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TRANSITION OF THE FATHER'S ROLE IN JAPANESE FAMILY AND CULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

In the domain of child psychiatry in recent years, there has been a rapid increase in various neurotic disorders centering upon juvenile in-the-home violence, delinquency and school refusal. It is only natural, if we are to continue making therapeutic contact, that we must think about solving the problems for the family as a whole.

From recent research on juvenile delinquency in Japan, especially drug abuse and reckless driving, we have been able to observe a curious phenomenon. It is called "*shirake*" in Japanese, and means an icy, apathetic state. That is to say, these children lack an awareness of their dissatisfactions, have little conception of their future lives and show little interest in intelligent affairs. This curious condition is the likely outgrowth of the "throw-away" life style, both psychologically and materially, that characterizes our present-day society.

These juvenile problems raise very basic questions on family life and education, for example, "What is the function of discipline in the family?" and "What kind of attitudes will these children develop toward work?"

When we examine the etiology of these problems, the various conflicts of the children toward their parents, especially the father, are plainly revealed. Yet, on the other hand, if we touch on the child's problems in an interview with the parents the lack of parental self-confidence and resolve often becomes apparent, and role confusion of the father in the family is frequently encountered.

We feel, in order to approach these problems, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between the father's role confusion and the child's mental development and personality formation. In studies on child development so far, the mother-child relationship has been overwhelmingly emphasized. And, until recently, it was thought that the pre-adolescent period was the earliest stage in child development where the father's influences could be seen. According to newer studies on the effects of paternal absence from the family, however, it has become increasingly evident that the father's role is quite important even in much earlier stages.

An ancient Japanese proverb says that one should fear "Earth-quakes, Lightning, Fire and Father," in that order. As this proverb points out, the Japanese people have considered the father a symbol of power and authority. Looking back historically, with the Second World War as a turning point, the father's role has begun to be devalued, and among the rapid social changes, has assumed a less meaningful existence. This tendency is caricatured, for example, in the title of currently popular comic strip in Japan, called

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"*Dame Oyaji*," a name which means "No Good Daddy."

Though family systems are changing all over the world, we are particularly concerned about what sort of changes the Japanese family will assume in the future. The role the father takes within the Japanese family may have enormous influence on that future course. In this paper, therefore, I would like to examine the role of the Japanese father from four different perspectives: history, ethnology, social anthropology and child psychiatry.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FATHER'S ROLE

In modern Japan, the father's role is in a confused and ambiguous state. And, from the viewpoint of family dynamics, it is declining, except for its economic function, toward a state of meaningless existence. The confusion in and decline of the father's role began shortly after the end of the Second World War. Going back, what changes has the Japanese father traced throughout our long and varied history?

According to Higuchi, a historian, the Japanese father figure emerged into prominence in the stone age, during the early origins of the Japanese people. In the stone age, our ancestors lived in small groups and ate foods gathered by strong adult men, the fathers. From stone implements discovered in shell heaps dating back 9000 years ago, it is quite clear that the art of fishing was very highly developed. The stone age father trained his sons in the art of fishing, which, in itself, played an important role in defense against foreign invaders.

By the Neolithic era ("*Jomon*" period, 8000 B. C. to 200 B. C.), however, people had grouped into hamlets and started to live in fixed locations. Marriages between the men and women of neighboring hamlets became the accepted pattern. This marriage form was called "*tsuma-doi-kon*," which meant that the husband and wife lived separately in their own hamlets, with the husband visiting the wife's house only at night. This kind of marriage represented a maternal family system centered on the woman. In ancient times, the word for parent meant only mother. And the word, "*omo-ya*" ("main house"), derived from the mother's residence. During this age, the parents had their own distinct roles in child education. The father was the transmitter of the art of production, and the mother was trainer in the art of home life.

During the next age, "*Yayoi*" period (200 B.C. to 300 A.D.), people began engaging in rice-based agriculture and acquiring holdings of rice and land. Consequently, the adult males, having gained economic and working power, were able to secure dominant positions in society. This was the origin of the paternal family system. The Japanese word father is "*oya-ji*." Etymologically, "*oya*" means parent and "*ji*" means the hand that symbolizes labor. Thus, in ancient times, the father was the person connected with physical labor.

