

## The Division of Family Work in China and Europe: On the Role of Culture

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**Abstract:** The current article aims to understand how culture affects couple's allocation of domestic chores in China and Europe. First, we review previous studies on Chinese couple's family work organization in comparison to data from European societies. Second, we examine the applicability of major theoretical models about the division of family work on the situation in China. While we conclude that cross-cultural differences in the division of family work exist, these differences can only partially be explained using these theoretical approaches. Thirdly, we expand the theoretical framework adopted by most cross-culture family studies by providing a discussion of traditional Confucian ideology and third party support with family work. We discuss finally the possible implications of these values and support for the division of family work across cultures.

**Key words:** division of family, cross-cultural, gender ideology, Confucian ideology, social support

With the growing participation of women in the labor force, couples are required to manage competing demands for time and other resources from the family and the work domains. One important adjustment to this situation is to (re)organize the provision of basic family needs in effective ways, by involving husbands, children and external providers in domestic chores. A functional division of family work is associated with higher personal subjective well-being, less depression, less marital conflicts, and higher relationship satisfaction (Barnett & Shen, 1997; Erickson, 1993; Wilkie, Ferree, & Ratcliff, 1998).

During past decades family researchers have developed various theoretical models, such as the time availability model, the relative resource model and the gender ideology model, to explain how spouses negotiate for a functional division of domestic work. However, most research has been conducted in western industrialized societies, especially in the United States, ignoring the impact of culture which may shape couple's experiences and adaptation in important ways (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000). As a result, these models cannot explain cultural differences in spouses' family work division very well, particularly when societies with strong traditions regarding family processes are considered (Calasanti & Bailey, 1991; Kamo, 1994).

The goal of the current review is to examine how culture influences couple's (re)organization of

domestic tasks, and to reveal new factors which may help understand the division of family work across cultures. I view culture as a "...socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institution, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts and modification of the physical environment" (Fiske, 2002, p.85). Many studies use the dimensions of collectivism and individualism to characterize cultural variation. Collectivism reflects values and norms viewing individuals as parts of in-groups or collectives, giving priority to the goals of these collectives over individual goals, and emphasizing the connectedness among in-group members and the harmony in relationships, and individualism reflects values and norms viewing individuals as entities independent of collectives, giving priority to individual goals over the goals of collectives, and valuing rationality and interpersonal exchange (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In the current review, we examine cultural effect by focusing on the literature involving samples from China and Europe to represent collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In the remainder of this article, we will first answer the question whether cultural differences exist in couple's domestic work organization in Chinese and European societies. Then, we will review previous research which tested the time availability, the relative resource and the gender ideology models in Chinese cultures, to answer the question whether these models can explain the cultural difference in the division of family work among Chinese and European couples. In the third part,

we will discuss two other factors, Confucian ideologies and support, which help to understand cultural influence on couple's family work organization. We will give a good introduction to Confucian ideologies, which has great influence on individual's family behavior in East Asian societies, and then discuss the implications of these Confucian ethics for family research in a cross-cultural perspective. Also, we will review the literature on external provider's contribution to family work, and suggest how others' support influences two partners' family work organization across cultures. Finally, several conclusions are made from the literature.

### **Domestic Chores Allocation in Urban China: Do Differences Exist across Cultures?**

Though gender related inequality in the division of family work exists in most societies, the relative size of men's contribution to housework varies across cultures (Davis & Greenstein, 2004; Moghaddam, 1998; Poeschl, 2008). Past findings reveal that husband has a relatively higher participation in family work in China than in European societies (Stockman, Bonney, & Sheng, 1995; Parish & Farrer, 2000; Zuo, 2002). In a time budget study involving two northeastern Chinese cities, Wang and Li (1982) found that Chinese spouses shared their housework more equally than did spouses in Russia, Czechoslovakia, France, and the United States. Whereas Chinese husbands, on average, shared more than 43% of the total housework time each day, husbands in the other countries shared 21.1% to 28.6% of the daily housework time (Hsieh & Burgess, 1994). Using data collected with an electronic ambulatory assessment procedure, Wang and colleagues (in preparation) found that Chinese husband contributed a greater proportion to the daily household labor (e.g., laundry, house cleaning, cooking etc.) than did Swiss husband (45.3% vs. 37.8%;  $p < .05$ ), while no cultural difference emerged in husbands' contribution to child care (40.6% vs. 40.3%;  $p > .05$ ).

