

Changes in Cultural Development under Economic Growth: Tradition, Individual Values and Social Ethical Framework

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Abstract: Currently, the impacts generated from the rapidly evolving economy is under the limelight across the globe, which plays a pivotal role in shaping social conditions. Economic growth has been widely analyzed as a driving force behind improvements in living standards, healthcare, education, and individual opportunities. Meanwhile, it cultivates diverse cultural transformations, presenting challenges to the safeguarding of traditional values and the maintenance of local identities. A significant concern emerging in contemporary discourse is the dual impact of economic advancement, which serves both as a driving force for modernization and as a constraint that endangers the cultural sustainability of minority communities. The article presents the complex relationship between economic growth and cultural development. Economic growth, measured by GDP, is crucial for enhancing living standards and access to education in a society, but it also leads negative impacts on societal traditions, individual values, and social ethical framework. The balance between benefits of economic growth and preservations of cultural identities and values should be emphasize, which inspires further research to focus on a developing a method for such sustainable development.

Keywords: Economic growth, Culture, Education, Social values, Women empowerment.

1. Introduction

Economic growth refers to the economy's capacity to enhance goods and services production over time[1], commonly assessed through the rise in gross domestic product (GDP). It significantly influences living conditions, facilitating better health, housing, education, nutrition, social connectivity, dignity, peace, human rights, environmental health, and overall happiness. Conversely, culture embodies a society's distinct spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional traits, encompassing artistic expressions, lifestyle practices, value systems, traditions, and beliefs[2].

Past researchers have thoroughly analyzed factors affecting economic growth such as the provision of high-level education by equipping people with enhanced competencies and capabilities [3], and the entrenched cultural values within a society by determining its operational dynamics and standards [4]. Past researchers have thoroughly analyzed factors affecting economic growth such as the provision of high-level education by equipping people with enhanced competencies and capabilities, and the entrenched cultural values within a society by determining its operational dynamics and standards [4]. Economic growth contributes to expanding compulsory education, individual capital, and ethical standards, while also bringing diverse cultures. However, it may erode traditional values,

increase consumerism, and spark cultural conflicts. Thus, this article evaluates whether economic growth hinders or enhances cultural development regarding traditional values, individual ethics, and social frameworks.

2. Economic Growth and Traditional Cultures

A strong economy, often measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), increases a nation's ability to invest in education, allowing for greater resource allocation to teachers and improved access to schools for children. . Consequently, standardized education fosters critical thinking and scientific reasoning skills, while promoting the official language to enhance social communication. Figure 1 shows that College Enrollment in the US (in million) and GDP in the US (\$, in billion) from 2019 to 2023.

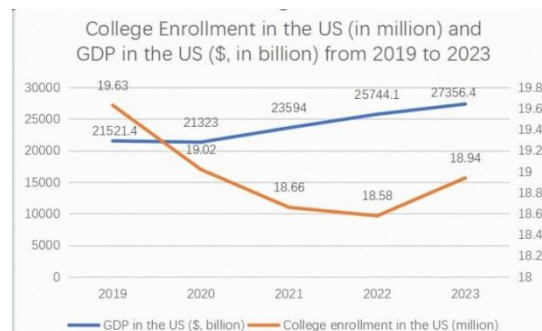


Figure 1: College Enrollment in the US (in million) and GDP in the US (\$, in billion) from 2019 to 2023 [5].

At the same time, the movement towards standardized curricula poses a threat to the preservation of religious cultures and regional dialects, hastening their potential extinction.

According to David Voas's groundwork in Taiwan - home to a variety of religious beliefs, including Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and folk religions - people with higher education are less likely than others to say that they have a religion, to worship or pray frequently [6]. Figure 2 illustrates that around 93% of people in Taiwan self-identify as Buddhists, Taoists, or adherents of Chinese folk religions. However, as is common in many East Asian religious contexts, this identification does not equate to active participation, unlike in various regions globally[7]. Higher education correlates with increased confidence in personal autonomy and a decreased reliance on supernatural beliefs. Notably, among the youth and those with advanced education, there is a rising trend of identifying as non-religious, infrequent engagement in worship or prayer, and a perception of minimal relevance associated with these practices.

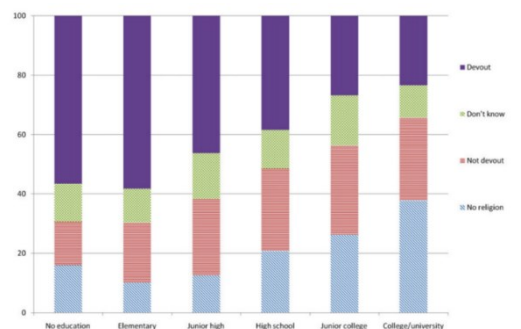


Figure 2: Religion by level of education, % (Taiwan Social Change Survey 2004) [5].