Interestingly, by looking at the original forms of "*kanji*," hieroglyphic characters made in China over 3000 years ago and adopted as the basis of our writing system, the character representing "father," ("父"), was formed by a combination of the symbols "right hand" and "stone axe." Therefore, the etymological meaning of the character for "father" is "having a stone axe in hand and working" (Fig. 1). The character for "mother," ("母") was created at around the same time and formed from a combination of the symbols for

“woman” and “breasts.” Thus, the etymological meaning of the character for “mother” is “a woman nursing a baby” (Fig. 2).

We can see from the ruins in *Toro*, built 2000 years ago, that by this period there had already developed a formidable level of practical knowledge and skilled labor. And it is evident that the continuing transmittal of acquired life knowledge was due mainly to the efforts of the father. In the 4th to 5th centuries A. D. (“*Kofun*” period), “*Yamato*” Court succeeded in bringing the country under single authoritarian rule, which was paralleled by the clear emergence of the paternal family system.

The transition of the Japanese family system, from the maternal to the paternal, in certain ways, has persisted down to present times and formed the characteristic Japanese double personality structure of superficial strategy, “*tatema*,” and real strategy, “*honne*.” In this sense, the father held an important social role, but it was the mother who reigned over the realm of family life.

In the 6th century, Buddhism found its way into Japan and Buddhist culture was prosperous in *Asuka* area (“*Asuka*” period, 552-645 A. D.). It was during this period that several influential clans appeared and organized groups based on blood relation, which in Japanese are called “*uji*.” Within this blood related group, many farmers, workers and servants, who were not directly related by blood, were also included. Those who stood at the top of this large family could exercise the greatest authority. Eventually, laws were legislated and the proper family system prescribed. Under this type of family system, the head of the family was the father who successfully exercised control over all its members. But even within this paternal system centering on the strongest father, traces of the mother concept still remained. People approved of different families organized by different mothers. And thus, even *Fujiwarano Fuhito*, who wrote many of the early laws, was permitted to marry his half-sister born of a different mother.

In “*Heian*” period, 8th to 12th centuries, the famous novel, “*Genji-Monogatari*,” was written by *Murasaki Shikibu*, a lady of letters and the daughter of a low-grade government clerk. During this period much of the early poetry and many classic novels were written by ladies educated and trained by their fathers, who sought the promotion and prosperity of their families in the Imperial Court. At the same time the tendency gradually grew for husband and wife to live more together, which gave strength to the development of the paternal family system.

In the middle of “*Heian*” period, when the aristocracy was at the summit of its prosperity, the warrior class, “*samurai*” or “*bushi*,” began to increase their social influence and gained the social limelight with the pretext of maintaining public peace and order. *Minamoto no Yoritomo*, one of the greatest “*samurai*” and founder of “*samurai*” political power in *Kamakura* at the end of the 12th century, encouraged the development of military forces in order to terminate aristocratic control. These “*Kamakura samurai*” typically engaged in farming in times of peace, but were beckoned to battle at the call of the “*Kamakura shogunate*” when war broke out. The father fought for and established his paternal authority through the honors he sought as a representative of his warrior family. The father made the family rules and eagerly educated his sons in the cultured arts and philosophy of life. The father, then, was an educator, and at the same time a master in the feudal relationship of master and servant.

After “*Kamakura*” period, Japan became extremely chaotic. In “*Sengoku*” period (the age of civil strife, 15th–16th centuries), the father consolidated his power and responsibility, particularly as they applied to social and family life. At the same time, most of “*samurai*” began to serve feudal lords, “*daimyo*,” and started to live in newly built towns around the castles. When “*samurai*” lost their lands and their productive ability in the form of tribute paid to “*daimyo*,” they had to make a living by indenturing themselves to these powerful feudal lords. They became, in a sense, salaried men, and their families had to depend on this income. Within the family structure, then, the father’s power increased so greatly, that certain dictatorial behavior patterns evolved in the father’s role in family life, patterns which still survive today.

