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**The Process of Leaving the Parental Home: A Comparison between the United States, Taiwan and Germany**

Extended abstract

Leaving the parental home has been a core subject and a significant marker in studying tradition to adulthood. Previous research has also identified several mechanisms to explain early incidences of leaving the parental home. Among various proposals, it appears that negative family experiences may account for the occurrence of leaving the parental home early. For example, *economic hardship* in the family of origin is an incentive for youth to seek the economic independence (e.g., Hao 1996). Since economic hardship is often observed among non-standard family households, this also partially explains the higher incidence of early home leaving among youth in single-parent- and step-families. In addition, children from non-standard families may experience less *social control* by parents as well as by their immediate social surroundings (e.g. McLanahan & Bumpass 1988), and may thus develop positive attitudes towards an early formation of cohabitating unions (e.g., Axinn & Thornton 1996), which in turn contributes to early separation from the parental home. For youth who are exposed to *stressful life events*, there is a general increase of the likelihood of early maturation and early home leaving (e.g., Juang, Silbereisen & Wiesner 1999).

However, the overwhelming amount of studies were conducted within a single society and lacks a cross-cultural comparative perspective *which enables us to find commonalities as well as differences in the process of transition to adulthood*. Hence, this paper intends to fill the gap by using the perspective of *institutionalization of the life course* (Kohli 1985) in a comparative approach. It should be noted that effects of the institutionalization of life course trajectories and of kinship systems in different countries can not be specified in intra-societal analyses which are usually entered as a constant factor or are typically neglected in the analyses. Hence, the cross-societal analyses is expected to provide the empirical basis for delineating various trajectories as they tend to shape the *timing*, the *extent* and the *order* of life-course transitions.

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At the start of comparative analyses, it is necessary to examine the specific definition of “leaving the parental home”. *Home* may be considered a place of living, if staying there was sufficiently long and significant for respondents and may or may not necessarily mean the coresidence with (biological) parents. *Leaving* presupposes a more or less permanent transition and often does not allow for situational changes nor temporary arrangements. *Parent* suggests biological parents, but step-/foster-parents may be subjectively defined as “parents” by respondents if important attachment is perceived. To resolve the above somewhat fussy problems, a remedial approach is taken which looks at the household composition of individuals during their specific life course and concentrates on the changes in the composition during the first 30 years under varying social and cultural conditions.

The United States, Germany and Taiwan were chosen for this comparison in a variance maximizing design, because of their relatively similar stage of economic development (US ranking 6<sup>th</sup>, Germany 15<sup>th</sup> and Taiwan 16<sup>th</sup> in GDP per capita worldwide) on the one hand, and clear differences in the institutional structure, social welfare regime and cultural values related to marriage and intergenerational solidarity. With this context in mind, a predominant research question is raised: Are mechanisms being identified in previous research in explaining home leaving among youth valid under different socio-cultural conditions? In order to better understand varying processes in the transition to adulthood, two hypotheses regarding effects of the respective institutionalization of the life course are tested:

***Kinship Hypothesis:*** The major cultural divide in family and kinship systems lies in the tradition of *patrilineal descent* and *patrilocal housing* as represented by Taiwan, and the *bilineal descent and neolocal living arrangement* which characterizes special Northwestern European Pathway (Hajnal, 1965) and is represented by Germany and the United States. It was assumed that the fundamental cultural divide results in different household structures as well as the process of home leaving for youth. To be specific, the strong normative basis of filial piety in Taiwan facilitates a tendency to stay with the family of origin until marriage (for daughters) and beyond (for the oldest son or sons) (Yeh, et al., 2013). This tendency is likely to be counterbalanced by the strong emphasis on educational success among youth (Yi, 2013) and hence may lead to early (temporal) separation from home a necessity for those who do not live in the proximity of institutions of higher education. In Germany and the United States,

a tendency of early and permanent home leaving is expected due to both the normative ideology of “one household - one marriage” (Laslett 1977) and the economic independence between adult generations. However, the early separation from home in the West may also be counterbalanced by the emerging unstable transitions from education to occupation, which may hinder leaving the parental home among youth..

