Wife's Decision-Making Power in a Chinese Context: A Marital Dyadic Perspective[1]

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Abstract

Previous studies of women's family status have raised various measurement concerns on wife's family decision-making power. Two major problems often mentioned are a lack of adequate measurement techniques and the failure to use couple-based data. This study examines both questions by providing evidence for a better measurement of marital power. The context is non-western, namely the Chinese society, and Taiwan will be used for illustrative purpose. In terms of wife's family decision-making power, we begin with a description of major theories and their links to power measures. A brief and critical review of the 'final say' measure of marital power is provided. Next, using Taiwan's family survey data, we illustrate how proposed measures of wife's family decision-making power are constructed with a specific emphasis on couple-based data and weighted scheme. Finally, by comparing personal characteristics, structural factors, as well as communication patterns within couples in the multivariate analysis, we demonstrate that the couple-based measure is indeed more effective in representing wife's marital power in the family.

INTRODUCTION

Family sociologists have long been interested in investigating women's status in the private sphere. Due to the prevalence of nuclear families in the West, prior studies of the family power structure were mainly confined to husband–wife dyadic relationship in which the marital power was usually defined as the ability of one spouse to modify or influence the behaviors of the other and to access important familial resources. Empirically, the marital power was often observed through the dynamics of family decision-making process (Shehan and Lee, 1990: Steil, 1997: Yi, et al., 2000). Several methods have been used to measure the type of power between spouses, but none seems to be considered completely satisfactory. While most scholars agree marital power is a multidimensional concept which should include power bases, power processes, and power outcomes, the decision-making outcome model remains predominant in the literature because of its availability as well as its measurable advantage. Relatively speaking, the marital power structure has been inadequately explored in Asian or in Chinese context. Among few studies, the decision-making outcome model again received the most attention (Yi and Tsai, 1989: Chen, et al., 2000: Yi, et al., 2000: Chen, 2002).

Reviewing the literature on marital power in the Chinese family or in other family systems, there are two crucial research caveats yet to be

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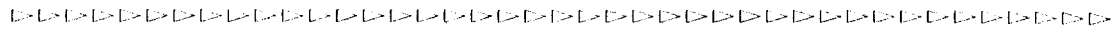
resolved. The first one is related to appropriate family decision items chosen. In order to eliminate potentially confounding effects and to simplify the analysis, the measure of who has the final say on family decisions was usually constructed on the basis of the most important family decision either reported by respondents or arbitrary chosen by researchers. This type of operationalization undoubtedly ignores the complex nature of family dynamics. The other potential flaw refers to the conventional categories in the measurement. The typical way is to categorize all decision-makers into three patterns, namely husband dominance, joint decision, and wife dominance. By restriction to couples only, possible intervention from co-residing family members, the elders in particular, will not be observed and may miss a fundamentally important family process in the non-western context.

To explore the dynamics of family power structure in Chinese society, we first delineate both concept and measurement issues related to women's status in the family by reviewing previous research. In terms of wife's family decision-making power, we begin with a description of major theories and their links to power measures. A brief and critical review of 'final say' measures in the study of marital power is provided. Second, by using Taiwanese data, we focus on how different measures of wife's family decision-making power are constructed, with specific emphasis on couple-based and weighted measures. Finally, linking both personal and structural factors as well as indicators of the power process between spouses, the effectiveness of the proposed measure for wife's family decision-making power is documented.

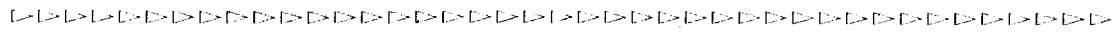## CONCEPT AND DIMENSIONS OF MARRIED WOMEN'S FAMILY STATUS

Women's status is the result of a variety of cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors. The physical separation of women and men actually contributes to and perpetuates gender stratification by reducing women's access to socially valued knowledge and resources (Spain, 1993). Accordingly, early work in gender studies took as a given that social life could be conceptualized as occurring in two mutually exclusive spheres. The concepts of private and public patriarchy may be especially useful in understanding the relationships and mechanisms by which male members of households and the state shape the lives of women. Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression, and public patriarchy is based principally in public site such as employment and the state (Walby, 1990: 26).