From the beginning of the 17th century, “*Edo*” (present-day Tokyo) was a prosperous and growing city of the “*Tokugawa* shogunate”. On the surface, it was a lively “*samurai*” town, but beneath this deceptive facade was a town of merchants, controlling the economy. These merchants had to have shrewd mental faculties, not only to manage the monetary economy, but to educate their sons as successors. Although most merchants were eager to educate their children, in the novels of “*Edo*” period there are numerous references to incompetent, overly protected sons. People at that time knew well what it meant to lose the prosperity, respect and authority established by the father, and thus most fathers paid keen attention to the training and progress of their children. In addition to the education of his family, the father attended to his own moral training with extreme diligence. The “*terakoya*”, private preparatory school of “*Edo*” period, was very widespread.

By the time of “*Meiji*” Reformation, in the latter half of the 19th century, the old feudal system had broken down, and a modern nation was beginning to emerge along occidental lines. In 1872, a national educational system was legislated and the right and duty to educate children, which had so far belonged to the father, was shifted to the government. The tradition of “*Edo*” period of providing education to the child privately through the father-child relationship was transformed into a nationwide educational system. The father, then, relinquished his right to educate his children and became dependent on the school system. To compensate for this loss in privilege and authority, and to prevent a sense of alienation, the father grew more affectionate toward his children, thus neglecting to put effort into pursuing his own growth and maturity as a father.

Legally, however, the father’s power, as head of the family, remained fairly strong due to the enactment of the “Civil Law Act,” which loaded him with new obligations, such as tax liability, military service and compulsory education.

This paternal dominance was reduced, however, after the Second World War, when the authority of the father was restricted with the passage of the “New Civil Law,” that gave legal equality to the relationship between the father and his adult age children.

Perhaps the most notable phenomenon in recent history, however, has been the increasing prevalence of the nuclear family, in which it appears the father is losing his former role as sole provider. Stemming from the abrupt changes in social structures, and of even greater concern for today’s father, is what appears to be the loss of a life goal, social ideal or meaning to his own existence.

ETHNOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FATHER'S ROLE

The meaning of the father's role viewed from a historical standpoint has been somewhat blurred since history tends to deal more with superficial phenomena than the way things actually were. On the other hand, ethnological research has enabled us to make a more accurate appraisal of the early ways of life which were in the mainstream of the Japanese cultural climate. Before discussing the father's role, let us consider what the commonly held views on children were.

Yanagida, an ethnologist, wrote that there were many regions in Japan where children were thought to be gods. Other ethnologists, through studies on the various traditional ceremonies of folk life, "*tsuka-girei*" in different areas of Japan, emphasized the popularity of the belief that children were endowed with a divine nature.

Many ethnological studies have arranged these ideas around the concept of "*shitsuke*" (a word roughly equivalent to "upbringing"). Japanese people have long thought the child to be Heaven's gift to parents, and that the child was only able to grow up through the endeavors of his parents and other people in the community and the grace of 'supernatural powers'. This "*shitsuke*" was necessary to educate and develop a useful member of the community, and was carried out not only by the child's true parents, but, in the event of traditional ceremonies, by the child's godparents and other community members. If, however, a person were childless, he would have no descendants to perform religious services for the departed souls of his ancestors or, for that matter, himself. This situation would, for the Japanese, be absolutely tragic, since they believed in the doctrine of transmigration of souls.

The traditional ceremony of life held at age seven, called "*ujiko-iri*," symbolizing the emergence of the child as a recognized member of the community, had the aim of educating and training the child to become a good citizen. Japanese people were expected to live in groups, and adopt an attitude befitting their circumstances and social position. This meant that education was to be carried out by both the family and the village groups. This pattern of community education became more formal and rigorous at the point the child entered "*ujiko-iri*." Sometimes the child had to join the self-governing, semi-supervised "*kodomo-gumi*," children's group, and later, at age fifteen, either "*wakamono-gumi*," young men's group, or "*musume-gumi*," young women's group, in order to receive training from the older children in manners and etiquette.

This group form of education instilled in the Japanese a fear of being left out of the group. As a result, a very Japanese method of scolding or threatening evolved. The older children would say, for example, "Don't fool around or leave the temple!!" or "Don't cry or you'll be laughed at!!" Many fathers used generalized expressions as a method of punishment. For example, to his son father might say, "If you are a man, behave like a man!!"

Unfortunately, there are but a few ethnological studies on the father's role. One ethnologist commented on the father's role as follows: "In Japan, the father demonstrates very little active relationship with his child. Usually, too, the child is less attached to his father than his mother. This is not that the father does not love his child, but fatherly and motherly discipline differ in their extent and nature. The father strives to implant the art of his life work into his child."

