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Diversity in Transitions to Adulthood: Role Structures and Gender Role Attitudes among Youth Across Seven Countries*

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This study investigates the transition to adulthood among youth aged 13–29 across seven countries—South Korea, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Sweden—using data from the International Survey on Youth Attitudes 2018. By integrating welfare regime theory with the concept of "compressed modernity," the analysis highlights how East Asia's rapid societal transformations produce distinct patterns compared to Western contexts. The findings reveal significant cross-national variations: East Asian countries exhibit delayed independence and marriage due to tensions between traditional familial norms and modern aspirations, while Western countries show earlier transitions despite structural constraints perpetuating traditional gender roles. Sweden's progressive welfare policies exemplify the potential for institutional support to foster gender equality. This study provides a comparative framework bridging East Asian and Western perspectives, offering insights into how institutional and cultural dynamics shape youth transitions and informing policies to support equitable pathways to adulthood.

Keywords: *transition to adulthood, youth roles, gender role attitudes, cross-national comparison, welfare regimes*

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Introduction: Diversity of Youth Transition Pathways

The transition to adulthood is a universal yet contextually diverse process that reflects the interplay between societal structures and individual agency. It encompasses key milestones such as completing education, entering the workforce, and forming families, which are deeply shaped by institutional, cultural, and economic factors. Scholars have long recognized the importance of understanding these transitions, particularly as they have become increasingly fragmented and delayed in many parts of the world (Settersten and Ray 2010). Comparative studies across countries provide a critical lens to examine how institutional contexts influence life course trajectories and societal attitudes, offering insights that are unattainable through single-country analyses.

This study explores the relationship between role structures (e.g., school-to-work transitions) and attitudinal structures (e.g., perceptions of gender roles and family formation) during the transition to adulthood across seven countries: South Korea, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), Germany, France, and Sweden. These countries represent diverse welfare regime types—East Asian, liberal, conservative, and social democratic—which provide distinct institutional contexts that shape youth transitions. By comparing these regimes, the study aims to uncover how institutional arrangements influence both the structural and cognitive dimensions of youth transitions, highlighting similarities and differences across contexts.

The use of welfare regime theory (Esping-Andersen 1990) as an analytical framework allows this study to connect macro-level institutional arrangements with micro-level outcomes. Welfare regimes vary in how they allocate responsibilities among the state, market, and family, which in turn influences individuals' opportunities and constraints during critical life transitions. For example, liberal regimes, such as those in the UK and the US, emphasize market-based solutions, while social democratic regimes, like Sweden's, provide extensive state support. Conservative regimes, typified by Germany and France, rely heavily on family structures, whereas East Asian regimes, represented here by Japan and South Korea, combine familialism with emerging egalitarian trends. Understanding how these institutional differences affect role structures and attitudinal structures provides a nuanced perspective on youth transitions.

Previous studies have often focused on specific regions or countries, with a significant emphasis on Europe and North America (e.g., Buchmann

and Kriesi 2011). While these studies have shed light on delayed or disrupted transitions, they have often overlooked East Asia's unique dynamics, particularly the intersection of rapid economic development and persistent traditional norms. We address the gap by integrating East Asian cases into a broader comparative framework. By examining seven countries, we move beyond single-country narratives to identify patterns that are both universal and context-specific.

The central research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do role structures differ across welfare regimes during the transition to adulthood?
2. What are the variations in attitudinal structures, particularly regarding gender roles and family formation, across these regimes?
3. How are role structures and attitudinal structures interrelated within different institutional contexts?

By focusing on these questions, the study contributes to the literature on youth transitions by offering a comprehensive comparative perspective that links institutional arrangements to individual life course outcomes. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how welfare regimes shape both the opportunities available to youth and their perceptions of key life events.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, Section 3 details the data and methodology, Section 4 analyzes role and attitudinal structures, and Section 5 examines the relationship between roles and attitudes. Section 6 discusses findings and implications, and future research directions.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Welfare Regime Theory with Youth Transitions

Transitions to adulthood are shaped by the interplay between societal structures and individual agency, reflecting institutional, cultural, and economic contexts. Elder, Shanahan, and Jennings (2015) emphasize the life course perspective, which highlights how historical, social, and individual factors intersect to influence life trajectories. Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare regime classification provides a foundational lens for understanding the interplay between institutional arrangements and youth life courses. By

categorizing welfare regimes into liberal, conservative, and social democratic types, Esping-Andersen highlights how different systems allocate responsibilities among the state, market, and family. These categorizations are essential for examining variations in youth transitions across countries. However, this framework requires adaptation to account for East Asia's unique context, characterized by "compressed modernization," a term that describes the region's rapid economic growth and societal change within a relatively short period (Chang 1999; 2010; 2017; 2022). This study builds on Esping-Andersen's insights by integrating East Asian perspectives, offering a comparative framework that bridges Western and Eastern welfare paradigms to analyze youth transitions.

