

# **Theorizing fatherhood, welfare and the decline of patriarchy in Japan**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper sets research perspectives on Japanese fathers within a broader review of welfare regime literature and gender theory to develop a historical perspective on fatherhood and work-life balance debates in Japan. The aim of the paper is to build on the comparative social policy and evidenced-based hypothesis that addressing men's social citizenship rights as fathers is the most effectual way to increase their involvement in childcare (Rush, 2015). The paper engages critically with classifications of Japan as an emergent East-Asian welfare state regime and pivotal global leader in the decline of patriarchal fatherhood. The historical review illustrates that government promotion of 'father-friendly' work-life balance policies or *waku-raifu baransu* from the 1990s was rooted in gender equality campaigns by *The Women's Bureau* and grass roots feminism that stretched back decades to post-WWII era. In addition, a move away from Confucian, traditionalist or familial welfare ideologies in favour of a 'Nordic turn' towards more comprehensive family policies is illustrated to have been underpinned by epistemological social science discourses. However, the paper highlights that despite 'ultra-low' fertility rates, Japanese employers and conservative politicians continue to uphold a strong variant of male-breadwinning family arrangements as a form of traditionalised Japanese modernism (Ochiai, 2014, p.214). More positively, the findings illustrate an epistemological shift in fathering research perspectives away from negative images of ineffectual salary-man fatherhood in favour of a structural focus on re-shaping the social citizenship rights of Japanese fathers for shared parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Introduction

Japan is of significant interest to international debates on the changing nature of fatherhood for three interconnecting reasons. First, alongside the USA, Japan was at the forefront of international research output on fathers' involvement in child-care and the significance of fathering to child development (Shwalb, *et al*, 2013). Second, Japan was located as a pivotal country in the global decline of patriarchy or 'rule of the father' which occurred during the twentieth century across Western Europe, the Anglophone nations, Russia, Korea, and to some extent Eastern Europe and Southern America (Therborn, 2004, p.107). Third, as a response to ultra-low fertility rates, the Japanese welfare state is understood to have abandoned "traditionalist or Confucian approaches to welfare provision" and attempted a 'Nordic turn' towards more comprehensive family policies, including parental leave schemes for fathers (Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011)

Therefore, this paper considers the changing nature of fatherhood in Japan as a central concern of comparative social policy by setting fatherhood research perspectives in the wider context of a historical review of mainstream and feminist perspectives on Japanese welfare state development and the decline of patriarchal fatherhood (Shwalb, *et al* 2013, Sechiyama, 2013, Takegawa, 2005). A key point of the historical review is the significance afforded to the post WWII era US Occupation for the perceived "weakening" of fatherhood and to the congruent influence of *The Women's Bureau* and grass-roots feminism on the development of 'state feminism' and the promotion work-life balance (WLB) policies (Shwalb, *et al* 2003, p.150, Kobayashi, 2004, p.5, Lambert, 2007, p.2). Another key point of the historical analysis is the significance afforded to the roles of what Takegawa (2005) labelled as the 'quasi social-democratic' welfare state bureaucracy and what Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen (2011) labelled as academic social policy 'entrepreneurs' in the promotion of gender egalitarian

work-life balance (WLB) policies or *waku-raifu baransu*. However, the review illustrates that conservative politicians and employers continued to idealise strong male-breadwinning family arrangements as a form of traditionalised Japanese modernism (Ochiai, 2014).

A major finding emerging from the review is that over the past decade epistemological fathering research perspectives transferred attention away from earlier agency-based approaches, which problematized fathers as weak and ineffectual salary-men towards a more structural focus on fathers' social citizenship rights (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013). A central conclusion emerging from the review is that normative social policy discourses aimed at promoting gender equality and father-friendly work-life balance arrangements were under-pinned by epistemological feminism and more latterly, fathering research perspectives, aimed at ending Japan's social norm of entrenched male-breadwinning and female homemaking (Osawa, 2011, p.2).

