



Nepal's transitional development and son preference

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Abstract

This study aimed to consider the conditions under which son preference weakens, starting with Balla and Kaur (2015), who showed that son preference weakens as one moves up the social ladder. Data collected from the questionnaire survey were analyzed using SPSS. The findings indicate that members of the upper class have a weak son preference, not only because of economic stability but also because they benefit from meritocracy. Based on these results, this study suggests three structural factors that give rise to son preference: a situation in which individuals' economic and social security depends on their families, the superiority of sons in inheriting the family lineage, and not receiving the benefits of meritocracy.

Keywords

son preference, social class, upward mobility, transitional development

Introduction

In an interview with journalist Hvistendahl, the French demographer Christophe Z. Guilmoto stated that Nepal is a country that meets the conditions for son preference to grow (Hvistendahl 2011, trans. 2012: 32). These conditions include a decline in the birth rate, economic growth, and the spread of reproductive technology. The data show that Nepal meets these three conditions.

Why does son preference become more pronounced as people become wealthier? Guilmoto suggested that as people become wealthier, they invest more in their "limited number of good quality children," most of whom are sons. Why do

people invest in their sons as they become wealthy? Based on demographics, Indian scholars Balla and Kaur (2015) predicted that son preference in India would weaken as people move up the social hierarchy. They found son preference to be strongest in the emerging middle class, but it weakens as people move up the social ladder. However, they did not explore in depth the circumstances that change with increasing social class to weaken son preference.

In this study, we aimed to consider the conditions that weaken son preference as people move up the social hierarchy. This investigation is grounded in the assumption that people tend to hold egalitarian values as they become materially wealthy, based on Inglehart's argument (2018) and Amoranto et al. (2011) data analysis.

The novelty of our study is its focus on upper-class upward social mobility as an attitude that appears to differentiate the lower class from middle-class egalitarianism. Upward social mobility is an attitude toward improving one's social and economic standing. This is associated with support for competition, a sense of self-determination, and meritocracy.

Research Methodology

We obtained data on son preference from a questionnaire survey of 1,036 men and 1,551 women aged 20 to 70 years in Bagmati Province, Kathmandu, Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, and Dhading; the questionnaire survey was conducted from October 2016 to March 2017. The selected areas included ten Village Development Committees, VDCs, from Sindhupalchok, 13 from Kavrepalanchok, nine from Lalitpur, six from Bhaktapur, nine from Nuwakot, two from Rasuwa, and 11 from Dhading. The survey questionnaire involved a random sampling method, with a probability proportional to size. We divided the six VDCs from Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur into 25, 6, and 8 wards by population size.

The dependent variable is son preference (see Table 1), which we measured through ideal gender composition, experience with sex determination, experience with abortion after gender determination, and the need for a son in the family. Respondents agreed or disagreed with phrases such as "A person with only daughters is unfortunate," "Not having a son reflects bad karma and lack of moral virtue," and "Only a son can provide ancestor worship." The respondents had various reasons for preferring sons, including security in old age, financial support, family lineage, funeral pallbearers, and inheritance of property, prestige, and power.

Table 1
Variables

Son preference	
Q. The purpose of an ultrasound among individuals who have ever sought one (multiple choice)	a. For prenatal health care b. For sex determination c. Other
Q. Some women undergo an operation to remove the fetus. Have you (or your spouse) undergone such an operation?	1. Yes 2. No
Q. In your opinion, is it necessary to have a son in a family?	1. Yes 2. No
Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree? (Choose one number)	
A. A person with only daughters is unfortunate.	1. Strongly agree
B. Not having a son reflects bad karma and a lack of moral virtue.	2. Agree
C. Only a son can provide ancestor worship.	3. Disagree
D. It is acceptable for a parent to receive financial assistance from daughters.	4. Strongly disagree
<p>We recorded 1=4, 2=3, 3=2, 4=1 for questions A, B, and C. The average total score was 7.6. The standard deviation was 2.0. From the above, 1 to 5 points were defined as low, 6 to 9 as average, and 10 points or more as high.</p>	
Q. What are the advantages of having a son in the family? (multiple choice)	a. Security in old age b. Financial support c. Family lineage d. Funeral pallbearers' e. Inheritance of property f. Prestige and power g. Other religious advantages h. Means to attain a dowry i. Nothing j. Other

Land holdings

- Q. How large is it? (1 hectare 19 ropani)
1. Less than 10 ropani
 2. 20 ropani
 3. 30 ropani
 4. 40 ropani
 5. 50 ropani
 6. 60 ropani
 7. 70 ropani
 8. 80 ropani
 9. 90 ropani and above
-

Household income

- Q. How much is your household's cash income per month in Nepalese rupees (NRs)?
1. 0 – 10,000
 2. 10,001 – 30,000
 3. 30,001 – 50,000
 4. 50,001 and above
 5. No income
-

Income groups were classified into three classes: poorest (0-10,001 rupees), second-fourth (10,001-30,000 rupees), and richest (30,001 rupees or more), based on the nominal household income quintiles used in Table 11-1 of the Living Standard Survey 2010/11.

Class self-identification

- Q. People sometimes describe themselves as belonging to the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class. Which one would you describe yourself as?
1. Upper class
 2. Upper middle class
 3. Lower middle class
 4. Working class
 5. Lower class
-

Upward mobility

Q. Please tell me about your views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? (Choose one number)

- A. I have complete free choice and control
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Disagree
 4. Strongly disagree

We recorded 1,2=1,3,4=0

Q. Please state your views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? (Choose one number)

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| A. Competition is good. It encourages people to work hard and develop new ideas. | 1. Agree with A
2. Agree with B |
| B. Competition is harmful. It brings out the worst in people. | |
-

Q. Please state your views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? (Choose one number)

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| A. In the long run, hard work usually helps a person build a better life | 1. Agree with A
2. Agree with B |
| B. Hard work doesn't generally bring success; it's more a matter of luck and connections. | |

We recorded 1=1,2=0. The average total score was 2.6, the standard deviation was 0.6. From the above, 0 to 1 point were defined as low, 2 as average, and 3 points as high.

Funeral pallbearers perform religious rituals such as setting fire to the body of the deceased during cremation. Entities/actors/issues related to family maintenance strategies include funeral pallbearers and property inheritance, whereas those linked to family economic strategies include security in old age and financial support. In addition, prestige and displays of power indicate that a woman who gives birth to a male child can establish a firm position in the family. The birth of a male child elevates a woman's status. The independent variables are landholding, household income, class self-identification, and upward mobility. We analyzed the data using SPSS.