Women's inferior status can be explained by combining two forms of patriarchy. Clearly, women's status should be seen as a multidimensional concept, reflecting both material and ideological components. To provide an approach for cross-national comparison on the status of women, Bradley and Khor (1993: 349) suggest that one way to analyze systematically is to conceptualize status broadly in terms of (a) its economic, political, and social dimensions and (b) a public and a private domain within each status dimension. The status of women therefore captures the complexities of the evaluation of women in any one dimension or domain of status and the web of interrelationships in the evaluation of women in different dimensions and domains.

Accordingly, two theoretical and research issues related to the study of women's status need more in-depth exploration. First, while researchers acknowledge the multidimensional nature of status, the economic dimension within the public domain has been found most often in the literature, with less emphasis on the political and social dimensions of status. This phenomenon somewhat reflects that the valuation of women's productive roles in the private sphere is lower than in the labor market. It also ignores the importance and possibility of other bases of women's status within specific cultural and social environments.

Second, despite emphasizing the differentiation of women's status between two domains, an increase in the permeability of the boundary separating the public and the private do-

mains or a reconfiguration of this distinction has been observed with the development of the capitalist economy and political citizenship (Mann, 1986). In particular, the degree of state intervention into family institutions and practices could reflect a decreased significance of the differentiation between two domains, but there is no agreement on whether this intervention has substantially improved women's family status (Wolf, 1985: Cheng and Hsiung, 1992).

MEASUREMENT OF MARRIED WOMEN'S FAMILY STATUS: FAMILY DECISION-MAKING POWER

Although several attempts to create an index of women's status have been made (Whyte, 1978: Andrews, 1982), there is no commonly accepted measure. Empirically, the status of women in the family often refers to their status relative to male members and it might best be understood as a reflection of the differences in husband's and wife's marital power (Steil, 1997), which is regulated through a set of socially constructed relations and gendered roles.

Despite unsettled concept and measurement debates on marital power, most scholars agree that it is a multidimensional concept which should include power bases (i.e., authority, attractiveness to each other), processes (i.e., problem-solving, conflict-resolution), and outcomes (i.e., who makes decisions, who wins) (Olson and Cromwell, 1975: McDonald, 1980: Szinovacz, 1987: Shehan and Lee, 1990). Due to the *measurability* of family decision-making power, previous studies mainly focused on the outcome of marital power. And, there is little concern with the discrepancies and conflicts that occur between spouses throughout power process (Yi and Lu, 1993). This often is the case because of lack of sufficient information from husband and wife within the same dyad.

Validity and Reliability of Final Say Measure

Efforts to measure power are obviously linked with definitions of what it is (Dallos and Dallos, 1997). The self-report instrument has been designed and used in many social studies for collecting respondents' perceptions on various individual and interpersonal issues. Using this technique, researchers have measured marital power by asking *who wins* in negotiations, *who realizes their objectives the most* or *who has final say and makes this decision*. Due to heavily reliance upon the final say measure and generally gathering information from wives only, Safilios-Rothschild (1970) have questioned the validity as well as reliability of measure and criticized it as one kind of *women's family sociology*.

With regard to the validity issue, while some have suggested that researchers abandon the final say decision measure and even the concept of marital power itself (Turk, 1974), Allen (1984) argues such a conclusion may be premature. He further indicates the results in previous studies may have dubious validity because of calculation errors, improper procedures, and the lack of external criterion variables against which the meaning of intercorrelations among measures can be assessed. "Unless the analytical procedures contemplated are given as careful consideration as is given to measurement, sampling representativeness, and other components of a well-designed research project, findings obtained about a host of family-related phenomena ultimately may themselves be found to be of dubious validity (p. 627)."

As for the internal consistency of the final say measure, several studies have shown reliability issue is not as serious as Safilios-Rothschild's critique. Through a secondary analysis of five data sets gathered from various studies of marital power, Allen and Straus (1984) assess the internal consistency of each data set and conclude that the reliability of the 'final say' measure is quite stable. While their findings show that there is no serious flaw related to internal consistency, the results suggest the reliability of children's responses is higher than those for either husbands or wives. Accordingly, they imply that the best choice of respondent for observation of final say decision power would be children. Next best would be wives and last choice would be

husbands. This implication reflects the most serious problem existing in the studies of marital power and decision-making power—husband-wife reporting consistency—, another critique from Safilios-Rothschild.

