

Taiwan Youth Project: The Study of Transition from Adolescence to Young Adulthood

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Research Background

Taiwan Youth Project (hereafter TYP) aims to study the trajectory of youth growth in Taiwan from the life course perspective. The project argues that significant social context, particularly family, school, community as well as the interplay of these three dominant institutions, accounts for various growth trajectories of the youth. The time frame is set from adolescence to young adulthood and the linkage between life experiences during adolescence and the subsequent developmental patterns during young adulthood has been the major concern. To investigate the process of transition, we believe that beyond biological and psychological traits, important social structural and personal resources need to be emphasized in order to provide a fuller picture of the social field where Taiwanese youth operate their daily lives. In addition, an attempt is made to explore and to specify possible effects from the social context of educational competition and traditional cultural values on various indigenous developmental patterns of Taiwanese youth. Hence, TYP is characterized by an analysis of social dimensions and the interplay of family, school and community is considered most relevant social mechanisms affecting various growth trajectories of Taiwanese youth.

The Research Focus

To capture the impact of changing norms in relation to the transitional period of the youth, besides general themes shared by most youth studies, selective specific issues pertaining to the Taiwanese context are incorporated. For example, in addition to the concept of autonomy reflected in the family process, spatial and community attachment resulted from leaving home, or dating attitudes as well as friendship network formation, the concept of filial piety in relation to elderly support and the competition from examinations are highlighted. Two entrance examinations in the life course, namely the comprehensive test for entering senior high school as well as for entering college, dominate the daily life of youth. In order to show this overwhelming social pressure, TYP examines the cram class attendance and constructs an innovative

module on family strategy adopted. Since for a typical Taiwanese adolescent, academic outcome is often closely associated with personal well-being, the development of psychological well-being has been followed annually. Furthermore, the contrast between the normal group with continuing education in schools versus other off-course experiences such as drop-outs or teenager workers in the labor force often not only represents different growth trajectory, it also implies different developmental outcomes. Qualitative accounts are gathered to provide relevant explanatory information on this subject.

In brief, TYP examines the tracking process occurred during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. Structural factors such as social class, gender norms, rural urban background and school resources are delineated. The turning point mechanism is further elaborated by studying family resilience observed among disadvantaged groups as well as by analyzing non-normative performance expressed by well-to-do families. In other words, the social capital, indicated by the interplay between family, school and community, serves as the underlying explanatory concept and its effect on the educational as well as on the occupational aspiration and achievement as well as on the individual psychological well-being becomes the final outcome in the research framework. Enabled by the longitudinal panel design, TYP intends to describe various growth patterns of Taiwanese youth from adolescents to young adulthood. To achieve the intended goal, significant social mechanisms affecting values, attitudes and behaviors of youth which in turn account for the diverse life course patterns will be identified. Four main research goals are listed below:

- (1) To examine youth's developmental process by emphasizing the interplay of family, school and community.
- (2) To explore possible linkages between adolescence and young adulthood from the life course perspective.
- (3) To analyze the operation and the outcome of social capital on various growth patterns of youths.
- (4) To delineate diverse growth trajectories of Taiwanese youth during the transitional period.

Sample, Research Design and the Research Team

Large longitudinal panel sample of two youth cohorts is used as the baseline for all analyses. Multi-stage stratified cluster sampling which considers urbanization degree as well as mean number of class and mean student numbers of schools results in 41 classes or 2700 students of 7th graders (Junior 1) and 9th graders (Junior 3) in northern Taiwan respectively. One of the parents, student's head master of the class

and school principal of junior high are interviewed since the beginning year of 2000. The project is designed to follow the adolescents into young adulthood and will reach a closure for Phase 1 in year 2007. For Junior 3 samples, 7 waves data have been collected and for Junior 1 sample, 8 waves of surveys will be completed in summer, 2007. The attrition rate has been satisfactory in that we are able to maintain approximately 65% of the original sample.

During the process, dyadic in-depth interviews of selected 60 parent-youth samples are conducted. The qualitative study allows us to delineate specific mechanisms occurred during the transition from adolescent to young adulthood which affect non-normative or off-course experiences of the youth. Family resilience of lower class samples with high academic achievement and downward mobility expressed by higher class samples with low academic outcome are two major concerns.

