



A Review of Research on the Dilemma of Motherhood in Contemporary China

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Abstract. With the improvement of women’s status in the modern value system, the role of mothers in the family has a large degree of autonomy and independence, but in many aspects of society, they are still bound by “motherhood”. This paper draws out the research central issue and characteristics of Chinese scholars on the domestic motherhood dilemma from the proposal of motherhood, mainly including the discourse analysis and criticism of the identity construction of “perfect mother”, and the motherhood dilemma of urban middle-class women. Finally, some thoughts on motherhood are put forward.

Keywords: Contemporary China · Motherhood dilemma · Research review

1 Introduction

Since the birth of human civilization, “mother” has played an extremely important role in society. No matter in matrilineal society, patriarchal society or in the family of modern society, the position of “mother” is always irreplaceable. In our country, from the gradual awakening of feminist awareness in the 1911 Revolution, to “women hold up half the sky” after the founding of New China, with the continuous improvement of women’s status, the status of motherhood has also undergone many changes.

The role of mothers in society today is very different from that in the past. In the past society, traditional women not only had to assist their husbands and nurture children, but also engaged in various productive labors in the family, and could not enjoy the same status as men, so they had a certain backwardness. Different from traditional motherhood, due to the improvement of women’s status in the modern value system, the improvement of women’s education and the awakening of women’s sense of independence, the role of mothers in the family has a large degree of autonomy and independence. But in many aspects of family, occupation, and society will still be bound by “motherhood”. This article will sort out and summarize the domestic research on the predicament of motherhood, summarize the constraints of motherhood that modern women are subjected to in life, and put forward some thoughts on motherhood at the end.

2 Proposition of Motherhood

The research on motherhood first originated in the second wave of Western feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, and the topic of motherhood is also a classic issue in the early days of women's research [1]. Under the influence of Foucault's discourse power theory, some feminists questioned the "mystery of motherhood", and their focus shifted from biological gender differences to various inequalities caused by social gender, and proposed Motherhood is an ideology constructed by social culture [2, 3]. Similarly, the French feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir also put forward a similar point of view. She criticized "biological determinism" in "The Second Sex", that is, motherhood is a biological attribute of women, and proposed the so-called motherhood is a cultural construct [3].

Motherhood is not only a cultural construct, but also a result of gender-differentiated labor [4]. When a mother is a caregiver, she not only puts in a lot of time, but also a lot of emotional labor. In other words, the role of mother not only means love, but also labor; she not only has a practical role in the family, but also has a high degree of emotionalism. In addition, as some scholars have pointed out, motherhood also has an attribute that is enforced in the process of socialization, that is, the "socially enforced altruistic attribute" [3, 5].

Motherhood has not only the socially enforced altruistic properties, but also the "intensive" properties [4]. The concept of "intensive motherhood" was first proposed by sociologist Sharon Hayes. The rise of such an ideology echoes the self-interest competitive maintenance mentality in industrialized capitalist society, and thus constitutes the The paradox of motherhood: Intensive motherhood is a gender model that requires women to invest a lot of time, money, and emotions to ensure a smooth parenting process to maximize the family's interests; at the same time, women's own needs are Either downplayed, or a solution must be found through multiple strategies, she believes that such a social construction is too ideal, which places women in an unattainable goal, causing them to feel depressed and depressed, thinking that they are not Be a good mother [6].

3 Characteristics of Research in China

Compared with foreign countries, the research on motherhood in my country started relatively late. Now more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the role of parenthood. Compared with foreign countries, China has problems that are more in line with our country's characteristics, such as those related to traditional concepts. Among them, as my country pays more and more attention to the equal rights of the sexes, the focus of the research is gradually focused on the motherhood dilemma faced by women in our country.

3.1 Discourse Analysis and Criticism of the Identity Construction of "PERfect Mother"

When the role of mother is mentioned in traditional Chinese culture, words such as selfless devotion can often be associated with words such as selfless devotion. Maternal

love is often associated with words such as the sacred and great, “a woman is weak, but a mother is strong”. The logic behind these words is hidden. That is, the sacrifice and dedication to the family is the source of the mother’s sense of self-identity and pride, and it can be said that these psychology come from “motherhood”.

Feminists believe that motherhood is a socially constructed topic, and the role of motherhood is also constructed by society, and its connotations are very rich in historical and cultural characteristics and historic [9–11]. They believe that the concept of motherhood is one aspect. It affirms the value of women, but on the other hand, it also reflects the suppression of women by the role of mothers. Zhou Enlai once pointed out that when “good wife and good mother” becomes a fixed term, it reflects the shackles of women in the patriarchal society [7].

Domestic research on the predicament of motherhood and related discussions first appeared around 2000 [8]. As the new middle class in the city and the only child entered the mode of marriage and childbirth, such as “intensive motherhood”, “education broker”, “full-time mother”, Words such as “motherhood punishment”, “motherhood involution”, and “widowed parenting” emerge one after another [8]. We can also see the domestic public’s dissatisfaction and denunciation of motherhood, and under the influence of feminism, domestic academic circles have Motherhood research and perspectives are also basically from a critical point of view [12].

