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Official Discourse on Family and Fatherhood in Post-1949 China

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Date of publication: June 21st, 2020

Edition period: June 2020 - October 2020

To cite this article: Tan, T. (2020). Official Discourse on Family and Fatherhood in Post-1949 China. *Masculinities and Social Change*,9(2), 174-206. doi: 10.17583/MCS.2020.4943

To link this article: <http://doi.org/10.17583/MCS.2020.4943>

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Abstract

Across the modern world, socio-political change has contributed to transformation of fathers' roles and of related official discourse. As most studies of discourse on fatherhood focus on Euro-American contexts, limited scholarly work explores Chinese discourse relating to family dynamics and gender roles, especially from a historical perspective. This paper therefore explores shifting Communist Party portrayals of the ideal family and father's role, by analysing mass media data from 1949 onwards. Four key phases of official discourse on family and fatherhood are revealed: during the period of collectivization, a nationalist model dominated, with fathers exhorted to devote themselves to economic development; during the post-Mao period of de-collectivization, an individualist model of parenting was promoted, with more intimate involvement in children's education encouraged; during the period of marketization from the mid-1990s, a state-supported model of parenting was promoted, 'envisaging fathers' more active participation in household duties. Finally, during the period of individualization in the early 21st century, a 'community model' of parenting was promoted, emphasising the father's dual role as nurturer and provider. While state discourse has superficially contested traditional patriarchal attitudes, challenges to such attitudes remain weak, and assumptions that the family and childcare are essentially the 'woman's realm' remain entrenched.

Keywords: Chinese fatherhood, official discourse, gender roles, child-rearing, household duties

Discurso Oficial sobre Familia y Paternidad en la China Post-1949

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Resumen

En el mundo moderno, el cambio político ha contribuido a la transformación de los roles de los padres y del discurso oficial relacionado con ello. Como muchos estudios sobre la paternidad se centran en contextos euroamericanos, hay una limitada literatura científica que explore el discurso chino relacionado con las dinámicas familiares y los roles de género, especialmente desde una perspectiva histórica. Este estudio, por lo tanto, explora el cambio en el retrato de la familia ideal y el rol del padre según el Partido Comunista, analizando los medios de comunicación de masas de 1949 en adelante. Se revelaron cuatro fases clave en el discurso oficial sobre familia y paternidad: durante el periodo de colectivización, dominó un modelo nacionalista, incitando a los padres a dedicarse al desarrollo económico; durante el periodo postmaoista de decolectivización, se promovió un modelo de paternidad individualista, animando a una mayor involucración íntima en la educación de los hijos; durante el periodo de mercantilización de mitad de los años 1990, se promovió un modelo de paternidad apoyado por el estado, concebido una participación más activa de los padres en las tareas domésticas. Finalmente, durante el periodo de individualización a principio del siglo XXI, se promovió un “modelo comunitario” de paternidad, enfatizando el rol dual del padre como cuidador y proveedor. Mientras que el discurso estatal se enfrentó superficialmente a las actitudes tradicionales patriarcales, el desafío a esas actitudes sigue siendo débil, y las suposiciones de que la familia y el cuidado de los niños son esencialmente “el reino femenino” siguen atrincheradas.

Palabras clave: paternidad china, discurso oficial, roles de género, crianza de los hijos, tareas domésticas

Confucian ethics underpin the long-established popular images of parents, where the father takes charge of supporting the family, while the mother is responsible for household duties at home. However, a variety of social changes in post-1949 China have implied shifts in the roles of men and women in the public sphere – with Mao Zedong famously declaring that ‘women hold up half the sky’. In terms of parenthood in the private sphere, the role of parents has changed since the mid-twentieth century. Nonetheless, it is unclear to what extent it has changed and why it transformed at different times (Feng, 1996; Yan 2003; Yang 2010; Fong, 2017; Liong, 2017). This research aims to fill this gap by identifying the key phases of official policies, and any significant shifts in the content or emphasis of party ideology regarding the nature and status of the family, and the image of the ‘ideal father.’

Traditional Values/Expectations of Chinese Fatherhood

The culture value of Confucianism and Taoism has been deeply rooted in defining the traditional Chinese values and beliefs towards gender allocation within the hierarchical family, like ‘*nan zhu wai, nv zhu nei*’ (men take care of things outside the family whereas women take care of things inside the family) and ‘*yi jia zhi zhu*’ (the head-of-household). There are also different expectations of paternal and maternal parenting (Ho, 1987), like the popular saying, ‘*yan fu ci mu*’ (strict father, kind mother).

The typical image of traditional patriarchal families is paternal control and authority. Traditional Chinese father’s primary role is a provider and teacher who provides for and disciplines children. Fatherhood in China means ‘emphasizing strong parental control, obedience, shaming, love withdrawal, filial piety, family obligation, maintaining harmony, collectivism, protectiveness, and “training”’ (Hulei et al., 2006; Molenda-Kostanski, 2016, p.19). Unconscious gender ideology pressures all families to follow the traditional values and expectations.

