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# **THE DIFFUSION OF THE BOOKSTART PROGRAM IN TAIWAN: DESCRIPTION, CONCEPTS AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

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## **Introduction**

Since the 1980s, many governments have reshaped their roles and capacities purposefully, and meliorated the relationships with civil society by adopting the notion of New Public Management (NPM) or “Reinventing Government”. NPM sought to address concerns about the lack of innovative capacity and a limited customer orientation in the traditional bureaucratic form of government (Verhoest *et al*, 2007). An upshot of the NPM has been the development of reform principles often based on the service innovations advocated and implemented in U.S. local governments (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

Extensive studies have examined policy diffusion in the public sector, both theoretically and empirically (Berry and Berry, 2007; Haider-Markel, 2001; Rogers, 2003; Walker, 2006, 2007; Walker, Avellaneda and Berry, 2011). However, these studies are primarily concerned with the diffusion of innovation in Western contents. The validity of these theories can be verified by applying them in a different content. In this symposium, we apply and examine the theories of policy diffusion in an Asian country—Taiwan, and to extend the literature on policy innovation and diffusion to the arena of Bookstart Program.

The Bookstart Program was initiated and implemented under the administration of the British national independent charity Booktrust in 1992, with joint effort from the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, UK. The positive experiences of Bookstart have attracted attention from many organizations around the world, including the Hsin-Yi

Foundation who assisted in introducing the program in Taiwan. Taichung County is the first local government in Taiwan to implement the program in 2003, and all of its twenty-one township libraries have provided the service since 2008. In 2009, Taiwan's Ministry of Education decided to promote the Bookstart Program as a national policy. How and why this innovative program can be successfully diffused among public libraries deserve close scrutiny.

This symposium seek to make a number of contributions by examining a number of competing conceptual frameworks on innovation diffusion, and to apply them in an East Asian context. The contributions that arise from examining these various conceptual frameworks are sketched out in Taichung County where, as is noted above, the Bookstart project took hold in Taiwan. The balance of this introduction is laid out thus: a brief description of the Bookstart program is provided which will serve as a description for the papers follow in this symposium. The analytical framework is then outlined. Then, survey designs and sample descriptions for this pilot study are also specified. It is followed by a brief discussion of some tentative observations.

### **The Bookstart Program**

Originated in the United Kingdom, Bookstart is a national program that encourages all parents and child carers to enjoy reading with children from as early an age as possible. A pilot Bookstart project was initiated in 1992 involving 300 babies in Birmingham. The programme is delivered through UK local authorities via a professional partnership of libraries, health visitors and early years settings. Health visitors will give a Bookstart pack to the parents with new born baby, and the pack contains free books and guidance materials, and an extended reading list of recommended children books (Booktrust, 2011b).

Extensive international studies have demonstrated that Bookstart children began school with significant advantages and with higher attainment in all aspects of pre-school life; Bookstart families tend to enjoy better parent-children relationship, and are more willing to visit libraries and to spend money buying books in the long run (Booktrust, 2011a). The

performance and the impacts of Bookstart in UK have drawn the attention from many other countries, such as USA, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Belgium, and Portugal. In Asia, Japan has participated in Bookstart Program since 2000, Korea in 2003, and Thailand in 2005, and Taiwan has officially joined the programme in 2006.

### *The diffusion of Bookstart program in Taiwan*

The process of the expansion and diffusion of Bookstart Program in Taiwan can be divided into three phases according to the occurrences of two critical events: the year that Bookstart was formally introduced by Shalu Township Library in 2003, and the adoption of Bookstart as a national policy by the Ministry of Education (MEO) in 2008.

#### *The advocacy of early children education (1977-2003)*

The Institute of Early Childhood Education was founded by the Hsin-Yi Foundation, a nonprofit organization which was established in 1971. Since then, the Foundation has promoted early children education, including programs designed to enhance reading for 0-3 years old baby (Hsin-Yi Foundation, 2011). On November 2005, Hsin-Yi became an allied member of Bookstart Program. Officially, Taiwan's MOE initiated the first policy for promoting children reading in 2000, the Council of Cultural Affairs (CCA) also designated that year as the "Children Reading Year."

