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Resituating Parenthood: Emergent Subjects and Shifting Power Relations in Urban East Asian Families

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Introduction

1. An important feature of modern states has been the governance of not only individual human beings, but of individuals at the aggregate level, namely the population, and its wellbeing in terms of, for example, size, health, education, prosperity and composition regarding sex, age, ethnicity and so forth. This form of governance is nowadays often taken for granted. Michel Foucault termed it 'bio-politics.' Bio-politics signifies the attempt, 'to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birth rate, life expectancy.'[1] This new form of governance has been closely linked to the emergence of liberalism and the hegemonic position of the market, and it serves both to ensure the 'freedom' of individuals and the legitimation and interest of the state. It is typical of bio-politics that power is exerted not in vertical ways, but horizontally,[2] thereby creating self-disciplining subjects in relation to institutions, norms and ideologies, and various bodies of 'truth' and what is 'normal.' Seemingly independent groups and individuals contribute to exerting power in non-vertical ways, and parents constitutes one of these groups.[3]

2. Compared to the West, bio-politics has emerged as a form of governance in East Asia in more recent times, but it is clearly a concept useful for capturing the shifting relations between the state and the individual, as well as the self-disciplining of individual subjects, especially in urban East Asia. Just like in the West, bio-politics in East Asia has emerged in tandem with rapid societal and demographic transformations characterised by urbanisation, the transition to a market economy and increasingly competitive labour markets. Two interlinked phenomena subject to bio-political governance that largely concern parenthood and parenting are *fertility* and *human capital accumulation*. Fertility rates in East Asia have plummeted, with Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea having some of the lowest fertility rates in the world (at 1.3, 1.2 and 1.3 respectively). China's fertility rate of 1.6 is also well below the replacement level (2.1).[4] Transition to low fertility has been accompanied by changes in family life, with increasing numbers of nuclear and single households, delayed marriage and childbearing, changing intergenerational relations and parenting styles, and so forth.[5] The size, structure and 'quality' of the population are issues of great concern in many parts of East Asia, as the region is becoming enmeshed with the global economy, and competitiveness increasingly hinges on 'appropriate' human capital.

3. Concerns over fertility and human capital accumulation are also linked to changing intergenerational resource flows. It is well known that resource flows from parents to children tend to expand in modern societies.[6] In many parts of contemporary East Asia, parents with sufficient means invest substantial resources and energy in their children's upbringing. This unprecedented flow of resources from parents to their young children is both resulting from and resulting in new norms and expectations of motherhood and fatherhood, and is likely to play out differently depending on sociocultural context, social policy and existing family traditions. At the same time, competitive labour markets, scarcity of jobs and limited public pension systems also underpin the need for parents to invest in the human capital of their children, a situation that only intensifies in low fertility contexts, where one child may be expected to provide old-age support to both parents and grandparents.[7]

4. To date, little research has been conducted into understanding how emerging parenting norms and practices intersect with gender and generation in a quickly changing East Asian context. In light of this, articles in this special issue on *Parenthood, Gender and Generation in Urban East Asia* explore how parenting strategies and the meaning of (having) children are reinterpreted and renegotiated, how gendered norms and ideals about parenthood are changing, and what bearings these have on family formation and practices. The reason for focusing on urban areas is that, as opposed to rural ones, they are more integrated in the market economy, the formal labour market, and they display a higher density of both formal educational institutions and after-school learning centres. The overall aim of this special issue is twofold: 1. to contribute a nuanced understanding of the empirical realities of shifting norms and practices surrounding parenting and parenthood in contemporary urban East Asia, and 2. to further develop theoretical insights which contribute to understanding the intersections between gender and generation when it comes to parenting and parenthood.

5. To meet these aims, the six articles featured here—each constituting a case study—were collected through an open call under the guest editorship of Kristina Göransson and Lisa Eklund. The articles cover a number of key themes in parenting and parenthood in urban China, Hong Kong, Singapore[8] and the Republic of Korea (hereafter referred to as South Korea), such as: family formation, reproduction and childrearing in relation to aspirations of continuous upward social mobility; the transformation of parenting arrangements and strategies, and their implications for gender equality in the family and the labour market; the role of population and family policies in shaping images of the 'value' of children; in what ways 'desirable' and 'undesirable' reproductive behaviours are constructed in state policies and/or in everyday life; the changing ideals of motherhood and fatherhood; and the renegotiation of intergenerational expectations and obligations. These contributions represent diverse social science fields, ranging from psychology, sociology, anthropology and social work to gender studies. Methodologically, they are based mostly on qualitative methods and data. One article has adopted a mixed-methods approach, deriving findings from both ethnographic and survey data.

