

Parental Beliefs and Fathers' and Mothers' Roles in Malaysian Families

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This chapter is an attempt to explore the interplay between parental beliefs and fathers' and mothers' involvement in childcare in Malaysian families. Most research on fathers' role in the family has been conducted on samples from North American and European families. These findings generally suggest that mothers are more involved in childcare than fathers, and that mothers and fathers maintain unique interaction styles with their children. Western fathers often engage with their children through vigorous rough-and-tumble play interactions. Although research interests in cultural socialization and fathers' roles in international families has been increasing since the 1990s (Bozett and Hanson 1991; Lamb 2010; Roopnarine and Carter 1992; Shwalb et al. 2013), very little empirical data on parental beliefs and fathers' and mothers' role in Asian societies are available. Given that they represent 60 % of the global population, Asian families embody diverse parental beliefs and practices. Also, because of the increasingly rapid modernization of Asia, it is important to undertake fatherhood and parenting research in Asian families. Research on Asian fathers and mothers will help us gain a clearer understanding of their parenting values and grasp the dynamics of the father's and mothers' roles within a cultural context. An additional benefit of conducting similar studies in Asia is that such research provides cross-cultural context for understanding parental beliefs and gender roles in family life. In some Asian countries, the mix of ecological factors, religious sentiments, and cultural forces provide an intricate matrix of parental beliefs and fathers' and mothers' roles in family life. One such country is Malaysia. Factors such as social status, economic praxes, home environment, religious values, and community resources often influence the parenting roles in Malaysian families (Baharudin et al. 2011). However, systematic research on parental beliefs and parenting in Malaysian families is extremely limited. This chapter is organized to address the following aspects in Malaysian families: (1) ethnic composition; (2) the

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sociocultural context of gender roles and parental beliefs; (3) fathers' and mothers' involvement in childcare; (4) contemporary lifestyles and parenting; and (5) implications for research and policy.

Ethnic Composition

Malaysia is a Southeast Asian nation. With over 29 million people in an area of 127,320 mile², its landmass consists of two major geographical areas. The Peninsular Malaysia is typically known as West Malaysia (Tanah Melayu) and it borders with Thailand and Singapore. East Malaysia is known as Malaysian Borneo and includes the states of Sabah and Sarawak. The current per capita GDP of about U.S. \$15,500 makes Malaysia a relatively affluent nation in Asia. The population of Malaysia consists of Malay (58 %), Chinese (24 %), Indian (8 %), and indigenous groups (10 %, e.g., Orang Asli). Each group has its own predominant religion, culture, and language. The Malays and the indigenous populations are commonly termed *Bhumiputras*, or 'sons of the soil' (Kumaraswamy and Othman 2011; Ng 1998). Whereas Malays are Muslims, Chinese are either Buddhists or Christians, and Indians are largely Hindus. Overall, about 60 % of the country's population is Muslim, 19 % is Buddhist, 9 % is Christian, and 6 % is Hindu. Most of the indigenous peoples are animists. Regardless of ethnic or religious differences, a Malaysian family is typically defined as a marital union or registration between a man and a woman, including their children and extended family members (Saad 2001). However, increasing trends toward nuclear families, women's education and participation in the paid labor force, female-headed households, and smaller family size characterize contemporary Malaysian families.



Source: www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/asia

The Sociocultural Context of Gender Roles and Parental Beliefs

The Malay family system is heavily influenced by Islamic customs and practices locally called *adat* (Kling 1995; Selvarajah and Meyer 2008; Tamuri 2007). The primary tenets of *adat* encourage the mother and the father to jointly raise children and inculcate values of a good moral character in them. The father is the head of the household and is expected to socialize his children according to *adat* and other socially acceptable values such as respect, shyness, and loyalty. The primary function of Malay fathers is to provide economically for children and the family. The practice of the hegemonic belief structures about masculinity, patrilineal hierarchy, kinship networks, and flexible family boundaries exert a strong influence on Malay parenting and gender roles (Noor 1999). In line with this hegemonic belief, the father functions as the family patriarch and the mother must practice domesticity, purity, and a submissive role in the family. The father or grandfather enjoys the roles of authority in the family. Although the traditional norm of a joint family system and polygyny are practiced in the villages (*kampung*), such practices are far less common in contemporary urban families. Factors such as women's education, nuclear family formation, women's participation in paid sectors, and birth control have been influencing fathers to break away from the traditional gender roles in the family.

