



The making of family values: Developmental idealism in Gansu, China



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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of developmental thinking in the making of family values. We analyze survey data collected from Gansu Province in China with regular and multilevel logit models. The results show that individuals' endorsement of neolocal residence, self-choice marriage, gender egalitarianism, late marriage for women, and low fertility depends on the conjunction of preference for development and beliefs in its association with those family attributes, which we term *developmental idealism associational evaluation*. Furthermore, such impact of developmental thinking on family values holds robust in the presence of indigenous ideational forces, in this case Islamic religion. Although Islam influences family values in the opposite direction than developmental ideas do, the effect of Developmental Idealism associational evaluation does not differ significantly between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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1. Introduction

Ideational explanations of international family change have become increasingly common in the literature. For example, the worldwide family planning movements (Barrett and Frank, 1999) and the efforts to improve women's status (Berkovitch, 1999; Boyle, 2002; Yount, 2004) have been due at least partially to the enactment of a "world culture", which promoted concepts such as progress, individuality, human rights, freedom, and equality (Meyer et al., 1997). In demography, cultural changes toward individualism and freedom in postwar Europe play a central role in the second demographic transition model offered by Lesthaeghe (2010) and van de Kaa (1987). In addition, Johnson-Hanks et al. (2011) have attributed family changes and variation to various "schemas"—the mental structures that provide roadmaps for everyday behavior. In this paper, we take a particular interest in how individuals' family values are influenced by ideas concerning development.

Over the past two centuries, there has been a rise of family values endorsing such attributes as nuclear families, self-choice marriage, romantic love, equal spousal relationships, late marriage, and lower fertility (see, for example, Gubernskaya, 2010; Inglehart, 1997; Lesthaeghe and Meekers, 1987; Thornton, 1985, 1989; Thornton et al., 1983; Thornton and Philipov, 2009; Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001; Dorius and Alwin, 2011; Esteve et al., 2012; Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2004; van de Kaa, 1987, 2002). Parallel to the rise of these family values has been a worldwide dissemination of developmental thinking, which puts the idea of development at a central place in people's minds (e.g., Ferguson,

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1999; Osella and Osella, 2006; Pigg, 1992). Thornton (2001, 2005) argued that those two streams of ideational changes have been closely connected and have reinforced each other.

According to Thornton (2001, 2005), family scholarship from the 18th century has been dominated by a developmental worldview that has posited human societies going through stages of progress and that those stages of development are associated with different family behavior. This family scholarship associated the highest levels of development with nuclear families, self-choice marriage, romantic love, equal spousal relationships, late marriage, and lower fertility, which it labeled as developed or modern family dimensions. Thornton has labeled the ideas of this societal and familial model *developmental idealism* (DI). He has argued that these ideas about modern societies and modern families have been spread widely around the world, both among elites and non-elites, with implications for family behavior. Within the ideas of developmental idealism Thornton has identified both beliefs and values as important components, with values also being seen as belief statements that contain evaluations of the goodness or badness of an attribute. Thornton summarized the ideas of developmental idealism into four fundamental beliefs and values: (1) developed society is good; (2) the modern family is good; (3) development and the modern family are causally associated; and (4) individuals have the right to be free and equal, with social relationships being based on consent.

Since its initial formulation, DI theory has informed empirical research in numerous countries. The topics range from DI measurements (Thornton et al., 2010a, 2012c) to the distribution of DI beliefs and values among different social groups (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2012; Binstock and Thornton, 2007; Thornton et al., 2010b), and to their influences on family behaviors (Cammack and Heaton, 2011; Guend, 2011; Kavas and Thornton, 2013; Thornton and Philipov, 2009; Yount and Rashad, 2008). However, previous literature has treated the DI beliefs and values as separate issues rather than considering their interrelationships. This paper, for the first time, weaves the DI beliefs and values into a psychological mechanism producing the family values that DI language labels as modern (labels that we also use in our discussion of the framework¹). Patterning on the well-established expectancy-value model in psychology (e.g., Fishbein, 1963, 1967; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), we articulate a micro-level value formation process called *DI associational evaluation*—namely, that values about the positivity of development (DI idea 1) and belief in the associations between development and certain modern family behaviors (DI idea 3) jointly lead to positive values concerning those family behaviors (DI idea 2).

Of course, the idea of development is not the only source of legitimacy. Religious doctrines and organizational capacities are some of the most important alternative structures to DI as they provide their own long-standing schemas and authority. Several empirical investigations of DI have acknowledged the roles played by indigenous ideologies, yet so far no study has formally assessed DI's influences net of strong local ideologies (Allendorf, 2013; Guend, 2011; Cammack and Heaton, 2011; Kavas and Thornton, 2013; Thornton and Philipov, 2009; Yount and Rashad, 2008; Yount et al., 2010).

This study offers the first empirical investigation on the influence of DI associational evaluation on family values. Using survey data from Gansu Province in China, where a large Muslim population dwells, we assess the impact of DI associational evaluation on individuals' endorsement of living arrangements, parental involvement in spouse choice, gender equality, fertility, and age at marriage. We also consider the local Islamic religion in juxtaposition with DI beliefs and values to examine the influence of Muslim religion and the net effect of DI associational evaluation. Finally, we examine whether DI associational evaluation influences are modified by the local Islamic religion.

2. Theoretical formulation

2.1. Developmental paradigm

The world, especially since WWII, has experienced the rise of a world culture (Barrett and Frank, 1999; Krücken and Drori, 2009; Meyer et al., 1997; Thomas et al., 1987). Ideas like individuality, rights, freedom, and equality have been disseminated around the world and gained great institutional authority (e.g., governments, non-governmental organizations, laws, and school curriculums). One key element of this world culture is the idea of progress or development (Meyer et al., 1997). Thornton (2001, 2005; also see, Melegh et al., 2012; van de Kaa, 2010) has argued that at least since the Enlightenment a developmental paradigm has characterized the worldviews of many scholars, policy makers, and other elites in the West. The paradigm specifies an essentialized uni-linear trajectory of history, along which all countries progress at different rates (also see Harris, 1968; Mandelbaum, 1971; Nisbet, 1969/1975; Sanderson, 1990). Consequently, at any given moment different societies can be ranked into a developmental hierarchy. For recent centuries northwest Europe and its overseas diaspora have generally been assigned to the top of the hierarchy, while other societies are viewed as less modern or developed and occupy lower positions on the scale.

Such worldview, which boils qualitative differences between countries down to a single dimension of development or modernity, has been challenged by many social scientists in recent decades (e.g., Amin, 1989; Baker 199,8; Bock, 1956; Böröcz, 2000; Böröcz and Sarkar, 2005; Chakrabarty, 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Hodggen, 1964; Jennings, 1975; Mandelbaum, 1971; Nisbet, 1969; Sreter, 1993; Tilly, 1984; Wallerstein, 1991). Nevertheless, the existence of developmental hierarchies in people's minds has been real and prevalent. Since the Age of Discovery, the developmental paradigm was

¹ We use the language of developmental idealism and modernity in our discussion in order to describe and analyze developmental idealism in its own terms. However, we do not endorse certain societies or attributes themselves as modern or traditional. See Thornton (2005) for a discussion of the language and labels used in describing developmental idealism as a belief and value system and the language and labels used in describing real societies and attributes.

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