



Japanese and Taiwanese Fathers' Perspectives of Father Involvement

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How to cite this paper: Yoko Ito, Satomi Izumi-Taylor, Chia-Hui Lin. (2022) The Impact of Emotional Interaction Design on Museum Displays. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 6(4), 530-538. DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2022.12.005

Received: September 27, 2022

Accepted: October 26, 2022

Published: December 2, 2022

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Abstract

Father involvement influences young children's learning and development. Few studies, however, have attempted to examine Japanese and Taiwanese father's perspectives of fathering. The purpose of this study was to examine Japanese and Taiwanese fathers' notions about this subject. The participants consisted of 82 fathers of five years old on the main island of Japan and 95 fathers of five year olds from Taichung, Taiwan. The Japanese and Taiwanese fathers were professionals from lower to middle-class families. The data came from written answers of these fathers' awareness of their roles, their involvement in childrearing, and sources of childcare knowledge. The results of quantitative analysis revealed that Japanese and Taiwanese fathers' perceptions of fathering were both similar and different. Their awareness of the father's role, involvement in childrearing, and resources for childrearing information were closely related to their own cultural and social contexts. The implications for early childhood educators are presented.

Keywords

Fathering, Childrearing, A Comparative Study

1. Introduction

Fathering influences children's development (Ito et al., 2017; Yeh et al., 2021), and an examination of fathering contributes to early childhood education (Ito & Izumi-Taylor, 2013; Yeh et al., 2021). Fathering refers to "the amount of time spent in activities involving the child" (Fagan & Palm, 2004, p. 45). Previously, Asian fathering research focused on China, Korea, and Japan (Shwalb et al., 2010), but it is beneficial to expand such research "to reveal the complexity of father involvement regardless of cultural context" (Yeh et al., 2021, p. 375) by including Japanese and Taiwanese fathers. Japan and Taiwan have experienced modernization, economic growth, and globalization and have witnessed noticeable changes and outstanding advances in childcare (Izumi-Taylor & Ito, 2017; Li et al., 2017; Yeh et al., 2021). Although these countries are geographical neighbors, they have their own notions about childcare which impact people's everyday lives and affect societal values and attitudes (Maclean & Symaco, 2017). By reviewing Japanese and Taiwanese fathering, educators can optimize childcare, providing educators with unique opportunities to see the dynamic change of family roles in Asia. Culture determines people's views of fathering and influences people's values, beliefs, and attitudes (Ito & Izumi-Taylor, 2013; Yeh et al., 2021).

The family's structural and compositional patterns (Halme et al., 2009; Okada, 2007) and an increase of working mothers with young children (Japan Institute for Labour and Policy and Training, 2021; Yeh et al., 2021) are related to fathering. Balancing work and home life of men can influence fathering (Bruning, 2020; Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office [GEBCO], 2020), and examining the father's role related to community expectations and cultural aspirations in different countries enhances educators' understanding of fathering (Lamb, 2010).

2. Literature Review

Studies of Japanese fathering have been growing (Bruning, 2020; Feining, 2020; Hattori, 2020; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019; Poff, 2021; Tamura et al., 2021; Terui et al., 2020), and Japanese people have become aware of the importance of fathering (Shwalb et al., 2010). Okada (2007) categorizes the five dimensions of fathering: involvement with children, family relations, marital relations, economic support, and parental personal fulfillment. Japanese fathers' support systems in childrearing (empowerment, partnership, balancing work and life, and networking) are critical in supporting fathering (Kozaki, 2017).

A Japanese trend of fathering is called "Ikumen" (cool dads) (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2019; Hattori, 2020; Tatsumi, 2018; Tsutsu, 2019). Ikumen combine work and childrearing, and they are viewed as super dads. The Japanese slang dictionary defines ikumen as dads who actively take the initiative in childcare (Nihongo Zokugo Jisho, 2010). In 2008, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) started a new campaign to support fathering by offering a brochure about work-life-balance, and this brochure recommends that fathers balance work and childcare (MHLW, 2018). A website, "Fathering Japan" (2021), advocates a joy of fathering, and one example is giving baths to children (Ichikawa, 2008; Murphy, 2016). This is a common practice, and fathers read books and play with bubbles to promote father and child communication.

