have substantial differences in the social norms on child-raising and child education as well as cultural expectations about the roles of mothers.

As for the factors determining the relative probability for families to be modified male breadwinner households in Korea, they seem to be the same as those observed for full-time dual-earner households. In Taiwan, meaningful determinants were not identified, probably due to data limitations of data given by a small sample. As for Japan, an important country for analysis, the higher the husband's income is, and the higher the number of children aged 7 and younger, the greater the possibility that a married woman from the relevant family chooses to be a housewife over a part-time worker. The educational attainment level of women is not exerting much impact in this. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the negative impact of preschool children is evident on women's part-time employment as well as their full-time employment. This is why it is hard to consider that well-developed part-time jobs in Japan have a positive effect on the post-natal continuation of married women's economic activity. In Japan, the probability of being a modified male breadwinner household is higher for those families that have no children and where the husband has a low income.

**Table 3.** Multinomial logit regression analysis of household employment patterns (baseline group for comparison= male breadwinner household)<sup>8</sup>

	Korea	Taiwan	Japan
<b>Full-time dual-earner household</b>			
Wife's education level: middle school diploma and below	0.327+	-0.265	-1.465**
Wife's education level: 2-year college diploma and above	0.373**	0.789**	0.266
Husband's income	-0.011**	-0.021**	-0.015**
No. of children aged 7 and younger	-0.631**	-0.325*	-0.975**
No. of children aged 8 to 13	0.034	-0.122	-0.185
No. of children aged 14 to 19	0.245**	0.047	0.209
Constant	0.269	1.412*	0.436+
<b>Modified male breadwinner household</b>			
Wife's education level: middle school diploma and below	0.852*	0.518	-0.529
Wife's education level: 2-year college diploma and above	0.620*	-0.106	-0.045
Husband's income	-0.014*	0.02	-0.005+
No. of children aged 7 and younger	-0.422+	-0.07	-0.634**
No. of children aged 8 to 13	0.248	0.415	0.098
No. of children aged 14 to 19	0.543**	0.137	0.178
Constant	-2.510**	-4.384**	-0.017
N	1956	584	1129
chi2	655.821**	180.032**	236.631**

+  $p < 0.1$  \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$ 

The analysis of cross-national differences in factors that determine household employment patterns reveals that different factors were in place when moving away from the male breadwinner-based household model in Korea, Japan and Taiwan. First, in Japan, in which male-centered corporate internal labor markets are dominant, women's educational levels are not a major determinant of household employment patterns. Instead, the family's demand for care is a more important determinant. Consequently, unless there is less demand for women's caring roles inside the family, it is less likely for the family to transition away from the male breadwinner family model. On the other hand, in Taiwan, where less discrimination against women in the labor market applies in its *laissez faire* labor market, highly educated women are leading the transition of households into the full-time dual-earner model. In addition, the country sees the smallest negative impact of preschool children on the full-time employment of women among the three countries. As for Korea, while the corporate internal labor market is not as strongly protected as in Japan, it still has a strong discriminatory nature against women. The country appears to stand somewhere between Japan and Taiwan, experiencing the most difficulties in departing from the male breadwinner household model. An exception

<sup>8</sup> Other household employment patterns are not included in the table since their regression coefficients are not statistically meaningful due to an extremely small number of relevant cases.

is given by the peculiar trend of families of low-educated women rapidly transitioning to the full-time dual-earner household model. Jang, Ji-Yeon (2009) interpreted this as a result of women's struggle to gain a job despite adverse conditions as their husband has insufficient ability to provide for the family. Even when controlling for the husband's income, low-educated women have a higher probability to form full-time dual-earner households than the baseline group (women with a high school diploma). This phenomenon is observed only in Korea, suggesting the high possibility that it is related to the occupational structure of the Korean labor market.

## **Conclusion: Varieties of gender regimes and limitations of the breadwinner model in East Asia**

This research began with a question: why do women's economic participation rates show such great divergence in East Asian societies despite these countries having poor public childcare support in common? This study shows that when social policies supporting women's economic activity are underdeveloped, it is the labor market structure that determines women's economic opportunities, and hence the employment patterns of married women and households in general. Labor market's structural features for each country determine the magnitude of the penalty against working women in general, as well as across social groups within each country.

By observing the three countries' household employment patterns' distribution and their determinants, it is possible to confirm that a certain divergence is occurring in East Asia. In Japan, the "1.5 earner household" is dominant, while full-time dual-earner households are prevalent in Taiwan, and male breadwinner households continue to be the norm in Korea. As for the differences in household employment patterns in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, each country is witnessing varying rates of decline of the traditional male breadwinner-only model across the social classes. In Korea, although the traditional gender division of labor is rapidly changing in the bottom class of the socio-economic hierarchy, it remains prevalent in the middle and upper classes. Japan seems to be transitioning away from the sole male breadwinner model across its entire social class hierarchy, but most of the change involves a transition to the 1.5 earner household. In the departure from the breadwinner model, the effect of women's educational attainment has been minimal, which is a testament to how firmly the gender order is rooted in the country. In Japan, a transition from the sole male breadwinner model to the modified male breadwinner model seems to be ongoing across social classes. As in the case of Taiwan, on the other hand, the upper class of the social hierarchy is rapidly transitioning to the dual-earner model.

