

Family Consumer session

Japan - Speaker

: ***Michiko Miyamoto*** (Chiba University)

PRESENT AND FUTURE OF JAPANESE FAMILY AND PARENT-CHILD
RELATIONSHIP IN LIGHT OF YOUNG ADULT SITUATION, Michiko Miyamoto,
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1. Trends in Japanese Family and Population

I wish to report changes in the Japanese family in light of the relationship between parent and young adult child. The reason I treat young adult issues is because they present the characteristics of the contemporary Japanese family and socio-demographic phenomena.

First of all, I would like to summarize the Japanese demographic movement in relation with the family and generation issue. The rapid aging of the Japanese population has few parallels in the world today. By the early twenty first century, Japan's "aging society" will be firmly established. At the same time, "fewer-children" phenomenon is seen as a defining characteristic of the period after 1975. This phenomenon, principally the result of later marriage or celibacy, has accelerated the aging of the Japanese population. A growing number of Japanese men and women have been putting off marriage until they are in their late twenties. In 1995 the average age of marriage was 28.5 years for first time grooms and 26.3 years for first-time brides. Even today, the Japanese average are among the highest in the world. Another important phenomenon is the upsurge in the rate of people never married. The proportion of men between the ages of 25 and 44 who had never married climbed by more than 4 percent compared with the previous census for all four or five-year age groups: unmarried women between the age of 25 and 29 rose by almost 10 percent. Thirty-seven(37)% of men and 20% of women in the first half of thirties and 23% of men and 10% of women in the latter half of thirties are unmarried. The increase in the number of never-married men and women who are 50 years of age or older, which first

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emerged in the 1970 census, also became more distinct. Evidently, a growing number of people are not only putting off marriage but abandoning it altogether. Japan has ceased to be a society in which everybody gets married. The low fertility rate has relation with such phenomena. The fertility rate had dropped to a low level of 1.42 in 1995. Such a low fertility rate means a smaller population, which would ultimately result in serious social problems. For this reason, such a lower fertility rate has suddenly brought an increased interest in the changes in the nature of the family underlying the phenomenon.

Next, I would like to explain why I intend to research parent-child relationship. The structure of parent-child relationship has seen major changes in fifty years after the war, and the most striking features among them may have been a change in the value and the role of children for parents.

Since it is a common practice these days for children to receive education in any form even after finishing their high school course, they are dependents for a long period of time and therefore no more positioned as breadwinners or supporters of their families. In addition, young people are recognized as those who enjoy affluent consumption and leisure, and called "single nobles" or "new mankind", which sometimes makes adult people feel puzzled in dealing with them. The burden of their educational expenses during the process has become the largest issue of household economy, and must be certainly one of the reasons for decreasing children. Taking into consideration such a situation, I have continued to carry out with coworkers a series of study of parent-child relationship with the intense consciousness of examining what the actual situation of young people reflects in the changing intergenerational relationships and families in Japan. I will review the present situation where the parent-child relationship is located in Japan and discuss the future prospect of Japanese society with fewer children(1).

2. Emerging "Post-Adolescence" and Real Situation of the Parent-Child Relationship

At first, I will refer to the framework by which young people are analyzed for their parent-child relationship. The most striking feature of youth in these days is the delay in timing of their social and economic independence and the period of dependence on

their parents extending beyond their teenage years. In addition to this, because the age at marriage become late, it is not reasonable, therefore, to try to understand this extended period of time by use of a traditional concept of "youth". The unmarried period at their twenties forms a "new stage of life", or "post-adolescence" prior to becoming complete adult. This period of time can be recognized as the transition period leading to marriage, namely family formation. Young people experience events such as leaving school, starting work, economic independence of their parents and selection of marital partners during this period. While young people leave family of orientation, the economy and protection of their parents during the transition period to adulthood, I assume that the features of the relationship of young people with their parents are condensed in their leaving process in these days and that changes in family will be able to be seen in the parent-child relationship. I will particularly focus on the process for young people to become self-supporting. This is because I suggest that the economic independence is an important step for young people to be adult and that at the same time the economic separation or non-separation is the principal aspect of the intergenerational relationship between parents and their children.

