International Conference on Fatherhood in 21st Century Asia:
Research, Interventions, and Policies

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469G Bukit Timah Road, NUS @ Bukit Timah Campus

Jointly organized by:

- Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.
- Family Research Network, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports
- Dads For Life, An Initiative of the National Family Council
- Gender Studies Minor Programme, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

International Conference on Fatherhood in 21st Century Asia: Research, Interventions, and Policies

This report provides a background for the conference, a summary of the presentations, and a reflection and next steps after the conference.

The National University of Singapore's (NUS) Asia Research Institute (ARI) in collaboration with the national Dads for Life movement, an initiative of the National Family Council, supported by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, and with the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, hosted the first international conference on Asian fatherhood from 17 to 18 June 2010. This conference provided a platform for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to discuss the diverse roles and challenges Asian fathers encounter when involved in their children's lives; and to address a range of policies and practice-based interventions related to fatherhood in Asian countries. This conference was convened by Professor Jean Yeung of ARI and the NUS Department of Sociology. The conference aims to gain a better understanding about the Asian men's diverse roles and challenges as a father and to raise awareness about positive father involvement.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of National Development, delivered the opening address as Guest-of-Honour of the event. Dr Gavin Jones delivered welcome remarks as the cluster leader of the Changing Family in Asia cluster in the Asia Research Institute. The keynote speaker, Professor William Marsiglio from the Department of Sociology and Criminology and Law at the University of Florida, set the stage by outlining the vision and opportunities to engage fathers in diverse settings.

The one-and-a–half day event featured five panel discussions—Father Involvement In Changing Asia; Fathering Across Diversity; Father-Child Relationship and Fathering Styles; Fatherhood Ideology, Aspirations And Motivations; and Fatherhood In The Context Of Migration—to promote research and exchanges on fatherhood in Asia and to raise awareness about positive fathering (see conference Programme in Appendix).

Presenters shared the latest research findings on fathers in the US and nine Asian countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, India, China and Vietnam, with about 180 academics, policy makers, and practitioners from government and community agencies. A roundtable discussion group for practitioners with three speakers was held on the second day of the conference.

Of the 17 papers presented, Singapore researchers shared their research on fathers in Singapore, including experiences of first-time fathers with fathering, marriage, family and work-life issues; interaction of fathers and their teenage children in Singapore; issues relating to being a father in Malay societies; and roles of fatherhood in Chinese and Malay communities of Singapore.

Summary of the Presentations

Keynote Speech - Expanding the Frame of Fathering: Visions and Opportunities to Engage Fathers in Diverse Settings

Professor William Marsiglio emphasises that fatherhood research and programmes that promote fathering should expand beyond fathers' direct involvement and define fatherhood broadly to think about fathering across the life course from preconception to postconception so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of men's interrelated experiences with conception, pregnancy, children, and romantic partnerships. He highlights the intersection of social psychological and life course perspectives of fathering that implicate men's procreative consciousness and sense of responsibility, fatherhood readiness, and three interconnected paths to experiencing fathering—*self-as-father*, *father-child*, and *coparental*. Professor Marsiglio explains how the interplay between cultural representations of fatherhood, gender ideologies, family demographics, and public policies and programmes can enable or constrain men's fathering. He also argues that we need to study how fathers think and act while accounting for the diverse cultural and physical contexts of fathering.

Professor Marsiglio suggests some creative ways to think about and study fathering. In his view, key research questions for Asian fathers are: (1) What is it about Asian fathers' procreative

identities, trajectories as fathers, and their situated fathering experiences that affect how they construct their identities as fathers, interact with their children, and influence their children's lives over the life course?, and (2) What conditions matter?

Panel 1: Father Involvement in Changing Asia

The following papers on fathers in Vietnam, India, Taiwan, and Malaysia distill relevant points for discussion and reflection in shaping more involved fatherhood in these countries. While fathers' involvement with children in these countries remains lower relative to that of mothers, all studies provide some evidence for an increased level of fathers' involvement over time in various aspects of children's lives, particularly for men with higher education. Family circumstances such as the age of the child, fathers' marital satisfaction, and the relationship with their own fathers also influence fathers' involvement levels. These studies underscore the familial, cultural, and policy contexts that are important when considering fathers' changing roles.

Fathers' Role and Social Changes in Vietnam

Jayakody and Pham discuss the extent to which traditional Confucian roles underpinning the Vietnamese family have changed over time and the social and economic forces linked to these changes.