Complementing the life course perspective, Buchmann and Kriesi (2011) introduced the concept of transition systems, which examines how institutional arrangements, such as education systems and labor markets, mediate youth transitions. These systems differ across countries and welfare regimes, creating distinct opportunities and constraints for young people. For example, strong state support in social democratic regimes facilitates delayed transitions, while market-driven liberal regimes often lead to earlier labor market entry.

Despite the rich body of literature on youth transitions, significant gaps remain. Research has predominantly focused on Europe and North America (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011; Settersten and Ray 2010), overlooking the unique dynamics of East Asia. This study extends this framework by incorporating East Asian contexts, which combine familialism with emerging egalitarian trends (Ochiai 2013; Peng 2011). Moreover, existing studies have often analyzed structural and cognitive dimensions in isolation, failing to capture their interconnections. For instance, studies on role structures have documented delays in transitions to adulthood, such as extended education and postponed family formation, particularly in social democratic regimes (Blossfeld et al. 2005). On the other hand, research on attitudinal structures has explored shifts in gender norms and family values, yet these studies rarely integrate structural factors (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; McDonald 2000).

This study addresses these gaps by linking role structures and attitudinal structures within a comparative framework. By analyzing seven countries that represent diverse welfare regimes, the study provides insights into how institutional contexts shape both structural opportunities and societal attitudes.

Role Structures and Attitudinal Structures Across Welfare Regimes

Role structures refer to the distribution of youth roles, such as living arrangements, education, and labor market participation, during the transition to adulthood. These structures are deeply influenced by welfare regimes, which allocate responsibilities among the state, market, and family. Liberal regimes (e.g., the US and the UK) emphasize market-driven solutions, often leading to earlier labor market entry but weaker safety nets. In contrast, social democratic regimes (e.g., Sweden) provide robust state support, allowing for extended transitions. Conservative regimes (e.g., Germany and France) rely on familial networks to mediate youth transitions (Blossfeld et al. 2005; Esping-Andersen 1990).

In addition to role structures, attitudinal structures encompass societal perceptions of key life events, including gender roles and family formation. These attitudes are shaped by institutional and cultural contexts, which mediate individual beliefs and behaviors. Existing research has documented significant delays in life course transitions, such as extended education and postponed family formation, particularly in social democratic regimes (Blossfeld et al. 2005; Buchmann and Kriesi 2011). McDonald (2000) argues that achieving societal gender equity requires a balance between public spheres (e.g., education and employment) and private spheres (e.g., caregiving and household labor).

Integrating role and attitudinal structures, this study bridges existing gaps by examining how institutional contexts influence both structural opportunities and societal attitudes. The interplay between these dimensions is crucial for understanding youth transitions, particularly in East Asia where traditional familialism interacts with emerging egalitarian norms (Ochiai 2013; Peng 2011).

East Asian regimes, represented by Japan and South Korea, offer a unique context where strong familialism intersects with rapid societal change. This region has experienced "compressed modernization," characterized by the simultaneous advancement of industrialization, urbanization, and education within a condensed timeframe (Chang 2022). These rapid changes have intensified the tension between traditional familism and emerging egalitarian norms. For instance, younger generations in South Korea increasingly challenge patriarchal family structures, reflecting broader shifts in societal attitudes (Lee 2016). In Japan, however, persistent gender inequities in both public and private spheres highlight the slower pace of attitudinal change, despite high levels of female education (Ochiai 2013).

This study incorporates these unique East Asian dynamics into the comparative framework, revealing how the interplay between compressed modernization and welfare regimes creates distinct pathways for youth transitions. By focusing on Japan and South Korea, this research highlights the role of institutional arrangements in mediating the balance between cultural continuity and societal transformation.

Data and Methods

Data

This study utilizes data from the International Survey on Youth Attitudes 2018, conducted by the Cabinet Office of Japan. The dataset, accessed through the Social Science Japan Data Archive at the University of Tokyo,[1] provides a cross-national basis for understanding youth values and attitudes that have significant implications for youth policy discussions.

The survey was conducted between November and December 2018, targeting individuals aged 13 to 29 across seven countries: South Korea, Japan, the US, the UK, Germany, France, and Sweden. A total of 1,000 respondents were sampled. The survey was administered via web-based questionnaires, utilizing quota sampling based on official population data. Respondents were selected according to demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and regional representation, ensuring the data's reliability and comparability across countries (Cabinet Office of Japan 2018).

To ensure cross-national comparability, the survey instruments were translated from Japanese into the official or primary languages of each participating country, following a meticulous process of back-translation and validation by native speakers (Cabinet Office of Japan 2018). In cases where identical questions had been included in previous surveys, the same translations were used to maintain consistency. This approach minimized potential bias arising from linguistic and cultural differences in interpretation (Cabinet Office of Japan 2018).