#### *The initiation of Bookstart in Taichung County (2003-2008)*

In 2002, Mr. H. T. Cheng, the Head Librarian of Shalu Township Library in Taichung County, Taiwan, learned the idea of Bookstart from an article in the *CommonWealth* magazine. In the same year, he incorporated Bookstart as a part of the library's proposals for applying for funding from *The Project for Improving the Space and Operations of Public Library* that was sponsored by CCA. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003, Taiwan Bookstart was inaugurated in the Shalu Township Library.

The program was encouraged and endorsed by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (CAB) of Taichung County and became a county level program in the same year. Soon, a partnership was

established between CAB and Hsin-Yi Foundation in 2006, the latter has to assist in providing training workshop and lecturers for enhancing the performance of Bookstart among township libraries. Following this arrangement, there were eleven more township libraries joined Bookstart in 2006, and the number was increased into sixteen in 2007, and all twenty-one township libraries in Taichung County had participated in Bookstart in 2008.

The performance of Bookstart in Taichung County is important. During the period between 2003 and 2009, the number of Bookstart related activities (ceremony, workshop, promotion) has been increased substantially, and more people have participated in these activities (Table 1). For the participating township(s) in Taichung County, Bookstart babies who have received Bookstart pack as a percentage of new born baby in each year has increased from 5.29% (just one library) in 2003 to 57.75% in 2009 (all twenty-one libraries). A total of 21,886 Bookstart packs have been delivered which is about 40.26% of all newborn babies in Taichung over the seven years period from 2003 to 2009.

[Position of table 1 about here]

Moreover, the innovative program has been adopted by some other public libraries in Taiwan, for example, Taipei Public Library and four of its branch libraries started to promote Bookstart in 2006. During this phase, there were fifteen township or public libraries located in seven cities/counties other than those in Taichung County participated in Bookstart.

#### *The expansion of Bookstart at the national level (2009~)*

The performance of Bookstart at the local level has draw attentions from the central government. The diffusion of Bookstart Program in Taiwan since 2009 can be divided into horizontal diffusion and vertical expansion. Horizontally, in accordance to *The Development Program for Innovative Library Service (2009-2012)* which was initiated by MOE on November, 2008, Bookstart programme was adopted as one of the three subprojects of its

*Special Funding Project for Promoting Reading and Improving Library Collection in 2009.* According to the funding scheme, five public libraries in each local government can be funded for up to 300 Bookstart packs individually on competitive basis. Bookstart has become a national policy ever since. For example, the MOE funded 103 public libraries implementing Bookstart Program in 2009, and 138 ones in 2010. The Bookstart program in Taiwan had delivered 38,624 Bookstart packs, conducted 1,209 sessions of various kinds of Bookstart related activities (e.g., workshop for parents, workshop about nourishing baby, story-telling, etc.) which were participated by 167,568 people, and issued 16,493 library cards for 0-3 years old baby (about 4.3% of the age cohort) in 2009 (MOE, 2010).

The MOE decided to expand the scope of the program by including the first grade student of the elementary school in the Bookstart program. Since 2009, every student in the first grade of the elementary school will receive a Bookstart pack from the school which includes one book and guidance materials. Also funded by the MOE, a “reading corner” is designated in every first grade classroom in which fifteen appropriate children books are provided for students to read. In 2009, 221,359 Bookstart packs for first grade student were delivered, and “reading corner” had been built in 9,050 classrooms.

### **An Analytical Framework for Studying Innovation Policy Diffusion**

#### ***Policy and innovation diffusion***

Innovations are defined as a process through which new ideas, objects, and practices are created, developed or reinvented, and which are new for the unit of adoption (Walker 2008). Innovations can be in services (that meet an external user or market need and are more concerned with what is produced), process (focusing on internal administrative, organizational and technological operations) and ancillary or partnership innovations where organizations work with other agencies to develop and implement innovations (Walker, 2008).