Modern Changes in Chinese Fatherhood

With China's rapid socioeconomic growth, fathers' attitudes and behaviour have changed to some extent, a finding supported by ample empirical research (Abbott, Ming & Meredith, 1992; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015). However, there exist different views on the degree and forms of changing fatherhood. Therefore, research on changing fatherhood in certain periods from a historical perspective has the potential to refine and enrich the existing body of work. Xuan Li (2018) traces fathers' parental and gender roles in traditional China (prior to 1911), the Republican era (1911-49), the Socialist era (1949-78), and the Reform era (1978-2000). She argues that Chinese fatherhood 'moves from a rigid, emotionally reserved, power-asserting patriarch to a refreshingly equal relational model full of warmth, support, and intimacy' (Li, 2018, p.16). Lingshu Hu (2018) uses a visual content analysis method to examine Chinese film posters from 1951 to 2016, highlighting five time intervals: 1951–58 (the early years of foundation), 1968–78 (during the Cultural Revolution), 1981–87 (the early years of 'Reform and Opening'), 1996–2002 (massive layoffs and millennium) and 2010–16 (present). He argues that Chinese men shifted from macho working-class men in the Mao era into 'soft'/'emasculated' men in Post-Mao era. His argument further extends Kam Louie's (2014) research on Chinese masculinity, consisting of *wen* (mental or civil) and *wu* (martial or physical) paradigms.

In the limited body of research on Chinese fatherhood from an historical perspective, most existing studies only target certain periods of socio-political shifts in family, rather than comprehensively examine all the changing trajectories in post-1949 China. This research will try to fill this gap by focusing on the changing image of the role of the 'good father' and ideal family and fathering within four different periods of post-1949 China.

Explaining Changing Fatherhood and National Discourse Impact on Fatherhood

Various factors (e.g., the increasing economic force, governmental work on gender equality, and social policies on child welfare) have great impact on changing fatherhood. Among them, how national discourse impacts fatherhood has drawn great attention, with Gladys Pak Lei Chong remarking: ‘Manliness and femaleness are political products according to the needs of the nation and the state at different historical moments’ (2013, p. 242).

In the process of modernization, socioeconomic and demographic changes, especially the declining fertility rate and the return of women to work, contributed to national discourse on achieving child welfare and gender equality. Governments in Western and Eastern countries began to put forward a series of legal policies to transform parenting (Ishii-Kuntz, 2015), since ‘parenting is no longer solely a private family issue and fathering cannot be developed in isolation from gender equal goals’ (O’Brien, 2009).

In recent years, there is an increasing research on social construction of masculinity and fatherhood in Chinese context (e.g., Louie, 2014; Li, 2018; Cao & Lin, 2019). Although more researchers have started to explore the interplay between Chinese official propaganda and family, there is limited research related to how far Chinese official discourse results in the transformation of fatherhood.

Theories Related to Fatherhood in China

Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as ‘a system of social structures and practices where men dominate, oppress and exploit women’ (p. 20). She then distinguishes two forms of patriarchy: Private patriarchy is ‘based in the private sphere of the household, where individual patriarchs exploit women’s labour and exclude them from participation in the public sphere’; Public patriarchy is ‘based in public spheres such as the economy and state, which collectively segregate women in the labour market and politics from wealth, power, and status’ (Lim, 2019, pp.3-4). Walby’s theory will be used to analyse

why the CPC puts forward different state advocacies on fatherhood in different periods and to argue that Chinese private patriarchy must give way to public patriarchy at points of conflict.

Silverstein (1996) argues that the traditional stereotype value of the father's primary role of breadwinner deprives men's needs for intimacy and emotional connectedness. Silverstein also reveals the practical method that 'redefining fathering to emphasize nurturing and providing will place men in equivalent dual roles' (p. 5). Silverstein's theory will be used to explain the CPC's ability of satisfying man's needs for intimacy and emotional connectedness, and to determine whether the Chinese state advocacies aims to achieve gender equality or not.

Anderson's (2009) proposes Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) to understand the changing relationship between males and their masculinities in different cultures. Anderson's theory will be used to explain the diversity forms of masculinity and fatherhood in the process of Chinese modernization and globalization.

In all, in investigating changes in fatherhood at the grassroots level, the nature of official discourse should be considered. This is because in a society like China's, it is difficult to delineate public and private spheres and the regime has sought to penetrate the latter by refashioning familial norms and personal behaviour (Davis & Harrell, 1993; Xie, 2013). While many states have pursued programs of 'public information' to promote responsible parenting, the approach of China's Communist regime has been more intrusive and draconian. At different historical points of the PRC, the CPC has sought to enlist the family in a state-directed drive for economic development and social transformation – demanding that citizens subordinate their private concerns to the Party's definition of the collective public interest. Official values have been spreading into the masses under the strict media controls. The party-state has explicitly and implicitly influenced the evolving vision of the Chinese family and the role of the father within it. Understanding the shifts in party policy or ideology will enable us to study in what ways popular attitudes and behaviour have responded to or resisted official efforts to transform them. This paper therefore aims to investigate the following three

research questions: a) What ‘ideal father’ has the party-state sought to promote at different times? b) How consistent have official messages been? What are the key shifts in official discourse on family and fatherhood since the Mao era? c) Why have these shifts occurred?