The descendants of Chinese immigrants from as early as the fifteenth century are known as Malaysian Chinese. Although hundreds of years have passed since the initial immigration, the Chinese residing in Malaysia have not at all severed their ties from their ancestors' traditions and customs, particularly those practices regarding parenting roles. The Malaysian Chinese have learned from their parents and grandparents about the family values of diligence, thrift, humility, education, respect for the elders, and filial piety (Hei 2011). In their parenting roles, they value the core Confucian beliefs such as propriety, righteousness, and benevolence. In particular, both the mother and the father inculcate the value of filial piety (absolute loyalty to the family) in their children. From a very young age, children are taught to be *siao-shoon* to their parents and older family members, meaning to be filial in Mandarin. The Chinese believe that the ability to be filial is one of the greatest virtues in life. For example, Confucian literature explains that a son should mourn the death of his father for approximately 3 years in order to demonstrate filial piety. The 3-year grieving period is significant: according to Confucian beliefs, children are nursed until reaching age 3. Therefore, in return, 3 years of mourning for a parent is appropriate (Hei 2011). Filial children obey their parents' wishes and readily attend to their needs. As children become older and financially independent, they are expected to support their aging parents. In view of the Western influence of individualism in contemporary Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese families, national policies and laws have been introduced to make sure that adult children observe filial responsibilities and care for their elderly parents. Those who neglect their parents could potentially be found guilty and be punished by law (Hei 2011). In return, parents

invest almost all their resources into their children's educations. Most of the Malaysian Chinese have been immersed in the English education system and they control a lion's share of Malaysian commerce and businesses.

The colonial British brought the Indians as indentured laborers to work in the rubber plantations and agricultural fields in Malaysia. The majority of Malaysian Indians are Hindu and the parents believe that children are born with some *samsa-karas* or predispositions (Rao et al. 2003). These predispositions stem from the decisions and events that took place during the child's previous lives. Hindu parents typically accept the fact that many individual differences cannot be changed due to predetermined traits or characteristics. Childhood is considered a time of innocence, and parents allow children to live a carefree life during this time. Similar to Malaysian Chinese or Malays, Malaysian Indian families are structured in a patriarchal fashion. The traditional parenting behaviors of Malaysian Indians are largely based on the Laws of Manu, a Hindu belief of patriarchy and *patibrata* (Roopnarine and Hossain 1992). This belief underscores men's authority in family matters (e.g., inheritance, residence) and women's self-sacrificing roles in the family (Chaudhury 2013). Whereas the notion of *patibrata* forces mothers to care for their children, husbands, and other family members, they play an ancillary role in making decisions for the family. The father is the head of the household and is responsible for economic and social roles in the family. For example, he accomplishes his social and spiritual duties by performing *kannyadaan* (giving away of a daughter in marriage). In Hindu ideology, there is a concept of *Shravan Kumar*, which means a dutiful and respectful son that cares for his aging parents. Similar to the Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian Indian parents put a profound importance on filial piety and academic achievement of their children (Rao et al. 2003). The success in college education is ultimately tied to principles of filial piety; the more adult children learn and earn, the more likely they would comfortably accommodate their aging parents.

The ethnography of Peninsular Malaysia is diverse with indigenous people commonly known as Orang Asli or the aboriginal peoples (Batek or Semai). Other indigenous people (Iban or Kadazan) reside in the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Malaysian Borneo. Although each group has its own distinctive linguistic identity, the traditional beliefs of the indigenous people of Malaysia have always been related to their customs, the community or village, and most importantly, the land. Land is of utmost importance to all indigenous people, not only because it provides families with a source of income, but also because cultural traditions and spiritual beliefs are firmly tied to geographical sites. Life events take place on their land, bringing together family members, neighbors, and friends. During cultural occasions (*kaamatan* harvest festival), parents often celebrate relationships with their children by acknowledging their love through warm and friendly interactions. The land is also the livelihood of most indigenous families in Malaysia. The plains are fertile and money is typically earned by selling surplus crops and food. The traditional subsistence economy ensures egalitarian gender roles between spouses, especially among the Batek (Endicott and Endicott 2008). The father and the mother are equally responsible for childcare, household labor, and food gathering activities. Nowadays, the concept of patrilineal hierarchy is present in some indigenous

families such as the Kadazans in Sabah. The main role for a Kadazan mother is to provide her children with moral values and norms (fidelity and respect). These norms encourage male children to relate easily to their fathers and female children to relate easily to their mothers (Hossain et al. 2005).

