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# Hoping for a Phoenix: Shanghai Fathers and Their Daughters

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## Abstract

Intergenerational relationships and gender roles in China are in transition because of ideational and structural changes resulting from social movements and policies in the past half a century. Using a mixed-methods design, we examine Shanghai fathers' involvement in their adolescent daughters' lives. In contrast to traditional stereotypes, Shanghai fathers are nurturing and highly involved in multiple domains of their daughters' lives. They also have very high aspirations for their daughters, regardless of their own socioeconomic background. Shanghai fathers see providing emotional and financial support, and helping their daughters to achieve success in education as their most important roles. The behavior of Shanghai fathers can be best understood in the unique Chinese contexts of one-child policy, transition to market economy, and increasing globalization.

## Keywords

fatherhood, Chinese family, father involvement, education, only child

In traditional Chinese families, the relationship between fathers and sons is most central as sons are expected to carry the family name to continue the family line. Daughters, on the other hand, are regarded as eventually belonging to

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their husbands' families after marriage. As the old Chinese saying goes, a married daughter is like "water poured out of the bucket" (*jia chu qu de nü er, po chu qu de shui*). Thus, traditional Chinese families make little investment in daughters. According to Confucian doctrines, girls are expected to be completely obedient to their fathers and perform domestic services before marriage and be subordinate to and depend on their husbands after marriage. The most important responsibility of a father was to secure a good marriage for his daughter. As such, the emphasis for girls' upbringing had been on cultivating their beauty and virtues of obedience, modesty, and morality as exhibited in the infamous practice of foot binding for daughters. However, parent-child relationships and gender roles in contemporary China have changed significantly as a result of a series of social movements and state policies such as the reform of marriage and labor laws, the cultural revolution, the one-child policy, and the economic reform (Davis & Harrell, 1993; Whyte, 2005).

Since the 1990s, there has been a burgeoning volume of fatherhood research that shows an increasing level of fathers' involvement, albeit at an uneven pace, in children's lives in Western countries. Several reviews of this body of literature show a generally positive relationship between paternal involvement and a variety of children and young adult outcomes despite the fact that patterns vary by outcomes examined and by fathers' profiles (Lamb, 2010; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Fathers' involvement has been connected to children's fewer emotional problems (Carlson, 2006; Teachman, Day, Paasch, Carver, & Call, 1998), better psychological well-being (Videon, 2005), and less delinquent behavior and substance abuse (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006). There is also some work suggesting girls who have close relationships with their fathers have their first sexual experience later (Regnerus & Luchies, 2006) and have more confidence in their attractiveness with the opposite sex (Biller & Weiss, 1970).

Western literature has also shown a positive relationship between fathering and men's own psychological well-being, health, employment behavior, and their *societal generativity*, that is, the tendency to serve as a mentor, provide leadership in the community, or care for other younger adults (Eggebeen, Dew, & Knoester, 2010). Hence, fathering behavior can significantly implicate child and family well-being. However, little is known about fathers' roles in contemporary Chinese families. Today's China, particularly in urban areas, shares some characteristics of Western societies, such as mass education, high female labor force participation, and an increasing access to diverse global media and consumer goods. Yet different cultural, socioeconomic, and political contexts imply that changes seen in Western societies may not be directly transferrable to China. It is important to begin to understand the extent to

which contemporary Chinese men's relationships with their children, especially their daughters, have evolved in the face of rapid socioeconomic transformation under the socialist regime.

This article aims to contribute to the emerging international comparative literature on father involvement by drawing on surveys, focus groups, and in depth interviews with Chinese fathers and their daughters in one of the most modern, westernized contexts in China—Shanghai. Although Shanghai is at the forefront of development in China, a long history of traditional Chinese culture and social characteristics remains. Trends in Shanghai may provide a glimpse of what lies ahead for other areas in China. We address the following research questions in this article: (a) To what extent are Shanghai fathers involved in their adolescent daughters' lives? (b) What factors influence Shanghai fathers' involvement with their daughters? We start with a brief review of current state of fatherhood research and the Chinese contexts of father-child relationships, followed by a description of the methodology and results of our study, and end with a discussion about the limitations and implications of this article.

## **Trends, Conceptualization, and Determinants of Fathers' Involvement With Children**

Research in the West suggests that fathers are less involved with their children than mothers (Gauthier, Smeeding, & Furstenberg, 2004; O'Brien, 2005) and spend more time in certain caregiving tasks, particularly play, conversation, and leisure activities (Georgas, 2006; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). However, there is a trend of fathers becoming more emotionally involved with children and in day-to-day care than before (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Ladge, 2010; Howard, Curtin, & Fotina, 2003; Morman & Floyd, 2006), although, as many studies suggest, the breadwinner responsibility remains central in men's family roles and their identities (Riley, 2003).