Their quantitative study leveraged on data from three waves of the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey, the Vietnam Demographic Health Survey, and three cohorts of the Vietnam Family Survey corresponding to the Vietnam-US war, the post-reunification period, and the "Renovation" period characterised by economic reforms and growing global influence.

The authors first provide a historical context for changes in cultural and economic development in Vietnam. They find no significant differences across historical period in attitudes towards men making the important decisions in family life or sharing housework equally with women when

both spouses work. However, there appear to be significant differences in men's fathering behaviour by historical period. Men in more recent cohorts were more likely to report looking after, bathing, and feeding their children. This was particularly true for men in the north, in urban areas, and those with higher education. Finally, there was sustained low participation by men in childcare. While 28% of mothers in recent cohorts said they spent at least three hours daily caring for children aged 15 and under, 30% of fathers reported spending less than an hour daily with their children. As such, the researchers call for the introduction of more programmes to increase fathers' daily participation in housework and child care, with some suggestive evidence from experimental research that men's attitudes and behaviour can be altered.

Proactive Role of Fathers in Children's Lives: The Indian Scenario

Sriram and Sandhu explore educated middle class fathers' notions of their child's success and achievement in India, their involvement with children in activities related to their success, and their motivations for getting involved.

The study involved: (1) a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with 12 educated middle-class fathers with children aged 6-21 years; and (2) a quantitative approach involving interviews with 120 educated middle-class fathers with at least one child aged 8-14 years. Respondents were from Baroda, a city in Western India.

In terms of fathering goals and notions of children's success, fathers interpreted success as good grades leading to a good career, developing good human values, and being happy and satisfied. Indian fathers are concerned about their children's success and are highly involved in ensuring their children's success. Top activities fathers were involved in include planning and providing for their children's future, guiding and mentoring children, and providing practical and emotional support to reduce stress and promote their children's learning. Mothers' involvement scores were higher than that of fathers in all domains, except in planning and providing for children. The researchers also found a positive correlation between fathers' and mothers' involvement. Although mothers continued to be highly involved, involvement was a family characteristic.

Fathers' traditional roles of provider, protector, teacher and moral guide continued to be important but new dimensions of availability of fathers and open communication with them also prevailed.

The data show these highly educated Indian fathers were actively involved in their children's lives and displayed this commitment in cognitive, behavioural, and affective levels.

Father Involvement in the Lives of Young Children in Taiwan

Ho et al. study government policies that promote father involvement, fatherhood roles in Taiwanese society, and comparisons between fathers and mothers in child activity engagement and parental role beliefs.

The study involved: (1) collecting qualitative and quantitative data through a survey of 26 pairs of parents of second-grade students in a local elementary school in Taipei; and (2) content analysis of parenting magazines.

Ho et al. describe that government policy legislating parent involvement in schools and allowing all employees (both mothers and fathers) up to two years of unpaid parental leave for each child until the child reaches three; parental leave subsidies; local parent education centres; and community programmes enabled father involvement. However, public support for such policies was still limited. Mothers remained more engaged than fathers in childcare, but both parents were equally involved in many other activities. Parenting magazines had been proactive in carrying progressive messages promoting the enlarged role of "new age" fathers and critiquing men who did not help out at home. However, fathers appeared to experience substantial stress in balancing their new roles carving out successful careers while simultaneously participating in the raising of children. The majority of these Taiwanese fathers felt they had few male role models of "balanced fathers". The study also shows that their views of father involvement and engagement with children are beginning to shift from traditional beliefs associated with a patriarchal society towards more egalitarian beliefs with respect to gender roles and

responsibilities. Contemporary Taiwanese fathers play multiple roles in their children's socialisation and development.

Contributions of Self, Contextual and Child Characteristics on Father Involvement among Muslims in Malaysia

In this study of 1,019 Malay-Muslim fathers of children aged 10 to 16 from intact families in the state of Selangor, Juhari et al. explore how contexts, and the characteristics of the father and the child predict father involvement among Malay-Muslims in Malaysia.

Fathers who perceived high involvement of their own fathers, who were more educated and more satisfied with their marriage and with their own fathers' involvement were found to be more involved with their children. Data also suggest that having fewer children, younger children, a higher level of education, a working wife, and higher family income predicted greater father involvement.

Fathers of younger children reported a higher degree of involvement, and the gender of the child was not a significant predictor of father involvement. Thus, Juhari et al. recommend that education may encourage fathers to become more "open" and willing to be involved, and that future research may need to examine the "meaning" of fathering, and the roles of religion and gender roles.