6. In this introduction, we will not attempt a full review of existing research on parenting in contemporary East Asia. Rather, we will provide a set of theoretical lenses that are useful for

understanding the changing norms, practices and ideals of parenthood. We will further illustrate how the articles that follow speak to each other as well as to previous research of relevance to the topic of this special issue. We conclude by offering directions for future research on our topic in East Asia and possibly beyond. First, however, we present a brief description of the six individual articles.

Featured articles

- Xuan Li's piece explores how contemporary urban Chinese men see themselves as fathers, their expected involvement in childrearing, and their ideal parenting styles in relation to recent changes in the institution of Chinese patriarchy. The analysis is based on *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, a reality show that features father-child interactions between male celebrities and their first-born preschool children during touristic adventures undertaken without the mothers.

- Mario Liong's study is based on interviews with divorced fathers from diverse class backgrounds in Hong Kong. He investigates how these men renegotiate their paternal role and how wider cultural and policy factors affect their experiences and aspirations as fathers.

- Kristina Göransson's contribution is an ethnographic study of Singaporean middle-class women who have opted out of the formal labour market to better support their children academically. How are their investments of time, energy, emotional and economic resources in their children's education explained, and what bearing does this have on norms of motherhood?

- The article by Yoonhee Kang explores the interplay between motherhood and children's education in the context of transnational migration, using the case of South Korean educational migrants to Singapore. The study is based on ethnographic data and in-depth interviews with Korean migrant mothers.

- Lisa Eklund's article is a sociological study of how fertility desires among young adults in higher education are shaped in relation to gender, sexuality and intergenerational relations in urban China. The data derives from in-depth interviews with higher education students in Beijing.

- Finally, the article by Esther Goh, Bill Tsang and Srinivasan Chokkanathan explores an understudied dimension of grandparents as caregivers. The study is based on a mixed-methods approach using both surveys and ethnographies of families in Xiamen, China. The rich data illuminates what factors contribute to positive and/or negative intergenerational dynamics when older parents reside under the same roof as their children while caring for their only grandchild.

Theorising parenthood

7. Although parenting strategies, preferences and practices can be regarded as something private that take place within the family, this special issue argues that parenting is also a public issue. We propose that parenting strategies need to be understood in a larger framework in which the family is regarded as a site of state politics and ideology. We take inspiration from studies in sociology, anthropology and gender studies that discuss parenthood in terms of state power as well as bio-political governance.[9] We also believe that drawing from existing research on gender and welfare regimes—research that focuses on how the design and implementation of polices are both gendered and 'gendering'—is important for understanding the evolving norms and practices of parenthood.[10] Yet, as the notion of bio-politics reminds us, it would be misleading to understand these as merely a function of macro-level processes. Therefore we propose that more agency-driven theoretical concepts such as 'doing family' and 'intensive parenting' are useful for analysing contemporary parenting cultures, but that state ideologies—as reflected through government policies—are important backdrops against which parenting norms and practices are reconfigured. It is also important to consider the outcomes of different parenting styles and choices. Hence, the concept of stratified parenting is introduced, a concept that bridges macro and micro perspectives.

'Doing' parenthood

8. Sociological studies on changing notions of the family have been heavily influenced by the work of David Morgan and his concept of 'doing' family, which points at the importance of everyday activities in shaping and setting boundaries for what constitutes the family.[11] The concept of 'doing family' resists the idea that family should be understood *a priori* as a unit constituted by a heterosexual nuclear couple. Rather, what constitutes a family depends on what people *do*, regardless of blood-ties and affinity. Inspired by the concept of doing family, we suggest that 'doing parenthood' offers a way to examine how people resist, accept, or negotiate ideologies and norms of family and parenting in their everyday lives.