Scholars have proposed different ways to conceptualize fathers' involvement. Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) in their early work suggested three levels of father involvement, including not only direct engagement with a child but also the time a father makes himself accessible to a child and the extent to which a father takes responsibility for arranging a child's activities such as medical visits, school or family events (Lamb et al., 1985). Pleck (2010) recently revised this conceptualization of paternal involvement to include three primary components (positive engagement, warmth and responsiveness, and control) and two auxiliary domains (indirect care and process responsibility). Other scholars conceptualize fathers' involvement in many different domains. For

example, Palkovitz (1997) generated 15 aspects of paternal involvement in cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains, including planning, communication, errands, maintenance, providing, teaching, availability, shared activities, protection, monitoring, affection, shared interests, emotional support, thought process, and caregiving. A common goal in these different conceptualization frameworks is to capture the many different ways a father can be involved with children beyond financial contribution and direct behavioral engagement.

Research has also examined the determinants of father involvement with children (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Pleck, 1997; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Some have attributed fathers' involvement to mothers' relative unavailability as a result of increased labor force participation (Veiling & Belsky, 1991). The identity theory explains father's involvement in terms of the significance they attach to their parental role (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Maurer, Pleck, & Rane, 2001). Still others have identified father's motivation, skills, confidence, and availability of family support and family friendly policies as factors that facilitate men's involvement with their children (Lamb, 1997; Maurer et al., 2001). Research has also found that parents' age, working hours, and socioeconomic status affect father's involvement. American and British studies suggest that more highly educated fathers tend to be more involved with their children (Eirini & Ann, 2003; Welsh, Buchanan, Flouri, & Lewis, 2004), especially in achievement-related activities (Yeung et al., 2001).

## The Chinese Contexts of Father–Child Relationship

Historically, the father is the undisputed head of the Chinese family. As Lynn (1974) notes, "The traditional [Chinese] family was patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal. The basic family concept was reverence, awe and duty of children toward parents, especially toward the father" (p. 33). In this sense, a father who expresses emotions may be seen as weak and emasculate. The image of a "strict father and kind mother" is also exemplified in the saying "a man drops blood but not tears," which emphasizes a tough and nonexpressive role in the family and community for fathers (Ho, 1987).

An important role that traditional Chinese culture has prescribed for fathers is to be a teacher to his children. However, the tradition emphasizes his teaching responsibility for sons, not for daughters, as exemplified by the old maxim "*zi bu jiao, fu zhi guo*" (it is the father's fault if a child is not taught properly) and "*wang zi cheng long*" (hope for a son to become a dragon, someone successful). In contrast, the traditional Chinese doctrine conveys the idea that "lack of talent is a virtue in woman" (*nü zi wu cai bian shi de*). The saying "*wang zi cheng long*" was later expanded to "*wang nü*

*cheng feng*” (hope for a daughter to become a phoenix). As dragons and phoenix are seen as the most auspicious and noble pair in Chinese culture symbolizing the emperor and the empress, this proverb carries the hope of parents for their daughters to marry someone prominent.

In the 1950s, the Communist Party’s commitment to bring gender equality to China, as epitomized by Mao’s proclamation of “women hold up half the sky,” resulted in the reforms of the Marriage and Labor Law. These reforms gave women legal rights to choose their own partners, to own properties, to gain education, and to have access to labor market opportunities under the principle of “same work, same pay” (Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, 1992). Recent research shows that most Chinese women now choose their own marriage partners (Ma, Shi, Li, Wang, & Tang, 2011), and women made up 46% of China’s total labor force in 2010 (Lin, 2011).

The vigorous attacks on Confucian doctrines during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) have undermined traditional parent–child relationships. Moreover, the one-child policy since 1979 has challenged the son preference tradition. Many Chinese families today, especially those in urban areas, invest all their resources in their only child regardless of the child’s gender. Being an only child means being the “only hope” of the parents to fulfill all their dreams and needs (Fong, 2002). Statistics show that gender differences at all stages of school enrolment have narrowed over time in China (National Bureau of Statistics, 2002). In 2009, almost half (44.5%) of those with university degrees were women (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

Few systematic studies have been conducted on Chinese fathers and the determinants of their involvement with children. Feng (2002) found that although Chinese fathers in urban areas are more actively involved with children than before, particularly in leisure activities and chatting, the breadwinner role has remained central to men’s identities and masculinity. A qualitative study of 39 married couples in Beijing has also suggested that the traditional breadwinner role has remained evident as both husbands and wives consider men who fail in their career as being “incapable,” “lacking ambition,” and “relying on wives for financial support” (Zuo & Bian, 2001, p. 1127). A recent study on 872 Shanghai fathers and 880 mothers under the age of 65 has shown that fathers with higher education are more involved in child care (Zhang & Xu, 2008).