The discourse analysis and critique of the identity construction of “perfect mother” is a hot topic in motherhood research in my country. In the age of informatization and sophisticated parenting, it is no longer enough for children to stay in daily care that only meets the basic needs of children. The society has higher and higher requirements for the role of mothers. Many mothers express that they do not know what to do with themselves. Just do it. There is a saying that “you learn how to be a mother after you become a mother”, and social culture has shaped motherhood as an innate ability, just like the “motherhood myth” criticized by feminists—think The social and cultural construction of motherhood is destined for women, and they believe that being a mother is a relaxed and pleasant thing. Through in-depth content analysis of the popular parenting magazine “Must Read for Parents”, Tao Yanlan pointed out that it is inappropriate to ignore the social and cultural construction of motherhood and only examine its biological side. It cannot simply be thought that this is due to the development and progress of scientific knowledge, people should realize that this is a result of social construction, and it is through such social construction that Chinese society further strengthens the public’s mind.” It is the mother’s responsibility to take care of the child”. By analyzing articles in parenting magazines, she reproduces an image of ideal mothers who follow expert scientific parenting advice, spend high amounts on children, and focus on family and children. This scientific concept of parenting, the prevalence of consumerism and traditional patriarchy have jointly constructed the ideal concept of motherhood in the current society [9–12].

Her research also found that the parenting style and the positioning of the mother’s role in families in different eras are different, and there is a close relationship between the two, which also affects the construction of the ideal mother’s identity. In the 1980s, it was emphasized that parents raised children together. In the 1990s, mothers were shaped to raise children based on scientific knowledge. In the 21st century, the requirements for

the current role have been further expanded to a diversified aspect, and mothers are not only the primary role of children. And the best nurturers are also constantly learning to be a parenting expert, balancing work and parenting, and in addition to being an independent mother. This series of representations and changes of the idealized mother image reflects the constructed relationship and practice [11].

3.2 The Motherhood Dilemma of Urban Middle-Class Women

Another hot topic in academic research on motherhood is the motherhood dilemma of urban middle-class women. The concept of intensive mothering proposed by Sharon Hayes has been widely spread in the media and academia. At the same time, the emergence of educational involution and the process of education broker have promoted the emergence of Chinese-style intensive mothering [13]. Words such as “comparing mother” and “Tiger Mom” Active in the public eye, the education of children in modern families mothers have gradually become the helmsman, showing a trend of “education brokers”. As a good mother, you must be omniscient, not only to take care of the children’s daily life, but also to find ways to do it. Improve your child’s educational achievement.

At the same time, this increasingly sophisticated parenting model has also brought some troubles to some urban mothers, who not only have to take care of family children but also work. The highly market-oriented division of labor has made motherhood excluded. The order of division of labor also makes family care appear “feminine” and “introverted” [14]. The punishment of motherhood has brought a new round of pressure on women. Many scholars such as Yu Jia and Xie Yu have concluded through actual data analysis. A similar conclusion is that childbirth will indeed have a considerable impact on women’s work patterns, and most of these impacts are negative [15]. Shen Chao analyzed the data from 1989 to 2015 and concluded that the phenomenon of motherhood punishment has been increasing in recent years [16]. The conclusion points out that the contribution women make in taking on the role of mother in the process of social and economic development is not directly proportional to the dividends brought by economic development. Gender discrimination and unfair treatment are also experienced in the workplace.

“Widowed parenting” has also become the focus of public complaints. Overworked mothers are less likely to take care of their children than fathers who have less time, less energy, and a lack of sense of responsibility. The pressure will be much greater, because in traditional culture, women are often expected to be good wives and mothers, whether it is taking care of family elders or household chores, as if it belongs to women’s work, although as women receive higher and higher Education, the awareness of individualization has become stronger and stronger, and they have been influenced by more gender equality discourses, but from a large scale, child care and family care still show a feminized trend [17, 18]. Due to the differences in natural biological structure, women have to bear the responsibility of childbirth. However, it is socially constructed to force the pressure of caregivers on women. This unequal division of labor makes women take on more spiritual housework in the family. Labor, thereby creating a mental load [19].

Under the background of modern biomedical research, the theory of “optimal breast milk” has been generally recognized by the society, and it is believed that the benefits

of this feeding method cannot be replaced by milk powder, but in the process, many mothers are also stressed by this theory. Am I still my child's "cow". Breastfeeding requires that the mother must do everything to meet the needs of the child, and must give full attention. The acquisition of intimacy with the child must be based on the premise of sacrificing the autonomy and independence of women. Breastfeeding has become an idealized characteristic of motherhood [20]. This feeding method can easily make women completely attached to their children in terms of identity. They believe that only when breastfeeding is successful at this stage can the role of mother be successful. In this situation, "breast milk is optimal" may have gradually exceeded the scientific language. This kind of "comparing mother" behavior from the starting point makes women fall into another predicament.

In addition, the society also requires women to be "hot mothers", not only to be thrifty and housekeeping, but also to be beautiful and generous, and at the same time to be brave enough to take care of career and family. These strict requirements do not reflect women's self-consciousness. On the contrary, it is a new form of oppression for them [21, 22]. The embarrassing situation of "can't have both" has played a negative role in women's social participation. All the situations mentioned above are the dilemma of female subjectivity in the practice of mother's role.

4 Conclusions

It can be seen that even in modern society, motherhood is still not completely free from the influence of traditional society, and women are still constrained by many traditional values in the family [23]. But what is gratifying is that more and more attention is paid to women's inequality in family and society. Family and parenting are not only women's own responsibility, and the concept of motherhood cannot be used to impose some additional pressure on women. The difficulties encountered need to be shared by men and the whole society. At present, the academic community basically holds a common opinion on the problem of motherhood dilemma. Mothers have the right to gain autonomy and the right to enjoy the respect she deserves.

We should realize that we are in a long transitional stage, and any change of concept cannot be achieved overnight. Equality between men and women has always been the goal pursued by our country, and various issues related to motherhood are undoubtedly obstacles on the road to achieving gender equality. The solution to the problem of motherhood requires the efforts of society, government and people. When solving the problem of motherhood today, we should not be too hasty. We must find a suitable solution according to the actual situation. It is foreseeable that in the future, academic research on these issues will continue unabated, and more and more attention will be paid to women's rights in the private sphere. I believe that in the near future In the future, the predicament of motherhood will surely be properly resolved.

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