

Intergenerational Transmission of Reproductive Behavior and Value of Children in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Taiwan, along with her counterparts in the East Asia, has experienced very low fertility in recent years. To explore the institutional context of low fertility, it is important to consider values of having children, expenses of giving and raising a child as well as the resources a family or a woman has at the given life stage. Analyzing a recently completed 3-generation sample of grandmothers, their daughters, and daughter's adolescent children, the aim of this paper is to examine the relationship of socio-economic contexts, value of children, and reproductive behaviors. To delineate impact of the institutional context, middle class vs. blue-collar as well as rural vs. urban background are compared. The result shows that psychological benefits of having children are the most reported reasons while personal and financial constraints are reasons not to have a child over generations. Grandmothers and mothers are also compared with respect to fertility-related attitudes and their actual reproductive behaviors.

Analyzing a recently completed 3-generation sample of grandmothers, their daughters, this paper will examine the value of children three subsamples reveal. Individual, familial and social contextual factors are presumed to account for the variation, and their relative importance in explaining different values held will be reported. A special emphasis is put on the social class and rural urban differences in order to capture possible social change effects. We assume that the VOC expressed by each generation have significant implication toward their actual reproductive behaviors.

The Significance of VOC Study

- 1. The VOC study in the 1970s.** Fawcett, Arnold and their colleagues initiated and coordinated the very first wave study named “Value of Children” (VOC) in the early 1970s, when overpopulation was a universal problem. This cross-national research design was carried out in six countries--Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Philippine, Thailand, and the United States (Hawaii only)--between 1971 and 1972. The main purpose was to explore individuals’ perceptions on the advantages and costs of having children as well as their consequent impact on the actual reproductive behaviors. To propose effective policy for reducing the pace of population growth was the ultimate intention. Therefore, the 1970 VOC study can be characterized as population-control-oriented cross-national research. The earlier findings argued that economic, cultural, normative, and psychological factors should be taken into account in explaining the fertility rate. The perceived value of having children was proposed to be the central mediator which tends to be subject to variation from changes in society and its respective culture.
- 2. The special focus of VOC study in the 2000s.** The 2nd-wave VOC study took place in the early 2000s. The external circumstance has changed from overpopulation to under-population for many countries in three decades. Headed by German social scientists, with Trommsdorff and Nauck as principle investigators,¹ the new VOC study has a new focus on the intergenerational transmission of the value placed upon children. Starting with six societies, it is hypothesized that value transmission across three generations functions as the key mechanism affecting teenagers’ value toward having children or not. To date, nearly 20 countries have participated in this cross-cultural study. In addition to the main concern on fertility motives and behaviors embedded in the original VOC, the new study expands the sampling design from teenagers to their mothers and grandmothers.

¹ Trommsdorff, G., & Nauck, B. 2005. The value of children in cross-cultural perspective: Case studies from eight societies. Lengerich, Germany: Pabst Sciences.

3. The Taiwan research setting. For the 2nd-wave Taiwan VOC project, two major concerns determine the research design. One is the intention to compare findings of VOC between the early 1970s and mid-2000s; the other is to compare findings of Taiwanese patterns with those of other societies. Accordingly, three corresponding datasets were collected from 2004 to 2007. The sample consists of 1194 adolescent children, 816 mothers and 347 grandmothers. The proposed paper will present findings by linking 347 3-generation data. Furthermore, to make meaningful comparison with the 1st wave Taiwan VOC study, a similar research design needs to be continued. Hence, purposive sampling with a goal of duplicating the original sampling areas and to encompass social class and rural urban differentiation is performed. As a result, the original classification of urban middle class, urban labor class and rural residents constitute three major components of Taiwan VOC samples in the 1970s as well as in the mid-2000s.

It should be pointed out that the new focus on the intergenerational transmission of VOC fits very well with the Taiwan context. Under the traditional norm of patrilocal residence, approximately one third of family structures are families with three generations (Weinstein et al., 1990; Yi and Chang, 1996). Among typical Taiwanese adolescents, almost half have co-residence experience with grandparents in early childhood (Yi, et al., 2006). This implies that along with an aging population, the frequency of intergenerational interaction in Taiwan may become more important. Consequently, family context may become more significant in shaping the individual value orientation. It will be interesting to investigate the outcome of generational interactions in the domestic field on the family values held by the younger generation.

Education as a differentiating factor. In addition to examining the variation of value of children over generations, grandmothers and mothers are also compared with respect to fertility-related attitudes and their actual reproductive behaviors. Previous studies indicate that the higher the levels of education women received, the less they attribute value to having children. The tendency is especially strong for women with a university education who ascribe a lower value to parenthood as a source of emotional benefits, maturity, and life success. They less often perceive parenthood as a natural part of humanity and less frequently agree with the statement that one's social status, life continuity, or family life is derived from parenthood. Other countries' research has improved that, with increasing education, there is a decrease in the number of women who agree with the statement "having a child is one of one's greatest life goals (Trommsdorff and Nauck, 2005)." Therefore, the impact of women's education on VOC and reproductive behavior will also be examined in Taiwan context.