Partnership and Parenthood in Post-transitional Societies: Will Specters Be Exorcised?

NOBUTAKA FUKUDA

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to reconsider partnership and parenthood in post-transitional societies from the viewpoint of sociology. As is well known, after the end of the Baby Boom, albeit with variations in the tempo and the level, a considerable decline in fertility has occurred in industrialized countries. Furthermore, this decline has occurred in tandem with the transformation of partnership such as an increase in the number of cohabited couples. The causes and effects of this decline in fertility have hitherto been studied by social scientists such as economists and demographers. Although the family has been one of the main research interests for sociologists for a long while, the changes in partnership and fertility behavior in developed countries have not been sufficiently argued from the perspective of sociological theory on family. In this article, we will initially compare and contrast two changes in fertility patterns: the first of these is the fertility decline that occurred around the latter half of the nineteenth century; the second is the change that has been observed in industrialized countries since the second half of the 1960s. We will then discuss the difference between economic and ideational approaches in the explanation of partnership and fertility changes. Finally, we will examine the convergence and the divergence theories on family change. This article will conclude with an emphasis on the importance of the middle-range theories.

Keywords: fertility, partnership, family change, postmodernity

Introduction

In The Communist Manifesto (1848), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels stated, “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism.” This specter has now been exorcized in European countries. Nowadays, the economy is run on a market system in all these countries. Instead, another specter is haunting industrialized countries—the specter of anti-natalism. As is well known, since the mid-1960s, with the end of the Baby Boom, a considerable decline in fertility has been seen in these countries, albeit with variations in the tempo and the level. Indeed, the total period fertility rate in most of these countries has fallen below the replacement level of population size. Fears of population decline caused by a scarcity of births have been harbored in the past by European countries such as France (Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985; Gauthier,