What implications do these findings hold for discussion on gender regimes in East Asia? Although several could be enumerated, instead of drawing conclusions, I would like to outline the problems inherent in existing studies on gender relations in East Asia by using the breadwinner model as an analysis framework. Although the breadwinner model is applied widely in academic research and social policy programs, it is also well known for being used without clearly agreed-upon



definitions (Warren, 2007).<sup>9</sup> In the existing literature, the breadwinner model is used as a concept that refers to the actual employment pattern of a household – who in the family supports the family by engaging in labor in the market and who is in charge of the housework (Haas et al., 2006; Warren, 2007; and Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001).<sup>10</sup> It is also used as a concept that refers to the collection of laws, policies, norms, and institutions that make a certain household employment pattern possible (Gornick et al., 1998). From an analytical viewpoint, the former is a more realistic concept, while the latter is more of an ideal type. Although both concepts are expected to be strongly connected with each other, that is not always the case, as various European studies pointing out inconsistencies between policy assumptions and societal workings, attest (Lewis, 2001 and Crompton, 1999).

How effectively the breadwinner model, as an ideal type, describes the gender reality of a given society, has been a constant topic for discussion in comparative studies of Europe and America (Arts and Gelissen, 2002), but it has never been a major issue in East Asia. In general, Japan is assumed to be a typical example of the dominant male breadwinner model. Even in studies on gender inequality, that Korea largely follows the male breadwinner model is not empirically corroborated, but often just implicitly accepted under the assumption that “is not generally disagreed upon” (Jang, Ji-Yeon, 2009:513). As evidence for this assumption, these studies highlight the fact that Korean women have low economic independence and do not have individualized social rights. However, while this evidence supports one characteristic of the male breadwinner model, which is that the government’s institutional support for married women’s participation in the labor market is insufficient, it fails to support another characteristic—the country’s support for women’s provision of unpaid caring labor. Therefore, I question whether it is appropriate to define the current situation, in which there are no well-developed social policies, as a male breadwinner model. To a certain extent, this problem has already been raised by many researchers. Hwang, Jeong-Mi (2007:367-368) questioned classifying Korea under the male breadwinner model by citing the lack of policies for helping ensure that the incomes of sole male providers are sufficient to support their families. Kim, Yeong-Soon (2009) argued that in Korea, the typical characteristics of the male breadwinner model are found only in the middle class, leading her to define Korea as an incomplete or “stratified male breadwinner” model. These attempts all highlight inconsistency between the ideal-typical male breadwinner model and the observed household employment patterns, but the conceptual confusion can be compounded through the combined use of the ideal type and real type.

This study attempted to analyze the topic of the East Asian gender regimes more from an empirical perspective rather than theoretically. This is why the focus

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<sup>9</sup> Warren (2007) criticized existing studies for their surprising lack of effort to theorize or control for the concept of the breadwinner model and pointed out that the concept of the model has at least five different meanings in several different research contexts: 1) breadwinner as a major income provider in the family, 2) breadwinner as a participant in the labor market, 3) male breadwinner as a concept that refers to ideology and policy packages, 4) male breadwinner as a male identity, and 5) male breadwinner as the head of a traditional nuclear family.

<sup>10</sup> In this context, the breadwinner model is interchangeable with a household employment type, thereby determining a family’s household employment type at the microscopic level, while referring to the household employment type prevalent at the social level.

was on identifying the characteristics of the household employment patterns in each country rather than applying the conceptual framework of the breadwinner model. Far from questioning the usefulness of this theoretical frame, what is stressed here is that the lack of a proper empirical understanding of families in East Asia can prevent us from gaining a fair understanding of gender regimes in this area. In a similar vein, Kim, Yeong-Soon (2009: 536) pointed out that “the male breadwinner-based gender regime in Korea, far from being a matter of fact as in Germany and Japan, is more of a fictional ‘assumption.’ [...] The fictional assumption that women have families upon which they can depend serves to conceal the serious issues of low wages for women in the secondary labor market and women’s exclusion from social security programs, and further encourages these issues to be socially condoned.”

This study underscores the fact that the structure of the labor market plays an important role in *de facto* forming the gender regime in East Asia. In particular, the existence or the legacy of powerful and exclusive corporate internal labor markets, characteristic of the labor markets of both Korea and Japan, creates a context in which discrimination against women is easily justified. This prevents women from entering the internal labor market, where quality jobs exist, and helps in preserving the traditional gender division of labor or in creating differences across social classes. This problem cannot be easily mitigated by work-family balance policies alone. Unless gender discrimination against women in the labor market is reduced through strong anti-discrimination policies, the transition to a new gender regime in Korea and Japan will occur very slowly or end up being accompanied by a serious gap between social classes.

Discussions on the varieties of gender regimes in East Asia are currently in a nascent stage. Looking forward to seeing more in-depth and rich discussions in future research, I now turn to the limitations of this study, to be examined in two parts. First, although several limitations of policy-oriented discussions have been pointed out, this study fell short in adequately conceptualizing how national policies and labor markets relate to one another, and how this, in turn, affects the intersectionality between gender and class, within a broader theoretical framework. Second, this paper did not fully discuss how to usefully apply the idea of intersectionality in practice. Further discussions are needed in the future to identify which directions and strategies should be taken to resolve gender discrimination in a society such as Korea, where substantial differences between household employment patterns among the social classes exist, and women’s labor and the experiences of families significantly differ by socio-economic status.

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