## Research Design

This study uses data collected in 2008 and 2009 in Shanghai, the most populous city in China, with a residential population of more than 19 million (Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2010). Shanghai provides an interesting context

for observing how father–daughter relationships have changed given the dramatic socioeconomic and policy changes in China. Perception of men in Shanghai is a very unique one. Contemporary Shanghai society stresses both traditional views of male strength through work and men’s affectionate care at home. Shanghai men have a reputation for being henpecked, a subject which has been much discussed in public media (Long, 1998). A specific Shanghai term, *madasao* (which means doing household chores such as shopping, washing, and cooking), is often used to describe a typical Shanghai man who is devoted to family life. Many strongly criticize Shanghai men, accusing them of not being manly, as exemplified by a book titled *I Rather Be Dead Than Be a Shanghai Man* (Qin, 2004). Others, on the other hand, highly praise Shanghai men for being caring to their wives and children (Liu, 2003). The notion of an involved and affectionate father, therefore, is not an unfamiliar one to many Shanghai men. We thus expect Shanghai fathers to be more involved with their daughters than other Chinese men, although adolescent daughters are likely to be closer to their mothers than to their fathers due to the deeply rooted Chinese gender ideology. Given the one-child policy and the highly valued human capital in a very competitive market economy in contemporary China, we expect Shanghai fathers to have high expectations of their daughters’ educational attainment and to be very involved in their achievement-related matters.

To gain a more holistic understanding of fathers’ involvement in their daughters’ lives, we combine both quantitative and qualitative data collected in focus groups, surveys, and semi-structured interviews from both fathers and daughters. This design provides a rich, multidimensional account that can enhance the validity of findings if results from different methods and responses from multiple informants corroborate each other (Creswell, 2003).

The study sample includes two age groups of girls: one in Year 2 of junior high school and the other in Year 2 of senior high school. This enables us to discern fathers’ involvement patterns by daughters’ age. We gained access to daughters and their fathers through 17 secondary schools with the snowball sampling technique. Schools provided “a ready-made frame of sampling in terms of age, sex, educational level, geographical area” (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 107). To include fathers and daughters from a wide range of backgrounds, we included different types of schools in different boroughs, ranging from vocational schools, private schools, and ordinary public schools to key schools. Among these 17 schools, 9 were junior high, 7 were senior high, and 1 was a vocational school. Four focus groups were first conducted with girls in two junior high schools and two senior high schools to discuss their fathers’ roles in their lives. Following that, 818 questionnaires with both close-ended and open-ended questions about daily family practices were distributed to the

girls who also took them home for their fathers to complete. In total, 773 girls and 598 fathers completed the questionnaires. Finally, 17 in-depth interviews exploring both fathers' and daughters' understanding of their relationships were conducted, including eight father–daughter pairs and one girl whose father did not take part in the study.

## **Characteristics of the Sample**

In all, 60% of daughters are aged 13 to 14 years old and 40% of them are 16 to 17 years old. 88.4% are the only child whereas 12% have siblings, and most of the girls live with both their parents. Most fathers in the sample were born or grew up in the 1960s during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). During those 10 years, the national university entrance examination was discontinued, and university education came to a halt. Instead of going to school, many young people were busy shouting slogans and reciting Mao's quotations (Wang, 2008). It is therefore not surprising that the majority of the fathers in our sample received only secondary school or lower education. 27% of the fathers in our sample have college degrees (see Table 1) because many returned to school to pursue more schooling later. This is a little higher than the Shanghai statistics that show 24.9% of males and 20.4% of females had been to college (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Compared with the national average of 7.4% of males and 5.9% of females having college degrees (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009), Shanghai residents have a much higher educational level.

Father's property ownership is also quite high, with only 5% of them not owning property. 85% of the fathers are Shanghai's permanent residents. There is very little difference between fathers' and mothers' education levels and occupations. About a quarter of the parents are in managerial or professional positions, 18% in manufacturing and agricultural work, and the rest are service and office workers. Data also show that Shanghai parents generally work very long hours, with about half of them working an average of 8 hours or more per working day. 75% of the girls live in dual-earner families.

## **Analytical Strategy and Measures**

We adopt a mixed-method analyses approach, interweaving quantitative and qualitative data (Plano Clark, Huddleston-Casas, Churchill, Green, & Garrett, 2008). We first describe fathers' involvement level in relation to that of mothers in multiple domains of their daughters' lives. Then, we examine factors that affect fathers' involvement with their daughters. The main dependent variable is father's involvement with daughter.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Study Sample

Variable	%	n
Daughter's characteristics		
Age (years)		
13-14	59.8	462
16-17	40.2	311
Only child	88.4	676
Family characteristics		
Dual-earner household		
Yes	75.0	548
No	25.0	183
Father's characteristics		
Age (years)		
32-40	52.8	408
>40	47.2	365
Family structure (living arrangement)		
Daughter live with both parents	84.2	643
Daughter live with father only	4.5	34
Daughter live with mother only	5.8	44
Daughter live with neither father nor mother	5.6	43
Property ownership		
None	5.0	34
1	59.3	400
>1	35.7	241
Education		
Primary	4.1	24
Secondary	68.5	405
University	27.4	162
Occupation		
Managerial (public or private sector)	10.6	68
Professional	14.1	90
Administrative	12.8	82
Small business	9.1	58
Business/service sector	35.5	227
Manufacturing and agriculture sector	17.7	113
Unemployed	0.2	1
Working hours		
≤8	48.5	375
8-10	36.9	285
>10	14.6	113