Selected findings:

1. Family Context

* **Parenting:** We first focus on the transition from junior high to senior high. Among four typical parenting styles derived from latent transition analysis, it is found that parents do change the control style from more stringent to more lenient pattern. Specifically, the most common 'high monitoring and low explanation' or 'lack of control' at the 9th grade is replaced by either 'high monitoring only' or 'both high monitoring and explanation' at the 10th grade. The subsequent parenting from 10th to 11th grade is relatively constant and has no significant gender differentials. Among Taiwanese families, the first comprehensive entrance examination does impose important constraint in the family process as reflected by the parenting style.

* **Family Strategy:** This is a new subject aiming to delineate the intense reaction a typical family adapts toward the competitive educational system in Taiwan. During the last year of junior high and senior high, both youths and parents are asked of specific family strategy applied at home. This includes physical provision (e.g., better space for study, better nourishment), family accommodation (e.g, parents decrease social activities or ask others at home to yield to the exam-taker-to-be) and behavior monitoring (e.g., limit time on the phone/internet or regulate daily routine). The result shows that parents tend to report higher likelihood of family accommodation and physical provision, while youths report higher monitoring behavior from parents. In addition, family strategy is clearly a class bounded practice with resourceful families using more different strategies which results in better academic performance indicated by the score from the entrance examination.

* **Intergenerational Relations:** This is another significant topic examined in TYP.

The relationship between youth and parents and grandparents is analyzed by subjective emotional closeness, by value transmission as well as by family structure. Our findings clearly point out the importance of earlier family experiences such as the co-residence of three generational household and being care for grandparents before age three, on the subsequent intergenerational relations. Lineage differentials with a preference toward patrilineal advantage are also documented. Using revised child-rearing value scale, it is confirmed not only identical value factors can be derived for both youths and parents, value transmission is significantly affected by family's SES (particularly father's education). Further analyses show that birth order of the youth is an important factor affecting the intergenerational relations in that eldest grandsons report the highest closeness with grandparents, much more so than granddaughters. Since Chinese families are characterized by strong lineage, gender and generational hierarchies, TYP findings offer the international podium valuable and unique interaction patterns between generations.

2. School Effect

* **Educational Aspiration and tracking:** For the first tracking from junior high to senior high, roughly 46% of youths enter senior high schools while half enters senior vocational high school or 5 year college. The second tracking from senior high to college results in 65% in college, 12% at work, 11% in cram class, 8% still in high school. The educational aspiration also varies during the tracking process. Youths not only tend to lower the highest degree intended as they age, they also reveal a more realistic attitude matching with their school performance. Parents, in contrast, have expressed relatively more stable aspiration in this regard. However, it should be pointed out that while Family's SES decreases its effect overtime and does not explain the outcome of youth's high school ranking, it does have a negative association with aspiration toward vocational high school in that higher SES families tend to dissuade children away from the vocational track at the high school stage.

* **Friendship Network:** TYP samples the whole class and asks each student to name their three best friends over the years. This intelligent design allows us to examine friendship formation in junior high and to follow changes afterwards. Two major lines of analyses are employed. Using network closure across generations indicate that more closed networks between parents of youth and friends do contribute to better academic ranking in class and to avoid delinquent behaviors. Patterns of friendship network are shown to be dynamic and vary according to class size and the gender combination of the class. Larger sizes and uni-gender class tend to have higher propensity of changing friendship networks over the years. As expected, the peer influence is significant with good friends exerting positive academic outcome, but

lower self-esteem.

* **The Cram Class:** Attending the cram class appears to be a common life style among Taiwanese youth. Interesting, Yi-lan actually has higher attendance rate than Taipei, reflecting possible reactions toward less educational resources in the rural area. Cram class experience is much more likely for junior high (55%-64%) than for senior high (32%-34%) due to the first tracking effect. Nevertheless, for top high school samples, the attendance rate is as high as 82% (vs. 62% of public high and 25% of private high schools)(see figure 1). This result as compared with the correlates for after-school classes for 3rd year students in most schools leads us to conclude that attending cram class is a reinforcing strategy while attending after-school classes is more a remedial strategy for Taiwanese youth.