Two field surveys to understand the real situation were conducted both in Fuchu, Tokyo and in Matsumoto, Nagano as "Survey on the relationship between parents and their adolescent children and their economic condition" and "Survey on life course and intergenerational relationship of baby-boomers" in 1991 to 1992. The subjects of the former survey was unmarried young people in their twenties and people in their fifties who belong to the generation corresponding to the parents of the former. The subjects of the latter were baby-boomers who were born in 1947 to 1949. Some of the important findings derived from the former survey are given in the following:

Approximately 30 per cent of the parents surveyed consider "it to be a matter of course for children to help family finance in behalf of their parents". There is a recognition that "the salary of their children can be allowed to be left at their disposal" among more than 60 per cent of the parents. They regard their children in employment as independent financial entities and children's salary as their own belongings, which indicates that they make a clear distinction between their children and themselves. In this regard, there has been established a clear tendency to individualize family finance among

parents and their children in employment. Children are destined to leave home some time in the future, and their present life is regarded as the preparatory period of time for establishing their own home irrespective of whether they are living with their parents or apart from them. Therefore, there are very few cases where children's contribution to family finance is expected, and even if they are required to pay the expenses for their own by their parents they pay less. And, it is in the case of considerably low income that the contribution from children is spent to living expenses, and in most cases children's contributions are saved by their parents as reserve for marriage. While parents expect that their children will be able to live a life by their own efforts, they give their financial and non-financial supports to their children in different forms.

The parents of post-adolescent are mostly in their fifties as of 1991. They belong to the generation most of whom have earned a certain amount of income and built their means by riding on the wave of the economic development of Japan, and have good prospects for their years after retirement based on pension. That seems to make the basic condition on which they take an accepting and supporting attitude to their adult children who have attained adult status and are employed.

In addition to the disappearance of contribution to family finance as a milestone to adulthood, another important feature is that timing of leaving home is delayed and that there is observed a situation where there no longer exists a norm which makes leaving home to be a requisite to become adult. Furthermore, many of parents are much satisfied with living with their adult children, which shows that the emotional bond between parents and their children are better maintained than generally expected.

It is also indicated that many of children living home with their parents scarcely play roles within the family and even allow their mothers take care of themselves. Thus, young people are completely exempt from a role of contributing to family finance and are under the patronage of their parents both financially and non-financially as a preparatory stage to marriage. They cannot be defined by the traditional concept of youth, and such situation is considered to be a new stage specific to the present age and therefore, designated as "post-adolescence".

The feature of post-adolescence is typically observed among the middle-class families who are living in the metropolitan area and financially well-off. But, since many Japanese have the consciousness of belonging to middle-class, the feature is not necessarily limited to middle-class families, but prevailing across a wide range of classes and areas. Such parent/child relationship seems to accelerates the later marriage (therefore leading to a decreasing children population).

3. The difference in Parent-child Relationship between Western Countries and Japan

We are coming up with a question of whether these features observed in the parent-child relationship are the phenomena peculiar to the developed countries or not. In many developed countries after the war there was a promoted spirit of supporting the dependence of young people under the favorable economic development. For example, in UK the state policy to support the independence of young people was adopted. Emancipation from dependence on parents and the formation of an independent household by own income and housing benefits were supported both normatively and in terms of system. Leaving home was considered as a take-off toward adulthood and there was a social principle to help young people leave home even in the social policy during a period of favorable financial condition, which was quite different from the situation in Japan. It was labor market and welfare state policy which made the principle possible(3). Therefore, it has been pointed out that unemployment issue of young people and reduction of state finance under the recession of economy forced them to make a great change in their living form and parent-child relationship.

