The Japanese Father Role, as Viewed Across Life Stages by Junior College Women

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In Cross-Culture, the Annual Bulletin of Koryo Women's College, 1996, 14, 231. I wish to thank the students of the Shwalb Koryo Seminar for their generous assistance, and the following colleagues who cooperated in the collection of the data reported: Norio Iwatsuki, Takeshi Uemura, Fujie Tsukada, Mami Futagami, and Thomas Schalow.
Abstract

Middle class junior college women (AT= 145) took part in a questionnaire survey concerning the paternal role. Most participants were from small cities or towns in the Tokai region (Aichi, Mie and Gifu Prefectures) in central Japan, and were first-generation college students. The purpose of the study was to generate research questions rather than to objectively test hypotheses. The students first recalled and compared the behavior and roles of their fathers at different stages of their own development from infancy through young adulthood. They also generated descriptors of "good" and "bad" fathers, and described the strong points and difficulties of their fathers. Fathers were described as spending the most time with their daughters in the years between infancy and lower elementary school, but a majority of daughters felt that the father had his greatest responsibility for them beginning in adolescence. Perceptions of the period of greatest paternal influence were spread evenly across childhood and adolescence, and influence was seen as lowest during the years of infancy and college. The two periods at which daughters thought the father-daughter relationship was closest were those of the preschool and college years. Finally, junior high school was said by a plurality to be the time when the paternal role was most important. The most common descriptors of a "good father" were gentle, reliable and family-centered, while those of a "bad father" were physically rough, abusive when drinking, and stubborn. These and other findings were compared to and very often corroborated data collected from independent samples of fathers and mothers. Several avenues were
follow-up research were suggested, and it was concluded that a development\textsuperscript{11} approach is needed in future studies of the father role.

要旨

「女子大学生の父親の役割の発達：短大生に対象調査」

145名の中高生の短大生を対象に、(1)自分の各段階段階において父親はいかなる役割を持っていたかを想起し、(2)横と父親を比較し、(3)「いい父親」と「悪い父親」のイメージ、(4)父親として難しく思う点について回答してもらった。ほとんどの被験者は、東海地区の地方都市に住んでいる者で、4枚のアンケートに記入し、セミナーの教師を通じて送った。調査目的は、仮説の検証よりも、研究課題を見いだすことであった。多くの父親は、娘の幼少時に大部分の時間を一緒に過ごしているか、娘が中学校に入ってからは最も強く責任を感じたと報告している。娘に対して最も影響を与えたと感じられた時期は、児童期から青少年期に均一に数らばっていたが影響が特に弱い時期は乳児期と大学時代であった。娘が最も強いと感じられた時期は、幼児期と短大の時期であった。「いい父親」のイメージでよく上げられた点は「優しい」、「頼りになる」、「家庭中心」等で「悪い父親」として「乱暴」、「酒乱」、「頑固」等がありました。最後に、娘の中学校の時期は父親としての役割が最も重要であると感じていた。被験者は、父親とおじいさんを比較し、同じ程度の類似点と相違点を挙げている。父親の最も難しい問題として「仕事」、「経済的な事」、「単身赴任」、「授業料」等が首されれている。結果は、父親自身の回答と比較し、父親自身の生涯経験の面から見て論じた。

謝辞：光陵女子短期大学の鶴橋・増村・植村・二神・シャーロー・シャーロープセミナーの協力は感謝いたします。
The Japanese Father Role, as Viewed Across Life Stages by Junior College Women

Introductory Comments

I wish first to thank the editors of Cross-Culture for allowing me to submit a paper to this fine bulletin. This paper is my fourth and final contribution to Cross-Culture. It has always been a challenge to complete a survey and to write a report in time for the annual deadline, but this has also provided me with an useful opportunity and impetus to organize and communicate some of my thinking.

In my opinion, a college bulletin serves at least two purposes. First it gives co-workers a chance to appreciate each other as creative thinkers. Secondly, submitting a paper forces each faculty member to express his or her thinking on a specialized topic, reminding each individual that a scholar must do more than classroom teaching. Therefore Cross-Culture is important, regardless of how many or few individuals in Japan read it, because writing is an important activity for us as professors. Few American colleges, and very few American junior colleges, have such a bulletin.