Empirical findings also show that husband is more likely to be the main contributor to housework in China than in Europe. In a cross-cultural study in China, Japan and Great Britain, Bonney, Sheng and Stockman (1992) found that the percent of wife's exclusive responsibility ranged from 35% to 47% for the tasks of washing up, cleaning the house, doing laundry, and cooking in China. By contrast, these figures ranged from 53% to 94% in Britain and were above 89% for all chores in Japan. Whereas less than 5% of the British and Japanese husbands "entirely" or "mainly" performed the four chores, the figures for Chinese husbands were between 9%

and 20%.

Taken together, previous cross-cultural research, albeit not rich, suggests that Chinese couple is likely to have more equal division of family work than European couple. It calls attention to the effect of collectivistic cultural values on individual's family behavior. Previous family studies have usually involved Japanese sample to represent collectivistic cultures and found consistently more gender inequality in the division of family work among Japanese couples than among European and American couples (Davis & Greenstein, 2004; Kamo, 1994; Xuewen, Stockman, & Bonney, 1992). The inconsistent finding in China and Japan suggests that collectivistic cultures can influence gender equality in close relationships in complicated ways. We will summarize past findings in the next two parts to reveal factors which are useful to explain couple's different family work organization across cultures.

### **Do Current Models Explain Spouses' Different Housework Allocation across Cultures?**

Researchers have developed various theoretical models, such as the time availability model, the relative resource model, and the gender ideology model, to explain the division of family work in western cultures. These models have been also adopted in most cross-cultural studies to understand couple's family work organization in other cultures (e.g., Davis & Greenstein, 2004; Kalleberg & Rosenfeld, 1990). In this part, we will review previous studies which examined these models in Chinese cultures, and suggest whether these models explain the cultural difference in the division of family work among Chinese and European couples.

#### ***Women's Paid Work: Time Availability Model and Relative Resource Model***

The time availability model and the relative resource model are both related with husband and wife's paid work situation. The time availability hypothesis (Hiller, 1984) assumes that the partner with more available time will contribute a larger share of household labor. Thus, there should be a negative relationship between a partner's paid work time outside the family and their time spent for domestic work. The relative resources hypothesis assumes that housework is divided in terms of economic or quasi-economic rules of instrumental exchange (Brines, 1993). The focus is on how partners' resources (earnings, education level, occupational status, or other resource indicators) enter into the bargaining process of domestic work division. The partner who has more resources is more likely to use these resources to

negotiate his/her way out of family work and thus reduce his/her share of it.

In general, the two models are supported in European samples. For example, women's domestic work division is found to be affected by their husbands' economic resources (Van der Lippe, 1994), wives' education level (Van Berkel, 1999) and professional work time outside the family in the Netherlands (Tavecchio et al., 1984). In a comparative study in Austria, the Netherlands, and Portugal, Lothaller, Mikula, and Schoebi (2009) found support for the time-availability model and partial support for the relative resources perspective. The division of family work was more imbalanced to the disadvantage of women, the more time men and the less time women spent on professional work. The absolute sizes of the incomes of women and men significantly contributed to the division of family work, but the relative income of woman as compared to the income of her partner did not matter.

The two models have also been tested in East Asian societies and received weak support in Chinese societies. Some found no significant association between Chinese women's economic status and family work time (Parish and Farrer, 2000; Zheng, 2006). Others found that the time availability model, operationalized by professional work time, and the relative resource model, operationalized by income and education level, are helpful to explain Chinese couples' housework time (Xu & Liu, 2003; Shi, 2007). As expected, gender differences in housework time are lower among couples where a smaller difference exists in both partners' professional work time and resources (e.g., income, education level) (Liu, 1994; Wang, 1999).

Therefore, the time availability and the relative resource perspectives are useful to understand the division of family work in Chinese cultures. It is, however, not clear to what extent the two models explain the cultural difference in the division of family work among Chinese and European couples. This question can be answered only in further cross-cultural study. This review provides below some implications by comparing couple's economic status in the two cultural contexts.

