

The Dink, Public Judgement and Stigma: The Childbearing Issue in the Chinese Context

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ABSTRACT

The Dink population experienced a great increase in number in China in recent years. This results in the stigma from various groups discrediting their morality. Under heavy pressure imposed by such discrimination and factors concerning economy, health, and loneliness, some of the Dink population choose to end their lives without children, which causes discussion on the issue among the general public. This study examines different categories of discrimination and provides a picture of how Chinese dink struggles and survives through them.

Keywords: social stigma, childless, the Dink population.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term "Dink", which means "double income no kids", was first invented in the 1950s in Europe and America, and it is a term used to describe couples who do not have children. For a long time, society regarded the unwillingness of being parents as an action of disgrace and an escape from social responsibility, and only truly being parents means settling down as a mature and responsible member of society [1-3]. Until the 1960s, people found dink or being childless acceptable [4, 5]. There are various reasons that people in European and American countries choose to be a dink. Firstly, people choose to relieve living pressure and cut living expenses by avoiding having children. Secondly, people found it to be happier and easier to live without children, and instead, they enjoy life on their own or with their couples. Finally, dink people are more willing to place their self-fulfillment over having children. They are mostly composed of couples who are linked with high socioeconomic status [6]. Dink couples choose to fully utilize their energy in their career instead of raising children. In that vein, dink groups are often stigmatized as irresponsible and selfish social roles according to traditional perspective, and sometimes their behaviors are attributed to hedonism. To be concluded, the dink population is always being stigmatized as selfish or irresponsible people who betray family.

Bearing certain similarities, though, the situation of and attitude towards dink in China verifies to a certain extent as the dink concept enters Asia in the 1980s with

the development of the Asian economy and social ideologies. In recent years, the Dink trend is becoming increasingly popular in China as more and more young people are not willing to born and raise children. Dink population in China, which is now estimated that there are currently 600 thousand Dink families, is mostly located in the first-tier and second-tier cities, and a large population of them are white-collar that earn a high-class or middle-class income. Behind the surge of the Dink population in China, the current Chinese social situation may explain the phenomenon. First of all, high living pressure is one of the major reasons. In recent years, the living pressure in China has been experiencing a permanent increase with the extremely fast pace of social development. With the migration of people into developed cities, the price level in those cities skyrocketed. For example, the portion of disposable income used to purchase a house or real estate has risen from 18.9% in 1998 to 110.8% in 2016. The astonishing price of living necessities is forcing young people to spend more time and energy working and making money for their own or their families future. In return, the great devotion in working leaves young people extremely little time to take care of, or even think of having, children. Besides implicit costs like the high price of housing and the lack of time for children, the cost of raising and educating children also makes raising children prohibitive to ordinary people. According to statistics, the tenth most expensive city to raise children in China, Changsha, requires 1.2 million Chinese Yuan on average to support children to their adulthood, while Beijing requires 2.7 million Chinese Yuan, topping the list. Facing the obstacle, including high living cost, low living

quality, and high cost of raising children, the population of newborn children is constantly decreasing. After the implementation of the law of Comprehensive Second Child Act (allowing every family to have two children) at the end of 2015, the birth rate reached 12.95% in 2016, but it turned out to fall to 8.59% in 2020 and indicates a similar decreasing trend in the future. The current social phenomenon suggests an unhealthy growth of birth rate, some of which is caused by the belief of dink that is becoming prevailing in recent years. Moreover, the Dink idea and trend will undoubtedly be expanded and popularized because young people are fully exposed to messages supporting the Dink lifestyle under a general social environment that bears a low willingness for children, which makes the topic of dink be of increasing significance.

The strong sense of family in traditional Chinese culture decides to have no offspring to be even more unacceptable than the situation in Europe, which the long history can justify that women or couples who cannot have offspring were looked down upon by friends and families. Despite the weakening of such viewpoint with the passage of time and the increasing cultural exchange with foreign countries, the belief is still firm in many families. When facing both the social pressure and stigma imposed by out-groups on the dink population, sometimes the dink population finds it hard to remain in a childless life, or they find it more beneficial to raise their children. This paper will analyze the stigma the dink population faces and the factors that facilitate ending childless lives based on typical case studies.