9. Parents' investment of time, emotion, energy and money in raising children has been analysed in terms of *intensive parenting styles*,[12] which can be regarded as one way of doing parenthood. Intensive parenting styles are typical of modern societies and characterised by parents investing substantial resources into their children's upbringing and education. In many parts of contemporary East Asia, where educational success is perceived as crucial for upward social mobility, middle-class parents increasingly engage with such parenting styles.[13] The notion of intensive parenting enables us to capture how changing norms of parenting are entwined with ideologies and politics of human capital accumulation, as well as the subjective quest for upward social mobility.

10. The ways in which the arrangements of parenting activities around children's education are stratified in terms of class, gender, age, and so forth is also relevant. For this perspective, we draw on the concept of 'stratified reproduction,' originally coined by Shellee Colen.[14] It

refers to how 'reproductive tasks are accomplished differently according to inequalities that are based on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in a global economy,'[15] and we suggest that parenting strategies are both stratified and stratifying, not least in relation to the quest for human capital accumulation, and the interest of the family for social mobility purposes. This may be particularly so in familialistic welfare regimes where public childcare and education are not provided in a universal manner, and access to these and other care services are dependent on the class position of the parents.

Situating parenthood in relation to welfare and care

11. It is well documented that welfare regimes have implications for decision-making with regards to timing of parenthood.[16] Social policy also affects power relations within the family and parenting strategies, as their ideological and normative implications shape the 'social imaginary that defines the rights and responsibilities' of family members.[17] Of key importance in understanding how welfare regimes impact on parenthood is how care is provided, and by whom; different welfare regimes attribute roles and responsibilities in providing care differently between the state, the market, the community and the family.[18]

12. Depending on the welfare regime, families take varying degrees of responsibility in providing care. The shifting responsibilities of families can be captured in the different processes of (de/re)familialisation. Defamilialisation occurs when many care functions are removed from the family, implying that individuals can receive care and achieve wellbeing through state programs. Refamilialisation captures the process whereby social policies extend care responsibilities to families,[19] whereby the state retrenches welfare provision, and families are left to organise care among their members or purchase care on the market. Where many of the welfare regimes in Western Europe have broadly undergone defamilialisation,[20] Asian countries have followed a more familialistic track, which was intensified due to welfare retrenchment reforms in the 1990s.[21]

13. Familialisation often entails clear gendered divisions of roles and responsibilities, not captured in the term itself.[22] Therefore, we propose the concepts *gender contract* and *intergenerational contract* to better capture the different roles, responsibilities, rights, expectations and obligations between genders and across generations that the six articles here bring to light, even though these two concepts are not explicitly used in all the articles. The gender contract and the intergenerational contract bring into sharper focus the standards and expectations of women and men across generations in terms of their paid and unpaid work and care,[23] including (grand)parenting tasks. These are produced and reproduced not only at the interpersonal or family levels, but also through social policy and laws.[24] Familialistic welfare regimes typically follow the male breadwinner model, where men are predominantly earners and women predominantly carers.[25] Familialistic welfare regimes also tend to involve care provision across generations, in which grandparents, predominantly grandmothers, have an important role to play in providing care for their grandchildren.

14. Familialism in the East Asian context is rooted in 'Confucian' family values. Previous research

has found that patriarchal Confucian culture has contributed to a gender contract among parents, in which mothers take a leading role in boosting the human capital of their children, while fathers take a more controlling and indirect role.[26] Moreover, sometimes referred to as the 'Confucian welfare states,' regimes in much of Asia still rely on family as the basic unit to provide social and economic security for the elderly, presupposing an intergenerational contract marked by continuous resource flows, financial and material, from adult children to their parents. Such an intergenerational contract must be understood in relation to welfare regimes that promote the ongoing importance of familial obligations, but also the specifically Confucian sense of intergenerational relations, whereby grown children are expected to reciprocate their parents' care. Hence, contrary to the assumption that modernisation is accompanied by the reversal of intergenerational resource flows to the advantage of the younger generation,[27] the expansion of resources that middle-class parents spend on their young children has not meant any disruption in the support of elderly parents.[28] Instead, the middle generation is increasingly squeezed by the pressure to fulfil responsibilities to both parents and their own children.