Past findings reveal that besides high women's participation in the labor force (about 90% in urban areas; Chen, Short, & Entwisle, 2000), there is a small gender gap in professional work time in China. During the period from 2001 to 2003, the gap has been, on average, no more than 0.9 hour per week (China Labor Statistical Yearbook, 2005). By contrast, in 2004 the gender gap was 15 hours per week in Switzerland, 9 hours in Germany and Belgium, 10 hours in Sweden, and

11 hours in Italy and Norway (Federal Statistical Office, Switzerland, 2008). Based on a cross-nation comparison of life time (1995), Shi (2007) estimated the gender difference in work time by 0.75 hour per day in China, while the figure was 1.45 hours in Finland, 1.72 hours in Denmark, 2.28 hours in Canada, 2.58 hours in the U.S., and 3.5 hours in Japan. A smaller gender difference in paid work time for Chinese couple is supported also by diary data from Wang et al. (in preparation), although less strongly. While Chinese husband spent 6.92 hours per week more than their wives on paid work, the gender difference was 9.96 hours per week for Swiss couple.

Therefore, Chinese couple is more likely than European couple to have smaller difference in time availability for domestic work. According to the time availability hypothesis, Chinese couple will then share more equally in family work than will European couple, which is consistent with past findings summarized in the first part.

On the other hand, the literature suggests that Chinese women's long paid work time does not decrease gender gap in pay. In 1999, Chinese women earned about 70.1% of men's pay in urban areas, partly because most of them were employed in low-income careers and with lower occupational status (The second national Chinese women's social status survey team, 2001). By contrast, women earned 20.7% in 2002 and 19.7% in 2004 less than men in Switzerland, and the gap was 13.4% in 2004 in Norway, 16.1% in 2002 in France, and 22.4% in 2001 in Germany (Federal Statistical Office, Switzerland, 2008).

Though these figures may suffer from a measurement bias, it is clear that Chinese women's impressively high labor force participation and long professional work time do not lead to an impressively small gender gap in pay. Chinese couple is likely to have larger difference in pay than European couple. Based on the relative resource model, the larger gap in pay among Chinese couples should be associated with more gender inequality in the division of domestic work. Thus, the cultural difference in the division of family work between Chinese and European societies is in accordance with the time availability hypothesis, but inconsistent with the relative resource hypothesis.

#### ***Do Gender Ideologies Remain Influential where Strong Family Traditions Exist?***

Gender ideologies describe the attitudes of a person concerning marital and family role expectations for husbands and wives (e.g., Greenstein, 1996). According to the gender ideology hypothesis, these attitudes are reflected by activities such as the routine performance (or nonperformance) of household labor between

husbands and wives. The hypothesis posits that the division of household labor will be more egalitarian in families where husbands and wives hold less traditional beliefs about gender and marital roles.

Empirical findings reveal that the gender ideology model is modestly supported in western societies (Coltrane, 2000; Mikula, 1998; Shelton & John, 1996). In general, men's and/or women's gender attitudes are associated with the division of family work in expected ways. The literature also shows that this model is useful to explain spouses' division of domestic work in collectivistic cultures. For example, Shi (2007) found that in Fujian province, Chinese wives' gender ideology was significantly related with their household labor time and leisure time. The more traditional gender ideology they held, the more time spent on domestic labor and the less time they spent for leisure activities. In a cross-cultural study in Japan and the United States, Kamo (1994) found that Japanese couple's division of household labor was associated with Japanese wife's gender ideology, but not with Japanese husband's gender role attitudes, while the association was significant for both American wife and husband.

Therefore, the gender ideology model is supported both in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. It is expected that gender ideologies should explain the cultural difference in the division of domestic work in Chinese and European societies. We summarize first past findings on gender ideologies in Chinese societies, in comparison to data from European societies, and then provide some implications of the gender ideology model for the division of family work in the two cultural contexts.

Previous research shows that Confucian traditions and norms have magnificent impact on individual's gender role attitudes and behaviors in East Asian societies (Kamo, 1994; Quah, 1998). Confucian ideologies describe strict gender rules and requirements for men and women. Based on Confucian ethics, for example, men are forbidden to enter a female area, such as kitchen, and women are required to be "virtuous wife and good mother" (Zuo & Bian, 2001). In China, the influence of traditional gender ideologies is so profound that it persisted even after the Chinese women's liberation movement which started at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was brought to a climax by the communist government in the 1950s (Wang, 1995; Zuo, 2005). In 2000, 43.8% of investigated men and 37.4% of women in Shanghai agreed that men's first responsibility was social activities and women's in the domestic domain (The second Chinese women's social status survey team, 2001). A 1999 survey among college students in six

Chinese provinces showed that 68.2% of participants agreed that women's primary responsibility was to arrange the daily life of their husband and to nurture children (Shi, 2001). Moreover, traditional family attitudes and behaviors have been found also prevailing in other Chinese societies (e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong) (e.g., Greer, 1992; Hsieh & Burgess, 1994).