[1] SSJDA Direct. "International Survey of Youth Attitude, 2018." https://doi.org/10.34500/SSJDA.1302.

Measurement

This study measured the structure of the transition to adulthood along two dimensions: role structures and attitudinal structures. Role structures refer to the distributions of roles in the production and reproduction spheres within given societies, which are key aspects of modern industrial societies (Lee 2022). Attitudinal structures reflect social norms on the roles men and women play in the public and private spheres in each country.

Role structures in youth were measured along two dimensions: education-labor, and family. Each subject, aged 13 to 29, had a specific status in these dimensions in 2018. Education-labor statuses were categorized into three categories: academic (studying), labor (working), and other (e.g., unemployed or housewife).[2] Family status was categorized based on the subjects' household composition into three groups: family (living with parents or siblings), single (living alone or with non-family members), and spouse-child (living with a spouse or children).[3] Finally, we classified all the combined statuses into nine categories as follows: (1) family/school, (2) family/work, (3) family/other, (4) single/school, (5) single/work, (6) single/other, (7) spouse-child/school, (8) spouse-child/work, and (9) spouse-child/other.

Attitudinal structures were assessed using survey items on marriage and gender roles. Respondents were asked to answer the question "How do you feel about marriage (including de facto marriage)?" with "One should marry," "It is better to marry," "It is okay to not marry," "It is better to not marry," or "Don't know." Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement ("Agree," "Disagree" or "Don't Know") with the statements "Men should work outside the home, and women should stay home and take care of it" and

[2] We classified "working part-time while attending school (including part-time work)" and "not working part-time while attending school" as "academic." In addition, we classified "working full-time," "working full-time while attending school," and "working part-time or as a dispatcher or contractor" as "labor." Further, we categorized "laid off," "working full-time as a housewife," and "unemployed" as "other."

[3] We placed those who lived with their father, mother, siblings, or grandparents into the "family" category, those who lived alone or with their girlfriend, boyfriend, friend, roommate, or other person into the single category, and we categorized those who lived with their spouse (including common-law) or their child as "spouse-child." While categorizing cohabiting couples, we decided to classify them as "single" unless they were legally married or had children. Although cohabitation without marriage reflects a significant life arrangement in some contexts, we determined that legal marriage or parenthood was a necessary criterion for inclusion in the spouse-child group. This distinction was made to maintain consistency in defining family status across the seven countries.

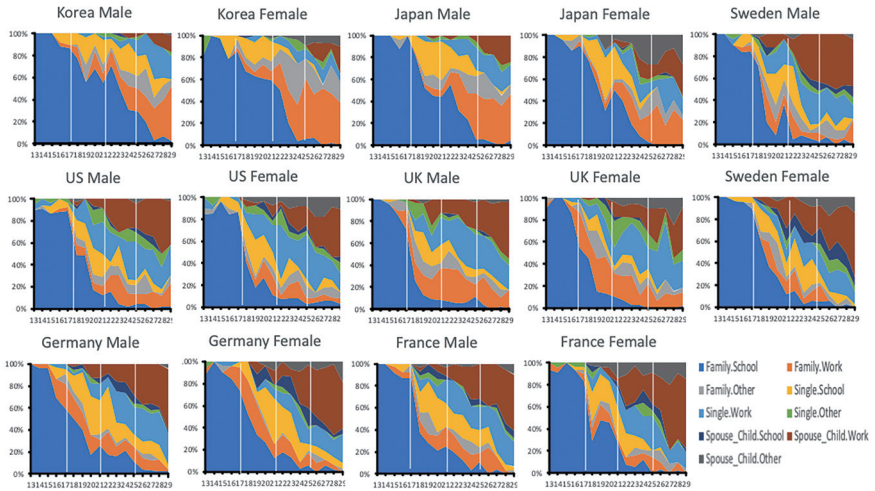

Fig. 1.—Comparison of transitional role structures across seven countries by gender

Note: In Figure 1, from left to right, the age increases from 13 to 29 years.

"When children are small, their mothers should be the ones to take care of them."

The analysis compared role structures and attitudinal structures by gender across countries, interpreting results within the typology of socioeconomic institutions and the unique social position of East Asian youth.

Role Structures and Attitudinal Structures in Transitions to Adulthood

Role Structures

Figure 1 illustrates the role structures of transitions to adulthood across the seven countries, categorized by gender. The analysis focuses on patterns of separation from the biological family and transitions into education, employment, and family formation.

South Korea and Japan exhibit delayed transitions out of the parental home and prolonged periods of education, and a late transition to marriage

compared to other Western countries. Japanese men and South Korean women often live with their parents and attend college until 22, then continue living with their parents while working until 29. Also, some people live with their parents in their mid-20s and find jobs or remain unemployed. Due to the conscription of South Korean men, half of them live with their parents until their mid-20s or independently while attending school. By age 25, 40% of Japanese women are married, compared to 10% of South Korean women. While the marriage rate increases slightly until age 29, about 70% of South Korean women are unmarried by 29.

