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# Gender and Intergenerational Support in Later Life: A Research of Urban China and Japan Based on Case Studies

Xue Yang

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the features of gender differences in intergenerational support in later life in contemporary urban China and Japan. Based on a qualitative study of the middle-aged and the elderly generations in Shenyang and Tokyo/Yokohama, I illustrate how gender effects in adult children's support to their parents, the elderly parents' support to their children, and inheritance. From the narratives of the interviewees in Shenyang, it is observed that there is no specific role allocation based on gender among adult children in supporting their elderly parents, because all children are considered to have obligations to do so. However, some elderly interviewees consciously favor their sons in support to adult children, especially in the cases of inheritance. On the other hand in Tokyo/Yokohama, difficult to obtain support from their male siblings or spouses, female family members are still the main providers of the elderly care. And there is no obvious evidence that parents give priority to their sons or daughters in support to children and inheritance. Gender differences in these two societies are considered to be related to women's status in the labor market as well as traditional culture framework.

## **I. Introduction**

In traditional Chinese and Japanese societies, the elderly parents tend to be supported by their sons who live with them, and the daily care is performed by their daughters-in-law. Meanwhile, assistance from the elderly parents to their children such as child care and financial assistance, as well as inheritance, tend to be conferred on sons as well. Hsu (1998) states that the ethic of filial piety, rooted in the father-son relationship, is central in both Chinese and Japanese societies. To be specific, in China, all the sons have obligations to support their elderly parents, and they all have the rights to inherit their parents' bequests;

while only the eldest son is obligated and has the right for inheritance in Japan.

Nevertheless, socio-economic and demographic changes such as attrition in the size and complexity of the household, expansion in income disparities, reform of the welfare system, rise in consumption, improvement in living standards, growing tendency of delayed marriage and child birth, have brought emerge influence to intergenerational relations, family norms, and the patterns of assistance among family members. The diversification of families has been recognized as a major family change by Chinese and Japanese sociologists (cf. Tang 2005&2007; Yang et al. 2010; Watanabe 1989; Nonoyama et al. 1996; Meguro 1987&2007). Hence, various patterns of intergenerational support in later life can be observed. In addition, although the supporting and inheritance systems are different, traditional elderly parent support and inheritance are usually a set of obligations and rights. However current inheritance law in both societies stipulates that all children have the same rights in inheritance. In other words, the priority of sons (or the eldest son) following the traditional custom is not guaranteed by law.

Related to intergenerational support in later life, gender norm deserve some attention. Confucianism gender norm is considered to have a long term influence in East Asian societies. Women had an inferior social status compared to men, and gender role in Confucianism thinking defines men as breadwinners, while women are considered to be in charge of domestic affairs. In China, customary phrases such as “the more sons the more happiness” (*duo zi duo fu*) and “a married daughter is like spilled water” (*jia chuqu de nv'er, po chuqu de shui*), demonstrate the strong emphasis on patrilineal ties and obligations. Nonetheless, socialist reform after 1949 has brought new challenges to traditional gender norms. Gender equality has been an ideology promoted by the government, and there was an official rhetoric encouraging women to work (Whyte and Parish 1984). By contrast in Japan, the concept of “good wife and wise mother” (*ryosai kenbo*) emerged as the ideal of womanhood during the Meiji Restoration (Hirao 2001:192), and survived during the rapid economic growth and structural change of the post-war period. Although the gendered division of labor remains prevalent in Japan compared to other advanced industrial countries (Ochiai et al. 2007), promotion policies related to gender equality have been launched by Japanese government since late 1980s. In short, intergenerational support used to have a patrilineal principle in East Asian countries, but the enhanced social consciousness of gender equality may have some impacts on it.

Under such backgrounds, in this paper I will especially focus on a gender view, to explore whether the role allocation among adult children differs because of gender in their support to elderly parents, and whether elderly parents treat sons and daughters differently in their support to children and inheritance. Moreover, I will discuss norms and values which are mobilized by the interviewees in explaining their decisions and behaviors involving intergenerational support, in order to clarify the features of intergenerational relations in later life in urban China and Japan.

## II. Methods and Data

### 1. Earlier literatures of Comparative Asian Family Studies

Understanding the behaviors and attitudes of people within any given society is difficult enough, but it is even more challenging to try to compare these between two societies. In order to build a constructive analytical framework of comparison, I take up research works by Hsu and Ochiai.

In Hsu's earlier work *Clan, Caste, and Club* (1963), he showed through a comparison the distinctive characteristics of family patterns in China, Hindu, and America. Based on his fieldwork in each of these countries, he uses familial relationships as a starting point for explaining differences among three world views. From his analysis of family, he moves into a comparison of the important secondary groupings characteristic of each society. Hsu's methodology may not be quantitatively accurate, but he shows an applicative approach to study the cultural difference in different societies. Furthermore, his approach is also practical to avoid making oversimplified generalization based on the data gathered within a single society.

There are not only differences of family systems, but also differences in political, socio-economic system and the level of development in Chinese and Japanese societies. However, with the rapid development in urban China since the market reform from 1978, industrialization and post-industrialization have proceeded simultaneously in urban China, and similar life styles have been observed in Chinese and Japanese cities. Within the context of modernization, post-modernization, and globalization, Emiko Ochiai and her fellow researchers conducted investigations in five regions in east and southeastern Asia (China, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Singapore). They employed an individual-level, life-course approach and theory of social network to study the networks of child care and elderly care and also to be able to adapt to variations in different societies (Ochiai et al. 2007).