2. SOURCES OF STIGMA

2.1 Family

Under the traditional context of China society, the stigma from family members towards not having children is quite serious. The stigma can be attributed to two dimensions of beliefs. First of all, the traditional Confucius belief regards not being able to leave offspring in the secular world as the biggest betrayal to one's family. In a family, Dink people are blamed by family members, especially older generations, for failing to leave descendants on the world, which is a betrayal to the family according to the traditional culture. The second dimension is from a more practical level. When young couples or young children in the families convey their thoughts of not having children to the elderly in the families, the older family members tend to persuade them in a way that is more related to their lives or later lives instead of the abstract historical belief that the younger generations no longer consider as seriously as, the older generations do. Parents will warn the children who are willing to enter a childless lifestyle that they may end up having an elderly year that no linear consanguinities can and willing to take care of them if they do not change

their mind about not having children. Although it may truly be an extremely practical question for people who have the idea to become dink in the past, this logic pattern is no longer persuasive to the younger generation. In the past, when Chinese families were still staying in a closely related family relationship, not having children was really a problem. The parents and children typically live in the same place where they have already spent their lives, and they may not have the idea to leave the place or the family. The firm patriarchal ideology of traditional Chinese beliefs made it a moral rule that young children are expected to stay at home to care for their old parents when they cannot support their living. However, the family-scale nowadays is much smaller than before. Younger generations tend to separate from the original family and form their own, making contact and the ties between parents and children weaker. Besides, the increasing and widespread availability of the social welfare system relieves the pressure of younger people to take care of their parents. Thus, the young dink population is concerning less and less about the issue of their future life after retirement, and it leads to the situation that the younger generation is not taking the stigma from family members very seriously.

However, the loss of family support makes it hard for the dink population to withstand stigma. Consistent support from one's family is an important form of collective resilience. Resilience in the family context involves belief systems that shape the meaning of adversity, views of positive outcomes, understandings of family cultural history in the context of social and economic resources, and communication processes such as emotional expression and problem-solving [7, 8]. In that vein, the stigma from family members on dink becomes extremely intolerable because it means that the resilience resource that should play an essential role in helping stigmatized Dink fight negative treatments turns out to be stigmatizing the dink population themselves. The strong stigma that dink couples face may eventually be intolerable to them and compel them to have children under the interference of their family members finally.

2.2 Cyber-active public

Besides the stigma from ingroups of families, people who choose not to have a child also receive aggression from out-groups throughout the society, among which the voice on the internet is the most accessible and fierce source. Cyber-attack towards dink people is widespread and easily noticeable to dink people. When the criticize upon dink was first carried out in real life and later formed on the internet, the stigma gradually generalized in a cyber context, considering the internet's incomparable ability to spread information. Furthermore, because of the animosity feature of the internet, the speeches and words criticizing childless decisions are usually uncontrolled in their extent, which arises lots of further discussions.

"I feel that those who voluntarily choose DINK are selfish and indifferent people in their bones. First, they think that raising children is just pay and burden, which will affect them while ignoring raising children can gain more happiness. Second, they do not know how to love and pay is also a kind of happiness. To put it bluntly, this kind of human nature wants others to love themselves, not others. Finally, this kind of people only wants to enjoy themselves at the moment, do not pay much attention to what will happen in the future, and lack a sense of responsibility for their own future. In short, such people are too selfish and not worth knowing" [9]. This is the comment on a commonly used application in China, Zhihu, which holds over 30 million daily uses. Receiving over 200 discussions and a positive number of thumbs, a button that stands for 'agree', the comment is proved to have great influence throughout the society and is a belief that receives popularity. The comment not only criticize the lack of responsibility that the action of being dink implies to the general public, but it even lifted the aggression toward any certain people that choose to not have a child by saying 'such people are too selfish and not worth knowing', which is questioning the character of the childless population. It can be regarded as a generalization of the stigma toward the dink people on the internet. When the idea criticizes people's decision to refuse to have children, the comments on the internet only appear in limited space online, mainly under discussion merely about the issue of actually being childless and the decision itself instead of the people who are holding the decision. However, with the pam-sharing of the ideology across the internet, 'being dink is selfish,' and others criticize arms an increasing number of people and reach out to a wider range of space. The criticize toward the decision of dink converts to insult and discrimination toward the whole childless population, discrediting the moral quality of such group. The discussion also appears in the comment concerning every problem about the younger generation or babies, for example, the discussion of pregnancy, the discussion about aging, and any version of social media that discusses whether to have children.