Men in both countries delay the transition to marriage more than women, with South Korean men marrying later than Japanese men. In Japan, where stay-at-home mothers are institutionally protected, the share of women who are married and stay at home is the highest among the seven countries.[4] These patterns reflect the dominance of familism and the influence of societal norms on youth life courses.

In the US and the UK, both liberal welfare regimes, individuals leave the parental home earlier, and education periods are typically shorter. However, limited state support for caregiving and economic pressures result in varied pathways, including delayed family formation or extended co-residence with parents after completing education. A higher percentage of individuals marry and live independently sooner compared to East Asian contexts.

However, 20–30% of men live with their parents until their late 20s, with the UK showing lower post-17 education rates. The proportion attending university is higher in the US than in the UK, with the UK having a higher proportion of people living and working away from home after age 18, and a faster transition to marriage. UK individuals marry and live independently sooner, with fewer women working post-marriage compared to men.

[4] In Japan, the family model of a gender-divided family, with a husband as breadwinner and the wife as housewife, remained stable from the 1970s to the 1980s. A series of policies to protect housewife during this time remain in place to this day. These include adjusting (increasing) the legal inheritance rate for wives, exempting pension premiums for wives with working husbands (special spousal deduction: 1985), reducing taxes for those with dependent spouses (spousal deduction from income tax: 1986) and establishing the survivor pension system. As a result of these measures from the 1980s, even today most married women adjust their working hours to stay within the limits of being recognized as a "dependent" due to the special spousal deduction. This is commonly referred to as the "¥1.03 million wall," because the threshold for a full-time housewife to work part-time was 1.03 million. If one's annual income exceeds this threshold, they lose the dependent allowance from their spouse's company and must pay income and residence tax. The deduction threshold increased to 1.5 million in 2018. According to the 2019 Labor Force Survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, more than half of all two-income households in Japan work for less than 1.5 million yen (Kuga 2019).

Independence and work start early but some remain with parents post-education. The proportion of people living alone and not working is also higher than in other countries, especially among British women at 21.

In Germany and France, two conservative welfare regimes, youth tend to leave the parental home earlier than their counterparts in liberal or familist regimes; few live with their parents at age 29, and a higher percentage of men and women live independently and attend college. More people pursue higher education than in the US and the UK. Compared to France, German women are more likely to live alone and pursue higher education. In Germany, people tend to live and work with their parents at 17, then live independently, go to school or work from their 20s onward, and marry relatively early. After the age of 25, many people are married and working. In France, fewer live with parents after 17, while in Germany, there is a slight increase in parental co-residence during the same period, followed by independent living and education/work.

In Sweden, a social democratic welfare regime, independence starts after the age of 18, with more men than women becoming independent earlier. Transition to marriage is rapid, with many married by 29. Swedish social democracy supports early independence and continued education, with high gender equality influencing transition patterns.

These patterns underscore the impact of welfare regimes and cultural norms in shaping youth transitions, providing a comparative context for the more detailed theoretical discussions in Chapter 5.

Attitudinal Structures

Figure 2 and Table 1 compare gender attitudes toward marriage. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of responses by age (13 to 29) for the statements "One should marry," "It is better to marry," "It is okay not to marry," and "It is better not to marry." Table 1 presents the mean scores for these attitudes, separated by gender, with higher scores indicating more traditional attitudes toward marriage. This analysis highlights cross-national and gender-based differences in marriage attitudes. These findings highlight variations without delving into theoretical explanations, which are addressed in Chapter 5.

FIG. 2.—COMPARISON OF MARRIAGE VALUES IN SEVEN COUNTRIES BY GENDER

TABLE 1

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE ATTITUDES ACROSS SEVEN COUNTRIES

Country	Gender	Mean	SD	n	t-value	p-value	Significance
South Korea	Male	3.54	1.02	553	9.23	< .001	***
	Female	3.02	0.99	511			
Japan	Male	3.38	1.30	554	4.57	< .001	***
	Female	3.32	1.18	580			
United States	Male	3.70	1.18	537	1.95	0.051	
	Female	3.54	1.20	526			
United Kingdom	Male	3.58	1.18	535	1.97	0.053	
	Female	3.40	1.12	516			
Germany	Male	3.51	1.00	539	0.61	0.544	
	Female	3.48	0.98	510			
France	Male	3.50	1.00	533	3.24	0.001	**
	Female	3.32	0.98	527			
Sweden	Male	3.28	1.08	529	1.32	0.186	
	Female	3.11	0.92	522			

***p < .001: Highly significant
**p < .01: Significant
Non-significant results do not have a significance marker.

In South Korea, the gender gap in attitudes toward marriage is the largest among the seven countries. Korean men (M = 3.54, SD = 1.02) exhibited significantly higher scores than women (M = 3.02, SD = 0.99; $t(1062) = 9.23$, $p < .001$), indicating stronger support for marriage among men. In Japan, the gender gap is smaller but remains significant, with men

(M = 3.38, SD = 1.30) showing slightly higher agreement with marriage than women (M = 3.32, SD = 1.18; $t(1132) = 4.57$, $p < .001$). This trend underscores the continued influence of traditional values on marriage in Japan, despite societal shifts toward individualism and gender equality.