Husband-Wife Reporting Consistency

Reliance on wife's report has been justified on grounds of economy and sample size, convenience, and her superior knowledge of household behavior (Huber and Spitze, 1983). However, some small-scale studies have found discrepancies between husband-wife reports either on household tasks or on decision-making items (Booth and Welch, 1978: Douglas and Wind, 1978). Coleman and Straus (1986) argue that it is not the amount of power per se, but the level of consensus concerning power relations that is related to conflict behaviors. Moreover, researchers suggest the discrepancy is not a methodological issue at all, but rather a substantive one, since it results from the differentially perceived realities experienced by the two spouses (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970: Fox and Murry, 2000).

Although there is no solution to husband-wife discrepancies, it is crucial to investigate the extent, sources, and consequences of inconsistent reports from both sides which in turn would be used to explain functioning in the family. Huber and Spitze (1983) have found that spousal discrepancy in marital power may arise from several sources. For example, the inconsistency in results may be due to variability among men and women in their perceived levels of power. Inconsistency may arise from vagueness in question wording. Most importantly, a couple's sex-role ideology might influence consistency of reporting. Gruber and White (1986) indicate that there are gender differences in self-reported use of personal power strategies. Both males and females are likely to report that men-in-general and women-in-general exhibit sex-stereotyped differences in the use of power strategies. Subjects' self-reported use of personal power strategies is likely to differ from the usage pattern they attribute to men-in-general and women-in-general.

Regarding family decision-making patterns, Huber and Spitze (1983) illustrate that "researchers would derive the same conclusions about aggregate participation by interviewing husbands or wives. Dual reports may be unnecessary for decision-making. They might serve to reduce error, particularly among less educated and older couples, but only at great expense (p. 73)." This conclusion may be premature. The implication might fit the distribution of decision-making patterns itself; that is, if researchers only want to know who has final say on each individual decision item at the aggregate level. On the contrary, if researchers' interest is to explore the interactional relations in marital power, it is not adequate to rely on only one spouse and neglect any potential discrepancy. With this consideration, it is appropriate to use couple-based data for understanding the level of discrepancy and conflict within a couple (Szinovacz and Egley, 1995).

Use of Weighting Schemes in Final Say Measure

Bradley and Khor (1993) note that no theory has suggested a weighting scheme for the component indicators of an index for the status of women. The choice of the component indicators and the method by which the indicators are combined reflect the researcher's perspective, regardless of whether this has been explicitly acknowledged. Even if the researcher does not address explicitly the weighting of the indicators in the analysis, the implicit assumption is merely that each indicator contributes equally to the index. As a result, the process by which one constructs an index directly affects the interpretation of the research findings.

While most researchers agree with the necessity of a weighting scheme, there is no agreement on weighting methods and their efficacy. In general, decisions weighted by importance are commonly accepted in the study of decision-making between spouses. Bahr and his colleagues (1974) suggest decision items could be weighted by the amount of conflict involved in making a particular deci-
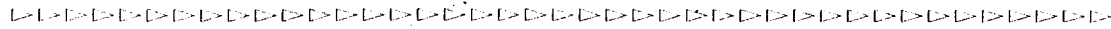
TABLE 1. THE PROPORTIONS OF WIFE'S INVOLVEMENT IN EACH FAMILY DECISION ITEMS AND DIMENSIONS (N=516)

Decision Item	H's Answer	W's Answer	Decision Dimension	H's Answer	W's Answer
Husband's job	10.47	12.02	Husband's job	10.47	12.02
Wife's job	76.55	72.87	Wife's job	76.55	72.87
Household expenses	76.55	76.55	Financial issues	83.14	82.36
Savings & investment	71.12	68.60			
Social affairs	63.76	63.76	Social affairs	63.76	63.76
House purchase	59.50	57.36	Housing issues	64.73	61.24
Housing/moving decision	57.17	56.20			
Co-residence with elders	47.29	47.48	Elder's arrangement	55.04	56.20
Parental support	48.06	49.03			
Fertility decision	75.78	76.55	Fertility decision	75.78	76.55
Children's discipline	82.95	81.78	Children's issues	83.72	83.53
Children's schooling	53.68	52.91			

sion, but no empirical study was presented to test their hypothesis. Though some studies find little difference between spouses' weighted final say scores, Allen and Straus (1984) suggest the more simply constructed unweighted version seems to have more validity and reliability than either of the weighted versions used in their study.