(continued)

**Table 1. (continued)**

Variable	%	<i>n</i>
Father's education value (1 = low, 3 = high)		
Mean = 1.99		758
Mother's characteristics		
Education		
Primary	5.1	30
Secondary	68.8	404
University	26.1	153
Working hours		
≤8	52.0	402
8-10	30.1	233
>10	17.9	138
Occupation		
Managerial (public or private sector)	4.8	27
Professional	21.5	120
Administrative	15.6	87
Small business	7.3	41
Business/service sector	35.4	198
Manufacturing and agriculture sector	14.8	83
Unemployed	0.5	3

Our choice of father involvement indicators is guided by previous literature to capture different ways a father can be involved in his daughter's life. The survey data provide information of fathers' involvement in the following domains: (a) emotional closeness, (b) supervision, (c) direct time engagement, (d) warmth, (e) communication, and (f) guidance and mentoring (see the appendix for a detailed description of these covariates). With the qualitative data, we also examine other important dimensions, such as father's financial provisioning, thought process, and their protective roles.

In the survey, father's emotional closeness is measured by an index created by taking the mean of 12 items from both the father's and daughter's questionnaires (ranges from 1 to 4), which include closeness to each other, the extent to which they know each other, how often father and daughter communicate with each other about their dreams and concerns, and the frequency with which the girl seeks her father's help in her social life and studies. The alpha coefficient for the 12 items is .842. Father's supervision

measures father's knowledge of his daughter's whereabouts after school, which ranges from 1 to 4. Direct time engagement is measured by taking the means of the following four items: time spent together on a weekday, time spent together on a weekend, the frequency with which father and daughter have breakfast together in a week, and the number of times they have dinner together in a week. Each of these items ranges from 1 to 4, with 4 indicating the highest frequency. The alpha coefficient for the four items is .785. Father's warmth is examined by taking the mean of the frequency of the times that the father praises his daughter. Communication is measured with five questions: whether they often talk about studies, hobbies, future career plans, fashion and music, and emotional issues. An index is created by adding these five questions relating to fathers' communication with their daughters. The alpha coefficient for the four items is .605. We also examine father's involvement in his daughters' studies which measures whether father has ever given advice on school or subject choice (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*).

Independent variables include covariates that are identified as important determinants of fathers' involvement in the literature, including daughter's characteristics (whether she is 13-14 years old or 16-17 years old; whether she is an only child) and father's age, education, occupation, and work hours. We also attempt to capture father's gender ideology, his motivation and confidence, and his value on education as mediators of how involved a father is. The value of education to a father is measured by taking the mean of his daughter's reports of his interest level in her studies and how frequently he helped with her studies. An index of father's level of confidence in fathering is created by taking the mean of two questions that assess the extent to which the father thinks he is a good father and how much he thinks his daughter can learn from him, ranging from 1 to 3, with 3 indicating high confidence. The alpha coefficient for these two items is .569.

In the multivariate analyses, we control for other family characteristics including property ownership, family structure, and whether parents are Shanghai natives or migrants. Mother's characteristics (education, working hours, and occupation) are also controlled for. However, these characteristics are not statistically significant and do not contribute significantly to the model, so they are not shown in our final models. The quantitative analyses are bolstered with narratives from open-ended questions in the survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with both fathers and daughters to gain a richer view of the father-daughter relationship.

## Results

### *Fathers' Involvement Relative to That of Mothers'*

Quantitative data from the survey show that mothers are significantly more involved in their daughters' lives than fathers in all domains (see Table 2). Daughters feel emotionally closer to mothers than to fathers. Mothers spend more time with their adolescent daughters in daily activities both on weekdays and on weekends. Mothers also have a better idea of their daughter's whereabouts and give them guidance in studies and communicate with them more frequently than fathers do.

This pattern is corroborated by the qualitative data. Most girls in the focus group note that their mothers take care of their daily lives. In-depth interviews reveal that the traditional gender ideology explains largely why mothers are more involved and closer to adolescent daughters.

Some fathers express a clear gender divide in the role of mother and father. Father Li who has a master's degree distinguishes his role from the mother's role:

I think mother's responsibility lies in the micro aspects of child's life such as the child's psychological aspects. She needs to talk more to the child and be closer to the child. But as a father, to my own understanding, [their role should be] something more macro or long term, to be an example for the family and to provide a good living environment for the child.

Children's gender is also a contributing factor. Father Ma, a migrant with senior high school education, thinks that he would have been able to communicate better if he had a son: "Girls are not like boys; if she is a boy, I can say whatever I wish to talk about."