Recently, younger Japanese fathers are more interested in childcare than those in the previous generations (Bruning, 2020; Hattori, 2020; Poff, 2021; Tamura et al., 2021). Thus, the government has been supporting fathering by promoting legislation for paternity leave since 2005 (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2009), and the MHLW (2018) and has launched a new program supporting fathering. There have been more Japanese fathers (58.2%) wanting to participate in childrearing and household chores (BICSPA, 2014). However, 37.8% of fathers reported that they returned home after 9 p.m. and could not spend time with children. They wish to care for children but must work harder since they are breadwinners (Tatsumi, 2018), and mothers are children's primary caregivers because of a lack of affordable childcare facilities (Izumi-Taylor & Ito, 2017).

Taiwan has moved towards rapid modernization about the role of fathers (Leung & Chen, 2017). It has experienced substantial social changes, including changes in family structure, from intergenerational to primarily nuclear households, and changes in gender role ideology (Chaung et al., 2019; Leung & Chen, 2017). Thus, the government has made efforts to shorten the parental gap by implementing parent involvement programs and curricula at public schools (Ministry of Education, 2009) and promotes egalitarian gender roles to increase fathering (Ho et al., 2013). The Gender Equality in Employment Act (Council of Labor Affairs [CLA], 2008) passed and extended paternal leave to five days (CLA, 2014). Fathers' higher level of childcare might be related to their democratic culture where household chores are less gendered (Chuang et al., 2019). Taiwan's recent reform policies support fathering (Yeh et al., 2021). In nuclear Taiwanese families, fathers are involved in preschoolers' lives, including everyday chores, leisure and school activities (Tsai & Lee, 2015). When fathers are involved in children's lives, their children's social skills and learning attitudes are highly developed.

One cross-cultural study of Japanese and Taiwanese parents regarding childcare (Mori et al., 2012) found that more Japanese fathers thought mothers were responsible for looking after children than did Taiwanese fathers. More Taiwanese parents reported that childcare and housekeeping chores should be shared by both parents than did their Japanese counterparts. Taiwan's parenting and gender roles have changed, and fathers are viewed as partners in caring for children (Ho et al., 2010). Because more mothers of young children work outside the home, the labour participation rate has increased among these women. Fathers have actively contributed to children's everyday lives and shared parenting roles. With maternal encouragement, Taiwanese fathers from dual-income families are involved with children's lives (Kuo & Chen, 2012).

Another cross-cultural study of American and Taiwanese parenting found that Taiwanese parents were actively involved in care giving but less involved in other activities, including leisure, or social activities with children compared to US parents (Newland et al., 2013). Parents' educational backgrounds influenced their involvement in children, revealing that less involvement was related to parents with lower education levels (Yeh et al., 2021). Taiwanese fathers from dual-income families with higher education tended to get involved in children's lives, participating in leisure time, being responsive to children's needs, and expressing their love to children (Ma, 2003).

3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine Japanese and Taiwanese fathers involvement. Although Japanese studies on fathering have increased (Bruning, 2020; Hattori, 2020; Poff, 2021; Tamura et al., 2021), such studies in

Taiwan are scarce (Ho et al., 2010). Because both Japanese and Taiwanese early childhood education has changed to improve childcare (Izumi-Taylor & Ito, 2017; Leung & Chen, 2017), studying these countries' fathering contributes to the current literature on predictors of childcare. To understand "the broader, more inclusive conceptualization of fathers' roles" (Lamb, 2010, p. 4), there is a need to examine fathering in different cultures. Thus, this study was conducted to fill this need. Two research questions guided this study:

- 1) How are Taiwanese and Japanese fathers' perspectives of fathering similar or different?
- 2) What influences their views of fathering?

4. Methods

4.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 82 fathers of five year olds on the main island of Japan and 95 fathers of five year olds from Taichung, Taiwan (see Table 1). These fathers were professionals from low-to-middle-class families. The respondent pool was selected based on convenience of access and availability (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) and was identified as fathers who "may have the best information with which to address the study's research questions" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 40).

As shown in Table 1, Taiwanese parents were younger than their Japanese counterparts and information about fathering came from written answers of Taiwanese and Japanese fathers. Many Japanese mothers were homemakers, while their Taiwanese counterparts participated in the workplace. Over 30% of Taiwanese participants lived with family members, and about 40% had family members nearby. Contrarily, Japanese participants lived away from their family members. Approximately 80% of Taiwanese participants had grandparents' support in childcare. Ninety percent of Japanese participants did not have babysitters, and 70% of Taiwanese responded likewise.