In response to the critique of *women's family sociology*, a proposed measure representing women's family decision-making power will be constructed by using couple data. The analytical data are drawn from *The Economic Development and Female's Family Status in Taiwan*. The survey's sampling frame consisted of married women ages 20–64. In order to meet the demands of randomization and representation, three stages of stratified random sampling procedure on the basis of the rule of probabilities proportional to sizes (PPS) were used in Taiwan's sample. In this study, we use couple data for examining the level of discrepancies between spouses and constructing couple-based measures of marital power. In total, this island-wide representative sample includes 516 Taiwanese couples.

STEPS IN CONSTRUCTING MEASURES OF WIFE'S FAMILY DECISION-MAKING POWER

1. Major Dimensions of Family Decisions

Since the original data set includes 13 fam-

ily decision items, the factor analysis is used to categorize decision items with similar decision-making patterns for representing the major dimensions of family decisions. The essential purpose of using this analytical method is to group those associated decision items together instead of constructing any hypothetical variable. By applying this method on both husband's and wife's data and excluding children's marriage item because of more missing cases, eight dimensions of family decisions are generated, including *husband's job, wife's job, financial issues, social affairs, housing issues, elder's arrangement, fertility decision,* and *children's issues* (see Table 1). In other words, because both decision items of household expenses and saving/investment (left side) have similar decision-making pattern, they are integrated as one dimension in terms of financial issues (right side).

2. Wife's Involvement in Major Dimensions of Family Decisions

To represent the degree of wife's involvement in each dimension of family affairs instead of showing either husband or wife with dominance, the popular-used family decision-making patterns (husband mainly, joint, wife mainly) are re-classified into two categories, in terms of *wife having final say individually or jointly* and *wife without any say* on specific family decision. Although there is no literature to support the necessity and adequacy of

this new classification, it is advantageous for constructing the measure of wife's decision-making power because it avoids an extreme distribution of decision-making patterns in some dimensions.

After re-classifying the family decision-making patterns, Table 1 presents the results of each family decision item for Taiwan's couples (left side). While wives are least likely to have final say on their husbands' job, they indeed participate in other important family decisions such as family economy, housing, children's discipline and schooling according to both husband's and wife's samples. As to the decisions related to parental support and co-residence decisions, the results show that less than 50 percent of Taiwanese wives engaged in these two decisions.

Since the new measure of wife's family decision-making power is constructed on the basis of the family decision dimensions, it is necessary to convert those decision items sharing similar decision-making patterns into the same decision dimension. A 2 by 2 matrix is used to explain how these items are converted into composite dimensions as follows:

Decision 2

		Wife Involved	
		Yes	No
Decision 1	Yes	X_{11}	X_{12}
	No	X_{21}	X_{22}

Decision 1 and decision 2 refer to those two decision items belonging to the same dimension. 'Yes' and 'No' denote 'wife could influence this decision' and 'wife has no say on this decision,' respectively. According to this matrix, there are four combinations, X_{11}, X_{12}, X_{21}, and X_{22}. X_{11} indicates 'wife could influence this decision,' while X_{12} and X_{21} indicate the wife is involved in making one of the two decisions. Since we assume decision 1 and decision 2 share more commonality and represent the same dimension of family decisions, these two decisions can be substituted for each other conceptually. Accordingly, both X_{12} and X_{21} are grouped into the same category as X_{11}. For instance, 76.55% and 71.12% of husbands reported that their wives participated in decisions of household expenses and saving/investment. In terms of dimension of financial issues, there are 83.14% of husbands reported their spouses' involvement either only one decision or both.

3. Dealing Discrepancies within Couples on Wife's Family Decision-Making Power

With two sets of estimates based on husband's and wife's one-side reports, the next key task is to examine discrepancies regarding wife's involvement within couples. In Table 2, the second column shows the extent of inconsistency between husband's and wife's answers on wife's involvement in each dimension of family decisions. While married Taiwanese women have the least say in family decisions which are traditionally dominated

TABLE 2. THE DISCREPANCIES WITHIN TAIWANESE COUPLES ON WIFE'S INVOLVEMENT IN EACH DIMENSION OF FAMILY DECISIONS ($N=516$)

	% of Inconsistency between H & W	Inconsistent Couples		Consistent Couples % of W Involved
		H's Answer # of W Involved	W's Answer # of W Involved	
Husband's job	8.14 (42)	17	25	7.81
Wife's job	16.47	52	33	79.58
Financial issues	15.50	43	37	87.22
Social affairs	13.18	34	34	67.32
Housing issues	13.57	44	26	65.02
Elder's arrangement	18.22	44	50	46.81
Fertility decision	13.95	34	38	80.41
Children's isues	7.95	21	20	86.53

by husbands themselves or elderly family members, the results show the degree of inconsistency between spouses are different significantly on two dimensions, husband's job and elder's arrangement.