There are also numerous quantitative researches on intergenerational support in later life in China and Japan, some of which I will mention in the latter part of this paper. They are significant to explore some general vision of the field, but we still know little about the specific decision-making process of the elderly and their adult children while supporting each other. The dynamics of later-life intergenerational relations is not fully understood, nor is the complexity of these relations fully described. Thus, I think an in-depth study is necessary to study the actual decision-making process of the elderly and their adult children while supporting each other in the sophisticated daily life, and I use the narratives of the interviewees in both regions for analysis.

### 2. Fieldwork in Shenyang and Tokyo/Yokohama

While obviously no single city can be taken as representative of all of urban China, there are two reasons for choosing Shenyang as my study region. First, Shenyang is a typical

industrial city, and there are many large state-owned enterprises there. I think it is significant in studying the collapse of the *Danwei*<sup>1</sup> welfare system. Second, the Chinese central government has chosen Liaoning as a model province for the old-age pension reform, so Shenyang, as the capital of Liaoning province, is considered to be an appropriate place to study the effects of the current old-age pension system. On the other hand, Tokyo and Yokohama are prime examples to study urban life style in Japan, with numerous migrants from all over the country. It also offers varieties to study present-day diversified intergenerational relationships.

The in-depth interviews were continuously conducted in Shenyang from January 2005, and in Tokyo and Yokohama (mainly Yokohama) from October 2007. Interviewees consist of 15 elderly and 12 middle-aged citizens in Shenyang, and 9 pairs are parent and child in the same family. Interviewees in Tokyo and Yokohama consist of 15 elderly and 12 middle-aged citizens. Unfortunately, I failed to get them in pairs in the same family. The names of the interviewees have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

The sampling in Shenyang was carried out in two stages. First, with the introduction from my parents and clerks of two resident committees in Shenyang, 12 elderly citizens agreed to assist with my interviews. In order to study the influence of *Danwei* welfare and increase the variety of my data, I selected the interviewees mainly based on their occupation, income, age, sex, health condition, living condition<sup>2</sup>, and social participation. Second, after having a more specific plan for comparative studies of urban China and Japan in 2006, I adjusted my sampling as well as the interview guide so that it would adapt to a comparative research. The interviewees in Yokohama were introduced to me at first by a senior Ph.D. candidate at Keio University. At the same time, I obtained permission to interview some of the users of an elder care facility where I worked part-time from March 2007 in Tokyo. Then I asked the interviewees to introduce new interviewees to me, so it was a snowball sampling in both Shenyang and Tokyo/Yokohama later. The sampling in the second stage actually led to a bias to the middle class<sup>3</sup> in both regions, but it was what I considered to be proper: Similar positions in social hierarchy added validity and offered more similar circumstances for comparison. Table 1~Table 4 provide some basic information about the interviewees.

The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. The interview guide focused on the socio-economic changes in urban China and their impacts to the elderly at the first stage, and later included life histories of the interviewees, and especially focused on the parent-child relationship, sibling relationship among adult children, care-giving to elderly family members, role allocation among adult children, decision-making process involving intergenerational support, and their personal definition of filial piety.

**Table 1 Elderly Interviewees' Profiles (Tokyo and Yokohama)**

Interviewee (Sex)	Age	Age of spouse	Household income (Annual)	Type of residence	Number of children	Support from children	Support to children <sup>4</sup>
Morimoto ( F )	90	Widowed	3,000,000 yen	Separately	2 daughters	D from 1 <sup>st</sup> daughter	/
Iguchi ( M )	88	80	2,500,000yen +house rent income	Near 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	2 sons	D from 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	C to 1 <sup>st</sup> son
Sakai ( F )	81	Widowed	4,800,000yen	Near 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	2 sons	D from 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	C to 2 <sup>nd</sup> son, F to 1 <sup>st</sup> son
Wada ( F )	78	Divorced	840,000yen	Facility	2 daughters	/	/
Noguchi ( F )	76	Widowed	2,400,000yen	Separately	1 son	/	/
Ito ( F )	76	Widowed	2,000,000yen	With 1 <sup>st</sup> son	3 sons	/	H to 2 <sup>nd</sup> son
Usuba ( F )	75	80	-----	Near 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	2 sons	/	/
Yoshida ( F )	75	Widowed	Livelihood protection	Separately	2daughters, 1 son	/	/
Sekine ( M )	75	72	1,800,000yen	Separately	2 daughters	F from 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter	/
Kawaguchi ( M )	74	69	4,400,000yen	Separately	2 daughters	/	F to 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter
Matsushima ( F )	74	73	3,500,000yen	Near daughter	1 son, 1 daughter	/	C to daughter
Kimira ( M )	73	71	4,000,000yen	With 1 <sup>st</sup> son	2 sons	/	/
Miyazaki ( F )	71	73	2,000,000yen	With daughter	2 sons, 1 daughter	/	/
Inagaki ( F )	71	74	4,500,000yen	Near daughter	1 son, 1 daughter	/	F to son and daughter
Naoe (M)	69	64	2,400,000yen +house rent income	Near 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	2 sons (2 <sup>nd</sup> son died)	/	C to 2 <sup>nd</sup> son

