



Gender Equality as Smart Economics: Problems of Drawing Equivalence Between Market Production and Household Bargaining Power Under Gender Dividend Assumptions

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The neoliberal trade regime prioritizes market mechanisms and women's self-realization in the workplace. The new measuring system for women's social value adds economic contribution as a new criterion and expects the chain reaction that ultimately contributes to overall female empowerment. However, the biased perception of women's dual role as good mothers and workers is a moral norm issue that forcibly imposes traditional womanly duties and modern social duties on the female population.

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ABSTRACT

Gender dividend is a steady benefit earned by investing in female development and integrating women into the workplace. Based on the Inter-American Development Bank's 2010 report, *Gender Dividend: Capitalizing on Women's Work*, narrowing the gender gap increases per capita income, expands the market, and improves overall social wellbeing. This paper explores female labour participation in the East Asian economic hub of Shanghai. The elite women in Shanghai are equipped to deal with complicated job tasks in the office, while they are still trapped in the social expectations of femininity at home. The neoliberal governmentality promotes a redistribution of resources in the market system, shown by an increased number of women at the senior management level and women's remarkable strides in the marketplace. Yet, the division of reproductive labour remains unaffected as the traditional East Asian perception of "good wife, wise mother" disincentivizes working women to gain household-level autonomy. Therefore, economic empowerment is an insufficient one-step solution to the social stigmatization of womanhood, as working mothers are forced to play conflicting dual roles in society.

Introduction

The declining birth and mortality rate allow emerging economies to capture the demographic dividend and accelerate economic growth. Since the 1990s, development agencies have promoted gender dividend by harnessing women's economic potential through female labour participation, to capitalize on the "other half of demographic dividend" (Desai 2010, 12). The gender dividend concept recognizes the unfavourable conditions for women in the labour market as a major obstacle to women's empowerment and autonomy in the market economy. Thus, gender dividend promoters recommend governments implement a series of childcare policies to relocate women from domestic work to economic production, hoping that increased female elites in the market will bring transformative changes to gender equality (Braunstein 2007, 14).

The theorization of gender dividend takes an interdisciplinary approach [fig 1]. The neoclassical economic growth model facilitates the fundamental concept that gender inequality restricts labour supply and productivity, which threatens long-run economic growth and efficient use of human capital. Moreover, the theory integrates a micro-view regarding women's roles at the household level (Pagés & Piras 2010, 15). *The Gender Dividend Report* states that women invest more

in the next generation than men do (Pagés & Piras 2010, 20). Economic participation provides women with the bargaining power to channel more resources to their children and thus improve family and social wellbeing. Gender dividend takes a more holistic lens than demographic dividend by incorporating women's role into the neoclassical framework, welfare pluralism, consumerism and familialism (Pagés & Piras 2010, 20). By removing women's employment barriers, gender dividend depicts an idealized development path with the government-designed social security system as the primary bearer of domestic work, and the women playing dual roles as docile workers and caring mothers to maximize their productive capacity.

Nevertheless, the feasibility of gender dividend as a one-step solution is questionable. Women have systematically weaker access to career development opportunities. According to The Global Gender Gap Report 2020, women occupy 36% of senior roles globally. Only 18% of firms have a female top manager, indicating that many well-educated working women are trapped in middle- and lower-level management (World Economic Forum 2020, 4). This paper discovers that the phenomenon of high female labour participation and low career opportunities is insufficient to maximize women's human capital productivity and fulfill the gender dividend. Based on

empirical evidence from low-skilled migrant labour and high-skilled elite managers in East Asia's economic hubs, the paper provides a gender-aware alternative to the neoclassical framework, and argues that gender dividend restricts female labour to productivity instruments, diminishing the self-autonomy for women to choose freely between domestic work and economic engagement. Ultimately, promoting female labour participation to produce gender dividends is a new form of gendered discipline that highlights women's economic backwardness and encourages women to work in the formal economy without addressing the unfair distribution of reproductive labour at the household level.