Panel II: Fathering Across Diversity

Three studies conducted in India, Singapore, and Taiwan document how traditional cultural norms intersect with the changing socioeconomic circumstances in shaping the gradual changes in father's family roles. Saraff finds that fathers in India were getting more involved in childcare but experiencing conflict and confusion regarding their roles. Singapore Malay fathers in Suratman's study were very involved in various aspects of child care and played an important part in their children's lives beginning at childbirth, and single Taiwanese fathers in Wang et

al.'s study encountered various familial and emotional barriers when faced with financial difficulties.

Culture and Conduct of Fatherhood in India: Are They in Synchrony?

In this paper, Anjula Saraff interviews 350 Indian fathers in Mumbai to shed light on the question of culture-conduct synchrony-asynchrony in the aspects of (1) the beliefs surrounding men's role in family life (culture), (2) men's participation in parenting – their involvement in childcare and housework (conduct), and (3) whether men's behaviour is in accordance with their beliefs.

The median age of fathers in this study was 35 years and most (60 percent) had been married for four to 10 years. A majority of the respondents were educated up to high school or above (76%) and had monthly income of between Rs.3000 to Rs.7000. The findings show that traditional cultural expectations of fathers are changing, but are still very influential in urban India. Some of the traditional images of the ideal father (that of surety, economic provider, role model and family head) were retained by fathers in actual practice. However, the author notes some real transformation, as some fathers were taking on roles of "new father" and participating in child care activities culturally not expected of them. For instance, slightly more than half of fathers were their child's playmate and friend.

Data show a low level of agreement between Indian fathers' perception and actual conduct. Those who were better educated, had a better living standard, lived in nuclear families, had working wives, and were Hindus were more likely to practise what they believed ideal fathers did. The author notes that these Indian fathers were confused about their fathering role as they were caught between old and new values. The author suggests there is an urgent need to educate men and their significant others so as to bring a change in their mindsets regarding men's role in the family.

Being a Father in Malay Societies

In her interviews with 10 young Malay dual income couples' management of child-care, Suriani Suratman studied who carried out daily tasks such as bathing, dressing, changing diapers, meal preparation, feeding, ferrying children, playing, reading, supervising homework and putting children to bed. The findings show that no matter how minimally, all the fathers were involved in one way or another in a wide range of daily childcare tasks. Most men ferried children to school and shared responsibility of a range of other tasks with wives, live-in helpers or mothers and mothers-in-law. Fathers also played an important role in attending to unpredictable childcare demands and special requirements during school holidays. Some couples declared that childcare tasks were assigned to the partner who was available. The author notes that traditional Malay households were not organised based on gendered division of labour. The distinction between men as the breadwinner and women as the caregiver is a relatively new phenomenon after industrialisation. Data also show that Malay women play a critical gate keeping role in a man's involvement with their children. Women were managers of childcare and household tasks who allocated tasks to others and supervised them. Malay women's household "manager" role is an important factor for men's involvement.

Suratman calls for work practices that allow both male and female employees to have flexible work arrangements that can support availability of fathers and mothers in the home and encourage fathers to participate in household-related work. She notes that the current official discourses on family roles in Singapore reproduce women's role as mothers. As an example, she cites the large imbalance between the four-month maternity leave and the three-day paternity leave provision that reflects the government's view that childcare is predominantly women's responsibility. She urges the Singapore government to more actively support a family-friendly work environment that will ensure good work-life balance for parents.

A Comparative Study of Seeking Help Behaviour of Single Parents in Taiwan

Shu-Yung Wang, Cheng C.H. and Hsieh Y.L. use survey data, in-depth interviews with 32 single parents (18 single mothers, 14 single fathers), and focus group with service providers and teachers to study whether there are gender differences between single mothers and single fathers in Taiwan in terms of help-seeking behaviour. They also reflect on the limitations of current social services for single parents, particularly single fathers. They find that single fathers' actual level of involvement with children was no less than that of single mothers. However, poor single fathers were less likely than poor single mothers to receive public assistance. Poor single fathers had more difficulty in balancing work and family since they were less likely to be in jobs with flexible hours. In addition, poor single fathers were often isolated from their family of origin because their family members were afraid that financial trouble would result in long-term economic dependence of the single fathers on family members. Most single mothers, in contrast, were close to their family of origin and received childcare help from their own parents.