Nepal's transitional development and son preference

(1) Son preference in Nepal

According to Guilmoto of Descartes University's Institute for Population and Development (located in France), Nepal has the potential to develop a strong son preference (Hvistendahl 2011, trans. 2012: 32). The population is 80% Hindu, and sons are highly valued as they are expected to inherit the family lineage, care for aging parents, and play central roles in family ceremonies. This is reflected in the proverb *Choro paye khasi, chori paye farsi*, which means, 'if a son is born, we sacrifice a goat whereas for a girl's birth we get a pumpkin to eat'. This is also an expression of inherent sexual discrimination in the Nepali society. However, this skewing in the sex ratio at birth did not occur until the second half of the 1990s.

Newspaper headlines such as "Sex-selective abortions rife in urban areas" (*Republica*, 2013, July 20), "Preference for son blamed for rise in sex-selective abortions" (*Republica*, 2013, July 23), "Sex-selective abortion continues unabated" (*The Himalayan Times*, 2018, October 14), "Female feticide: Unpardonable crime" (Jha & Jha, *The Himalayan Times*, 2016, Aug 11), and "Health Ministry to monitor hospitals to curb sex-selective abortions" (Poudel, *The Kathmandu Post*, 2019, October 15) demonstrate high public concern regarding abortions of female fetuses.

Guilmoto pointed out common features of countries that have seen son preference rise in recent years: "economic growth," a "rapid decline in the birth rate," and the "prevalence of prenatal screening tests and abortion systems." "Economic growth" and the "rapid decline in the birth rate" indicate that when household income rises during an "economic growth period," people tend to raise a small number of children with great care. The prevalence of prenatal screening tests and abortion systems implies that there is an environment that promotes traditional son preference (Hvistendahl 2011, trans. 2012: 32).

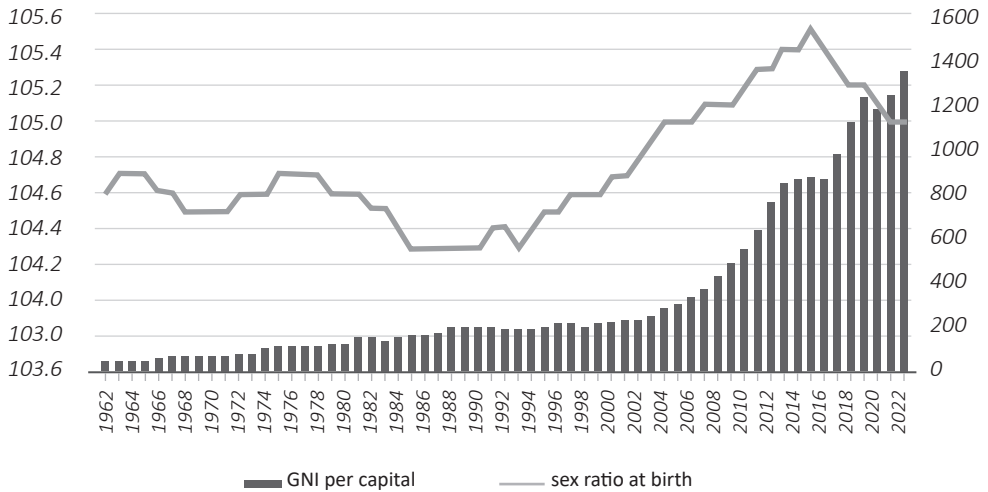
(2) Economic growth and the declining birth rate

Nepal shares three characteristics with other countries in which the sex ratio at birth has become skewed. Rising income levels resulting from economic development have created a situation in which children value quantity; the legal and technological basis for pursuing this is in the process of being established.

As shown in Figure 1, the sex ratio at birth in Nepal began to skew over two decades, from the second half of the 1990s through 2010. While economic growth in Nepal came to a standstill because of the civil war that lasted from the late 1990s to 2006, gross national income (GNI) continued to climb, and by 2021, it was roughly 5.4 times that of 20 years earlier.

Figure 1

Estimated sex ratio at birth in Nepal and GNI per capita (1950–2022)



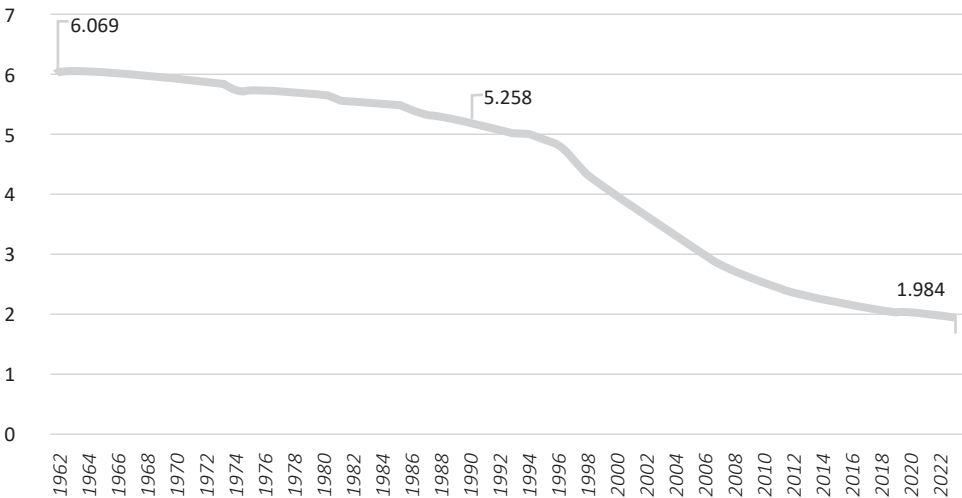
Note: Created by the author using the World Development Indicators, sex ratio at birth (male versus female births); last updated June 28, 2024, and GNI per capita; Atlas method (current USD), last updated June 28, 2024.

In 2021, Nepal's economic growth rate was estimated to be 7.5%, making it the fifth fastest growing economy in the world. The country also experienced a sharp drop in the proportion of the population living on less than USD 2.15 per day. However, according to the World Bank (2022), inequality has persisted, with the Gini coefficient falling from 55.2 in 1995 to 8.2 in 2010.