### **Background: theorising fathers, patriarchy and welfare**

On the one hand, fathering Research was active in Japan from the 1980s, but on the other hand, Japanese fathers tended to emerge as being weak and ineffectual. Global fatherhood research perspective ranked social science attention to fatherhood in Japan as analogous to academic output in USA where the research was both broad and deep (Seward and Rush, 2015). Shwalb *et al* (2003, p.146) highlighted the longstanding influence of western psychological research and child development theories and the fact that fathering research was "far more active in Japan than in either China or Korea". However, Shwalb (1996, p. 249) observed that by the mid-1990s that there was a general tendency to devalue the role of fathers in Japan because fathers were stereotyped as being "uninvolved at home and slaves to their companies". Over the next decade, Shwalb *et al* (2003, p.150) continued to raise concerns that "the modal Japanese family" had "become democratic, individualistic, and

achievement orientated, with fathers as primary wage earners and mothers as domestic authorities” or ‘Kyoiku-mama’ begging the question as to whether the ‘salary-man’ basis of male-breadwinning had created a situation where Japan was “Once Confucian” was “Now Fatherless”.

The rise to prominence of “Japanese education-centred mothers” or ‘Kyoiku-mama’ was contrasted with fathers suffering from ‘lanshin-funin’ or ‘transfer isolation’, which occurred when men were involved in job-transfers to distant cities unaccompanied by their wives and children (Shwalb *et al* 2003, p. 152). On the one hand, mothers were perceived as being able to carry out housework and childrearing duties by themselves in smaller nuclear families. On the other hand, it was perceived that fathers had “lost their sense of purpose in the home” and that the onset of economic recession from the 1990s “increased the stress on fathers” who felt they had to financially support higher spousal expectations for children’s education (Shwalb *et al* 2003, p.154).

The weakening or decline of patriarchal fatherhood in Japan was a central theme of Yamato’s (2008) study on fathers’ involvement in family life. Yamato’s study separated the history of Japanese fatherhood into three distinct periods. The study began with the Tokugawa period from 1603 to 1868 which was characterised by the highly patriarchal and Confucian samurai inspired *ie* stem family system. The second stage was the Meiji Restoration period of the authoritarian state when fathers’ legitimacy as heads of *ie* families was undermined by the physical separation of men from child-rearing through industrialisation. Finally, the third stage was the post-World War II period when the Japanese modern family mirrored the Parsonian American family model of male-breadwinning fathers and full-time caregiving mothers (Yamato, 2008, p.151).

However, at the heart of epistemological debates about the declining legitimacy of patriarchal fatherhood lay a clash between different interpretations of power concerning the relationship between patriarchy and welfare capitalism (Rush, 2015, p.12). On the one hand, Marxist feminist interpretations posited that gender inequalities were the outcome of interaction between two co-existing systems of patriarchy and capitalism (Walby, 1990) However, more recent feminist perspectives on welfare state comparison returned to conventional understandings of patriarchy as a more familial concept meaning fathers control over families (Folbre, 2009, p. 208)

Sechiyama (2013, p. 7) set out to bring “order to the discussion of patriarchy” for comparative sociology studies of gender and patriarchy in East Asia. Sechiyama (2013, p. 11) distinguished between Japanese cultural anthropological understandings of patriarchy as *fukensei* or “rule of the father” and sociological understandings of *Kafuchosei* meaning patriarchalism which referred to a system of control steeped in tradition where power was exercised by the male head of household on the basis of filial piety. Hamilton (1990, p. 88) suggested that East-Asian and Chinese patriarchy differed from western versions, because Confucian patriarchy was more enduring and much stronger. Alternatively, Therborn located Japan (and China) at the pivotal epicentre of the twentieth century decline of patriarchy following WWII (2004, p.74). Therborn’s analysis spanned five continents covering the period 1900-2000 and depicted the decline of patriarchy as an epic dismantling process carried out in three ‘acts’ over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The pioneering 19<sup>th</sup> century introduction of mass education in Japan was described by Therborn (2004, p.58). as a core feature of the “Japanese path’ towards de-patriarchalisation, which was spearheaded by the Meiji Restoration, when from 1868 Japan sought to abandon “the evil customs of the past”. Shwalb *et al* (2003, p.150) concurred with the suggestion that access to “compulsory schools” in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century diminished patriarchal-