Taken together, the practice of filial piety or *adat* or *Shravan Kumar* conveys a uniform message about families that transcends across Malay, Chinese, and Indian families in Malaysia. In line with a patriarchal belief structure, a Malay, Indian, Chinese, or Kadazan mother's main duty is to take care of her children. It can even be considered a duty to raise her children well (Rao et al. 2003). The expression of "strict father, kind mother" characterizes traditional parenting styles of these three major sub-cultures in Malaysia (Saraswathi and Pai 1997). Strong ties to extended family members and accessible and flexible family boundaries also influence mothers' and fathers' roles. Another important parental belief is that parents must invest in children's academic achievement and adult children must care for their aging parents. Although the communal approach to childrearing is present among the Orang Asli (Batek), mothers' and fathers' behaviors and investment in the family are based on egalitarian gender roles (Endicott and Endicott 2008).

Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Childcare

Malaysian families across these three major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) follow a patriarchal family structure that affects the levels of each parent's involvement in childcare and other household chores. Fathers are typically responsible for financially supporting the family, and therefore, they spend less time with their children and household chores than their wives. Despite modern influences (such as women's rights, education, delayed marriage, and rising divorce rates), women still perform the majority of childcare-related tasks. It appears that the increased modernization of Malaysia is forcing working mothers to embrace a "second shift" – a far too common skewed distribution of gender roles that has been widely noted in Western families (Hochschild 2003).

Empirical evidence from early research suggested that mothers spent significantly more time in childcare activities such as changing diapers, feeding, and putting the child to bed than fathers did in Malaysian Chinese families (Roonarine et al. 1989). Likewise, mothers were found to spend more time in childcare and other household tasks than their male counterparts in both Malaysian Chinese and Malay families (Noor 1999). Findings from the latter study suggest that fathers spent about 71 % as much time as their spouses did. Participants for this latter study were urban professionals and found to be highly involved in childcare and other domestic chores. Similarly, findings from an anthropological study revealed that fathers and mothers in Batek indigenous families participated in childcare equally and treated their male and female children similarly (Endicott 1992; Endicott and Endicott 2008). Some aspects of childcare examined in Endicott's study included bathing, cleaning, cuddling, and cooking.