The average household size in Nepal has shrunk and the number of children born to each woman (the total fertility rate, or TFR) has been declining. The average household size in the survey was 4.5, which would be 4.3 in urban zones and 4.7 in rural areas (Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission, Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS] 2017: 28).

According to the World Development Indicators, there has been a steady decline in the TFR from 5.2 births per woman in 1990 to 1.9 births per woman in 2022 (Figure 2). Although fertility rates have stagnated in urban areas, this decline has been prominent in rural areas.

Figure 2
Total fertility rate (1991–2022)



Note. The data sources are as follows: World Bank, World Development Indicators, fertility rate and total fertility rate (births per woman); last updated April 15, 2025.

(3) Access to prenatal screenings and abortion

Nepal's skewed sex ratio at birth emerged after the National Abortion Policy made abortion legal in 2002 (Frost, Puri, and Hinde, 2013). Prenatal sex determination and sex-selective abortions are strictly prohibited. However, medical professionals perform illegal sex determination as a side business (Kantipur Daily, January 22, 2017). Abortions are relatively cheap and available at public and private medical institutions as well as in clinics run by charitable organizations that support family planning. Furthermore, imported Indian abortion drugs are readily available on the black market. Easy access to abortion may promote the abortion of female fetuses, resulting in an imbalance in the sex ratio at birth.

From the above, we can deduce that various conditions promote son preference, as mentioned by Guilmoto (Hvistendahl 2011, trans. 2012: 32).

Literature review on the structural basis for sex preferences

(1) The family as a type of system

Even if parents want a small number of “high-quality” children, why do they want boys? Who wants boys, and for what reasons?

Let us consider this question concerning the family. A family refers to a group bound by spousal relationships, blood relationships, or intimacy. Viewing a family as a type of system, its function can be described as maintaining the family group for the next generation by giving birth to and raising new group members, in addition to the financial function of producing and supplying goods and services required by members for daily life (Murdock, 1940, trans. 2001). The structural basis for sex preferences is easily understood when perceived in terms of financial strategies, namely passing assets on to future generations.

(2) Inheritance in the family group: Matrilineal or patrilineal?

The preference for having sons or daughters' changes depending on the family group's inheritance strategy; that is, under whose lineage the family group is organized and who will inherit its assets and status. Even in India, where there is a strong preference for sons, the sex ratio at birth in patrilineal states such as Punjab and Haryana differs from that of the matrilineal state of Kerala. Social anthropologist Todd (1999, trans. 2008: 246) noted that, because people in matrilineal societies—where families and blood groups are organized around the mother's lineage—prefer to marry the children of their mother's brother or father's sister and pass down the mother's assets, women have a high status in society. Thus, *purdah* (the separation of women) and female infanticide do not occur in

these societies. However, in patrilineal cultures, males are valued for the purpose of lineage, and assets and status are passed down from father to son. Patrilineal societies have the tradition of a dowry in which the bride's family gives money and household items to the groom's family; thus, there is an aversion to having a daughter because it is seen as a financial burden.

Development economist Banerjee observed ads in North India's Delhi stating, "If you pay 500 rupees (for an abortion) now, you will save yourself 500,000 rupees (for a dowry) later" (2012, trans. 2012: 169). These aspects demonstrate the structural basis of son preference in patrilineal societies.

(3) Financial strategies of the family group: Expectations for social security

In economics, considerable research has been conducted on son preference. In an analysis of China, where son preference has become a social problem, economists identified expectations of financial contributions to the family and social security as the reasons why boys are preferred.

Qian (2008) focused on the difference between the sex ratios at birth on tea and fruit plantations to determine whether this was related to the value of men and women in the labor market. The need for women's delicate fingers to handpick tea leaves and men's ability to carry heavy loads of fruit were ultimately linked to differences in the sex ratio at birth.

Sen (1990) examined the increase in the female child mortality rate after Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms of the 1980s. He found this to be related to the dismantling of the medical insurance system and the differences in the values of men and women in the labor market. During this time, people's communes, which were the pillars of the medical insurance system, were dismantled, and there was a huge increase in healthcare prices and costs borne by individuals. People relied more heavily on pensions and children in the household as a form of social insurance for old age. Furthermore, the reforms led to a decline in female employment, giving rise to the idea that female activity in the workforce is unproductive, this increased men's value as earners. Ultimately, this strengthened son preference.

(4) When upward mobility weakens son preference

Indian scholars Kaur and Bhalla (2015) claimed that as individuals move from the lower to the emerging middle class and then on to the middle class, son preference weakens, making the sex ratio more equal. Class status affects the demand for both the number of children and their sex composition.

Kaur and Bhalla (2015) argued that while son preference is strongest among the lower and emerging middle classes, members of the lower class do not have the resources to make this a reality. However, members of the emerging middle class have a degree of financial ability to undergo a sex determination screening or abort a female fetus, making female abortion comparatively more prominent in the emerging middle class. The emerging middle class consists of people who have climbed out of poverty and whose goal is to become members of the middle class, where people no longer have concerns about falling below the poverty line. Members of the stable middle class have financial ability but no longer desire to select the sex of their progeny. Members of the middle class have education and values that do not favor sex selection; they emphasize child quality more than child quantity. Hence, they tend not to select for sex.

How does perceived class status relate to value? Amoranto et al. (2010) examined how perceived class status (among the upper, middle, and lower classes) relates to values that are deeply linked to higher economic growth. People who perceive themselves as being middle class have fewer liberal values and attitudes than those in the upper class in terms of gender equality and upward mobility (Amoranto, Chun, and Deolalikar 2010: 10). Amoranto et al. (2010) suggests that, as one moves up the social class hierarchy, one becomes more egalitarian.

Upward social mobility is an attitude toward improving one's economic and social standing. It was measured in the World Values Survey using scale items such as "A powerful feeling that you could choose the life you wanted," "A competitive principle that considers competition to be good," and "A performance principle that success is brought about by diligence rather than connections." We hypothesized that attitudes toward improving economic and social standing would be related to liberalism and egalitarianism.

According to the theory of cultural evolution, the political scientist Inglehart (2018) proposed that a society with strong concerns for survival places importance on material wealth, religious authority, and family norms. This is said to have arisen from the fact that individuals had to depend on the group to survive, and that there was no choice except to highlight unity within the group under a strong leader.