I was able to do this survey because of the cooperation of my faculty colleagues whose names are listed above. Let me take this opportunity to thank all the faculty members of Koryo College for their kindness. I have asked each colleague many questions over the past four years, and have always received thoughtful answers. Nobody has ever said to me, “I am too busy to help you.” I believe that the heart of any college is found in the quality and character of its teachers, and I have a very deep respect for all of these individuals: Masaru Kajita, Norio Iwatsuki, Junzaburo Takahashi, Katsuhisa Ishikawa, Yasuko
Otake, Takeshi Uemura, Fujie Tsukada, Mami Futagami, Yasumi Gee, Thomas Schalow, Hisae Nakanishi, Anne Meadows, Masashi Inagaki, Junko Yokochi, Kyouji Hitomi, Yoshiaki Katada, and Yutaka Kurihara. They are a gifted and unique group of teachers, and I am proud to have worked with them.

Background

The present study represents a follow-up on two surveys concerning father-daughter relations (Shwalb, 1993, 1994). The primary purpose of this study was to have a sample of daughters look back over the years of their young lives, and to assess different qualities of their fathers between infancy and young adulthood. Most data on Japanese fathering have been collected from fathers of preschool children, and this survey sought to consider fathering across childhood and adolescence.

In response to a recent inquiry I made concerning father research, a well-known authority on the American family asked me, "Have you found something worth studying about Japanese fathers? I thought they were so insignificant that nobody studies them!" Such a reaction reflects the image of Japanese fathers in the West, i.e. that they are unworthy of research. Many Japanese clinicians and social commentators also blame the "weak" Japanese father for childhood psychopathologies. But before we convict Japanese fathers as either irrelevant or malevolent, we should collect some objective evidence. A survey such as that reported below is only a first step, but it may suggest what kinds of objective evidence are needed as we examine the Japanese father role.
Method

Procedures

Questionnaires were distributed in May of 1995 to 160 students attending a women's junior college in the suburbs of Nagoya City. The instructions asked that the student complete the form by herself and return it within one week. A total of 145 questionnaires were returned, for a return rate of 90.6%. The questionnaire (copies are available in Japanese or in translation from the author) were four pages in length, and consisted of four main sections: (1) personal and family demographics, (2) comparisons of time spent together, sense of responsibility, perceived influence, feelings of closeness, and general importance of their fathers at different stages of the women's lives, (3) comparisons of the fathers with students' grandfathers, and (4) the images of a "good" and "bad" father. In addition, women were asked to describe their most important activities with their fathers in recent years, their fathers' strong points, and the greatest difficulties of their fathers. Of these sections, only (2) included forced choice questions, and participants were asked to give examples to illustrate their choices. Participants

The following summarizes the demographics of the sample. The ages of students ranged from 18 to 21 years, and the mean age of their fathers was 48 years. The fathers were almost all born after World War II. The modal level of education of students' fathers was high school (64%), followed by four-year college (21%), junior high school (14%) and technical college (1%). The modal level of the students'
mothers was also high school (60%), followed by junior high school (21%), junior college (13%) and four-year college (6%). About 70% of the students' mothers were currently employed, and most of these worked at least 20 hours weekly. Grandmothers currently lived in 27% of the students' families, and grandfathers lived in 16% of the families. These demographics are comparable to statistics reported for middle class Japanese families in small cities and towns (Nippon Aiiku Research Institute, 1994).