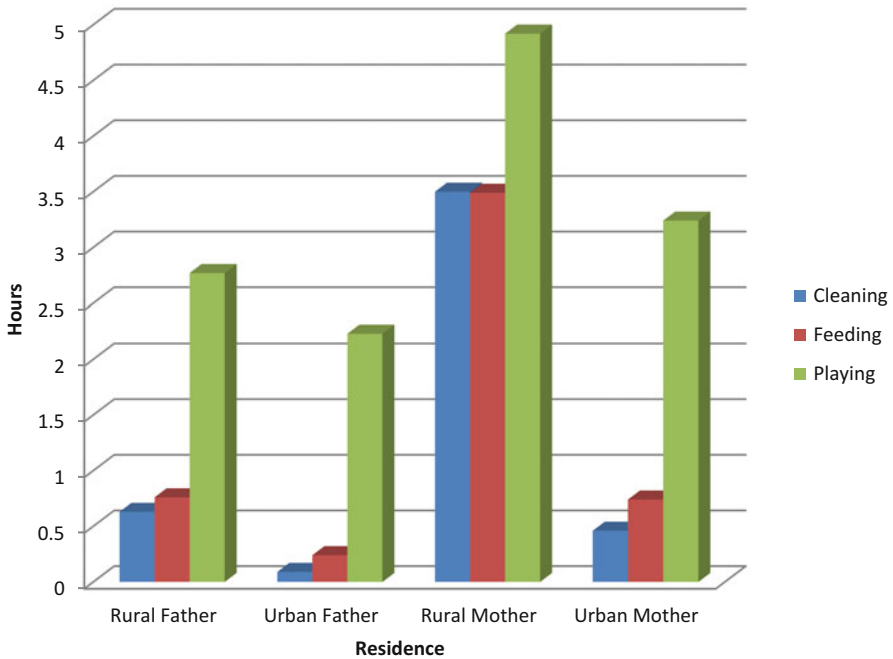


Fig. 1 Amount of time mothers and fathers spent in childcare each day

I conducted research to examine the differences in mothers' and fathers' involvement in childcare tasks as a function of sex of the child in rural and urban Malay families. My findings were similar to the findings derived from other studies on Malaysia families. Both in rural and urban families, mothers spent more time than fathers in childcare activities such as feeding, cleaning, and playing with their children. Whereas mothers and fathers in rural families spent 11.91 and 4.16 h in childcare each day, mothers and fathers in urban families spent 5.41 and 2.56 h per day (Hossain 2013; Hossain et al. 2005). A detailed analysis of these findings suggests four major involvement patterns. First, rural mothers spent more time in childcare activities such as cleaning, feeding, and playing than mothers in urban families; second, fathers in both rural and urban families showed a similar level of involvement in caregiving; third, the mothers spent more time playing with their young children than caring for them, as did the fathers; and fourth, the discrepancy between mothers and fathers' time investment in childcare is higher in rural families than in urban families (Fig. 1).

The fact that mothers and fathers in rural families spent more time engaged in childcare than urban mothers and fathers could be due to the differences in ecology. Most urban families have two-income parents who tend to employ live-in household maids or care providers for their children. However, my own research did not explore the extent to which other care providers were used to compensate for parental care. Future research can be designed to address this issue. Furthermore, the

difference between the mothers' and fathers' involvement in childcare might have stemmed from their ecological contexts and cultural beliefs that mothers are the primary care providers of the child. Although urban parents spent far less time performing child-related tasks than rural parents, mothers and fathers are more egalitarian in urban families than mothers and fathers in rural families. It is possible that the *adat* and cultural beliefs about traditional gender roles are still much stronger in rural families than in urban families. Also, I have gathered from my field observation that rural parents either hold or keep their children within an arm's length distance while working in the kitchen, vegetable garden, and rice fields. Such a rural ecology obscures the modern boundary between parents' work environment and childcare involvement. I assume that these parents included the time they held their children while working in their reports of the amount of time they spent in childcare. This might have resulted in rural parents' reports of higher involvement in childcare than their urban counterparts.

Kadazan fathers in Malaysian Borneo also follow the trend of spending less time with their children than their spouses (Hossain et al. 2007). These fathers commute daily to work in city centers and therefore often have less time for childcare tasks. Also, Kadazan mothers were reported to be more affectionate and loving than fathers were (Rosnah 1999). Comparing these results to a study on Batek mothers and fathers residing in the Lebir River watershed in Kelantan, it was found that the parental practices of the Bateks were based on the beliefs of egalitarian gender roles. To that end, in the Batek tradition, mothers and fathers equally participated in childcare and household labor (Endicott 1992; Endicott and Endicott 2008).

There is very little empirical research available concerning mothers' and fathers' involvement in childcare in Malaysian Indian families. Available findings from prior research suggest a weak link between parents' education and their involvement in school-age children's education in Malaysian Indian (Tamil) families residing in plantations (Vellymalay 2010). Whereas a majority of the parents in Vellymalay's study had high expectations about their children's school success, assisted their children with homework, and contacted school teachers, the relationship between parents' education and the academic strategies employed for their children were not found to be significant. The parents and school teachers in plantations are tied by ethnic similarity; therefore, parents had reasons to believe and to depend upon school teachers' support for their children's educations (Vellymalay 2010). Regardless of their Tamil or Sikh/Punjabi origins, Malaysian Indian parents are more protective of their daughters than sons, and expect their children to master behaviors such as respect, interdependence, and obedience (Gill and Gopal 2010; Keshavarz and Baharudin 2009). Future research should focus on the extent to which mothers and fathers are involved with their children and the link between parental beliefs and their involvement in childcare in Malaysian Indian families.