paternal power by “taking away the traditional functions of families and fathers”. From a northern European perspective, Bjornberg *et al* (1996, p.176) expressed similar concerns about the erosion of fatherhood in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through welfare state encroachment into areas of child welfare and socialisation such as education and income redistribution which had previously given patriarchal fatherhood its core social legitimacy. The centrality of the provision of universal access to education within “the concept of the welfare state” meant that improving the quality of children’s lives became a national enterprise with concerns about “quality being defined not in terms of parental hopes” but by “collective utility” for the social fabric of society (Kaufman, 2002, p.470). In this way, the concept of the welfare state was understood to be both a consequence of the decline of patriarchal kinship or familism and a major contributor to the ongoing decline of patriarchal fatherhood (Rush, 2015).

In relation to East-Asian welfare state models, the conventional understanding was of a region of ‘welfare laggards’ when it came to social spending (Peng and Wong, 2010, p.657). On the other hand, Choi (2007, p.16) argued that Japan was far from being “a laggard welfare state” and was well on “the way to crystallization”. Tendencies to position East-Asian welfare states within Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime typology of *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) caused controversy and were labelled by Takegawa (2005, p.171). as a form of ‘welfare orientalism’. Takegawa (2005, p.171) engaged critically by suggesting that ‘Confucian welfare state’ and ‘East-Asian regime’ models or typologies were rooted in conventions of “welfare orientalism” Alternatively, Takegawa (2005, p. 175) classified welfare states against levels of worker de-commodification within *capitalist systems* as implied by Esping-Andersen’s (1990) model and against levels of *patriarchy* as implied by Walby (1990) on the basis that “patriarchy hampers solidarity and recognition” and was “made possible by the reproduction of gendered social relations” Takegawa (2005, p.175)

argued that it was necessary to classify welfare states on the basis of levels of de-commodification and the extent to which social policies had worked to “de-gender” male-breadwinning systems. Decommodification is the extent to which welfare systems compensate for the labour market dependency of paid employees or, in welfare terms, “commodified” workers through the provision of social citizenship entitlements such as pensions, unemployment benefit, maternity leave and parental leave (Rush, 2015, p. 11).

## **Methods**

This paper combines a review of the literature on welfare regime theory and gender analysis with critical engagement of fathering research perspectives to develop a historical perspective for comparative social policy analysis. A major advance of international welfare state developments has been the introduction of individualised and non-transferable ‘father-quotas’ to paid parental leave schemes in a growing number of countries including Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia and Estonia (Rush, 2015). A major advance of epistemological perspectives has been the growth of studies which classified national variations in the social citizenship rights of fathers with reference to Esping-Andersen’s (1990) welfare regime theory (WRT) including Rush, (2015), Smith and Williams, (2007), and Hobson *et al* (2002). Japan was classified across an international continuum as being medium/low in terms of parental leave decommodification, low in terms of child support obligations for non-resident fathers and low on shared parenting policies for non-resident fathers (Rush, 2015, p, 138). The sources for the following review of literature were chosen from the fields of fathering research, gender studies, family policy, political economy and comparative welfare state debates to establish a historical perspective. The review presents a decade by decade overview of epistemological understandings of social policy developments concerning fatherhood roles and work-life balance developments from the post WWII era to the present day. The review builds on the combined epistemology and social policy approach

of Rush (2015) for a critical analytical framework to classify welfare regimes and the social politics of fatherhood in relation to levels of de-commodification, de-patriarchalisation, gender equality and father-involvement in childcare.

### **Literature Review-the post WWII era**

Therborn (2004, p.74) located post-war Japan as being at the ‘actual centre’ of the global decline of patriarchy when “the elaborated patriarchal traditions of Confucianism and of feudal *samuria* norms were attacked head on, by US occupation-emboldened Japanese reformers”. Moreover, Therborn (2004, p.71) suggested that the Japanese Constitution of 1947 included “a ringing affirmation of gender equality” and ventured that:

“Eradicating millennial patriarchy was, of course, a protracted and difficult operation, which has not been fully completed in the past half century, but in China and Japan an epochal process of change was set in motion around 1950”