Not surprisingly, the literature reveals that individuals hold more traditional gender ideologies in China than in the United States (e.g., Wu, Levant & Sellers, 2001). Using data collected in Hong Kong, mainland China and Florida, U.S.A, Chang (1999) found that Chinese people were less egalitarian than Americans in their work-related gender attitudes, but Chinese women were more egalitarian in domestic gender role attitudes than their American counterparts in Florida. In a cross-cultural study in China and Switzerland, Wang and colleagues (in preparation) found, however, that Chinese couples scored less egalitarian than did Swiss couples on gender ideology scale which assesses both domestic and professional gender role attitudes.

Therefore, traditional gender ideologies are still prevailing in Chinese societies, and Chinese couple is more likely than European couple to hold traditional gender ideology. According to the gender ideology model, Chinese couple should thus have more gender inequality in family work organization than European couple. This is inconsistent with past findings summarized in the first part. Thus, gender ideologies cannot explain why Chinese husband has generally larger contribution to domestic tasks than European husband.

In sum, the three models are useful to understand the division of family work in collectivistic cultures, but they are not powerful enough to explain the cultural difference in the division of family work among Chinese and European couples. The literature reveals that Chinese couple is likely to have more equal division of domestic work than European couple. It may be due to the smaller gender gap in professional work time in China, as expected in the time availability model. It contradicts, however, the hypothesis of the relative resource and the gender ideology models. Based on the two models, Chinese couple's larger gender gap in pay and more traditional gender ideologies should foster more gender inequality in family work organization in Chinese households. Therefore, other factors should be considered beyond the three models to understand cultural effect on couple's family work organization.



## Which Other Factors Can Help to Understand the Division of Family Work across Cultures?

Researchers have argued that to better understand cultural difference, individual's behavior should be explained in their own cultural view (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). It is even true, when individual's family behavior in various societies is considered, given different emphasis on family in collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1995). Thus, we suggest examining the effect of cultural values regarding family on couple's family work organization in collectivistic cultures.

Others' support is another important factor to be considered in family research. It has been studied in research on kin networks or paid help. Although the literature reveals great use of support in family (e.g., Cohen, 1998), few studies have examined the impact of support on partners' division of domestic work. This limitation may lead to incomplete understanding of partners' family work organization. In this part, we will summarize past findings about cultural values and support, and suggest how they may help to understand couple's division of housework in various cultures.

### *Confucian Ideology in Ancient China and Its Potential Impact on Family Life*

Understanding the basis of Confucianism is crucial to understand individuals' social behaviors in Chinese and other East Asian societies. Confucianism proposes a complete ethical system as a framework for a person's regulation of individual issues and interpersonal relationships. In family studies, two types of relationships are of interest, the wife-husband relationship and the individual-family (i.e., in-group) relationship. Researchers have discussed that Confucian ethics foster less egalitarian gender ideology in Chinese societies and other East Asian societies, because they require husband and wife to manage different tasks in society, women being in charge of domestic chores and men working outside the family (Kamo, 1994; Li, 2004; Zuo & Bian, 2001). In Confucianism, both the husband-wife relationship and the individual-family relationship are, however, defined along two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and intimacy/distance (Hwang, 1999). Thus, Confucian values may affect individual's family behavior in different ways.

The superiority/inferiority relationship between family members is described in the following paragraph:

*"What are the things which humans consider righteous (yi)? Kindness on the part of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the part of the elder brother, and obedience on that of*

*the younger; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of the elders, and deference on that of juniors; benevolence on the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister. These are the ten things which humans consider to be right."* (Li Chi, Chapter 9: Li Yun; cited in Hwang, 1999, p.169).

Therefore, based on the idea of "the ten things of righteousness (yi)", not only the wife, but also the son, the younger brother, juniors and ministers should follow the principles of filial duty, obedience, deference, loyalty and obedience in social interactions. Under these ethics, women are put in an inferior situation in the husband-wife relationship, and gender related inequality is likely to exist in relationship.

