Beyond WEIRD-centric Theories and Perspectives: Masculinity and Fathering in Chinese Societies

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Abstract

The fatherhood scholarship has made much theoretical progress over the past decades, yet existing models and concepts continue to draw primarily on WEIRD-centric assumptions. This review uses demographically sizeable, culturally significant, yet understudied and under-theorized Chinese fathers as an example to reveal the limitations of applying WEIRD-centric perspectives in studying fathering and fatherhood. Specifically, existing models and concepts of fathering and fatherhood, with an emphasis on father involvement, especially in rough-and-tumble play, are predicated on the assumptions of nuclear family and western hegemonic masculinity. The Chinese cultural tradition, in contrast, endorses a literatus masculinity and emphasizes the family lineage, thereby encouraging fathers' educational involvement and inviting grandparental care. These cultural traditions intersect with unfolding social developments in contemporary Chinese societies to shape fathering ideals and practices. A full, routine inclusion of non-WEIRD fathers, such as Chinese fathers, promises to benefit the scholarship on fathering and fatherhood as a whole.

Keywords: fatherhood, fathering, Chinese, cultural diversity, gender, social change

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The past few decades have witnessed an increasing focus on men in developmental and family science and diversifying theories and disciplinary stances related to fathering and fatherhood (Adamsons et al., 2014; Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020; Volling & Cabrera, 2019). Although researchers have repeatedly stressed the need for more empirical investigation and better conceptualization of diverse populations beyond western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic ("WEIRD") societies (Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010), empirical studies on fathers in non-WEIRD contexts remain limited. Furthermore, there has been little theoretical advancement that goes beyond the white, middle-class norms on which existing theories and empirical studies are built. Theoretical development beyond WEIRD contexts provides an important opportunity to reflect critically on taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning mainstream theories and conceptualizations of fathering and fatherhood (Chuang & Moreno, 2008; Shwalb et al., 2013).

Chinese men constitute one of the largest populations of fathers around the world, particularly given the sizeable presence of Chinese ethnics and the norm of near-universal marriage and parenthood in Chinese societies (Davis, 2014; Greenhalgh, 2015; Ji & Yeung, 2014). As of 2020, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau are home to a total of 1.43 billion people (Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, 2020; Taiwanese Ministry of Interior, 2020; Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Census and Statistics Department, 2018; Macau Special Administrative Region Statistics and Census Service, 2020). There are also significant populations of transnational Chinese migrants, and the size and visibility of Chinese diasporas are expected to grow globally in the foreseeable future (Batalova & Echeverria-Estrada, 2020; Xiang, 2016).

In addition to the demographic significance of Chinese fathers, the father has been a central figure in Confucian ethics which had governed private and public life for much of the Chinese history (Hwang, 2001). Nevertheless, Chinese fathers' roles in and influences on their families' lives—both as residents of their home societies and as immigrants—remain under-researched and under-theorized (Li, 2020). Empirical research on Chinese fathers is extremely limited, compared to that on Chinese mothers, in both the English- and Chinese-language literature. As of July 2020, a literature search for English-language, peer-reviewed publications in the PsychNet database using keywords such as "fathering," "parenting," and "Chinese fathers" yielded only 56 empirical studies that included some Chinese fathers in the sample regardless of research topic, among which as few as seven focused exclusively on Chinese fathers (Chuang et al., 2020). Our literature search in Chinese-language databases indicated a similar paucity of methodologically robust and theoretically informed investigations of fathering and fatherhood among Chinese populations.

Even when Chinese fathers are included in empirical studies, they are often examined in a cultural vacuum using simply transplanted WEIRD models of fathering under unspoken WEIRD-centric assumptions, irrespective of the language of publication (e.g., Gao et al., 2020; Yin et al., 2013; Zou et al., 2019). Benchmarking Chinese fathers against WEIRD norms, early studies tended to underscore the strictness or emotional aloofness of Chinese fathers (Chuang, 2018). In most cases, Chinese fathers were subsumed, alongside Chinese mothers, under a single category of Chinese parents, reflecting a notable lack of gender sensitivity (Chuang et al., 2020b). Chinese fathers' family ideologies and practices also tend to be portrayed as monolithic, which overlooks considerable intracultural variations in historical and social contexts underpinning fathering ideologies and practices (Chuang et al., 2020a, 2020b). Although a small number of empirical studies have revealed some within-culture heterogeneity in Chinese fathering, such as by rural–urban status (Zhang & Xu,

2008), geographic location (Chuang et al., 2013), children's gender (Chen et al., 2004), and cohort (Liu et al., 1995), these findings are under-utilized in informing theoretical developments in the study of Chinese fathers or fathering in general. These limitations represent a missed opportunity to critically reflect on the embedded cultural meaning of fathering and fatherhood from a non-WEIRD perspective, which would benefit not only scholarship on Chinese fathers, but also research on fathers, men, and families in general.