In the US and the UK attitudes toward marriage are relatively egalitarian, with minimal gender differences observed. In the US, the mean score for men (M = 3.70, SD = 1.18) was slightly higher than for women (M = 3.54, SD = 1.20), but the difference was not statistically significant ($t(1061) = 1.95$, $p = .051$). Similarly, in the UK, men scored 3.58 (SD = 1.18) compared to women's 3.40 (SD = 1.12), with no significant difference observed (t (1049) = 1.97, $p = .053$).

Germany and France, both representing conservative welfare regimes, show moderate gender gaps in marriage attitudes. In Germany, men (M = 3.51, SD = 1.00) expressed slightly stronger agreement with marriage compared to women (M = 3.48, SD = 0.98), but the difference was not statistically significant ($t(1047) = 0.61$, $p = .544$). In France, men scored 3.50 (SD = 1.00) compared to women's 3.32 (SD = 0.98), with a significant difference observed ($t(1056) = 3.24$, $p = .001$).

Sweden, a social democratic welfare regime, exhibits the smallest gender gap in marriage attitudes, with no significant differences between men (M = 3.28, SD = 1.08) and women (M = 3.11, SD = 0.92; $t(1049) = 1.32$, $p = .186$). Sweden's progressive policies and strong state support for childcare and family formation reduce the societal reliance on marriage as an institution.

These findings highlight the complex interplay between cultural norms, institutional contexts, and individual attitudes. South Korea's significant gender gap reflects the tension between traditional patriarchal expectations and the aspirations of highly educated women. In contrast, countries like Sweden and the Anglo-American nations exhibit more egalitarian attitudes, underscoring the role of welfare regimes in shaping marriage norms. Germany and France occupy a middle ground, reflecting both traditional values and gradual shifts toward individualism.

By situating these differences within broader structural and cultural contexts, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of marriage attitudes during the transition to adulthood. The similarities between contemporary South Korean youth and the "parasite singles" (Yamada 1999) in Japan highlight shared societal pressures, such as the financial and social burdens of marriage and family formation. However, the more pronounced rejection of marriage among South Korean women reflects deeper tensions in gender role expectations and a lack of institutional support for balancing

FIG. 3.—COMPARISON OF GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES IN SEVEN COUNTRIES BY GENDER 1

FIG. 4.—COMPARISON OF YOUTH GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES IN SEVEN COUNTRIES BY GENDER 2

professional and family life.

Figures 3 and 4 reflect another aspect of gender role attitudes. Figure 3 shows the number of people who agree or disagree with the statement "Men should work outside of the home, and women should stay home and take

care of it," and Figure 4 reflects the ages and number of people who agree or disagree with the statement "When children are small, their mothers should be the ones to take care of them." From left to right, age increases from 13 to 29, with red indicating favorable opinions and blue indicating unfavorable opinions.

Gender role attitudes exhibit clear cross-national variations, with distinct patterns emerging across the seven countries examined. In South Korea and Japan, agreement with traditional gender roles, such as "men should work outside the home, and women should stay home," is higher compared to other countries, particularly among men. Younger women in these countries, however, demonstrate a lower agreement with these traditional norms, indicating a generational divide.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles are more prevalent, especially among younger individuals. Nevertheless, traditional caregiving roles continue to be endorsed by some, highlighting persistent divides in attitudes across age and gender groups.

Germany and France reveal mixed patterns. In Germany, cultural norms supporting maternal caregiving remain strong, whereas in France, a gradual shift toward egalitarian attitudes is evident, with younger cohorts displaying lower agreement with traditional roles compared to older generations.

Sweden stands out with predominantly egalitarian attitudes and minimal agreement with traditional caregiving roles. These patterns are consistent across age groups and genders, reflecting a broader societal consensus favoring gender equality.

These findings underscore the critical role of institutional arrangements and cultural legacies in shaping gender role attitudes across diverse welfare regimes. While progressive policies can mitigate traditional norms, entrenched cultural expectations remain a significant barrier to achieving full gender equality.