Gender Dividend Theorization Limitations

Gender-Blind Neoclassical Framework

The neoclassical growth model sees gender inequality as a form of market failure because a male-dominated production system fails to maximize the productivity of unemployed women. This perspective focuses on education equity and labour allocation. The basic assumption is that educating girls who start with a relatively lower education necessitates

a higher marginal return than educating boys due to the diminishing marginal returns to education (Knowles, Lorgelly and Owen 2002, 126). Similarly, gender segregation in the labour market fails to match the most efficient labour with the most appropriate job when less efficient men are prioritized before the more efficient women (Esteve-Volart 2000, 159). At the household level, the neoclassical model concludes a bargaining problem showing that the productivity loss, due to the asymmetrical allocation of resources between men and women, is systematically correlated with the self-interest of the male producers. Therefore, the household is not a unitary production site that prioritizes collective interests (Braunstein 2007, 18). Gender inequality needs to be solved at the fundamental level by granting women more productive resources, property rights and credit market access to address allocative inefficiencies.

Based on the neoclassical assumption, the gender dividend concept is ideal for addressing stagnating economic growth and unequal household bargaining power in one step. However, this approach fails to engender the macroeconomics of distribution when depicting women as individual laborers and blames

Gender Dividend in Three Dimensions

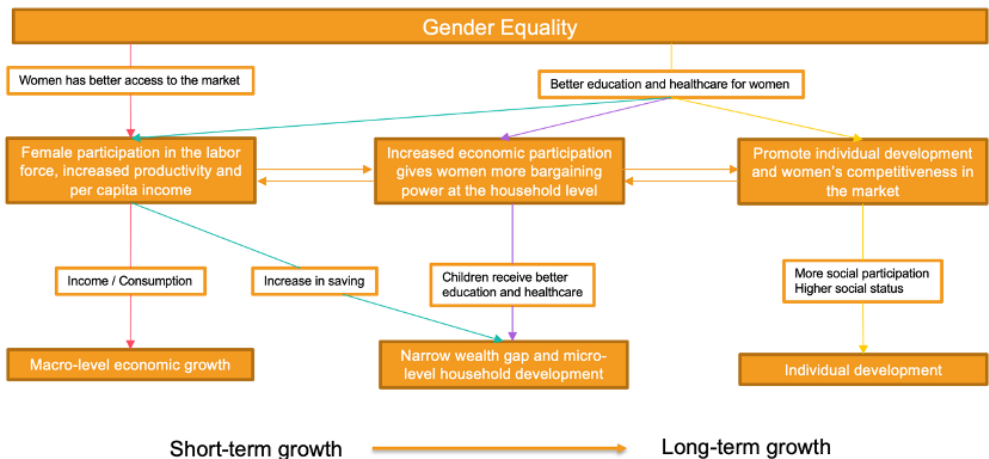


Fig.1 Gender Dividend Theorization

the unfair treatment and inequality on market malfunction. The

liberal feminist approach to women's participation in the contemporary social system recognizes the isolation of women in the modernization process and explores how women are disadvantaged and discriminated against in the existing system (Jaquette 1982, 270). The liberal feminist approach challenges the neoclassical assumption by focusing beyond the worker's identity and incorporating the fundamentally different interests between women and men regarding their institutional roles in the labour market and household.

The feminist view counters the neoclassical assumption that gender-based inequality perpetuates economic growth. In emerging economies, export firms capture the dividend from cheap and low-skilled female manufacturing workers to enhance competitiveness and profitability in the global market. Seguino finds in her research that the trend of gender wage differentials in Taiwan rose from 65.1% to 66.0% from 1981 to 1990, indicating that the export-intensive strategies capitalized on the subordinate position of female labour in the manufacturing industry that allowed factories to obtain a cheap labour force (2000, 447). Contrastingly, the gender wage differentials declined by 1.3% in Korea during the same period. The analysis shows that women's labour participation is not the primary driver of the narrower gap; instead, the upscale shift of industry from the manufacturing sector to high-skilled niche markets has created favourable conditions for women's wage increase (Seguino, 2000, 457). Seguino's findings are significant, as they reveal that the neoclassical framework is gender-blind because it neglects the restricted mobility of working women between female- and male-dominated industries, especially in semi-industrialized economies. Without macro-policies designed to ensure wide access to education and a gender-equal workplace, the patriarchal presence manifests gender hierarchy and traditional gender norms by keeping the female dominated industry

wage low, thus securing males' decision-making power at the household level with higher earnings.