Generally speaking, it appears that mothers across the three major cultural groups (Chinese, Malay, and Kadazan) in Malaysia play a stronger role in their children's early socialization and daily care. These findings from Malaysian families (except with the Batek) are very similar to what has been reported from other studies regarding

parental involvement in childcare (Lamb 2010). That is, mothers are usually the primary caregivers to their young children, a trend that reflects disproportionate levels of invested time, social interactions, and involvement between mothers and fathers. This has been consistent throughout several different social-organizational patterns that hold strong cultural beliefs and norms. However, mothers and fathers in peninsular Batek families show egalitarian involvement with their children. Although sociocultural and religious factors provide the context of parent-child interactions in Malaysian Indian families, we know little about the extent to which Malaysian Indian mothers and fathers are involved with their children.

Contemporary Lifestyle and Parenting

Over the last several decades, Malaysia has experienced rapid social transformation as a result of increased industrialization and urbanization. The ensuing social changes have influenced how modern Malaysians live and work. These shifting norms are accompanied by a noticeable difference concerning women's roles in society; specifically, the role of Malaysian women in family life has changed dramatically. Although more Malaysian women than ever before are pursuing higher education, entering the labor force as both workers and entrepreneurs, and working longer hours outside of the home, many traditional beliefs regarding gender roles continue to persist in the public and private arenas (Mellström 2009; Yusof and Duasa 2010). The promotion of traditional family values across religious groups (as a means to combat the perceived decline of morality) has influenced numerous social and economic policies. Such policies tend to undermine the ability of Malaysian women to fully participate in the formal sector economy. This trend is in direct contradiction to the Malaysian government's official support of women's increased presence in the labor market, an initiative designed to bolster economic development and personal growth (Stivens 2006; Elias 2011). Given this incongruity, modern, dual-income Malaysian families face the difficult task of navigating conflicting social norms, while raising and supporting their children. Numerous factors influence the amount of time that mothers' and fathers' spend caring for their children. Such factors include gender role expectations, level of education, the number of hours spent working outside of the home, the presence of a stay-at-home parent, and the availability of alternative childcare options. The majority of very young children (ages 0–4) in Malaysia are cared for by their mothers or other family members, with a small minority receiving care outside of the home. In contrast, Malaysian children over the age of 4 have near universal enrollment in preschool. The difference in childcare practices between these two age groups may reflect disparate expectations among parents regarding the most appropriate or beneficial means of caring for young and preschool-aged children. However, recent research suggests that the lack of adequate, affordable and accessible childcare facilities for infants and toddlers has more influence on Malaysian families' use of childcare centers than personal preference (Elias 2011). According to a study on

family-friendly policies in Malaysia, the majority of workers desire greater flexibility in their places of employment, and express a lack of support for child and elder care (Subramanian and Selvaratnam 2010). At least one recent survey has shown that contemporary Malaysian women, even those pursuing college degrees and intending to enter the labor force, believe that they will have to provide the majority of care for their offspring and housekeeping duties while working outside of the home, and this belief appears to dramatically influence their field of study and choice of career (Mellström 2009).

The composition of Malaysian families has changed over the past several decades mainly due to the national shift toward industrialization and urbanization. Although smaller family size and nuclear families have increasingly become the norm, especially in urban areas, many Malaysian mothers are experiencing the challenges of caring for their both own young children and their aging parents—in addition to working outside of the home. Until recently, the “sandwich generation” phenomenon was unknown in Malaysia. However, recent research has indicated that the increase in formal employment among women, along with a growing senior population and subsequent caregiving responsibilities, compounded with the general lack of social service provision by the government, has created a generation of young mothers responsible for balancing an ever-increasing workload (Norzareen and Nobaya 2010). Although contemporary Malaysian women provide the majority of caregiving for both their children and elderly parents, the traditional parenting beliefs and some government policies continue to relegate women to housekeeping and childcare, in spite of their increased participation in the labor force (Anwar 2009; Elias 2011; Stivens 2006). Such beliefs and practices still afford men or fathers the opportunity to maintain their provisioning role in the family. Noticeably, many contemporary middle and upper class Malaysian families often use imported live-in household maids hailing from places like Indonesia and the Philippines. These maid services free mothers and fathers from childcare and domestic chores and allow them to spend additional time at work. However, employed mothers end up doing more household work than their male counterparts as the beliefs and practice of domestic labor is still tied to traditional gender roles in the family.