With economic growth and the establishment of a welfare state, in a society where individual survival does not depend on the group, individual freedom and spiritual richness are brought to the fore, and religious authority and family norms are weakened (Inglehart 2018, trans. 2019: 83, 170). If we apply this to son

preference, in circumstances where the family is essential for individual survival, the reproductive norms for maintaining the family biologically are emphasized, and son preference becomes stronger. Yet in a situation where individual survival is guaranteed by systems other than the family and there is no need to depend on the family, the family's strategies for preserving their economic status and pedigree become less important, and son preference diminishes.

Based on the above, we posited the following:

Hypothesis 1 : Individuals with greater land holdings prefer sons.

Hypothesis 2 : Lower-income individuals prefer sons.

Hypothesis 3 : The higher one's class self-identification, the weaker the son preference.

Hypothesis 4 : Individuals with lower upward mobility prefer sons.

Results

(1) The basic information of the respondents

The average age of the 2,589 respondents was 34.8 years. Almost fifteen percent 14.8% were Brahman, 21.2% were Chhetri, 30.4% were Newar, 26.7% were Janajati, and 4.9% were Dalit (n=2,535). Almost eighty percent 79.8% were married, and 20.2% were other (n=2,585). Almost four percent 3.7% identified themselves as upper class, 21.4% as upper middle class, 40.9% as lower middle class, 17.0% as working class, and 16.9% as lower class (n=2,589).

Regarding land ownership, 73.5% were under 10 ropani, 13.4% were under 11-20 ropani, 5.6% were under 21-30 rapani and 7.4% (n=1,885) were above 31 ropani. About the household income was 14.6% were within the income range of Rs. 0-10,000, 36.8% had the income range of Rs. 10,001-30,000; 19% were within the range of Rs., 30,001-50,000; 7.75% were within the range of Rs. 50,001 and above and 21.8% had no income (n=2,565).

Of the respondents, 60% preferred equality (n=2,555), with the ideal sex composition being equal numbers of sons and daughters among 61%, a preference for sons among 24%, and a preference for girls among 8%. However, around 40% felt the need to have a son, and 20.2% had undergone a sex determination screening (n=1,145), after which 16.6% had chosen an abortion (n=1935). Regarding the reasons for needing sons, the respondents mentioned reasons such as the maintenance of family lineage (65.2%), security in old age (41.1%), being the chief mourner in funeral proceedings (39.1%), financial support (31%), inherited assets (21.3%), and prestige and power (9.6%) (n=2,581).

In the following, we describe the results of verifying the hypotheses, which were statistically significant.

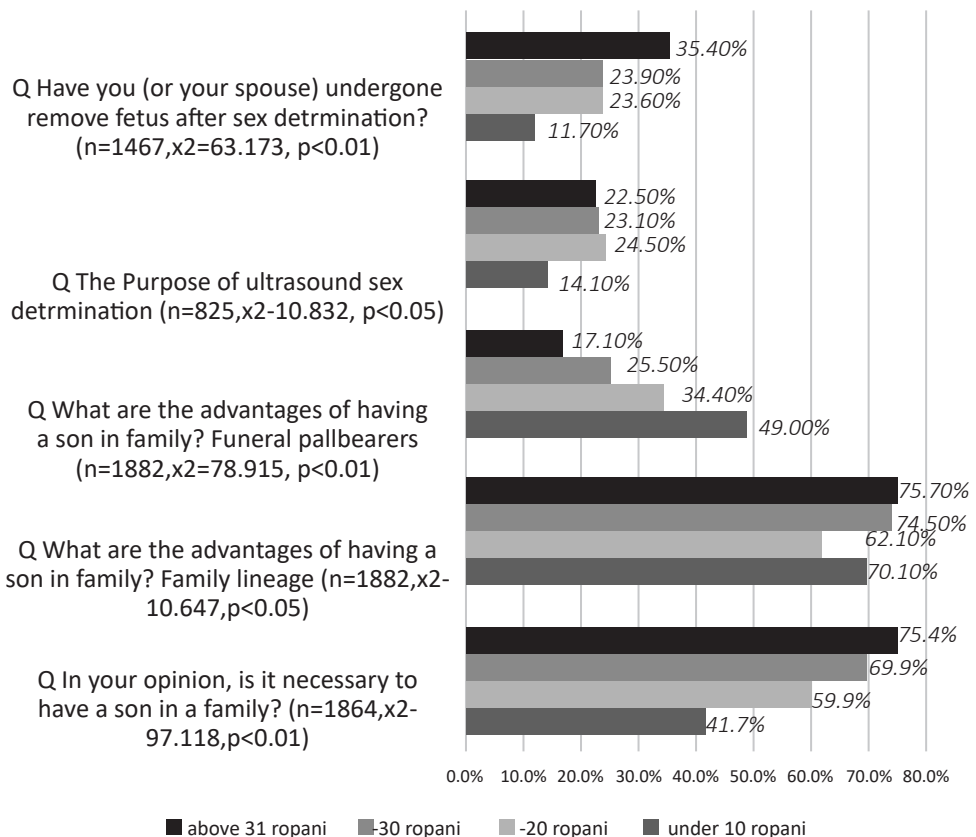
(2) H1: Individuals with greater land holdings prefer sons

Those who had more land tended to prefer a son. As for pressure to have a son, there was a tendency to answer that the larger the area of land owned, the greater the pressure.

As illustrated in Figure 3, regarding the need for a son and the reason for family lineage, the percentage of those who own “10 ropani or more” and “20 ropani or less” was low, but the share of those who own more than 30 ropani was high. In terms of the need for a son to be the chief mourner at a funeral, the smaller the owned area, the higher the proportion of respondents.