Besides the superiority/inferiority dimension, Confucian ethics also emphasize close connectedness and intimacy in relationships. The intimacy/distance relationship among family members is described in the following paragraph:

*"Father and son are one body; husband and wife, brothers, are all one body. The relationship between father and son is like that between head and feet. Husband and wife are a combination of two separate parts of one body; brothers are the four limbs."* (Confucian Rites: Chapter on Mourning Dress; cited in Hwang, 1999, p.169).

Based on this notion of one whole body, a family is a unique "in-group" in China and the relationship among family members is different from those with other people outside this group, including friends. Members of a family residing under the same roof have an obligation to share resources with one another and resource allocators must do their best to satisfy the needs of their family members, following the need rule for social exchange (Hwang, 1999). This is consistent with empirical findings that collectivist is more likely than individualist to view self as interdependent and to value harmony in close relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These values are likely to foster we-consciousness between husband and wife and even among extended family members. Few studies examined these values' effect on individual's family behavior.

### *Modifications of Confucian Ethics and Implications for Family Studies*

With rapid social development in Chinese societies in recent years, some Confucian values, such as emphasizing obedience to parent and different gender roles, have decreased, but other values (e.g., supporting a benevolent care for parents, mutual interdependence of family members, and interpersonal harmony) are still pervasive among Chinese (Brindley, 1990; Chu, 1997; Yeh, 1997). Most family studies have,

however, focused on traditional gender ideology values, and paid little attention to the effect of interdependent values on couple's family work organization. Based on the literature, we will provide some implications how these interdependent cultural values help to understand individual's family behavior across cultures.

Previous family research reveals that collectivist's emphasis on family has impact on their gender construction and family behavior. In an interview study with 20 newlywed Singaporean couples, Quek and Knudson-Martin (2006) found that some collectivist norms, such as doing family, we-consciousness, and marrying one's equal, promoted gender equality among these couples. They argued that these spouses' focus on the family's relational network (i.e., doing family), fostered mutual attention to each other's extended families, and thus provided a platform for equality talk regarding conflicts and decision making. Also, they found that these couples were obliged to consider each other's needs and to adjust to each other, due to we-consciousness. Quek and Knudson-Martin asserted, therefore, that these collectivist norms may promote some interactive processes between spouses (e.g., flexible household organization, open dialogue regarding conflict, equal say in decision making), thereby fostering gender equality in relationship.

Empirical findings in China suggest, however, that these collectivist values emphasizing family may strengthen traditional gender commitment (Zuo, 2005). For example, Bao and Xu (2007) found that in Shanghai, women's stress was mainly other-oriented. As a result, these women voluntarily took double burdens of managing household chores and earning money to reduce their husband's stress. They explained their behavior in terms of family welfare. Family welfare is also important motivation for Chinese in the work domain. Commitment to the work role is likely regarded as a means-to-an-end in Chinese societies, and the goal is the family's financial security (Chan & Lee, 1995; Redding, Norman, & Schlender, 1994; Redding, 1993). According to this family-based work ethic, extra work after official hours or on weekends is a self-sacrifice made for the benefit of the family rather than a sacrifice of the family for the selfish pursuit of one's own career (Yang et al., 2000). When work interferes with family, other family members usually show understanding and provide support to the worker, even though they do not approve of the interference of work with family (Zou, 2001).

Therefore, consistent with the definition of collectivism by Triandis (1995), Chinese husband and wife are likely to interpret their activities, both in the family and in the work domains, as

contribution to the welfare of family rather than of individual, and to give priority to family's welfare over their individual needs. Based on these values, Chinese spouses may be reluctant to require a reduction of their own responsibility, due to individual needs. Given that gender roles are still defined in traditional way in Chinese societies, it may thus foster gender inequality in the family domain.

In sum, Confucian ideologies emphasize different gender roles for men and women as well as connectedness and intimacy among family members. While gender ideologies have been examined in family study, little is known about the impact of interdependent values, such as emphasis on family and we-consciousness, on individual's household organization. The literature suggests that these norms may foster mutual attention to each partner's needs and promote gender equality in relationship. They may also discourage spouses to reduce their work load, due to individual needs, and maintain traditional gender related inequality in family. In future family study, researchers should pay attention to these interdependent values' effect in collectivistic societies.