Therborn (2004) located Constitutional reform in post-war Japan and the revolution in China in 1949 within what he labelled ‘the Constitutional moment’ when the 1948 United Nations Convention on Human Rights enshrined the principle of equality between of sexes and delivered a decisive blow to arranged marriages and bars on inter-racial marriage in the USA. Shwalb *et al* (2003, p.150) explained that the American occupation following WWII transformed Japan into a nation where “fathers were reduced in legal status to equals with their wives and grown children” Shwalb *et al* (2003, p.154) imputed the American occupation for weakening the authoritative legitimacy of modern of fatherhood and fathering in Japan:

“Specifically we consider the effects of the American occupation of Japan following World War II to be one cause of weakness in many of today’s Japanese fathers. The



occupation ostensibly promoted democracy, equality, and individualism, and although its goal of democratization succeeded in overturning the traditional patriarchy, for some Japanese it replaced authoritarian fathering with permissive rather than authoritative fathering”.

Kobayashi's (2004, p.3) study of the path towards gender equality and 'state feminism' in Japan highlighted the significance of the US occupation and the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). Kobayashi (2004, p.3) highlighted that what she labelled as 'The Women's Bureau' was not staffed by government bureaucrats but rather by feminist activists from the pre-war period who were appointed by "consensus between the American occupation forces and Japanese government". The term 'Women's Bureau' was coined to refer to the variously named agencies for women in the Ministry of Labor between 1947 and 2000. The Kobayashi (2004, p.3) study illustrated that feminist activists climbed the bureaucratic ladder into positions of elite influence within The Women's Bureau and developed bureaucratic skills and gender equality networks by confronting weak institutional power with individual aspiration and capability.

Lambert's (2007, p.7) study on the political economy of the post-war family in Japan also emphasised the importance of legislation during the U.S. occupation and the fact the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) placed a great emphasis on child welfare and on the implementation of the 1947 Child Welfare Law which "far exceeded pre-war programmes" by seeking to "ensure the health and welfare of future generations". In addition, Lambert (2007:2) illustrated and highlighted the significance of women's political and trade union activism by explaining that:

Throughout post-war history, mothers' groups and the women's bureaus in union organisations rose up and demanded more child-care services and longer maternity

leaves. Groups such as the Japan Teachers' Union (Nikkyoso) and the Mothers' Association (Hahaoya no Kai) were important initiators of policy. However, the biggest changes in Childcare and childcare Leave policy coincided with periods of high labour demand and challenges to the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party

Recent comparative studies have highlighted the extraordinary growth of radical trade unionism in Post-war Japan and the mobilisation for a left-wing government. Shinoda explained in a global history of trade unionism that SCAP promoted trade unionism "not because of Japanese lack of union experience but precisely because of its rich history of labour movements, which could energise the democratisation of Japan" (2009, p.152). Shinoda made a case that post war trade unionism in Japan was able to contend for "power" and should be returned to its rightful place in epistemological accounts of "the global history of trade unionism" (2009, p.153). This type of analysis supported by Baker's (1965) earlier study which illustrated that the pro-communist *Sohyo* or Japan Council of Trade Unions, which was established in 1950, went on to organise the largest strike waves in Japan's history in 1952 and to organise the populous 'Spring Struggles' of 1964 and 1965. These post-war reassessments served to undermine stereotypical images of Japanese fathers as slaves to their companies and Japanese mothers as compliant homemakers.

### **1960s and 1970s**

These new re-assessments of the post WWII role of women's groups and trade unions, and especially groups such as the Japanese Teachers Union are critical to understanding the important role of Japan's welfare state institutions in gradually realizing a number of epochal social policy initiatives from the 1960s including Universal Medical Care and Pension in 1961, the 'first year of welfare' in 1973, the basic pension in 1985 and the enactment of

Long-term Care Insurance in 1997. Put simply, Takegawa's (2005: 178) claim that "Japan's welfare state was de-facto formed" by what he labelled as the top-down quasi-social democratic state bureaucracy, with the acceptance of the conservative parties, is being supplemented by fresh perspectives on the bottom-up pressures coming from women's groups, leftist parties and the Japanese trade unions for improved family and social policies (Shinoda, 2009, Lambert, 2007, Kobayashi, 2004)

