An Interdisciplinary Perspective of the Human Patriarchy

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ABSTRACT

This article discussed the origin and mechanism of occurrence towards Human patriarchy by compared with two kinds of great apes who have the similar genes with human being: chimpanzees and bonobos. Besides, the article traced the evolution of human beings in order to show how food and competition affects the onset of patriarchy as well as the reason of chimpanzees and bonobos’ different social behavior under different environmental pressure. After these comparisons, the article pointed out the unique and special characteristic of human beings and forecasted the future of human social formation.

KEYWORDS

Interdisciplinary, Patriarchy, Evolution, Resource, Competition.

INTRODUCTION

When we look back through history, Human patriarchy is cross-cultural, and appears on different isolated continents. Hence, the prevalent patriarchy cannot be a coincidence. Why vast majority of prehistory human societies are patriarchal? Where is the origin of human patriarchy? These problems have not yet been answered. It is indeed difficult to study human behaviors because different from other species, whose biological factors contribute to almost all of their conducts, humans are shaped by both nature and culture. But many animal species, especially the great apes, whose genes are very similar to humans’, are also patriarchal. This resemblance leads to another alternative explanation that patriarchy is evolutionary beneficial. Indeed, we can find clues of patriarchy in comparison between humans and our primate relatives.

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THE ORIGIN OF PATRIARCHY

To investigate the reasons of human patriarchy, great apes, our closest relatives, include both common chimpanzee (Pan Troglodytes) and bonobo (Pan Paniscus), are needed to be studied. It is fascinating that chimpanzees and bonobos share the closest genetic traits to humans, but they take on different social systems. Bonobos, live in the south of Congo River, are matriarchal, whereas chimpanzees, live in the north with gorillas, and are patriarchal. Why bonobos and chimpanzees are more genetically related but so different on societal system? Tremendous researchers and theorists tried to answer the question through following angles:

Researchers argued that female cooperation is different between chimpanzees and bonobos, which contributes to their societal system difference. White and Burgman (1990) noticed female bonobos stays in the group they were born but female chimpanzees travel to a new group after sexual maturity. They also noticed although male bonobos are physically stronger than female bonobos, which like chimpanzees do, their sexual coercion failed on female bonobos due to female cooperation. On the contrary, the less cooperative female chimpanzees are more likely to be victims of violence and rape. Therefore, theorists hypothesized the more female cooperation against males, the more matriarchy the species will be.

The same result is referred to human society. Researchers analyzed studies across 50 years, and concluded men and women do not differ in cooperation overall. But in male-male and female-female cooperation tasks, men perform better on intersex cooperation than women. Women out-performed men on mixed-sex scenarios (Balliet et al, 2011). Thus, due to less female cooperation, men are like male chimpanzees, always take advantage of the other sex. However, the “cooperation theory” did not take evolution perspectives into consideration. It only shows a correlation between cooperation and societal formation but does not explain why males and females are different on gender based cooperation at the beginning.

Another theory claimed the primary reason of patriarchy is resource related. Sommer et al (2011) compared both chimpanzee’s and bonobo’s habitual condition in Gashaka Gumti National Park, Nigeria, and indicated chimpanzees, who live north of Congo River, spend more time on remove seeds from fruit, and cost them more energy on digestion, compares with bonobos, who live in the resource rich south. More importantly, only bonobos have access to a high protein herb that makes them barely short on food. Sommer et al also noticed difficulty on food acquisition indicates a smaller gregarious size and more female-female competition in chimpanzees, which could lead to a male advantage and shape their social system into patriarchy.

Although it is still mysterious whether human ancestors’ genes are chimp like or bonobo like, our ancestors are mobile, which makes them unlikely to stay in one single resource rich environment like bonobos do. As a result, even genus homo during Pleistocene age were not famished, food foraging style and food availability should be more similar to that of chimpanzees’.

The third theory tries to explain patriarchy from evolutionary angle. Evolutionary speaking, as a living organism, one must successfully reproduce. Earlier evolution psychologist tried to explain human patriarchy through “male compete female choose” (MCFC) model, which means due to different selection pressures, men compete with each other to win women and try to gain mating opportunity as much as possible,
whereas women are more cautious on casual sex and picky on mate candidates (Buss & Schmitt, 2011). This phenomenon can be easily explained by an economy term “supply and demand curve” that men produce thousands of sperms per second on average but women only produce hundreds of ova during their life span, so men become the cheap and competitive seller whereas women become the picky buyer. Thus, the fittest individuals are the competitive men who can control over resource and power and the women who have the psychological mechanism that prefer rich men.

