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**Family Dining, Diet and Food Distribution:
Planting the Seeds of Economic Growth**

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By Professor Maria Sophia Aguirre¹

Abstract

Economic growth is an outcome of more than economic processes. It is an outcome of economic, social, and political processes that interact with and reinforce each other in ways that worsen or ease the achievement of economic growth and development. In this paper we seek to establish the relevance of one of these processes, family dinners, for the economy. Empirical evidence indicates a close relationship between family dinners and the production of human, social, and moral capital. Frequent family dinners strengthen the family relations, increase academic performance, and help to prevent substance abuse. Studies also provide evidence of a relationship existing between family meals and economic activity. The existence of family meals affects positively efficiency in the distribution and consumption of food within an economy. Thus, attention to the frequency and the quality of family meals as well as to the patterns of food consumption is of interest for all agents in the economy.

I. Introduction

The family has a reciprocal relationship with the economic environment; the family is affected by it, but it is also able to shape it. Thus, how families allocate their time is in part a function of what is possible and desired by both its members individually and as a whole, and in part is a function of what is possible and desired given the economic environment in which the family and its members find themselves. Developed countries in the last forty years have experienced economic and demographic changes regarding family life and the allocation of time. These include, among others, the decline in family size, an increase of the rearing of children by single parents, increased maternal employment with the consequent increase in the enrolment of children in early education and childcare, the decline in traditional family activities such as church attendance or visit to elderly relatives, and a decrease in the time spent together by parents and children -which also seems to have affected the frequency and the quality of family dinners-. At the same time, there has been an increased concern about the acquisition of skills by children, engaging them in multiple extra curricular activities, while nutritional good habits, especially in America, have significantly declined.

We also know that the family plays an important role in the production of these human, moral, and social capital and therefore, on resources use, economic activity, and economic structures.¹ The ways both parents and children spend their time and consume goods is an indicator of the values parents place on the attainment of certain skills and the quality of consumption. It is also an indicator of the value placed on the context for learning. How they make their choice on the allocation of time and how that has affected family dinners is the subject of this paper. This is relevant for both economic policy analysis and design as the decisions and actions of all members of the household have long-term effects for their development as well as for the growth of the economy.

Since the seminal work of Jacob Mincer (1962) and Gary Becker (1965), economists have become aware of the importance of analyzing the allocation of time not only on work carried out for pay outside the home but on the work of the home and other non-work activities. As a

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consequence, economic analysis has come to consider that not only the scarce resources but also the allocation of time to various activities affect the relative prices of good and services, the growth path of real output, and the distribution of income. It also affects the development of human, social, and moral capital. Today we know that these last three types of capital are necessary but not sufficient conditions for economic growth to be sustainable.ⁱⁱ

For the most part, the U.S. research on the allocation of time has centered on the role of time inputs in social accounting, in behavioral models of market and non-market activities, and in the methodological issues around measuring the time used. By contrast, in Europe and developing countries, much of the work concentrated on comparing the time allocation among societal groups or across countries for the purpose of national income accounting. Other studies have attempted to model behavior and have focused on the use of time within the household to produce market and non-market goods and services such as meals, childcare, housing services, etc. Time allocation research has served two main purposes. At the macro level they have been used in the construction of augmented economic and social accounting systems mainly focusing on non-market production time and inputs of leisure time. The rationale behind this focus has been that leisure activities play an important role in the production of economic welfare. At the micro level, time allocation data has been used to describe and model household behavior such as the division of responsibility for non-market activities by sex, the allocation of non-market time in children and care of the elderly, and the analysis of leisure time activities. Microeconomic models have examined a set of household production activities involving shopping, cleaning, cooking, repairs and maintenance for housing, etc. Others have used optimization models to analyze household production choices, transportation mode, labor supply, leisure activities, household production and sleep.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this paper we seek to build on this literature and expand it by studying the connection that exists between family dinners, human capital, and economic activity. We find that frequent family dinners enhance the quality of human and social capital as it improves educational outcomes, strengthen family relations, and deters activities that diminish human, social, and moral capital. Furthermore, we find that family meals are relevant to ensure efficient distribution and consumption of food in the economy.

The next section introduces the theoretical framework for the analysis. Section three presents some evidence of the impact of family dining or the lack of on human, social and moral capital. The fourth section deals with the issue of food distribution and its connection to family dinners. The paper ends with conclusions and policy recommendations.