Figure 3

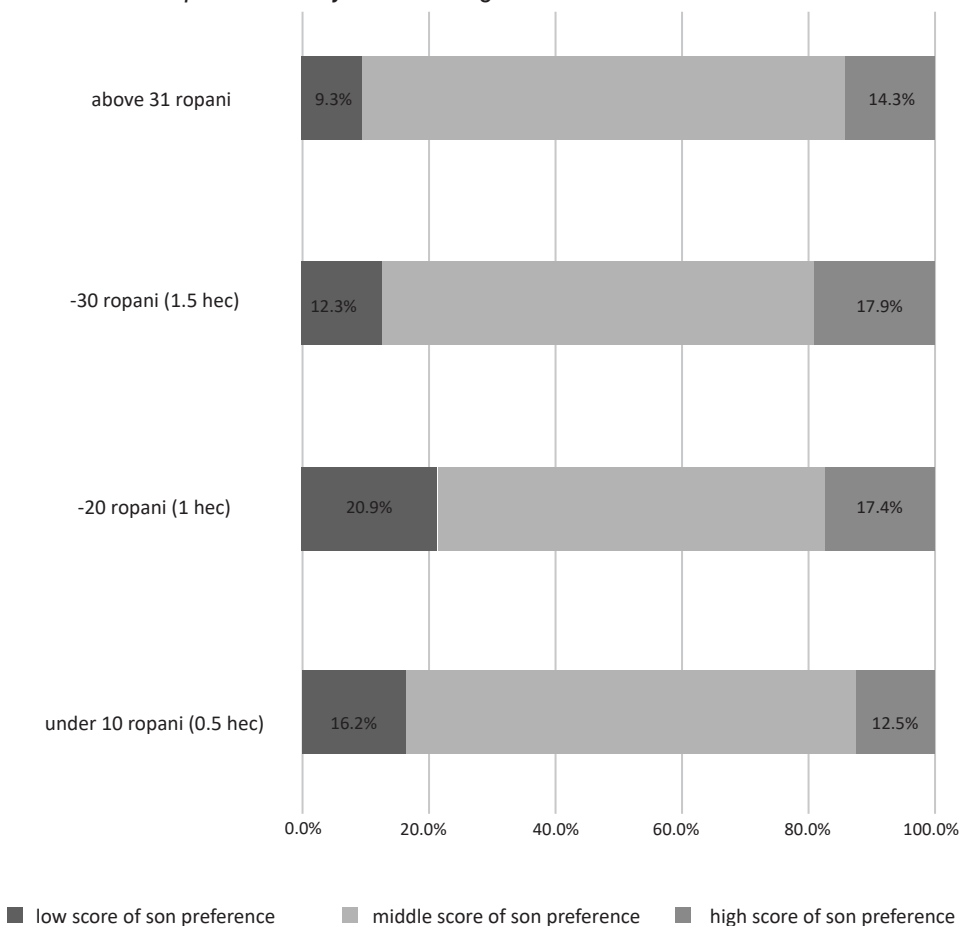
Percentage of respondents who answered “Yes” for each question by land holdings



There was a tendency to conclude that the larger the area of land owned, the more the sex of a fetus would be determined. This was especially common for respondents who marked 10–20 ropani. There was a tendency to answer that the larger the area of land owned, the more likely the woman would be to have an abortion after determining the sex of the fetus.

Figure 4 shows that the number of people with a high score for son preference was low for “10 ropani or less” and “31 ropani or more,” and relatively high for 20 ropani. We measured the scores for son preference using phrases such as “A person with only daughters is unfortunate,” “Not having a son reflects bad karma and a lack of moral virtue,” and “Only a son can provide ancestor worship.”

Figure 4
Scores for son preference by land holdings



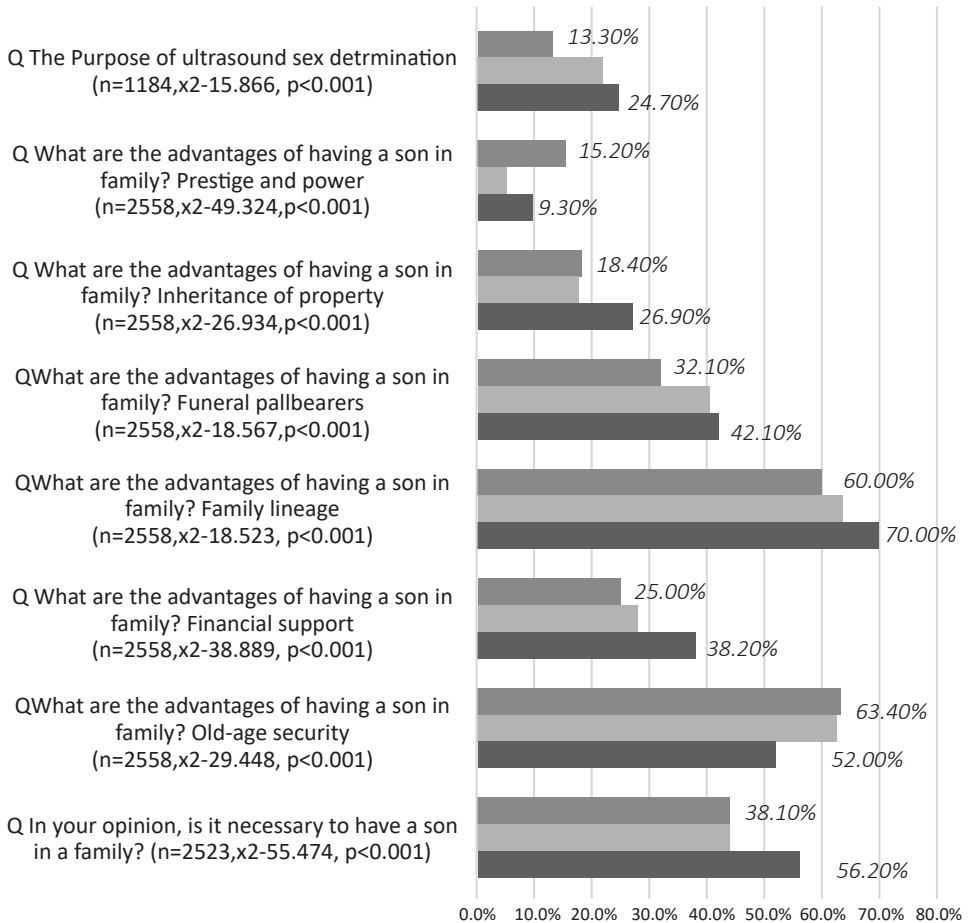
Note: n=1874, χ^2 -squared = 17.709, df=6, p-value<0.05

(3) H2: Lower-income individuals prefer sons

As depicted in Figure 5, the lower the income, the stronger the tendency to answer that sons were needed. The lower the income, the higher the proportion of respondents who answered that a son was needed for security and financial support in old age.