To address these gaps, we use Chinese fathers as an illustrative case to interrogate key, basic assumptions that have tacitly guided existing conceptualizations of fathering and fatherhood. By critically revealing and challenging some of the assumptions, we demonstrate how the inclusion of and focus on non-WEIRD fathers would enrich the theorization of fathers' roles in child development and family life. Thus, in this article, we first briefly discuss existing theories on fathering and fatherhood and how these theories are predicated on the assumption of a masculine, individualistic man as defined by western-centric ideals. We then review Chinese cultural traditions and social changes pertaining to masculinity and personhood to showcase how the fatherhood scholarship can derive inspiration from the cultural traditions and development of Chinese societies to generate new conceptual insights.

Existing Theories on Fathering and Fatherhood

Despite a persisting absence of a "grand theory," existing conceptual frameworks have engaged with several facets of fathering and fatherhood, such as father-child interactions as well as fatherhood and gender (Lamb et al., 2000; Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020). Scientific interests in fathers' roles can be dated back to the Freudian theory developed at the onset of the 20th century, which portrayed the father as the primary male role model with which boys can identify (Stevens et al., 2002). The development of attachment theory, the mass loss of men during the World Wars, and the second-wave feminist movement in Western Europe and North America in the 1970s all provoked public concerns over

"fatherlessness" (Lamb, 2000). It was in such historical contexts that early models of fathering and fatherhood emerged, with a primary focus on defining and measuring the quantity and quality of fathers' involvement with their children and the developmental consequences of such involvement (or its lack).

Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine's (1987) classic tripartite model was one of the first that transcended the "presence versus absence" binary by outlining fathers' engagement, accessibility, and responsibility for their children. This model was further augmented by models and concepts that captured the affective and behavioral quality of father involvement. For example, Pleck (2010) incorporated paternal warmth and control into his model of father involvement, and Paquette (2004) highlighted the "activating" nature of fathering through interactions that "excite, surprise, and momentarily destabilize children" (p. 193) and encourage risk-taking in safe environments (e.g., rough-and-tumble play). To decentralize research on fathering and fatherhood from an assumed deficit perspective, Palkovitz (1997) further enriched the construct of father involvement by including the interlinked lifespan development of fathers and children, adding a positive, "ethical" component to the conceptualization. Similarly, Hawkins and Dollahite (1998) used the terms "father work" and "generative fathering" to incorporate fathers' willingness, capabilities, and responsibilities to attend to children's diverse and changing developmental needs. These models and concepts, despite some variation in their contents and valuation of father involvement, focus on the father-child dyad, albeit sometimes in comparison with the mother-child dyad in the family.

Other researchers have developed a second line of theories to examine fathers' gender role as men and to chart how fathers' roles have evolved against the backdrop of complex, changing gender landscapes in Western Europe and North America. For example, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) offered a systematic critique of gender essentialist assumptions underlying previous fatherhood research. Following feminist thoughts in western societies,

some scholars redefined fatherhood in an attempt to challenge hegemonic ideals of masculinity. These attempts have led to the development of new notions such as "intimate fatherhood" (Dermott, 2008) and "caring masculinities" (Elliot, 2016), which use fatherhood culture as an example of the compatibility of care and nurturance in existing models of masculinity. Furthermore, other scholars pointed out that the gender revolution was incomplete in the realm of parenthood. For example, Allen and Hawkins' (1999) discussion about maternal gatekeeping showed that some mothers may resist fathers' involvement in childrearing by setting impossibly high standards to defend their gendered sphere, despite potential benefits father involvement may bring for themselves. This means that fathering is not an individual behavior and experience, but rather relationally and interactively constructed with other family members. Going beyond the father-child dyad, these theoretical developments have engaged with the intricate relationship between fathering and gender in the family (Doucet & Lee, 2014).

More recently, scholars of fathering and fatherhood are increasingly attentive to values and ideologies embedded in broader sociocultural contexts that may shape fathers' expected and actual roles in child development and family life (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Elder & George, 2016; Marsiglio et al., 2005; Palkovitz & Hull, 2018). Randles (2018) described, for example, how contemporary U.S. fatherhood policies and programs are still closely informed by intersecting racial and class hierarchies. Some new models position the father-child dyad with reference to other influential actors such as the mother and children's siblings in the nuclear family (Cabrera et al., 2014), whereas others have taken advantage of increasingly diverse family forms to dismantle the taken-for-granted monolithic "ideal" of the family and fatherhood (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). For example, Marsiglio, Day and Lamb (2000) have used "varied and often negotiated definitions of father" (p. 287) to argue for a

more inclusive conceptualization of father involvement in the context of diversifying family forms in contemporary WEIRD societies.

Although an emerging body of empirical research (e.g., Chuang & Moreno, 2008; Chuang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2009; Roopnarine, 2015; Shwalb et al., 2013) has shed new light on fathering and fatherhood of diverse sociocultural backgrounds (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2005), theories in fatherhood research, as in many subfields of family science, are tacitly rooted in dominant cultural norms and social concerns of 20th century western societies where systematic inquiries into the father's role in child development began. These theories, built on assumptions of normative masculinities and personhood of conventional white, middle-class families in WEIRD societies, have guided key agendas in fathering and fatherhood research.