II. The Allocation of time in households

Becker (1965) and the subsequent household production models (hpm) that followed his original model, introduced a new framework to analyze the response of individuals to market prices, time prices, income, and technologies that would influence the production function for home goods. In it, he proposed the incorporation of the cost of time in the theoretical analysis of choice in the same way that other cost of goods is typically included. Becker viewed the household as a small factory where capital goods, raw materials and labor to clean, feed, raise children and otherwise produce commodities.^{iv} Thus, in this model, households are both producers and utility maximizers. On the one hand, they combine time and market goods to produce some basic commodities by combining inputs of goods and time according to the cost-minimization rules as the firms do. On the other hand, they also choose the best combination of these commodities in the conventional way by maximizing utility subject to prices and the constraint on resources. Thus, Becker changed the understanding of working hours and leisure in such a way that now the price of consumption is the sum of direct and indirect prices in the same way that the full cost of investing in human capital is

the sum of direct and indirect costs. Behind the division between direct and indirect costs is the allocation of time and goods between work-oriented and consumption-oriented activities, i.e., the costs resulting from the allocation of goods and the allocation of time. This means that the two determinants of the importance of forgone earnings are the amount of time per dollar value of goods and the cost per unit of time.

The cost of time, however, is not constant but varies across commodities, as well as over the course of economic agent's life. Whether the time spent in an activity contributes to enhance other activities will also affect its cost. For example, the cost of time is typically higher during the week than during weekends because the first one is not paid if allocated towards consumption-oriented activities while on the weekends, even if time is not allocated to work-oriented activities, it remains paid. For retired persons, however, there will be no differences on the cost of time between weekdays and weekends. Similarly, the cost of time will be less for commodities that contribute to productive efforts such as sleeping, food, or rest. The opportunity cost of time is less because these commodities indirectly contribute to earnings, as sleeping, food and rest contribute towards the productivity of the household and facilitates the accumulation of human capital.

Households today are more conscious of time: they keep track of it continuously, live in a very tight scheduled, and rush about more. Simultaneously, they seem to be wasteful of material goods. On this count, food is not an exception. There has been a shift from home production of goods and services for the family dinner to their purchase and this has affected the quality of the meal. Using the household production model's framework, such behavior could be explained, at least partially, as a response to a change in relative costs. One can say that today households have experienced an increase in the cost of time and, this increase in the relative cost of time, has caused a substitution towards more expensive goods. In our case this means that an increase in the value of a mother's time may induce her to enter the labor force and spend less time cooking by using pre-cooked meals, carry-out, eating outside, or simply hire workers to carry out the housework, including family meals and the feeding of its members. Household production models predict that changes in the allocation of time should show a change in the methods used to produce given commodities and not a corresponding change in the quality of consumption. This in turn, means that according to Becker's analysis of choice the quality of the family meal should not be affected by substituting it by other way of meeting the food needs of the family members.

As previously mentioned, empirical evidence confirms that as the cost of time increased over the last four decades, the shopping time of both women working outside the home and in the home has increased, with the former registering a significantly larger increase in shopping time than the latter.^v These results are consistent with the increase of consumption of goods and services that studies have found and that household production models would predict when the relative cost of time increases.

Regarding the quality of consumption as a consequence of the reallocation of time and consumption by households, empirical evidence indicates that rather than remaining the same, the quality of the family meal has declined. Research suggests that families are reducing the frequency with which they sit down together to share meals. With many activities for children conflicting with dinner hours and parents working long hours, families are often unable to eat together at home. Instead, if it takes place, they may sit and rush through meals, eat in shifts, or eat while watching T.V., and thus little interaction takes place.^{vi} Similarly, empirical evidence has shown a decline in the nutritional value of home meals.^{vii} Often fast foods, frozen foods, or meals with high energy and fat intakes are used in lieu of healthy meals with balanced diets.^{viii} The results paint a picture of a lower quality in family dining, which often is accompanied by low interpersonal relations among family members.

The decrease in the quality of meals indicates that family dining is not easily substitutable. Presently, the market produces high quality food products. Thus, the fall in the quality of the food consumed could be either due to lack of knowledge on the part of the household or to income restrictions. The first cause calls for education of the household, the second cause would suggest an overvaluation of the cost of time on the part of the household if one measures this cost strictly as forgone income. The time that the family spends together during meal times, however, cannot be substituted by the market, as interpersonal relationships among specific persons cannot be either bought or sold. Therefore, since families have decreased the time they allocate to family dining, this seems to suggest that it is considered an inferior good. Yet, as we will see later, empirical evidence indicates that for the most part this does not seem to be the case.

Household production models do not include in their analysis the interpersonal relational dimension that some consumption activities, such as family dinners, include. Such dimension is known to be relevant for the generation of human capital.^{ix} Through out history, dining has always taken a central role in human interactions and relations. In this regard, not only the content of the meal but the form and the environment in which this takes place has been the subject of great attention by households. Today in spite of the significant decline in the frequency and the quality of family dinners, its central role has not been forgotten. Empirical evidence finds that most children desire more frequent family dinners, especially when the frequency of them is low. Similarly, 94% of parents who have less than three dinners per week desire frequent family dinners.^x This indicates that households are aware of the interpersonal relational dimension of family dinners and its importance to the family members. It also suggests that families face barriers, other than lack of willingness, to gathering around the table. These barriers include working hours, after school activities, and long commutes. Although the presence of women in the workplace has changed, to some extent, women's role in household management, wives have retained primary responsibility for family food shopping and meal preparations.^{xi} How these conditions affect human capital is what we address in the next section.