Methods and Sources

This study employs documentary analysis to find explanations regarding official discourse on fatherhood. Policy statements (i.e., new marriage law, one-child policy, two-child policy, and national five-year plans for family education) have been regarded as the official guidance on ideal Chinese marital relationship, family structure, parenting, gender role allocation and childcare welfare regime. In terms of mass media, this study selects the following four top print media focusing on Chinese official ideologies of family, parenting and gender roles.

1) *Women of China* (WoC, *Zhongguo Funu*) is the first authoritative women’s magazine, launched in June 1939. It is the only magazine which has been continuously published by the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) since 1949. It covers the latest social affairs, marriage, family, education, health and science. It is one of the most widely read magazines among women within China, with an annual circulation of over 3 million worldwide (see Figure 1).

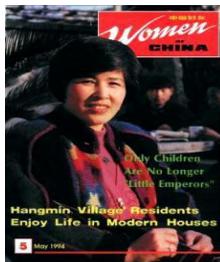


Figure 1. *Women of China* (WoC, *Zhongguo Funu*).

2) *Parenting Science* (PS, *Fumu Bidu*) is the first authoritative parenting magazine, launched in April 1980. It is a family education guide for parents of children aged 0-6. Since October 2008, its full electronic version has been freely accessible online, making it popular among younger computer literate parents. It is published nationwide with an annual circulation of 960,000 (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Parenting Science* (PS, *Fumu Bidu*).

3) *Women of China News* (WoCN, *Zhongguo Fumu Bao*), the only national daily newspaper for women, launched in October 1984 by ACWF. It reports and comments on socio-cultural affairs and policy changes on women and family. Its official website *Chinese Women's Network* was set up in 1998, and its mobile app *China Women's Daily • MMS version* was officially released in July 2004, significantly increasing the readership among young generations with mobile phones (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Women of China News (WoCN, Zhongguo Funu Bao).

4) *The Family Education of China* (FEoC, *Zhonghua Jiajiao*) is the first official family education magazine, launched by ACWF and Chinese Family Education Association in 1993. It is a practical family education guidebook for parents of children aged 6-14 (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. *The Family Education of China* (FEoC, *Zhonghua Jiajiao*).

The Changing Roles of Fatherhood in Post-1949 China

This section will explore the ideal family and fatherhood in contemporary China via analysis of policy statements and ACWF-affiliated publications. This section will also investigate the degree of change in the discourse of fatherhood and masculinity alongside the changing national discourse of modernization and economic development. China has experienced significant social transformation since 1949, and the social norms about gender roles in family have been reshaped and reconstructed accordingly. Changes in fatherhood refer to not only attitudes and practices towards paternal parenting, but also the gender allocation of household work within the family. After analysing the official documents, this paper puts forward four phases of changing fatherhood, corresponding to the key shifts of propaganda related to family.

Nationalist Model of Parenting (1950s-70s)

Right after the founding of the People's Republic of China (October 1st, 1949), the state's priority was on '*wei wen he jing ji fu su*' (maintaining stability and social-economic recovery). The brutal land reforms from January 1950 broke up the traditional extra extended family structure and generated many nuclear families. However, the existing patriarchal Chinese marriage traditions hindered the state's control of the male-dominated power in these new types of families. New Marriage Law was thus launched on May 1, 1950 to challenge the patriarchal order in the individual 'small' family. Particularly, aiming to liberate women from unpaid work in the public 'big' family, Article 48 of New Marriage Law regulated that 'the state implements equal pay for men and women'. Meanwhile, to advocate that care for both children and the elderly is the parents' inescapable responsibility, Article 49 of New Marriage Law regulated that 'Parents are obligated to educate children and look after the elderly'. While working mothers were praised as glorious production models in socialist posters in the early 1950s, images of mothers raising children alone could also be found (see Figure 5). Family friendly support in

the labour force tended to be presented as support for mothers and put into full play by mothers, rather than as potential benefit to both parents, or fathers. Fathers were still portrayed with a focus on their work life and their main role as provider.



Figure 5. Mother with her children.

In the mid-1950s, China followed the Soviet model of social development. ACWF launched a national campaign of ‘*wu hao jia ting*’ (five good families) to shape the new socialist family-based morality. The standard of ‘five good families’ (e.g., good characters, good living standards, good civilization of urban and rural areas, and good neighbor relationship) was broadly spread (Zhang & Yue, 1956, p.17). In the public sphere, men and women were all encouraged to devote themselves to the socialist industrialization on a massive scale. However, in the private sphere, mothers were expected to educate and look after the children, allowing fathers to dedicate themselves to their work day and night. This is verified by a national poster titled ‘go to sleep, do not disturb daddy from working at night’ in 1955 (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Mother putting her children to sleep while their father works.