Good Mother Hypothesis

The micro-level positive effects of gender dividend rely on the 'good mother hypothesis,' which assumes that children benefit more in households where the mother controls the greater share of economic resources (Lipman and Stewart, 2005, 134). The hypothesis challenges the traditional neoliberal framework of unitary preference and essentializes the mother's primary responsibility in childcare. Dooley, Lipman and Stewart (2005, 134) use the least square and logit model to show that mothers' share of income is statistically insignificant to their children's outcomes. A notable reason that falsifies the good mother hypothesis is the correlation between wives' earnings and husbands' unobserved characteristics. For example, an elite working woman may marry a man who deviates from the traditional perception of masculinity by handling a larger share of childcare duties. A man who encourages his wife to seek a job would have progressive views and would treat the children similarly (Lipman and Stewart, 2005, 136). Research studies find that both father's and mother's education and income levels are determinants of children's outcomes (Dufflo 2012, 1066; Chou et al. 2010, 55). Therefore, one cannot isolate the impact of mothers' income share by claiming women as the primary bearer of reproductive works.

Moreover, the 'good mother hypothesis' normalizes women's dual role in society as highly-skilled workers and caring mothers, which neglects the conflicting nature between these two roles. Gender dividend reports constantly prioritize a welfare pluralist approach that the government takes a prominent role in transferring the childcare duty from women to society (Pagés & Piras 2010, 4; Pellegrino, D'Amato and Weisberg, 6). Public policy recommendations such as childcare initiatives, after-school programs and affordable education systems aim to reduce the discriminatory bias toward

married women in the labour market and incentivize working women to spend household time in career development. Although these social services can be classified as defamilializing instruments to unburden parts of women's childcaring duty, the market-driven process fails to challenge the existing perception of gender roles (Leitner 2014, 46). Garment workers in Sri Lanka are illustrative examples of the dilemma faced by girls who are stigmatized as Juki girls, meaning those who diverge from the nation's highest ideals of femininity when they leave the community. These female factory workers are pressured to play the dual role as filial daughters and docile workers to meet the social expectation for 'good girls' (Lynch 2016, 38). Emerging economies like Sri Lanka seek to follow the global trend without losing cultural distinctiveness, and women are perceived as the carrier of national tradition (Lynch 2016, 39). Therefore, the core challenge faced by women in economic modernization is the social stigmatization of women's entry into the market as acts of cultural contamination. Defamilialization plays a limited role in altering the societal concern that working women are incapable of becoming role models for future generations to learn about traditional customs. Sri Lanka's example is insightful to the gender dividend case; women in economic development are requested to handle the state's aspiration as a productive worker and the social aspiration as a qualified mother. Consequently, as the traditional social norms problematize the outsourcing of childcare, the defamilialization policies, in the hope to capture gender dividend, undoubtedly pressure women with the double burden of cultural femininity norms and economic development duties.

It is rejected that all empirical data disprove the 'good mother hypothesis' (Murti, Guio and Dreze, 1995, 760; Quisumbing 2003, 139; Ward-Batts 2008, 338). However, these macroeconomic findings fail to explore beyond the quantitative results and derive conclusive theoretical frameworks. Firstly, the positive externality of a good mother is measured by the amount spent on children in these experiments,

without evidence indicating the relation between spending and children's cognitive and behavioural development. Secondly, these experiments prove the correlation between mothers' earnings and spending on children but lack insights into the causal mechanism. It is empirically insufficient to prove that children are better off if their mother plays a dual role in society. The assumption regarding the positive household-level influence of gender dividend needs to highlight the re-division of labour in domestic works instead of restricting the 'good mother' effects.