III. Family Dinners and Human Capital

Data from across countries and sciences clearly seems to suggest that healthy families are key for sustainable economic growth. Children develop best within a family that is functional, i.e., with a mother and a father in a stable marriage.^{xii} Men and women also perform best within a stable family.^{xiii} Empirical evidence also shows that when the family is disrupted, the individual and social costs are very large.^{xiv}

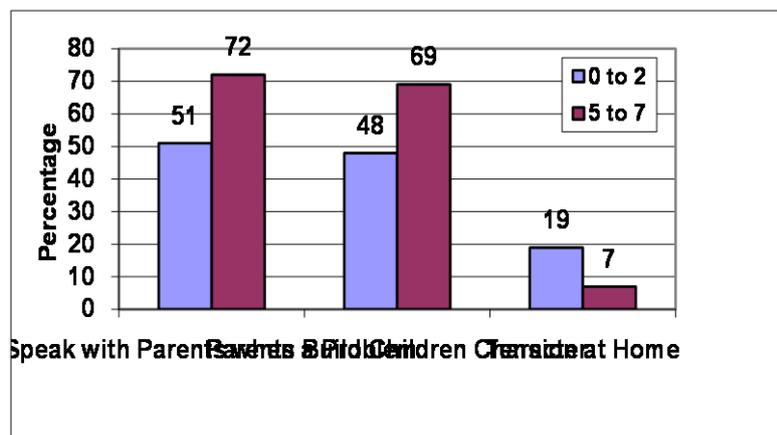
Parental engagement plays an important role, among other things, in the normal physical and psychological development of children, in their academic performance, in their sociability, in their health, and in the prevention of teen substance abuse, violence, and pregnancies.^{xv} Children in households where there are high relational levels and low levels of tension or stress among family members, where parents reinforce their children's character, and where there is a level of high trust between parents and children, have a significantly higher probability of normal development and are at half of the risk of the average teen for substance abuse.^{xvi} Frequent family dinners are one of the simplest; most effective and important aspects of family life where the engagement between parents and children takes place and strong ties develop.

CASA, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse in Columbia University, (2005) studies the impact of family dinners on teenagers. Figure 1 presents the relationship between family dinners and strong family relationships. In all cases, where families share dinner frequently, family relationships are stronger. The willingness of children to speak with their parents about a problem

and who think their parents are helping them develop a good character are respectively 41% and 43% higher in households where there are frequent family dinners. In contrast, tension among family members is 2.7 times higher in families where family dinners are infrequent. These findings indicate that frequent family dinners facilitate parental engagement and by doing so, contribute to the building of both human capital and positive social capital.

Academic Performance is also affected by the frequency of family dinners. Figure 2 shows that the number of students obtaining B grades or above is 38% higher among teenagers whose families frequently have dinner together. Academic performance is closely tied to both human capital and productivity growth, both important components of economic growth. Empirical evidence shows that human capital affects economic growth both directly through productivity and indirectly through factors of production, mainly technology and innovation.^{xvii}

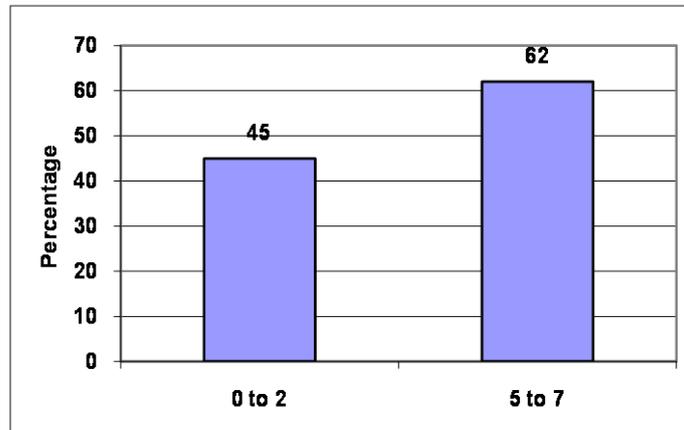
Figure 1
Family Relationships and Its Relation to the Frequency of Family Dinners
(% of Teens)



Source: *The Importance of Family Dinners II*, National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University.