Historically and ethnologically, the seemingly paradoxical co-existence of “*tatemae*” and “*honne*” is a feature most unique to Japan. This pattern reveals itself in the way the mother, who puts all her efforts into domestic education, gives deference and respect to her husband, who in turn, represents the formal seat of authority. In terms of “*honne*,” the mother is the actual educator, but in terms of “*tatemae*,” the father has the privilege of being acknowledged as the formal educator. The children, subsequently recognize the father’s power through their mother’s attitude.

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FATHER’S ROLE

In viewing the father’s role from the social anthropological perspective, it will be necessary to explain the concept of “*ie*” (although there is no exact English equivalent, it can be thought of as “household”). Nakane, a social anthropologist, clarifies the distinction between the concepts of “*ie*” and “family” in Japanese society. The family is a universal concept present in every society, but “*ie*” is formed under special conditions peculiar to Japanese culture.

From studies of old, traditional farming communities in Japan, it was determined that Buddhist ancestral tablets were first made around the middle of “*Edo*” period. And, social anthropologists have supported these findings with their assertion that it was around the same time that “*ie*” concept rooted itself in the common people of Japan.

A household must conform to the following requirements in order to be an “*ie*”: First, there must be a place to live and a group of people to share the place together. In addition, the occupants of “*ie*” must not consist of the living members only, but their ancestors as well, who spiritually live with them. Lastly, “*ie*” must survive from generation to generation.

The Japanese village, “*mura*,” was organized around the basic “*ie*” unit. When one inquired about the size of a “*mura*,” it was common practice to ask, “How many “*ie*” does the village have?”

“*ie*” system emerged around the middle of “*Edo*” period and prospered well into “*Meiji*” era. During “*Taisho*” period, which followed (1912-1925), it began to decline, and virtually disappeared after the Second World War. The head of “*ie*”, usually the father (“*kachō*”), represented “*ie*” legally and socially. One of his sons, usually the eldest son, was prescribed to succeed to the head of “*ie*”. When there were no blood-related successors in “*ie*,” an adopted son, or a man adopted as a husband for the daughter, was able to succeed to the headship just as would a legitimate son. This system of succession, requiring no strict blood relationship, can be seen in only a few countries in the world.

The father in “*ie*” system symbolized something slightly different from the fathers in family systems of other countries. He was, of course, a symbol of authority and power. But the powerful father image was generally associated with wealth or property. He was a pivotal person in the economic system of “*ie*”. The father who lost his earnings, or abidicated the headship of the family, had to be dependent on his son, who then became the new head of the family, a situation which differed from that in China or India.

Also, it is very important to discuss the father’s role apart from the concept of the family, or “*ie*” system. In Japan only the direct heir, after marriage, was expected to

live with his parents. All the other children had to leave home sooner or later. This represented a linear type of family system. In present-day Japan a switch is taking place from the old, linear or extended family structure to the nuclear family. In the linear family, the inheritance system was based on the right of primogeniture. The social structure in the family was dual, namely the formal relationship between the father and child, and the informal one between mother and child.

Hsu depicted the idea behind this form of Japanese social structure with the word "Kintract," which he coined from kinship and contract. In the traditional Japanese family, the father embraced the discipline of "*samurai*" system and combined it with Confucian ethics, which were useful for controlling and ruling.

THE FATHER'S ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE PSYCHIATRIC PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN

As was discussed before, the meaning of the father's role, the family and "*ie*" system have been transformed very gradually and insidiously from the stone age to modern times. But since the Second World War, particularly after 1950, the rapid changes in the family system have, indeed, been rather surprising. According to the results of the national census, the average size of the Japanese family between 1920 and 1955 was 5.0. It dropped to 4.56 in 1960, and to 4.08 in 1965. It is predicted to be around 3.21 in 1985. Comparing this decrease in family size to other countries, in Europe as a whole, it took one century to fall from 5 to 4, and to reach the same level in the United States, it took fifty years, from the end of the Civil War to the 1930's. In Japan, however, it only took ten years, from 1955 to 1965, to reduce the family size from 5 to 4. In this post-war period the nuclear family increased astoundingly to over 75 per cent.