Among 516 couples, only 42 couples (8.14%) have inconsistent answers, with 17 husbands and 25 wives (not in the same dyad) reporting that wife has a final say on her husband's job. In contrast, the dimension of elder's arrangement is major source of disagreement within couples (18.22%). Since adult sons (especially oldest son) are seen as the major care providers and financial supporters, in most situations son(s) and their parents together make the final decisions related to these arrangements. Yet, despite being excluded from negotiating process by their husbands, other male and elderly family members, the finding seems to indicate few women might have a little say on this family decision. That is w,hy more disagreement is raised in this dimension.

Unlike husband's job and elder's arrangement, more wives could influence family decisions which are directed to conjugal and parent–child relations. It is reasonable that Taiwanese couples have the least disagreement regarding children's issues (7.95%). Not only wives have a higher degree of involvement but husbands also perceive this situation in their families. The results among those inconsistent couples indicate that husbands seem to be more likely to overestimate the wife's participation in these dimensions of family decisions, while corresponding wives tend to underestimate their degree of involvement.

Since these comparisons are separated from each dimension of family decisions, there is no way to identify the degree of disagreement *within each couple*. Therefore, we again calculate the degree of discrepancy between spouses by adding all disagreements in dimensions of family decisions for each couple. The results (not presenting here) show that only 45.93% of couples have totally consistent answers regarding wife's involvement, and about 16% of couples showing disagreement on at least three decision dimensions. In other words, it is inadequate to rely upon one spouse's response alone for generating wife's family decision-making power.

4. Couple-Based Measure of Wife's Family Decision-Making Power

To construct an adequate measure of women's family decision-making power, a single couple-based composite variable combining the answers from husband and wife across major dimensions of family decisions is created. In essence, there are three considerations for constructing a couple-based composite measure: (1) similarities or differences in husband's and wife's characteristics, (2) concurrence or non-concurrence in attitudes and behaviors, and (3) the distribution of cell counts (Oladosu, 1999). Since the differences in both spouses' characteristics will be used to explain the differences in family decision-making power of married women and the potential problem rising from the cell counts is not significant, the construction of the new measure is mainly concerned with the concurrence and non-concurrence of attitudes and behaviors. Hence, the consensus between husband's and wife's answers on each dimension of family decisions is the major criteria for constructing the new measure.

Dimension A	Husband's report of wife's involvement	
	Yes	No
Wife's report of wife's involvement — Yes	X_{11}	X_{12}
No	X_{21}	X_{22}

A 2 by 2 matrix shown above is used to explain how different scores are assigned to construct the new measure. Diagonal cells, X_{11} and X_{22} in the cross-tabulated table, display both spouses with concurrent answers on Dimension A. It is least controversial to assign different scores for these two cells representing women's family decision-making power. In this study, 3 and 0 are assigned to X_{11} and X_{22}, respectively. Here, X_{11} represents the wife has the "final say" on Dimension A and it was reported by both husband and wife. Therefore, the assigned power score on Dimension A for a couple is 3 points. On the contrary, X_{22}

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refers to both spouses reporting that wife was not able to add opinion on decisions belonging to Dimension A, and then 0 point is assigned.

Off-diagonal cells, X_{12} and X_{21}, reflect non-concurrent answers within a couple. Is it adequate to assign the same score to these two cells? If yes, why is this assignment conceptually or theoretically acceptable? If not, what is a better solution? Since relatively few studies have focused on the couple-based measurement issues, it is difficult to find an appropriate example for answering the above questions and assigning adequate scores to these two cells. For this reason, traditional family practice and socially constructed gender roles are used to determine the assigned scores.

First, all dimensions of family decisions are divided into two groups. Group I refers to those dimensions, including wife's job, financial issues, social affairs, housing issues, fertility decision, and children's issues that are more likely to allow wife's involvement. Husband's job and elder's arrangement are included in the second group because they reflect two family domains highly dominated by husbands and/or other male family members.

