

CHANGING IDEAS ABOUT FAMILY CARE FOR THE ELDERLY IN JAPAN

ABSTRACT. As rapid social changes occur around the world, accompanied by increasingly larger numbers of elderly in need of care, it is crucial to gain new knowledge of the relationship between changing social institutions and the impact of such changes on the context in which care is given to the elderly.

In Japan, the family has traditionally been the context in which caregiving occurs. Although family care still remains central, 22 focus groups conducted in Tokyo in 1982 and 1990 with three different age groups (N=175) reflect the significant changes which are occurring in the traditional Japanese family system – despite important continuities – and the manner in which these changes are influencing the Japanese approach to care for the elderly.

In this article, we focus on material, instrumental, and emotional reciprocity among adult generations within the Japanese family. Our data suggest that families mix traditional options with newer ones in providing care to their elders.

Key Words: Japanese family system, intergenerational reciprocity, inheritance, changing cultural frameworks, focus group methodology

INTRODUCTION

This article is written about changing cultural frameworks and the redefinition of what constitutes a socially acceptable solution to problems of providing care to the Japanese elderly. We wish to accomplish the following goals: 1) to place the Japanese elderly and the arrangements made for their care within the changing context of Japanese kinship relations and household formation; and 2) to examine, in a qualitative way, the impact which these changes have had on the negotiation among family members of care arrangements for individual elderly people. Data will be examined from focus groups conducted in Tokyo in 1982 and 1990 with three different age groups of Japanese.

The nature of aging in Japan has changed significantly in the post-World-War-II period. People who were 65 years of age and older constituted 5.3% of the total Japanese population in 1920, and this did not change until 1955. By 1970, the 65-and-older age group had grown to 7.1% of the total population, and continued to grow to 10% in 1985 and 11.2% in 1988 (Okazaki 1990: 7). The rate of growth in Japan's elderly population is several times that of the Western European countries, where the proportion of the population 65 years of age and older is approximately 15% of the total. Japan is projected to have a comparable proportion of elderly people (16%) by the year 2000. This proportion is expected to climb to 20% by 2010 and to stabilize at 23.6% in 2020 (Okazaki 1990: 8–9). This major demographic shift is largely attributed to improved health care as well as to improved public health conditions, both of which have

dramatically reduced the mortality rate, and to postwar social changes which have reduced the birth rate as well.

The rapidly growing proportion of individuals over 65 in the Japanese population is already having an impact on Japanese cultural and social institutions. At the same time the lives of Japanese elders are being influenced by independent changes in these institutions. It is extremely important for gerontologists in Japan and elsewhere to acquire an understanding of the relationship between aging in the modern world and changing cultural and social institutions.

We believe that interpreting changes in family care for the elderly in Japan primarily through a quantitative lens excludes aspects of this social phenomenon which are crucial to understanding its nature and complexity. In this article, we examine the relationship between the Japanese elderly and the family system of which they are a part from a qualitative, sociocultural and structural perspective. We argue that this kind of analysis significantly improves our understanding of the social changes which are reflected in survey research on this topic. Quantitative measurements of social change can seem confusing and even contradictory if they are not accompanied by qualitative, cultural analyses of the kind presented here.

We know from survey research done on elements of care for the elderly in Japan that important changes have occurred in such variables as intergenerational living arrangements (Hirosima 1987a and b; Japan Aging Research Center 1991), exchange of services between elderly mothers and their adult daughters (Akiyama, Antonucci, and Campbell 1990), and inheritance patterns (Tsuya and Martin 1992). Yet, these studies also point to a seemingly contradictory survival of traditional features of household structure and eldercare as well.

Hirosima, for example, notes that the percentage of younger elders who are living with their adult children has decreased. In contrast, the percentage of adult children aged 20 to 39 who are living with their parents has remained constant or increased slightly. Hirosima attributes this apparent contradiction to the decline in the birth rate. Today's older adults have had fewer children than did earlier cohorts of elders. Thus, they have fewer children available with whom they can possibly co-reside. In the younger adult generation, there are more only children or only sons, who are expected to take on the responsibility of living with and caring for their elderly parents. Young adults who are free of this responsibility because they have a sibling available to take it on have, therefore, decreased as a percentage of the total young adult population, explaining the figures for co-residence among this group (1987a: 33). Thus, the statistics indicate a shift away from traditional patterns for the older generation, while, at the same time, indicating that many younger adults continue to engage in traditional living arrangements.