Emergent subjects and shifting power relations

15. In the following section, we consider the findings of our featured articles in relation to the theories presented above as well as to previous research relevant to the topic of this special issue. All the case studies demonstrate how the ideas and practices of parenthood are entangled with different forms of power relations. Of special interest, then, are the emergent themes of doing parenthood and shifting power relations—both between women and men, and between generations.

The quest for advancing population quality

16. As mentioned above, reproduction and parenthood are fundamental aspects of bio-political governance. States directly and indirectly try to control not only the size and structure of the population, but also its quality through human capital accumulation. The enhancement of human capital is regarded as a prerequisite for fostering productive workers and consumers who are able to compete on the global market. The societies studied in this special issue have invested heavily in enhancing the quality of their populations from a human capital point of view.[29] These countries have invested in competitive formal education systems and frequently rank among the top-performing countries in international student assessment tests and ranking lists. Buying into the 'new normal' of human capital accumulation, middle-class parents increasingly raise their children to be highly marketable commodities or 'bundles of skills,' who can succeed in the rapidly changing global market (see especially Yonghee Kang in this issue). Parents are increasingly understood as neoliberal subjects—rational calculating beings—judged by their ability to plan and arrange their children's daily activities, including their schooling and private lessons, as well as by their scientific knowledge about child-rearing and education. This has meant that parenting styles in East Asia have received much attention internationally, particularly in relation to children's academic achievements. The authoritarian style of 'tiger moms' (mothers who raise their children in a presumably

'Chinese' way), '*kiasu* parents' (Singaporean parents who invest substantial time and energy in their children's education), and 'goose fathers' (Korean fathers who stay behind while mothers accompany the child(ren) to study abroad) are all examples of these.

17. Research indicates that practices around preparing one's children—often a single child—for the future, coupled with widely held ideas of what constitutes responsible parenting, fall most heavily on mothers.[30] This suggests that parenting remains highly gendered, both in terms of expectations and actual time spent. Mothers tend to take on the lion's share of practical support, sometimes at the expense of their own working lives, as the articles by Kristina Göransson and Yoonhee Kang vividly illustrate. These articles further demonstrate how the emphasis on human capital is reflected not only in formal education systems and a booming private tutoring industry, but also in the widespread conviction among parents that substantial resources and sacrifices are fundamental to securing top grades in school.

18. The pressure on parents to make the 'right' decisions and carefully plan their children's activities emanates from the expertise-based approach typical of intensive parenting, suggesting that bio-politics manifests itself in horizontal ways.[31] Indeed, Göransson's study illustrates how the 'scientisation' of parenting is not restricted to expert literature but in fact has been internalised and reproduced by parents themselves as part of their 'identity work.'[32]

Transnational family arrangements and educational migration in neoliberal times

19. The quest for human capital accumulation is also reflected in educational migration, a practice entangled with a growing global education market, in which East Asian countries increasingly aspire to become regional 'education hubs,' attracting talented students from around the world.[33] Even in the face of this development, there is a dearth of ethnographic research that explores how increasing competition in the education market influences parenting strategies around children's education and development. Kang's article makes an important contribution in this regard as it explores the interplay between motherhood and children's education in the context of transnational migration, by examining the case of Korean educational migrants in Singapore.

20. Although many previous studies have claimed a clear contrast between the 'new motherhood' based on rationality and entrepreneurship and the more conventional motherhood based on caring, Kang's study demonstrates that South Korean migrant mothers understand and frame their new mothering practices in traditional notions that emphasise the affective dimension of motherhood. Despite the rational, entrepreneurial roles these migrant mothers play, the expertise in their managerial role is validated and authorised, *only if* it is enacted *with heart*, which is often called mother's 'heartfelt care.' Thus, Kang's study identifies a cultural contradiction in neoliberal motherhood; the very unmarketability and emotionality of maternal care are believed to be the most valuable resources with which a mother should manage her child. This is a paradoxical consequence of the neoliberal emphasis on entrepreneurship and the marketability of its subjects as the most desirable

attributes of personhood, attributes that offer the best fit in rapidly changing markets. Thus, Kang's study shows resistance in the midst of conformity to neoliberal ideals of human capital accumulation, with clear implications for the gender contract.