Second, comparing the relative difficulty of wife's involvement in each dimension, two scores (2 and 1) are assigned conceptually to X_{12} and X_{21}. Because wives are more likely to have the final say on the dimensions in the first group, the rules for assigning scores are different from the second group. For instance, if a wife said that she could affect the decision of children's issues despite her husband's saying she could not, the assigned score for this situation is 2 points. The assumption for this assignment is concerned with the likelihood of the husband underestimating the wife's involvement.

On the other hand, traditionally husbands could dominate the decision of their own job. Therefore, if a husband said his wife could influence this decision while wife's answer is no, the assigned score should be higher than for a couple in which the husband's answer is no but the wife said she can influence her husband's working decision. This assignment assumes that the degree of wife's involvement in this group of family decisions will be higher with power granted from the husbands.

TABLE 3. PERCEIVED MOST IMPORTANT FAMILY DECISION ITEM AMONG TAIWANESE COUPLE

	Same answer	Different	
		H's	W's
Husband's job	5.1	13.5	10.7
Wife's job	0.4	0	1.2
Household expenses	27.9	18.9	22.1
Savings & investment	12.5	13.9	13.5
Social affairs	1.1	1.2	1.2
House purchase	18.7	11.5	11.5
Housing/Moving decision	0.4	0.4	0
Co-residence with elders	0	0.8	1.7
Parental support	1.5	7.0	0.4
Fertility decision	0	0.4	0.4
Children's discipline	22.1	18.5	23.4
Children's schooling	6.6	9.0	8.6
Children's marriage	3.7	3.7	4.1
Don't know, N/A, missing	0	1.2	1.2
Sample size	272	244	

Note: To avoid a higher percentage of uncertain answer (i.e. don't know, N/A, and missing), the most important family decision item will be adjusted by four family economic management items as indicated in the shaded categories.
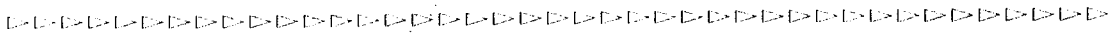
5. Weights for Various Dimensions of Family Decisions

Despite the wide use of wife's family decision-making power in representing women's family status, most scholars have questioned the adequacy of assigning equal weights to different family decision. To respond to this critique and identify the relative importance among dimensions, one set of weights is generated from couples' perceptions of 'what is the most important family decision.' The weights are then assigned to the newly constructed couple-based measures.

In the questionnaire, each respondent was asked to identify which family decision was the most important one in his/her family. The same as the discrepancy on the report of the degree of wife's involvement in family decisions within couples, Table 3 indicates that slightly more than 50 percent of Taiwanese couples (272 couples) have the same answer on which decision is the most important one in their families. Since more respondents may report 'don't know' and 'difficult to report', the other question was added in the questionnaires. For those who could not or did not answer the first question, they were asked to answer the second question: "among *household expenses, saving and investment, social affair,* and *house purchase,* which one is the most important family decision?" Before adding the reports derived from the second question, the decision related to children's discipline was regarded as the most important family item among most Taiwanese respondents. After adjusting for four family economy items for those who failed to respond to the primary question, the decision of household expenses was ranked as most important family decision.

With regard to non-concurrent couples, in addition to family economy and children's discipline decisions, husbands and wives separately have viewed the decision of husband's job as the most important decision, but this opinion was not shared between spouses within the same marital unit. According to these comparisons within and between couples, the results support the assertion that it is inadequate to assign each family decision the same importance or, empirically speaking, the same weight. Therefore, using the relative importance of each family decision approved by couples with and without consistent perceptions, a set of weights is generated and assigned to the eight major dimensions of family decisions. Combining these weights with the previous couple-based measure on women's family decision-making power, a new weighted measure representing wife's family status is created.

Table 4 displays how these weights are calculated based on the distribution of important family decisions (as shown in Table 3). Since all decision items have been categorized conceptually into eight dimensions, the relative importance of each dimension is represented

TABLE 4. GENERATED WEIGHTS FOR MAJOR DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY DECISIONS: BASED ON PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF TAIWANESE COUPLES

Dimension	Consistent	Inconsistent		Average	Weight
		Husband	Wife		
Husband's job	5.1	13.5	10.7	8.4	0.088
Wife's job	0.4	0	1.2	0.5	0.005
Financial issues	40.4	32.8	35.6	37.5	0.392
Social affairs	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.1	0.012
Housing issues	19.1	11.9	11.5	15.6	0.163
Elder's arrangement	1.5	7.8	2.1	3.1	0.033
Fertility decision	0	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.002
Children's issues	28.7	27.5	32.0	29.2	0.305
Sample size	272	244		516	516