These results shed some light in explaining some of the reasons for the difference in academic performance of children that have been found in the U.S. *vis a vis* other developed countries. In spite of higher educational expenditures per capita in the U.S., the academic performance of children in the U.S. is lower than in other developed countries. For the most part, for men and women across countries the time spent in paid work as well as housework is roughly the same between developed or developing countries. Yet, the time spent in social interactions is substantially higher in the U.S. than in any other developed countries while the frequency of family dinners is higher in other developed countries than in the U.S. This suggests that what type of social interaction children receives make a difference in their academic performance. Spending time driving children to a myriad of activities, attending basketball and football games, etc... cannot replace the time spent in family dinners as the former are not perfect substitutes of the latter. It also indicates that the relative cost of time to family dinners is higher than the cost of time towards other modes of spending time with one's children.

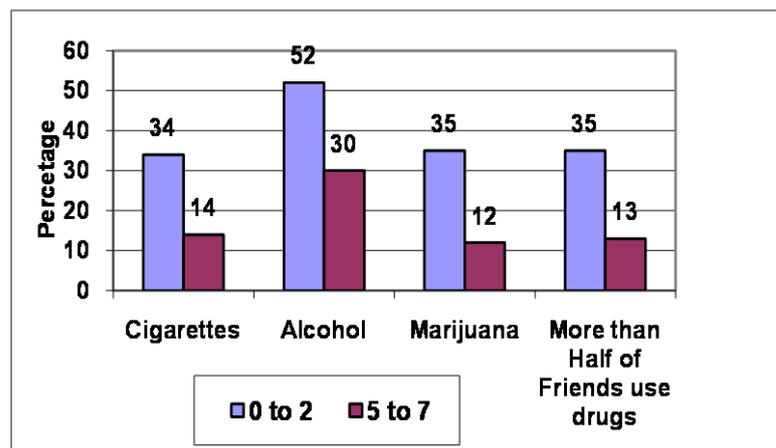
Figure 2
Academic Performance and Its Relation to the Frequency of Family Dinners
(% of Teens Obtaining Mostly A or B Grades in School)



Source: *The Importance of Family Dinners II*, National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University.

Figure 3 presents the effects of frequent family dinners on substance abuse among teenagers. The evidence shows that teenagers whose families have less than two family dinners per week are two and a half times more likely to smoke cigarettes, one and half times more likely to drink alcohol, and three times more likely to try marijuana. In addition, infrequent family dinners increase the risk of teenagers relating to other children who use drugs by 169% (35% vs. 13%). The negative effect of substance abuse in education is well-documented fact. Also well documented is the crime and decline in moral capital connected with such behavior. Empirical evidence shows that declines in moral capital have negative effects in both investment and economic growth.^{xviii} Eating family dinners together has also been found to be associated with less aggression overall, as well as less delinquency in youth from single-parent families.^{xix} Thus, results suggest that in the efforts to decrease substance abuse among children and adolescents, the frequency of family dinner play need to be included. From this perspective, parental education and awareness is essential. It is important to note that substance abuse imposes a significant burden on the government finances not only due to rehabilitation costs but also because of the spillover on crime and neighborhood security, narcotic traffic, and productivity of workers.

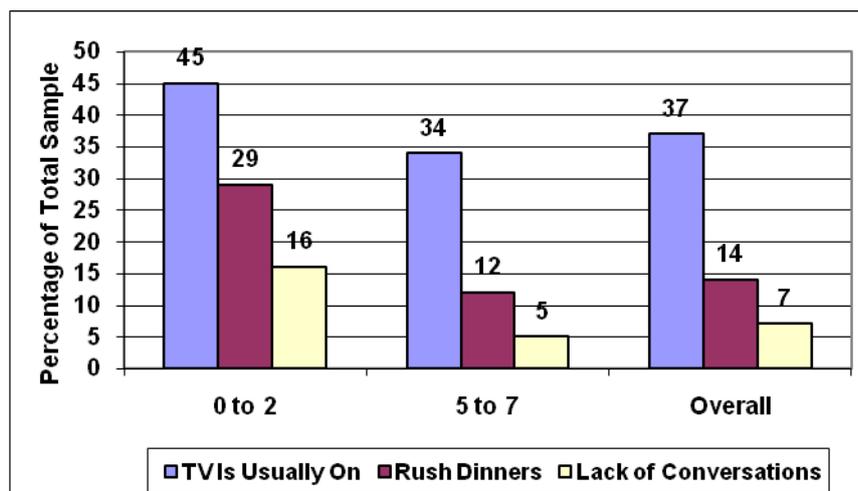
Figure 3
Substance Abuse and Its Relation to the Frequency of Family Dinners
(% of Teens Who Have Tried Abuse Substances)



Source: *The Importance of Family Dinners II*, National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University.