Neoliberal Imagination of Individual Development

Gender dividend shifts women's values from the reproductive capacity in the household to market production. Women's labour diversification overcomes the existing institutional inequality and reduces patriarchal constraints to promote women as a significant component of the growing economy, rather than victims of the rigid gender hierarchy. Gender dividend promoting strategy regarding women's self-empowerment includes improving workplace gender equality and flexibility to foster equal opportunities and reduce gendered occupational segregation. These strategies, however, assume that household work is a liability because women do not receive financial gains from raising children and domestic work (Braunstein 2007, 25). The neoclassical economic framework measures the increasing opportunity cost of women's time in unpaid household labour. The gender dividend assumptions follow the framework and deny women's specialization of household affairs as the most efficient outcome for individual development and the entire economy.

The undervaluation of women's domestic contributions perpetuates hegemonic neoliberal governmentality that views the market as an "arbiter to resources" and the "harbinger of social good" (Sharma 2008, 25). Similar to other neoliberal development packages, the gender dividend measures empowerment with the universal standards of the

female labour participation rate. The economy-first approach stimulates a top-down configuration of power, which stigmatizes the housewives at the grassroots level as unproductive and backward social members.

Boserup hints that wage is not a simple payment for economically productive work; women's efforts to maintain and reproduce the labour force require social assessment and valuations (1970, 68). The undervaluation of women's reproductive contributions views men as the primary wage earners and family providers, while women are reduced to complementary wage earners. Liberal feminists contend that the modernization process destroys the female economic system. Boserup's perspective on gender wage differentials diverges from this view. Her point supports a Marxist theory that the capitalist system normalizes women's unpaid household work (Jaquette 1982, 274). The Marxist feminist perspective is valuable in assessing the neoliberal imagination of women's self-empowerment in the gender dividend case. The neoliberal development package is designed to increase women's share in the market production pie through their engagement in the originally male sphere, rather than incorporating women's reproductive contribution to increase the size of the pie. Consequently, the concept of gender dividend elucidates that gain in family bargaining power is a privilege exclusive to working women because housewives' contributions are perceived as private affairs, unassociated with macro-level social benefits.

The economy-driven individual development in the gender dividend concepts provides limited practical values in contemporary East Asian economic hubs. Kan and Hertog (2017, 565) conclude that in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, having an additional child is associated with more household work for women, shown by a coefficient of 0.26 [fig.2], but not for men. The research indicates that household work is "women's work" in all four countries regardless of female labour participation. Meanwhile, a positive

correlation between women's fertility preferences and husbands' share of domestic work illustrates that women are overburdened with multiple social roles under the social pressure of "good wife, wise mother." Female migrant caregiver literature by Lan (2006, 47) and Constable (2014, 16) often highlights the contrasting image of elite working women in high-income countries and the marginalized, racialized female migrants from underdeveloped regions. Such a depiction provides limited insights into the dilemma faced by female employers and the growing lucrative caregiving industry. Female migrant workers dominate the caregiving industry to fill in nonmarket labour, showing that household work is still stratified by gender and that male employers are unwilling to take a greater share of household responsibilities. One must recognize that increasing female workforce participation is of marginal importance to eliminating social expectation for the femininity featured by reproductive capacity and household responsibility.

Gender Dividend Application –Elite Women in Shanghai (Extracted from Interviews)

Economic Reform Generation (Born in the 1970s)

Yan worked as a senior marketing manager for over 25 years in a large retail company across multiple Chinese cities. She chose to return home and spend time with her teenage daughter in her late 40s, and she is operating her own international trading business after sending her daughter abroad in recent years. Yan says that she feels empowered with the higher socioeconomic status gained from the constant engagement in economic production. "My husband left me because I was busy working, but I am proud that my financial capacity creates a privileged life for my daughter after our divorce." China's era of economic reform opens potential for additional employment, especially entrepreneurial activities for women. The financial aspiration and ambition to become valuable societal members trigger women to leave their household roles and seek class mobility independently. A 1988 newspaper survey already

showed that the majority of Chinese urban women refused to return to household work (Summerfield 1994, 722).