Parenthood and fertility preferences

21. To boost local fertility rates, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea have long pursued pronatalist policies—providing child allowance, high-parity birth bonuses, parental leave etc. For example, as shown in the article by Göransson, Singapore has extended parental leave and introduced a Baby Bonus Scheme that provides cash incentives to encourage childbearing. Likewise, in China, where the one-child policy was replaced by a two-child policy in November 2015, the state is mobilising to encourage a second child among families. Several provinces and municipalities are now revising their regulations governing fertility in order to promote a two-child norm. Maternity leave has been expanded and, in some cases, paternity leave as well to provide a more conducive situation to having an additional child.[34] In addition, incentives for late childbearing have been rescinded as newly married couples no longer enjoy the privilege of an extra marriage holiday that was previously tied to 'late marriage.'

22. Still, as Lisa Eklund found in her study, marshalling the resources required to raise a child and foster human capital accumulation among the younger generation is regarded as a serious impediment to wanting more than one child. Ideals and expectations around doing parenthood can also deter people from wanting children in the first place.

23. Moreover, the preference for fewer children has not been evenly accompanied by a corresponding decrease in son preference, since investment in the human capital of sons is still regarded as generating better results than daughters, at least from the perspective of labour market opportunities. All societies under study have experienced skewed sex ratios at birth (SRB). While skewed SRB peaked in South Korea and Singapore in the mid-1990s and is now back to normal, it persists in China and Hong Kong, despite state interventions to prevent prenatal sex-selection. Particularly in China, the surplus male population looms as a potential threat to social stability, and has been identified as a population quality concern. But this has not translated into shaping fertility preferences in favour of daughters, as we see in Eklund's study. Eklund instead identifies a two-child norm among young adults in urban China, an ideal partly driven by the quest to have both a son and a daughter.

Stratified parenting

24. The issues of stratified parenting and work-family balance are important themes in doing parenthood and the shifting power relations it entails in terms of the gender contract and the intergenerational contract. In terms of paid labour and the gender contract, the societies studied diverge; while female labour force participation has hovered around 50 per cent in Hong Kong and South Korea since the 1990s, it increased in Singapore from 50 per cent in 1991 to 59 per cent in 2014, while it dropped from 73 to 64 per cent in China over the same

period of time. Common for all countries,[35] however, is that women are often expected to continue to shoulder family responsibilities. Previous research shows how women negotiate, contest and reinterpret motherhood to balance these conflicting expectations.[36] How and to what extent women's decisions to leave the labour market reflect their experiences of and aspirations for parenthood is addressed in both Göransson's article on Singaporean mothers' educational work and Kang's piece on Korean educational migrants in Singapore. These studies show that the responsibility to ensure a child's human capital accumulation largely falls on the shoulders of women, with implications for work and the gender contract. The father's part is primarily to enable the mother to quit her full-time employment for the sake of the children, which represents a gender contract based in a male breadwinner / female caregiver model.

25. Parenting strategies and parental care are not only stratified along gender lines, but also in terms of how class, ethnicity and generation intersect. Göransson's ethnographic study from Singapore reveals how care is becoming stratified, where families employ domestic workers to undertake basic care work, while the mother focuses on more 'important' work, such as supporting children in their studies. The strategy of hiring domestic workers is contingent upon the availability of cheap labour from poorer regions, something which reproduces global inequalities. Parenting strategies and arrangements can therefore also be stratifying, increasing social inequalities.[37] Likewise, the assumption that parents are compelled to invest substantial resources and time to support their children's development and education likely cements existing social inequalities and decreases social mobility across generations.[38] As demonstrated in the articles by Göransson and Kang, while competitive education systems encourage parents to go the extra mile for their children, the possibility of making time available to spend with one's children clearly is a matter of financial capacity and class.

26. Furthermore, studies by Kristina Göransson and Mario Liong in this issue both illustrate cases in which the grandparents' role in supporting the raising of children is stratified. Both Göransson's study of Singapore and Liong's study of Hong Kong point to the recent development that grandparents are not considered capable and well-informed enough to be 'trusted' to perform certain child-rearing tasks, in particular the educational work that supports children academically and developmentally. This is especially so for the segment of the middle class that can afford to purchase care on the market, either paying for preschool or extra school activities.