Figure 5

Percentage of respondents who answered "Yes" for each question by income group



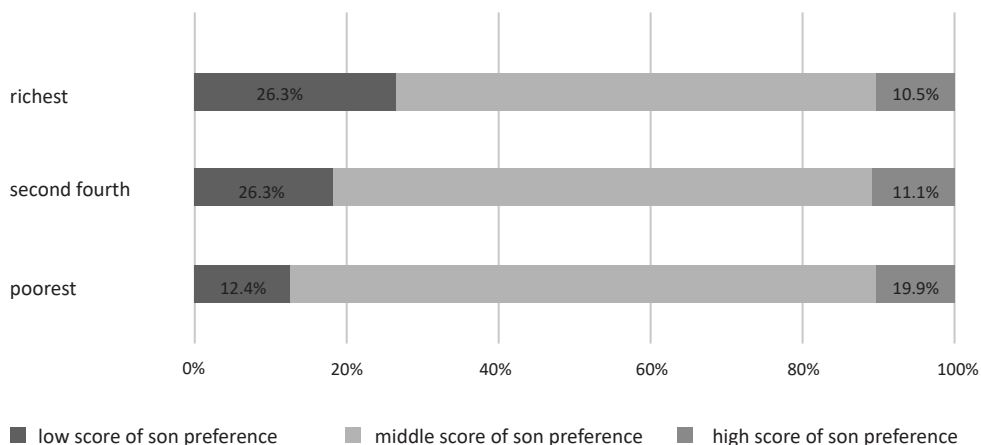
Regarding family lineage, the lower the income, the higher the percentage of respondents who said that a son was required to inherit property and be the chief mourner at the funeral. Likewise, the lower the income, the higher the score in favor of a son, and the higher the number of people who had undergone a sex determination screening.

Conversely, people with higher incomes were more likely to indicate that a son was necessary for prestige and honor.

Figure 6 indicates that the share of people with a high score for son preference was low for “richest” and relatively high for “poorest.”

Figure 6

Scores for son preference by income group



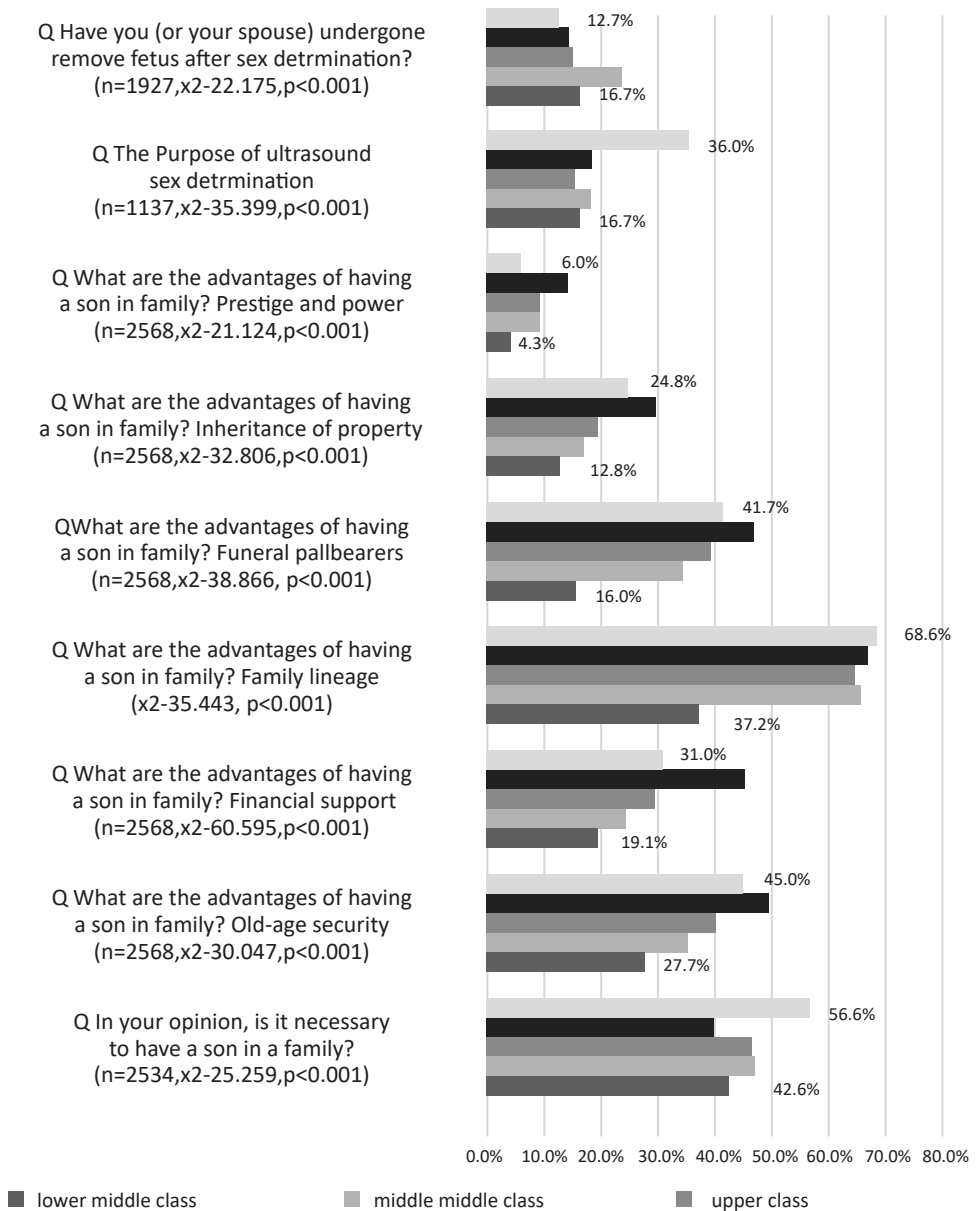
Note: n=2553, $\chi^2=79.917$, df=4, p-value<0.001

(4) H3: The higher the individual’s class self-identification, the weaker the son preference

The results of the analysis of son preference by class self-identification showed that people who identified as belonging to the lower class tended to want sons (Figure 7). As for reasons for needing a son, the working and lower classes tended to cite financial support, security in old age, and inheritance of property more than those in the lower and upper middle classes, excluding “family line.” From this, we found that the working and lower classes tended to prefer sons because of family economic and maintenance strategies.