Results and Discussion

*Students' Views of Fathering at Their Different Life Stages*

Each student was asked to recall and choose the stage of her own development when her father (1) spent the most time with her, (2) had his greatest amount of responsibility for her, (3) had his greatest influence on her, (4) had his closest relationship to her, and (5) was generally most important in his role as a father. Table 1 displays the distributions of these choices, along with data (Shwalb, 1993, 1994) collected from independent samples of mothers and fathers of junior college women at the same college. Women also were asked to give examples to illustrate their choices concerning time together, responsibility, influence, and the paternal role.
Table 1
Comparisons of Daughters’, Mothers’, and Fathers’ Views of Life Stages and Father-Daughter Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Stage</th>
<th>Infancy</th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Low Elem</th>
<th>Up Elem</th>
<th>JHS</th>
<th>H.S.</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When did father spend the most time with the daughter?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices by Daughters:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers:</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers:</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did father have his greatest responsibility for his daughter?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did father have his most influence on his daughter?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters:</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did father feel the closest to his daughter?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fathers:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At which period in the child’s life is the father role most important?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Group res: daughters = , fathers = , mothers = . Tabular data are percentages of responses. Father data and mother data have been previously reported (Shwalb, 1993, 1994).
Time spent together. Daughters were first asked at what stage of their development they spent the most time with their fathers. Most (77%) selected either infancy, preschool or early elementary school as the period of greatest contact. These data were similar to paternal and maternal reports, except that a larger proportion of students (11%) chose high school as a period of maximum time with the father. As with other data, this may be explained in terms of students' inability to recall their earlier years.

Comments: In general, these data show that fathers spend relatively little time with their daughters once they are about 10 years of age. Whether this is a reflection of the girls' stages of development, or changes in their fathers' own lives and roles, should be the subject of follow-up research.

Feelings of responsibility. While the mode for recalled amount of time together was in the preschool years (according to exactly the same 38% of daughters, fathers and mothers), this age was the least frequently reported period in terms of paternal responsibility for daughters. Compared with mothers' and fathers' recollections, the distribution of choices of periods for maximum responsibility were more evenly spread out across infancy, elementary school and adolescence, according to the daughters. The largest percentage (27%) of daughters chose the high school years as that of maximum paternal responsibility.

Comments: All three surveys (daughter, mother, and father) showed that while time together peaks in the first years of fathering, responsibility increases from adolescence. These data indicate that the nature of the paternal role changes according to the child's age.
Participants distinguished between spending time with a child and having responsibility for the child. It is likely that responsibility for the young child rests in the hands of the Japanese mother.

*Perceived influence.* When young women were asked at what age their fathers influenced them the most, there was no clear period which stood out. The distribution of these choices was evenly spread out between the preschool and high school years, with fewer choices for infancy and the college years. The pattern in these data was quite similar to those reported by fathers and mothers.

*Comments:* What stands out in these data is that the lowest points of perceived influence were for the periods of infancy and the college years (the present). Had we only surveyed college students these findings might have been attributable to inability to recall infant experiences and a bias to look critically at one’s present relationships. But the findings were closely corroborated by data from fathers and mothers. If they are true, the data suggest that men are thought to have very little influence on babies, and that they lose their influence again as their daughters move into young adulthood. However, the present data do not show the absolute level of influence at any stage; it may be that fathers have very little influence at any life stage.

*Perceived closeness to the child.* When asked at what stage the father had his closest relationship with the daughter, young women most often chose two periods: the preschool and college years. Again, if we compare these data with those for the previous item, there is a clear differentiation between influence and closeness of the father-daughter relationship. Reports by daughters were very similar again to those by mothers and fathers.

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Comments: No correlational analyses were conducted, but inspection of Table 1 (regarding the preschool level) suggests that perhaps perceived closeness is related to perceived time spent together. However, when we look at the frequencies for the college age level, many women report spending very little time with their fathers. Yet they report this as a very significant period in terms of parent-daughter closeness. Follow-up research should investigate whether 'absence makes the heart grow fonder,' but it is likely that a more complex relationship exists between these two variables.

The most important period for the paternal role. The modal response to the question of "During which period is the paternal role generally most important?" was junior high school (33%), followed by the preschool years (26%). The choice of preschool was more frequent among daughters than among fathers or mothers. As was the case for closeness and influence, the period of infancy was chosen least often by the students.