Policy diffusion is typically associated with the concepts such as “policy transfer” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; Stone, 1999), “lesson-drawing” (Rose, 1991), and “policy

convergence” (Knill, 2005). The literature on policy diffusion is strongly interconnected with that on innovation diffusion. Rogers (2003:5) defines diffusion as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.” According to Rogers (2003), the “innovative decision process” involves five stages— knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation — and four essential elements — innovation, communication channel, sequence of adoption, and actors. The implications are threefold: (1) Members of a social system are the individual actors who induce or promote the innovation (Walker, 2006). Therefore, organization and individual actors (especially organizational leaders) are both units of analysis in research studies. However, the analysis on the organizational level usually focuses on one type of diffusion (Berry, 1994; Damanpour and Aravind, 2004) or determinants of diffusion (Damanpour, 1987). (2) Rogers’ model is similar to a policy making process which involves sequential stages. The diffusion of innovation should link the adoption to the implementation, management and the performance of the innovation (Newman *et al.*, 2001). These stages or activities have been termed as the “innovation management” (Tushman and Moore, 1988; Ven de Ven *et al.* 1999). (3) In addition of the dichotomous dependent variable (to adopt or to reject an innovation), Rogers suggests that ordinal variable (Canon and Baum, 1981) can also be used to study policy diffusion<sup>1</sup>.

In their theoretical explanation of innovation diffusion, Berry and Berry (2007) summarize the studies of policy diffusion into two basic approaches. The “diffusion” approach emphasizes the notions of mutual learning, competition, and citizen pressures which are important elements in the intergovernmental relations framework. The “internal determinants” approach assumes that local political, administrative, economic and social factors determine the decision of local government whether to adopt an innovation or not. There are four models within the “diffusion” approach: (1) “national interaction model” which stresses the importance

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the dependent variables of diffusion, see Berry and Berry (2007:178).

of network and learning; (2) “regional diffusion model” in which the geographic locations of the sender and receiver are crucial; (3) “leader-laggard model” emphasizes the time sequence of innovation adoption in which competition and citizen pressures are significant variables; and (4) the “vertical influence model” in which the interesting question is: how the higher level government utilizes financial incentives to induce the lower level government to adopt an innovation?

In seeking to move towards more comprehensive theoretical frameworks of innovation in public organizations, Walker (2010) proposes a framework which focuses on the influences of innovation characteristics, internal and external determinants, and models the way in which these variables impact on the adoption and implementation stages of innovation. The innovation characteristics describe the types of innovation, such as service innovation, process innovation, and ancillary innovation (Walker, 2006). This recognizes that innovation is a relatively complex concept, with some innovation focusing on what is delivered (service innovation), other touching on ways in which new organizational practices are developed (process innovations) and that innovation can be conducted alone or in partnership with other organizations (ancillary innovations).

According to Walker’s (2010) framework, two perspectives can be identified through which the diffusion of Bookstart Program in Taiwan can be examined. First, to comprehend policy diffusion, we have to analyze it horizontally and vertically. At the downward pressure of the central government on local governments, known as top-down or bottom-up vertical diffusion (Allen, Pettus, & Haider-Markel, 2004; Daley & Garand, 2005), coercion and incentive are two important elements through which innovative policy can be adopted by local governments. On the other hand, the horizontal diffusion is more driven by information flows, learning and competition than hierarchical policy system.

Second, the focal point of this study is upon diffusion, which includes internal and external characteristics as the control variables on the likelihood of adoption because they are identified



as factors influencing the capacity to innovate (Walker, Avellaneda, and Berry, 2011). For an individual public agency, the decision of whether to adopt an innovative policy is partially influenced by the characteristics of the external environment within which the agency provides its services, such as intergovernmental relations, socio-economic and population conditions, etc. On the other hand, the decision is also constrained by the internal resources of the organization, such as financial conditions, human resources, facilities, organization culture, etc.

### ***Conceptual framework for Bookstart Taiwan***

On the basis of the literature review, the primary factors which affect policy diffusion can be summarized by the interplay between the locus and focus of study (Table 2). Taking into considerations of elements of frameworks provided by Rogers (2003) and Walker, Damanpour and Devece (2011), the relationships between these factors and policy diffusion can be organized into a framework (Table 2).