In both Taiwan and Japan, the typical family consisted of more than one child, and there was no significant difference among the two groups of participants regarding the number of children in one family. A majority of Taiwanese mothers who worked outside the home had helpers, whereas most of the Japanese mothers were homemakers. Of these participants, there was a significant difference between Japanese and Taiwanese mothers' working conditions ($p < 0.001$) because more than 30% of Taiwanese participants had parents or grandparents living in their homes and 40% of family members living nearby to help with childrearing. However, none of the Japanese participants had family members living near their homes ($p < 0.001$).

In Taiwan, there was a significant difference in the responses regarding availability of childrearing help from the grandparents ($p < 0.05$), demonstrating that more Taiwanese participants could depend on grandparents as compared to the Japanese participants. Another significant difference in the use of babysitters among these participants ($p < 0.001$), indicated Taiwanese participants used babysitters more than did their Japanese counterpart.

4.2. Instrument

The first author created the questions regarding the following issues: awareness of the father's role, involvement in childrearing, and sources of childcare knowledge (Ito et al., 2011; Ito & Kurokawa, 2009). We asked participants to rate eight items regarding fathering, including being a leader of the house, a breadwinner, a loving parent, a caregiver, a supportive spouse, and a teacher who informs about life, the culture, and social norms to children. More questions regarding fathering came from one study (Ito & Izumi-Taylor, 2013), with 15 questions about changing diapers, providing milk, and caring for sick children. The questions about sources for childcare information came from a study by (Benesse Institute for the Child Sciences, Parenting, and Aging [BICSPA], 2011), identifying information about how fathers obtained help regarding childrearing. We also asked about additional sources for information, including the wife, relatives, grandparents, etc.

5. Results

The instrument for the quantitative analysis study regarding awareness of the father's role was an eight-point rank scale survey questionnaire. We gave the highest awareness 8 points, and the second highest 7 points, etc. Table 2 indicates the results of a t-test.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participant

	Japanese		Taiwanese		χ^2 test
	N=82	%	N=95	%	
Father's age					
25-29	0	0.0%	2	2.1%	
30-34	1	1.2%	9	9.5%	
35-39	24	29.3%	34	35.8%	
40-44	38	46.3%	30	31.6%	
45-50	13	15.9%	13	13.7%	
<50	5	6.1%	6	6.3%	
NA	1	1.2%	1	1.1%	
Mean	41.8		40.02		
Mother's age	N=82	%	N=95	%	
25-29	0	0.0%	2	2.1%	
30-34	6	7.3%	18	18.9%	
35-39	26	31.7%	42	44.2%	
40-44	40	48.4%	28	29.5%	
45-50	6	7.3%	4	4.2%	
< 50	0	0.0%	1	1.1%	
NA	4	4.9%	0	0.0%	
Mean	39.5		37.8		
Number of children	N=82	%	N=95	%	
1	26	31.7%	20	21.1%	
2	47	57.3%	60	63.1%	
> 3	9	11.0%	15	15.8%	
Mean	1.79		1.96		
Mother's occupations	N=80	%	N=92	%	
Working	4	5%	64	69.5%	
Part-time working	12	15.0%	3	3.3%	***
Stay-at-home	64	80.0%	25	27.2%	
Living grandparents	N=82	%	N=93	%	
Living with grandparents	0	0.0%	33	35.5%	
Grandparents living close by	17	20.7%	34	36.5%	***
No grandparents living close by	65	79.3%	26	28.0%	
Having childcare support from grandparents	N=82	%	N=93	%	
Yes	68	63.0%	75	79.8	*
No	40	37.0%	19	20.2	
Using babysitters	N=82	%	N=95	%	
Yes	5	6.1%	27	28.4%	*
No	77	93.9%	68	71.6%	