What is not clear from survey research is the qualitative nature of the co-existence of continuity and change in family structure and care for the Japanese elderly. We seek to address this gap in knowledge by examining the manner in which components of the traditional Japanese cultural framework for intergenerational reciprocity can be separated and recombined in new ways, ways which

frequently include non-traditional ideas about and practices in caring for the elderly. This phenomenon is repeatedly illustrated in our focus group data in descriptions of eldercare problems which are faced, and solved, by individual families. The qualitative approach which we have used suggests that changes in family structure and care arrangements for the elderly in Japan do not reflect a wholesale shift from traditional patterns to non-traditional ones. Instead, the indication is that individuals mix traditional options with newer ones, feel uncertain and ambivalent about the choices they make, and struggle to make sense of broader social trends and changes in terms of their own personal circumstances.

BACKGROUND

Household Formation, the Dependency of the Elderly and Intergenerational Reciprocity

The traditional Japanese stem family, known as the 'ie,' is the context within which care to the elderly was provided in the past, and within which it is still frequently provided at the present time. The 'ie' is a complex social institution with several major functions (Bachnik 1983; Nakane 1970; Long 1987). In kinship terms, the members of the 'ie' form a three-generation stem family in which the eldest son takes his bride into the home of his parents, with whom they live until the parents die. Other children form their own households after marriage, and contact between these newly formed households and the original 'ie' is limited. The 'ie' is primarily a property-owning, corporate group in which greatest emphasis is placed on maintaining this group over time. Traditionally, 'ie' property included household goods, land, a house and/or business.

The head of the 'ie,' usually the eldest living male, unless this individual has formally retired, is responsible for managing the 'ie' property well, preserving it to be passed on to the next generation and, of critical importance, for the selection and training of a successor to carry the 'ie' on through time after his own retirement and/or death (Long 1987). Although the oldest son is the preferred successor, if necessary, someone else, such as a younger son, a daughter, or an adopted son-in-law is chosen, even when there is an eldest son available. Choices about who will succeed to 'ie' headship are characterized by extreme flexibility and pragmatic considerations regarding a prospective successor's competence and overall ability to preserve and enhance the success of the 'ie' in the next generation (Bachnik 1983; Smith 1974; Lebra 1989).

The head of the 'ie' is responsible for caring for the elderly of the household. The elderly have traditionally depended on the 'ie' successor and, especially, his wife, typically their daughter-in-law, for physical care, financial security, emotional support, and integration into a social group. Dependency on others is valued and encouraged in this family system, and the elderly have traditionally and 'naturally' been considered to be physically dependent on younger people. Survey results for 1989 indicate that fifty-eight percent of individuals sixty years

of age and over reside with their children (Japan Aging Research Center 1991: 45–46). As individuals grow older they tend to live with their children, married or otherwise, in even higher numbers (Japan Aging Research Center 1991: 45–46; Hiroshima 1987a and b).

In this article, we will discuss one of the areas in which the redefinition of intergenerational relations within the context of the Japanese family is reflected in our focus group data: reciprocity among adult generations. We will address two kinds of reciprocity: 1) material reciprocity/inheritance; and 2) instrumental and emotional reciprocity.

Writing about intergenerational reciprocity, Selig, Tomlinson and Hickey note that “the ethical dimensions of responsibility for dependent older family members and ... how these relate to the burdens of caregiving” have seldom been addressed in the extensive literature on family care of the elderly (1991: 624). They also acknowledge that the cultural traditions which define what is ethically acceptable and appropriate in providing care differ from one society to another.

Cross-cultural studies have been particularly useful in highlighting such ethical differences, while, at the same time, stressing the widespread importance of intergenerational reciprocity across cultures. For example, Togonu-Bick-ersteth and Akinawo (1990) emphasize that, although there is a general similarity in the filial values and future expectations of eldercare among Nigerian and Indian university students, differences between the two societies at the micro-level seem “to shape the reality of how the old are viewed, what is considered appropriate duty to the old, and the reactions to proposals for formalized or institutional care of the old” (p. 329). They conclude that modernization has affected these two countries differently and that “attempts at introducing more formalized care for the old must not be based on the simplistic notion that what is good for one developing country must be good for another” (p. 330).