### *Fathers' Involvement in Multiple Domains*

The survey data show that despite their lower involvement relative to mothers, these Shanghai fathers are generally very involved with their daughters in a wide range of ways. As seen in Table 2, 76% of the daughters say they are "close" or "very close" to their fathers and 67% say their fathers "generally know" or "know very well" of their whereabouts. 53% of the girls spend more than 3 hours with their fathers on a weekday and 67% spend more than 3 hours with them on a weekend day. About half of the girls had dinner together with

**Table 2.** Comparison of Girls' Involvement With Mother and With Father

	Mother (N = 767) %	Father (N = 766) %
Emotional closeness <sup>a</sup> (1 = low, 4 = high; How close are you to your mother/father?)		
Not close at all	1.3	3.8
Not very close	7.6	20.8
Close	42.3	49.2
Very close	48.7	26.3
Mean (SD)	3.38 (0.69)	2.98 (0.79)
Time spent together <sup>a</sup>		
Time spent together on last school day <sup>a</sup> (hours)		
<1	16.3	22.2
1-2	15.5	24.3
3-5	40.7	33.1
>5	27.6	20.4
Mean (SD)	2.80 (1.02)	2.52 (1.05)
Time spent together last Sunday <sup>a</sup> (hours)		
<1	22.2	17.9
1-2	24.3	15.3
3-5	33.1	23.7
>5	20.4	43.1
Mean (SD)	3.34 (0.97)	2.92 (1.14)
Frequency of breakfast together last week <sup>a</sup>		
None	36.4	45.4
1-2 times	29.1	26.5
3-4 times	9.9	8.9
>4 times	24.5	19.3
Mean (SD)	2.23 (1.18)	2.02 (1.15)
Frequency of dinner together last week <sup>a</sup>		
None	9.3	14.1
1-2 times	13.3	17.0
3-4 times	14.1	16.9
>4 times	63.4	52.0
Mean (SD)	3.32 (1.02)	3.07 (1.12)
Supervision <sup>a</sup> (1 = low, 4 = high; Does your mother/father know where you go after the school?)		

(continued)

**Table 2. (continued)**

	Mother (N = 767) %	Father (N = 766) %
Not at all	5.9	12.5
Not very well	10.9	20.9
Generally know	36.4	33.9
Know very well	46.8	32.6
Mean (SD)	3.24 (0.87)	2.87 (1.01)
Guidance/mentoring (Does your mother/father give you advice on school/subject choices?)		
Yes	74.5	68.1
Communications (Issues discussed with parents, multiple choice)		
Daughters' study	73.7	60.7
Daughters' hobby	57.7	47.6
Daughters' career plans	64.9	55.0
Fashion and music	38.7	20.3
Emotional issues	38.1	15.5

<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant between father and mother according to chi-square tests.

their fathers more than four times in the week. Many girls also often talk to their fathers about their studies (60%), hobbies (47%), and plans for the future (55%), but less frequently about fashion (20%) and emotional issues (15.5%). A majority of the girls (68%) say they have sought advice from their fathers regarding which university or subjects to choose.

When asked what fathers thought they could do best for their daughters, 241 out of 432 fathers mentioned items are caring for and giving emotional support, financial provisioning, and communicating with daughters.

Some girls note that their father's care goes beyond direct engagement to being nurturing and influencing them at a cognitive level. As one girl writes, "He cares for me a lot even though he is not always around." Another girl writes, "My dad is busy working and comes back home only once a week, but he brings lots of things for us, thinks about us a lot, and gives me lots of love."

Many girls value and enjoy a warm relationship with their fathers as shown in the following comments: "He will make me let my bad feelings out," "He always praises me and gives me confidence," "Sometimes, he is quite humorous, and he brings happiness to me," and "We live happily and can joke with each other."

Similarly, the qualitative data show that emotional closeness is highly valued by fathers. Father Shen, a college degree holder, recalls his happiest moment and comments that a father should be like a friend to his child:

Like last night both my wife and I had to work overtime and my two kids went to after-class clubs. So after that we went to have dinner in a restaurant. That time, we were friends, not parents and children. We were very casual and just randomly talking and chatting. I felt very happy. Really! That moment, I was happier than if I'd won a prize or got a bonus.

Father Zhan also comments, "Father–daughter relationship should be very close. In China, people prefer boys to girls. But at the same time, there is a saying that girls are parents' cotton sweater and boys are their shirts."

The "cotton sweater" here means that daughters are close and warm to their parents' hearts, whereas "shirt" describes boys as good in appearance but not necessarily close to parents.

Several girls emphasize their fathers' supportive and protective roles: "When a daughter confronts difficulties in her life, she will always go to her father. Father is someone she can rely on and who can support her." Another girl comments, "He knows how to protect me and has a big shoulder for me to rely on."

We see little evidence of the traditional stereotype of "strict father and kind mother" as many girls mention their fathers' "soft" side. Girl Zhan (aged 13 years with graduate parents) compares her parents:

My dad is much more open than my mum. He is very funny. And we can play together and talk to each other. For example, he is not like my mum when talking about my school life. My mum tries to find the mistakes and bad things. I can talk to my dad about everything. Also, he accompanies me to play badminton and do other sports.

An older girl in the focus group described her father's participation in the housework:

As soon as my dad gets back from work, he goes to the market to buy food and does the cooking. My mum does not cook, only watching TV by the side. After he finishes cooking and then we have dinner together. Occasionally, my mum will do the laundry, but mostly my dad does it. He would never say why I have to do so much, he is just happy doing everything.