Comments: This questionnaire item might provide a clue about in which period research time and resources would be most profitably invested. It suggests that precisely at the time when fathers spend the least amount of time with their daughters (adolescence, which was called "the age of rebellion" by several participants), men are recalled as spending the very least amount of time with their daughters. It is debatable at which point in development fathers are most important (Gjerde & Shimizu, 1995; Shwalb, 1993, 1994), but the contrast between the time-together responses and the important-period responses shows that we cannot rely solely on time use measures to gauge developmental changes in the Japanese paternal role.
Daughters were next asked to list words that describe a "good" and "bad" father. This question did not seek to provide information about the participants' own fathers, but rather was concerned with general ideals and values concerning fathering. Table 2 provides lists of the fifteen descriptors most often generated by daughters, alongside the most frequently used descriptors from the independent sample of fathers. These are given in order of frequency.
descriptors of a "Good Father" and a "Bad Father". According to Daughters and Fathers

A Good Father:
By Daughters
Gentle
Reliable
Family-centered
Firm
Understanding
Broadminded/tolerant
Works hard
Strong
Mainstay of family
Serious
Responsible
Knowledgeable
Empathic
Truthful
Worthy of respect

A Bad Father.
By Daughters
Physically rough
Abusive when drinking
Stubborn
Soon gets angry
Wants things his way
Critical/yells a lot
Selfish
Does nothing but work
Irresponsible
Heavy gambler
Unfaithful to wife
Too strict
Good-for-nothing slob
Weak
Uninterested/apathetic

By Fathers (Shwalb, 1993)
Gentle
Family-centered
Reliable
Truthful
Healthy
Works hard
Broad-minded/tolerant
Diligent
Listens well
Worthy of respect
Responsible
Understanding
Empathic
Cheerful
Loving

By Fathers (Shwalb, 1993)
Irresponsible
Wants things own way
Heavy drinker
Irritable
Indecisive
Selfish
Good-for-nothing slob
Heavy gambler
Soon gets angry
Uninterested/apathetic
Stubborn
Slovenly
Doesn't say anything
Leaves everything to wife
Permissive

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The following descriptors of "a good father" were found in both lists by daughters and fathers: gentle, reliable, family-centered, understanding, broad-minded, works hard, responsible, empathic, truthful, and worthy of respect, although the relative frequencies of these free-responses differed for several items. Items only frequently generated by daughters were firm, strong, mainstay of family, serious, and knowledgeable; items listed often only by fathers were healthy, diligent, listens well, cheerful and loving.

Descriptors used often by both daughters and fathers for a "bad father" included: heavy [abusive] drinker, stubborn, soon gets angry, wants things his way, selfish, heavy gambler, good-for-nothing slob, and uninterested/apathetic. Items which were listed frequently only by daughters were: physically rough, critical/yells a lot, does nothing but work, irresponsible, unfaithful to wife, too strict, and weak; only fathers frequently listed: irritable, indecisive, slovenly, doesn't say anything, leaves everything to wife, and permissive.

Comments: Follow-up research should investigate first whether daughters attribute the preceding descriptors to their own fathers. In addition, a factor-analytic study would clarify the dimensionality of these attributes. These data nevertheless indicate that daughters have clear images of good and bad fathers. Discussion with one Japanese colleague provided a note of caution in the interpretation of these data. According to this scholar, questionnaire items which use dichotomies such as "good vs. bad" are more typical of Western psychological thinking, and may be inappropriate to the Japanese.

On the surface, what was clearest in these two pairs of lists is (1) that the overlap in contents was great between fathers' and daughters'
images of "good fathers," while (2) images of "bad fathers" very often differed between fathers and daughters. That is, most "good father" items were found on the lists of both men and daughters, while most "bad father" items were frequently generated by only one sub-sample. This suggests that while there are core aspects of good fathering, fathers may see themselves and their peers differently than do their children. They do not report aspects of fathering that are very important to their daughters (e.g. physical roughness, over-devotion to work, and weakness). **Fathers' Strong points**

Some aspects of "good fathering" were ascertained on the individual level by another questionnaire item, which asked daughters to "Describe your father's best point as a father." One difference between this type of question and the "good/bad" question may be that they differ in the time frame students invoke in their images of the father—it is unclear whether responses were of fathers of college students or of fathers at various stages of daughters' lives. This factor should be more clearly investigated in follow-up research. Most of these responses were also included in the Table 2 list: (in order of frequency) family-centered, gentle, understanding, works hard, good with children, respects me, supportive, firm, forthright, gives me advice, and good to his wife. It should be noted that even the most frequently listed item (family-centered) was only written by 9% of the sample—all item frequencies were low for this variable.