[Position of table 2 about here]

Essentially, the diffusion of Bookstart Program involves both the international and national levels. At the international level, the question is how the idea of Bookstart Program can be spread from UK to the other nations? What is the role of charity (e.g., Booktrust) or nonprofit organization (e.g., Hsin-Yi Foundation) in the diffusion process? Through what means and/or process does the idea of Bookstart be spread globally? The focus of this study is on the diffusion of Bookstart Program in Taiwan, thus the research questions are directed towards understanding the factors within organizations and their environments that influence the adoption of innovation. The proposed framework to explore these issues involves six domains of analysis, each of which consists of different set of variables, utilizes different research methods, and focuses on different unit of analysis. These are illustrated in Figure 1, of which the core is the decision of innovation adoption. These are now briefly described.

[Position of figure 1 about here]

*Partnerships.* The first domain of analysis directs attentions to the influence of the public-private partnership on the innovation diffusion. As suggested by Koski (2010), knowledge brokers occupy critical roles in developing a common policy vocabulary and creating a diffusion infrastructure by acting as communication hubs for existing and interested organizations to learn and to adopt innovations. Thus, the arrangement and collaborations among MOE, CAB, public library and Hsin-Yi Foundation should be crucial in the expansion of the Bookstart program. Specifically, this domain examines the diffusion of Bookstart Program by looking at the influences of resource interdependency, intergovernmental relations, and the interactions between public and nonprofit organizations.

*Internal (organizational) factors.* The unit of analysis of the second domain is the organization. The main research question is why does an individual public library decide to or not to implement Bookstart Program? Several types of variables can influence this dichotomous decision. For example, the organizational characteristics of the public library are likely to be influential. These factors include the availability of human and financial resources, existing standards of operation, the adequacy of existing facilities, organizational culture, etc. of the individual library. Essentially, these organizational characteristics concern the capacity of individual organization to innovate. A second area of importance is innovation type. Walker's (2006) study emphasizes the types of innovations and the factors associated with their adoption. But in addition of the way information about an innovation is communicated (i.e., policy learning), the characteristics of an innovation (e.g., the extent to which an innovation is compatible with the organization) and the complexity of the innovation can also influence the decision of whether to adopt an innovation (Rogers, 2003).

*Individual factors.* It is hypothesized that the perceptions of Head Librarian toward

Bookstart will influence the adoption of the program. The leadership of an organization should play a pivotal role in the decision of innovation adoption. Their perceptions shall include variables such as motives, needs, interests, values, past experience, expectation, preparatory set, reward or punishment and so on. This domain of study focuses on individual as the unit of analysis. To certain extend, form the perspective of the Head Librarian, the perceived supportiveness of the local political leaders should play an important role which facilitates or conditions the adoption of the program.

*External factors.* The fourth domain involves two perspectives: the socio-economic conditions of the environment within which an individual public library functions, and the geographic location of the library. The Bookstart program targets a specific group of the population (new born babies and their parents), the socio-economic conditions of the service recipients (such as birth rate, family income, the degree of urbanization, parent's occupations, etc.) not only constrain the willingness or ability to participate the program, but also serve as the preconditions for the public library to consider the adoption of the innovative program.

Another possible approach is to bring geographic information into the equation. Conceptual approaches that could use geographic information include ones based on social learning theory. Social learning theory argues that how and why an organization adopts innovations is directly related to its learning from, and competition or cooperation with, its neighboring organizations (Mintrom and Vergari, 1998; Haider-Markel, 2001; Christopherz, 2001; Cohen-Vogel and Ingle, 2007). To determine whether there exists any geographical pattern of policy diffusion across jurisdictions becomes the central task of this type of study. This framework can then be utilized in Geographic Information System—a research tool that takes the geographical location of the public policy or innovation consideration. External factors such as this allows focus on outcomes of innovation, such as the accessibility of the facility to the target population, and distances and transportation times.