## *Factors Affecting Fathers' Involvement*

To understand what factors affect father's involvement, we conducted multi-variate analysis on multiple domains of father's involvement. Table 3 presents findings based on the survey data.

Survey data show that fathers are more involved with younger than with older daughters, and that they know more about their younger daughters' whereabouts, spend more time with them, and are warmer to them.

The interview data illustrate this difference by girls' age pointing to the biological and psychological changes in adolescent girls making some older girls no longer feel the same degree of intimacy with their fathers as with their mothers and peers. Girl Shen (aged 16-17 years, whose father works in a university as a student support officer) reasons why she turns to her mother when she encounters problems, especially about her physical and emotional changes:

When I was little, he was like a hero. But now, there is a bit more distance. After all, there are many things I can't talk about with him. For example, the biological changes, surely I would tell mum. And things like emotional problems, I think men are not very good at understanding these things.

Survey data in Table 3 also show that fathers' long working hours, occupation, and household assets are negatively associated with the amount of time they spend with their daughters. Fathers in management jobs and those who own one or more properties spend less time with their children. For fathers, work takes priority and the pressure to survive and prosper in the workplace puts great demands on their time. As noted above, survey data show that half of the fathers in the sample work more than 8 hours per working day. In the in-depth interviews, most fathers cite work as the main reason why they are not able to spend more time with their daughters. As Father Chen, an officer in a foreign trading company, admits,

Society now is different. It is developing so fast. The pressure comes together. As a result, I have to use 80% of my time on work. I spend less time on family.

Father Ma, a construction worker, shares how his demanding job has affected his time with his daughter:

**Table 3. Estimates of Factors Affecting Various Aspects of Fathers' Involvement With Daughter**

Variable	Emotional Closeness	Supervision	Time Engagement	Warmth	Communication <sup>a</sup> (Odds Ratio)	Guidance <sup>a</sup> (Odds Ratio)
Daughter's characteristics						
Age of daughter: Whether 13-14	0.194** (0.046)	0.063 (0.082)	0.302** (0.063)	0.185* (0.084)	0.099 (0.112)	1.000 (0.223)
Whether only child	0.111 (0.067)	0.222 (0.120)	0.096 (0.092)	0.012 (0.123)	0.109 (0.166)	0.833 (0.341)
Father's characteristics						
Father's education; university and above	-0.115* (0.055)	-0.104 (0.099)	0.013 (0.076)	0.165 (0.101)	-0.109 (0.136)	0.930 (0.289)
Reside with fathers	0.152(0.079)	0.374** (0.142)	0.813** (0.109)	0.148 (0.146)	-0.016 (0.195)	1.834 (0.364)
Father's occupation Managerial	-0.076 (0.073)	-0.170 (0.130)	-0.406** (0.100)	-0.171 (0.133)	0.066 (0.178)	0.566 (0.345)
Father's work hours <sup>b</sup> ≥10 hours	-0.035 (0.060)	-0.125 (0.107)	-0.162 (0.082)	0.016 (0.110)	-0.095 (0.148)	0.573* (0.280)
Father's age >40 years	0.033 (0.051)	-0.022 (0.091)	0.161* (0.070)	0.109 (0.093)	-0.077 (0.125)	0.655 (0.261)
Father's confidence (1 = low, 4 = high)	0.094** (0.034)	0.147* (0.061)	0.155** (0.046)	0.062 (0.062)	0.195* (0.084)	1.390* (0.164)
Father's education value (1 = low, 3 = high)	0.401** (0.039)	0.525** (0.070)	0.296** (0.053)	0.504** (0.071)	1.040** (0.096)	5.460** (0.211)
Household assets (ref = no property)						
1 property	0.044 (0.101)	-0.215 (0.180)	-0.356* (0.138)	-0.365* (0.184)	0.234 (0.250)	1.199 (0.501)
≥2 properties	0.034 (0.104)	-0.210 (0.186)	-0.410** (0.142)	-0.252 (0.189)	0.192 (0.258)	0.903 (0.512)
R <sup>2</sup>	.246	.189	.290	.137	.220	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> log likelihood	.228	.170	.273	.117	.202	567.398
N	570	569	569	566	564	570

<sup>a</sup>Logistic regression.

<sup>b</sup>Missing data indicator included in the model.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

There was a period that I needed to get up around five or six o'clock and come back home around seven or eight at night. Like things that her teacher reported to me about her stuff at school, I reminded myself to talk to her once I got back home. But she was doing her homework at night and I was very tired after work.

Many fathers see financial provisioning as their main duty to their daughters. The deprived environment that the fathers grew up in motivates them to prioritize this role. After transitioning from a command to a market economy, it is now possible and "glorious" to accumulate private wealth, and most parents strive to do that. Father Chen says, "I just want to try my best to let her enjoy. In my time, we didn't have such good living conditions. It was very difficult even to buy a bicycle."