Motivated by the goal of ‘*chao ying gan mei*’ (surpassing Great Britain and catching up with the United States) and the national strategic goals of four modernizations (i.e., industrial, agricultural, national defence and science and technological modernization), China entered the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962). A series of collectivist social reforms broke up the original family structures, pulled individuals out of their families and embedded them in ‘*dan wei*’ (urban units) or rural people's communes. These highlighted communist attempts at ‘*qu jia ting hua*’ (de-familialization). The Party-State drew a picture of communist happiness (see Figure 7), shaping the collective psyche and providing collectivist supports including childcare.



Figure 7. Communist happiness.

However, the collectivist supports did not function as well as expected and the people's sacrifices of 'de-familialisation' failed to accomplish the national targets of industrial development. Regarding parents' roles, educating children in class education became parents' revolutionary responsibility:

What kind of responsibilities should each family shoulder in cultivating a new generation of revolutionaries? In a revolutionary family, the relationship between parents and children is not only the flesh-and-blood relationship between the elder and the younger, but also a partnership between the predecessors and the successors in the revolution. Parents should not only develop our revolutionary successors, but also lead the new generation to more prosperity (People's Daily Editorial, 1964).

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the CPC did not acknowledge any distinction between 'public' and 'private'. To deal with the increasing unemployment and urban growth problems (Xu, 2017), a large-scale national campaign namely '*shang shan xia xiang*' (up to the mountains, down to the villages) was launched in December 1968. Over 17 million middle and high school students were sent to villages to learn from the peasants. The

movement separated family members and seriously disrupted family lives. Peasants' traditional gender and family values greatly impacted the values of '*xia xiang zhi qing*' (educated urban youth working in villages). Meanwhile, the Party-States issued official propaganda to persuade people that bourgeois morality would result in returning to capitalist society. It is clear that the Cultural Revolution represented the peak of masculine values wielding rifles. The image of *Wu* masculinity was predominant. Macho working-class men in Mao era, especially during the Cultural Revolution, were supposed to be 'stoic and emotionally unexpressive' (Hu, 2018, p.343).

In sum, during the Maoist era of collectivization, family functions were replaced by the nationalist model of parenting, as seen in an article entitled 'comprehensive planning and strengthening of women and children's welfare work' (Zhang, 1956, p.1-3). This article characterises the nationalist model of parenting in terms of national social institutions bearing the main responsibility of parenting. Traditional family-based functions have evolved into the collective's responsibility. Fathers are explicitly advised via propaganda to devote themselves to the economic development, rather than to take time to raise and 'control' children. The family value of 'domestic and harmonious family' emphasized that all men and women should energetically contribute to socialist industrialization. However, propaganda circulated within China showed that mothers often took the main responsibility of looking after and educating children. The parenting value of raising a 'healthy successor' shows the states' priority of socio-economic development and the Party-State control. The gender value of '*qu xing bie hua*' (de-gender) and Mao's belief of 'what men can do; women can do' make it clear that women were encouraged to fight against the masculinist socialist citizenship. Sexual discrimination in the labour market was still prevalent, although it was significantly weakened in the Mao era (Wang, 2010). Mao's effort to justify the centrality of male authority in public life contributes to the decline of male authority in private life. However, although Mao's 'feminine gender role norms' now socialized women to perform the double roles of provider and nurturer, Mao did not call for the revaluing of fatherhood.

Although during the Mao era, women made significant progress in attaining economic equality, gender allocation of household work and the dominant definition of fatherhood were not challenged. In other words, private patriarchy remained obedient to public patriarchy. The community bore the main responsibility of parenting, but mothers were still expected to be the main caregiver and father was still expected to be a good provider and children's moral model.

Individualist Model of Parenting (The Late 1970s – The mid-1990s)

China experienced the process of de-collectivization and 'zai jia ting hua' (re-familialization) after reform and opening-up (1978) and the early stages of the one-child policy (1979). Facing the old problem of traditional practices coming back into force after the Cultural Revolution and the new problem of raising a single child, the Second Marriage Law of 1980 was promulgated in January 1981. However, it imperfectly met demands resulting from the enormous changes in society. The census in 1982 showed that the '4-2-1 family' (referring to nuclear family unit consisting of four grandparents, parents and a child) had gradually become the main family structure. To advance the healthy development of the Chinese population and marriage relationships, Hu Yaobang, then-chairman of the CPC, gave instructions - 'the problems of marriage and family should not only be restrained by the proper law, but also rely on the proper public opinion guiding ordinary people' (Hu, 1982). Afterwards, a public discussion was conducted in WoC about 'what kinds of new morality and custom should be built up in the issues of marriage and family' from June to September 1982. Regarding family relationships, Kang Keqing, then-leader of ACWF, made a special claim on the ACWF's official book *Marriage and Family Work with Children*:

Both husband and wife are the masters of the family. They should be equal and share the household duties. By setting up a democratic family style, the feudal patriarchal ideology and the traditional values of 'husband-head' are overcome. It is also important for parents to nurture

children and support the elderly. Parents should educate and train their children to become useful people for the four modernizations – modernization of agriculture, industry, national defence and science and technology (Kang, 1982, p. 155).