*Knowledge utilization.* The fifth domain of analysis we outline here examines the

relationship between policy learning (e.g., knowledge utilization) and the innovation adoption. For example, Mossberger (1999) suggests that innovation diffusion may not be a policy per se but that policy-relevant information and lessons drawn from performance evaluation can be the core elements for the latecomers to learn from. It is argued that policy diffusion involves the process of knowledge utilization through which diverse but relevant policy information are collected, processed, and utilized in decision making. The typical considerations of the information types and who, what, when, how, and by what means to learn involved in policy learning tend to affect the policy decision.

*Policy performance.* The last domain concentrates on the impacts of the program on the service recipients, particularly the behavior of the parent and children after participated in the Bookstart program. Performance has always been the essential part of any policy or program evaluation. It not only reflects the degree of achievement of policy objectives, but also is related to the notions of accountability, responsiveness and quality (Barzelay, 2001; Kettle, 2005).

### **Data Collection Method and Outline of the Articles**

This symposium represents the first attempt to test aspects of the proposed analytical framework. The five papers in this symposium address segments of the framework. The analytical framework serves as an organizing platform on which various theories of innovation diffusion can be tested independently and/or collectively. Note that each of the five papers has its own research framework, but some of them share the same data collection method.

With the assistance of the CAB of Taichung City<sup>2</sup>, two types of survey questionnaire were sent to all 31 public libraries within the jurisdiction from October to November of 2011. The Head librarians of these public libraries were asked to answer the first questionnaire which was designed to address the questions regarding the organizational internal characteristics, the

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<sup>2</sup> Taichung county and Taichung city were merged as the Taichung Special Municipality Government (Taichung City) on December 25, 2010. All 21 townships of the original Taichung County become parts of the 29 districts of Taichung City.

external factors, the Head librarian's attitudes, and knowledge utilization. Out of the 31 public libraries in Taichung City, 23 of them responded the survey. Data collected from these questionnaires are analyzed in the last four papers (Ke and Huang; Lee and Pan; Liao and Shih; Hsu and Sun) respectively in this symposium.

Lin and Chang article commences by placing the Taiwanese Bookstart program in a holistic governance framework. They note how the scope and remit of the Bookstart program has changed over time as it has become a national policy tool. In conclusion it is suggested that while the governance framework for Taiwanese Bookstart has developed there is still some way to go in relation to resource integration and the development of a local government policy network.

Next, Ke and Huang attempt to demonstrate the information and knowledge utilization in the innovation adoption process by looking at the information network involved during the innovation decision process and the influence of the information and policy member types and characteristics on knowledge utilization. Ke and Huang divide the Bookstart program in Taiwan into five innovation-and-diffusion stages: separate development, initiating innovation, integrated collaboration, initial diffusion, and overall diffusion. The research results show that most policy members have approved the importance of policy information and knowledge in decision-making. Information roles of members have varied, evincing a diverse aspect. However, the information network among members has exhibited a vertical distribution focused around formal and legal organizations.

The literature on innovation diffusion has primarily focused on the association between institutional factors and innovation adoption, the issue is dealt with by Lee and Pan. They utilize Scott's (2001) three pillars of institutions (regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive institutional factors) in examining the characteristics of public organizations offering innovative services. The research hypotheses are not all supported by the data, significant correlations are found only between the three institutional factors. Although the respondents

perceive that the Bookstart program can bring positive effects to the preschool children and their parents, and they have referred to peer libraries on making the adoption decision, regulative institutions such as the will of higher authorities and economic utilities matter the least among the three institutions. Therefore, if the government intends to promote Bookstart program, it is the most important, strategically speaking, to appeal to librarians' professional values, virtues, and sense of responsibility to pave the way for policy diffusion.

As for the external factors, abundant evidence has supported the argument that policy learning and economic competition affect policy diffusion (Boehmke and Witmer 2004). Learning theory posits that government officials tend to draw on the experience of nearby local governments when considering whether they should adopt a policy, and economic competition may explain policy diffusion as a response to inter-government pressures. Liao and Shih's paper intends to test these two models by examining whether the cooperation or competition levels of library are spatial dependence by using geographic information system (GIS). The finding showed that cooperation level is not autocorrelated with the cooperation level in neighboring districts, and similar result is found in the competition level. The analysis of OLS shows the budget has effect on cooperation level, thus more finance resources may trigger the cooperation among the libraries in the Bookstart program. Even though the findings of Liao and Shih's paper are not very strong, it nevertheless highlights the potential contribution of applying GIS in the study of policy diffusion.