For example, Lambert's (2007, p.18) study highlighted the role of parents' groups and the Japanese Socialist Party who both brought pressure to increase public child care during the 1970s, with the eventual submission in 1974 of a Socialist Party proposal to the Lower House. Lambert (2007, p.19) also highlighted the role of the powerful Japan Teachers' Union which also began to demand childcare leave and which was the main initiator of the 1975 Childcare leave legislation that was first tabled at the 1963 Teachers' Union annual conference. Four years later the Socialist Party submitted a proposal for childcare leave in 1967 which specified one-years leave at 80% of wages (Lambert, 2007, 19). This was an early and ambitious demand and pre-dated the introduction of paid parental leave in the Nordic countries during the following decade.

### **1980s and 1990s**

The entryism strategy of feminist activism within the welfare state bureaucracy enabled The Women's Bureau to eventually produce two epochal and controversial pieces of legislation in the form of the 1986 Equal Opportunity Employment Law (EOEL) and the 1999 EEOL amendment. The Women's Bureau was initially criticised from all sides politically, including by leftist women, for initiating poorly thought out legislation. However, it was eventually recognised that the 1986 and 1999 Equal Opportunity Employment Laws had produced an "unexpected effect in Japanese society" by arousing "greater consciousness of gender

inequality in society” and ultimately by changing social values toward gender relations and by raising the “political and economic participation of women in Japan” (Kobayashi, 2004, p.5).

However, Ochiai's (2014) study on the politicisation of family policy highlighted that following his election as Prime-Minister in 1982, Yasuhiro Nakasone promoted a series of “familialist reforms” under the guidance of epistemological ‘Brain Trusts’ which included the authors of *The Ie Society as Civilization* (1979) who harked back to a romanticised and traditional view of the stem-family household system. Ochiai (2014, p. 223) also highlighted that the brains trusts of Yasuhiro Nakasone had included economists such as Yasusuke Murakami and Shoichi Royama who had published the neo-liberal oriented *Life Cycle for a Japanese Welfare Society* (1975). Therefore, in many respects, the Equal Opportunity Employment Law (1986) was enacted in spite of the traditional and familialist nature of the ruling Liberal Party's neo-liberal and conservative outlook (Ochiai, 2004, p.219). However, Ochiai, (2014: 219) explained that despite the neo-liberal overtures to a ‘A Farewell to Copying’ in *Life Cycle for a Japanese Welfare Society* (1975) and the conservative overtures to idealizations of the *Ie* stem-family household, the Yasuhiro Nakasone administration was firmly fixated on a post WWII image of the male-breadwinning father and the homemaking mother in a nuclear family which represented a traditionalization of Japanese modernity. By contrast, the left-leaning coalition government led by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto in the 1990s, which included the Socialist Party, appointed “feminist intellectuals and women officials” to design “policies promoting gender equality”. But ultimately Ochiai (2014, p.221) argued that the *Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society* (1999) and the *Long-Term Care Insurance Act* (2000) failed to counter the cultural scripts and familial welfare ideologies embedded by the Nakasone administration during the 1980s.

However, the 1990s brought a broader contemporary interest in the social politics of Japanese fatherhood, which began to surface following a series of official reports linking the decline in the total fertility rate with an absence of fathers' involvement in childrearing (Sano and Yasumoto 2014, p. 323). According to Shwalb *et al*, (2003, p. 148 ) these social policy reforms were also driven by a perceived crisis of ineffectual or weak Japanese fathering to the extent that "government policies in the 1990s encouraged fathers to become more involved with child development". Social policy reforms included The Child Care Leave Law in 1992 to promote paternity and maternity leave, with a paternity leave entitlement for eight weeks if the mother was at home and for up to 52 weeks if the mother was working for more than three days per week (Shwalb, *et al* 2003, p.168). Another major childcare initiative aimed at increasing the fertility rate was called the *Basic Direction for Future Child Rearing Support Measures* (1994), which was commonly known as the *Angel Plan* and was revised in 1999 and again in 2004 to become more individualised and gender equal with regard to the promotion of child-rearing by mothers and fathers (Sano and Yasumoto 2014, p. 323).