TABLE 5. REGRESSION RESULTS OF FOUR MEASURES OF WIFE'S FAMILY DECISION-MAKING POWER AMONG TAIWANESE COUPLES

Independent variables	Husband's measure	Wife's measure	Couple-based measure	Weighted measure
Wife's age	−0.043	−0.057[+]	−0.050[+]	−0.057[+]
Age gap of couple	−0.180***	−0.166**	−0.171***	−0.191***
Wife's education				
None & elementary	(ref)			
Junior high	0.685	1.110	0.861	1.001
Senior high	1.328	1.648[+]	1.432[+]	1.632[+]
College & over	1.711	2.621*	2.150*	2.443*
Husband's education				
None & elementary	(ref)			
Junior high	0.580	−0.108	0.083	0.158
Senior high	−0.805	−1.194	−1.058	−1.155
College & over	−0.322	−1.385	−0.910	−1.041
Wife's work				
None & housewife	(ref)			
Informal	1.635**	1.043[+]	1.231*	1.375*
Formal	0.668	0.607	0.604	0.680
Husband's work				
None & housewife	(ref)			
Informal	0.199	1.023	0.700	0.779
Formal	0.906	0.432	0.685	0.719
Family structure				
Stem & extended	(ref)			
Nuclear	0.932[+]	0.899[+]	0.883*	0.980[+]
Perceived disagreement				
No disagreement	(ref)			
H or W/disagreement	0.597	1.165[+]	0.885	0.942
H & W/disagreement	1.067[+]	0.883[+]	0.979[+]	1.040[+]
Observed disagreement	−0.306[+]	−0.903***	−0.681***	−0.768***
Sex-role attitudes				
Wife	0.300***	0.359***	0.333***	0.383***
Husband	0.141*	0.137[+]	0.135*	0.146*
Marital arrangement				
Decided by elderly	(ref)			
Decided by couple	−0.244	−0.095	−0.145	−0.251
Child care				
Wife solely	(ref)			
Help from others	−0.238	−0.527	−0.361	−0.434
Household tasks				
Wife solely	(ref)			
Help from others	−0.761	−0.186	−0.337	−0.404
Wife's ethnicity				
Fukienese	(ref)			
Hakka	−0.853	−0.989	−1.021	−1.167[+]
Mainlander	−1.991*	−1.111	−1.443	−1.634[+]
Husband's ethnicity				
Fukienese	(ref)			
Hakka	0.463	−0.372	−0.028	−0.065
Mainlander	1.903*	1.240	1.522*	1.676[+]

TABLE 5. CONTINUED

Independent variables	Husband's measure	Wife's measure	Couple-based measure	Weighted measure
Residence				
Rural	(ref)			
Town	−2.177***	−1.480*	−1.754**	−1.952**
Urban	−0.531	−0.118	−0.247	−0.234
Intercept	10.615***	10.438***	10.449***	12.122***
R^2	0.228	0.273	0.274	0.275
R^2 adjusted	0.186	0.233	0.234	0.234

Note: + $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests)

by corresponding family decision(s). Here is an example showing how the value-based weight is generated and assigned to the dimension of financial issues.

Couple with same answer (272 couples)

Financial Issues was seen as the most important decision: 40.4% (27.9% of household expenses + 12.5% of savings & investment)

Couples with different answers (244 couples)

Financial Issues was chosen by husbands: 32.8% (18.9% of household expenses + 13.9% of savings & investment)

Financial Issues was chosen by wives: 35.6% (22.1% of household expenses + 13.5% of savings & investment)

Average Importance of Financial Issues of All Couples

$$\frac{40.4 \times 272 + \{(32.8 + 35.6)^*244/2\}}{272 + 244} = 37.5\%$$

With the new averages for major dimensions of family decisions adjusted for both consistent and inconsistent couples' answers, another percentage distribution (the fifth column in Table 4) of these dimensions showing the relative importance is calculated. For example, the calculation of the weight of financial issues is using its new average (37.5%) as numerator and divided by the subtotal of new averages (95.6%) of eight dimensions of family decision. Consequently, the generated weight for financial issues is equal to 0.392. They are used as the weights for constructing the weighted measure of wife's family decision-

making power.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MEASURES OF WIFE'S FAMILY DECISION-MAKING POWER

Conventionally, the measure of wife's family decision-making power was derived only from one spouse, typically from wife's reports. In this measure, there is no way to examine whether the wife's answers reflect the power relationship and possible disagreement between herself and her husband. To overcome this flaw, employing two operational schemes, the degree of discrepancy within couple on wife's involvement in family decisions and the relative importance of these decisions, the new couple-based and weighted measures of wife's family decision-making power are created.

