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EDITOR

Urbanism and Restrictions on Women’s Socioeconomic Roles*

An Analysis of Communities in Taiwan

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The effect of urban life on traditional values and conventionality has been the major theme of Fischer’s (1972, 1975a, 1975b) works on urban theory. Fischer’s primary contribution lies in his attempt to synthesize the two leading, yet opposing, theories in urban sociology in America – the Simmelian-Wirthian conceptions of “urbanism as a way of life” and the so-called compositional approach followed by Lewis (1965) and Gans (1962). In trying to synthesize these two theories, Fischer developed his own theory, i.e. the subcultural theory of urbanism.

The subcultural theory begins where the theory of Simmel-Wirth’s urbanism starts, namely, urbanism, i.e. size, density, and heterogeneity, has a significant impact on social structure and peoples’ lives. Fischer (1972, 1975a, 1975b) argued that urbanism would bring about changes on the social structure as well as on peoples’ lives, but that the changes would not come from the anomic, disorganized, pathological nature of urbanism, as the Simmelian-Wirthian theory implies. On the contrary, the changes (specifically, unconventional and nontraditional behaviors and social phenomena) would occur through the organized, integrated, supportive groups of people with a “set of modal beliefs, values, norms, and customs associated with a relatively distinct social subsystem existing within a larger social system and culture,” as the compositional theory seems to imply (Fischer, 1975b: 1323). Urbanism (primarily population concentration), according to Fischer, produces a diversity of such subcultures, strengthens them, and fosters diffusion among them through the so-called “critical mass” (Fischer, 1975b: 1325) or “dynamics density” (Durkheim, 1933; Schnore, 1958) or the “institutional completeness” (Breton, 1964).

Thus, in communities of larger population concentration or higher degree of urbanism we should expect to find a higher incidence of nontraditional/unconventional behavior and social phenomena. These social phenomena and behaviors are not just statistical correlates – they are behavior patterns and social phenomena supported by distinctive subcultures and people associated with these subcultures.

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The present paper is an attempt to address some of these issues with data from Taiwanese communities. This is done to examine the extent to which the theories of urbanism are "western ethnocentric" as they have been labeled (Hauser and Schnore, 1965). Specifically, we shall address the following two general questions:

1) Whether more highly urbanized communities do have a higher incidence of nontraditional/unconventional social phenomena and behavior patterns; and
2) Whether a higher incidence of nontraditional/unconventional social phenomena and behavior patterns can be explained in terms of the subcultural theory, as Fischer (1972, 1975a, 1975b) insisted.

Using the size of community as an index of urbanism, Fischer (1975b) found significant associations between urbanism and a set of nontraditionalism items such as religiosity, church attendance, and attitude toward alcohol and birth control. In this study, however, we shall use four different measures of urbanism. These include population size, density and heterogeneity and a linear combination of these three indicators, labeled, "urbanism."

There are several reasons for this particular strategy. First, as Hauser (1957: 5) pointed out, whereas cities in the West developed largely as a result of the play of market mechanism (where population size may act as a guiding force), in the developing societies, central planning has played a dominant role in urban growth. As a result, population size may not act as a market mechanism in these societies. Furthermore, most of the underdeveloped countries, including Taiwan, are overpopulated even in the rural areas. Population concentration or size alone in this condition may not have the same meaning, much less be an adequate measure of urbanism, as might be the case in the Western societies.

Population size is measured simply in terms of number of people in a community. Density is measured in terms of number of people per square kilometer. Gibbs and Martin's (1962) "occupational diversification" is used here to indicate heterogeneity. It measures the degree of dispersion of a community's labor force distribution across different occupational categories. Since the relative importance of size, density, and heterogeneity on non-traditional behavior and social phenomena is unclear, equal weight is assigned to each of the three to obtain a composite measure of urbanism.

The social and economic roles of women, as indicated by the degree of women's participation in modern occupations and professions (Tsai, 1969), the general fertility ratio, the percentage of women married, and the extent of the geographic mobility of women, are employed in this study to tap traditional/conventional behavior patterns and social phenomena. Specifically, restricted female roles are indicated by low women's labor force participation in modern occupations and professions, a high general fertility ratio, a high percentage of women married, and a low percentage of geographic mobility among women.

Women in Chinese society have traditionally been assigned a subordinate, inferior, and subservient role to play (Lang, 1946; Levy, 1949; Yang, 1950; Wolf, 1968; Thelin, 1976). Such inferiority, subordination, and subservience