With the disintegration of the urban work unit system and rural collectivization, the Party-State distributed the responsibility of childcare into the duty of individual households. The previous collectivist support from work units and people's commune in the Mao era was significantly eroding: the people's commune system was cancelled after 1983 and the so-called '*tie fan wan*' (iron rice bowl) was also broken for urban workers in the late 1980s. After dismantling of the previous socialistic and collectivist welfare arrangements, the Party-State failed to establish supporting social organizations and welfare system to support childcare. In the end, the responsibility of providing public services such as pensions, childcare, medical care and education were transferred from the state to households through the market. China thus has stepped into the individualist modelling of parenting, where individual households take responsibility for childcare, resulting in 're-familialization'. Faced with greater responsibilities and risks, the traditional model of mutual assistance among extended family members once again became an important means for Chinese families to cope with risks and adapt to changes.

In the post Mao era, the '*su zhi*' (quality) of the population was increasingly emphasized since the labour force is the driving factor of socio-economic development. '*Su zhi jiao yu*' (Quality education) was first put forward in the 1980s and continuously developed in the 1990s. As Deng Xiaoping said, 'the national modernization depends on the talent; the talent is cultivated by education while education is based on the family', the importance of family education drew great attention. However, compared with legislation and supports for 'quality education' in school, the supports for 'quality education' in family primarily relied on parents themselves. Regarding how to raise well only children, ACWF concentrated on strengthening the connection between family education and school education

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in rural area, and set up the new standards of ‘five good families’, namely ‘have right political ideologies; work well; respectful to the elderly; educate children well and plan fertility well; hardworking and thrifty.’ Besides this, in 1989 *Parenting Science* ACWF also praised young fathers, who became good responsible fathers through self-study:

For this ‘sacred’ role as a father, I have purchased dozens of parenting books which talks about ancient and modern Chinese and foreign family education methodologies. I also read newspapers and periodicals and listen to radio programs of family and children. To become a so-called modern good father with scientific methods to educate children, I also do self-reflection every day (Wang, 1989, p. 17).

Furthermore, western parenting attitudes and practices, and child-centred values started to be introduced to China in an era of globalization. A famous educationist Chen Heqin, who is a father of seven children and the ‘father of Chinese early childhood education’, set up the first China Education Society Early Childhood Education Research Association, and emphasized that paternal involvement in children's education plays a vital role in creating a better future for children. He gave many speech encouraging fathers’ involvement in family, published by ACWF. Meanwhile, there were a growing number of ACWF’s reports and intellectuals’ papers in the WoC from the early 1990s, providing some practical suggestions for parents to scientifically educate their only children:

A man should be grateful to his child. Without child, he cannot become a father. If he is not a father, he will not be a true and complete man...The father and son could wear same trousers. That is family happiness... (Jiang, 1994, p. 34).

In sum, due to the implementation of the one-child policy in the period of de-collectivization and marketization, the value of the household as the foundational socio-economic unit was dramatically increased and the attitude of son preference was challenged to some extent. For instance, girls rather

than boys were always shown in the posters of implementing the one-child policy (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. Girl with her parents.

The key exception to one-child policy, i.e., to allow rural families to have a second child when the first child is a girl - was not a 'challenge' to son preference, but a concession to it in rural areas. On the other hand, in order to raise '*ren kou su zhi*' (population quality), parenting involvement in raising children has been considered in the individualistic model of parenting. The Party abandoned any attempt to challenge or undermine parental authority within the family and implied that parents should undertake their childrearing duties rather than relying on the collective welfare and support. The new family value of building a 'democratic harmonious new family' indicates that men should share housework and childcare duties to ensure that all young men and women contribute more to the socialist modernization discourse. The parenting value of 'scientific childcare' encourages parents to raise only children of 'high quality'. However, there remains some tensions over the issue of who should take care of children. On one hand, the images of mothers raising children are shown more often in the posters and official publications. On the other hand, there is an increasing voice of encouraging fathers' participation in educating their only children from the early 1990s. However, the party-state did not provide the related legislation or comprehensive guidance to family education.

Under this individualist model of parenting, equalities at home and in the workplace thus become mutually reinforcing. Official documents both called for ‘*chao xian qi liang mu*’ (super good wife and kind mother) and the practice of ‘*xian fu liang fu*’ (good husband and kind father). The new term of ‘*jia ting zhu fu*’ (househusband) emerged. Note that education appears to be a key issue in the Chinese notion of parenting from the Deng era. Both school education and family education tend to educate children towards family and group orientation meanwhile emphasising individual values and opinions. It continues to challenge the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the authority of parents including the father. The traditional hegemonic masculinity has been replaced by inclusive masculinities, including the ‘modern’ masculinity which is understood as ‘more expressive, egalitarian and peaceable’ (Connell, 2012, p. 7). Fathers prefer to develop children’s independent living ability and cultivate the independent consciousness (e.g., Wang & Yang, 1983, p.32-33; Deng, 1983, p.34-35). In the late 1980s and early 1990s emerged a portrayal of the father as carer and friend (implying equality and approachability), with the responsibility to cultivate a happy child with critical thinking (e.g., Xue, 1992, p.40).