Figure 7

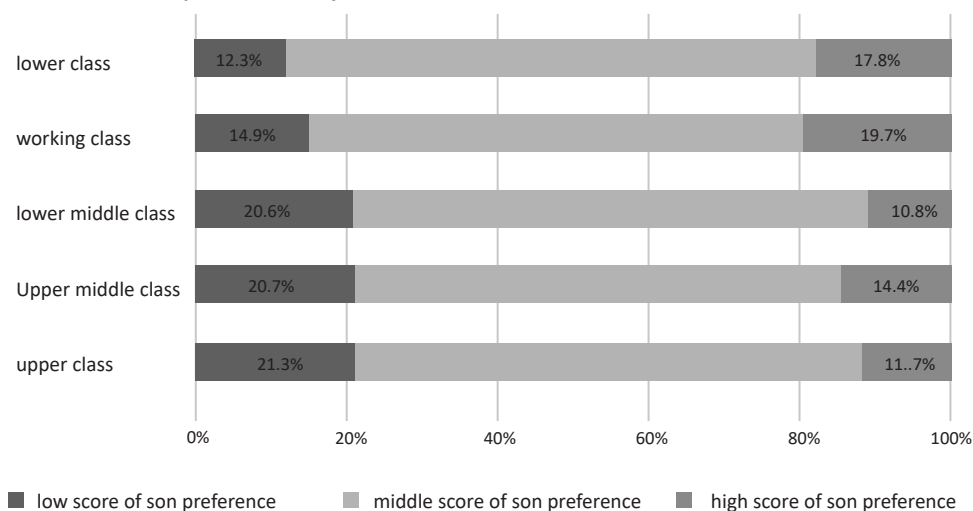
Percentage of respondents who answered "Yes" for each question by class self-identification



Regarding the first point, i.e., the expectation that sons will provide financial support and social security, having private assets means that this is no longer a concern. In recent years, Nepalese households have been leaning toward nuclear families, indicating that the tendency of extended families to take care of elderly parents is changing. However, what about maintaining the family lineage? The share of respondents who chose family lineage as the reason for needing a son differed by 30 percentage points between the upper and lower classes. The important life ceremony of funerals is also relevant to family lineage. This was indicated by a mere 16% of upper-class respondents, a difference of more than 25 percentage points from working-class respondents.

A large share of those who scored high for son preference belonged to the working and lower classes (Figure 8). Lower-class individuals were also more likely to say that they needed a son and intended to undergo a sex determination screening (Figure 7).

Figure 8
Scores for son preference by class self-identification



Note: n=2563, $\chi^2=40.576$, df=8, p-value<0.001

In contrast, the number of women who had had abortions after sex determination was greater in the upper-middle class (Figure 8). The tendency of those with a higher education, income, and caste to self-identify as upper-middle or upper class, and those with a lower education, income, and caste to self-identify as lower or working class suggests that those with relatively higher education, income, and caste are undergoing sex determination screenings and aborting girls.

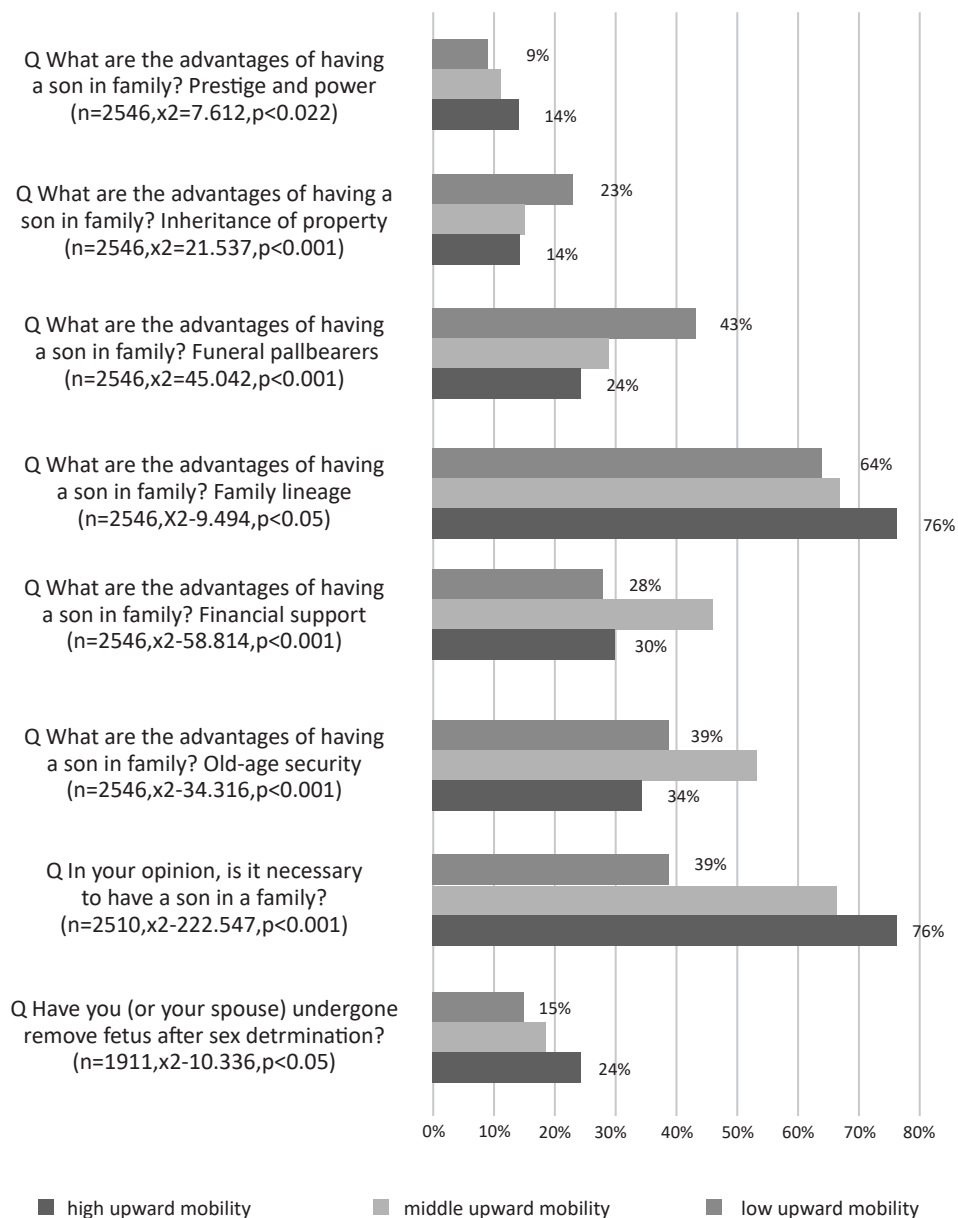
Using Kaur and Bhalla's (2015) discussion on the relationship between social class and son preference, this can be interpreted as a discrepancy between "preference" and "practice" in Nepal. The lower and working classes have a strong preference for male children but lack the resources to achieve this preference, which has not resulted in abortions.