The Relationship Between Roles and Attitudes

Structures of youth transition regimes

Is there a relationship between role and attitudinal structures in the transition to adulthood? Figure 5 presents a cross-tabulation of gender role attitudes, opinions on marriage, and family status. Regarding marriage, responses such

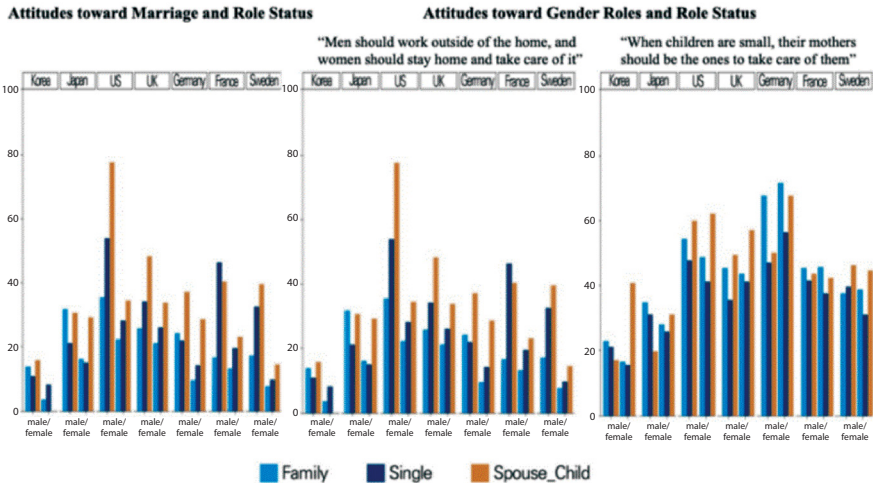

Fig. 5.—Cross-tabulation of Gender Role Attitudes, Marriage Opinions, and Family Status Across Seven Countries

as "One should marry" and "It is better to marry" are categorized as positive attitudes, while "It is okay not to marry" and "It is better not to marry" are categorized as negative. For gender role attitudes, agreement with statements such as "Men should work outside of the home, and women should stay home and take care of it" and "When children are small, their mothers should be the ones to take care of them" was examined in relation to the family status of youth respondents.

The interplay between family formation and value norms across different institutional and cultural contexts reveals nuanced patterns in attitudes toward marriage and gender roles. These patterns are shaped by welfare regimes, cultural traditions, and generational dynamics, which collectively influence how individuals perceive and navigate transitions to adulthood.

South Korea exemplifies the tensions between rapid societal modernization and entrenched traditional norms. As Sasano (2023) observes, younger generations, particularly women, reject traditional family roles due to significant gains in education and workforce participation. Unlike Western systems that have slowly shifted towards gender equality, South Korean societal institutions lag behind, adhering to familist policies that place caregiving responsibilities squarely on women. In the meantime, women's

education levels have risen quickly,[5] and women are also entering the workforce at higher levels. The notable difference between the idealized lives of young people and older generations is one of the reasons for the radical rejection of traditional gender roles among South Korean youth. South Korea's "compressed modernity" (Chang 2017; 2022) amplifies the conflict between generational aspirations and societal expectations, making family formation increasingly burdensome. South Korean women face substantial burdens in balancing professional autonomy with traditional family obligations, resulting in widespread opposition to caregiving roles and marriage.

In Japan, the pace of change is slower but follows a similar trajectory. While younger women challenge traditional gender roles, attitudes remain less extreme than in South Korea. Japanese men display higher support for traditional roles, reflecting their perceived financial responsibility within families (Sakamoto 2011; Suzuki 2012). However, single individuals and women living independently are more likely to reject these attitudes, driven by economic instability and evolving family structures. The phenomenon of parasite singles, described by Yamada (1999), illustrates how prolonged co-residence with parents facilitates delayed family formation, a pattern further exacerbated by economic stagnation. The "semi-compressed modernity" of Japan (Ochiai 2014) reflects a gradual but steady shift, with generational divides becoming more apparent as younger cohorts prioritize autonomy and dual-income family models (NIPSSR 2021).

In the US and the UK, economic pragmatism influences gender role attitudes. Liberal welfare regimes with limited state support for caregiving often necessitate a division of labor within families, particularly among married individuals (Esping-Andersen 1999). Hochschild and Machung (2012) observe that cultural ideals of gender equality often conflict with systemic limitations, resulting in persistent traditional divisions of labor.

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[5] Data comparing tertiary education attainment among mothers (55–64 years) and daughters (25–34 years) shows that South Korea has a 60% gap in tertiary education attainment between mothers and daughters, more than three times the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 20% (OECD 2022). While most countries have experienced a rise in the educational attainment of daughters compared to their mothers, the generational gap in South Korea is unprecedented. Given that the average increase in educational attainment between parents and children is around 20%, this means that the change that other countries have experienced in four generations, from great-grandmothers to daughters, has been achieved in just two generations. South Korea's compressed modernization is evident in its female educational attainment, and this explosion in educational attainment is unparalleled in the world. This dramatic increase in female education is related to the dramatic change in values among young women.