The widespread of the thoughts criticizing dink population made the dink population thoroughly exposed to the negative environment, and the fierce attitude that the cyber community provides made the stigma even harder to endure, which means a huge loss of the support to dink population. Perceived social support was found to correlate moderately to highly with greater life satisfaction. On the other hand, the lack of social support made it hard for the dink population to stick to their beliefs.

When facing stigma from different social contexts, some of the Dink group that have lived lives with neither children nor the will of having children wish to have children or are persuaded to have children. However, becoming parents after ending a Dink life at a relatively

high age is not appropriate sometimes, considering giving birth at high age is damaging for women's bodies. The huge generation gap between parents and children is also harmful to children's development and family harmony, which presents challenges in light of the sharp cultural shift that requires adaption on all sides [10].

3. CHINESE PUBLIC'S VIEW ON DINK'S WILL AND THE ACTUAL ACTION OF HAVING CHILDREN

Here is a story about a dink wife after she lost her husband. Three years ago, Lin Zihua's uncle died unexpectedly. This year, her aunt was 52 years old. She felt that her world had collapsed. The young and elegant lady grew 10 years older overnight. Soon after she was ill and hospitalized, Lin Zihua and her cousin took turns to take care of her, but no matter how considerate they were, they did not seem to get into her aunt's heart. She cried and said that the most regretful thing in her life was not to have children. "If I have a child, I will not feel desolate in my early fifties. If I have a child, I will have a warm embrace when I have to leave one day [11]."

When the dink couple finally decides to end their childless lifestyle and have children, several factors that lead to the tremendous transition in their life-long thought of breeding must have existed. This passage will analyze the reasons that Dinks may have when they decide to have children based on the case presented at the beginning of the paper. The reasons can be categorized into four parts: economy, health, loneliness, and stigma. Although in the case of Zihua's aunt, the wife in a dink relationship did not succeed in having children at last because of the death of her husband, and lots of problems concerning the actual born of the child was overlooked, so the case is more about a childless wife conveyed and demonstrating the strong willingness and eagerness of having children, which resembled the will of those dink couples that eventually had children when they were still in the phase of planning to end the childless life.

3.1 Health and economic concerns

In the case of Lin Zihua's aunt, Lin Zihua and her cousin took turns to take care of her, but no matter how considerate they were, they did not seem to get into her aunt's heart. She cried and said that the most regretful thing in her life did not have children. "If I have a child, I will not feel desolate in my early fifties. If I have a child, I will have a warm embrace when I leave one day... " Although Lin Zihua's aunt was accepting the care given by her younger generations that did not have direct blood relation with her, she was not pleased, or emotionally comforted, by the kind of care or the source of care. The previously dink female regretted the decision not to have children she made before when she had to face the problem of raising herself when she was not physically

capable. Based on this case, the worsening of health is seen as a trigger for the dink population to have the will to have children. Under the traditional Chinese context of "family", people tend to be more willing to accept help within families.

In that vein, people criticize Dink people for their reason to have children merely because they are afraid of their health condition in the future. If they are diagnosed with certain diseases that make their late years inconvenient physically, they may wish to have children who know them and care for them to take care of their health and lives.