#### *Considering Support from Others to Complete the Understanding of the Division of Family Work*

Research on the division of family work has typically focused on the wife's and the husband's or cohabiting couples' contributions, ignoring or at best neglecting the contribution of others. When adopting an intercultural perspective, this view is incomplete, and restricts the understanding of housework allocation in the family (South & Spitze, 1994; Spitze, 1999). This became increasingly true in recent years, with an increasing number of employed wives dealing looking for support from other family members or paid services in western societies (Brines, 1994; Cohen, 1998). For example, Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis (1991) reported that 37% of full-time employed and 31% part-time employed wives used some form of paid domestic help. In a 1990 survey, Orapesa (1993) found that 12% of the respondents purchased housecleaning, and the figure increased to 20% among full-time employed women.

How does support from others influence husband and wife's housework time? The literature reveals mixed findings. Some found that help from other people (e.g., children at home, relatives, friends, paid service etc.) reduced husband and wife's time spent on domestic chores (Brines, 1994; Cohen, 1998). Others got, however, contrary results that spouses had more housework time when they received support from others (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992; Padgett, 1997). The latter group of findings may reflect larger actual need in household labor among

couples who receive support from others. Therefore, spouses' relative housework contribution should be examined to understand the role of support in spouses' family work organization.

Past findings suggest that others' support does influence the division of domestic work between husband and wife. Hiller (1984) proposed that the existence of an extended family network would actually enhance sex-role segregation because other women might contribute to the household tasks which otherwise would be performed by the husband. Further, researchers found that tasks that occurred less frequently and more flexibly, usually those male-typed tasks (e.g., yard care, home repair), were more likely to involve higher level of help (Cowan, 1987; Litwak, 1985). Thus, the existence of support may promote gender inequality in family work organization. Other empirical findings show, however, that others' help fosters gender equality in couple's division of family work. Padgett (1997) reported that instrumental support was associated with reduced relative housework contribution by both African American husband and wife, and the husband contributed more relative to their wives when they received at least monthly instrumental assistance in contrast to those who did not receive assistance (husband's contribution: 42% vs. 34%). Therefore, when support is available from others, spouses reorganize their family work providing in dynamic ways. As a consequence, it can either promote gender equality or hinder it in relationship.

In this review, we are interested in the question of how culture influences couple's support experiences and whether it helps to understand the division of family work across cultures. Culture psychology reveals that different cultural values and norms regarding relationships shape individual's support experiences. In individualistic cultures, individuals view self as independent entity and give priority to individual needs and goals, while individuals in collectivistic cultures view self as interdependent and give usually priority to in-group's goals and needs over those of individual (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Thus, individualists are more likely to seek explicit social support in response to individual needs, and collectivists may be reluctant about giving burden to others with own problems (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004). Rather, collectivists have been found more likely to use and benefit from implicit support without disclosure of personal feelings of distress (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). This suggests that family may be the main support provider in collectivistic cultures.

Previous research shows that collectivists use large amount of support in domestic domain.

Resident grandparents have been found highly involved in child care and other major household functions in China, Taiwan, Thailand and other Asian societies (Hermalin, Roan, & Perez, 1998; Chen et al., 2000; Cornwell, Casper, & Chou, 1990; Parish & Whyte, 1978). In a cross-cultural study, Schoebi and colleagues (2010) provide evidence that couples get more support with family work in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures. They found that Chinese spouses had a larger need of support and were unlikely not to receive support if needed. By contrast, Swiss couples were unlikely to report need of support, and they frequently did not receive support when needed. More interesting, while Swiss couples expected more support from their partner than from extended family members, Chinese husband and wife expected more support from extended family members than from each other. Therefore, family is a unique in-group in Chinese societies and individual can expect and get much help with housework organization from other family members.

Though high level of support exists in Chinese households, few studies examined its impact on Chinese couple's family work organization. Based on past findings in western societies, it is expected that support will relieve Chinese couples' housework burden. This is supported by the finding from Chen, Short and Entwisle's (2000) study. Using data from eight Chinese provinces, Chen, Short and Entwisle (2000) found that a mother's childcare load was significantly reduced if either paternal and particularly if the maternal grandparents lived in the household. When the grandparents did not live in the household, a mother's load of childcare was reduced only if paternal grandparents lived nearby.

Empirical findings, albeit rare, suggest that others' support also helps to explain the different division of family work among Chinese and European couples. Using diary data from China and Switzerland (part of the same data reported in Schoebi et al. (2010)), Wang and colleagues (in preparation) found that when spouses' paid work time and gender role attitudes were controlled, the husband's receipt of support was negatively associated with a traditional division of daily household labor between partners. Thus, support from others can foster gender equality in family work organization, which is consistent with previous finding (e.g., Padgett, 1997).