Shomaker describes reciprocity as “an instrumental principle of interaction between generations” among the Navajo Indians (1990: 33). Wehl (1988) concludes that the high rate of intergenerational support and interaction among rural Arabs in Israel is rooted in normative values about family solidarity and obligations towards other family members. Cattell (1990) found that long-term intergenerational reciprocity and the ethic of filial piety are powerful cultural norms which enhance the well-being of Samia elders in western Kenya. Cox and Gelfand (1987) found that attitudes towards aging and intergenerational assistance and exchange vary among the Hispanic, Portuguese, and Vietnamese populations of Santa Clara County, California. The practical realities faced by both the young and the old among these immigrant groups, and the degree to which younger generations have assimilated to American culture, also influence these attitudes.

Expectations regarding family care of the elderly and intergenerational reciprocity in Korean and Chinese culture strongly resemble those found in Japan, as all three of these East Asian cultures have been much influenced by

Confucian ethical conceptions of filial piety. Sung (1991) found traditional family supports for the elderly to be important in the urban environment of Seoul, South Korea, as did Lee (1986) for the ethnic Chinese in Singapore. Davis-Friedmann (1991) and Ikels (1983) found that traditional forms of intergenerational reciprocity and eldercare among the Chinese are reshaped in response to different social environments.

The analysis of changing ideas about intergenerational reciprocity and eldercare in Japan which is presented in this article is set against the background provided by the kind of cross-cultural research cited above. As in many other cultures, intergenerational reciprocity is important in Japan and related in crucial ways to eldercare. Similar to the Chinese cases described by Davis-Friedmann and Ikels, the continuity of traditional patterns of reciprocity and eldercare in Japan co-exists with flexibility vis-à-vis the changing social environment in which the Japanese – young and old alike – find themselves. What is unique in the Japanese case is important to know for those who must plan for the needs and challenges presented by the rapidly aging Japanese population. What Japan shares with other cultures in the continuing importance of intergenerational reciprocity, and in the capacity for traditional ideas about eldercare to endure and change at the same time, is important to know for anyone who wishes to understand the nature of intergenerational reciprocity, social change and eldercare arrangements cross-culturally.

METHODS

The research upon which this article is based was conducted using focus group methodology. A focus group is a small group of individuals brought together to discuss topics which have been selected beforehand by the researcher. Focus group methodology has been described as “a tool for studying ideas in group context” and “a technique for specifying the diversity of meaning” (Manning, Miller and Van Maanen 1988: 5).

Twenty-two focus groups were conducted in Tokyo, 10 in 1982 and 12 in 1990, with a total of 175 people in three generations (see Table I): G-1, ages 61–91 (N=44, 7 males and 37 females); G-2, ages 27–59 (N=73, 8 males and 65 females); and G-3, ages 18–22 (N=58, 7 males and 51 females). Members were recruited in various ways: G-1 were members of senior centers or volunteer groups; G-2 consisted of volunteer, social, and work groups; G-3 were students at two-year or four-year colleges. Group members knew each other before the interview, which is not always the case in focus group research. Group size varied from three to twelve with most groups composed of six to eight members. An effort was made to represent a range of class and income levels. For example, the G-3 colleges ranged from a government-sponsored nursing school, which drew lower-income young women, to a more elite private university.

About half of the G-1 and G-2 members participated in both 1982 and 1990. All G-3's are different in the two time periods. In 1982, because the groups were done to supplement a survey on women's changing roles and care of the elderly

TABLE I
Age of focus group members (N = 175)

	1982 (10 groups)	1990 (12 groups)	
G1 (61-91)	24	20	7 males 37 females
G2 (27-59)	39	34	8 males 65 females
G3 (18-22)	24	34	7 males 51 females
Total	87	88	

(Campbell and Brody 1985), they were all female. In 1990, one G-2 group, at a company, was all male, and men participated in both G-1 and G-3 groups.

