

Scientific Motherhood on Breastfeeding

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Intro:

Hello everyone! Welcome to our class! What is technoscience? I think the answer is too abstract to understand easily, but it does not far away from us. So, today I will use a case which happens in daily life to help you have a preliminary idea of technoscience. I would like to ask you a question before we start the class. I don't know if you go to parenting section when you visit a bookstore. There is a lot of books about how mothers can raise children in a more scientific way. But have you ever thought, how a mother raised her child in the past when there was not any scientific or so-call professional guidance?

There seems to be a social consensus that "mothers cannot do without the help of science in raising healthy babies," and the "traces" of scientific involvement are particularly evident in how to feed newborns. On the website of the National Health Service of the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Taiwan, it is clearly stated that breast milk contains the most suitable nutrients for the growth of newborns¹. However, how do Taiwanese mothers respond to this scientific opinion? Before answering this question, please allow me to have a brief on scientific motherhood in Taiwan.

Background:

Slide A: What is scientific motherhood? This ideology appeared in late nineteenth-century United States. According to definition from scholar Rima Apple, scientific motherhood is the idea that women need professional medical and scientific help to raise their children healthfully².

In Taiwan, scientific motherhood emerged after World War II, and the reason of emergence could not be separated from US Aid at that time. After World War II, Taiwan was considered by the United States as one of the most important partners in preventing the expansion of Communist power. As a result, the then Nationalist Government signed "Mutual Security Acts" with the United States and received assistance from 1951 to 1965³.

¹ Health Promotion Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare, "Breastfeeding," <https://www.hpa.gov.tw/Pages/List.aspx?nodeid=389> (accessed December 5, 2022).

² RIMA D. APPLE, "Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Society History of Medicine* 2, no. 8 (1995): 161, <https://academic.oup.com/shm/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/shm/8.2.161>.

³ Taiwan Ministry of Culture, "US Aid," in *Encyclopedia of Taiwan*, last modification September 24, 2010, <https://nrch.culture.tw/twpedia.aspx?id=3920>, (accessed December 6, 2022).

Among US Aid, technical assistance was one of the important items, including medical and health care, which was the most penetrated part of US Aid to Taiwan society⁴. Taiwan's medical system began to be oriented toward the United States, and it was not surprising that the dominant scientific motherhood ideology was introduced to Taiwan through medicine. In addition, due to technical assistance, Taiwan's medical and public health care improved, more people chose to give birth in hospitals. Official parenting manuals, parenting guides written by pediatricians were required reading for every mother⁵.

Slide B: However, the mainstream knowledge of feeding at that time was formula milk, which met the scientific criteria of time and rationed feeding, and naturally became the choice of most Taiwanese mothers, but this situation did not last long.

Between 1939 and 1976, there were many warnings from around the world about the potential of formula to cause more serious health problems in infants, and there were numerous scientific studies that showed that breast milk contained many nutrients suitable for the growth of newborns. Breast milk has once again jumped onto the stage as the "DREAM FOOD for babies in the 21st century"⁶.

The global emphasis on breast milk also influenced Taiwan, and around the 1990s the Taiwanese government cooperated with the WHO to prohibit manufacturers from promoting some formulas and started the Breastfeeding Promotion Program⁷. With the government's strong propaganda, the feeding knowledge of "breast milk is the best" continues to this day.

Main body:

So how do Taiwanese mothers respond to the mainstream knowledge of feeding that breastfeeding is the most scientific way? I searched the news, interviews, and personal posts to find the real voices of Taiwanese mothers. I find that most Taiwanese mothers are influenced by the ideology of scientific motherhood to choose breastfeeding, but not all mothers can successfully practice scientific motherhood due to their own conditions and social environment.

Slide C:

Type 1: Just do it without question

A mother shared her breastfeeding experience on a main internet forum in Taiwan, PTT

⁴ Tsui-Hua Yang, "U.S. Aid in the Formation of Health Planning and the Medical System in Taiwan," *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica* (2008): 92, <http://dx.doi.org/10.6353/BIMHAS.200812.0091>.

⁵ 黃韻庭,「餵什麼?為什麼?:台灣哺育知識變遷的社會學考察」(碩士論文,國立政治大學,2013年),47頁。

⁶ 黃韻庭,「餵什麼?為什麼?:台灣哺育知識變遷的社會學考察」,62頁。

⁷ 黃韻庭,「餵什麼?為什麼?:台灣哺育知識變遷的社會學考察」,62頁。

(like reddit). When a user left a comment asking her if she believed breastfeeding was the best for her child, the mother said she was not sure, but the doctor said that you would better breastfeed your baby.

In the comment section of this post, some mothers said they did not understand why some people did not choose to breastfeed their children when it was the best for them, but they do not have much difficulty in breastfeeding, which they admitted⁸.

Therefore, we can see that under the influence of scientific motherhood, some Taiwanese mothers will follow the advice of their doctors and choose to breastfeed, but they do not know whether breastfeeding is really good for their children's growth. Some mothers may even criticize other mothers who do not choose to breastfeed.

Type 2: Am I a failure as a mother?

There is a famous obstetrician in Taiwan, called Wuwu who delicated in dispelling the myths about pregnant women. Based on her caseload, Dr. Wuwu says mothers often wonder if they are a failure because they can't breastfeed their children, even if they have to choose formula for health issues.

Dr. Wuwu said that although doctors always emphasize that they are only advising and not forcing, breast milk is considered the best gift a mother can give her baby under the scientific discourse, which is directly linked to the health of the child. As a result, some mothers have told her that they feel ashamed that they can't give their babies the best protection because they can't breastfeed, and that they feel ashamed of their children⁹.