In sum, husband and wife use large amount of help with household organization and reallocate their housework contribution in response to others' support. Support is also important to understand couple's division of family work in Chinese and European cultures. Chinese couples are more

likely than Swiss couples to receive help with housework from other family members. It fosters gender equality in family work organization among Chinese couples. Thus, researchers should examine in further study how others' support affects husband and wife's family work (re)organization and what role culture plays in this process.

### Conclusion

During the past decades, couple's family work (re)organization has been a focus in family research. A functional division of domestic work helps spouses to cope with conflicting work and family demands and increases their well-being. It has been, however, little examined in China, even though Chinese women have high labor force participation and heavy work load. Given different cultural values and norms, it remains a question whether past findings and theoretical models in western societies can help to understand couple's family work organization in Chinese cultures and other collectivistic cultures. The current review focuses on previous research involving samples from Chinese and European societies and discusses how culture influences couple's division of family work. To summarize, several conclusions are made below and implications are provided for further study.

First, the literature reveals that culture has impact on couple's family work organization. Chinese husband is likely to have larger relative contribution to housework than European husband. It is inconsistent with past findings in Japanese societies. Sharing common Confucian ideology, Japanese couple divides usually family work in a rather traditional way (e.g., Davis & Greenstein, 2004). Why does couple differ in their division of family work in various societies? We suggest a new theoretical framework to understand these cultural differences.

Second, major theoretical models developed in western cultural context, such as the time availability model, the relative resources model and the gender ideology model, are valid in Chinese cultural context, but they cannot explain well the cultural difference in the division of domestic work among Chinese and European couples. Chinese couple's more equal division of housework relative to European couple is in accordance with the hypothesis of time availability, but contradicts the hypothesis of relative resource and gender ideology. It suggests that Chinese couple has organized their family work according to other factors in addition to those in these models.

Third, cultural values shape individual's motivation and behavior in the family domain. Collectivistic cultures emphasize close

connectedness interdependence among in-group members and give priority to in-group's needs over individual's needs. Previous research has, however, focused on how traditional gender structure in collectivistic cultures reinforces gender inequality in close relationships (Quah, 1998), and ignored the impact of other collectivistic values, such as emphasis on family and we-consciousness. The literature suggests that these values may discourage spouses to bargain for a reduction of own responsibility, due to individual needs, and result in gender related inequality in relationship. Also, they may foster gender equality in spouses' interactive process. Thus, these values emphasizing close connectedness among family members may be crucial to understand why collectivistic cultures promote gender equality in some cases (e.g., in China), but hinder it in other cases (e.g., in Japan).

Finally, support from others has impact on couple's housework time as well as on their relative contribution. Although male tasks tend to receive more help from other people and paid service, support must not lead to gender inequality in couple's family work organization. In response to others' help, husband and wife are likely to reallocate each other's contribution in dynamic ways. As a consequence, others' help can promote gender equality in relationship. Empirical findings show that husband's receipt of support helps to explain why Chinese couple has more gender equality than Swiss couple in the division of daily household labor. Thus, researchers should pay attention to the third party's contribution in further family study and examine how partners reallocate each other's contribution in response to support. Further, the literature reveals that individual's support experiences are shaped by cultural values and norms. Collectivists are more likely than individualists to get support from extended family members in the family domain. Support may help to understand the mechanism of cultural effect on couple's family work organization.

In sum, the current review aims to understand the division of family work among Chinese and European couples. Current models developed in western societies have been found weak to explain the cultural difference. Based on the literature, we suggest that collectivistic values regarding family and others' support with family work can help to explain couple's housework organization in various cultures. Researchers should pay attention to cultural values regarding family and individual's various support experiences in the family domain, and examine how and through what mechanism these values and support play their roles.

This review is a pioneer to provide an expanded theoretical framework for cross-cultural

family research, by providing a discussion of Confucian values and support with family work. It discusses for the first time implications of Confucian values and support for the division of family work in China and Europe, and suggests considering them to complete our understanding of cultural effect on couple's family work organization. Note that the current synthesis is based on a limited empirical basis. The lack of data on the allocation of family work, comparable across cultures, is striking. Further evidence, including spouses' provisions as well as contributions by formal and informal third parties, and considering the rapid socio-cultural development in the different countries, is necessary to corroborate the conclusions drawn here.

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