Discussions were conducted in Japanese by the second author and a Japanese facilitator, guided by questions about care for the elderly, preferences for living arrangements, and intergenerational relationships. Examples of questions asked of younger focus groups include: "Which do you think would be better ... taking care of your own parents or your husband's parents?"; "Before you marry, would you talk about this with your husband? Would you hesitate to marry an eldest son?"; and "When you get married, how would you like to live ... alone with your husband, with your parents, or with your husband's parents?"

All focus groups were asked: "Do you think children have an obligation to take care of their elderly parents? What kind of responsibilities do children have for their parents?" Younger people were asked if they had discussed these issues with their own parents and whether or not they expected to be taking care of their parents or in-laws when these older individuals could no longer care for themselves. Older focus groups were asked how they felt about being dependent on their children: 1) financially; 2) for emotional support and advice; and 3) for physical care (bathing, dressing, feeding, etc.). They were also asked whether they preferred living on their own or with children after being widowed. All focus groups were asked if children who care for their parents or in-laws should receive something material in return, such as a house, or money from the inheritance.

Focus group discussion sessions ran from an hour and a half to two and a half hours. The groups were audiotaped, and then the tapes were translated and transcribed. The authors read through the transcripts and identified the following common themes: 1) gender roles; 2) relations with daughters-in-law as compared to relations with daughters; 3) preferred residence; 4) inheritance of property; 5) use of government services; 6) intergenerational reciprocity; and 7) dependency of the elderly on younger generations. Data from the transcripts were then coded by the authors into the above categories, and analyzed within this thematic framework.

RESULTS

Specific forms of exchange and reciprocity among adult generations are central to the definition and structure of the traditional Japanese household. Reciprocity was a major theme which was discussed across focus groups. The types of reciprocity which were of central concern to focus group members fell into two categories: 1) exchange of material goods and resources in the form of inheritance for eldercare; and 2) the presence or absence of long-term emotional and instrumental reciprocity among generations which has developed over many years of close association. While the three different age groups involved in our focus group discussions had different views about these two forms of reciprocity, views within the same age group did not differ from 1982 to 1990. However, because some of the same people participated in both the 1982 and 1990 focus groups, the lack of change over time may well be due to the fact that these individuals had not changed their opinions about this particular topic.

Gender Differences

There were no discernible gender differences in general opinions about such matters as inheritance and the importance of long-term reciprocity within an 'ie'. However, women in all three age groups were vocal about the need for men to help more with the physical tasks involved in eldercare and housework, seeing this as an important issue. Many of the G-3 women expressed the desire to continue working after marriage and after bearing children, although some of these women said they would take time off when their children were very young. In connection with the desire to work, they insisted that the men they marry will have to help with the housework. The few men in the G-3 groups tended to be ambivalent and resistant to the idea of men taking on responsibility for housework.

As a whole, the men in the one all-male G-2 focus group were conservative and asserted strongly that it is a woman's duty to care for the dependent children and elderly people in her household. Women should be free to have jobs only if there are no dependent members of the family requiring their care. "In this situation," explained one of the men in this group, "it will not be a problem for your wife to work instead of doing some hobbies". Several said that men could not care for the elderly because they were required to work outside of the home, and that men did not know how to care for an elderly person, unless this meant driving the aged individual various places. One man asserted that, if a woman is not available to provide care, "it will cause your family to collapse".

In contrast, women in both the G-1 and G-2 focus groups felt that men needed to help their wives with eldercare and housework because the burden of a woman's doing everything herself was simply too great. Some of these women told stories of male relatives, or husbands, who did, in fact, help with eldercare – out of personal devotion to an elderly parent or as a practical matter in helping the family to survive the burdens and stresses involved. One G-1 man described

his efforts to learn more about caring for old people so that he could care better for his disabled wife, whom he did not wish to place in a nursing home.

Material Reciprocity/Inheritance

An overall shift from obligatory, 'ie'-based attitudes towards inheritance to compensatory and pragmatic attitudes is strongly reflected in our focus group data. The accounts of focus group members are consistent with survey results described by Tsuya and Martin (1992). These authors found that Japanese elders with more 'modern' characteristics – such as urban residence as opposed to rural, and with children whose marriages had not been arranged – are more likely to depart from the prewar ideals of living with their married children and transferring family inheritance to the eldest son only.