The concern of economic ability in the future is one major reason the dink population chooses to have children. If the dink population estimates that the pension they receive and the savings may fail to support them in their later years, they probably wish some lineal consanguinities to provide them with substantial support when they are old. In return, the childless community is scolded to have children merely based on the purpose of economic interest.

3.2 Loneliness

For elderly people, they not only hope to receive substantial support and care of their life, but they are more eager for emotional satisfaction. Loneliness is the issue that old people try to avoid when they are no longer socially capable of maintaining firms and meaningful relationships, and loneliness and social isolation in older adults are serious public health risks affecting a significant number of people and putting them at risk for dementia and other serious medical conditions [12]. Thus, the group of people who used to choose not to have children emerged to view raising children for accompanying, especially those dink people who lose their couple in old years. The case of Lin Zihua's aunt is quite typical. After her husband passed away, she was regretted not having a child before and was extremely eager to have a child to take care of her and live with her despite the meticulous care her nephews were giving her. She was experiencing the loneliness of the passing away of her couple, the loss of her husband turning out to decrease her satisfaction of life. It is noticeable that the satisfaction to life of elderly people in China is higher for people living with the couple than those living alone [13]. Lin Zihua had just lost the few family members she could rely on after her husband's death since she had no children to support each other. The case explains the requirement of accompanying the dink population when they are old and why they decide to have children for future preparation in their later lives.

One direct reason and the common view of the public on childless groups is the stigma towards them. As mentioned earlier in the article, the stigma towards the dink population mainly comes from two directions: cyber

and family. The internet cultivates the generalization of stigma towards stigma and allows personal abuse because of the anonymity internet provides, imposing great stress on the dink population in the online environment that they are always exposed to; traditional Chinese belief criticizes not having children badly, so the loss of one of the most resilience resource made dink people hard to face the stigma. Altogether, the stigma from cyber and family constantly questions the dink population their choice of not having children, finally contributing to their decision to have children. In return, after dink people end their childless life, they will receive the stigma from the general public from the perspectives mentioned. They have to burden the criticize that accuse them as extremely selfish in having children: dink choose to have children because they wish to depend on their children economically in the future; dink choose to have children considering having a child to take care of them; dink choose to have children to have some people to accompany them in the later years, or they choose to have children because they want to get rid of the stigma imposed on them. Questioning their true sincerity to the dink lifestyle and their characteristics.

On dink people having children, at last, several concerns and appeals are made here. First of all, the awareness of dink couples should be improved. Since Dink couples are usually above 35 years old when they give up Dink life and want to have children, it is not ideal because women over 35 will not be physically suitable for pregnancy and childbirth. Parents who have children at a high age inevitably develop generation gaps between their children, considering the age difference. That generation gap may further lead to the lack of conversation among family members, limited guidance from parents to children, lowered happiness and harmony within families, etc. In that vein, the research helps Dink couples to avoid becoming regretful with their choices of not having children by providing the reference of how they can withstand the stigma that the Dink lifestyle accompanies, and the research will effectively reduce the number of parents that are too old to meet the appropriate standard of having children as well as the number s of families of such circumstance.

4. CONCLUSION

In the context of family, cyber, and social perspectives, people who choose not to have children are experiencing discrimination from various aspects. Surrounded by the negative aggression from out-groups, some of the dink population find it easy to get rid of the label of "childless" and return to a traditionally and secularly encouraging life of establishing families with children. The reasons that propelled the dink population to have children are concluded. Dink people may want children to take care of them in the future because they estimate an unsatisfactory economic condition when they get older due to job loss,

bankruptcy, or investment failure. Another factor is Dinks' concerns about their health. If they are diagnosed with certain diseases that make their late years inconvenient physically, they may wish to have children to take care of their health and lives. Loneliness can also contribute to the appearance of ideas to have children. Some Dink people worry that they will be lonely when they get old, especially after their spouses pass away, so they expect their children to accompany them in the future. Finally, it is the stigma that gives the dink population huge pressure no matter before or after the childless life.

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