Besides the downfall of religion, education expansion due to boosting economies leads to the extinction of dialects. Linguists estimate that around 31,000 languages have existed in human history, but only 6,000 are spoken today. Nine languages become extinct each year, and if this rate continues, more than half of the world's languages could become extinct within the next 100 years [8]. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson define such a situation as linguicide, which is the extermination of languages and an analogous concept to (physical) genocide [9]. As standardized education becomes more available, the emphasize on official language, such as Mandarin in China, is deepened, which, in turn, leads to less use of local dialects in schools and everyday communication. In the 17th century, as the French began to supplant Latin as the predominant European lingua franca in international diplomacy, there was a pervasive belief across Europe in the inherent legitimacy and preeminence of the French language. The structure of the French language was declared to be more closely related to the natural order and expression of thoughts. Diderot, the principal editor of the French Encyclopédie, advocates for this principle and asserts that French serves as the most suitable language for scientific discourse, enlightenment, and the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, non-French dialects were excluded from the orthodox education system, whereas French was stigmatized, glorified, and rationalized as the dominant and official language, which is “incorruptible” [9].

3. Economic Growth and Culture Values

3.1. The Relationship Between Economic Growth and Changes in Social Consumption Patterns

As a society experiences economic expansion, the processes of modernization and industrialization advance, leading to a widespread transformation in social and cultural values. On the one hand, economic development gives rise to wage increases, enabling individuals to afford a wider variety of premium products and promoting consumerism in society. Once basic needs are met, improving financial capabilities and increasing disposable income enable individuals to pursue a higher quality of life, such as dining in a restaurant or travelling to experience diverse cultures. The exposure to new experiences and cultures, meanwhile, reinforces an individual’s value on novelty and quality of life.

Figure 3 illustrates that as US GDP climbed from 21323 billion to 27356.4 billion (approximately 28.30%) between 2019 and 2023, the number of residents traveling abroad also increased significantly, despite a pandemic-induced drop in 2020. From 2021 onward, US travelers surged from 49.1 million to 98.5 million, an increase of about 100.61%, indicating a positive correlation between GDP growth and international travel.

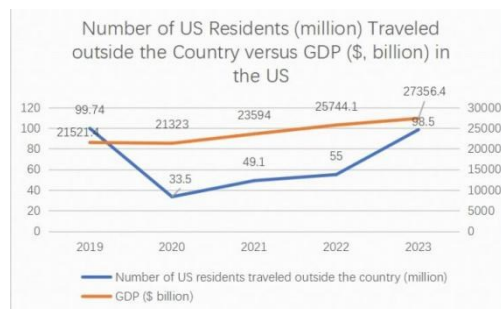


Figure 3: The trend of Number of US Residents Traveled outside the Country versus GDP in the US [10, 11].

Societal values and tolerance levels, regarding authority, sexual norms, and marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals and abortion views, vary with economic conditions. Economic growth increases access to education and information, promoting critical thinking and awareness of

social issues like equality. In contrast, societies marked by insecurity and low well-being often react defensively to foreigners and cultural changes. Economic expansion facilitates interaction with diverse cultures through immigration, travel, and media, enhancing understanding of different belief systems and fostering progressive values that address existing inequalities.

3.2. The Impact of Economic Development on Women's Empowerment and Social Values

Research done by Ronald & Wayne suggests that societies that prioritize survival values tend to exhibit diminished subjective well-being, report poorer health outcomes, display low levels of interpersonal trust, show a marked intolerance towards outgroups, and generally support limited gender equality [12]. Furthermore, they emphasize materialistic values, possess a strong faith in science and technology, demonstrate minimal engagement in environmental activism, and tend to favor authoritarian governance structures. Societies high on self-expression values tend to have opposite preferences on these topics.

In terms of the effects of economic growth on women's empowerment, substantial evidence supports a positive correlation. From the aspect of women's education, Ester Duflo found that Parents always held lower aspirations for their daughters than for their sons [13]. In places where no woman had ever been the local leader, 86 percent of parents wanted their daughters to be either a housewife or whatever their in-laws would decide for her (the corresponding fraction was below 1 percent for the boys). Also, Tatiana Damjanovic and Geethanjali Selvaratnam demonstrated that economic poverty leads to educational inequality, which limits the number of highly intelligent girls receiving education while directing educational investments toward boys with lower intelligence [14]. However, it has been established that the marginal returns on female education surpass those of male education, and elevating women's education levels would significantly increase overall economic advantages. Thus, Economic burgeon empowers women by increasing their access to education and gives them hope by expanding their opportunities to engage in formal employment and be economically independent. Hassan & Cooray employed Extreme Bounds Analysis (EBA) and demonstrated a positive impact of economic growth in accelerating investment in female education in Asia [15]. Furthermore, the study conducted by Nisha et al. demonstrated that enhancing cultural and educational standards can facilitate gender equality, thereby accelerating improvements in a nation's social and economic metrics [16]. This forms a positive feedback loop of economic development, educational advancement, equality promotion, and continued economic growth.

