

Pursuing Modernity in Childbirth: Struggles between Technocratic Value and Technological Constraints

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Since the late 1960s, childbirth in Taiwan has been gradually medicalized. With the idea that technology can control childbirth, the medical model dominates childbirth in contemporary Taiwan. However, can technology perfectly control childbirth? Does technological control over childbirth ever reach its limit? What are the Taiwanese obstetric community's beliefs about technology? How do these beliefs influence women's birthing experiences?

I answer these questions based on my ethnographic research in Taipei and Touyuan from 2008 to 2009. This article focuses on the prenatal surveillance by which Taiwanese obstetricians attempt to reduce Cesarean rates as a response to policy. The obstetricians conduct prenatal assessment on how possible it is for a woman to complete vaginal birth, mainly through measuring fetal weight and pelvic size. They implement so-called "preventive interventions," such as labor induction, when the possibility is low. On the one hand, I examine the professional beliefs behind these clinical practices, and show the strong technocratic values among Taiwanese obstetricians. On the other hand, I analyze how this prenatal surveillance may increase, instead of reducing, Cesarean sections. In doing so, I highlight the contradiction between the obstetricians' beliefs in technology, and the constraints of technology itself. Meanwhile, although the obstetricians constantly face the limits of technology, their technocratic values are widespread and significantly influence women's birthing experiences.

Based on this analysis, this article is also concerned with the following questions: What prices do people have to pay when they pursue modernity without reflecting on the limits of technology? Who pays for it? This article

shows how childbirth has become an arena where people struggle between their technocratic values and the limits of technology.

Keywords: prenatal surveillance, Cesarean sections, modernity, technocratic value, risk