Single fathers who could not maintain a stable job were seen as failures by ex-wives, friends, and social workers, even though they were very close to their children and performed caring roles. Single mothers who went out to work or had new boyfriends were not seen as good mothers. While single mothers confided in friends, single fathers preferred the company of other single fathers or confiding in strangers via telephone hotlines to talking to social workers. They preferred engaging in outdoor activities with other single families to getting in line for means-tested cash benefits, or food items. They also did not know how to get help or did not want to ask for assistance as this represented a threat to their masculinity. These characteristics of single fathers were barriers to help-seeking.

Panel III: Father-Child Relationship and Fathering Styles

Papers in this panel focus on father's relationship with teenagers. Ho et al. and Shum-Cheung Hoi Shan find that Singapore fathers did not have as intimate a relationship with their teenage children as mothers did and many of them perceived financial provisioning as their primary family role and saw work as a significant barrier for them to spend as much time with their children as they desired. Feng Xiaotian finds that the relationship between single children in

China and their fathers was not significantly different from that between children with siblings and their fathers. Kuan Ping-Yin and Wang Chihtsan find that father's educational involvement in Taiwan had a positive impact on children's academic achievement but involvement on the part of fathers was generally lacking. Shan's paper suggests that the traditional role differentiation between husbands and wives is very much prevalent in Singapore. Despite the increase in female labour force participation since 1980, mothers were still considered to be chiefly responsible for child care duties, and they perceived themselves to be so as well. Even grandmothers and paid workers figured more prominently than fathers as main caregivers for children.

Subjective Wellbeing and Attitudes Related to the Family: Interaction of Fathers and their Teenage Children in Singapore

Ho Kong Weng, Ong Qiyan and Ho Kong Chong conducted a study on 400 parent-youth pairs to explore the role of fathers in Singaporean households, father-youth relations in terms of life satisfaction and the strength of mutual influence in life satisfaction between father and youth, and the importance of family support, interaction and harmony to father, mother and youth's life satisfaction. The youths were aged 15-19 years, and 222 father-youth pairs and 178 mother-youth pairs were interviewed.

The proportion of youths from employed mother-youth pairs who confided in their mothers was higher than the proportion of youths from employed father-youth pairs who confided in their fathers. Compared to mothers, fathers played a less active role in providing emotional support to their youths. Fathers' life satisfaction did not have a significant influence on youths' life satisfaction but mothers' life satisfaction had a positive influence on that of youth. Weaker father-to-youth influence in life satisfaction could be due to fathers being less involved in their youth's upbringing. Employed fathers reported higher life satisfaction than unemployed fathers, and the more home interfered with work, the lower the life satisfaction of employed fathers.

However, a large proportion (approximately 60%) of fathers agreed that work kept them from spending the amount of time they would like to spend with their family. Ho et al. conclude that

although there is a shift in the culture of fatherhood, the conduct of fathers has yet to catch up. The breadwinner role is still the dominant role for Singaporean fathers despite their desire to spend more time with their family. To strengthen the bond between father and youth, greater involvement in youth's upbringing and more communicative efforts are needed on the part of fathers.

The Analysis of Father-Child Relations of Only-Child Youths

Examining parent-child relationship in a survey of 2,357 working youths in 12 cities in China in 2007, Feng Xiaotian compares only child's relationship with their parents with the relationship between children with siblings and their parents. He found that there were no significant differences between the two groups. The data show that fathers did not have as intimate a relationship with children as mothers did. The father-child relationship of the only-child youths manifested significantly different characteristics from mother-child relationship in daily conversations between parents and offspring, and in terms of mutual psychological support. Only-children preferred to talk to their fathers about work issues, social news, and their own future. Only-children were more inclined to talk to their mothers about personal feelings, marriage, and family affairs. Mothers also provided more psychological support than fathers. Feng found that child's gender and living style had no effect on father-child relationship. He did find, however, that the father-child relationship involving a married offspring was more intimate than that which involved an unmarried offspring.

Fathers sought emotional support from their children less frequently than mothers did. Seventy percent of Chinese fathers did not confide in their children and about 60% of only-child youths did not seek psychological support from their fathers. 44.2% of youth chose to tell a friend, 20.5% chose to keep worries to themselves, and 18.9% chose to tell spouses or lovers. Only 3.9% chose to tell their fathers. Thus, for the only-children, parents' families were no longer the main spaces to conduct social activities. The interaction between father and child decreased during adolescent period, while peer groups, spouses and lovers became major psychological supporters for the

only-child youth. Feng recommends that the measurement of father-child relationship could be improved, for parent-child relation is a two-way interaction of objective behaviours and subjective perceptions and feelings. He suggests that measurement of father-child relationship should include the dimensions of understanding, communication, trust, interaction, conflict, and mutual evaluation.