Murdock, a social anthropologist, studied family systems of 250 primitive societies and drew the conclusion that the nuclear family was the representative form for man. Evolutionary theories on the family, proposed by other anthropologists, however, seem to differ from Murdock's views. What is important here, however, is what this sudden reduction in family size means in Japan, and what sort of role the father will assume under these circumstances.

Many of the parents and children with various psychiatric problems whom we see at our clinics, clearly show the dilemma imposed by the changing state of the family and, particularly, the father's role.

In our investigations into the rapidly increasing problem of neurotic school refusal, we carefully made note of the father's personalities. Many of the fathers of these problem children have little self-confidence, and show unsociable, unmanly or dependent characteristics, findings which concur with a study by Makita and Okonogi, et al., conducted some ten years ago. The fathers, at first sight, seem to possess undaunted attitudes toward their families, but actually, when confronted with important family decisions, they very often relinquish their roles as fathers.

In addition, there is the group of children involved in what I have termed "in-the-home violence." In recent years there have been many cases of juvenile delinquency, but the contents are changing from antisocial to asocial behavior. The child who engages in "in-the-home violence" differs from the asocial type of delinquency, although psycholo-

gically it seems to have a pattern similar to the situation in school refusal. That is to say, children involved in "in-the-home violence" never get in trouble outside "*ie*", and they usually behave as honor students at school. At home, however, they go on wild rampages directed against parents, siblings, and/or household employees.

The father in this situation is usually very serious, but lacking in self-confidence. And, compared to his wife, who is very masculine, fastidious and pretentious, the man is a very shadowy, obscure figure. The male child in this kind of family tends to develop marked feminine characteristics, and a rather dependent personality. This dependency factor, connected to "*ie* consciousness" peculiar to Japan, gives rise to the development of home centered violence.

The dependency state is called "*amae*" in Japanese, and the verb, "*amaeru*," implies an ambivalence between the passivity in gaining acceptance and love, and the activity of striving for acceptance and love. Thus the word "*amaeru*" has an implication very similar to "depend" in English.

From the psychopathological point of view, it was Doi who first paid attention to the word "*amae*." He analyzed the mental state of the Japanese represented in the word "*amae*," and pointed out that each member of Japanese society lives in a strong mutual dependence with the group. Balint has theorized that "*amae*" is a form of primary love which, in the case of the European neurotics he examined, was deeply repressed. Yet the average Japanese, on the other hand, is often conscious of his own "*amae*." It is said, in terms of psychological structure, that Japanese people have tactfully adopted "*amae*" to fit life within Japanese society. And, subsequently, this condition of "*amae*" has created a special group syntocity, that induces in the Japanese people the desire not to be excluded from the group, nor to let others feel excluded.

Kawai, a Jungian psychotherapist, in his description of Japanese culture, indicated that Japanese myths are made up of a very thoughtful balance of both the paternal and maternal systems.

DISCUSSION

We saw historically how the paternal system was gradually formed over the foundation of the maternal system, and how, subsequently, the mentality of "*tatema*" and "*honne*," peculiar to Japan, developed and became firmly fixed in the social fabric.

Ethnologically, I have shown a rather unadorned view of the common person's life, in which children were seen as god-like treasures. The nature of paternal and maternal roles in child rearing were clearly separated within the family, much in the way Mead has emphasized the tremendous importance of both fatherhood and motherhood in child development. This ethnological separation of parental roles was very important, and the success of the father's role usually was accomplished through the mother's cooperation.

Ethnologically speaking, group education was linked to "*ie*" system and "*ie* consciousness." Yet Japanese today, as much as in previous times, want to adhere to "*ie*" or other groups, even where there is no blood relationship. The father's authority came into existence with the establishment of "*ie*" system, but, in fact, he only symbolized the economic pinnacle of power in the family. The father who abdicated his headship was immediately shorn of privileges. In one sense, today's father is in a situation

very similar to the father of old. The Japanese father after the war was legally shorn of his headship privileges and started to withdraw from even the traditional responsibility as educator of his children. Beneath the tidal wave of social and cultural upheaval, today's father has been transformed into a seemingly understanding, superficially sophisticated man.

