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Zhang Li: Male Fertility Patterns and Determinants The Springer Series on Demographic Methods and Population Analysis. Dordrecht. Springer, n 27, 2011, 206 pp

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Research on male fertility is rare. Technical reasons are often evoked for this scarcity. One set of reasons is related to the difficulty of knowing for certain who is the child's father when a birth is registered. In the case of individual declarations in censuses or surveys, men more often omit one or more of their children, especially those born in previous unions. These technical reasons also conceal ideological ones, however. Fertility is often considered as a female concern by social scientists and even by policy makers. Contraception and family planning measures are almost always directed toward women. Men, for their part, are considered to play a minor role in fertility decisions and behaviors. Even at the time when formal demography led the discipline of population studies, population models, such as the stationary population model, were based on a one-sex (female) approach. At the beginning of his monograph on male fertility, Zhang mentions that of the 75,000 fertility studies he tracked in the Popline data base, "...only 381 dealt with fertility and reproduction behaviors involving males conducted between 1950 and 2000, two-third of which were biological and medical in orientation" (p. 3). In this context, Zhang's book can be considered as pioneering effort to advance male fertility studies. Despite its title, the monograph is not exclusively a study on male fertility but a systematic attempt to compare male and female fertility across time and space. The book is structured by chapters that propose a specific comparative study of male and female fertility, all of them original, except for two that have already been published in journals. The chapters are grouped into two sections preceded by an introductory section with three chapters: a general introduction (Chapter 1), a review of the literature on male fertility (Chapter 2), and a chapter on data and methods (Chapter 3).

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In the second section (differentials in male and female fertility rates), Zhang proposes a macro approach to male fertility with a cross-national analysis of male and female fertility in a sample of 43 countries from developing and developed regions (Chapter 4) and a study of male and female fertility in 23 sub-regions of Taiwan (Chapter 5). Data used for these chapters come from aggregated vital statistics compiled in the United Nations Demographic Yearbook for the first study, and the Taiwan-Fukien Demographic Fact Book for the second. Dependent variables are age-specific fertility rates, which allow analysis of age-specific patterns of fertility, i.e., tempo differentials between men and women, and the total fertility rate. The cross-national comparison shows that TFR is slightly higher for women in countries where female fertility is below replacement level, while men's fertility is higher in other countries. In all countries, timing of fertility differs between the sexes, occurring later for men than for women. Results obtained for Taiwan sub-regions display similar differences. According to Zhang, who adopts a formal demography perspective, such country and regional differences in female and male fertility differentials could be related to migration and mortality.

In contrast to this second section of the book, the third section (determinants of male and female fertility differentials) presents a micro approach to the differential determinants of male and female fertility. A first study proposes an analysis of demographic (i.e., marriage) and socioeconomic (i.e., income) determinants of male and female fertility (Chapter 6). Other chapters are devoted to specific determinants, such as religion (Chapter 7), the influence of cohabitation (Chapter 8), and traits inherited from parents, especially religion (Chapter 9). A last chapter concludes the book (Chapter 10). All results presented in this section are based on data from the US National Survey of Family Growth, cycle 6, which includes a question on the number of children ever born (CEB). Poisson regressions are estimated to investigate the effect of independent variables on CEB. The results generally show that independent variables play the same role for men as for women. One interesting exception to this rule is that male fertility increases as family income rises, while female fertility decreases.

Zhang admits himself in his concluding chapter that he did not investigate the effect of the spouse's or partner's characteristics on male and female fertility, and even in his macro investigations, he did not try to build a two-sex model. One can also add that the author does not really adopt a life course perspective, approach with which he could have studied the transitions to fatherhood and motherhood as resulting from the couple's negotiations about childbearing timing and quantum and the normative environment of the societies he examined. However, as already mentioned, Zhang's monograph is a pioneering study that opens up further questions on male and female fertility.