Yet, the 1980s and 1990s were mainly notable from a fathering research perspective for the public perception that social policy "needed to address the widespread social concern that poor fathering" was at the "root of childhood psychopathologies" (Shwalb, *et al.*, 2003, p.148). According to Shwalb *et al*, (2003, p.148) "government policies in the 1990s encouraged fathers to become more involved with child development" because it was felt that "fathers might be responsible for various social ills" and because "increasing numbers of mothers (and fathers)" were understood to "have shown either apathy or disgust toward children" all of which "spawned an interest in studies of parental cognition". Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen's (2011: 345-8) comparative study of family policies supported the view of crisis driven decade of social policy change and argued that from the 1990s Japan began to exhibit "social democratic" features through a series of "significant discursive shifts" that

were centred on the crisis of the fertility and the Japanese phenomenon of “parasite singles”. The term ‘parasite singles’ was coined by the conservative sociologist Masahiro Yamada to describe modern Japanese women who were forgoing marriage in order to “channel their personal incomes into entertainment and luxury goods” (Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011: 348).

However, by the end of the 1990s researchers were highlighting findings that 60% of fathers agreed with the statement that they could not spend enough time with their families because of their jobs (Shwalb, *et al.*, 2003, p.156). To address fathers’ low take-up of paternal leave the Japanese government passed the *Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society* in 1999 and the Ministry for Health, Labour and Welfare launched a nationwide campaign with the slogan “A man who does not participate in childrearing is not a father” (Porter and Sano 2009, p.13, Shwalb, *et al* 2003, p.169 ). This strategy bore echoes of the poster campaigns in Sweden carried out by the Swedish Ministry of Labour four decades earlier from the mid-1950s, which begged the question “Can a real man push a pram” (Rush, 2015, p.49).

### **Post 2000 debates**

During the noughties the Japanese Government encouraged companies to become more ‘family friendly’ (*fuamiri fuendori*) through reports such as *Aiming for Family Friendly Corporations*, published by the Women’s Bureau of the Ministry of labour (2000). These efforts culminated in 2004 with a “high-profile policy campaign built around the English language term work-life balance (waku-raifu baransu or WLB) (Seeleib -Kaiser and Toivonen 2011, p.349). The Women’s Bureau of the Ministry of labour (2000) and the *National Women’s Education Centre* (2005) were at the forefront of these debates to modernise the social politics of Japanese families and fatherhood.

Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen (2011) explained that political pressure during the noughties for father-friendly work-life balance measures in the form of Nordic-type ‘daddy months’ or ‘papa quotas’ also came from proposals made in 2006 by the Democratic Party of Japan. This led Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen (2011, p.332) to suggest that contemporary family policies in Japan were taking on “Nordic shades”. Social policy reforms of the noughties included *The Childcare and Family Care Leave* act, which offered a replacement-rate of 50% of parents’ pre-birth wage for up to a maximum of 18 months leave. The law allowed fathers to take leave “regardless of their partner’s employment status” (Sano and Yasumoto 2014, p. 324). However, less than 2% of Japanese fathers took parental leave and this was explained by the observation that “hierarchical Japanese corporate culture” was “deeply rooted in traditional Japanese culture” and did “not support men taking paternity leave” (Sano and Yasumoto 2014: 324).

The ineffectuality of progressive social policy was also explained by observations that the influence of social science academics such as Sato Takeishi and Machiko Osawa was undermined on consultative bodies such as “work and life harmonization” committee by strong opposition from Japanese employer organisations to WLB entitlements for workers (Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen, 2011: 351). Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen (2011, p. 332) also argued that private “companies” represented by the *Keidanren* acted as *antagonists* to bolster a ‘structural dynamic’ of firm-specific skills requirements and institutionalised aversions to “causing trouble to others” or *meiwaku wo kakeru* which, combined to limit “the propensity of many Japanese employers to support robust parental leave schemes”.

More controversially, Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen (2011) also suggested that the failure of parental leave policies to take-off in Japan was in part due to the comparatively weak political influence of women and contrasted the weak political power of women in Japan with the pivotal role of Nordic women as constituents of various political and activist groups.

Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen (2011, p.332) ultimately argued that reforms towards father-friendly parental leave regimes and gender egalitarian work-life balance arrangements were driven by “conservative political leadership” and blamed their failure to take off on the comparatively weak political influence of women in Japan’s hierarchical corporate culture.

On the other hand, Schoppa (2009, p.431) suggested that since Japan was a “late developer” among welfare states, Japanese women faced different challenges to their Swedish counterparts forty years earlier, because Swedish women made the “push for equality” at a time when women had children at young age, which encouraged them fight for social change to balance work and family life. By Contrast, modern Japanese women were choosing either not to have children or to just have one child in order to mitigate the problems of balancing work and motherhood (Schoppa 2009, p.431). Schoppa (2009, p.431) predicted that without women’s groups telling them what to do and “using their muscle to push for change” the quasi-social democratic bureaucrats of the Japanese welfare regime would not manage “to engineer a gender-role revolution. By contrast, Lambert (2009: 28) suggested that women’s groups had exercised their political muscle to push for change, and that when set in a historical context the push for change remained ongoing and would result in “more mother-friendly family policies, which by contemporary trends meant more ‘father-friendly’ social policies.

More recently, the push for change in Japan was significantly strengthened by Japanese fathering research perspectives. By 2004, studies were re-casting Japanese fatherhood with higher levels of father involvement owing to shorter working hours, increasing maternal employment levels and the growth of Japanese men’s associations advocating for higher levels of paternal involvement in childcare (Ishii-Kuntz, *et al.*, 2004, p.779). Moreover, contemporary studies moved beyond individual or psychologically focused investigations which problematized fathers’ agency and role identity towards a more structural focus on



work-related factors to produce findings, which showed that companies' accommodation of parental responsibilities increased father involvement (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013). On the basis of these studies and the critical finding that 'time availability' was strongly associated with higher levels of fathers' involvement in childcare, the Japanese fatherhood research fraternity recommended that the government should devote more efforts to "creating father-friendly" policies and reducing long working hours practices (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013, p. 268). Overall, the hypothesis that modern Japanese fathers were developing more gender egalitarian parenting ideologies was supported by data from a nationwide survey which showed that the number of men who considered paid work as the most important aspect of their lives had declined from 24% in 1978 to 8% in 2005 (Ishii-Kuntz, 2008, p. 9). The *National Women's Education Centre* carried out a similar survey which illustrated that the number of fathers who expressed a desire to spend more time with their children had increased from 27.6% in 1994 to 41.3% in 2004 (Porter and Sano, 2009, p.15). This finding led Porter and Sano to conclude that the number of "fathers who wish to spend more time with their families" was "undoubtedly increasing in number" and it was time to "change the social system to actualise these desires". On the basis of these types of findings, Japanese fathering epistemology recommended that it was "necessary to change both structures and attitudes" by promoting gender equality in employment, by promoting parental leave policies for child-rearing and family care work, by promoting gender equality in governments, companies and civic society institutions and by promoting father involvement and gender equality in media campaigns (Ishii-Kuntz, 2008, p. 9).

### **A Nordic turn in Japanese fathering epistemology and social policy**

Strong recommendations for structural change represent a Nordic turn in the social politics of Japanese fathering research away from a more psychological and agency-driven focus, which

problematized Japanese fathers' as weak, ineffectual and permissive salary-men, whose primary identities were forged in the work-place. The evidence emerging from the Nordic countries supported the recommendation that macro or structural frameworks such as the availability of child-care provisions and parental leave arrangements had the most effectual impact on improved levels of father involvement in childrearing and family life, including housework (Rush, 2015). Gíslason (2011) highlighted four conditions for take up of parental leave by fathers, based on Nordic experiences, which were individualisation or non-transferability in the form of father quotas, high wage compensation, flexibility of when leave could be taken and publicity in the media through government awareness campaigns. Scandinavian analysis highlighted the importance of the concept of individualization to fatherhood and gender equality debates, and the importance of depatriarchalisation to children's rights and child well-being (Rush, 2015). Gíslason suggested in a Nordic review of parental leave that "unless we focus more on men and their roles, we have come as far we can go on the gender equality front" (2011, p.13). Significantly for Japanese social policy, Swedish studies highlighted that individualised and non-transferable parental leave was found to enhance mothers and fathers interest in having larger families (Rush, 2015, 51).