**Table 2 Middle-Aged Interviewees' Profiles (Tokyo and Yokohama)**

Interviewee <sup>5</sup>	Age	Household Income	Type of Residence	Number of children	Support from parents / Inheritance	Support to parents
Taguchi (F)	65	6,000,000 yen	Separately	1 son 2 daughters	Inherit father-in-law's office / Equal division of others	F to parents-in-law , D to parents
Maeda (F)	65	30,000,000 yen	With mother-in-law	1 son 1 daughter	NA / younger sister-in-law inherits	F, N to mother-in-law
Inaba (F)	60	30,000,000 yen	With mother-in-law	1 sons 2 daughters	NA / sisters-in-law inherit / Eldest sister inherits	L to father-in-law, N to mother-in-law
Sakaue (F)	60	4,000,000 yen	Separately	2 sons	NA / younger brother-in-law inherits	L to parents and parents-in-law
Higasino (F)	59	6,000,000 yen	Separately	2 sons	NA / eldest brother-in-law inherits / (eldest daughter) inherit estates, equal division of movables	F to parents and parents-in-law , L to parents
Muragami (F)	58	8,000,000 yen	With parents-in-law, With mother	2 sons 1 daughter	F / NA / Eldest brother inherits	N to parents-in-law and mother
Kawabata (F)	58	20,000,000 yen	Separately	1 son 1 daughter		F and L to mother-in-law
Kikuchi (F)	56	18,000,000 yen	With mother-in-law	2 sons 1 daughter	NA / Eldest brother inherits house, equal division of movables	L to parents, N to mother-in-law
Yoshioka (F)	56	10,000,000 yen	Separately	1 son 1 daughter		D, HC to parents-in-law
Natsume (F)	55	4,000,000 yen	With mother-in-law	1 son 1 daughter		L to parents, N to mother-in-law
Miyao (F)	52	10,000,000 yen	Near parents	1 son 1 daughter	F, C / NA	D to parents
Izumi (F)	50	30,000,000 yen	Near parents	3 sons	F / brother-in-law inherits	D to parents

**Table 3 Elderly Interviewees' Profiles (Shenyang)**

Interviewee (Sex)	Age	Age of Spouse	Household Income (monthly)	Number of Children	Type of residence	Support from children	Support to children
Zhou (F)	87	Widowed	3600yuan	4 sons 2 daughters	Near 1 <sup>st</sup> daughter	/	C to 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter, F to 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> sons
Fang (M)	80	78	4000yuan	1 son 3 daughters	Separately	N when in hospital	F to 3 <sup>rd</sup> daughter, C
Ma (M)	80	77	4700yuan	1 son 2 daughters	Separately	N when in hospital, HC, D	F, C
Zhao (F)	79	86	2500yuan +no income	2 sons	With 1 <sup>st</sup> son (single)	HC	F, HC to 2 <sup>nd</sup> son,
Shang (F)	78	widowed	800yuan +9000yuan	4 daughters	With 3 <sup>rd</sup> daughter	F from 3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> daughters	F to 1 <sup>st</sup> daughter, HC, C to 3 <sup>rd</sup> daughter
Jiang (F)	77	79	1000yuan	1 son 3 daughters	Separately	HC,F,N when in hospital	/
Ren (M)	74	NA	3600yuan	3 sons 1 daughter	Near daughter	/	C to 3 <sup>rd</sup> son, F to all children
Li (F)	68	Widowed	900yuan +600yuan	2 sons 1 daughter	With 1 <sup>st</sup> son	N for husband from sons	F, C to 1 <sup>st</sup> son F to 2 <sup>nd</sup> son
Cai (F)	65	67	1300yuan +no income	4 daughters	With 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter (divorced)	F from 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> daughter	F, C to 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter
Shen (M)	79	79	2400yuan	1 son 2 daughters	Near son	/	D to son
Zheng (M)	76	71	2800yuan	1 son 3 daughters	With son	/	F, H, C to son
Han (M)	74	73	2100yuan +NA	6 daughters	With 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter (divorced)	N when in hospital	C
Wang (F)	73	76	4000yuan	2 sons 1 daughter	Separately	F for medicine	C to 2 <sup>nd</sup> son
Lin (F)	71	Widowed	395yuan +NA	2 sons 1 daughter	With 1 <sup>st</sup> son	/	H to 1 <sup>st</sup> son
Zhang (M)	70	70	2600yuan	2 sons	Near 1 <sup>st</sup> son	/	C to 1 <sup>st</sup> son



**Table 4 Middle-Aged Interviewees' Profiles (Shenyang)**

Interviewees	Age	Occupation	Household income	Number of children	Support to parent	Support from parent	Type of Residence
Shu's 1 <sup>st</sup> daughter (divorced)	58	Manager	3000yuan +4000yuan	1 son (married)	D	D	Live with son
Fang's 1 <sup>st</sup> son	53	Retired	6000yuan +NA	1 daughter (married)	D, H, N when in hospital	F	Live with daughter
Ma's 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter (divorced)	43	Government employee	2000yuan	1 daughter (18)	HC, D, N when in hospital	C	Live with daughter
Zhao's 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	53	Bank clerk	5000yuan	1 daughter (single)	HC	F, D	Near parents
Shang's 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter	50	Retired	1300yuan +2000yuan	1 daughter (single)	N	C	Near parents-in-law
Jiang's 1 <sup>st</sup> daughter	57	Retired	2600yuan	1 daughter (married)	HC, F		Near daughter
Ren's 1 <sup>st</sup> daughter	52	Retired	3000yuan	1 son (single)	HC, D	F	Near parents
Li's 1 <sup>st</sup> son (divorced)	43	Industrial worker	600yuan +900yuan	1 son (16)	HC, N	F, C	With mother and son
Li's 2 <sup>nd</sup> son	40	Unemployed	NA	Single	C	F	Alone
Cai's 4 <sup>th</sup> daughter	35	Doctor	NA	1 son (6)	F, D	C, HC	Near parents-in-law
Yin (F)	55	Retired	6000yuan	1 daughter (married)	F, N	C/brother inherits	With parents-in-law for 1 year
Liu (F)	55	Retired	3500yuan +3500yuan	1 daughter (single)	F, N	C	With daughter