It is also relevant to consider the quality of family dinners. Figure 4 presents this information. Here family dinner is measured by whether television is usually on or off during dinner, whether dinner lasts too long or is not long enough, and whether there is enough conversation and sharing of matters in life. Once again, teenagers in households where family dinners are infrequent report the worse quality of family dinners. 45% of these households eat with the TV present, 29% report that the dinners are rushed, and 37% report low levels of interaction among family members. By contrast, in household where family dinners are frequent, use of TV during meals and rush dinners are 1.2 times and 2.5 times less frequent. Also, lack of conversations during meals is 3.1 times more infrequent in these families. This is very relevant for human capital formation as empirical evidence reveals that low levels of parental-children relationship are detrimental to their physical and psychological health as well as to their academic performance and sociability. In addition, many hours of television has been found to be a relevant factor in the obesity of children and adolescents. In turn, obesity has been found to increase health care costs as well as to decrease academic performance.^{xx}

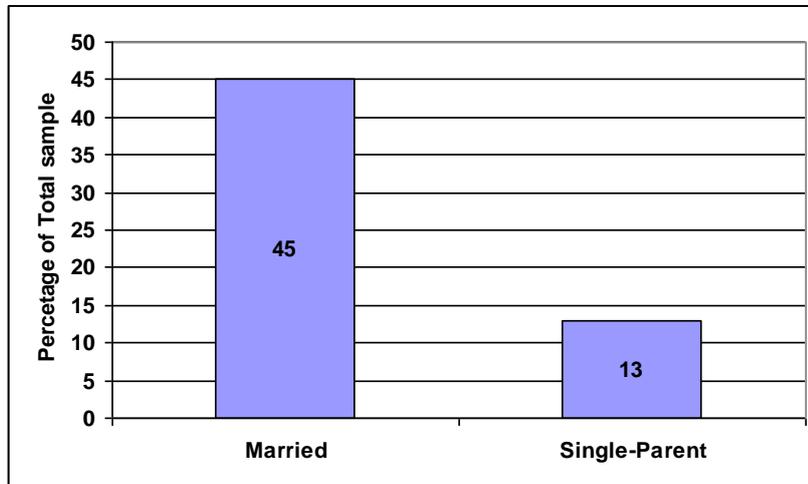
Figure 4
Quality of Family Dinners and Its Relation to their Frequency
 (% of Teens)



Source: *The Importance of Family Dinners II*, National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University.

The frequency of family dinners is connected to the family structure. We know that family structures are closely connected to the welfare and well-being of its family members. In all cases single parents are significantly worse off than married couples.^{xxi} Hofferth *et al* (2000) reports a significant difference in the time spent in family dinners each week across family structures. While on average children of married couples spend 8 hours a week in family dinners, children from single-parent families spend 4.06 hours in family dinners. Similarly, the percentage of children having family dinners is 3.5 times higher in married couples than single-parents households (Figure 5). Empirical evidence also shows that single mothers spend less time in meal preparation and consumption.^{xxii} Thus, indicating that marriage is more conducive to frequent family dinners, which in turn strengthens the development of human and social capital. These results are consistent with the large body of literature that suggests that stable families are best for human beings that in turn, strengthen human capital.

Figure 5
Percentage of Children Whose Families have Family Dinners by Family Structure
(% of children)



Sources: Administration for Children and Families, Department of House and Human Services.

In Summary, the data thus far indicates that the frequency of family dinners affect the quality of social and human capital generated in the family. Frequency of family dinners strengthens the family relations, increases academic performance, and helps prevent substance abuse. However, it is not enough for a family to eat together. The quality and the family structure where the family dinner takes place are important as well. Married couples eat more frequently together. We now turn to the analysis of the impact of family dinners in the economic activity.

IV. Family Dinners and Economic Activity

The operation of any economy can be summarized in three fundamental activities: production, exchange, and consumption. When studying family dinners, it is this last activity, which is relevant. To consume one first needs to obtain goods and services. In order to obtain goods and services one needs buying power and distribution power, which takes place through income and redistributed profits.^{xxiii} This redistribution is influenced by history, luck, and nature, as well as by every economic agent’s behavior.^{xxiv} It is this influence exercised by each economic agent that demonstrates the need of human capital for a fair and equitable distribution system to enable goods and buying power to meet the needs of the family. Studies are unanimous in concluding that there are substantial returns to scale in consumption in the economies of home production.^{xxv} In order to examine how family dinners influence distribution and consumption in an economy the 1958-1961 famine in China as well as the most resent change in the consumption patterns of Chinese children are of assistance.