Implicit Values of Masculinity and Personhood in WEIRD Contexts

Theories of fathering and fatherhood are closely anchored in hegemonic gender ideologies, including ideals about masculinities, while theories of mothering and motherhood are often implicitly taken as generalizable to parents of both sexes (Day & Mackey, 1989; Palkovitz et al., 2014; Pleck, 2010). Connell's (1995) influential theories on gender and power defines hegemonic masculinity as a socially constructed form of masculinity that is held to be superior to femininity and other types of masculinity, albeit with varying contents across different sociocultural contexts.

The hegemonic masculinity in western contexts since the Industrial Revolution expects an ideal man to be an economically self-sufficient full-time breadwinner who heads a heterosexual, married nuclear family and demonstrates physical as well as mental strength (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Louie, 2014; Miller & Maiter, 2008). More recent social changes in WEIRD societies, such as the feminist movements and the rise of neoliberal consumerism further required the "new man" to be playful, cool, and stylish (Aarseth, 2009;

Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). By contrast, education is socially constructed as "feminine," and thus rejected by "real" boys and men, so much so that the gender achievement gap favoring girls have caused social concerns regarding a potential "boy crisis" (Connell, 1989; Jackson et al., 2010; Morris, 2012; Renold, 2001).

Much of the fathering and fatherhood scholarship is aligned with such WEIRD masculine expectations, as reflected in the key issues present and absent in extant empirical literature. Fathers' gender role as the breadwinner, mostly framed in opposition to their caregiving role, has been a central theme of discussion, although recent literature has begun to challenge the binary framing of the two roles (e.g., Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Schmidt, 2018). When fathers are examined in the context of hands-on childrearing, their role as playmates—especially in vigorous, rough-and-tumble play—is often highlighted (e.g., Cabrera & Roggman, 2017; Flanders et al., 2009; George et al., 2016), although fathers are found to engage in a variety of roles other than a playmate and mothers are found to spend more time (than fathers) playing with their children (Chuang & Zhu, 2013; Puhlman & Pasley, 2016; Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). In contrast, children's education and scholarly development is a rare topic among studies on father involvement in WEIRD contexts. Paradoxically, research on social mobility and stratification has primarily focused on fathers as a key resource for their children's socioeconomic mobility (Beller, 2009; De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2001). Thus, overlooking fathers' involvement in their children's education may limit our knowledge of the micro-social mechanisms underpinning the process of intergenerational socioeconomic transmission.

Furthermore, fathering is often implicitly imagined as private practices taking place in the nuclear family independent of extended families or broader nonfamilial community relations. The confinement of paternal practices and influences to the nuclear family can be seen in a preoccupation with the "absentee" or "deadbeat" fathers and "fatherlessness" in the

initial stage of fatherhood research (Green et al., 2019), which assumes the nuclear family to be the primary site for children's learning from male figures. Following this ideal, many studies tended to scrutinize non-WEIRD fathers against the ideal template that valorizes the legal co-residence of biological parents and fathers' breadwinning role, while abasing fathers' deviance from such "normative" practices and values as "inadequate" or "pathological" (Garcia Coll & Pachter, 2002; Miller & Maiter, 2008; Roer-Strier et al., 2005). Few studies have explored fathers' relationships with extended family members such as grandparents and other relatives, although these relationships can exert a significant influence on both fathers' own lifespan development and their role in childrearing (e.g., Luo et al., 2020). The limited studies on fathers' multigenerational relations are restricted to ethnic minority families and are yet to be mainstreamed into the fatherhood scholarship (e.g., Hunter, 1997).

Chinese Fathers: Potential Theoretical Innovations

Fathers in Chinese societies and transnational Chinese diasporas have begun to garner scholarly attention in family science, child development research and men's studies, although they remain systematically understudied (Chuang et al., 2020b; Li, 2020). Given the limitations of existing ethnocentric ways in which fathering and fatherhood are understood and studied, the examination of Chinese fathers can help researchers to better position their perspective and broaden their scope as they theorize fathering and fatherhood. Specifically, such reconceptualization would benefit from attention to the distinctive configurations of masculinities and personhood in the Chinese culture and unfolding social changes in Chinese societies.