***School-Work-Trajectory-Hypothesis:*** The three societies vary in the degree of institutionalization of the school-work-trajectory. The educational system in Taiwan tends to be more inclusive in that the entire population of school-age youth are considered and is thus characterized by the strong institutionalization of the trajectory, making the transition from school to work an almost normative trajectory. Germany represents a society with medium institutionalization by dividing the youth population into a dual system of academic and vocational tracks. In contrast, the United States represent a society with weak institutionalization accompanied by highest “individualized” life courses as well as non-normative transition trajectories. We expect the stronger the institutionalization of life course transitions is, the more influence of “structural” factors (such as education and work opportunities) and the less “individual incentives” (such as “push” factors out of the family of origin or “pull” factors from intimate relationships) will be observed in predicting home leaving for youth.

## **Samples**

Three large-scale nation-wide representative panel studies are used in the analyses:

(1) The National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY) of the United States. This panel started in 1997 with 8,984 respondents of the birth cohorts 1980 - 1984. Data were collected annually, of which 14 waves were used for the analysis.

(2) The Taiwanese Youth Project (TYP). This panel started in 2000 with 2,844 respondents of the birth cohorts 1986 - 1987. Data were collected first annually and recently bi-annually. 10 waves were used for the analysis.

(3) The Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (pairfam) of Germany. This panel started in 2008 with 12,402 respondents of the birth cohorts 1971 - 1973, 1981 - 1983, and 1991 - 1993. Data were collected annually, of which 5 waves were used for the analysis.

Data were harmonized post hoc to enable comparative analyses which resulted in a

rich data set across all three countries, comprising information on life course transitions until the age of 30 for Germany and the United States and until the age of 25 for Taiwan.

## **Results**

Descriptive analyses revealed distinctive patterns of the school-work-trajectory for three countries. The pattern found provides support to the above theoretical assumption. More than 80 percent of the Taiwanese adolescents were in the educational system until the age of 22, and approximately 80 percent in the workforce two years after. The other extreme were the United States, where both an early entry into the workforce and a substantial proportion in the moratorium was salient from age of 19 and onwards. As expected, Germany held a position in the middle with more resemblance with the United States than Taiwan. The same pattern showed up in the entry into first romantic relationships, which was delayed in Taiwan in comparison to Germany and the United States.

Graph 1 displays descriptive results of the age-specific household composition for youth until the age of 30 in Germany and United States and until the age of 25 in Taiwan. The comparison among three countries demonstrates several empirical regularities. Firstly, youth experienced different levels of de-standardisation in the household composition since childhood, with US having the most diversity and Taiwan the least. This may imply significant differences in the potential effect of “push”-factors for early home leaving. Secondly, the contrast between different kinship systems in the household composition was evident in that the bilineal kinship systems of the United States and Germany revealed a relative prevalence of single-mother- and stepfather-families among non-standard families, and the patrilineal kinship system of Taiwan showed relatively higher occurrence of single-father- and stepmother-families among non-standard families. This may result in important differences in the process of early home leaving. Thirdly, differences in the pace of home leaving can be ascertained with youth in United States having the highest early leavers and Taiwan the lowest.

It should be noted that for Taiwanese youth, a clear pattern of institutionalized returning to the parental home was observed. This generally occurred after age 22 and is suspected to be an outcome of completing higher education. A related phenomenon, or temporary bi-local living arrangement, was also found in that youth may leave the parental

home during weekdays for education or for work and go back home during extended weekends or holidays. In other words, for those whose homes were not close to educational or work places, leaving the parental home may have become the necessary transition and thus, do not signify permanent living arrangement. Since the temporary practice of bi-local living arrangement is in accordance with the normative expectation of parental support, young adults in Taiwan may very well hold subjective concept of not leaving parental homes while in actuality have stayed in different household for long years.

Additional analyses of German, American and Taiwanese youth confirm the importance of the cultural pattern on “one household - one marriage” in bilineal societies and the patrilocal residence in patrilineal society. Specifically, coresidence with members of the family of origin or with in-laws was extremely rare after marriage in bilineal societies (less than 4 percent of 26 years old married Germans). In contrast, coresidence with paternal family members was common in Taiwan. It was found that for married Taiwanese men at age 25, 4% lived with their in-laws (or wives’ family members) and 77% coresided with members of their family of origin. Similarly, while 18% of married Taiwanese women at age 25 lived with members of their family of origin, 58% co-resided with their in-laws or husband’s family members. Patrilineal kinship system has undoubtedly exerted its strong influence in the living arrangement of Taiwanese youth.