The Impact of Father's and Mother's Parenting Styles on Children's High-School Academic Achievement in Taiwan

Using a nationally representative sample of 9,269 junior high students in Taiwan in 2001 and 2003, this research by Kuan Ping-Yin and Wang Chihtsan reveals three dimensions of paternal and maternal parenting styles that were similar to those found in past research. Considering paternal and maternal parenting concurrently in the analysis, fathers' and mothers' parenting were found to have independent impact on children's academic achievement. Secondly, paternal parenting had a negative relationship with maternal educational involvement but not vice versa. Thirdly, father's educational involvement (but not mother's) had a positive impact on children's academic achievement.

These findings underscore the importance of fatherhood and the need to consider its impact simultaneously with mother's parenting behaviours. Moreover, the findings show that the role of parental educational involvement needs to be considered within the context of parental styles in general. Previous findings about the positive effect of parental involvement may have overstated the role of this parental role. Parental concern over children's education is only one facet of general parenting and what is more important is how parents treat their children in general. This research also raises a question: if Taiwanese fathers are generally less involved in parenting than mothers, why does their limited involvement have such an important and direct impact on their children's academic achievement?

Child Care and Parenting Practices in Singapore: A Focus on Fathers

This study by Shum-Cheung Hoi Shan, on 530 parents (248 fathers and 282 mothers) and one of their children (261 boys and 269 girls) between the age of 10 and 12, shows that mothers were the main caregivers to children in most cases despite the fact that more than half of the mothers in the sample were working women. Only a very small percentage of fathers were main caregivers to children across all age groups. Notably, even grandmothers and paid workers figured more prominently than fathers as main caregivers for children at any age. Even though females' participation in the labour force had increased since 1980, mothers were still considered to be chiefly responsible for child care duties, and they perceived themselves to be so as well.

Few fathers nominated themselves as the preferred main caregivers of children at any age, probably because they perceived themselves as provider of financial support for the family, at least partially if not fully, instead of being responsible for child care. Many parents and children reasoned that mothers were preferred over fathers as main caregivers because mothers understood children best, and could therefore provide better care. Interestingly, parents and children also tended to prefer grandmothers over fathers as main caregivers, as the former were thought to be better at child care. Contrary to conventional belief, fathers used physical punishment less frequently than mothers did, and mothers were considered to be more controlling than fathers. However, fathers were considered to be less warm and accepting than mothers.

Shum-Cheung highlights that it will probably take a substantial shift in ideology to increase fathers' participation to be on par with that of mothers, given that the traditional role differentiation between husbands and wives seems to be very much prevalent in Singapore, even among the younger generation of parents. She urges future studies to consider in-depth analysis of fathers' interest in child care, and to identify factors which could boost fathers' involvement.

Panel IV: Fatherhood Ideology, Aspirations and Motivations

Presentations in this panel focus on how men make the transition to fatherhood and how they view their roles as father. Utomo et al. investigate young fathers' life situations after fatherhood in Greater Jakarta. Lim explores the transitional stages of a father before and after the arrival of the firstborn, and Tan examines how structural and cultural contexts shape men's construction of fatherhood in two ethnic communities in Singapore.

Moving towards Independent Living: Young Fathers' Family Responsibilities in Greater Jakarta

Utomo et al. base their research on data collected in the 2009/2010 Indonesian Transition into Adulthood Survey of about 3,000 young fathers aged 20-34. They first point out that fatherhood lacks scholarly attention, and they seek to understand young fathers' life situations in Greater Jakarta in relation to their employment, their financial and emotional relationships with their own parents, their health and well being, and gender roles and attitudes towards children.

This study shows that these young fathers had a high level of employment and satisfaction with job prospects while young mothers had a relatively low employment rate. These Indonesian fathers worked for long hours and were happy with their breadwinner roles. Data show that traditional gender roles remain strong in Jakarta.

The authors find that, compared with mothers, these young fathers had more traditional gender roles, which was in line with Indonesian social norms that see the husband as an authority figure who regulates and dominates the household. Non-fathers appeared to be more egalitarian than fathers, and the authors feel that there could be something about becoming a father that makes a man become less egalitarian. The authors found that Muslim men were less egalitarian – congruent with the statement from the Islamic religion that *The husband is the head of the household* and a *wife must worship and serve her husband*. Mothers believed that they were mostly responsible for children's growth. Nevertheless, they also wanted a role in the public domain. This was particularly true with highly educated mothers. Young fathers wanted a role in

the domestic domain too but were often rejected by the mothers. Both seemed to want a role in each other's primary sphere but faced certain resistance from their significant other. The data also show that fathers were more likely than non-fathers to agree that "a life without children is not fully complete", and non-fathers agreed that there was social pressure to have children.