Chinese Masculinities: Education-Focused "Literatus" Ideal

The traditional Chinese culture promulgates a distinctive ideal of masculinity that emphasizes scholarly accomplishment, interpersonal harmony, and emotion reservation (Louie, 2014)—qualities that are drastically different from the hegemonic masculinity in

WEIRD societies that endorses physical strength, independence, and assertiveness. Rooted in a worship of sages and scholars such as Confucius and Laozi, and reinforced through centuries of governance by the literati class, such a model of masculinity attaches great value to one's educational attainment and self-regulation (Hinsch, 2013). According to Louie's (2004) conceptualization of Chinese masculinities based on literary and historical sources, physical strength and athletic talent, such as martial skills, although socially recognized, boast much lower prestige than literatus qualities. While Confucian family ethics assign the obligation of financial provision to men as do WEIRD fathering norms, it is not just one's individual economic success or fame, but also a lifelong cultivation of scholarly and socioemotional skills, as exemplified by one's management of emotions and social relationships, that defines the symbolic achievement of Chinese men (Louie, 2004).

The masculine ideal prescribed by the traditional Chinese culture influences the ways in which Chinese men understand and perform their paternal roles, first and foremost by emphasizing the father's roles in children's education. In both historical and modern Chinese societies, children's and especially boys' academic development, rather than leisure and physical activities, is seen as a key duty of the father. Such a belief is reflected in traditional idioms such as "to feed [the child] without teaching is the father's fault," which is still upheld by many Chinese fathers today, albeit with revised interpretations (Cao & Lin, 2019). For example, Chuang and colleagues (2013) reported that as Chinese fathers described their roles in their children's upbringing, the role of educator was most frequently noted. Taiwanese fathers are particularly active in teaching their children about their cultural heritage (Ho, 2011). Empirical studies have consistently reported that Chinese fathers across diverse geolocations and from varying social classes are closely involved in their children's education (Cao & Lin, 2019; Ho et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2013). For example, when asked to describe their fathers' affective display, children in Mainland China spontaneously referred to

their fathers' help with schoolwork as an expression of paternal love (Li, 2020). In contrast, Chinese fathers tended not to deem engagement in "vigorous play" with children as their main responsibility, and such play was not necessarily considered as essential to high-quality father-child interactions, as similarly observed among some other non-WEIRD fathers (Hewlett, 1991; Sun & Roopnarine, 1996).

Chinese Personhood: Emphasizing Family Lineage

Chinese societies have also been characterized by a collectivistic culture, as opposed to individualistic WEIRD cultures (Triandis, 1995). The practice of collectivism in everyday family life, including fathering, has often been interpreted as parental authority over children (through authoritarian parenting) or children's compliance to parents (Chen-Bouck et al., 2019; Huang & Lamb, 2014; Peterson et al., 2005). However, other aspects of collectivism may directly or indirectly shape Chinese fatherhood in more subtle ways, such as through an emphasis on family lineage.

Unlike WEIRD societies that typically emphasize the independent functioning of nuclear families, family lineage is highly valued in traditional Chinese family ethics (Hu & Scott, 2016). While the importance attached to extended family and kin network has been a shared feature of many collectivistic societies (Therborn, 2014), the Chinese family was traditionally "characterized by the centrality of the parent-son relationship in family life and its superiority over all other family relations, including conjugal ties" (Yan, 1997, p. 193). Extending the family lineage through giving birth to and cultivating their children, especially sons, forms a core part of Chinese men's familial obligation (Greenhalgh, 2015).

Both parent-child relations, especially father-son relations, and conjugal relations have undergone drastic changes in Chinese societies throughout the 20th century. For example, the New Culture Movement in early 20th century challenged the Confucian patriarchal order, socialist policies in middle 20th century were introduced to subvert both parental and male

authority, and subsequent family planning policies further elevated children's status in the family (Hu & Shi, 2020; Li, 2020; Yan, 1997). But even in Mainland China, where the cultural emphasis on patriarchal family lineage was disrupted and the conjugal relationship has risen in significance during the socialist era, the centrality of the parent-child axis remains strong. The past decades have witnessed a re-emphasis on one's natal family lineage, manifested in growing intergenerational intimacy and dependence (Yan, 2018).

The enduring and reviving emphasis on parent-child relations in the Chinese family has significant implications for everyday fathering practices. Like fathers from WEIRD societies, a new generation of Chinese fathers have begun to shoulder greater childcare responsibilities and duties than their predecessors (Chuang & Zhu, 2013). Interestingly, however, according to nation-wide time-use surveys, there was only a slight increase in Mainland Chinese fathers' daily time investment in childcare between 2008 and 2017, while the time spent by their female counterparts increased much more dramatically (Du et al., 2018). This has led to a widening gender gap in parenting time—a trend that is opposite to those observed in WEIRD countries (Gauthier et al., 2004; Sayer et al., 2004). Although conjugal relationships still set the scene for childbearing in shaping Chinese fathers' childrearing practices (Fan et al., 2020), fathering in Chinese families appears to be contextualized by qualitatively different family dynamics, where the importance of father involvement stems from a motivation to invest in children in order to continue the family lineage more than an emphasis on gender-egalitarianism.