State-Supported Model of Parenting (Mid-1990s to 2011)

In 1995, the Chinese population reached 1.2 billion and the population of children reached 340 million. The previous individualist model of parenting could no longer meet the needs of narrowing the gap between the growing population of children and the quality of family education. The ‘*liang gang*’ (Two Outlines) and the revision of the Marriage Law therefore were implemented in 1995. Afterwards, the ‘*quan guo jia ting jiao yu gong zuo jiu wu ji hua*’ (National Ninth Five-year Plan for Family Education) was implemented by ACWF and Ministry of Education in 1996, marking the shift of Chinese family education from the family-oriented path into the government-led and administrative development path. The state-supported model of parenting began. The *Outline for Planning the Development of Children in China in the Nineties* advocated all parties to jointly promote the

physical and mental health of children, and to foster the socialist constructor and successor of a ‘*si you*’ (idealistic, ethical, cultural and disciplined person). In 1996, the national campaign of ‘five good families’ was changed into ‘*wu hao wen ming jia ting*’ (five good civilized families), namely, ‘love China and obey laws; study and work hard; respect gender equality; look after children and respect the elderly; scientific parenting’. The article titled ‘dialogues in a family’ showed how parents should teach children:

Family relations are binding ties - providing care and support in times of need... In the late 1990s, TVs had not become popular. Xiaomai really need money to buy a TV for watching English Channel. I gave him money and supported his study. Finally, Xiaomai scored 100 in English exam. ‘Great!’ I congratulated him sincerely (Yuan, 1997, pp. 18-19).

China stepped toward building ‘*quan mian jian she xiao kang she hui*’ (a well-off society all around) from 2000. Meanwhile, China also faced a rapidly growing population ageing trends (Hong, 2013). In the previous individualist modelling of parenting, isolated families led to mothers mainly looking after children and the elderly. A series of papers highlighted that educated mothers in cities suffered ‘double burden’ from both paid work and unpaid housework, while fathers spent more time watching TV than doing household chores or interacting with children (Olson, 2000, p.30-31). This phenomenon led to an increasing number of educated young women delaying marriage dates, and married women failing to fulfil their traditional duty of giving birth. The increasing number of ‘leftover women and men’ were portrayed as likely to threaten social stability (Fincher, 2016) and the growing number of DINK (dual income, no kids) and delayed birth time worsened the serious problem of aging society. The emerging state-supported model of parenting thus encouraged parents to focus more on child’s character development, as evidenced by a well-known article titled ‘close attention to the character development of only children’ in 1997 WoC (see Figure 9).

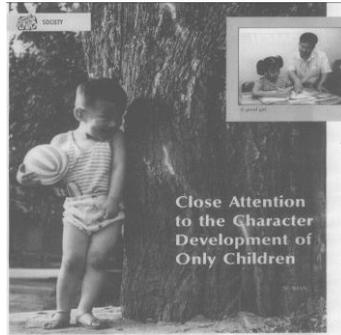


Figure 9. *Close Attention to the Character Development of Only Children*, published in WoC, 1997.

Hu Jintao, the leader of China from 2002 to 2012, said “a harmonious family is the foundation of a harmonious society and morality is an important fulcrum for a harmonious society” (Hu, 2002). A new project of ‘family civilization’ was launched by ACWF from 2004. China’s first national conference of commending the advanced units and individuals in family education, entitled ‘double qualification,’ was held in 2005. In addition, facing the social moral decline, a report titled ‘always highlight the theme of moral education’ argued that parents should stress more on moral development than intellectual development of children (Chen, 2007).

Moreover, official propaganda started to introduce Western styles of parenting. Specifically, official propaganda increasingly advocated against ‘father absence’ and supported men’s greater engagement in household duties, as confirmed by a series of papers, such as ‘in the United States, it has become a fashion for fathers to share childcare responsibilities, especially in middle-income families’ (Tai, 2005, p.42), and ‘Britain advocates fathers to enjoy parental leave for increasing parental responsibility’ (Wu, 2007). From 2000 to 2012, there are 91 articles related to fatherhood in the WoCN and 7 articles related to American and British fathers’ new standard of a ‘good father’. Jin

Yong's article titled 'what do Chinese fathers lack?' (Jin, 2000) indicates that the role of the 'strict father' has been abandoned by more and more fathers, and father's spoiling of children has become a worrying issue for mothers. 'How to be a good father' was discussed and western values were widely publicised. An article entitled 'American have a new standard of 'good father'' (Yang, 2004) shows that young American fathers hope to reorganize work and life because they think it is important to build strong relationship with the child. They should not only earn money, but also educate and play with children.

In terms of gender values, there were more contradictions on the ideal gender model than ever. On one hand, the official propaganda in mass media reshaped the intergenerational transformation of gender stereotypes and the traditional gender-segregated chores. For example, the widespread paper 'a story of a mosuo family' (Lielai, 2004, pp.32-34) introduced the life of matrilineality in Yunnan province and the customs of maternal uncles helping raising children. A more gender-neutral model was propagated through official media. Li Yuchun, a popular female singer who shews traditional women's clothes and employ gender-neutral behaviours, embodies this trend. Contradicting this, official media also advocated for traditional gender education encouraging girls to be feminine and boys to be masculine. For instance, female weaving and cooking classes were held in Tongji Women's College because officers believed young women should be good at traditional mothers' 'shou yi' (craft) (Shi, 2005).