### III. Findings

#### 1. Support from Adult Children to the Elderly Parents

Gender role is the most conspicuous difference in adult children's support to their elderly parents between Shenyang and Tokyo/Yokohama. In Shenyang, role allocation among

children is not likely to be decided by gender. Similar results are shown in previous quantitative studies focusing on the relation between gender and intergenerational assistance in later life. For instance, Xie and Zhou examined gender differences in adult children's financial support to parents using a data set collected in 1999 in three Chinese cities (Shanghai, Wuhan, and Xi'an), and the results show that married women provide the same or higher levels of financial support to parents than married men (Xie and Zhou 2009). Based on a survey data in Baoding—a city in Hebei Province, Whyte and Xu argue that elderly parents are as much or more likely to rely on married daughters as married sons (Whyte and Xu 2003: 186). Moreover, they point out the possibility that grown women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of caring for and helping aging relatives (ibid.: 189). However, none of my female interviewees in Shenyang complained about “over burden” in supporting their parents and parents-in-law in their narratives, since children's conjugal family is recognized as one “unit” in their support to parents. Additionally, it is confirmed that sons-in-law also provide various kinds of assistance to their parents-in-law.

*“We took turns to take care of my father-in-law in the hospital before his death: each family (adult children's conjugal family) for one day. Those who were busy with their work afforded less though. ....My mother-in-law is living alone now. My wife goes to visit her a lot when she gets leaves from work, and I help her to do the shopping. I buy and deliver things such as rice and oil (which are considered to be heavy for the elders) to her house when there is a shortage.” (Fang's 1<sup>st</sup> son, Shenyang)*

*“( \*: Do u feel stressed (taking care of your dad while he was ill?) No. My father has 4 daughters, so we are not short of hands. Daughters went in the day, and sons-in-law stayed at the hospital at night.” (Shang's 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter, Shenyang)*

Adult children in Shenyang claimed that they do not have a clear role allocation among siblings in support for their parents, and moreover that there should not be a difference between sons and daughters, since children—no matter male or female—all owe obligations to their parents. Adult children tend to describe the support for their elderly parents as their “duty”, “obligation” in their narratives. When support is needed for the elderly parents because of illness, adult children are likely to adapt to the particular circumstances at the time. In fact, most interviewees describe their role allocation principles as “Those who have more money should provide more economic support, while those who have more time should offer more hands-on support”. In the specific decision-making processes, one particular child may take the leading role; however, it is not determined by gender or birth order but by their characters, abilities, and resources, and the child who provides the most financial support is likely to act as the “leader” among the siblings as

well.

*“We didn’t have a specific role division among siblings. We just took turns (to take care of the elderly parent in the hospital). Well, those who had more time went to the hospital more, and those who were busy could ask other siblings for help. It’s not a big deal. As for the expenditure, my third younger sister paid the most: hospital fee, for example. And it’s always like this: when we were going to pay, she said, “I have paid”. She doesn’t do the math with us. She’s more flexible than us, and more decisive. For these reasons, she’s always the person of decision in our family affairs.” (Shang’s 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter, Shenyang)*

*“We don’t have a specific role sharing when our parents are at home. We go visit them at our own paces. But when my father was in hospital, we divided our roles. When he was in the hospital for 3 months, and at that time, there was no helper we could hire, so we took turns looking after him. Daughters, and sons-in-law, one person each day, and my mother was always in the hospital to take care of my father.” (Yin, female, Shenyang)*

From the viewpoints of the elderly, most elderly interviewees claimed that they are satisfied with their children’s support, including emotional attachments. Only one interviewee Jiang who internalized a strong traditional gender norm complains about her daughter-in-law for not visiting her often. However Jiang’s 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter thinks her mother does not have the right to urge her sister-in-law for support because “She (sister-in-law) has a different surname”. In this case, the mother-in-law has an expectation on her daughter-in-law for care-giving, but she does not have the power to make her bargaining successful. Her daughter tries to persuade her by mobilizing the norm emphasizing on the obligations of birth children.

*Jiang: “Your sister-in-law seldom comes, doesn’t she?”*

*Jiang’s 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter: “She’s a Waixingren<sup>6</sup>, so don’t complain about it. My brother is coming every weekend, right?”*

*Jiang: “But what can he do? He can do nothing excepting cooking. He’s a man, so he can do nothing else, like cleaning the house and so on. Besides he’s aging too. He’s nearly 60 now.”*

On the other hand, the narratives of the interviewees in Tokyo and Yokohama show that, females—daughters and daughters-in-law—are the main providers of non-financial support, which is corroborated by many previous studies in Japan. According to *Annual*

*Report on the Aging Society 2012* (Cabinet Office 2012), the main care-givers of the elders are families, and 69.4% of them are women. Using national family research of Japan data (NFRJ 98), Kim states that, non-financial support is more common than financial support. Elderly parents and adult children are independent financially. Meanwhile, men tend to provide financial support, while women tend to provide non-financial support (Kim 2001: 15-33).