27. Yet, at the same time, grandparents' support can enable women to work in the absence of affordable childcare services,[39] something which can facilitate a dual earner model, meaning that the gender contract is dependent on the intergenerational contract, which can be gendered itself, as shown by Goh, Tsang and Chokkanathan (see further below). Grandparents' involvement in childcare can thus free up time that parents can use to generate incomes to further enhance their social mobility.[40] Still, ideals about educational work and intensive parenting mean that many women actively choose other parenting arrangements, as reflected in lower labour market participation among women after they

have become mothers.[41] This also needs to be viewed in the context of limited childcare services,[42] typical of familialistic welfare regimes.

28. Parenting strategies can also be stratifying in terms of generating gendered child subjects, fostering children with the 'appropriate' gender identities. Two of the six articles here identify the emergence of the 'boy child' as a subject of specific parental strategies. Eklund's study identifies a deliberate ambition to discipline the boy child by fostering the gender identity of the 'responsible' and 'capable' man, an ambition which sometimes translates into the preference for an older son and a younger daughter. Li's study of celebrity fathers also identifies an important aspect of doing fatherhood as fostering the appropriate traits of a 'real man,' whereas daughters are left with more space and leeway. The boy child is also becoming increasingly associated with concerns over social mobility, something which also implicates stratification processes. In fact, Eklund identifies the phenomenon of 'son aversion' among young adults, which stems from high housing costs and the notion that men need to provide housing to be able to attract a bride.

Fathering in East Asia

29. Recent international studies have made an important contribution to research on fathers' parenting strategies,[43] but there remains a shortage of research on fathering, as opposed to mothering, and the ways fathers negotiate, select and prioritise parenting activities with regard to children's development and education in East Asia. The articles here by Xuan Li on constructs of fatherhood in Chinese popular media and Mario Liong on divorced fathers in Hong Kong add to the body of research on fathering by showing how fathers renegotiate and prioritise family life and time and the resources spent on doing fatherhood.

30. The article by Liong investigates how single fathers in Hong Kong experience and resist the stigma associated with divorce. Liong departs from the hegemonic family discourse that views the two-parent family as the ideal in Hong Kong, and which permeates how social policies are devised. This discourse is perpetuated by the recently established Family Council and existing family policies that stigmatise divorcees, with implications for fathers 'doing parenthood.' The study finds that some of the interviewed fathers postponed divorce until their marriage was unbearably painful and the relationship with the mother had become irretrievable. This reduces the chance of developing co-parenting collaboration or highly involved paternity after divorce. However, divorced fathers also show that they can be caring and stay closely involved with their children. Even fathers who no longer live with their children can remain engaged in their children's lives, and some fathers demonstrate reflexivity and regret at their distant fatherhood. The study further finds that divorce does not necessarily distance fathers from their children and can present an opportunity for distant fathers to reflect upon their fatherhood. Fathers who feel responsible for their children's well-being do their best to remain involved with their children and build close relationships with them. Liong's study also bears witness to emergent forms of 'intensive fathering,' whereby fathers invest much time and significant resources in furthering the skills and human capital of their children by, for instance, taking them to extracurricular activities. However, this does

not take place at the expense of father's work careers, except in the rare cases when fathers have sole custody of children.

31. The article by Xuan Li highlights three themes of fatherhood in today's China: 1. recognition of the father's willingness and potential to engage in childrearing; 2. increased expectations for paternal involvement in childcare; and 3. a heightened desire for paternal warmth and father-child intimacy. These findings reveal profound shifts in the culture of fatherhood in China in relation to both the intergenerational contract and the gender contract, with more dramatic changes in the former than the latter. Indeed, the study finds that the transformation of the gender contract is much less pronounced. While rigid adherence to the hands-off, emotionally distant fathering model is diminishing through the emerging subject of the 'nursing dad,' acquiescence to the unequal division of childcare work and anxiety about nurturing the 'real man' in the next generation persist. The contrast between radical changes in parent-child relations and the (albeit implicit) conservative views of the gender contract reveals how parenthood and manhood can take intertwined yet independent courses in neoliberalising China.