In sum, the marginalized father's role attracted great attention in the process of modernization and globalization. The increasing individual orientation challenges Chinese vertical bonds of hierarchy and filial piety, and continually reconstructs gender roles. Chinese government has taken the state-supported model of parenting to overcome the unstable socioeconomic conditions in the beginning of 21st century. To achieve a harmonious society under the control of the Party-State, the family value of building a 'harmonious family' is particularly emphasized. However, the gender value of shaping 'gender neutrality' struggles: on one hand, the stereotype of gender

image is challenged to some extent; yet on the other hand, the official message on gender roles and parenting is inconsistent.

Community Model of Parenting (2012 – the Present)

Massive urbanization (growing from 16% in 1960 to 57% in 2016) has led to 61 million so called left-behind children (i.e., those whose parents have migrated to urban areas for work, leaving their children in the care of relatives), which accounted for 23.6% of all children in 2010 (Hong, 2013). The previous policies attempting to strengthen the protection and care of left-behind children in the countryside have struggled to match needs. New Law on the Protection of Minors was launched in 2012, indicating that fathers must pay for the childcare fee to mothers after divorce. Following this, the implementation of the National Twelfth Five-Year Plan for Family Education in 2012 marked the shift of Chinese family education from giving priority to urban areas to a universal development path. National legislation on family welfare also showed the state has been increasingly adopting Western approaches of generous childcare support. In April 2012, ‘Female workers labour protection special provisions (draft)’ was implemented to prolong maternity leave from 90 to 98 days. After the implementation of Population and Family Planning Law from December 2015, many provinces revised the local family planning and extended paternity leave days. Additionally, ACWF promoted compulsory family education college courses (Qiao, 2017). China has evolved into the community model of parenting, increasing the integration of family, school and society education into children’s family education:

Chinese family education should be carried out based on scientific research, publicity and training. Under the principle of ‘children-oriented’, ‘parent subject’ and ‘multi-directional interaction’, we attempt to build a comprehensive family education guidance service system that covers urban and rural areas to promote public services for family education (Wang, 2016).

A popular reality show in Hunan Province, ‘Dad, Where are We Going?’, started in 2013, and has portrayed various images of good fathers, such as ‘friendly father’ (e.g., The relationship between Zhang Liang and his son), ‘soft father’ (e.g., Lin Zhiyin gently educates his son), and ‘active father’ (e.g., Wu Zun positively encourages his children to express freely). Although this is a local media representation, it was highly praised by Chinese official newspapers. For instance, *People’s Daily*, published a commentary in 2013 by commentator Liu Yangsheng, saying “the strong father-child relationship embodied in the reality show makes people feel warm and encourages people to return to their families.” The ACWF also published a series of reports and papers to praise the ‘involved fathers’ depicted in this program, and encouraged young fathers to learn from them.

However, another strand in recent official discourse indicated a regression to hierarchical models of fatherhood, especially since the advent of the Xi era. Legislation may serve a symbolic function – i.e. signalling that the government ‘cares’ about this issue, even if it may not actually do much about it. Recent legislative changes suggested a ‘traditionalist’ or Confucian turn in family law. For instance, a new Law of Protection of Rights and Interests of the Aged in 2013 requires the offspring of parents older than 60 to visit their parents ‘frequently’ and to ensure their financial and spiritual needs are met. Furthermore, in the context of an increasingly aging society, population policy was amended in 2015 to institute what is effectively a two-child policy (see [Figure 10](#)). However, the burden of taking care of four parents and two children is likely to fall on young mothers.



Figure 10. Parenting Science cover.

Regarding responsibility for childcare, official messages remain unclear or contradictory. On one hand, the ACWF explicitly encourages fathers' positive engagement, confirmed by an article titled 'father needs to hold up half of the sky in the family education' (Wang, 2017). On the other hand, the ACWF also insists on women taking more responsibility. For instance, the campaign of 'five good civilized families' was changed to '*zui mei jia ting*' (the most beautiful families) and its standards were revised. Most of the award winners of 'the most beautiful families' were mothers who not only do well in their career but also devote themselves to household duties.

In sum, in the process of individualization, China has set up community model of parenting, which comprehensively enhances the childcare supports from family, society and the state. The official vision on the family value of the 'beautiful family' has emphasized '*jia feng*' (family spirit), '*jia xun*' (family training) and '*jia jiao*' (family education), but legislation provides little on the role of fathers. The parenting value of 'various parents' role' allows people to balance work and life, and rethink father's various roles except for provider and discipliner. However, China has not really begun to move away from the assumption that the family and childcare are essentially 'women's realm'. Some scholars (Silverstein, 1996; Seward & Stanley-Stevens, 2014) predict that the pattern of friendly father will not be achieved

unless there is a concerted and sustained effort to support fathers who wish to be more involved with their children. The gender value of ‘women hold up half of the sky outside of home, and men hold up half of the sky inside of home’ should aim to achieve women’s ‘liberation’ by calling for greater contributions from fathers in the private sphere.