Men's Transition to Fatherhood: Experiences of First-Time Fathers with Fathering, Marriage, Family and Work-Life Issues

Lim highlights the inadequacy of father-focused services and fatherhood preparation in Singapore despite the fact that the transition to fatherhood is a meaningful yet challenging life-changing experience for men in their life cycle. In his study, he looks at men's experiences before and after the birth of their firstborn, and investigates strengths and barriers in men's preparation to be father. With seven participants in the pilot study and 20 interviewees, he explores and compares their perceptions, expectations, plans, preparations and personal adjustment before and after the birth of their firstborn.

His study reveals that the first-time fathers' preparedness was influenced by their own father's influence and alternative father models, personal characteristics, prior child-care experience, marital well-being before birth, child care plan, practical preparations and work-life arrangements. Lim notes that practical support and alternative modeling were particularly important for those who did not have a good role model in their fathers. In addition, he found that the overall marital quality of the couple deteriorated after the birth, especially during the initial months after birth. Last but not least, the fatherhood transitional adjustment outcome was influenced by father-child involvement, father's own coping, work-life adaptation, marital well-being after birth, and the living and child-care support arrangements. Lim stresses the need for support and guidance for men when they start as new fathers who could provide a satisfying home environment for the whole family.

Explaining Variance within Constructions of Fatherhood between the Chinese and Malay Communities of Singapore

Tan emphasises the changing nature of "fatherhood" within the multi-cultural milieu of contemporary Singapore in his comparative study of variance in constructions of "fatherhood" between the Chinese and Malays. The author conducted secondary analysis of official data to show the socioeconomic characteristics of these ethnic groups and then interviewed 20 respondents in five households. The interviews reveal cross-ethnic differences arising from the interaction between structural (i.e. occupational-stratification) and cultural factors (i.e. religious beliefs) within the site of ethnicity. The religious beliefs of the two ethnic groups that shape gender ideologies lead to very different understanding and expression of father's involvement with children. The differences in their socioeconomic characteristics also influence the involvement of fathers of different ethnic groups. Both Chinese and Malays communities exhibited a cultural lag or "asynchrony" in term of their adoption and relation to the general view of "a universal, new father".

Given the diversity and different needs of fathers within specific communities, Tan calls for more research into the correlation among the disparities in education levels, average ages of first marriage and the stages of fatherhood. These findings may be helpful in tailoring family policies in Singapore. He argues that the analysis of significant ethnic-based divergences within the constructions of fatherhood would serve as a useful basis for the revision of policies which often assume a homogenous developmental pathway for modern paternity in the household.

Panel V: Fatherhood in the Context of Migration

Globalisation has provided various economic opportunities for transnational migratory labour and this has influenced the division of domestic labour and how families function as a unit. Scott Harper discusses the impact of transnational migratory labour on children's behaviour and parent-child relationships in Filipino families. Le Thi Hoai Phuong explores fatherhood in rural

Vietnam where there is widespread emigration of wives to the cities for work, and Kang Yoonhee investigates how Korean fathers in Singapore negotiate their fatherhood.

Transnational Migratory Labour and its Effects on Filipino Families

Emphasising that transnational migration remains crucial for the economic survival of Filipinos, Harper estimates that roughly 2 million individuals become Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) per year. This study is one of the few which addresses the role of OFW fathers in the family. He raises two key questions in his study. First, do children of OFW families, compared to those of non-OFW families, encounter different issues of parent-child relationship and problematic outcomes? Second, what are the factors that may help buffer any negative effects of father absence? Harper conducted a comparative analysis of 116 OFW families and 99 non-OFW families in measures of family outcomes, and the interrelation of OFW father behaviour, mother behaviour, parent-child attachment, and child outcomes.

Harper finds that increased paternal warmth during visits predicted increased marital and father-child relationship quality, and he also speculated that such paternal warmth was indirectly associated with the quality of mother-child relationship and problem behaviours among children. In addition, he points out that mother's negativity to father's contact is associated with a decline in marital quality and father-child relationship. He argues that this negativity in turn affected mother-child relationship quality and child's behaviour. Last but not least, a high quality of mother-child relationship was found to be associated with fewer child behaviour problems. Harper concludes that as transnational migration for work in the Philippines will remain in the foreseeable future, it is important to further investigate potential ways in which some of the negative effects on children may be mitigated in families that live apart for work.