Although the norm of living with the eldest son has been loosened to some extent, on the attitude level, a symbolic significance of the eldest son in support for elderly parents can still be observed in Yokohama. In the cases of two interviewees, the eldest son clearly showed awareness that they should play the main role of taking care of their elderly parents. However, their wives did not get along well with the parents, and as a result, the daughters in the two families performed care-giving, and eventually the parents were sent to nursing-care facilities. To a large extent, the support which the elderly parents receive from their sons—especially the daily care—are provided by their daughters-in-law. Therefore, support from sons to the elderly parents is likely to be decided by their spouses. We can also see the influence of “daughters-in-law” in support from the narratives of the elderly parents.

*“I don’t know how to use the new washing machine. My second daughter-in-law wrote the instructions on paper and put it on the machine for me. My second son lives near here, so his wife comes here a lot.” (Iguchi, male, Yokohama)*

*“I have two children, and I love them both. I hoped I could live with them all, my families, as a wish. I dreamed about my two sons’ family, and we, 3 families in all, living together, but... They both have their children, and it’s difficult to live with my eldest son since their house is too small. I asked my second son to live with us in our house, but his wife... my daughter-in-law doesn’t want to live with us.” (Usuba, female, Yokohama)*

Especially in answering the reasons for not expecting care-giving from their adult children, two of the elderly interviewees mentioned “it would be a pity for my daughter-in-law”. It indicates that it is their daughters-in-law, but not their sons, are considered to be the providers of daily care-giving. Meanwhile, it demonstrates that daughters-in-law are no longer recognized as desirable care-givers for the elderly interviewees. Instead, expectations for daughters have increased. As Kasugai points out, although the norm of eldest daughter-in-law as the main care-givers has been weakened, the gender norm remains strong, and in reality it appeals as the phenomena that the main care-giver is transformed from daughters-in-law to daughters (Kasuga 1997). The strong consciousness of gender difference can be confirmed in the middle-aged generation as well.

One of the middle-aged interviewees explains, “If I have daughters, I may have some expectations (for care-giving) on my children. However I only have two sons, it is difficult to expect on their wives.”

*“In case I need nursing care, I will go to those facilities, which are run by money. Although I say to my daughter-in-law, ‘If I have dementia, please change the dippers for me’, actually I don’t expect it. It will be such a pity for her, so I don’t wish her to really do so.” (Noguchi, female, Yokohama)*

Nevertheless, there is one case in which the husband played the major role in non-financial support for elderly parents among the 27 cases in Yokohama. In this case, the two sons and their wives took turns visiting their elderly mother who lived in a nursing care facility in Gunma, which is a 3-4 hour-drive from Yokohama, and took care of the mother’s house. The role division is also rare: role division is quite equal, while in most other cases in Tokyo and Yokohama, there is likely to be one particular child and his/her family who mainly take care of the elderly parents, while other children support less or do not support at all. It is also to be noted that the wife in this case works full time in a real-estate company.

Additionally, taking care of parents-in-law might influence the power relationship between the wife and the husband. Daughters-in-law who take care of their parents-in-law will be appreciated by their husbands, and are likely to gain more bargaining power in other aspects of family life. While daughters who take care of their own parents are likely to feel “sorry” to their husbands, as their support to parents might occupy their time which they think should be used to do their own house chores. Daughters’ support for their own parents is often linked with how they were brought up, and how their parents cherished them in the narratives. That is, feeling grateful to their own parents is an important motive for daughters to provide support.

*“Because I am taking care of my mother-in-law, my husband is thankful of it. And I feel our relationship is more equal.” (Inaba, female, Yokohama)*

*“I feel sorry when I have to go back to my hometown to take care of my parents, and sometimes my husband complains about it. However, he understood that when we got married. I am the eldest child in my home, there’s no choice.” (Higashino, female, Yokohama)*

## **2. Support from the Elderly Parents to Adult Children and Inheritance**

Compared to the elderly in Yokohama, more elderly parents in Shenyang claimed that they

have experiences in supporting their adult children, and various kinds of support can be observed. For example, they share their housing with a married child who is unable to afford a new residence, provide financial support to their children's house-purchasing, grand-children's education, and living expenses of their children who were laid off in the national enterprise reform, help with children's household chores, and care of their grandchildren. Among the fifteen elderly interviewees, seven of them live with their children, and the reason for living together either is that adult children are not able to get a new residence, or they return to parents' house because of divorce or other personal affairs<sup>7</sup>. Elderly parents also do most of the household chores when they live with their children.

Elderly parents talk about taking care of grandchildren as "natural", and it is considered to be grandparents' duty to do so. Most of the elderly interviewees in Shenyang have helped one or more of their children in the child-care, and many of that are long-term assistances. With parents' help in household chores and child care, the burden of the dual breadwinner family is lessened to some extent, and it has been an important supportive resource for the maintenance of dual breadwinner family before and after the market economic reform since 1978.

*"My two granddaughters are in junior high school now. My wife took care of them when they were little. Now their junior high school is near my home, so they come here after school, and I cook dinner for them when their parents are busy at work. Sometimes my son and his wife come here to eat too."* (Zhang, Male, Shenyang)

Chen argues that parental investment increases the likelihood of future old-age support from children (Chen 2003:218), and also my earlier research shows that financial support from the elderly parents enhances a sense of obligation for children, even if parents give such support without expectations (Yang 2008). However, intergenerational support in later life is not always based on the principle of reciprocity. The principle of support to children are claimed to be based on "children's needs". In one typical case, an elderly mother who lives with her third daughter sold her own home, and gave the money to her eldest daughter, who was relatively poor among the children. There are also some elderly parents who receive financial support from children who have good income, and give financial support to children whose economic conditions are bad. Through this, we can infer a possibility that elderly parents make an adjustment of economic conditions of their children, and it can be considered that these parents perform a function of redistribution among family members.