Young, single individuals in both countries exhibit more egalitarian attitudes, reflecting their independence from caregiving responsibilities. However, young men in these contexts remain slightly more supportive of traditional roles.

Germany and France exemplify intermediate positions between traditional and progressive norms. Conservative welfare regimes in these countries sustain the male breadwinner model, which continues to shape attitudes, particularly among middle-class families of old ages (Esping-Andersen 2009). However, younger generations, particularly women, are increasingly questioning traditional roles, indicating gradual societal modernization. Nevertheless, cultural continuity in maternal caregiving norms remains prominent in Germany, while France demonstrates greater acceptance of non-traditional family structures, such as cohabitation and births outside of marriage (Hakim 2000).

Sweden represents a benchmark for gender equality, supported by progressive gender-egalitarian policies and robust childcare provisions. These policies facilitate non-traditional family structures and dual-income households, contributing to minimal support for traditional roles among both men and women (Lesthaeghe 2010). However, a small but notable minority still endorses maternal caregiving, highlighting the enduring influence of cultural legacies (Esping-Andersen 1999). This suggests that even in egalitarian contexts notions about traditional gender divisions of labor are deeply ingrained and still persist.

The complex interplay between cultural legacies, economic realities, and welfare policies manifests distinctly across different welfare regimes. For example, in South Korea, the cultural expectation of familial caregiving intersects with limited state support for childcare, creating significant barriers for women to balance professional and family life (Sasano 2023). This contrasts sharply with Sweden, where robust welfare policies, such as subsidized childcare and gender-neutral parental leave, enable dual-income households and mitigate the reliance on traditional family structures (Lesthaeghe 2010). Similarly, in Germany, while economic realities favor early workforce participation, cultural norms around maternal caregiving persist, particularly in conservative middle-class families (Esping-Andersen 2009). These examples highlight how institutional frameworks mediate the relationship between cultural norms and economic pressures, shaping the timing and structure of youth transitions to adulthood.

Formation of structures of youth transition regime Structures: A Comparative Analysis

The role structures presented in Section 5.1 reveal significant cross-national differences in the interplay between family formation, gender role attitudes, and institutional frameworks. By synthesizing these insights, this section explores how institutional arrangements and cultural legacies jointly shape youth transition regimes, offering a deeper understanding of broader societal dynamics.

In conservative welfare regimes, such as Germany and France, institutional frameworks strongly align with cultural traditions to sustain traditional role structures. Married individuals in these regimes exhibit the highest support for traditional roles, reflecting their direct engagement in caregiving and family responsibilities. Institutional structures, including tax incentives and parental leave policies in Germany, reinforce the male breadwinner model, particularly within middle-class families, perpetuating entrenched gender roles (Esping-Andersen 2009). Similarly, in France, while maternal caregiving norms remain prominent, there is a gradual shift toward modernization as seen in the growing acceptance of cohabitation and non-traditional family structures, such as births outside of marriage (Hakim 2000). These findings highlight the critical role of institutional policies in reinforcing traditional gender norms while also indicating the emergence of generational shifts toward more egalitarian attitudes.

East Asian familist regimes, represented by South Korea and Japan, exemplify the tension between traditional familism and modern aspirations, albeit through distinct dynamics. In South Korea, the concept of "compressed modernity" (Chang 2022) underscores how rapid societal transformations have widened generational divides. Younger women increasingly reject caregiving roles due to rising education levels and growing professional ambitions. However, limited institutional support for dual-income families perpetuates traditional expectations, creating a significant burden for women attempting to balance professional and family life (Sasano 2023). Japan follows a similar but slower trajectory. Economic stagnation and prolonged co-residence with parents facilitate delayed family formation, commonly referred to as the phenomenon of "parasite singles" (Yamada 1999). The "semi-compressed modernity" of Japan reflects a steady, albeit gradual, shift, with younger cohorts showing increasing support for dual-income family models (Ochiai 2014). These patterns highlight the unique challenges faced by East Asian youth in reconciling cultural continuity with societal

modernization.

Liberal welfare regimes, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, are characterized by the interplay of economic pragmatism and individualism, which shapes flexible and egalitarian attitudes among young, single individuals. However, systemic limitations, including minimal state support for childcare, frequently lead to a reversion to traditional divisions of labor upon marriage or parenthood (Hochschild and Machung 2012). In these contexts, cultural ideals of gender equality often conflict with structural constraints, creating economic pressures that perpetuate caregiving roles, even among younger, progressive cohorts. This tension is particularly evident in the United States, where cultural narratives promoting independence coexist with systemic barriers to achieving gender equity in caregiving roles. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, early family formation is accompanied by persistent gendered divisions of labor, reflecting the limited scope of state intervention in liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1999).