From the aspect of women's political status, Caiazza & Putnam through a study on the correlation between women's status and social capital in the United States, found that efforts to improve women's status could raise levels of social capital [17]. Conversely, women tend to perform better in regions with higher social capital, enhancing their awareness of resources and increasing their access to these resources. In addition, Bailey and Diprete, in their research analyzing the economic and social circumstances of American women in conjunction with their political participation over the past fifty years, posited that as women's social and economic standing improved (specifically, as their financial resources expanded), their engagement in political processes also heightened [18]. This trend encompasses a rise in voter turnout, an uptick in campaign contributions, an elevated interest in electoral matters, and an increase in women aspiring to hold public office. While this transformation has been incremental, it has consistently and resolutely fortified women's political clout.

In summary, enhanced economic welfare fosters a consumer-oriented lifestyle through improved financial access. This shift promotes cultural acceptance of marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ+ community, while advocating for gender equality by diversifying the economy and expanding women's employment opportunities, ultimately elevating their social status.

4. Economic Growth and the Inflow of Culture

Economic growth often results in low unemployment, relatively high employment growth and high wages, therefore attracting migration of both skilled and unskilled mobile labor from other regions. R Cohen posits that every culture exhibits permeable borders, indistinct limits, and common traditions that stem from the historical context we have outlined, particularly influenced by a significant transformation in interconnectedness, encapsulated in the array of social changes broadly referred to as globalization [19]. Especially considering the trend of economic boom worldwide and globalization, migrants are more likely to spread the culture belonging to them to their destination societies, leading to greater overlaps and deterritorialization. During the late 19th and 20th, the United States experienced rapid industrialization and economic growth and attracted millions of migrants from Italians, China, Poles, and Germany [20]. Seeking comfort in a strange land, as well as a common language, many immigrants sought out relatives, friends, former neighbors, townspeople, and countrymen who had already settled in American cities. This led to a rise in ethnic enclaves within the larger cities. Neighborhoods such as Little Italy and Chinatown developed in major cities like New York and San Francisco, preserving the cultural heritage of these immigrant groups. The influence can still be seen in American cuisine, with Italian and Chinese foods becoming staples of the American diet. Aiming to accommodate nine million migrants arrived, the Bureau of New York opened Ellis Island in 1892. Approximately fifty percent of the American population can trace their lineage back to individuals who, at various points in history, gained entry into the nation via the gateway at Ellis Island. Upon arrival, medical professionals conducted assessments of the newcomers to identify any indicators of communicable diseases. The majority of these immigrants were granted admission to the country following a brief review of their accompanying documentation.

Consequently, culture evolves into a hybridized, amalgamated, and in certain instances, whimsical form by integrating novel cultural elements from the contemporary environment. The migrants present, represent, perform and express their origins, journeys and experiences. Novels, film, poems, dances and music, and the digital media, provide a sort of moving wallpaper, a succession of opaque and pellucid screens that surround everyday activities.

Tracing back to the premodern period, the narratives, paintings and religious iconography contain the theme of migration and culture mix. The *Odyssey* by Homer, regarded as the second surviving piece of Western literature, symbolizes the journey of the wandering migrant, while *Penelope* embodies the notion of the wife, family, and community awaiting at home. Likewise, *Exodus*, the second book of the *Bible*, portrays Moses guiding the Jewish enslaved population towards the Promised Land, complemented by Arnold Friberg's iconic painting *Parting of the Red Sea* which immortalizes this significant moment.

The experience and imagery of translocality in the contemporary global landscape have rendered the relationship between culture and migration increasingly omnipresent, fostering a rise in cultural hybridity.

5. Conclusion

While economic growth is frequently celebrated and recognized for its beneficial impacts, such as enhancing living standards and expanding access to education and employment, it also presents challenges regarding cultural preservation and the transformation of social values. As people become more rational and confident with their personal competence by getting access to higher-level and formal education, they tend to be less likely to believe in religious convictions. Thus, traditional values such as creeds and religions decline. The expansion of standardized education also leads to the decline of dialects, or linguicide, as the official language becomes the mainstream.

Moreover, economic expansion fosters tolerance and equality by enhancing access to education and facilitating exposure to varied cultures. This progress results in the advancement of social norms that promote greater acceptance of marginalized groups and a transition toward gender equality, as demonstrated by the rising status and empowerment of women. Simultaneously, economic development triggers an inflow of migrants, introducing a rich diversity of cultures that blend and hybridize with existing ones, creating multicultural societies. The interaction between economic expansion and cultural evolution demonstrates a reciprocal relationship in which prosperity leads to both the enrichment and erosion of cultural practices, traditions, and social values.

In a nutshell, economic growth, while transformative in improving people's well-being, also reshapes the cultural fabric of societies, influencing individuals' beliefs and values. Thus, the ongoing challenge lies in finding a balance between economy-boost modernization and preserving the cultural identities that define a society's heritage, which further studies could focus on.

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