Some elderly interviewees in Shenyang consciously give priority to their sons in the support to children. From this, we can see the influence of the traditional cultural framework, which puts emphasis on the priorities of sons. Even though nowadays, sons and daughters share the same role in support to their elderly parents, preference for sons on the

social attitude level still exists. Especially in the cases of the inheritance of housing, two of my elderly interviewees claim that “it is normal to let the sons to inherit.” Under the influence of such elderly parents who favor their sons, daughters have been educated to take the priority of sons for granted since their childhoods, and they tend to think that male siblings should inherit parents’ properties as well, even if they provide the same support to their parents.

*“My parents live on pension, and the pension is enough to support their living. About the inheritance, I don’t really think about it, and I don’t need it either. My parents’ home will absolutely belong to my elder brother.....My mother’s property all belongs to my brother. I won’t fight for it. But if my mother left 100,000yuan, and my brother would like to share with us, I will take the money. After all I did take care of my parents. However, it’s up to my brother. He can choose to share or not. We three sisters think my parent’s property as my brother’s belonging, because he is the son.” (Jiang’s 1<sup>st</sup> daughter, Shenyang)*

*“My mother left a will saying that we should inherit equally. From this will, I can tell my mother was really disappointed with my brother. However, after discussing, we sisters decided to let my brother inherit all the property. In fact, there’s a sister who has some economic difficulties, and she was not happy with this decision at that time, but she didn’t tell us. Later, she said that even though she’s not satisfied with this, she cannot fight for it with our brother.” (Yin, female, Shenyang)*

Elderly parents in Tokyo and Yokohama do not support their adult children as much as those in Shenyang. Three elderly interviewees provided financial support, and five of them had experiences in helping with household chores and child care. Three of the middle-aged interviewees claim that they received parents’ financial support, and only one of them received assistance in child care. Most of these are short-term assistances. This contrast between the two societies is partly because of the geographic distances between parents’ and children’s residences. The strict limitations towards social mobility before market reform have made most of the adult children stay in the same city with their parents in Shenyang, while most middle-aged interviewees in Tokyo and Yokohama live in a relative far distance from their parents’ houses. Nevertheless, those who live in the same city with their parents seldom receive assistances in childcare either. The Japanese social norm that taking care of children is the mother’s responsibility is widely accepted by both the elderly and the middle-aged interviewees. Meanwhile, the nuclear family norm in Japan makes the elderly interviewees have a clear recognition of the “boundaries” between their children’s conjugal family and their own. Therefore, they consciously choose not to

“interfere” in their children’s family affairs. The elderly interviewees in Tokyo and Yokohama tend to emphasize that they provide support because they were requested by their children, that is, “not to provide support positively unless being asked”. However, similar to the cases in China, parents’ support in child care provides more possibilities for women to work full time.

*“I don’t interfere in my children’s child care....and when I look at my two sons’ families, I feel happy that they raise their children all by themselves. (My daughters-in-law) do not go to work at the cost of putting their children in a child care center. I always say, you should take care of your own children. I don’t know if you would say it is old-fashioned or not, but one should take care of one’s own children. Some people would use child care center or depend on grandmas for help, I don’t wish my children to do so.” (Miyazaki, female, Yokohama)*

In some previous studies, it is said that financial support from the elderly parents and inheritance are likely to be given to their eldest sons (or eldest daughters), which can be seen as an investment for care in later life, that is, an exchanging model (Ootake 1993; Matsuura and Shino 2001). In contrast, Naoi, Kobayashi and Liang’s research indicates that the departed husband’s inheritance property does not contribute to an elderly widow receiving various kinds of support from her children (Naoi et al. 2006). In the cases in my research, the reason for supporting adult children is more likely to be explained as “because of children’s requests” by the elderly. In other words, “children’s needs” seem to be the decisive factor for elderly parents to provide support.

Various kinds of inheritance are observed among the middle-aged interviewees. The most common kind is one in which the child who lives with the elderly parents (usually the eldest son or daughter) inherits all the properties, or the eldest son or daughter inherits the residence, and share the movable properties with the other siblings. Compared to traditional Chinese inheritance that all the sons divide the inheritance equally, traditional Japanese inheritance is always conferred on the eldest son (or eldest daughter). In both societies, inheritance and support to the elderly parents used to be a set of rights and obligations, however, the situation has greatly changed. For instance, there is a case in which the daughter performed the main role in her mother’s care, but her brother—the eldest son—inherited all the properties. She explains:

*“The lands and mountains (heritages) do not belong to my brother, and neither do they belong to me. They belong to our ancestors. It is my brother’s duty to take care of these lands and mountains, and pass them to his son.” (Muragami, female, Yokohama)*



The inheritance in this case followed *ie*<sup>8</sup> norm: the family head does not own the property, but was merely the trustee in the present generation who looks after it. In this sense, support and inheritance can be considered as two different things that cannot mingle.

In contrast, there is a case in which the daughter-in-law who played the main role of care inheriting nothing, since her husband's two sisters thought that it's not necessary to count their brother as an inheritor because he has a good income. For the daughter-in-law who took care of her mother-in-law for a long time, she felt as though her work was not rewarded and appreciated at all. In this case, the support for the elderly factually followed *ie* norm; however, the inheritance was based on children's actual economic conditions.