What makes the Chinese famine a useful case is that it occurred at a time when China had enough supply of food available. In addition, it acquired unprecedented magnitudes, as in a short period of time it produced 30 million casualties and about 33 million postponed births.^{xxvi} Studies have found a variety of causes to explain it, including bad weather, reduction in sown acreage, government’s high grain procurement, forced collectivization, allocation of resources away from agriculture to heavy industry, bad management, and collapse of incentive mechanisms. Another factor to which the famine has been attributed to is the sudden withdrawal rights from the collectives.^{xxvii} Although these theories offered some explanations as to the magnitude of the catastrophe, they failed to explain why the famine first started when there was not only enough

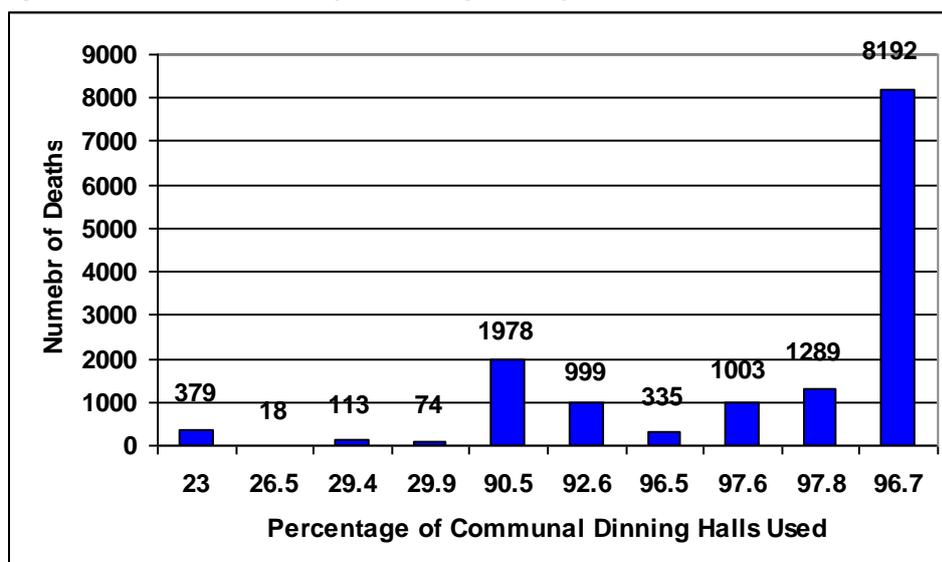
supply but in fact the grain per capita income available for both agricultural and nonagricultural populations had registered an increase in 1958. In a 1997 study, Chang and Wen suggest that the primary cause of the famine was not the collapse in grain production but the failure in consumption rationality that took place when family dinners were replaced by the communal dining system.^{xxviii}

In 1958, with the aim of reinforcing the communist ideology in China, Mao and the Party created more than 2.65 million communal dining halls. Commune members were instructed to dine in them in stead of at their homes.^{xxix} The Party advertised the new policy as a means to liberate more labor, especially women, from housework for productive purpose. As a consequence, private kitchens were destroyed in many places, peasants’ private food stocks were collectivized, and cooking woks and pots were collected and melted down to serve as iron or steel. Furthermore, under the illusion of unlimited food supply, communal dining halls provided free meals to members, and communes no longer allocated grain and other food products to individual farm households. In stead, food products were channelled directly into communal dining halls, thus peasants had no other option but to rely on them for meals.^{xxx}

A popular slogan of the communal dining halls was “open your stomach, eat as much as you wish, and work hard for socialism.” As a consequence, peasants ate more than they needed, leftovers were thrown away, and much of the food was wasted in the process of transfers from storage to cooking simply because of neglect or poor management. This over consumption and waste quickly exhausted the food and by the end of 1958 there was a reported food shortage and/or starvation in some areas.^{xxxi} In spite of this, Mao refused to revert his policy until the mid of 1961 when farmers were allowed to decide whether to keep communal dining halls or prepare meals in their own kitchens. Also, small private plots were returned to the peasants. As a result of this reversal on policy, most communal dining halls were closed and the grain output started to grow. The famine was ended within six months.^{xxxii}

Figure 6 depicts the relationship between the use of communal dining halls by the population and the number of deaths generated by the famine. Although with some outliers, that reflect the impact of other factors in mitigating or exacerbating the famine, an inverse relationship can be found.

Figure 6 Number of Death by Percentage of Population Use of Communal Dining Halls



Source: Chang and Wen (1997), Table 5.

Samples were chosen by using 30% of lower as a criteria for low use of communal dining and 90% or above as a criteria for high use of communal dining. The total data included 25 provinces.

Clearly the experience of the Chinese famine of 1958-1961 speaks to the relationship that exists between family dinners and efficiency food consumption and distribution. The elimination of family dinners precipitated within six months a famine that lasted until family dinners were reinstated. Although other causes, as previously mentioned helped contribute to the catastrophic development, family dinners played a crucial role in the beginning of the famine and in its end. The Chinese experience also indicates that when economic policy undermines family dinners, the consequences for the economy of a country could be disastrous and economic growth becomes unsustainable.

Today, forty five years later, China is facing another distribution and consumption food problem but of a different nature. Various surveys on children's consumption have reflected that, since the late 1990s, in Chinese urban families, children's consumption is higher than that of adults. Studies have found that parents unceasingly satisfy children's wishes of food consumption, but ignore what children really need for their healthy growth, thus wasting resources and jeopardizing the development of their children. Some provide to them excessive in between-meals and unbalanced diets that destroy their such as liquid food supplements when they do not need them. Thus the family meal has been replaced by milk, cookies, and cold drinks, or by health supplements, all of which contribute to stomach diseases. Not surprisingly, the number of digestive medical conditions among children has doubled in five years.^{xxxiii}

Children's luxury consumption is mainly reflected in between meals snacks. Expensive candy and canned drinks are bought by parents if they are in fashion. Researchers have indicated that such pattern of consumption cannot be sustained by all families and therefore it is lowering the parents' living standards. Concerns on this issue have been accentuated by the rapid aging population that China is suffering and by the negative human capital as well as distributional effects that this waste of resources can have in upcoming years. They sustain that if parents unconditionally satisfy children's food desires, it is easy for children to be led to the one-sided pursuit for material goals and go astray if their family cannot satisfy their expanded material desires.^{xxxiv} Thus, resources are used inefficiently when decisions on consumption are made in such a way that weaken family dinners rather than strengthening them. This, in turn, hampers the sustainability of real economic growth as it affects negatively not only the efficiency of distribution and consumption of goods and services in the economy, but also affects savings and thus investment.

V. Conclusions

Economic growth is an outcome of more than economic processes. It is an outcome of economic, social, and political processes that interact with and reinforce each other in ways that worsen or ease the achievement of economic growth and development. In this paper we have sought to establish the relevance of one of these processes, family dinners, for the economy. In doing so, we attempted to establish the relationships that exist between family dinners, and human, social and moral capital, as well as with economic growth. Empirical evidence indicates a close relationship between family dinners and the different types of capital previously mentioned. Frequent family meals enhance human, moral, and social capital, the existence of all of which are necessary conditions for sustainable economic growth. Frequent family dinners strengthen the family relations, increase academic performance, and it helps prevent substance abuse. Furthermore, the role of frequent family dinners in the economy indicate that many of today's human, social, and moral capital problems are not going to be resolved in court rooms, legislative hearing rooms or classrooms, by judges, politicians, or teachers. Rather it will be solved in living rooms, dining rooms, and across kitchen tables – by parents and families.

Studies also provide evidence of a relationship existing between family meals and economic activity. The existence of family meals affects positively efficiency in the distribution and consumption of food within an economy. Furthermore, the Chinese case indicates that is not enough for an economy to produce enough food. The context in which the food is distributed and consumed, as well as the qualities of meals are also important for the interpersonal relational dimension of consumption, which in turn plays an important role in developing human capital and strengthening social and moral capital. Thus, attention to the frequency and the quality of family meals as well as to the patterns of food consumption is of interest for all agents in the economy.

The frequency of quality family dinners is higher in healthy families, where both parents are present. It follows that good economic policies with regard to family dinners are those that foster a healthy constitution, preservation, and development of the family. As in any other aspect of the economy, it is not enough to seek the implementation of remedial policies, i.e., those who seek to solve or assist dysfunctional situations or its consequence. Friendly family policies are needed at both, the micro and the macroeconomic level and facilitating frequent family dinners is one way of doing this. For this, all sectors of society need to be engaged.

Governments can foster and promote the family through using multiple tools: taxes, education, health care, homeownership, and work participation policies. Within this context, if governments aim at increasing the quality and frequency of family dinners, three issues need to be addressed: working hours, after school activities, and long commutes. In the area of work and school activities, the structure itself seems to be in need of revision. Long working hours and short school hours combined with a myriad of extracurricular activities are not conducive to frequent family dinners. In both areas, much remains to be done. An important change in paradigm is required if these policies are to effectively address the family dining needs. Policies to be effective must address the needs of the family as a unit and not the needs of each of its members independently of each other. The relative cost of time to family dinners also demonstrates that time should be crucial component of public projects involving time savings, mostly transportation.

At the private sector level, businesses also need to respond to the need of strengthening the family. The length of the workday as well as its structure requires immediate attention. Some of these initiatives can include systems of flexible working hours for men and women, work sharing, and the provision of facilities that allow parents, especially the mother, to work from their home some days of the week. At the individual level, education and information regarding the importance of frequent family dinners, their role in the creation and growth of human capital, as well as the normal development of children needs to be imparted. Only in this manner the allocation of time will be optimal in this area. On this endeavor, mothers have a special role, as it is generally she who has primary responsibility for the performance of household tasks, especially in the area of food shopping and meal preparation, even though she might also work outside her home.