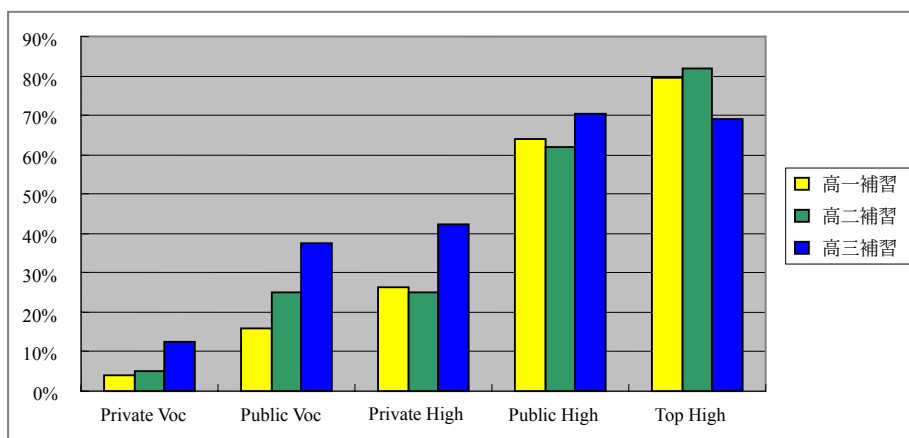


Figure 1 : The Percentage of High School Students Attending Cram Class

3. Community Context

* **Community Interaction:** Community participation is considered to exert influence in youth's life satisfaction. Our findings support the argument and points out that family and friends are important mediators in the process. In addition, the relative importance between parental versus community effects in youth's community attachment is compared. The result claims family dominance during the adolescent period. While rural-urban differences are focused throughout the entire project, rural youth tends to express more autonomy at an earlier age and urban youths are more inclined to parental guidance in making decisions.

4. The Interplay of Family, School and Community

* **Social Class Difference:** A recent finding elaborates on the class differential in terms of parental involvement in school and at home. In general, with regard to academic performance, middle-class parents are more effective in attending parent-teacher meetings and in responding school dairy; working-class parents who discuss educational plan with youths help significantly, but not in doing actual

homework nor in setting up study schedules. Obviously, class resources may be transformed into specific educational resources in promoting the academic outcome.

* **Mental Health:** One of the most interesting findings of TYP is the gender differences in the developmental trajectory during adolescence (see figure 2). Depression over the junior and senior high years indicates that girls are more depressed than boys. Significant life events in the family are immediate triggers, but only traumatic incidence such as parental divorce will exert long term effects, others are mostly temporary impact. Furthermore, for middle-age parents, emotional support significantly mediates mother’s depression level, but not father’s.

* **Deviant Behaviors:** Deviant behaviors are not necessary associated with individual’s psychological well-being. Again, gender differences are found in that boys are more inclined to show deviant behaviors while girls are more likely to have depression, if external stimulus is present. Having more deviant friends result in more deviant behaviors. The HLM analysis further points out that the average class deviant level accounts for the probability of becoming deviants during adolescence.

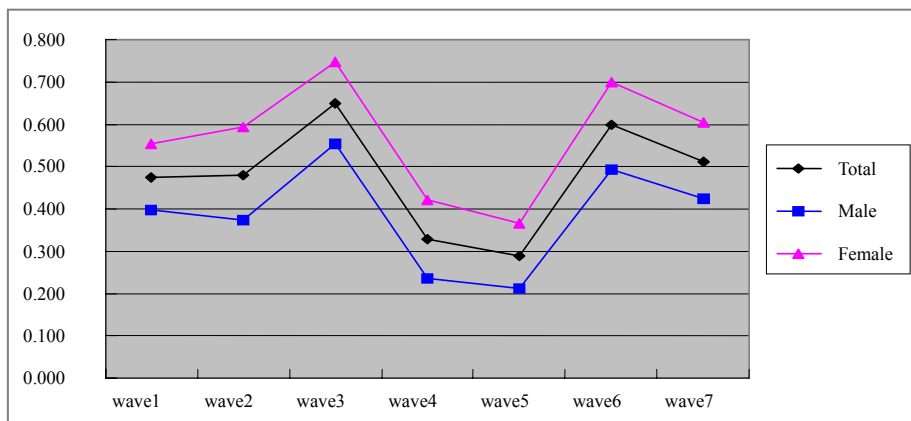


Figure 2 : Average Adolescents' Depressive Symptoms Overtime

Future Plan

In the future, it is intended to combine both samples into one adult sample and to continue follow-up studies in their subsequent important life stages, such as finding first job, married, having first child, as well as future division of labor at home, etc. The present datasets will allow us to analyze and to link the structural, contextual as well as individual factors operated in different life stages. If this plan materializes, TYP will become a valuable academic asset for all.

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