

## Family images in modern society: pictures from Taiwan

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### Abstract

*In Taiwan, world lowest birth-rate was caused by economic and social environment. Family-friendly policies and benefits from government were conducted in years. The birth-rate, however, were still not raise gradually. Aims of this study were present family images of happiness and challenge from Taiwan and gather voice from parents who lived in this context. Iconology was adopted as the methodology to conduct data collection. Research data were gathered from 50 Taiwanese families which included family pictures and semi-structure interviews. Two main findings were as follow: (1)Most pictures that parents named as 'happiness moment' were going out because of the precious moment of 'being together'. (2)Most challenging moment exited when children were sick or parents' transition in new parenthood. Policy of 'home care day off' in most enterprise is not good enough to support parents. Family friendly policies or systems in Taiwan are either complicated or short term only.*

**Keywords:** parenting stress, parenting experience, iconology, Taiwan

## 1. Introduction

In modern society, member composition, function and core values of family are changing and influenced by context. The common trends such as smaller family size, late parenthood and challenges in family financial are easily seen as a global phenomenon [1]. In Taiwan, birth-rate reached 'lowest-low fertility' level which is a significant situation in the world [2] [3].

Family-friendly policies and benefits such as financial support, tax deduction, child care benefit and free tuition for 5-year-old children from local and central government were conducted in years [4] [5]. The birth-rate, however, were still not raise gradually. Parents' who have their own children are stressed due to firstly, economic and social context [6][7] and secondly, complex and unhelpful policies [8].

It is obvious that there is a gap between government policies and parents' need. The aim of this study, therefore, is trying to explore families' need from parents' point view. Research questions are as below: First, present family images from Taiwan. Second, gather voice from parents who lived in this very low birth rate society. Third, try to link parents' opinions to social context to present a whole picture of family images in Taiwan.

## 2. Theoretical framework

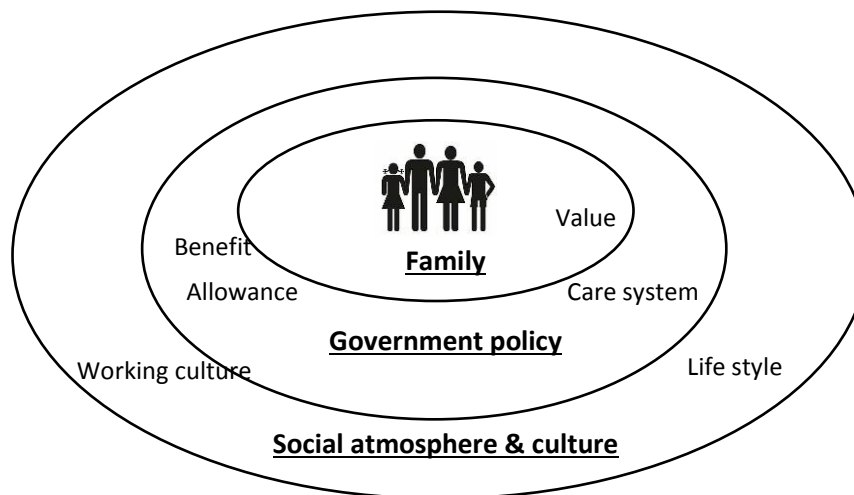
### 2.1 Ecological system Approach

Urie Bronfenbrenner first pointed out ecological system to describe the contextual influences in human's development process since 1970's. Sequence layers from microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems to chronosystems. "The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nester

structures...moving from the inmost level to the outside... [9]". It showed that the influential elements are linked from inner to outer level and interplayed.

In order to initially analyse the family image and present the whole map, framework of ecological system in this study were adjusted from Bronfenbrenner's approach due to families are the unit in this study. The core is family which might include parents' value and the way they raising their children. The intermediate level is about something influences or interact with family (e.g. policies or activities from school, community and government). Last level is the social and culture atmosphere that people might not easy to recognized and tell but showed in the same large group (e.g. life style, culture or trends).The three levels of ecosystem for family are as Figure 1.

Figure 1: Family in the Ecological System



## 2.2 Iconology

Iconology was firstly a way to describe the content and understanding of art in 20 century. Erwin Panofsky pointed out the three strata of iconology are description analysing and explanation. Sequential steps of iconology in visual art are describe about the nature of the subject then analyse the meaning (in general, in society) of the art piece and followed by the meaning from the author or combine with the contextual factors for explanation[10].

In most studies, opinions of parenthood has been explored from either questionnaire or interview [11][12] [13]. Iconology, however, might have the chance to transmit some other information from parents. In this study, therefore, family pictures were gathered as the main resource to present image from family. Content of the pictures, interpretation from parents and researchers all considered into the process in the analysing to show information beyond parents' opinion only from interview.

## 3. Method

Qualitative approach was conducted in this research. The initial sample consisted of 50 families who had multiple backgrounds and lived in northern of Taiwan. In order to accomplish data collection that refer to family stories and parents' thinking, interview families were selected from interviewers' relatives or friends. Those interviewers who took the class of 'family and parenthood' in early childhood education and care programme 2014 and had basic understanding of trends and current situations in modern families.

The semi-structured approach was chosen because parents' opinion might be varied from family to family. Three dimensions of questions were designed for all the interviewee but adjusted by interviewers.