Continuity and change in the intergenerational contract

32. The familialistic welfare regimes of urban East Asia may increasingly squeeze the middle generation, which must fulfil responsibilities to elderly parents and to their own children, but intergenerational support often runs in both directions. Asian welfare regimes strengthen the intergenerational contract in two ways: First, by offering limited old-age care and pensions, they place the responsibility for old-age care on families (adult children), and second, the lack of affordable and accessible childcare requires in-family childcare, which is often provided by the older generation, although resistance towards such arrangements is emerging, as discussed above. The articles here illustrate how parenting activities and the meanings of (having) children are intimately entangled with the continuing expectation of intergenerational obligations, but also the ways those obligations are being reinterpreted, particularly in terms of gender.

33. Eklund's study of young adults in urban China shows how parents are important in shaping the fertility desires of their adult children, pointing to not only the value of children, but also the value of grandchildren to grandparents. For many, the intergenerational contract necessarily entails grandchildren, and thus parenthood is both a matter of desire and of intergenerational obligation. But Eklund's study identified cases where young women reject parenthood. This suggests a reconfiguration of expectations—that continuing the family line, previously regarded as the most important act of filial piety, is no longer a matter of obligation, but can be purely a matter of desire. A reinterpretation of the intergenerational contract and the meaning of children is also reflected in Li's article on changing constructions of fatherhood in urban China. As mentioned, Li's analysis illustrates the emergence of a more child-centred parenting approach among urban elite fathers, which is a marked departure from the traditional hierarchical father-child relation.

34. Turning to care arrangements, Esther Goh, Bill Tsang and Srinivasan Chokkanathan illustrate another aspect of the ways that the intergenerational contract is being reinterpreted in the Chinese context. Their study found that the older generation no longer enjoys an unassailably privileged position where resources flow from the middle to the older generation. One way that grandparents can protect their position in the wider family is to provide childcare, and the study found that grandparents have a key role in providing care and support to their grown children and their grandchildren. Goh, Tsang and Chokkanathan show how these care patterns are gendered in two respects. First, paternal grandparents were more involved in providing care and support for their adult children and grandchildren. Second, grandmothers were by far more involved in care and support compared to grandfathers. Again, this pattern needs to be understood in a wider social policy context, where the retirement age of women is set five years younger than for men in China,[44] meaning that older women are more available than men to engage in grandchild care. Yet, Goh, Tsang and Chokkanathan's study found that grandparents find themselves providing care and support without much reciprocity and regard. In some ways grandparents are then performing tasks and care work that nannies often perform, suggesting that grandparenting is becoming 'grandnannying.' This points to the power relations shifting in favour of the younger generations. Indeed, one reason for the lack of reciprocity is the belief of adult children that their providing a grandchild is in itself an act of reciprocity, which suggests that becoming a parent is a fulfilment of the intergenerational contract—a finding Eklund's study of young adults also generated. Recognising the need for intergenerational reciprocity that extends to practical, emotional and material support from the adult to the elder generation, governments have, through social policy and law, institutionalised adult children's obligation to support their parents (for example in Singapore and China).

Conclusions and directions for future studies

35. The far-reaching societal and demographic transformations across East Asia have had profound effects on family life as well as gender and intergenerational relations. These are reflected in declining birth rates, increasing numbers of nuclear and single households, delayed marriage and childbearing, a widening generation gap, and expansion of the resource flows from parents to children. By exploring how changing parenting norms and practices in different parts of urban East Asia unfold in relation to these societal and demographic transformations, this special issue brings into sharper focus the intersections between parenthood, gender and generation.

36. As we have related the featured articles here to existing research and analytical frameworks useful for understanding the reinterpretation and renegotiation of parenthood and the meaning of having children, several insights of theoretical and empirical relevance for the East Asian context emerged. Important to note is that the theoretical concepts deployed in this article have been generated in a western context. We believe that in order to deploy these concepts in an East Asian context, they need to be situated in two broader contexts: welfare regimes, and intergenerational relations, both of which are gendered. By doing so, we have identified trends and processes that point to contradictions or at least tensions

between policy, ideology and practices related to parenthood. Yet, to understand these contradictions, as well as their implications for future developments, we have asserted need to resituate parenthood: while the family clearly needs to be regarded as a site of state politics and ideology, we argue that agency-driven theoretical concepts are equally necessary to analysing contemporary parenting cultures. This is becoming increasingly relevant in neoliberalising East Asia, as state power is shifting to a bio-political approach to population management. The six case studies included here illustrate a multitude of ways in which people are planning and 'doing parenthood,' that is, ways in which they resist, accept, or negotiate ideologies and norms of family and parenting through activities in their everyday lives. At the same time, reproduction and parenthood, as subjects of bio-political governance, are hardly a purely private matter. As already pointed out, the size, structure and quality of the population are issues of great concern in many parts of the region, where population ageing is seen to hamper global competitiveness and places a burden on public services. By highlighting how contemporary East Asian states attempt to influence fertility and human capital accumulation in this introduction, we set the stage for the featured articles' consideration of the implications for family formation and parenthood.