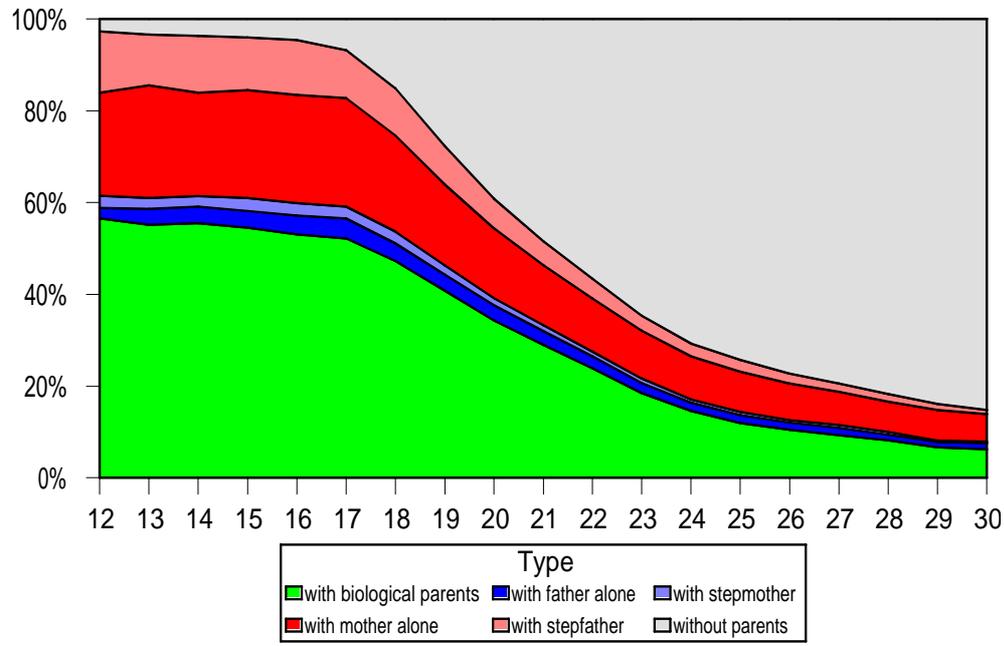
Table 1 shows multivariate analyses results, comparing the effect sizes of predictors on the first event of leaving the parental home (i.e., not living with any biological or step-parent in the same household). The results revealed pronounced differences in the respective effect sizes, sometimes even reversals in the direction of effects. For example, the effects of single-father-/stepmother-constellations and single-mother-/stepfather-constellations varied according to the respective kinship system. In general, our results suggest to take into account institutionalized school-work-trajectories and institutionalized kinship systems in explaining home leaving for youth.

The full paper will test additional variables, especially time-dependent events and attitudes on home-leaving. It will also comprise a full model with interaction-effects between the respective society and “push”-factors related to the family of origin as well as “pull”-factors related to romantic relationships, marriage, and occupational opportunities. This will allow for a critical discussion of the research questions on the cross-cultural validity of “push” and “pull”-mechanisms of home leaving and on the proposed two hypotheses