It is reasonable to believe food and competition triggered MCFC, which could cause the onset of patriarchy. However, it is worth noting that human society remained patriarchy for thousands of years, even during recent centuries, when humankind does not lack of resource any more. This phenomenon is, of course, possible because of genetically encoded psychological mechanism. Parish found when chimpanzees and bonobos are put into the same human involved situations (both species have the same limited access to a certain “fishing” site), male chimpanzees and female bonobos remain dominant in their group (1996). Chimpanzees and bonobos are genetically close, but their social behavior varies due to different environmental pressure. Even environment shortly changes, millions of years of evolution has already encoded the specific psychological mechanism into their genes, which ensure their behaviors remain consistent. But this argument seems ignored the biggest difference between humans and animals. If everyone is genetically similar in this world, why behavior varies culturally? Also, if human patriarchy is similar to that of great apes’s, merely a genetic expression, why our society suddenly evolved to be egalitarian in some cultures within a hundred years? Hence, human patriarchy is more complicated. At least, not as simple as the great aps that patriarchy is merely a genetic expression. Even mankind genetically evolved to be patriarchal, subtle genetic changes could happen during mankind history. As a result, we should use a more integrated, chronological approach to address this question comprehensively.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PATRIARCHY

Dramatic environmental change that could alter selective pressure happened twice in history. Both changes decreased the fitness of patriarchy. The changes are two domestication processes those are, the cognitive revolution happened 70,000 years ago, and the agricultural revolution happened 12,000 years ago. Both revolutions facilitate a resource rich situation. During the cognitive revolution, mankind evolved a large brain that makes us claim on the top of food chain. Tooby and DeVore (1987) proposed the concept “cognitive niche” to explanation the zoological abnormal behaviors of human race. Biologically, sexual selection makes men physically more competitive than women, but natural selection gifted human race, both men and women, a large brain to deal with the environment with knowledge, than just simply evolve new specific features to adapt into target environment. In other words, cognitive niche is a panacea. Tooby and DeVore (1987) described the term specifically: An ecological niche by definition related to the behavior of a species living under specific environmental conditions. A prey, for example, a plant, evolved poison to defend itself. A predator evolved liver to metabolize the poison, in order to consume the plant. So, an evolutionary arm race goes on. However, human race is

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different from other species. Accumulated culture, knowledge, and reasoning ability are the strongest weapon to deal with any preys and environments. As a result, cognitive niche brought our race a boost of recourse that reduced the fitness of patriarchy at the first time.

The second domestication, agricultural revolution, further enriched resources that mankind need for survival and reproduction. If cognitive revolution makes our race the top of food chain, agricultural revolution pushed our society into a more food abundance situation ever. Mankind stopped nomad life style and settled down. Also, hunter-gatherer tribes developed into agricultural community. Crops stockpiled in barns. Individual property and wealth arose. A resource rich living environment caused less competition and violence than before. Agricultural revolution further eroded the adaptiveness of patriarchy.

Both revolutions lead mankind into a rather a more resource sufficient, less competitive, and mutual mate choice (MMC) environment than the resource rare, more competitive, and MCFC past. Similar has been found in bonobos as well. Yong (2012) argued the reason why chimpanzees and bonobos are so different is because chimpanzees live in the north of Congo River with gorillas, who are both a competitor and a threat. Lucky enough for bonobo group who live in the south with abundant food. They eventually domesticated themselves.

THE FUTURE OF PATRIARCHY

Modern society is experiencing a transition from historical patriarchy to modern egalitarian. Even majority of human culture are historically patriarchal, recently women are having more powers and rights than before. Women are already out- performed men in some areas of education (Pande & Ford, 2011). Not only because feminists and ideological pioneers push and advocate egalitarianism, women themselves are indeed becoming more educated and independent, especially in developed countries where masculinity is no longer a desired feature in social contact and managing problem. When mankind struggled with war and hunger in old times, strong and aggressive men indeed have many advantages than women. However, in the peaceful and resourceful 21st century, violence and testosterone, an adaptive strategy for survival then, compare with civilized trades and negotiations, are maladaptive. Even men can learn to adapt into the new environment we are living in now, as more likely to be influenced by biology and to engaged in risk-taking and competitive tasks, men have more distracters that stop them from gaining academic success and other accomplishments. Therefore, a future social hierarchy may manifest: Top class will become gender equality. Middle class will consist more women than men whereas third class will contain more men than women. Hence, a hundred years later, who will be the ones asking for more equal treatment? Men or women?

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