It seems that in comparison with these Western countries Japan is fundamentally different from these countries in that it has maintained the stem family system for a long period of time. The norm of the stem family system has survived for a long time even after the war, and still continues to remain although the succession of *the Family* by a successor has been attenuated. Even though children live away from their parents for a certain period of time after marriage, they are often implicitly destined to live together again with their parents in future. In Japan where more than 60% of the aged

people live together with their children in the same family, it is not contrary to a norm of the family to live with young adult children. The separation or distinction between generations in the western terms is still not predominant. In addition, with a decreasing number of children parents maintain the intimate relationship not only with their successors but with other children, especially, with daughters. Parents have weakened parents of forcing other children out of the family. Because of the background such as the decline of family businesses, the increase in the economic power of parents, a decreasing children population and an increasing level of education, there emerged a dense parent-child relationship accompanied by the protection and material overprotection of children, which is rarely observed in any other countries(3). The economic power of allowing children to stay at their parental home for a long period of time has been given to these parents during a period of economic growth. When considering living forms of young people, the rate of those people who live with their parental home is high compared with that of other countries. It seems to be necessary to note that the fact that approximately 80% of young people stay at their parental home during a period of transition to adulthood is an important background in understanding the parent-child relationship in Japan.

4. Prolonged Period of Education, Delayed Opportunity to Leave Home and to be Economically Independent, and Emancipation from Obligation to Support Parents

While the burden of educational costs has increased with an increasingly prolonged period of education, it has been always imposed on parents, which is quite different from other developed counties(4). Since 1970s the expense of higher education, in particular, has been remarkably increased, contributing to the main cause of tightened family finance at a period of middle-age(5). It is to be noted that no system has ever helped students live a college-life independently of support from their parents.

Another feature of Japan is that the difference between classes has been relatively small, and "the consciousness of everyone belonging to middle-class" has been created by the benefit of economic growth which had extended over all classes. A point of

particular importance is that enthusiasm for educating children, long-term provision of care to them and behavior of not promoting their independence have been spread over a wide range of classes regardless of the differences in class and region. The consciousness of aiming at college education has been quite high. Under the present situation where 70% of people wish to have their (male) children receive college education, it is likely that the period during which young people are dependent on their parents will be still prolonged(6).

Besides, it is to be remembered that there is another background which delays the independence of young people. The time when post-adolescence emerged roughly coincided with the time when their mother generation became "full-time homemaker" . Furthermore, the role-sharing has been clarified between husband and wife. Husbands are devoted to corporate work while wives are in charge of household affairs and child care has been clarified. It may also be stated that the fact of weak relationship between husbands and wives which is described as "divorce within home" has resulted in one-sided provision of services to children.

Industrialization has raised not only the income level of parents but the educational level of their children. As a result, the period of supporting children by their parents has been extended over a long period of time beyond an age of twenty, which led to the disappearance of the economic role of children within family. Furthermore, the economic relationship between parents and children includes an aspect of support of parents by their children. In this respect, too, the parents-child relationship has

greatly changed with time. The previous generation who did enjoy an increased level of education, namely those in their fifties and older at present started to support their parents at considerably early stage, mostly immediately after finishing school. It was a common practice for successors to support their parents, and other children were released from the obligation(7). Even for the baby-boomer generation, approximately 40% of them had supported their parents before they got married. However, there has been a gradual decrease in number of people who support their parents after marriage among baby-boomers and the following generation. This is because of the result of the matured pension system. In addition, longevity of parents

has delayed the time when support to them by their children is started beyond their middle age. To the contrary, the flow of resources proceeds from parents to their children up to the period of middle age of the latter.

High economic growth had helped disseminate such intergenerational relationship widely not only among upper class but among other classes. The parent-child relationship has generally become intimate at an individual level and children have become an increasingly expensive existence. People try to deal with these issues by decreasing the number of children. As a result, there may be an emerging conflict in interest between generations at the macro level.

But there has been observed a shift of intergenerational relationship. An important change observed from the above baby-boomer survey is that 45% of them in Fuchu, Tokyo, and 35% in Mtsumoto, Nagano, expressed their intention of preparing for own aging rather than spending money for children. This shows that a circulation of parents transferring own affluence preferentially to their children is beginning to greatly change with such generation.