**Comments:** Many students did not list any "good points," which suggests that either the questionnaire was too long, or that they could not think of any good points. There was also a great variety of
descriptors used for this variable (52 descriptors), which indicates that follow-up research and analyses should focus on general descriptors which might encapsulate the diversity of free responses (Fukaya, 1990). Difficulties of Fathers

As for the previous question, frequencies of free responses about the most difficult aspects of fathering were all low. Table 3 indicates some differences between daughters' and fathers' responses to this question, in order of frequency, but more in-depth research is needed on this issue to assess the generality and seriousness of these problem areas.

Table 3
The Most Difficult Aspects of Fathering, According to Daughters and Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Daughters</th>
<th>By Fathers (Shyfelb, 1993)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over-worked</td>
<td>Entrance examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>Teaching child to behave like an adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job transfer</td>
<td>Discipline of females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school tuition</td>
<td>Understanding child's inner feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending me to college</td>
<td>Loss of respect in adolescence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with rebellious adolescents</td>
<td>Dealing with rebellious adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing for family</td>
<td>Generational differences in values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's education</td>
<td>Seeing child's viewpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance examinations</td>
<td>Keeping child from going bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childrearing</td>
<td>Understanding female's feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These two lists are rather different, which suggests that men and daughters ascribed different meanings to this questionnaire item. The items which appear in both lists concerned dealing with difficult and
rebellious adolescents, and entrance examinations. Otherwise, daughters tended to focus on situations and experiences (e.g. job transfers, school tuition expenses) while fathers more often listed relational problems (keeping the child from going bad, loss of respect, dealing specifically with female children).

Comments: The contrast between these two lists may or may not be significant. It may be that while daughters think fathers are most worried about their daughters in terms of finances, tuition, and their careers, men might be more worried about their personal relationships with their daughters. If this contrast is valid, it represents a serious gap between men's and daughters' thinking about the father-child relationship. On the other hand, these low-frequency responses may simply reflect different perceptions of the meaning of the questionnaire item.

The Father-Daughter Relationship: College-Age Children

Finally, women were asked to write a couple examples of “important things your father did in the past two years, as a father” in order to describe the contents of the father-child relationship in the period of youth. The following items were most often written by the daughters (in order of frequency): counseling daughter about work/careers, family trips, worked hard at the office, helped her move to her own apartment, supported child's studies, helped with daughter's preparations for entrance examinations, served on the high school PTA, and paid her college tuition.

Comments: Given the lack of shared time reported, it is not surprising that there were few items (24 different activities) reported, and that many students did not answer this question. However, close
to a quarter of the daughters in this sample described the present time as their period of greatest closeness in the father-daughter relationship and in terms of paternal responsibility. Previous studies (Takahashi, 1990) indicate that the mother-daughter relationship is more important than the father-daughter relationship, and future studies should seek to show the relative importance of fathers in their daughters' lives. Participants in this study were forced to focus on their fathers, but while it is likely that they answered honestly, it is possible if asked many might say "my father unimportant in my life nowadays, other than as a source of financial support."

Closing Comments

The survey reported was a pilot study, and raises more questions than it answers about Japanese fathers. The findings show that a developmental approach is needed in future studies of the Japanese father, and research should not be limited to any particular life stage. For even though men spend the most time with young children, the data show that they may have the greatest potential importance during adolescence. In addition, follow-up research should look more at relations between different variables, such as those of responsibility, influence, time, closeness and importance. This study also showed that despite the limitations of questionnaire methodology participants can distinguish between these five Variables, which should be treated as separate aspects of the father role.

Clearly the father role changes at different stages of child development. This might be expected because men continue to develop as individuals across the lifespan. In future research we must look more at the development of men, and not limit our focus to the
father-child relationship. In addition, as a matter of convenience data were only collected here concerning the father-daughter relationship, but data is also needed concerning the father-son relationship and the husband-wife relationship. There is a general tendency in Japan to devalue the father role, because fathers are stereotyped as uninvolved at home and slaves to their companies. However, a sizable minority of young father today are described as active with their children (Shwalb, Kawai, Shoji, & Tsunetsugu, 1995). The present data on older children and their fathers may prove to be of historical significance, as a baseline as we look at how fathering changes in the next generation. Finally, it is hoped that this study will suggest some avenues for developmental and cross-cultural studies of fathers.
References