37. The idea that having fewer children allows more investment in each child and the fostering of well-educated and well-nourished children points to a tension between 'sound' fertility rates and human capital accumulation. The state wants to increase fertility rates, but at the same time wishes to enhance the human capital of its populations, which encourages parents to opt for fewer children. This tension is underpinned by the familialistic welfare regimes that characterise the countries under study, which lays the actual burden of human capital accumulation largely on individuals and families. This requires a considerable investment of parents' time, skills and financial resources, which in turn perpetuates the gendering of parenting practices, a process that strengthens the gender contract whereby mothers engage in intensive parenting, educational work and motherly care, and fathers assume the role of breadwinners, at least in middle-class families.[45] While intensive mothering has been associated with a double burden in western contexts,[46] it functions as an incentive to opt out of the formal labour market in East Asia, at least when family resources allow for such arrangements. Even with a trend towards more intimate relations between fathers and children emerging in the region, this development does not seem to jeopardise fathers' careers.[47] Hence, few signs of 'intensive fathering' are evident.

38. Although familialistic welfare regimes rest on the idea that the family is the basic unit for providing economic support to its members, a position that presupposes the continuous importance of intergenerational obligations,[48] several of the case studies here point to shifting power relations between generations with regard to 'parenting skills' and authority. Today's intensive and expert-based approach to childrearing likely contributes to undermining the older generation's authority with regard to raising children. This may indicate that the multigenerational family is losing moral ground as grandparents are regarded as obsolete in their childrearing methods, unable to provide intellectual stimulation to their grandchildren, and likely to spoil them.[49] The fact that a familialistic welfare regime

nurtures intergenerational ties while grandparents lose moral ground highlights another point of tension and contradiction worth investigating further: How is the intergenerational contract being reconfigured in middle-class East Asia? The dynamics of situations where families rely on the multigenerational family but the generational gap is increasing require further research and investigation, not least in terms of how this development introduces changes to the gender contract.[50]

39. We argue that competitive labour markets, scarcity of jobs and limited welfare systems not only underpin the need for parents to invest in the human capital of their children, it also seems to reinforce a gender contract, where women mantle the care-giver role and men the bread-winner role. Also, the trends of reducing female labour force participation and increase in the gender wage gap[51] need to be put in relation to changing ideologies, strategies and practices of parenting. Women withdrawing voluntarily from the formal labour market to become 'better mothers' as mumpreneurs, manager moms and housewives—or 'grandnannies' for that matter—certainly would fit government objectives to reduce unemployment. There is scope for feminist researchers to further investigate any such links and implications.

40. While intensive parenting and educational achievement are typical of contemporary (middle-class) parenting, future work will need to make clear just how the selection and prioritisation of parenting activities around children's education intersect with family cultures and intergenerational expectations, and how states shape notions of the value of children in and through existing family and education policies. Therefore, we suggest that more studies could productively examine the ways the expertise-based approach typical of intensive parenting challenge and transform traditional flows of authority between generations. We also propose that an important direction for future studies is not only how parenting practices are stratified, but how they also contribute to stratification process, along not only generational and gender lines, but also along lines of class and ethnicity, where, in particular, women from poorer regions—both native and from other countries—enable middle-class families to pursue their parenting strategies by doing the 'less important' child care work. Parenting strategies seem to be an increasingly important avenue for social mobility and human capital accumulation, as the family is left to struggle for its own survival and well-being in neoliberal East Asia. In this regard, undertaking comparative studies between 'the West' and 'the East,' exploring how welfare retrenchment and parents' roles in human capital accumulation and social mobility are interlinked is also worth pursuing.

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