Interviewees were asked to offer at least two pictures to show the moments of happiness and challenge before the interview. Also, they received the interview questions in advance. Interviewees who joined this study were explained about the purpose of this study and aware their family pictures were used in academic study.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Family Images

#### 4.1.1 Happiness Moment

Most pictures that parents names as ‘moment of happiness’ were took when they travelled somewhere or ate out in restaurants (n=39); second were having some ceremony such as graduation or birthday party (n=8); third were children’s pictures only that parents choose to represent the happiness of children’s growing process.

According to the photos from parents which be named as ‘happiness moment’, the nature of them were formed from ‘going out’: travel, trip, friends visiting etc. Not even one picture of happiness moment form 50 families was taken ‘at home’. The reason from interviews is clear: family members going out only when they (usually fathers) finally have TIME. Most of the main financial burdens (36 in 50 families) were on fathers’ shoulder. They usually don’t have quality time during weekday so mothers arrange trip or dinning family event when fathers have time.

*“During weekday, both of us have to work, especially my husband. He usually works late sometimes he even can’t see the children. We can only have a proper time to meet when we go out for meal in weekends. (N21-1)”*

*“My husband is always busy. The reason I named it as the happiness moment is because he promised us to have a small trip for such a long time then he finally made it last month. (N16-1)”*

Therefore, the reasons behind the nature in those pictures are not only the fun to eat and travel, but the precious moment of ‘being together’.

Pictures also showed that happiness came out in important moment in children’s ceremony. Parents recall about the developmental process during these milestones. *“My son was very shy when he went to kindergarten at three. In the graduation ceremony, I saw a very confident boy with big smile. I feel so happy.... (N26-1)”*

There are also chosen pictures presented happiness moment that show children only. Parents thinking about these pictures is that they appreciate the process of development. *“It’s hard to bring up three children. However, when I see their smile faces in this picture, it worth everything... (N35-1).”*

#### 4.1.2 Challenging Moment

More than half (28 in 50) interviewee’s think that most challenge moment in parenthood is when children are physical ill. Those pictures of ‘challenging moment’ showed the images of sick children. The reason for parents to define them as challenging moment is obvious that they suffered from watching their sick children. Also, they have to squeeze time or ask for day off to take care of children at home/hospital. Furthermore, the policy of ‘home care day off’ in most of the business is not good enough to support parents.

*“When my child was sick, I felt so bad to watch him but can’t do anything to help him. It’s like forever in that week. I and my husband have to take turns to ask for day off and take care of him. We used all the day off chance we could ask...(N47-2)”*

*“It’s just like a nightmare when children are sick. We parents have to again ask help from boss, colleagues. I’m so stressed because of I can’t sleep well, my salary was cut down and I have to do triple things when I go back to work...(N01-2)”*

Initial parenthood is another challenging moment in parenthood. Many of the interviewees (18 in 50) name it as the most unforgettable challenging period mainly because they lacked of knowledge and experience to raise new born baby.

*“Both of us love child, we expected this child for a long time. When he finally came to our lives, however, we felt very difficult to take care of him. We don’t even know how to hold such a fragile baby. I was so afraid I’ll hurt him. As to the breast feeding, oh...it’s really killing me... (N06-2)”*

This is quite similar as the previous research that parents face the raising challenge in other countries (White etc., 1999; Lu, 2006). In Taiwan, however, parents have to face difficulty from financial dimension. When we talked about benefit from social welfare, local government and day care system, only two parents’ think they are helpful. Most parent’s opinions are family friendly policies or systems in Taiwan are either complicated or short term only.

*“One of my relative said that she got about USD 700 allowance when she has the new born baby. I tried to find where I can apply this support than I realized those support were different in each county and actually I didn’t know where I can find the accurate information. (N11-2)”*

## 5. Discussion

To see the reasons that make most parents happy, we firstly find the family going out event then realized it was because that’s probably the only chance family members can finally being together. From the view of the very basic need in a family relationship, being together is essential and unreplaceable. In the working field, however, work over time is the common situation in Taiwan. According to the statistic from Ministry of Labor, about 50% of labor experienced it and 1/3 of them usually work over 12 hours per day [14]. Moreover, the myth of ‘work longer means work harder’ is existing in this society [15]. In recent years cases of sudden death from overwork in Taiwan finally forced people to think about this value of hard working [16]. Therefore, it is easy to understand that why arrange travel and dinning event can make the happiness moment in family life.

As to the challenging moment, except the common new parenthood challenges all over the world, parents in Taiwan suffered from the support mechanism from enterprise and government. Continuing the working culture above, only few enterprises have enough support for family care such as the day off for family care, special policy of home-based working when employee’s children are sick...etc. [17]. Family friendly regulations and policy for labors in Taiwan were not applied in employee’s working life. From the point of view in social support for family, there are actually multiple benefit and financial supports from government in recent years. The comments from parents, however, are disappointed due to the confusing information resource and the long term support.

## 6. Conclusion

Family images from Taiwan tell about the moments of happiness and challenging. In traditional Chinese culture, having a son to carry on father’s name is very important. Though this paper did not show how this tradition influence in Taiwanese society, but it is obvious that parents face a severe environment support them to bring up their children. Culture atmosphere of hard working, regulations of family friendly policy in enterprise, clear and long term information are really necessary from parents’ point of view. There is a good chance that images of happier parents who have time and support to enjoy their parenthood will be presented in the future while the family friendly environment was meet parents’ need.

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