$p < 0.001$ ***, $p < 0.01$ **

Table 2. Awareness of Father's Role

	Japanese		Taiwanese		t	p	t-test
	N=82	SD	N=95	SD			
A leader of the house	4.10	2.74	5.78	2.82	-3.853	0.000	***
A breadwinner	4.17	2.94	3.15	2.49	2.430	0.016	*
Teacher of knowledge and culture	4.66	2.06	4.89	1.84	-0.747	0.456	
Caregiver	4.50	2.47	3.60	1.96	2.603	0.010	*
Teacher who teaches social norms	4.31	1.90	5.16	1.86	-2.867	0.005	**
Parent who enjoys children	4.89	2.06	4.39	1.84	1.619	0.107	
Teacher who shows to live life	4.45	1.98	4.41	1.87	0.134	0.894	
Parent who supports wife	5.01	2.25	4.01	2.41	2.744	0.007	**

$p < 0.001$ ***, $p < 0.01$ **

Table 3. Involvement in Child-rearing

	Japanese		Taiwanese		t	p	t-test
	N=82	SD	N=95	SD			
Diaper changing	2.37	0.58	2.72	0.50	-4.345	0.000	***
Giving milk	1.89	0.73	2.62	0.57	-7.366	0.000	***
Caring for sick children	1.89	0.63	2.61	0.61	-7.688	0.000	***
Feeding	2.19	0.57	2.44	0.54	-3.045	0.003	**
Helping change clothes	2.30	0.51	2.66	0.50	-4.807	0.000	***
Putting to sleep	2.22	0.61	2.51	0.54	-3.218	0.002	**
Bathing a baby	2.30	0.70	2.61	0.53	-3.387	0.001	**
Giving showers, helping bath (father is not taking shower or bath with children)	1.95	0.76	2.35	0.65	-3.699	0.000	***
Taking bath with children	2.68	0.50	2.18	0.67	5.687	0.000	***
Reading books to children	2.26	0.57	2.36	0.61	-1.428	0.155	
Playing with them outdoors	2.51	0.55	2.72	0.45	-2.820	0.005	***
Buying children's food	2.00	0.65	2.04	0.64	-0.437	0.662	
Buying children's clothing	1.70	0.72	2.42	0.52	-7.629	0.000	***
Buying toys and books	2.11	0.59	2.62	0.49	-6.183	0.000	***
Taking children to an picking them up from school	2.00	0.47	2.54	0.54	-6.967	0.000	***
Participating in school's events	2.32	0.47	2.47	0.58	-1.803	0.073	
Writing notes on school's parent note-book	1.26	0.49	2.36	0.59	-13.442	0.000	

$p < 0.001$ ***, $p < 0.01$ **

Japanese fathers viewed their roles as breadwinners, caregivers, and partners who helped their wives (see Table 2), indicating they valued their roles as helpful partners. In comparison, Taiwanese fathers valued their roles as leaders of the house and teachers of their children. However, they did not value their roles of breadwinners or caregivers. This might be related to the fact that Japanese fathers were considered to be breadwinners because their wives did not work outside the home, and that in Taiwan, both parents worked outside of the home, earning dual incomes. Japanese and Taiwanese fathers appeared to value their roles as teachers who provide knowledge and culture to their children.

Taiwanese fathers' involvement in purchasing children's clothing, toys, and books, and participating in school's events was significantly higher than that of Japanese fathers (see Table 3). Although Taiwanese fathers did not emphasize their roles as caregivers, it seemed that they were involved in their children's everyday care. By Comparison, Japanese fathers were involved in bathing children. Japanese fathers' involvement was closely related to supporting their wives as partners, and Taiwanese fathers were involved in educational issues, including writing

notes to school.

Table 4. Resource of Information for Childrearing

	Japanese		Taiwanese		t	p	t-test
	N=82	SD	N=95	SD			
Wife	2.79	0.46	2.73	0.55	0.809	0.420	
Relatives/grandmother	1.62	0.66	1.93	0.68	-3.374	0.001	**
Friends	1.65	0.57	1.96	0.66	-3.351	0.001	**
Read books	1.65	0.70	2.13	0.71	-4.389	0.000	***
Read magazines	1.65	0.65	1.93	0.66	-2.790	0.006	**
Internet	2.20	0.64	2.46	0.65	-2.814	0.005	**

p < 0.001 ***, p < 0.01 **

Both Japanese and Taiwanese fathers gained childrearing information from their spouses (see Table 4), but Taiwanese fathers also obtained information from other sources, including relatives/grandmothers, friends, books, magazines, and the Internet. They used the Internet more than did their Japanese counterparts to gain information. We found significant differences in those five resources (relatives/grandmothers, books, magazines, and the Internet) between Japanese and Taiwanese fathers. Taiwanese fathers were active in obtaining their childcare information from various resources.

6. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that these fathers' involvement is both similar and different. We will present these fathers' perceptions in terms of the father's role, involvement in childrearing, and resources for childcare information.

6.1. Father's Role

Each country's social and political environments are closely related to fathers' perceptions of their roles as fathers (Hattori, 2020; Ito & Izumi-Taylor, 2013; Ito et al., 2017). Japanese fathers work, and their spouses stay home to care for children, partially because Japanese affordable childcare facilities are lacking (Izumi-Taylor & Ito, 2017). In many instances in Taiwan, both fathers and mothers work outside the home. Because Taiwanese parents are dual-income earners, the grandparents support childrearing by living with them or living nearby.

Taiwanese fathers consider themselves to be teachers and leaders of the house, and they appear to teach their children lessons about life and their culture. These findings are supported by others' studies stating that Taiwanese fathers actively contribute to the everyday lives of their children (Chaung et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2010; Kuo & Chen, 2012). Japanese fathers perceive their roles as breadwinners and caregivers (Okada, 2007; Tatsumi, 2018) and take responsibility in some aspects of childrearing, including bathing their children (Ichikawa, 2008; Ito et al., 2017; Murphy, 2016). Japanese fathers enjoy childrearing, but their roles are limited because of long working hours (BICSPA, 2014; Bruning, 2020; Yeung, 2013). However, they consider themselves as partners with their wives in childcare (Bruning, 2020; Kozaki, 2017; Okada, 2007; Tamura et al., 2021), but this is not the case for their Taiwanese counterparts.

6.2. Involvement in Childrearing

There were more Taiwanese mothers working compared to their Japanese counterparts, and this might influence how fathers view fathering. This could be partially related to the Taiwanese government's active involvement in research on working mothers and gender equality studies (Chuang et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2010; CLA, 2008; 2014). Since both Taiwanese parents work, grandparents support childrearing by being nearby or living with them. However, many Japanese couples with non-working mothers do not have access to grandparents, and fathers are unable to care for their children because of their work (BICSPA, 2014; Bruning, 2020), thus, balancing work and life is

important in fathering (GEBCO, 2020; Goldstein-Godani, 2019; Kozaki, 2017).

Taiwanese fathers perceive fathering to be part of their everyday practices, and they are involved in childcare (Chuang et al., 2019). Likewise, Japanese fathers are involved in bathing children, changing diapers, clothing children, and playing with them (Ichikawa, 2008; Ito et al., 2017; Murphy, 2016). In spite of their busy and long working hours, they try to be involved in childcare as much as possible by helping their wives (Bruning, 2020; Kozaki, 2017; Okada, 2007).

6.3. Resources for Childrearing Information

Both Japanese and Taiwanese fathers actively seek childrearing information from various sources. These fathers appear to gain such information from their wives and marital relations, and partnerships are important in fathering (Kozaki, 2017; Okada, 2007). Although many Japanese and Taiwanese fathers use the Internet and other resources to obtain childrearing information (Fathering Japan, 2021; Ito et al., 2017), more Taiwanese fathers collect such information from relatives, friends, books, and magazines. It appears that Taiwanese fathers are more active in gaining childrearing information than their Japanese counterparts. Such networking is desirable in fathering (Fathering Japan, 2021; GEBCO, 2020; Kozaki, 2017).

6.4. Implications and Limitations

The implications of this study may be both theoretical and practical regarding fathering. In theory, when studying fathering in different cultures, we understand how culture and political conditions influence it. In a practical sense, sociocultural situations mediate how fathers perceive father involvement. Therefore, both public and private sectors, families, and educators need to work together to support fathering. Supporting fathers' abilities to network with a variety of resources might be helpful. Disseminating childcare information among fathers may impact fathering greatly. This study promotes the understanding of the factors influencing fathering to inform future educational programs.

Limitations of this study are threefold: Taiwanese fathers are younger than their Japanese counterparts; a majority of Japanese mothers stay at home; and many Taiwanese grandparents participate in childrearing. A matching of participants' demographics is needed

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