*"(My husband's income is good), so I don't really need the money. That's true. So, his younger sister and older sister must have considered "You don't need the money, don't you?", and probably from this consideration, they didn't even ask me about the inheritance. But, from my standpoint, I hope they had asked me first. It is not the problem of the money; it's the problem of the attitude." (Inaba, female, Yokohama)*

There are also three cases in Tokyo and Yokohama, in which adult children who neither lived with nor took care of their elderly parents, claimed their rights in inheritance, because "it is the legal right". In these cases, adult children choose different norms to claim their rights in inheritance based on their own circumstances, and negotiate with other siblings to obtain economic interests. In sum, diversified inheritance styles indicate diversified awareness toward the relations of support and inheritance in contemporary Japanese cities.

### **3. Different Norms and Values in Gender Role of Intergenerational Support**

The institutional factor plays an important role in the differences of gender role allocation in the two societies. In urban China, with the emphasis on gender equality after the socialist reform, both husband and wife work, both earn roughly equal incomes, and both share household chores, child care and parent care, even though women are likely to contribute more in these aspects. Furthermore, Tang and Parish state that in Chinese cities, during the market transition, education, job and income advantages provided by the market give women an unusual set of bargaining advantages relative to their husbands, many traditional and modern cultural norms about male and female roles are weakened, even though they never completely fade away (Tang and Parish 2000: 316).

In urban China, compared to the traditional norm that "Men go out to work, while women take care of the family", the view that "Children should take of their own parents" shows stronger influence. In other words, support to the elderly parents is mainly performed by their birth children. Sons and daughters-in-law do provide support to their parents-in-law, nevertheless, their support are likely to be on a subsidiary level. This phenomenon can also

be related to the theory of the “feedback” (Fei 1983) system of intergenerational support in Chinese society. “Feedback” means children’s repayments to parents’ efforts for raising them to grown-up, but for children-in-law, the obligation of this repayment does not come about for their parents-in-law: they do not own their parents-in-law for the “feedback”. Therefore, the pressure and requisition from a social moral level is not as strong as that for the birth children. As is well known, the traditional Chinese society is a patriarchal society. A married daughter used to be considered as a member of her husband’s family and lost membership in her natal family. Thus she had the obligation to support her parents-in-law. However, with the changes I mentioned above, gender equality has become more of the behavioral and ideological norm in the elderly support in urban Chinese families.

However, gender equality hardly appears to be in the labor market of care work, although the elderly care in urban China has shown a market oriented tendency nowadays. Most husbands and wives both work full time, and it leads to the problem that they do not have plenty of time to look after their parents if the care is necessary on a daily level. Moreover, financial condition permitting, adult children who have retired from work tend to hire domestic workers for the elderly care as well. Especially in urban Chinese middle class families, it can be observed frequently that full time domestic workers live with the elderly and take care of them. Most of these workers are women from rural areas of the country, who are paid moderately but still better than in their hometowns. The income gap between urban and rural areas makes it convenient for urban families to hire such rural workers. On the one hand, these rural workers have lessened the pressure for urban middle class families in the elderly care; on the other hand, a new gender inequality is created in the labor market of care-giving at the same time.

As for the preference for “son” in inheritance in Shenyang, the emphasis of “carry on the ancestral line” (*chuan zong jie dai*), the traditional preference for son may provide an explanation. Despite all the rapid socio-economic changes in urban China, the traditional patriarchal culture framework still shows an influence. The traditional elements are also reflected in marriage rituals, that expenditures were much larger for the groom’s than for the bride’s family. Additionally, there is a social custom that men should provide the housing when couples get married in most regions in China. Nowadays, more and more young couples prefer to live alone after marriage in the cities, and it adds the requirements for parents of sons to think about preparing a new residence for their sons when they are newly married. Consequently, gender inequality in inheritance is largely influenced by such patriarchal traditional social customs. Although daughters have been playing an important role in supporting their elderly parents, they seldom gain the equal rights in inheritance.

On the other hand, in post-war Japan, the gender role division “man=breadwinner, woman=housewife” has been a major aspect of the modern family model, and Japanese social welfare system is designed largely based on this gender role division as well. Under such institutional conditions, house chores, child care and the elderly care are considered to be a housewife’s work. “Mother’s love” is largely valued, and “mother’s responsibility” in

child care is emphasized on a social attitude level. Therefore compared to their counterparts in Shenyang, grandparents in Tokyo and Yokohama purposely choose not to provide child care support to their children positively, because child care is considered to be mother's responsibility. With the recognition that different generations may have different values in child care, grandparents intend to avoid conflicts with their children (daughters and daughters-in-law) over the issue. The awareness of "independence of nuclear family" can be widely observed from the narratives of both generations.

From the narratives of the middle-aged interviewees in Tokyo and Yokohama, it also can be observed that they have developed identities as housewives. Although they feel stressed about the hard nursing care work, they are likely to consider it as their job and what they should do. Although they hope their husbands would help with the care work, the fact that the long working hours and commuting hours make their husbands have little time to provide such assistance. Furthermore, although many women do have a job after the period of child care, their jobs are likely to be either part-time or in small firms (Brinton 1989&2001), which are difficult to be considered as a "career"; hence when the families need women to take care of their elderly parents, they would naturally give up their work in the labor market<sup>9</sup>. The norm of gender role has been showing some changes in present-day Japan, but as long as women cannot gain a relatively equal position in the labor market, it seems to be difficult to ask for much participation of men into the household work.