## **Findings and Discussion**

The decade by decade review of epistemology and social policy served to illustrate that the push for work-life balance policies in Japan was rooted not only in the contemporary politicisation of low fertility rates but also in the push for gender equality by the Women's Bureau that stretched back to post WWII era. This type of historical perspective served to highlight the significance of interactions between epistemology and social policy to comparative studies of welfare state and to national variations in the social politics of fatherhood. This type of comparative social policy analysis offers a structural focus on welfare states and fathers' social citizenship rights as an alternative to more agency-focused

psychological and child development perspectives on fatherhood. The historical perspective contributed to theorisations of an epochal decline of patriarchal fatherhood that was spurred on by events in Japan after WWII and deepened by the efforts of the Women's Bureau, leftist political parties, trade unions, epistemological feminism and more recently epistemological fathering research perspectives. The historical perspective also helped to undermine stereotypical, a-historical, modern and heterogeneous images of Japanese fathers as slaves to their companies and Japanese mothers as compliant homemakers.

A major finding that emerged from the review is that from the mid-noughties epistemological fathering research perspectives began to depart from predominantly western influenced psychological concerns about weak and ineffectual fathers towards a more structural focus on fathers' social citizenship rights and on how family and labour market policies might improve fathers' capacity for increased involvement in child care and housework (Ishii-Kuntz, 2008). Another major finding is that traditionalist welfare and family ideologies, which were culturally embedded during the 1980s by the Nakasone administration, are beginning to fracture under pressure for change from epistemological and institutional demands for social policies to support gender equality and shared parenting. A central conclusion that emerged from the review was that normative social policy discourses aimed at promoting gender equality and father-friendly work-life balance arrangements were under-pinned by epistemological feminism and more latterly, fathering research perspectives, aimed at ending Japan's social norm of entrenched male-breadwinning and female homemaking (Osawa, 2011, p.2).

The push for gender equality in Japan was depicted by Schoppa (2009) as lagging forty years behind the push for gender equality in Sweden. However, Swedish feminism remained very active in the 1990s and the 2000s, and won long-standing demands for decommodified and individualized or non-transferable parental leave for fathers in 1995 and again in 2002 (Rush,

2015). Overall, the historical review highlighted that Japan was not necessarily lagging behind and was not impervious to what Therborn (2004) labelled as the growing influence of ‘global feminism’ from the 1960s. Indeed, within East-Asian epistemology on family policy, and fertility it is increasingly becoming recognized that the “political power of feminists” has had a supranational influence (Suzuki, 2013: 44, Ehara, 2013).

Overall, the study illustrated that the epistemological communities of family, gender and sociology researchers in Japan were continuing the challenge the patriarchal nature of salary-man familism by promoting gender equality, shared parenting and de-commodification for working fathers in the form of shorter hours and through access to non-transferable paid parental leave. In this way social scientists, trade unions and women’s groups were putting Japanese fatherhood and the welfare state in Japan to what Choi labelled as the ‘gender test’ (2007:12).

An interesting finding for future research is that instead of focusing on fathers’ influences on child development, the new Scandinavian research agendas are focused on how children, influence fathers’ caring practices and on how children, as active agents, contribute to the production of the adult world and their place within it (Rush, 2015, p.131). Two other significant findings emerging from the Nordic experiences are that that stern, critical or authoritarian fathers were rare or non-existent and that Swedish parents tended to be mild and gender-neutral disciplinarians and secondly that gender impacted most positively on children when parents acted as if gender didn’t matter (Rush, 2015, p.131). In this respect, the literature review for this study indicated that ongoing comparisons between fathering in Japan and Sweden might illustrate more convergences than divergences, and shed light on how improving social citizenship rights for fathers (to care) serves to reduce role strain between father and work identities and support transitions to fatherhood.

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