In the final paper, Hsu and Sun examine the effects of the motivations of individual civil servants in providing public service on the innovation adoption. Research on the adoption of innovative policy usually focus on the influences of the external and internal factors, less emphasis has been placed on the effect of individual civil servants on the adoption decision. Hsu and Sun's study employs the concept of Public Service Motivation (PSM, Perry and Wise, 1990), it is hypothesized that the motivation of serving the public interests may promote individual Head Librarian to adopt the Bookstart program. Findings uncover some correlations

between PSM and innovation diffusion indicating that the personal characteristics of civil servant affect the process of diffusion. In conclusion the article questions the validity of PSM in its application to study the motivations of civil servants in Taiwan alongside considering the role of individuals in the innovation diffusion process. These three implications will be emphasized in the future.

### **General Observations**

Although there are different forms of policy diffusion, and the studies on this topic are vast, Evans (2009) argues that they are essentially focusing on four central research questions. What is studied when policy diffusion is studied? How is policy diffusion studied? Why do public organizations engage in policy diffusion? And in what ways can the study of policy diffusion be improved? On the basis of the diffusion of a minor program—Bookstart Program—in Taiwan, this symposium attempts to address these questions by proposing an analytical framework that can be used to study policy diffusion from different perspectives empirically. The proposed framework is loosely constructed so that different domains of factors that may affect the policy diffusion in general, and the spread of Bookstart Program in Taiwan in particular, can be studied thoroughly. It involves different level of analysis, and is focusing on different units of analysis.

The research results indicate that some of the hypotheses of innovation diffusion are not supported in this pilot study. The mixed results may be caused by the small sample size in this pilot study. According to the Library Association of the Republic of China, there are 435 public libraries and 113 branch libraries in Taiwan, and 150 of them have already implemented the Bookstart program in 2011. These 548 public libraries will be surveyed in the future.

More importantly, the results may have a positive implication for future research. Note that the presupposition of Western literature on policy diffusion is that local governments are autonomous and having sufficient financial resources. It is biased toward the horizontal diffusion among the same level of governments (Berry and Berry, 2007), relatively few study

examines the vertical diffusion between higher and lower level of governments (Shipan and Volden, 2006). Taiwan is a unitary state in which the centralized central government plays the pivotal role in policy planning, and the heavily subsidized local governments are primarily responsible for policy implementation. The mixed results not only indicate that more attention has to be paid to the selection of appropriate theories of innovation diffusion to explain the diffusion of Bookstart program in Taiwan, but also that efforts should be made to modify these theories or to construct more valid ones in explaining innovation diffusion in different cultural, social and governmental contexts.

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Table 1: The Performance of Bookstart in Taichung County (2003-2009)

Items	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Ceremony	1	2	2	13	16	24	22	80
Workshop for parents	1	4	9	11	25	35	25	110
Workshop for volunteers	—	1	—	3	3	3	2	12
Promotion activities	5	5	5	15	40	51	102	223
Township library	1	2	2	11	16	21	21	21
# of Participants	300	410	1550	5979	11763	18688	24279	63529
Bookstart babies	50	130	460	2052	4071	6713	8410	21886
# of new baby of the participated township	946	2494	1417	8643	12094	14200	14562	54356
% (Bookstart babies/ new baby of the participated township)	5.29	5.21	32.46	23.74	33.66	47.27	57.75	40.26

Source: Cultural Affairs Bureau of Taichung County, 2008, 2009

Table 2: The Locus and Focus of Policy Diffusion

Focus	Locus		
	Organization	Actors	Management
Internal	Organization's Internal Characteristics	Individual Attitudes	Knowledge Utilization (Implementation and Evaluation)
External	Organization's External Characteristics	Governance Network (Public-Private Partnership)	Performance and Impacts



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework