

A Review of Shifting Paternal Involvement Literature: Comparative Perspective from the Europe, the USA and East Asia

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1. Introduction

Traditionally the responsibility for childcare has fallen primarily to mothers. However, a variety of socio-cultural changes have implied shifts more or less in the roles of men and women outside the home in a particular range of countries especially since the Second World War.

As the crucial but easily overlooked in the supervising the education of children, whether paternal involvement has also undergone a series of various transformations within different countries or not? There exists some common knowledge, as follows:

Fuchs elaborated that “Now, some mothers leave home each day to go to work, earning wages to provide materially for the children, and some fathers stay home as major nurturers on a daily level.” (Fuchs 2004: 332). Ishii-Kuntz discovered that there were also some signs that the younger generation of East Asian men was becoming more interested in the upbringing of their children than their fathers’ generation (Ishii-Kuntz 2003: 352-380).

However, LaRossa argued that “a close reading of the materials suggests that the culture of fatherhood in the fifties (1945-1960) was neither a simple continuation of previous patterns nor a more progressive version of what had come before, but rather a more traditional strain of patriarchal fatherhood.” (LaRossa 2004: 47-52). Taga expounded that there exists a huge gap between the new social-cultural expectation on paternal involvement and practical father’s engagement (Taga 2007: 13-14). Fincher, meanwhile, pointed out that gender discrimination, in the historically male - dominated Chinese society, has always been maintained and reproduced by the People's Republic of China (Fincher 2014 : 1-4).

The weight of evidence indicates that there wasn’t consensus of opinion amongst scholars about the contents and process of contemporary shifting fathers and their patterns of interaction with their children.

Although there exists an extensive literature on status of paternal involvement in certain countries or regions, studies that adopt a comparative perspective on this issue are relatively few. And the question

of how attitudes and practices have been affected, in different countries, by social and cultural changes associated with 'modernization', remains largely unanswered.

In this paper, I therefore attempt to synthesize and critique existing literature dealing with the experience of different countries or regions - ranging from 'Western' societies (among which there are considerable differences), to former socialist 'Eastern bloc' societies, i.e., East Asia.

In each case, I ask: to what extent has traditional attitudes and practices about the role of fathers and paternal involvement changed? What differences amongst societies can be observed and how have these difference been explained? Furthermore, whether there are common points among certain countries? On the basis of my review of the existing literature, I propose five models of shifting paternal involvement illustrating each with the case of one specific country.

2. Review

(1) Different shifting patterns of fatherhood

Western societies are the first to have experienced the transition to urban, industrial modernity - and the problems, tensions and issues that this involves. Thus, there is an extensive literature on the history of the family in modern Western societies. Lamb traced the evolution of fatherhood in America from pre-industrial through modern times and identified four clearly defined stages - moral teacher, breadwinner, gender role model and nurturing father (Lamb 1988: 235-238).

The scholarly analysis of East Asian fathers dated back to the early 1980s, soon after the renaissance of research on fatherhood in the West (Li and Lamb 2013: 45-47).

Societies in Asia and elsewhere that have engaged in 'catch - up modernization' have looked to the West as a template - not just for industrialization or technological modernization, but also in the sphere of values and morals. Yasumoto expounded the three phases of Japanese fatherhood (namely, salary man, professional women and can't be called as a father) changes from the mid-20th century (Yasumoto 2010: 23-24).

(2) The factors of transitional paternal involvement

The issues firstly came from the anthropological studies on African-American paternal absence and the high incidence of crime among their adolescent children. A bigger body of literacy came out with the course of urbanization, feminist movement and technical revolution to explore the shifting fatherhood.

In the process of urbanization, the changes of individual family role happened (Antecol 2000: 409-426). More and more women entered the labor market. Family members had to share the housework, and work together to ensure their children get a good education.

Furthermore, more and more father realized that children custody institutions are certainly very important (Tsai 2006: 345-357), and paternal involvement and assistance are also necessary.

Women's liberation movement is a collective appeal to redefine the role of women, an expression of motivation to gender equality in terms of family role (Antecol 2000: 409-426).

However more and more researchers argued that feminist is confined to the political and economic level, rather than in the level of family issues (Fincher 2014: 1-4; Larossa 2005: 837-857)

In addition, the technical revolution especially in the kitchen reform influences the division of housework (Hinsch 2013: 151-156), such as dishwashers and washing machines promote the process of changes of family roles. Media is also a powerful medium for the transmission of the images of the family and fatherhood. Images of the family and fatherhood are transmitted through a variety of forms of media, including television, movies, children's books, parenting literature, comic strip and so on.

3. Models of shifting paternal involvement

After the Second World War, the majority of countries in the world started a new round of reforms. The states respectively set up a series of new policies including extensive family policies, labor systems, social welfare institutions and so on. And these influenced the family life and paternal involvement significantly.

According to the relationship between the state and family, this study synthesizes the empirical, theoretical, and contemporary literature about shifting fatherhood. And this article divided the countries into five following models: Nordic model, Eastern European socialist model, Mediterranean model, Liberal model and Complicated East Asian model.

(1) Nordic model - Sweden

In studies of Nordic model of fatherhood, the Sweden can be characterized in terms of the exemplar social democratic and universal welfare state (Ginsburg and Rosenthal 2006: 39-41).

During the late 1940s and 1950s, it was an extremely ambivalent society in this period, and the family was in the clash between traditional patriarchal family and a more democratic family structure. On one hand, men were no more congenitally family leaders and incremental proportion of women became more financial independent and autonomous. But later the two roles of women as mothers and workers rapidly became the important social issue of concern. On the other hand, the emotional anxiety of men and the expectation of women participated into the household were increasing (Suwada 2015: 141-143).

During the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, women's role of "caring head" (Ginsburg and Rosenthal 2006: 39) in the family was questioned. Both men and women had leading roles in the process of gender equality, both as human beings and as parents. Women's ability to give birth was not to be exchanged with the ability to care: caring about and raising children were tasks to be shared between the father and mother.

During the 1960s and 1970s, childcare became a common political issue for both genders (Suwada 2015: 143-145). Not only did the women worry about the conflict of family and work, but also men did now. For one thing, the commission weakened the women's vital role in family. For the other thing, they intensified the importance of the father to child ("the emphasis on the children needing their fathers marks an important shift in the ideological construction of fatherhood and the 'fatherless society' was now construed as a new problem").

During the 1970s and 1980s, the gender-neutral reforms set out to changes to transform male-breadwinner families into dual-earner families. On one hand, the Marxist-feminist underlined the wages of women's housework. On the other hand, Swedish politicians criticized the men's evasion of father's responsibility.

During 1990s and the turn of the century, with the economy downturn and financial deficit, the commission emphasized the children should spent much more time with their parents rather than staying at the public care and downplayed the conflict of men and women like before. Sweden has now been given the title "the most men-friendly country in the world" (SS 2014: 41-45). However Sweden is still an unequal society where women took on much more responsibility for childcare and housework.

(2) Eastern European socialist model – Russia

As a social institution, Russian fatherhood is an exemplar of bounding to the context of political and socioeconomic processes.

Mainly because of the Bolshevik's claim that communism would liberate women from patriarchal oppression, masculinity and fatherhood are neglected in the gender study of Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Ashwin argued that "the destruction of patriarchal institutions such as the church and the traditional family unit did not have as its primary aim the liberation of women." (Ashwin 2000: 5-8)

The state owned the strongest power just as Ashwin said that "The individual men who stood at the head of the family acted as a barrier, limiting the influence of the state on other family members. In order to achieve control of society, therefore, the state had to challenge the power of the patriarchs. It did this through legislation, state violence and direct repression of individual men, aimed at transforming the state into a universal and exclusive 'father'" (Ashwin 2000: 9-14).

(3) Mediterranean model – Spain

In terms of primary loyalty to the traditional religious beliefs, the Spain can be characterized as the exemplar Mediterranean model.

There are twofold transforms that Spanish society experienced:

Firstly, the social reforms from the citizens' demand promoted other European welfare systems to be introduced to Spanish families. In the cases of non-payment of child support since 1989, whose goal was to "meet the needs in the situations of absolute necessity" and was included into the Criminal Code, the state majorly paid for the certain amount of the child support (Hobson 2002: 20-23).

Secondly, it was the redefinition process. The transform happened from the patriarchal and hierarchical traditional family into a modern family characterized by equality and democracy. Just as Hobson's informants said that "We are not the fathers of times gone by, the Spanish man who did not concern himself with matters of the family, who had two mistresses." (Hobson 2002: 23-26).

However, Gracia found that the conflicting view on the rights and duties of father still existed (Gracia 2014: 26-30). The Mediterranean countries (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and a few smaller countries) are all deeply Catholic – apart from Greece, which is Greek Orthodox (with very similar traditional views regarding the family and the roles of men and women). And all have a huge generation gap, with many young people – especially young women – rejecting traditional expectations regarding

motherhood, while state institutions slowly adapted partly because of the influence of the Church.

(4) Liberal model - The USA

In terms of primary loyalty to the market, The USA can be characterized as the liberal model of fatherhood.

In literature dealing with American fatherhood, four archetypical father roles have been identified over time (Lamb 2014: 267-278), as follows:

Firstly, Moral Father - the father who is responsible for moral oversight and moral teaching-existing from the earliest days of the formation of America.

Secondly, Breadwinner - the father who is responsible for the financial support of his family and it appeared around the time of the Industrial Revolution.

And then, Gender-role Model Father and it arose at the end of World War Two-emphasizing the father as a strong masculine role model for his children.

Lastly, New Nurturant Father – the father who is actively involved in the parenting of his children. And it has arisen within the last three decades. Furthermore, New Nurturant Father is closest to the model of the New Father

However, some scholars (Zielińska-Król 2013: 135-139; Freeman 2003: 213-216) more and more focused on the crisis of fatherhood/father absence in the USA and pointed out that “Policy makers had depicted a ‘crisis of fatherhood’ which had somehow become ‘woven into the warp of the crisis in welfare states’” (Zielińska-Król 2013 : 135).

(5) Complicated East Asian model – China

On the one hand, there are more and more signs to show that fathers in East Asia are taking increasing responsibility of childcare, on the other hand, the cultural stereotypes still hold men back from playing more active roles. And China is an exemplar of this complicated East Asian model of fatherhood.

Lamb’s investigation in China elaborated that “In general, there was a clear differentiation of perceived parental roles: the father was more likely to be the educator, the knowledgeable parent to whom the child would turn for help in doing homework and solving problems.” (Lamb 1988: 234).

Furthermore, the notion of “strict father, kind mother” was facing challenges from the symptomatic of the social changes that are taking place in China. There was evidence showing that father are more lenient than mother (Hinsch 2013: 151-156).

However, Tsai (2010) argued that although the male realized that the female make significant contributions to the family finances, they still thought father’s main role is breadwinner. Therefore, fathers in China are still far less involved in the family or the traditional ‘mothering activities’ than mothers (Tsai 2010: 423-439).

4. Comparative perspective

(1) Three common points

Although each country is with a different cultural background, some studies (Taga, 2007: 14-16; Tsai

2006: 345-357) have shown that East Asian fathers share some common characters, for instance the conflict with the traditional images of 'strict father, kind mother' and modern images of 'kind father', especially since around the start of 21st century.

In the process of urbanization, the changes of individual family role happened. More and more women entered the labor market. Family members had to share the housework, and work together to ensure their children get a good education.

Some scholars (Gracia 2014: 29-30; Fincher 2014: 3-4) elaborated that the impact of Westernization has contributed to the undergoing rapidly transformational East Asian family system. They saw 'modernization' as a globalized process, where 'globalization' = 'Westernization'. In many modern societies (especially, but not only, in East Asia), there has been a strong emphasis on 'catching up' (technologically, militarily, etc.) with the West. This perceived necessity of 'catching up' has been used by political elites to persuade 'the masses' of the need to subordinate their individual desires (and rights, etc.) to the 'duty' of promoting national growth and building a strong state. Often this has involved hidden (or not-so-hidden) costs for women in particular.

In addition to the main logical influence factor, pop culture and technical revolution also affects families and paternal involvement.

(2) Three differences

Another change came from feminist movement's collective action (Larossa 2005: 237-257). There is a natural or inevitable progression towards feminism, which is desirable, but its triumph is not inevitable.

However, East Asian feminist movement has demonstrated the inner contradiction of gender role in family issues. Women in East Asia experience a quite different way in fighting for their freedom and equality. The initial highly intense feature of East Asia feminism that borrowed from foreign culture conducted to the lag of fatherhood. On the one hand, they seek for equal right in political and economic areas, on the other hand, they adhere to the traditional values of family.

The State and family in the Northern Europe are comparatively balanced, and the state has a relatively large impact on the society. As for countries in the liberal model, like the USA insists on not interfering the family education and early education. Socialist countries impose more control over the social development. Actually, China as an example deeply reflects the chaos of paternal role due to the state form.

In all the five models, paternal involvement is moving towards the equality of male and female and a proactive paternal involvement. However, the development schedules under different modes are different. Countries in the northern Europe has been involved in paternal involvement since 1960's. America starts this from 1990's whereas the Easter Asia begins to pay attention to this after 2000.

5. Discussions and Conclusion

This study concluded discussion with the following two points: At first, the issue about the reliability of these five models needs further discussion. Furthermore, changes in shifting domestic arrangements are not without conflict. Does there exist a possibility that paternal involvement may be stagnant or

even retrograde in certain periods or certain countries? This requires further study.

This review indicates four points, as following:

Firstly, the process of shifting fatherhood under the five models is different. However, the paternal involvement is moving towards the equality of male and female and a positive paternal involvement.

Secondly, paternal involvement seems to be just an issue of family inside. However, it actually reflects the relation between the state and the society.

Furthermore, the practices are much more complex than those five models showed. But reflexive modernization appears to be the most suitable analytical tool. It is this distinction between the more fluid individual choices.

Lastly, although East Asia as a whole is different from Western fathering, the questions of what does existing research tell us about diversity within East Asian societies with respect to parenting attitudes and practices remain largely unanswered.

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Notes

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This study aims to shed light on different shifting patterns of fatherhood by a comparative perspective and critically review of the factors explained by researchers in this respect. This article critiqued existing research on the evolution of fatherhood's notions and father's role in family education. It analyses and compares changes that various societies in Europe, America and East Asia have undergone in this respect, and explores why different societies have changed in different ways, or at different rates. To explain shifting attitudes towards fatherhood and parenting more generally, it assesses the importance of culture, social and demographic change, the development of welfare systems, and other aspects of public policy.