Conclusions and Discussions

This paper provides an explanation of the periodization of official discourse on fatherhood based on the continuous official historical documents and mass media data in post-1949. During the period of collectivization (1950s - 70s), the CPC has taken the nationalist model of parenting. Fathers are explicitly advised by propaganda to devote themselves to the economic development, rather than take time to raise and ‘control’ children. A responsible father means focusing on actively attending the states and communities’ work and events. The increasing number of dual earner families to some extent relieves the problem of male privilege because ‘mothers and fathers can do the same things’. But social institutions’ supporting parenting have not significantly influenced gender allocation of household duties since revaluing of fathers’ roles is not the priority. The father-child relationship is regarded as secondary to mother-child relationship. During the period of de-collectivization (the late 1970s - the mid-1990s), the CPC adopted an individualist model of parenting. The ideal father-child relationship become closer. In the process of ‘re-familialization’, there were some tensions over the issue of who should take care of children. On one hand, the image of mothers raising children were shown more often in official propaganda. On the other hand, the voice of encouraging father’s participation in educating only children increased. A responsible father means providing good environment and/or educating children regardless their gender. During the period of marketization (the mid-1990s - 2011), the CPC took measures to promote a state-supported model of parenting. Men’s increasing needs for intimacy and emotional connectedness contributed to a decline of hegemonic masculinity and promoted a redefinition of fatherhood, making the prevailing models of fatherhood more father

friendly and discursive. Father's more intimate involvement in children's life was encouraged. During the period of individualization (2012 - now), China has established a community model of parenting. The parenting value of 'various parents' role' allows people to rethink father's traditional roles, and father's emotional role is expected to a degree. Redefining the modern 'good enough father' (i.e., emphasizes nurturing as well as providing) has become the centre of gender socialization for responsible men. The concept of father as nurturer has the potential to change the traditional stern and disciplinarian father within a hierarchical family into a more emotional and responsible father within a democratic family.

Through documentary analysis, this study also finds that the PRC policy statements have promoted the liberation of women in both private and public spheres, but have seldom highlighted the role of father within the family. The messages in print media have superficially contested the constancy of traditional patriarchy and its influence in reconstructing gender role allocations remains unclear and contradictory. A gap between official rhetoric and public policy remains. Although ACWF recently welcomed public opinions, the free and uncensored sharing of opinions are not allowed to be published. It proves Fincher's (2016) argument that the ACWF exists to prevent the emergence of any independent women's movement, not to provide a platform for the voice of women. Moreover, this research agrees with scholars on Chinese fatherhood (Hu, 2018; Li, 2018) that education has become a key role of transforming fatherhood, with a diminished preference for sons in the reform era.

In all, this research argues that state advocacy of active mothers' and fathers' equivalent dual roles of provider and nurturer in different periods serves to the state's rapid economic development and social stability, and reinforces patriarchal culture and society in China. It has hindered the acceptance of diverse family forms and has deprived fathers' rights and needs for intimacy and emotional connectedness with their children. During the Mao era, the 'state feminist' (Wang, 2010) gender role norms socialized women to perform the dual roles of provider and nurturer, which were not for the benefit of a private patriarch/individual fatherhood, but for the collective of public

patriarchy/ 'state fatherhood' (Heng & Janadas, 1995). In the case of a conflict of interest between the public and individual, the ideology of the official discourse calls for the accommodation of private/family to state's needs of economic development and the well-being/harmony of the collective, rather than advocating for the rights and well-being of the individual. During the Post-Mao era, official discourse has redefined fathering to emphasize nurturing as well as providing, which serves the state's considerations of capitalist development, rather than as a recognition of gender equality. Once a conflict of father's responsibilities in nurturing and providing happens, the official ideology suggests that mother must accommodate father's commitment to work, rather than advocating for a compromise to balance the needs of both father and mother who are both provider and nurturer. Official discourse reflects the ideology that fathers must live up to their obligation as breadwinner and head-of-household. This reinforces male privilege and female subordination, namely the continuance of a male-dominated family model. The inequitable dual roles in private and public thus mutually reinforce Chinese patriarchal tendencies. In all, gender equality is not a priority in the Communist period.

Lastly, differentiating between the understanding of 'propaganda' and 'representation' in Chinese context is very important, but it is hard to answer the question whether or not all media representations are propaganda in China. The researcher is aware that Chinese official control of media mass is generally strong and is getting stronger. Through its examination of official discourse on changing fatherhood, this research also poses some key questions to consider for future researchers. To what extent has official discourse on fatherhood resulted in the transformation of popular discourse? In what ways has this change occurred? What gap remains between official discourse and popular discourse on changing fatherhood? Research into the impacts of changing national discourse on popular masculinity and fatherhood can foster a more refined understanding of the issue.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Edward Vickers, Marc Archer, Anita Nyberg, Alessandra Ferrer, Yi Zhang for their constructive comments on the manuscript.

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