Slide D:

Type 3: Dilemma of work and breastfeeding

In addition to their own conditions that make breastfeeding difficult for some mothers, most Taiwanese mothers are caught in the dilemma of work and breastfeeding.

According to Taiwanese women's groups fighting for women's rights, Taiwan's breastfeeding policy follows the WHO standard, which recommends exclusive breastfeeding up to six months. However, most Taiwanese mothers have to return to work as soon as possible after giving birth due to the unsound parental leave in Taiwan, so they cannot breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months¹⁰. Governments promoting breastfeeding policies in force only emphasize the benefits of breastfeeding based on scientific research but ignore the real situation of mothers, leaving them in a dilemma.

⁸ 「母乳：母乳的好處」，PTT，2016年3月29日，
<https://www.ptt.cc/bbs/BabyMother/M.1459263822.A.1AD.html>。

⁹ 楊貴智，「法客話題 EP83 | 烏烏醫師：法律要把子宮還給媽媽了嗎？」，2021年3月9日，於法客電台，法律白話文運動製作，podcast，
<https://podcasts.apple.com/tw/podcast/%E6%B3%95%E5%AE%A2%E8%A9%B1%E9%A1%8C-ep83-%E7%83%8F%E7%83%8F%E9%86%AB%E5%B8%AB-%E6%B3%95%E5%BE%8B%E8%A6%81%E6%8A%8A%E5%AD%90%E5%AE%AE%E9%82%84%E7%B5%A6%E5%AA%BD%E5%AA%BD%E4%BA%86%E5%97%8E/id1482463498?i=1000512244374>。

¹⁰ 楊貴智，「法客話題 EP83 | 烏烏醫師：法律要把子宮還給媽媽了嗎？」。

Type 4: Stuck at home

Even though Taiwan passed the “Public Breastfeeding Act” in 2010, which is enacted to safeguard the right of women to breastfeed in public places, there are still a lot of news that mothers are criticized for breastfeeding in public.

So, a mother said in a PTT forum that although she has no difficulty in breastfeeding as a full-time mother, she feels like she is stuck at home because her child needs to drink milk by regular hours. “I can't even breastfeed outside, it's like I'm a cow at home 24/7.”¹¹

Therefore, even though some mothers are able to breastfeed up to 6 months of age, the regular rationing advocated by scientific motherhood ties them to the home. Although breastfeeding is a scientific approach that the government is advocating nationwide, feeding babies is still considered by most to be a private practice.

According to the four categories, the majority of Taiwanese mothers desire to breastfeed as much as they are able to because they "believe in the profession," however not all mothers are appropriate.

Many mothers struggle with nursing since the scientific discourse that links breast milk directly to a baby's health forces mothers to "only" select breast milk.

Conclusion:

After World War II, the ideology of scientific motherhood began to emerge in Taiwan because of US Aid, and Taiwanese mothers were changed from the queen of the nursery to the servant of science¹². As a result, the mainstream knowledge of breastfeeding has changed from formula 1970s~1990s to breast milk 1990s~now. In today's Taiwanese society, breast milk has become the "only" option for mothers due to scientific endorsement, but not all mothers can successfully breastfeed. Therefore, we can also see that scientific motherhood ideology, which emphasizes the need for science, does not consider the real experience of mothers and even marginalizes them in parenting.

¹¹ 「心得：餵母乳的優缺點」，PTT，2022年8月23日，
<https://pttyes.com/BabyMother/M.1661238799.A.F1A>。

¹² RIMA D. APPLE, “Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” 178.

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8. 「母乳：母乳的好處」。PTT。2016年3月29日，<https://www.ptt.cc/bbs/BabyMother/M.1459263822.A.1AD.html>。

Background: scientific motherhood

What is scientific motherhood?

Late 19th Century in America

“Scientific motherhood is the insistence that women require expert scientific and medical advice to raise their children healthfully.” ——Rima Apple

Scientific motherhood in Taiwan

Emerged after World War II

US Aid: technical assistance

- Taiwan's medical system began to be oriented toward the United States
- Taiwan's medical and public health care improved; more people chose to give birth in hospitals



Background: shift in mainstream feeding knowledge



Formula milk
1970s~1990s



Breast milk
1990s ~now

- Global trend: Breast milk has once again jumped onto the stage as the **"DREAM FOOD for babies in the 21st century"**
- Taiwanese government cooperated with the WHO to prohibit manufacturers from promoting some formulas and started the **Breastfeeding Promotion Program**

How do Taiwanese mothers respond to scientific advice on promoting breastfeeding in Taiwan?

Type 1: Just do it without question

- Follow the advice of the doctors
- Even criticize other mothers who do not choose to breastfeed

Type 2: Am I a failure as a mother?

- Breast milk is directly linked to the health of the child, according to what doctors say
- Mothers feel ashamed that they can't give their babies the best protection

How do Taiwanese mothers respond to scientific advice on promoting breastfeeding in Taiwan?

Type 3: Dilemma of work and breastfeeding

- Work ladies are hard to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months
- Real experiences from different class of mothers are ignored

Type 4: Stuck at home

- “I can't even breastfeed outside, it's like I'm a cow at home 24/7.”
- Regular rationing advocated by scientific motherhood ties them to the home

2017/02/19, 社會
女星在高鐵哺乳遭批「妨礙風化」，她分享法條回應：沒什麼好可恥的

The actress was criticized for breastfeeding on the high-speed train, and she shared the law in response: there is nothing to be ashamed of