Traditional gender roles award men purview over the public sphere, including working outside of the home in the formal economy, whereas women have domain over the private sphere such as housekeeping and caregiving tasks. Despite widespread endorsement of traditional gender roles for women in Malaysia, a common conception of masculinity, particularly in rural Malaysia, revolves around social interactions, with much less emphasis on the role of economic provider. The use of relational status as a primary means to gain power in society serves to maintain strong divisions between men and women's roles in Malaysia, with women serving reciprocal roles to men. This arrangement also leaves room for women to enter the paid labor force in ways not typically accessible in cultures that place financial provisioning as men's primary function in the family (Mellström 2009). Women in Malaysia currently outnumber men enrolled in higher education, and the Malaysian government has repeatedly and explicitly articulated the need for women to contribute to the nation's economic growth and development by joining the paid labor force (Elias 2011).

However, the Malaysian government has sent mixed signals about the role of women in the public and private spheres. While encouraging women's participation in higher education and the paid labor force, the government continues to endorse conservative gender norms that are typically based on religious ideology in both official and non-official discourse. For example, the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN), a subdivision of the Ministry of Women and Family Development, even went so far as to declare homemaking women's Jihad (Stivens 2006). The Malaysian government actively promotes traditional family values as the most effective way to combat the perceived decline of morality among their citizenry. The government has used this same ideology to promote a unified national identity based on a paternalistic family structure. Such a family structure holds strongly to the idea that women contribute the most to society by serving as mothers and wives (Mellström 2009; Stivens 2006). The conflicting messages sent by the Malaysian government may cause dissonance or ambivalence towards participation in the paid labor force amongst Malaysian women.

More than 60 % of Malaysians identify Islam as their religion. The Malaysian government has promoted a national Muslim identity over the last three decades, successfully linking economic progress and modernity with Islamic ideals, and highlighting women's dual role in national economic growth and social reproduction within the home (Anwar 2009; Mellström 2009; Stivens 2006). Modernity itself has become an extremely salient concept within Malaysia recently, with a national goal of achieving developed nation status by 2020 (Elias 2011). *Adat* or filial piety incorporates traditional family values as a basis for morality with an outward acceptance of conservative gender roles. The Malaysian government has encouraged its citizens to extend this conception of family to their relationship with the state, and has actively integrated individual educational and occupational goals into the successful development of the national economy and culture (Mellström 2009). Despite evidence of gender discrimination by the state, many Muslim women have the desire to raise their children in the tradition of Islam, with a radical subset of women hoping to "find liberation, truth and justice within [their] faith" (Anwar 2009, p. 176).

The association between the family and participation in the formal economy appears to have had great success in influencing Malaysian women's choices in their fields of study and careers, as demonstrated by studies investigating women in higher education and female entrepreneurs (Alam et al. 2011). However, the types of employment available to women and the level of familial support continue to play a significant role in their decisions and success (Alam et al. 2011; Idris 2010; Khan et al. 2012; Mellström 2009; Stivens 2006). In a study on women in computer science, a male-dominated field in the west, Mellström (2009) found that students believed that they could succeed in their future careers based on several factors: the entry of women in the electronics industry in the 1970s; the association of computer science with indoor spaces; the presence of numerous women in the field before them; and the ability to balance work and family responsibilities due to the nature of the job. The need to effectively negotiate the responsibilities of the mother and worker was also prevalent among women entrepreneurs. Specifically, the majority

of women-owned businesses resides in the service sector and typically provides services that fall within home economics such as food, sewing, handicraft, and childcare (Alam et al. 2011; Elias 2011; Malaysia Department of Statistics 2011).

Malaysian women in the paid labor force appear to be employed primarily in the private sector. Social class and ethnicity account for significant differences in education and labor force participation. Scholars have observed that the quotas outlined in Articles 152 and 153 of the Malaysian constitution (that provide preferential treatment of *bumiputra* (Malay) citizens in Malaysian universities) have enabled a great number of Malay women to enroll in higher education, most notably in the field of computer science (Mellström 2009). National policy makers argue that the preferential access to the scholarships and other benefits afforded to indigenous Malay women is a step toward rectifying past discrimination against them and encouraging them to advance in education. It is expected that modern educated Malays (particularly women) will contribute to the national economy and be informed parents as well. In a critical review of how gender has influenced Malaysia's transition to a knowledge-based economy, Elias (2011) discussed how low-paid migrant laborers performing household tasks for middle-class, educated women exacerbates the ever-present inequality amongst economic classes. Elias' review also underscored the challenges of promoting home-based businesses amongst the lower classes, who frequently lack literacy skills and space to work. Although the Malaysian government has offered substantial financial support for women entrepreneurs, they only make up approximately 15 % of employers in the nation, which indicates an imbalance between the type of assistance provided and the needs of women who may want to start a business (Idris 2010). It appears that the type of employment available to Malaysian women still depends on their economic status and ethnicity.