Elsewhere, I have argued that it is within the family that the need for distribution is mainly felt and that it is for this reason that it is through the family that the economy transcends the mere individual level. Distribution within the family is usually carried out through the women. One can see, therefore, the importance of the women's role in the economy. Woman, because of her characteristics, has the capacity to distribute goods in a just manner, according to the specific needs of each member of the family. This is an important idea when thinking on income distribution theory and policy as well as on sustainable real economic development.^{xxxv} The study of the family meal and its effect on human capital as well as on consumption reinforces this idea.

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- ⁱ I have addressed this point elsewhere. See Aguirre (2001 and 2006).
- ⁱⁱ Social capital has been defined in several ways. One definition that encompasses most of them is “an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. These norms can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends, all the way to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity and Confucianism.” (Fukuyama (2000, p.3.) Human capital is generally understood as the physical and technical efficiency of the population. For a clear presentation of social capital see Fukuyama (2000) and for human capital and the family see Becker (1991.) Already Coleman (1999) in his seminal paper on social capital had emphasized both the interrelation that exists between social and human capital as well as the fundamental role that the family plays on their development. Specifically, Coleman states: “But there is one effect of social capital that is especially important: its effect on the creation of human capital in the next generation. Both social capital in the family and social capital in the community play roles in the creation of human capital in the rising generation. (p. 109)” For an economic analysis of the connection of these forms of capital with growth see Alesina and Rodrick (1994), Knack and Keefer (1997), Kalemli-Ozcan *et al* (2000), Mauro (1995), and Whiteley (2000).
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Juster and Stafford (1991) for a more detailed analysis on the literature’s treatment of the allocation of time.
- ^{iv} Becker (1965), p. 496.
- ^v See Hofferth *et al* (2001). The literature indicates that the number of families dining together in the U.S. has increased between 1998 and 2005 from 47% to 58%. The quality of these dinners, however, has not necessarily accompanied this increase. CASA (2005).
- ^{vi} Kinney *et al* (2000) and Certain *et al* (2002).
- ^{vii} Ogdon (2002).
- ^{viii} Bowman (1999).
- ^{ix} Grissmer (1994).
- ^x CASA (1995).
- ^{xi} Polegato and Zaichkowsky (1994).
- ^{xii} Growing within a context of a healthy marriage decreases the risk that children will suffer from emotional or behavioral problems, be victims of abuse or neglect, and struggle in school. Adults also benefit from healthy and stable marriages. Married mothers suffer from a lower rate of depression, enjoy higher income and lower living costs, and have higher savings and wealth. Healthy families are good for children, adults, and the states. For a Review of the literature, among others, see Amato and Keith (1991), Nock *et al* (2002), Grissmer *et al* (1994), Sun (2001), Fagan (1999 and 2002), and Rector *et al* (2004).
- ^{xiii} Akerlof (1998), Aquilino (1996), Fagan and Rector (2000), and Rector *et al* (2003).
- ^{xiv} For a Review of the literature see Larson (1995), Nock (2002), Fukuyama (1999), Schramm (2003), and Aguirre (2001).
- ^{xv} Akerlof *et al* (1996), APA (1996), Bisnaire (1990), Dube (2003), Hetherington (1989), Hofferth *et al* (2000), Jeynes (2001), and Zwaanswijk (2003).
- ^{xvi} *ibid.* and CASA (1995), p. 3.
- ^{xvii} Knack and Keefer (1997).
- ^{xviii} Kalemli-Ozcan *et al* (2000) and Mauro (1995).
- ^{xix} Griffen (2000).
- ^{xx} Bowman and Harris (2003).
- ^{xxi} Aguirre (2006) and Fagan (1999 and 2002).
- ^{xxii} Zick and Allen (1996).
- ^{xxiii} There are three ways for this transfer to take place: voluntary payments, theft, taxes, and government benefits.
- ^{xxiv} Concerning the issue of luck, history and growth see Easterly, *et al* (1993). For how choices affect economic growth see Becker (1993).
- ^{xxv} For a survey of this literature see Deaton and Muellbauer (1980).
- ^{xxvi} Ashton *et al* (1984).
- ^{xxvii} For a review of these findings see Walker (1984).
- ^{xxviii} For a review of this literature see Chang and Wen (1997), p. 2
- ^{xxix} The communes collectivized all means of production, including not only land and draft animals, but also those retained by individual members under the preceding cooperative system, such as small private plots of land and orchards. Many communes also collectivized members’ personal property such as kitchenware and furniture.
- ^{xxx} Chang and Wen (1997), p. 5.
- ^{xxxi} In some rural areas the grain in three months amounted to what usually sufficed for six months. In some other areas, three months’ supply of grain was consumed in two weeks. See Yang (1996) for a more detailed study of overconsumption.
- ^{xxxii} *Ibid*, p.8.
- ^{xxxiii} Ying (2003), p. 376.
- ^{xxxiv} *Ibid*, 379.
- ^{xxxv} See Aguirre (2001).

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