Fathers, today, are often rejected by their children, especially their sons, because of the differences in their sense of values. It is out of this situation, in his effort to cope with the generation gap, that the father desperately seeks the child's acceptance and tries to remold himself into an understanding figure. Unfortunately, this task is usually more than the father can manage and he often gives up on his children. Not only does today's father feel a rupture in the relationship with his children, but the children, dissatisfied with their father, also feel a similar rupture. Father and child, unable to recognize their own "egos," psychologically injure and depend on each other within the sphere of general situational ethics.

The recent confusion in the father's role has been worsened by the state of the rapid increase in nuclear families. In connection with this increase, the root cause of the decline in paternal authority can be postulated as being related, psychologically and physically, to the following four kinds of "nearness" ("nearness" as defined by Matsubara, a sociologist): 1) The nearness in personal relationships, brought about by the sudden shrinkage in family size. 2) The nearness in physical living space, the result of the gradually narrowing size of Japanese homes and apartments. 3) The nearness in access to information and knowledge, stemming from the infiltration of mass media. And, lastly, 4) the nearness in proportionate economic contribution to overall family support, the result of income brought home by not only the father, but by his wife and older children.

Many of the problem children whom we see at our child psychiatric clinics, often reflect these conditions, and we can recognize many uniquely Japanese features in these problems.

To conclude, what do the changes in the father's role foretell of the future of families? In looking at the changes the father's role has undergone, what meaning can be applied to our present life and existence? These are complex questions open to further study and speculation.

Howells, in his work on fathering, discussed how the social and legal father, "pater," characteristic of human society, differs from the biological father, "genitor," seen in animals. Benson, in his research on fathering, wrote that the father was an invention of human society in order to form the family system. Freud speculated, from studies on totem and taboo in primitive cultures, that the father was a symbol for maintaining social function and had a very important role in the socio-cultural evolution of man.

Evolutionary theories suggest that sudden, rapid changes could be dangerous to human society. Most animal species require a wholesome, fixed ecological environment. However, the uniqueness of man lies in his intelligence and adaptability.

Nevertheless, the drastic changes in the father's role in Japan have brought our society to a critical turning point. But what does this turning point prophesize for society and the family? Disorganization of the family? New life styles? Or a return to the old tradition?

Social structure is too complicated now to permit easy assumptions. But in our present, somewhat confused family situation, I would like to suggest that Japanese fathers think more carefully about their own course in life, exist seriously day to day, and, most importantly, convey to their children a sense of confidence in life.

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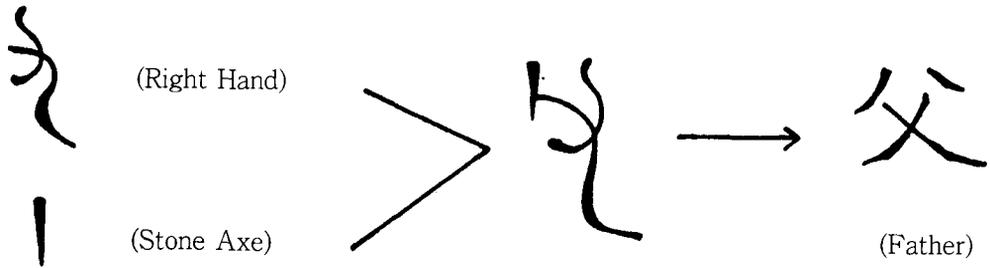


FIGURE 1

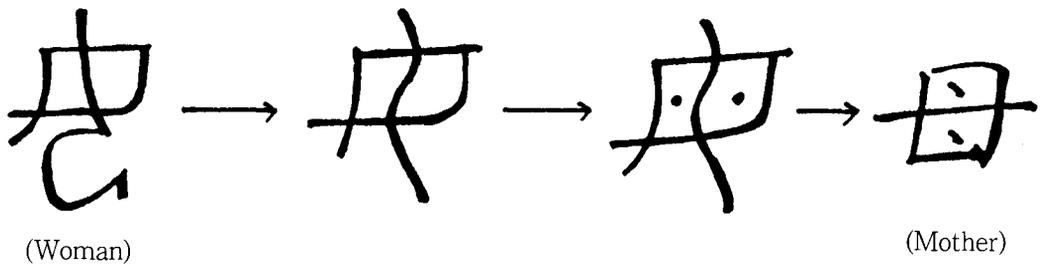


FIGURE 2

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