Although Malaysia has undergone dramatic modernization, including a low unemployment rate and a high rate of economic growth since the 1980s (Stivens 2006), parenting behaviors still revolve around the traditional family values of *adat* and filial piety. The dual interests of maintaining a patrilineal family structure and women's entry into education and paid employment create a clearly visible conflict. Because of these changes and dualism, many families must deal with parenting in a multifarious and different light. The availability and use of cheap live-in domestic maids have made the parenting roles more complex in contemporary Malaysian families. Those who are against the recent urbanization of the country fear that there will be a decline in family values, which might ultimately lead to social delinquency and other serious issues such as illiteracy, immorality, and corruption. LPPKN responded to the fear of moral decay by initiating a campaign called the "Malaysia Nation of Character" (MNOC). This campaign stresses that the solution to these anticipated social and family problems in Malaysia can be resolved by encouraging parents to raise their children with knowledgeable, resilient, and ethical values. The movement encourages parents to equip themselves with appropriate skills and more significantly, an understanding that the family institution and overall quality of life are at risk of decay (Stivens 2006).

Summary and Implications for Research and Policy

Although Malaysia is a nation in transition, family values and religious beliefs are still the core foundations of successful and moral parenting in most families, whether they subscribe to the principles of Islamic tradition (*adat* and/or *akhlaq*), Confucian teachings, (filial piety), Hindu wisdom, (*Shravan Kumar, patibrata*), or the subsistence ecology. Stated differently, diverse values, traditions, religions, and socioeconomic conditions provide the context of parenting in multi-ethnic Malaysia. Whereas Malay, Chinese, Kadazan, and Indian families tend to follow traditional gender norms in parenting roles, the Bateks tend to exhibit egalitarian parenting roles in the family. These findings are noteworthy because they suggest that, regardless of geographical proximity or similarity in beliefs and family traditions, levels and styles of parental involvement with children vary between major Malaysian groups and the Bateks. Malaysian families have different cultural traditions that are embedded within their distinctive religious norms and customs, and yet they are largely similar in their parental beliefs and involvement with children. Another significant finding was that mothers and fathers in Malay families spent more time playing with children than providing basic care to them. This particular finding from Malay families is partly in line with the primacy of father-child play interactions that were observed in many Western families (Lamb 2010).

Methodologically, in some studies that have looked at paternal and maternal involvement in the past, it has been questioned whether the researchers have thoroughly examined all the various facets of caregiving tasks. The amount of time spent interacting with a child can be considered relative to specific sociocultural factors such as multiple care providers. Another drawback of past studies has been the amount of time the researchers and their recruited assistants actually spent interviewing or observing their participants. A potential solution could be the incorporation of longitudinal studies that extensively follow the lives of parents and their children for a much longer period of time. In order to gain a more rounded sense of parental beliefs and practices in Malaysia, future systematic research should include the context of extended family, live-in domestic maids, religious ideologies, and economic diversity and their influence on mothers' and fathers' involvement in childcare.

There are many ways to raise children effectively who are expected to become ethical, moral, and successful young adults. Studies based in non-Western countries have the potential to enlighten and inspire others by offering skills, techniques, and strategies for successful parenting that may be novel to others, especially in the Western world. At the same time, based on cross-national findings that suggest an increased level of fathers' involvement in childcare, and in view of increasing modernization in Malaysia, my research observations should be of interest to national children or parent organizations (Hossain 2013). Government policy makers can use these data when working on early childhood development and parenting policies and programs. The continued interest in parental involvement in non-English speaking and/or developing countries such as Malaysia can aid researchers in determining various aspects of parenting that can be unique to a particular region or common across cultural groups.

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