The strong emphasis on family lineage, coupled with a demographic shift towards a prolonged shared lifespan between multiple generations in the family (Bengtson, 2004), has also led to the prevalence of grandparent involvement in childcare, as young children are considered to belong to the paternal (and increasingly also the maternal) lineage (Zhang et al., 2019) instead of solely to the nuclear family. Moreover, due to a lack of affordable public

childcare provision, a high rate of female labor participation, and a close concern over their (often only) grandchildren's well-being, Chinese grandparents play an active role in caring for their grandchildren, especially during their early years (Cong & Silverstein, 2012; Goh & Kuczynski, 2010; Zhang et al., 2019). Recent statistics show that as many as two-thirds of urban children are cared for by their grandparents in Mainland China (Zhang et al., 2019).

Grandparents' participation in childcare introduces further complexities to family dynamics, which in turn shape fathering ideals and practices. On the one hand, grandparents' care provision may reduce the need for father involvement in childcare, thereby lessening the burden for some fathers. On the other hand, the traditional belief that "men take care of things outside [the home], women take care of domestic things" more closely endorsed by the grandparents than the fathers (Hu & Scott, 2016) may present an obstacle for Chinese men to participate in daily childrearing as a primary caregiver or egalitarian co-parent. Such intergenerational conflicts, often involving discrepant childrearing ideologies and practices between the parents and grandparents, require Chinese fathers to tread cautiously between their several, sometimes conflicting roles in the family. In such a context, fathering cannot be assumed to take place in a nuclear family but rather in a complex web of familial relations and power geometries.

Social Changes and Diversity: New Social Ecologies of Chinese Fathering

While we have discussed Chinese fathers as an entirety, it is the least of our desires to suggest that Chinese fathers represent a static, homogenous social group; quite the contrary. A further, in-depth understanding of Chinese fathering and fatherhood would benefit from a close reading of the changing social realities in contemporary Chinese societies through an intersectional lens (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Although today's Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong differ considerably in their political and economic configurations and regional cultures (Chuang et al., 2020), social trends such as diversifying family forms, winding paths

of the gender revolution, and accruing socioeconomic inequalities, have cast some common influences on gender and family values and practices, which in turn shape the ecology of fathering in contemporary Chinese societies.

Diversifying Family and Care Forms

While intergenerational lineage remains important in contemporary family life, changes have taken place in the institutions of family and marriage in Chinese societies. Between 1985 and 2016, the crude divorce rate in Mainland China increased from 0.4‰ to 3.0‰, which is comparable to the 2016 divorce rate of 3.2‰ in the U.S. (Hu & Qian, 2018); and 23% of all marriage registrations in Mainland China in 2010 involved at least one remarrying spouse (Hu & To, 2018). Divorce and remarriage are even more prevalent in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Zhang, 2019). While existing WEIRD-centric conceptualizations of fathering and fatherhood are predominantly situated in the context of biological families, the rise of blended and stepfamilies in Chinese societies (as well as in WEIRD countries) presents a pressing need to re-examine the family ecology of contemporary fathering. In this context, father involvement in diverse disrupted single-parent, step- and blended families is a key, yet understudied area in both non-WEIRD and WEIRD societies (Balachandran & Yeung, 2020).

Moreover, with the advancement of reproductive technologies, pathways to fatherhood have become increasingly diverse in Chinese societies (Tang et al., 2019). In addition to traditional pathways such as adoption, sexual minority groups, particularly in Taiwan where same-sex marriage was legalized in 2015, have become more likely to make use of such technologies to become fathers (Jeffreys & Wang, 2018; Tang et al., 2019). The development of the global surrogacy industry also means the diversification of pathways to fatherhood increasingly takes place in a transnational rather than a national context (Twine, 2015). While these new trends have received scarce attention in existing research, they underline the need

for research on fathering practices in previously understudied populations in Chinese societies, such as sexual minority groups and the infertile.

The coming of age of the state-moderated market economy in Chinese societies and the consequent labor-driven mobility, compounded by the state's mass offloading of childcare responsibilities to individual families, has given rise to the commercialization of childcare, particularly among affluent families (Kleinman et al., 2011; Mei, 2020; Yan, 2009). As childrearing responsibilities are outsourced to professional care providers such as live-in nannies, the inclusion of non-familial sources of care and potentially non-family members into the household inevitably reconfigures father-child interactions. At the same time, fierce academic competition has driven children across Chinese societies to spend long hours in schools and rapidly expanding, mostly private extracurricular educational institutions (Ren et al., 2020). The growing moral imperative for Chinese fathers to secure "high-quality" professional, commercial care and education for their children may also mean that they spend more time on paid work to afford such commercial services, which in turn limits the time they can spend with their children. Such financial burden may be exacerbated for fathers in two-children families, following the relaxation of the One-Child policy in Mainland China in late 2015. As a result, contemporary Chinese fathering is characterized by a paradox that demands fathers to participate more in paid labor to pay for their children's lengthened participation in institutionalized, extracurricular concerted cultivation (cf. Lareau, 2011), yet judges the quality of fathering by the amount of time fathers spend with their children.