In Tokyo and Yokohama, the eldest son (or daughter) is likely to have a priority in inheritance when they continuously cohabit with their elderly parents, that can be interpreted as the traditional style of the elderly support and inheritance. But for daughters-in-law who are the main providers of care-giving to their parents-in-law, as Okuyama (2004) and Ueno (2005) argue, because children-in-law don't have the legal right for inheritance, they are placed at a disadvantageous position where they are not able to claim for the rewards of their hard work.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In both urban China and Japan, thanks to the functioning of public pension systems, most elders do not depend on their children financially on a daily life level. Although in urban China, because of the failure of present medical insurance system, some elders still receive financial support from children when they fall ill; in urban Japan, elderly parents and their children are more likely to be financially independent. Thus, I especially focused on the non-financial support—mainly care-giving—in Tokyo/Yokohama. Although the norm that the eldest daughter-in-law should take care of the elderly has been loosened to some extent, daughters' function in care-giving has been expected instead, and quite a few women experienced the double burden of taking care of parents and parents-in-law. All these lead to a conclusion that in urban Japan, women perform most of the support to the elderly parents, and this circumstance has not changed much. In contrast, it is observed that role allocation

among adult children in their support to elderly parents is seldom related to gender in Shenyang, because all children are considered to have obligations to support their elderly parents. The differences in the supporting style to the elderly parents come from different traditional family systems and different structures of employment in the two societies, which I discussed in detail earlier in the paper.

Meanwhile, support from the elderly parents to their children shows different features as well. There is no evidence from the narratives that elderly parents consciously give priority to their sons or daughters in Tokyo/Yokohama, and it is the same with non-financial support from elderly parents in Shenyang. However, in the cases of inheritance, urban Japan shows changes despite that the eldest son inheritance is still often observed, while some elderly parents in Shenyang are likely to have a preference for their sons. It indicates that the emphasis on “carry on the ancestral line”—which is believed to be son’s function in traditional Chinese society—still has strong influence in contemporary urban Chinese citizens’ awareness. Although in the cases of supporting the elderly parents, daughters’ functions have been different from the traditional recognition, the belief that only sons can carry on the family name and continue the family line has not changed much. Therefore, the norm of gender equality exists in family support to the elderly parents, while the patriarchal culture frame has a considerable effect in the elderly parents’ support to children: different gender norms mingled together to create the feature of intergenerational support in urban Chinese society.

I also have to point out that this research is based on case studies conducted in Shenyang and Tokyo/Yokohama, although I have taken some earlier studies based on quantitative survey data for reference, it is still possible that intergenerational support in other regions may show different characteristics. For this reason, I take a conservative attitude towards making generalization. Moreover, I focused mainly on a gender view to explore the features of intergenerational support in later life in the two societies, while obviously there are other factors which can have an influence on support relations and in decision making process of intergenerational support between the generations and among families involved. It leaves a future task to study all the factors and how they interact with each other as well.

Instead of discussing the changes in intergenerational support among different generations, I focused mainly on the contemporary elderly generation and their children generation in this paper. There is no need to mention that intergenerational support will change in the next generation: the increase in social mobility and decrease in child number add difficulties for the expectation of support from other children or relatives in urban China, which makes the current support style frequently observed hard to continue. Meanwhile, the intergenerational support relations between the middle-aged interviewees and their children also differ from those I discussed in this paper. These questions need to be clarified in the future discussion of this issue.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Danwei* (单位), is the name given to a place of employment in China. Prior to economic reforms a work unit acted as the first step of a multi-tiered hierarchy linking each individual with the central Communist Party infrastructure. Work units were the principal method of implementing party policy. Also workers were bound to their work unit for life. Each *Danwei* created their own housing, child care, schools, clinics, shops, services, post offices, etc. *Danwei* also takes care of employees after they retire.

<sup>2</sup> “Living condition” here has two meanings. First, it means the condition of the interviewees’ houses. Second, it means whether the interviewees were living with their children or not.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of “middle class” can be different due to different socio-economic condition. In my research, I define it as those who live in the city, work as white collars, and lead a modern lifestyle. About the definition of middle class, see Hsiao, H. Ml. Ed. (1999). *East Asian Middle Classes in Comparative Perspective*, Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Ochiai et al. (2007). *Asia no Kazoku to Gender* (Family and Gender in Asia) Tokyo: Keisosyobo.

<sup>4</sup> C=child care, F=financial support, HC=household chores, H=housing, N=nursing care, D=daily support (shopping etc), L=long-distance care, NA=not available

<sup>5</sup> All are housewives except Kawabata (full-time) and Miyao (self-employment).

<sup>6</sup> *Waixingren* means a person with an “outside” surname. Under patriarchal customs, a married daughter is considered to be a *Waixingren* to her natal family. However nowadays in Chinese cities, because husband and wife have different surnames, *Waixingren* becomes a term referring to children-in-law.

<sup>7</sup> All the co-residences are in parents’ houses expect for the case of Mrs. Shang.

<sup>8</sup> *Ie* (家) is the traditional Japanese family unit. It was a patriarchal system. See Vogel, E.F. (1963). *Japan’s new middle class: the salary man and his family in a Tokyo suburb*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>9</sup> In the turnover for the purpose of nursing care, women always account for over 80% from 2002 to 2007 (Cabinet Office 2012).

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