(5) H4: Individuals with lower upward mobility prefer sons

As a result of simple tabulation, 91.0% of the respondents (n=2,541) answered that they had "completely free choice and control." 80.7% of the respondents (n=2,560) agreed with the statement that "in the long run, hard work leads to a better life." 88.3% of the respondents (n=2,556) supported competitiveness. An upward mobility score calculated from responses to these three questions was used in the analysis. The results showed that the proportion of abortions after sex determination was higher in those with low upward mobility and lower in those with high upward mobility. The need for sons was greater for those with low upward mobility and lower for those with high upward mobility. The need for a son for financial support was low for high upward mobility (Figure 9).

Figure 9

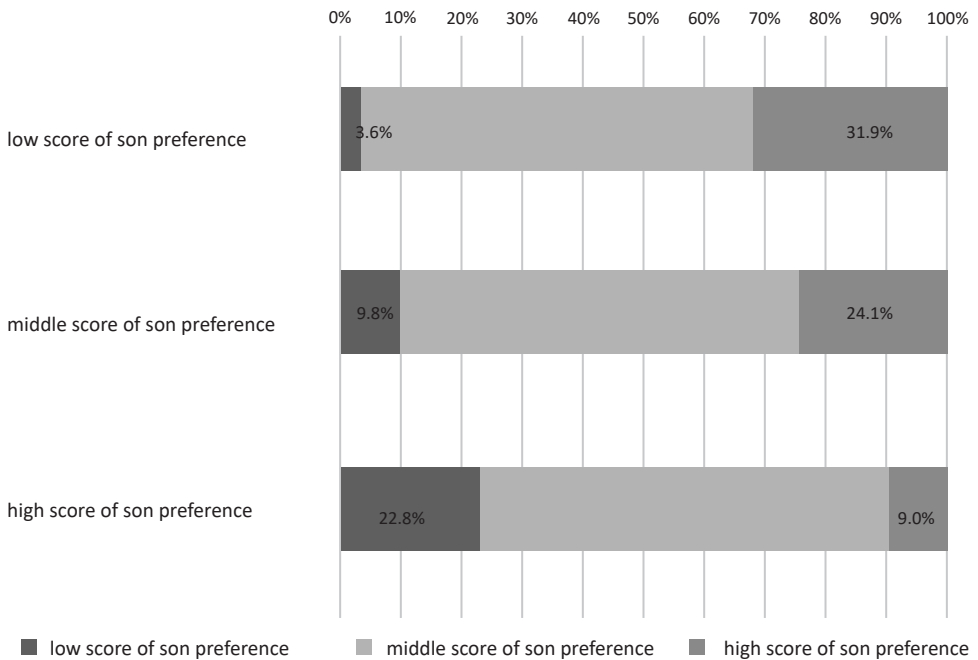
Percentage of respondents who answered “Yes” for each question by upward mobility



The Scores for son preference were higher among those with lower upward mobility (Figure 10).

However, the need for sons due to the funeral pallbearer was higher, with high upward mobility. The need for sons owing to property inheritance was higher, with higher upward mobility (Figure 9).

Figure 10
Scores for son preference by upward mobility



Note: n=2500, $\chi^2=190.656$, df=4, p-value<0.001

Conclusion

Who wants sons?

We identified two groups: a group that prefers sons based on the family's economic and patriarchal strategies (such as those with lower incomes, being from the working class, being from the lower class) and a group that prefers sons based on a patriarchal strategy (such as a person owning more land).

First, a person with more land prefers a son following the patriarchal system in which male family members inherit family property. Women are at a disadvantage in terms of land ownership, which reflects the status of their family strategies. According to the National Population and Housing Census 2011, 79% of women had neither a house nor land; only 11% owned both a house and land, and 9% owned only land.

Second, people with lower incomes prefer boys based on their expectations of financial contributions to their families and social security. This reflects the male dominance in the Nepalese labor market. Looking at the labor market situation, although 85.4% of the working-age female population participates in the labor market (World Bank, 2019), the average monthly wage for females is 70%–100% that of males (CBS, 2019: 33).

Third, although the working and lower classes prefer sons based on the expectation that sons will provide financial support and social security and inherit assets, this does not ultimately lead to abortion, as the ability to act in terms of funds for abortion or access to medical facilities is low. On the other hand, members of the upper-middle class prefer sons to maintain family lineage, and the proportion of those who choose abortion is greater because they have the resources to do so. In terms of financial support and social security, the importance of sons to the upper class is declining. Members of the upper class can rely on resources that make them self-sufficient; they do not need to rely on children and possess new values that do not conform to traditional preferences.

Fourth, the greater one's upward social mobility, the weaker one's son preference. Upward social mobility is an attitude toward improving one's social and economic standing. Upward social mobility is related to a structural shift from a status-oriented to a merit-oriented society. Within this context, individuals who are released from their status (i.e., freed from traditional constraints) and are able to experience a broadening of their life choices may ultimately hold egalitarian or individualistic values. While we could not conclude that upward mobility reduces the importance

of sons in terms of family lineage and funeral pallbearers, we inferred that members of the upper class not only have a weaker preference for sons resulting from the financial stability underpinned by their incomes, but that their experience of the social shift toward meritocracy has also weakened son preference.

We offer three suggestions regarding the structural factors that generate preferences for family institutions. First, although household incomes have improved, people have not achieved economic stability, which forces them to rely on their families for economic and social security.

Second, although there is no need to rely on sons for economic reasons, family maintenance strategies emphasize sons and reduce daughters' attractiveness.

Third, the institutional shift from "attributionalism" to "meritocracy" under the advancement of capitalism has failed to provide many people with freedom from attribution, freedom from traditional constraints, and expanded life choices. The current social system has failed to realize that people have the same chance of doing well in life regardless of their parents' socioeconomic background, gender, caste, place of birth, or other circumstances beyond their control. As more people benefit from meritocracy, they have come to realize that self-actualization is possible regardless of sex, and that the sex of their children will become less important. Thus, if these conditions shift, strategic changes will occur within the family, which will further weaken son preference.

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