Winding Paths of the Chinese Gender Revolution

Whereas the call for father involvement in WEIRD societies was largely propelled by the feminist movement in the 1970s, the gender revolution in Chinese societies and its relation to fathering and fatherhood are complex. The Confucian patriarchy, which favors males over females, was challenged in late Qing dynasty and during the early 20th century

when Chinese feminist forerunners (many of whom were élite fathers) fought for women's rights to education and work (Wang, 2005). In Mainland China, gender equality policies were implemented in the 1950s to mobilize women into the labor force to help build the socialist state. Such policies granted equal rights to women and girls vis-à-vis their male counterparts in education, employment and marriage, leading to an unprecedented increase in female labor force participation (Ji et al., 2017; Zuo, 2016). Gender equality was also incorporated into state campaigns for family-planning policies to combat traditional son preference and female infanticide, and to promote parental investment in their daughters, with partial success in urban areas (Fong, 2002; Hu & Shi, 2020). Post-socialist Mainland China, however, has witnessed a retrenchment of welfare in areas such as childcare, which used to be provided by the socialist state to incentivize female labor participation (Ji et al., 2017; Qian & Li, 2020).

In Taiwan and Hong Kong, the progress toward gender equality started more recently. In Taiwan, contemporary Women's Movements started in the 1970s (Ku, 1988), and the Taiwanese authority made gender equality a governmental priority in 1997 by establishing a central government agency that later became the Gender Equality Committee. Hong Kong was ruled under the British law from the mid-1880s to 1984, during which time Confucian patriarchal norms such as concubinage was retained by local élite patriarchs and tolerated by British colonizers (Liong, 2017). In recent decades, however, the Hong Kong government has proactively taken measures to promote gender equality, for example, by establishing the Women's Commission in 2001 (Hong Kong Women's Commission, n.d.).

In the meantime, Chinese men have been largely left out from the gender reforms. The early feminist movement in late 19th century and early 20th century, led primarily by male cultural élites, encouraged female education but did little to overturn men's gender privilege (Z. Wang, 2005). Although the socialist state encouraged women to participate in traditionally male domains of education and work, no complementary policy was designed to

support men's participation in domestic and care work. A lack of state support for men's involvement in family life is also reflected in the absence or short durations of nationally mandated paternity leave, which is only available in some provinces in Mainland China. In Taiwan and Hong Kong, paternity leave is as short as five days (Wu, 2019).

Consequently, progress toward gender equality has been partial and uneven in Chinese societies. On the one hand, Chinese parents now have comparable educational aspirations for their sons and daughters (Hannum et al., 2009). There has been a reversal in the gender educational gap as Chinese girls outnumber and outperform their male counterparts in education (Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; D. Xu & Li, 2018). On the other hand, son preference retains its strong, persistent influence over fertility decisions, as Chinese societies still have some of the highest male–female sex ratio at birth to date (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). Moreover, despite advances in girls' educational achievement, Mainland China has witnessed a long decline in female labor participation rate over the past four decades (Xiao & Asadulla, 2020). In Taiwan, the female labor participation rate did not rise above 50% until 2012 and has since stayed stagnant (Taiwanese Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan, 2020). Domestic work, including childrearing, remains a female duty. Although 92% Taiwanese women age between 25 and 29 work, 27% of the employed women leave their jobs after marriage and 16% after pregnancy, and approximately half of the leavers never return to work (Taiwanese Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan, 2017).

In globalizing Chinese societies, traditional ideals of Chinese masculinity have become stigmatized as nerdy, compliant, and physically weak vis-à-vis globally dominant WEIRD masculinity. The stigmatized dichotomization of Chinese versus western masculinity has not eased, despite increasing intercultural contacts and exchanges since Mainland China's re-integration into the global society (Hird & Song, 2010; Kao et al., 2018; Lu & Wong, 2013).

As a result, Chinese men today are seen to experiment with and hybridize various imported masculine models (Liu, 2017), including in their roles as fathers. For example, national surveys in Mainland China show that today's urban middle-class Chinese fathers are increasingly expected to take charge of their children's leisure time and to participate in sport-related activities with their children (Chinese National Center for Children, 2017; Ho et al., 2011). In their parental roles, many Chinese men are found to depart from the tradition of emotional reservation to actively embrace a more expressive, affectionate style of masculinity (Li & Jankowiak, 2016; Li & Lamb, 2013). For example, many Chinese fathers today are found to willingly convey their parental warmth in a variety of ways, including physical closeness and intimacy which were previously believed to be a "western" way of expression (Li, 2020). The endorsement of a warm, caring and emotionally sensitive masculine ideal is also reflected in recent media representations of Chinese fathers (Li, 2016; Song, 2018). Meanwhile, the scientization and professionalization of care, school and extra-curricular education may have partly eroded the traditional role of Chinese fathers as an authority figure in their children's education.