Although there was no comprehensive theoretical framework for gender dividend, the Chinese government recognized the importance of capitalizing on women’s productivity with state-owned childcare facilities. Yan’s experience demonstrates the rising entitlements and capabilities for Chinese women despite the existence of a double burden (Summerfield 1994, 729). The paid employment opportunities allow women to have alternative sources of income through social engagements, translating to more bargaining power in the household. Most importantly, Yan highlights that creating a better life for one’s children is the primary driving force for her and her colleagues to pursue their career goals. This child-first phenomenon illustrates that most childcare duties are still imposed on women, but they have options to fulfill the responsibilities from economic or reproductive

contributions.

Smart Economics Generation (Born in the 1980s)

Helen is a partner in one of the largest consulting companies. She obtained a number of professional certificates and language skills throughout her career journey, and she frequently works overtime after becoming a partner. Helen thinks she is lucky to have a husband with progressive views about being DINK (dual income, no kids) couples. Nevertheless, Helen describes herself as, “a modern woman from outsider’s views but actually a conservative woman” to justify her desire to bear children. She believes that she is lucky that her family could afford boarding kindergartens and live-in babysitters. In contrast, her colleagues with less supportive families were pressured to leave their work positions. Helen’s case shows that women’s specialization in childcare was further transferred to professional caregivers and private schooling programs. However, the transfer of domestic work provides limited empirical evidence to the re-division of reproductive labour. Helen believes that it is rare for typical Chinese fathers, whether successful or not, to take time on such “trivial matters.”

Helen is confident, from her recruiting experiences, that female candidates tend to be more qualified than their male counterparts. Deloitte’s gender dividend report shows that women’s educational attainments are rapidly catching up in emerging economies (Pellegrino et al. 2011, 4). Still, women’s labour participation lags behind men’s, and they have a relatively higher turnover rate due to family affairs. Helen emphasizes that women with high educational attainment constitute a valuable talent pool, while family duties drag potential female leaders behind. Based on Helen’s opinions, an efficient gender equality policy should focus primarily on women’s workplace

Table 5: OLS regression models of housework participation^a

VARIABLES	Husbands		Wives	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
China	1.075*** (0.227)	0.883 (0.787)	1.478*** (0.143)	0.509 (0.794)
Japan	-1.392*** (0.277)	-2.816 (2.996)	1.414*** (0.165)	0.864 (1.092)
Korea	-0.233 (0.244)	2.964 (2.152)	1.215*** (0.147)	0.872 (1.238)
Has a job	-0.114 (0.456)	-0.101 (0.470)	-0.820*** (0.110)	-0.808*** (0.111)
Spouse has a job	0.880*** (0.166)	0.865*** (0.168)	0.290 (0.216)	0.297 (0.216)
Age	0.040** (0.012)	0.039** (0.013)	0.021* (0.009)	0.020* (0.009)
Number of children <16	-0.078 (0.117)	-0.075 (0.118)	0.264*** (0.066)	0.250*** (0.066)
Household income 2 nd qrt	-0.005 (0.216)	-0.006 (0.218)	-0.185 (0.125)	-0.175 (0.125)
Household income 3 rd qrt	0.102 (0.229)	0.105 (0.231)	-0.186 (0.130)	-0.173 (0.130)
Household income 4 th qrt	-0.218 (0.237)	-0.235 (0.240)	-0.489*** (0.141)	-0.472*** (0.142)
Secondary level	0.051 (0.295)	-0.480 (0.627)	0.039 (0.155)	0.292 (0.499)
Postsecondary level	0.061 (0.351)	-0.428 (0.705)	-0.326 (0.200)	-0.717 (0.554)
Spouse: secondary	0.146 (0.251)	0.572 (0.613)	0.047 (0.180)	-0.333 (0.805)
Spouse: postsecondary	0.401 (0.339)	0.818 (0.724)	0.062 (0.217)	-0.857 (0.835)
China*secondary		0.685 (0.717)		-0.289 (0.523)
China*postsecondary		0.877 (0.852)		0.473 (0.617)

Fig.2 Extracted from *Domestic division of labour and fertility preference in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan* by Kan and Hertog (2017)

opportunities to ensure that women can outsource the domestic duties to professionals and advance their career journey, making them the decision-makers of their life plans.