Making more money is also seen by many fathers as the main avenue to express their love for children and to ensure their daughter's educational success. As Father Li reasons,

When you talk about love, it is not as empty as air. I do really like my daughter, and I will buy my daughter some clothes, this is a way [to express myself] by using materials. This is more powerful than saying "I love you, daughter" by one hundred times.

Both survey and in-depth interview data reveal that these Shanghai fathers have extremely high aspirations for their daughters. In the survey data, 92% of fathers expect their daughters to go to university and 84% hope that their daughters would get into a "key" university. In the interviews, fathers consistently stress the value of education as the most useful asset they can give to their daughters and some see their daughters' academic success as one of their most important responsibilities.

These high aspirations are partly fuelled by the fathers' own life experiences and from the globalization process. Having missed the opportunity for schooling when they were sent to the countryside to be "re-educated" during the Cultural Revolution, these fathers have strong desires to see their daughters succeed and, in a way, fulfill their own dreams. As Father Wang, who has a junior high school education, puts it, "My degree is not recognized by society and no one will acknowledge people who only go to junior high school. So I wish she could study hard." He says his disappointment motivates him to encourage his daughter to exceed him:

My main responsibility is to *peiyang* her to go to school, and go to university.

The Chinese word “*peiyang*” was frequently used by fathers in the interviews and on the questionnaire. “*Peiyang*” has a broad meaning, which can be interpreted as “to cultivate.” It not only encompasses helping their daughters to achieve academic success but also to develop good character. For example, fathers talked about how they could help their daughters become a “good,” “useful,” “responsible,” “earnest” person, “develop their intelligence,” “develop their ways of thinking,” and “develop their personality or interests.”

Father Li, who returned to school to pursue his master’s degree as a mature student, expresses his goal to ensure that his daughter could exceed him. He comments,

Let me give you an example: I am very keen on her maths and I buy her exercise books. Every time I buy one, I buy two copies. I give one copy to her to do first. When she gets it wrong, I give her another copy to do. Or when she finishes the first one, I give her another copy to do again.

Many fathers also see the increasingly fierce competition that their daughters will meet in a globalized market economy, unlike the old system of “iron rice bowl” with guaranteed jobs and benefits which they grew up in, as a reason for their daughters to study hard. Father Shen vividly describes the situation:

The competition in the society is getting fiercer and fiercer. Shanghai is a city which is open not only to the whole of China, but also open to the world. She is not only facing the competition among Shanghai people, but people from all over China and the world. For example, when there is a job available, she may not wish to do it because she is only given 1,000RMB, but migrants will do it just to stay in Shanghai.

Fathers try very hard to help in different ways; some help by searching for more information online about school choices, others help by checking their homework, or just being there while the girls do their homework. Fathers who have the benefit of having had a good education want their daughters to exceed them and are usually equipped to coach their daughters. Father Zhan, who has a master’s degree, helps his daughter improve her grades, and his daughter feels closest to him in the family.

One older girl in the focus group also shares, “Basically, my improvements in mathematics, chemistry and biology are all due to my fathers’ help.”

However some girls are annoyed by their fathers' endless talk about study. Father Li's daughter, who attends a very good school and performs quite well academically, comments, "[when we talk] he only talks about study, study, and study! . . . He is too strict with me and has a very high expectation that is really beyond my ability."

Some fathers who are not well educated try to help in different ways. Several girls in the focus group appreciate their fathers' efforts. As one says,

My dad can seldom help me in my studies, it is a fact. But I remember when I was in the last year in junior high school I studied until very late every night and my dad accompanied me. I was very touched by that. Also, he waited for me outside whenever I went for after-class tutorials.

Survey data (in Table 3) show that the value a Chinese father places on education is a key factor affecting his involvement in all domains, regardless of his educational level. When a father values education and has confidence in himself as a good father, he not only provides more guidance in his daughter's studies but is also more emotionally close to her and warmer, provides more supervision, and spends more time and communicates more frequently with her. In the survey, 61% and 27% of fathers, respectively, "agree" or "strongly agree" that they are good fathers, with only 12% disagreeing. The in-depth interviews reveal that fathers' education is related to their confidence in being a good father. Father Wang, a single father who did not finish senior high school, was frustrated with his own limited capability to father because of his education.

Father Mei, a factory worker who only finished junior high school, is another example of a father who feels he has failed as "a good father." His daughter is addicted to the Internet, hangs out with bad peers, ran away from home a few times, and wanted to quit school. He simply does not feel he can help and would not communicate with his daughter, citing his low educational level as a reason. He says,

She does not want to listen to me. Besides, I cannot teach her anyway. I do not know the English and Mathematics they learn at school. How could I teach her anything?

## Discussion

We find that Shanghai fathers, like fathers in Western societies, have lower involvement in their daughter's lives than mothers. However, in contrast to the stoic stereotype, many contemporary Shanghai fathers have a warm and nurturing relationship with their daughters and are highly involved in many aspects of their daughters' lives. They have strong fatherhood ideologies; many desire to play an important role in their daughters' lives and consider themselves to be doing so. Many function as teachers of skills and morals and as protectors. The "main breadwinner" role remains central to Shanghai fathers' identity. Fathers' time spent with daughters is largely constrained by their work.