In Sweden, a social democratic welfare regime, institutional advancements support progressive gender-egalitarian policies. Comprehensive welfare provisions, such as subsidized childcare and gender-neutral parental leave, facilitate dual-income households and mitigate the reliance on traditional family structures (Lesthaeghe 2010). Even within such progressive contexts, the enduring influence of cultural legacies remains visible, as a minority of respondents continue to adhere to maternal caregiving norms. This persistence underscores the challenges of dismantling deeply ingrained norms, even in the presence of robust welfare policies aimed at fostering gender equality.

Discussion

This study identified significant cross-national variations and commonalities in the interplay between role structures and attitudinal frameworks during transitions to adulthood. By analyzing attitudes toward marriage and gender roles alongside family formation patterns, this research highlights the mutual influence of life course transitions and value systems. The inclusion of East Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan provided a unique lens to explore rapid societal changes, contrasting them with the gradual transformations observed in Western societies.

A key contribution of this study is the application of the concept of "compressed modernity" to analyze youth transitions, particularly in East

Asia. This framework illuminates the unique challenges and opportunities arising from rapid societal changes occurring within condensed timeframes (Chang 2022). The accelerated pace of industrialization, urbanization, and educational expansion in South Korea and Japan has shaped life course trajectories that differ markedly from those in Western societies. Younger cohorts in these countries face heightened tensions between traditional familial expectations and modern aspirations for professional and personal autonomy. This study underscores how these rapid transitions exacerbate generational divides, as younger individuals increasingly reject caregiving roles traditionally assigned to women.

In addition, the study bridges the gap between institutional policies and cultural legacies, illustrating how institutional arrangements mediate cultural norms and shape the interplay between economic realities and attitudinal shifts. For instance, Sweden's comprehensive welfare policies, such as gender-neutral parental leave and subsidized childcare, facilitate dual-income households and promote egalitarian gender roles (Lesthaeghe 2010). In contrast, South Korea's limited institutional support exacerbates gender role inequalities, placing a disproportionate caregiving burden on married women (Sasano 2023). Similarly, in Germany and France, conservative welfare regimes reinforce traditional gender roles through policies like tax incentives and parental leave structures that favor single-income households (Esping-Andersen 2009). These findings highlight the role of institutional frameworks in either perpetuating or mitigating traditional family dynamics, depending on the cultural and policy context.

Moreover, this study extends Esping-Andersen's (2009) concept of the "incomplete gender revolution" by demonstrating how structural barriers and entrenched cultural traditions sustain traditional family dynamics, even as female labor market participation rises. In conservative welfare regimes like Germany and France, the persistence of maternal caregiving norms underscores the disparity between increased economic opportunities for women and the slower progress in men's engagement in caregiving roles. Even in progressive regimes like Sweden, residual cultural legacies perpetuate some adherence to traditional maternal caregiving expectations. Conversely, in East Asia, rapid societal changes have created distinct challenges, with younger generations in South Korea and Japan increasingly rejecting traditional roles but facing institutional inertia that hinders progress.

Key findings underscore the tendency for individuals who have formed families to express more traditional attitudes, while singles or those living with parents exhibit more progressive views. However, the intensity and

trajectory of these attitudes vary significantly across regions. South Korea exemplifies a sharp generational divide, with younger women rejecting traditional gender norms in response to compressed modernity (Chang 2017; 2022). Japan, while following a similar trajectory, demonstrates a slower pace of change, reflecting its semi-compressed modernity (Ochiai 2014). In contrast, Western liberal welfare regimes such as the US and the UK reveal a pragmatic adherence to traditional gender roles, driven by economic constraints and limited state support for caregiving. Meanwhile, conservative regimes in Germany and France exhibit a blend of persistent traditional values and emerging egalitarian ideals. Sweden stands as a benchmark for gender equality, yet residual cultural legacies still support maternal caregiving among a minority.

The findings have significant theoretical and policy implications. First, they challenge Western-centric narratives by demonstrating how compressed modernity in East Asia produces distinct dynamics that differ from the gradual transitions in Western contexts. This underscores the potential for generational change to drive social transformation while calling attention to the structural reforms needed to support young people navigating the complexities of modern adulthood. Second, by integrating diverse cultural contexts and theoretical frameworks, this study contributes to the broader discourse on gender, family, and societal transitions. It emphasizes the role of institutional frameworks, such as parental leave and childcare policies, in shaping societal attitudes. Policymakers must address the structural barriers that reinforce traditional family roles, particularly in conservative and liberal welfare regimes.

However, this study has certain limitations. The inclusion of seven countries provides a broad comparative scope, but the representativeness of the sample may limit generalizability. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the data prevents capturing the temporal evolution of attitudes and role structures. Longitudinal studies are necessary to investigate how transitions in education, employment, and family formation reshape attitudes over time. Finally, while this study highlights the interaction between institutional frameworks and cultural norms, it does not fully explore specific policy impacts. Future research should analyze how targeted interventions—such as gender-neutral parental leave or subsidized childcare—can mitigate inequalities and support diverse family structures.

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