Fatherhood in Today Rural Vietnam

Phuong starts with an introduction of how Confucian philosophy cultivates the idea of fatherhood in traditional Vietnamese culture. She observes that although the Vietnamese family

is experiencing "westernisation", the urban population is more westernised than the rural population. In view of the trend of transnational migratory labour among Vietnamese women, Phuong investigates the phenomenon as well as its problems and challenges by conducting in-depth interviews and group discussions with 47 men and 49 women from 17 different provinces in the northern part of Vietnam.

Phuong finds that fatherhood in the rural areas of Vietnam is most fragile as work migration has provided wives with the opportunity to earn more than husbands. She also notes that no special attention has been accorded to fatherhood in Vietnamese culture. She urges for policy support for Vietnamese "manhood" and "fatherhood" among the rural men. She suggests that these Vietnamese fathers should be provided with the means to develop their role as the "master of the family", the "pillar of the family", and the main labour force in the society, as this would ensure the sustainable development of Vietnamese families.

"Any One Parent Will Do": Negotiations of Fatherhood among South Korean 'Wild Geese' Fathers in Singapore

With the growing number of Korean students migrating for education in Singapore, many variations in Korean transnational family arrangements and practices could be seen. One exceptional family arrangement involves fathers accompanying their children to study in Singapore. Through ethnographic study with five such South Korean fathers in Singapore, Kang explores how gendered notions of care work interplay with the conceptualisation of fatherhood through transnational migration. She documents these Korean fathers' experiences of migration, their daily routines, and their values and attitudes toward their children's education.

Her case study reveals that Korean fathers negotiated their fatherhood in the context of migration by challenging the dominant gender ideology and retaining their close associations with conventional "masculine" domains. She also argues that the plurality and ambivalence of these fathers' experiences clearly show that fatherhood does not comprise static gender attributes but rather is a social construct with multiple, shifting and contextually contingent meanings,

embedded in specific social conditions and transnational practices in a rapidly globalising world. The fathers experienced self transformation and reconfiguration of the gender division of labour, in which they had to perform both mother and father roles.

Summary

This first international conference on Asian fatherhood provides a glimpse of contemporary Asian fathers' involvement in their children's lives and how they perceive their roles. The fathers in the nine countries represent men of diverse culture background and socioeconomic statuses. While existing data do not allow us to compare fathers' involvement with children across these countries or with the western countries, all studies provide some evidence that men in more recent cohorts are more involved with their children in a wide range of activities than their own fathers were, particularly men with higher education. That said, these papers also show that Asian fathers' level of involvement remains considerably lower relative to that of mothers. Findings from these presentations, coupled with a paucity of international time use research, suggest that we have probably seen slower changes in Asian men's fathering behaviour than men in western societies despite Asian women's increasing role in the labour market. Changes in men's behaviour also generally lag changes in gender ideologies and are often accompanied with considerable ambivalence from both men and women about their respective family roles.

These presentations underscore some unique Asian contexts that are crucial in shaping fatherhood in Asia.

(1) The deep seated traditional gender norms and values remain strong, prevalent in moral teachings in some countries and in religious decrees in others. For example, Confucian teachings about patriarchy and intergenerational hierarchies in family structure are among the clearest principles of social organisation in societies such as Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, and to some extent, China for generations. The traditional values such as "strict father, kind mother", the "three obediences and four virtues[i]" for women, and "son preference" clearly still exert discernible influence on men's perceptions of their family roles and behaviour and women's attitudes about how men should behave. Religious decrees that have been in existence for thousands of years, in

Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity, also still play a strong role in shaping fatherhood ideology and behaviour. Teachings such as "Husbands are head of the household, a religious teacher, and a disciplinarian", and "A wife must worship and serve her husband", leads to confusion among Indian men about their roles in a rapidly changing socioeconomic circumstances and the significantly less egalitarian Muslim males compared to Muslim females reported in several presentations.

(2) Asian men lack male role models as fathers. Men tend to feel unprepared and inadequate as fathers as a consequence of the moral and religious traditions about the primacy of men in families mentioned above. However, several studies suggest that a men's own father's involvement has a significant influence on his own involvement with his children. Mother's gate keeping behavior is also a significant factor that needs to be kept in mind when attempting to understand or influencing fathers' behaviour. Several presentations noted that Asian men need considerable support and guidance in their new roles and called for more attention to relevant policies and programmes.