The fathering behavior in Shanghai can best be understood in view of the historical contexts of contemporary China as the country moves from a feudal system to a communist society and subsequently to a market economy. Parent-child relationships and gender roles have become more egalitarian as a result of reforms under the Chinese communist government since the 1950s. Since the late 1970s, when the country initiated the one-child policy and economic reform, many parents have concentrated their investment in their only child regardless of the child's gender. In recent years, rapid privatization and globalization have greatly enhanced the value of human capital and increased competition for life opportunities. These social forces together have reduced the gender bias in fathering behavior that has been deeply rooted in traditional Chinese families and prompted Shanghai fathers to be highly concerned with their daughters' academic success.

The lack of educational opportunity and material resources available to Shanghai fathers when they were young have motivated them to try their best to provide for their daughters. Cultivating the next generation largely means ensuring their academic success, and many fathers believe that being a good provider is the most effective way to support their daughters and to express their love. Shanghai fathers' high aspirations for their daughters' educational attainment, regardless of their socioeconomic status, is the most significant predictor of their involvement level in their daughters' education. The saying "*wang nü cheng feng*" (hope for daughter to become a phoenix) takes on a new meaning in contemporary Shanghai to convey parents' high expectations of their daughters' success based not on marrying a good husband but on the daughters' own academic achievement. Shanghai fathers' high involvement in education-related matters is in contrast to the relatively low involvement by Western fathers in this respect (Yeung, 2004).

These results underscore the importance of situating fathers in their macro socioeconomic contexts, in addition to the psychological and micro-level

factors that most fatherhood theories to date focus on, when theorizing fathering behavior. The data used in this study have many limitations. The relatively small and nonprobability sample means that our findings are not generalizable to all Chinese fathers in Shanghai or fathers in other areas. Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the data prevents us from investigating changes over time or conducting rigorous causal analyses to address potential reverse causality among covariates. Thirdly, the lack of information on father–son relationships also makes comparison of fathers' relationships with daughters and sons impossible. Despite these limitations, triangulation of data collected with multiple methods and from both fathers and daughters shed some light on changes in intergenerational relationships and gender roles in Chinese families under major ideational and structural changes in recent decades. These results contribute to international comparative research on fatherhood. Future work on Chinese fathers' family roles based on a representative sample with a longitudinal design will allow more adequate observations on changes in family dynamics in a transitional economy in China.

## Appendix

### The Dependent Variable and Mediating Variable

Questions	Codes
Emotional closeness	
(F) How close are you to your daughter?	1: not close at all 2: not very close 3: close 4: very close
(D) How close are you to your father?	
(F) How often did your daughter seek your help in her studies in the last month?	1: none 2: <2 times 3: 2-3 times 4: >3 times
(F) How often did your daughter seek your help when she had problems with her social life in the last month?	
(F) How often did you talk to your daughter about your life in the last month?	
(F) How often did you talk to your daughter about your dreams in the last month?	
(F) How often did your daughter talk to you about her dreams in the last month?	

(continued)

**Appendix (continued)**

Questions	Codes
(F) How often did your daughter talk to you about her worries in the last month?	
(F) How often did you talk about your concern for your daughter in the last month?	
(F) How well does your daughter know about you?	1: not at all 2: not very well 3: know generally 4: very well
(F) How well do you think you know your daughter?	
(D) How well does your father know you?	
<b>Supervision</b>	
(D) How well does your father know of your whereabouts?	1: not at all 2: not very well 3: know generally 4: very well
<b>Direct time engagement</b>	
(D) How much time did you spend with your father in the last school day?	1: <1 hour 2: 1-2 hours 3: 3-5 hours 4: >5 hours
(D) How much time did you spend with your father last Sunday?	
(D) How often did you have breakfast with your father in the last week?	1: none 2: 1-2 times 3: 3-4 times 4: >4 times
(D) How often did you have dinner with your father in the last week?	
<b>Warmth</b>	
(F) How often did you praise your daughter in the last week?	1: none 2: <2 times 3: 2-3 times 4: >3 times
<b>Communication</b>	
(D) Do you often talk about study?	0: no
(D) Do you often talk about hobby?	1: yes
(D) Do you often talk about your career plans?	
(D) Do you often talk about fashion and music?	
(D) Do you often talk about emotional issues?	

(continued)

**Appendix (continued)**

Questions	Codes
<b>Guidance</b>	
(D) Does your dad give you advice on which university/subject you should choose?	0: no 1: yes
<b>Education value</b>	
(D) How much interest does your father show in your study?	1: not much 2: a little
(D) Does your father help you with your study?	3: a lot
<b>Confidence level</b>	
(F) Do you agree that your daughter can learn a lot from you?	1: totally disagree 2: generally agree 3: totally agree
(F) Do you agree that you are a good father?	

Note: F = father's response; D = daughter's response.

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