Gender Dividend Generation (Born in the 1990s)

Peiyao has worked as a project manager in various high-skilled industries, with particular expertise in robotic process automation. Peiyao claims that her extraordinary competence at work has helped her counter the social stigmatization of being a single, working woman. Her parents have never pressured her to become a wife or a mother. Unlike Yan and Helen, who expose the apparent workplace gender discrimination faced in their journey, Peiyao believes that the workplace creates a “gender-neutral” space for all workers to showcase their advantages. “I deny the stereotypical view that women have to act like a man in the workplace to get promoted. I think women have distinct advantages in team building by demonstrating enthusiasm and compassion.” Peiyao’s experiences bring a nuanced scope into the gender dividend case that focuses on the unique value of female labour participants, compared to the group analytics approach that encourages the elimination of gender differentiation.

Peiyao expresses her opinions on the two extremely diverging views regarding China’s recent three-child policy. She firstly points out that Shanghai’s over-congested housing structure constitutes significant reasons for the strong public resistance against the policy, meaning that the opposition offers insufficient implications to Shanghai-featured feminism. She also depicts a harsh reality that women who withdraw from work to bear children view reproductive labour as a more valuable option when facing a career bottleneck. Peiyao’s idea uncovers the fact that the contemporary market offers a lack of room for the promotion of married women beyond the intermediate management level. Compared to the gender dividend’s idealization for the double female roles, most working women are compelled to make trade-offs between working and childbearing under the disadvantageous labour

market circumstances.

Findings from Stories of Elite Women in Shanghai

The three stories are not representative of all working women in the given generation, since their privileged birth circumstances have allowed them better access to education. Nevertheless, Yan, Helen and Peiyao’s career stories demonstrate a progressing pattern in workplace gender equality with the increasing job availability, promotion opportunities, and importantly, chances for social mobility. Yan, Helen and Peiyao all mention a feeling of empowerment from their earned property rights and socioeconomic status. Meanwhile, when discussing their family roles, the difficulties of achieving a work-life balance construct a new dilemma within a system interlocking economic liberation and social differentiation of gender. Their stories imply that women’s career advancement is tied closely to their family relations. Yan asserts that her daughter’s future motivates her work and that divorce is a necessary step to freedom. Helen thinks that her release from the mother role is relevant to the support from her enlightened husband and the private schooling program, which constitute critical factors in her success. Young elite women like Peiyao accomplish impressive achievements in the workplace to escape from the character of the traditional woman. Consequently, one can conclude that a more gender-equal work environment provides negligible improvements to the social perception and requirement for femininity. The gender dividend’s economy-centred perception of women’s value fails to address the systemic invisibilization of domestic work and contradiction of women’s dual roles, thus incentivizing social critics of housewives and workplace double standards for pregnant female workers, to limit women’s capacity in exercising agency.

The increasing female labour participation offers women financial autonomy and household-level bargaining power. Nevertheless, the gender dividend concept considers solely a woman’s worker role to

claim that the future generations are beneficiaries from the changing household spending pattern (Esteve-Volart 2000, 45). Women's roles as mothers are also time-consuming and irreplaceable; these invisible contributions should not be seen as backlashes in the gender dividend paradigm that forcibly pull women out from the liberated workplace. Sen's capability approach stresses freedom from servitude, indicating that economic growth and social reforms must focus beyond wealth to generate a broader range of women's choices (1999, 360). Yan, Helen and Peiyao stress the necessity of policy actions to reduce the adverse impact of women's childcare duties on career development. Yan provides an illustrative example of the policy expected, "the fathers should also have one-year delay for promotions after taking the paternity leave." Although Yan's policy suggestion incurs unavoidable social costs, it represents the voices of the elite working mothers who lose control in their career journeys due to childbearing. Future improvements on the gender dividend concept should assess the effectiveness of defamiliarization instruments in social perception change and then legitimize women's household work in cash values to dissociate traditional housewives with backwardness. Lastly, future scholars are recommended to make policy suggestions regarding the government's interventions to create a genderless workplace.

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