In the absence of policy and welfare support, but with increasing pressure to conform to hegemonic WEIRD ideals of masculinity, there has been little social momentum for Chinese men to pursue gender equality in family life by participating in "feminine" tasks such as daily childcare (Ji et al., 2017), which would effectively relieve their female partners of the heavy burden of childrearing. As Hu (2018) reported, Chinese men's participation in domestic labor is configured by the gendered presence of other family members, including children, spouse, grandparents and relatives, in the family. Specifically, Chinese fathers, particularly those who are unemployed, are seen to "do" gender and derive a sense of masculinity from housework withdrawal (Hu, 2018). In a recent interview-based study of urban Chinese fathers and mothers with 10-year-old children, Li and colleagues (under review) found that Chinese

parents increasingly appreciate and welcome father involvement in childcare, with an expectation that they will impart the ideal "masculine traits" to their children.

Socioeconomic Inequalities and Mobilities

In recent decades, a state-guided neoliberal turn in the socioeconomic development of Chinese societies presents Chinese fathers with multifaceted challenges. Taiwan and Hong Kong have experienced rapid economic growth in the postwar decades, whereas Mainland China's 1978 economic reform marked the beginning of the country's transformation from a primarily agrarian socialist state to one that actively participates in global capitalism. As Chinese societies become more closely integrated into a neoliberal global economy, employment, particularly in the rapidly expanding private sector, is increasingly characterized by long working hours and a lack of minimal legal and social protection of workers' rights and welfare (Lee et al., 2007). This development has also brought about severe socioeconomic disparities between social classes, regions, and rural and urban areas (Xie & Zhou, 2014).

Regional economic inequality has led to mass internal rural-to-urban migration in Mainland China. Nearly 300 million rural Chinese migrated to urban China to seek work in 2018 (China National Statistics Bureau, 2019). Although an increasing number of women participate in this internal migration, men account for the majority of married rural migrants with children (Choi & Peng, 2016). As these social changes cascade through the Chinese family, fathering takes place in a "double-bind" of work-family demands (Cao & Lin, 2019). Many Mainland Chinese fathers from rural or economically underdeveloped regions migrate to urban centers to seek work opportunities, leaving their families and children behind in rural areas (Zhao et al., 2017) and only seeing their children a few times a year (Choi & Peng, 2016). Even for urban fathers, long work hours and children's extended participation in

educational and extracurricular activities play crucial roles in shaping the mode and time of father-child contact.

As mobile and tele-fathering becomes a new norm for a large number of migrant and urban fathers, new conceptualizations of father involvement require due consideration of the implications of both the mobilities turn and digital turn for fathering (Park & Cookston, 2020; Urry, 2007). The mobile context also urges scholars to consider technology-mediated fathering as a new, emerging trend. While much attention has been paid to mothering at a distance in transnational and translocal families (Peng & Wong, 2012), fathering at a distance beyond the context of marital disruption and parental separation is yet to receive an equal amount of scholarly attention.

Discussion and Conclusions

As Souralová and Fialová (2017) pointed out in their feminist critique on the (lack of) research on transnational fatherhood, gender binary can result in a "biased research process itself, in which the gender norms influence the selection of research topics, questions, and strategies" (p. 165). WEIRD-centric assumptions about masculinity and personhood have similarly dominated the fathering scholarship. Despite insightful cross-cultural studies on fathering and fatherhood in an array of non-WEIRD contexts, especially those based on in-depth ethnographic evidence (Hewlett, 2000), findings of these studies have often been disregarded as irrelevant to supposedly "mainstream" WEIRD societies and are seldom cited in psychological and sociological English-language literature on fatherhood. This is potentially due to a combined set of reasons, such as the small scale of the studies, a perceived centrality of "mainstream" WEIRD societies, and a perceived geographic and sociocultural distance from the "far-flung, peripherical" societies. The hegemony of the WEIRD model extends to non-English literature, such as research on Chinese fathers and

fathering published in the Chinese language, which often follows transplanted WEIRD theories and models instead of developing a non-WEIRD perspective.

Chinese fathers, like fathers in other non-WEIRD cultures, have long occupied a marginalized place in the fatherhood scholarship due to WEIRD-centric norms that have long dominated this subfield. Nevertheless, the sheer size of Chinese populations and the growing integration of Chinese societies into the global world mean that Chinese fathers present an increasingly important example in rendering visible the sociocultural limitations of existing WEIRD-centric theories on fathers and fatherhood. Thus, this review article not only foregrounds conceptual insights from non-WEIRD contexts, but also re-iterates the value of reflecting critically on ethnocentric assumptions inherent in fathering and fatherhood research.

Our review stresses the importance of incorporating cultural diversity into theoretical developments in fatherhood and fathering research. As distinct family systems capitalize on different qualities as important in constituting masculinities and fathering roles, the quality, form and substance of father involvement and father-child interactions are judged against vastly different, culturally embedded standards (e.g., rough-and-tumble play versus educational involvement). Building on the premise of the nuclear family and western hegemonic masculinity, WEIRD theoretical models of fathering are not conceptually equipped for examining fathers' multiple roles as the parent, the partner, and the son(-in-law). To redress this issue, it is crucial to understand how today's Chinese fathers navigate complex and gendered multigenerational relations in the family in juggling filial care provision to their own parents and parents-in-law, childcare, and conjugal relations.