We also construct two conventional measures relying on husband's and wife's reports separately. There are only two assigned scores, 3 and 0, for representing the husband's or wife's report on wife's involvement in each individual decision dimension. Accordingly, four measures of wife's family decision-making power are created. The results show that couples with totally consistent answers on the extent of wife's involvement have higher power measures for wives than those couples with inconsistent answers. Among couples with inconsistent answers regarding marital power, husbands seem to be more likely to overestimate their wives' family decision-making power than their wives (15.01 points vs. 14.75 points on average).

To verify the effectiveness of newly con-

structed couple-based and weighted measures of women's family decision-making power, we compare all four measures by using a multivariate analysis of how major individual-, couple-, and household-level factors affect the exercise of marital power separately and jointly. Considering the main purpose of this study is to introduce the method for constructing new measure, the detailed rationales regarding the impacts of these factors on wife's decision-making power are removed.

Using four different power measures as dependent variables, Table 5 presents the results of regression analysis applying to Taiwanese couples. The results show that approximately 23.4% of the variation in couple-based power measure can be explained by using these explanatory factors. Considering the change in R-square, the full model is less able to explain the variation in the measure based on husband's own reports (adjusted $R^2 = 0.186$). In addition, in this model both husband's and wife's education do not have significant effects in predicting wife's family decision-making power. Yet, wife's informal employment status shows a larger statistically significant positive impact on their power ($b = 1.635$) in this model using husband's reports.

Comparing wife's reports, couple-based, and weighted couple-based measures, there is little increase in the adjusted R-squares across the three models. The influential effects of explanatory variables are similar in these models, except having slightly changes in the significant level across models. These findings may imply, for Taiwan couples, that wife's reports on family issues and marital relations are somewhat more believable than that of husband. Moreover, the fit of the model will be improved by considering and comparing both spouses' answers and the importance of different dimensions of family issues.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Previous studies of women's status and marital power have raised various measurement concerns on wife's family decision-making power. Two major problems often mentioned are a lack of adequate measure-

ment techniques and the failure to use couple-based data sources. The technical obstacle, although complicated, requires a return to the original theoretical formulation in order to derive valid construction. By doing so, it allows us to reach an operational definition of the decision-making power, and to result in a comprehensive empirical measure. Since the data set used in this study was intended to overcome the previous measurement problem by collecting information from both spouses, we are able to construct a couple-based measure.

It is evident that couple data are crucial to overcome the problem of disagreement on who has the final say in analyzing the marital process between spouses. In this study, two marital power indicators, namely, the unweighted and weighted couple-based measures, are constructed to reflect married women's decision-making power at home. Furthermore, the proposed couple-based measures are presented in relation to two conventional power indicators— reports by husband's and by wife's samples only. In other words, the effectiveness of the proposed measure versus other conventional measurement is compared.

Since there have been inadequate references on couple-based measures, the consistency of reports between spouses as well as the traditional gender norms practiced in the family are used as two criteria in the construction of measurement. Our analyses show that both unweighted and weighted couple-based measures, as expected, are better measures in term of reflecting true spousal relations. In contrast, to reply on one spousal report, either husband's or wife's, tends to create problems such as overestimation or underestimation of women's decision-making power. Despite the possibility to better capture the dynamic process between spouses, however, we do not find significant increase in the explained variance for couple-based measures in the model of multivariate analysis.

Overall, this study documents the importance and the effectiveness of the marital dyadic perspective in the study of conjugal relations. Couple-based measures have the ex-

pected advantage of providing more dynamic information of both spouses. Taken the complex familial process in Chinese or in East-Asian societies into account, conjugal pair as unit of study brings out special meanings and implication to the changing family system. Conjugal disparity has also shown to be crucial in studying conjugal attitudes toward family values and family process (Chien and Yi, 2004). Hence, to collect couple data in future family studies will undoubtedly contribute to the explication of family patterns in this region.

[NOTE]

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