It is surely correct to say that the characteristic of financially favored young people is a phenomenon brought by high economic growth which had realized high growth rate and full employment, and emerged as a specific intergenerational relationship, but it had lasted for only a limited period of around thirty years in a historical term. Many cases in other developed countries have shown that the relationship between young people and their family suffered the impact of the economic conditions. Due to the ongoing long-term stagnation and cavity industrial structure since the collapsing of bubbled prosperity of economy, new graduates continue to have difficulty in finding jobs. At the same time, some of their parents have suffered a wide range of effects which they have never experienced because of reconsideration of the lifelong employment and seniority wage systems as well as because of reduction of middle-aged personnel. The intergenerational relationship will have to change not only at the micro level but at the macro level.

We are at a stage where we have to take into account the arrival of such society. We have to understand how the economic change may alter the parent-child relationship

and examine how the intergenerational relationships should be not only at individual level but at the societal level.

(Tables and figures will be given at the submission of the paper in the symposium)

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Japan – Reactor Paper by Michiko Miyamoto.
: Midori Otake. Tokyo Metropolitan University.

RESPONSE TO THE REPORT BY Ms. MIYAMOTO, Midori Otake, Department of Home Economics, Tokyo Gakugei University, 4-1-1 Nukui-Kitamachi Koganei-shi Tokyo, 184 Japan

The major subject of the Ms. Miyamoto's report was a presentation of the factors behind the characteristics of contemporary Japanese families -- women bearing fewer children and people getting married at a later age. Her report was based on surveys she has conducted regarding the relations between parents and post-adolescent children. I have summarized the two factors that Ms. Miyamoto put forward in her report, in rough form, in the following paragraphs.

The first factor is the high incomes earned by the generation of parents who reaped the benefits of Japan's economic development. Longer educational careers and high education costs, which are shouldered by the parents, delay the economic independence of the children. Furthermore, because the parents earn enough to support their families, the children use most of their income to meet their own personal needs, without making contributions to the family finances, even after they have started working. They avoid marriage, knowing that their personal disposable income will fall if they get married and have to bear the financial responsibility of a new family.

The second factor is the strong bond between parents and children, which is a manifestation of the value placed on blood relations in East Asian culture. In East Asia, where blood relationships are treasured, people consider parent-child relations to be even more important than spousal relations. There are expectations for children to resume living with their parents even when they become temporarily independent. Parents and children continue to play their original roles regardless of their age. Therefore, many mothers continue to act as full-time housewives doing all of the household work and continuing to care for the children even after the children are grown up. In return, the children continue to act as if they require care.

Ms. Miyamoto's report, which attributed the phenomena of lower fertility rates and later marriages to the high financial status of parents and to the close ties between parents and children, should be highly evaluated for presenting a new angle of analysis on Japanese families. However, I believe that the major factors behind lower fertility rates and later marriages are the stronger economic status of Japanese women and the insufficiency of social systems to support working women with children. Therefore, there is a slight gap between my views and those presented in Ms. Miyamoto's report, which places emphasis on the financial strength of parents and intimate parent-child relations. In view of such differences, I have prepared several questions which I hope will spark discussion.

First of all, I would like to ask Ms. Miyamoto what percentage of Japanese families are covered in the surveys she has conducted. Although she points out that parents have high incomes and that their children depend on them economically even when they have their own incomes, I do not believe that this is necessarily the typical pattern for the majority of Japanese families. Secondly, Ms. Miyamoto does not differentiate between males and females when she discusses the generation of children. I suspect the two have dissimilar behaviors. My question is: Does gender make a difference? For example, the reason for male children getting married at an older age cannot necessarily be found in the fact that their mothers take care of their basic necessities, and that their links have therefore become strong. After all, they would not be inconvenienced in any way if, after their marriages, their wives took over the duties that were performed by their mothers.

Lastly, I would like to know whether the situation is the same in South Korea, since one would expect them to be if the strong ties between parents and children, which are typical in East Asian cultures, are a key factor. South Korea has also shared Japan's rapid economic development. Are South Koreans marrying at later ages and bearing fewer children? Are the children of high-income parents spending all of their incomes on their own needs and not helping with family finances? Is there a tendency for children to be taken care of by their parents even after they become adults? Are the child-parent roles fixed even after the children grow up?

I would like to limit by reactions to the aforementioned points, and I hope they will help inspire discussion on the topic.