Going beyond longstanding cultural traditions, our review equally emphasizes the importance of recent social developments in shaping the unfolding ecology of Chinese fathering both within and beyond Chinese societies. Our review urges scholars to consider the

crucial role played by specific social conditions, such as the absence or presence of state welfare, emerging forms of socioeconomic inequality, population mobility and technological advancements, in shaping fathering practices. These conditions not only determine the availability of alternative forms of childcare, they also influence the social and symbolic meanings attached to father involvement, as an act of gender egalitarianism (in WEIRD contexts), the maintenance of cultural heritage (in Taiwan), and the cultivation of educationally competitive participants in the globalizing capitalist economy (in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong).

Against the backdrop of globalization, the examination of Chinese fathers could help reveal how the global and the local are concurrently at play in shaping the transnational ecology of non-WEIRD fathering. In Chinese societies, fathers are experiencing a global "acculturation" in the face of an influx of WEIRD parenting and masculine ideologies, e.g., through the popularization of western "scientific" parenting guidebooks and media products. Meanwhile, there has been a revitalized appreciation of traditional Chinese culture in Chinese societies (e.g., the establishment of Confucian schools). The rise of China's "soft power" on the global stage and the rapidly expanding flow of emigration from China means Chinese fathers also contribute to a cross-cultural hybridity of fathering ideals.

This hybridity may be particularly relevant to understanding the fathering practices of Chinese men living in diasporas (Chuang et al., 2020b). On the one hand, diasporic Chinese fathers, especially recent immigrants in North America and western Europe, are highly likely to be employed, economically-competent breadwinners in married, two-parent families, thereby converging with white, middle-class WEIRD ideals of fatherhood (Chuang et al., 2020b). Many immigrant Chinese fathers are found to be more involved in hands-on childcare than their counterparts in Chinese societies (Chuang et al., 2013), which may be partially due to fathers' conformity to or pursuit of WEIRD-centric expectations for caring

masculinities (Elliot, 2016), although a practical lack of grandparental support may have also played a role. Although relatively rare, some immigrant Chinese fathers may effectively practice lone parenthood in the host countries as their spouses move back to their countries of origin to pursue better career opportunities (Waters, 2010), challenging the traditional Chinese ideals of gender role and fatherhood.

Meanwhile, under the hegemonic, orientalist cultural stigmas imposed on immigrant Chinese fathers and the diasporas in which they live, diasporic Chinese fathers may feel pressured to meet unfamiliar, WEIRD-centric masculine expectations, such as participating in their children's athletic development instead of involving in their children's education. Such acculturative stress may reinforce their endorsement of traditional Chinese ideals of fathering and fatherhood. For example, immigrant Chinese fathers who have obtained U.S. citizenship (and thereby deemed better established in their host countries) were found to be less expressive of warmth when engaging with their infants than their counterparts without U.S. citizen status (Capps et al., 2010). In this sense, the limited research on diasporic Chinese fathers has emphasized the importance of examining the role played by characteristics of home and host societies, as well as distinct migration and acculturation pathways, in shaping migrant men's fathering ideals and practices (Chuang et al., 2013; Qin, 2009).

Importantly, non-WEIRD theoretical models and perspectives on fathering and fatherhood require attention to the intersection between social, economic, and political developments and distinct long-standing cultural traditions. As we have begun to demonstrate in our review, fathering is shaped by multiple intersecting and interlocking forces such as social and family relations, culture, race and ethnicity, class, and place (Collins & Bilge, 2020). While our review is far from exhaustive in demonstrating the complex, intersectional configurations of Chinese fathering, which may also include other dimensions such as children's gender, cohort differences, and regional variations, we have demonstrated the

importance of understanding fathering at the cross-over between long-standing traditions and unfolding social conditions.

Adopting an intersectional approach would mean refraining from essentializing culture as the sole or major force that determines non-WEIRD fathers' parenting experiences, practices, and outcomes. Rather, scholars are encouraged to recognize that the same cultural traditions can assume different meanings for fathers occupying different social, economic and geographical localities and in distinct family and household set-ups (e.g., blended families, multigenerational co-resident families, and families with live-in nannies), directing fathers to devise and adopt distinct, flexible parenting practices under specific life circumstances. Taking this critical intersectional approach, which cuts across the disciplines of developmental psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history, would help reframe and better position existing theories that are widely employed in studying fathering and fatherhood to generate deeper conceptual insights. Building on our review, we invite scholars to move to a full and routine inclusion of non-WEIRD fathers as equally valuable target groups of research to enrich the scholarship on fathering and fatherhood as a whole.

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