(3) Several studies, however, also illustrate that policies in Asian countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, and Singapore are often gender-biased and far from taking family-work balance issues seriously. There appears to be a diverse and uneven development of policies and programmes that promote and support fatherhood among Asian countries. Taiwan's relatively new initiative of parent education centres and of the two-year parental leave policy, Singapore's Dads-for-Life movement, and programmes in India and Malaysia are good examples of such efforts to encourage and help fathers nurture psycho-social bonds with their children. More work is warranted to learn about the impact of such policies and programmes in different countries. There are also structural barriers at the work place and in other social units that hinder fathers' positive involvement. More work is needed to have a better understanding about these structural barriers and explore how policy and programmes can help addressed these challenges.

(4) Migration is and will remain a fact of life for countless Asian fathers and their families. These experiences present unique socio-psychological and structural challenges for Asian men that need to be further investigated.

(5) Grandparents and domestic helpers play much greater roles in child care in Asian families. The involvement of these members can have varying effects on father-mother and father-child relationships for families of different socioeconomic and cultural background, and more work is needed to gain better understanding about these dynamics.

It is clear that Asian fathers are negotiating, challenging, and creating new meanings of fatherhood. There is often an interaction between cultural and structural factors that shape how fatherhood evolves in all societies. The "new fathers" we see in Asia will likely to be different from those in America or European countries given the unique contexts noted above. For example, Asian fathers seem to be significantly more involved in the academic achievement of their children than fathers in the western countries, as highlighted in papers on fathers in Taiwan and India, and migrant fathers in Asia are exploring uncharted territories to fulfill their responsibility as fathers. Much more work is needed to understand how fatherhood evolves in Asia.

Reflections and Next Steps

This first international fatherhood conference in Asia went very well. It was well organised, presentations were of good quality, and the papers offered much food for thoughts for policies, practice, and future research. The participants were enthusiastic and provided much positive informal feedback. The conference received some media attention in both local radio and newspapers, as well as in NUS research notes and ARI newsletter. I believe that the conference achieved the purposes of advancing knowledge about Asian fathers and raising public awareness about fatherhood in Singapore and Asia in general.

The papers were of varying quality and used different research methodologies. Several studies on China, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Vietnam were based on data from large probability surveys. A few studies were based on medium-sized samples – India, Malaysia, and Singapore, and other studies were based on focus groups or in-depth studies collected from small and/or selective samples. Some of the papers were more polished, and others are still quite preliminary in their analysis. There is room for improvement for most papers in methodology and analysis. Regarding the contents, most papers were limited to examining paternal involvement, in

particular, direct engagement of fathers in two-parent families with their children. The keynote speech offered much insight into how fatherhood research could be expanded beyond direct engagement of fathers to explore stages before a man becomes a father, the socio-psychological aspects of fathering, and how the roles of fathers change as they move through different life stages and in different family circumstances or cultural contexts.

It will be useful to consider future conferences that build on what this conference has accomplished. One potential conference, for example, could focus on specific policies and programmes that are relevant to fathers' roles. This will dovetail well with this first conference. Other conferences could focus on transitioning to fatherhood, non-residential fathers, low-income fathers, stepfathers, social fathers, or the impact of father's involvement on children's development or marital relationships.

A website for Asian fatherhood research network can be established to provide information about researchers working on fatherhood research in different areas, working papers, publications, and conferences on Asian fatherhood.

Another possibility is to build on the network that we have forged in this conference and extend it to form a fatherhood network for practitioners. Dads for Life could follow up with authors to secure contacts of practitioners in respective countries and create a network for practitioners to share strategies of increasing awareness of fatherhood and father involvement. A page on the Asian fatherhood website can be created specifically for practitioners with information about programmes and practitioners in different countries. Such a network can also be useful for convening special conferences for practitioners.

Authors of selected papers will be invited to participate in publishing their papers collectively in either a special journal issue or a book volume. These papers will need to be peer-reviewed and revised satisfactorily before they can be accepted for publication. Over the next two years, I will work with a subset of the authors on their papers and perhaps add other research about Asian fatherhood to publish as a collection.

[i] The three obediences and four virtues were the traditional Confucian teaching of wifely submission and virtues prescribed to women. A woman is to obey her father as a daughter, obey her husband as a wife, and obey her sons in widowhood. The four virtues for women are morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work