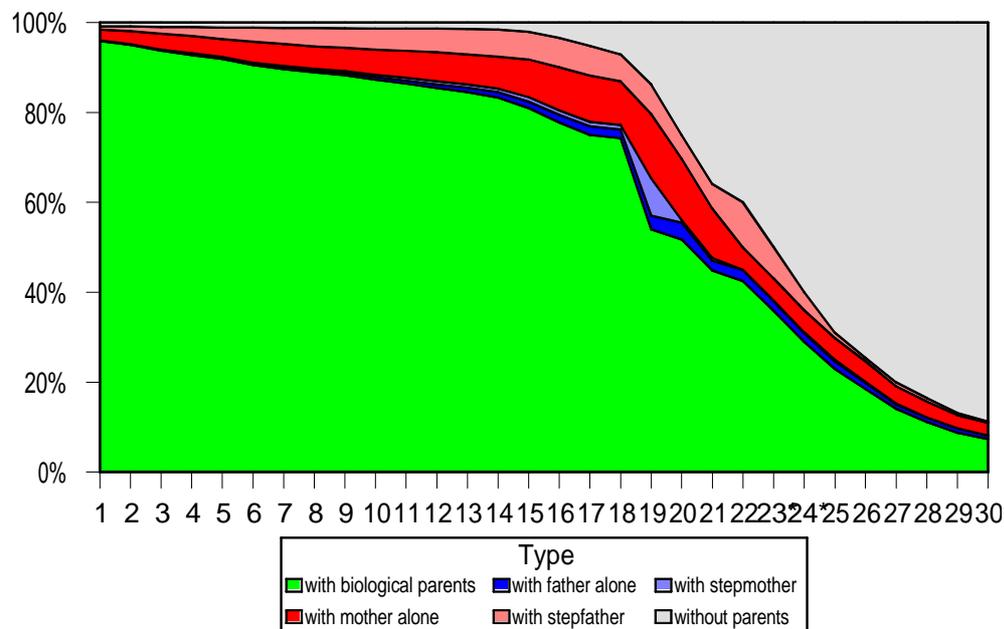
regarding potential impact from the kinship as well as from the school-work-trajectory among youth in different societies.

Graph 1: Living arrangements in the United States, Germany and Taiwan

a) United States



b) Germany



c) Taiwan

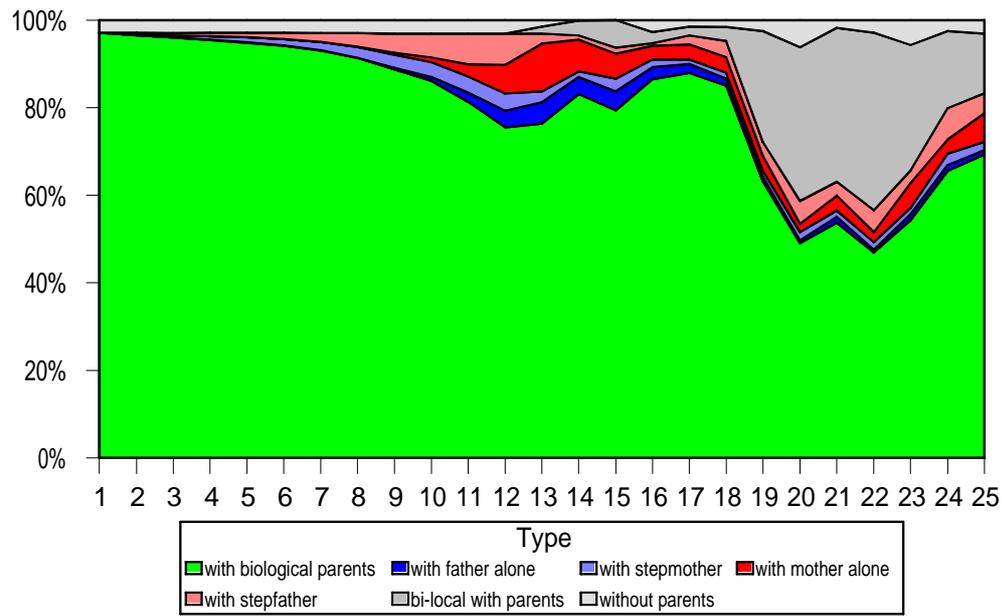


Table 1: Determinants of leaving the parental home in Germany, the United States and Taiwan (Logit discrete time event history analysis)

	Germany	USA	Taiwan
Age (centered)	.42***	.44***	.51***
Age <sup>2</sup>	-.03***	-.05***	-.08***
Male	-.42***	-.29***	-.04
Partner	.57***	.16***	.03
Family income (centered)	-.001	-.01***	.002*
Family income <sup>2</sup>	.0001**		
In school	-.55***	.31***	-1.11***
In vocational school	-.31**	-.20***	-.13
Employed	.17	.19***	-.64***
Core family (reference)	-	-	-
Single mother	.32**	-.04	.03
Single father	.17	.09	.55**
Stepfather family	.48***	.18***	-.05
Stepmother family	.48+	.34***	.42*
Parental appreciation	-.14**	.02	.00
Number of events	943	5325	1516
R <sup>2</sup> (Nagelkerke)	.13	.11	.21