However, the focus group data go beyond merely confirming these changes. Our results indicate that solutions to individual problems involve combining traditional 'ie' ideas and practices with strategic non-'ie' choices. Thus, solutions to the problem of who inherits, and in return for what services, embody a practical, circumstance-driven mix of traditional and non-traditional elements rather than reflecting a wholesale shift from one to the other. The boundaries of what is acceptable in this area are being broadened and redefined.

Focus group members of all ages persistently linked material reward to the care of the elderly. Although reservations were sometimes expressed about how cold or impersonal it may seem to link care with inheritance, focus group members insisted that if the caregivers were not given exclusive rights to inheritance over non-caregiver siblings an injustice had occurred.

The members of G-3 focus groups generally perceived inheritance in terms of idealized norms, and these young people had less to say about inheritance than did their older counterparts in the G-2 and G-1 focus groups. Both young men and women spoke of future arrangements with their parents which reflected traditional expectations of inheritance in exchange for eldercare. Oldest sons in their families were expected to inherit property, while one of the daughters in a family with no sons was expected to marry a man who would become a member of her family and help her care for her parents. Only occasionally did a focus group member – male or female – express a non-traditional approach to inheritance, such as not expecting to receive property in exchange for care, or, in one case, preferring to save her money in order to pay for her own care in old age.

The comments of G-3 focus group members about the link between inheritance and eldercare included the following: "I think that it would be a good idea that I get a house because of living together. This idea makes me feel better ... and also helps me financially"; "I think the idea that a person who lives with ... parents gets the house is reasonable. If I do not live with my parents, I don't think that I have the right to get their house"; "I assume that parents may want to give something for the child who takes care of them"; and "... my father tells me to take care of him by building a new house in the garden of their house. In

Tokyo, it is very hard to afford to buy a house so it is a good idea, but I wish my brother would stay in that house and take care of them”.

One G-3 woman explained that either she or her sister will inherit the house, take on the family name, and care for her mother, and commented: “Basically, my mother comes with the house”. A G-3 man complained that his parents will sell the house and go to an old people’s home: “So there will be nothing ... even no house. ... This is the worst case”.

Two overall characteristics are particularly striking with respect to G-3 focus group members: 1) the high degree to which these young people had discussed inheritance/eldercare issues with their parents, as issues closely tied to decisions about marriage; and 2) the degree to which inheritance/eldercare issues are not yet part of the daily responsibility of these individuals. In fact, most of these young people are still receiving support from or are living with their parents. The arrangements mentioned are plans for the future. There are, as yet, no difficult challenges and compromises for which they must take personal responsibility in coping with the care of a particular elder. These will presumably materialize as G-3 individuals enter later stages of their lives.

In contrast, G-2 and G-1 focus group members spoke in specific detail about the conflicts, worries, compromises, negotiations, and broader social changes involved in allocating inheritance in exchange for care. While individuals in both G-2 and G-1 focus groups believed property should be given in exchange for eldercare, their own experiences in providing and/or receiving care had taught them the extent to which traditional arrangements can actually be implemented in individual cases, taking the idiosyncracies of circumstance and personality into account.

These older focus group members wrestled with postwar changes in patterns of inheritance encouraged by the 1947 change in the inheritance law, which mandates that all children receive a share of their parents’ property. Negotiations of property in exchange for eldercare must take this inheritance law into account in one way or another. The following two exchanges between focus group members occurred in G-2 focus groups, and were characteristic of concerns expressed about the ways in which the inheritance law could enter into inheritance/eldercare negotiations:

Example #1

- Person a) “My younger brother and his wife live together with my mother and take care of her. My other brothers and we will not ask for my mother’s property. In our minds, all property which my mother has goes to my brother automatically. But his wife (the daughter-in-law) feels uneasy.”
- Person b) “I understand that, because the law says the property should be divided equally among children.”
- Person a) “Yes, so the other brothers took steps to renounce the

property.”

Example #2

- Person c) “The change [in care patterns for the elderly] is partly due to the change in the law of succession. According to the old law, the eldest son is the sole successor, and in return he sees after the old parents. Now all of the estate goes to all children equally.”
- Person d) “Right. In the past, the eldest son had the obligation to look after his parents, but he got all the inheritance, too. There was a give and take. But due to the change in law, the estate goes to every child. But strangely, the idea still prevails that the eldest son is to take care of the parents. My husband is the eldest son of his parents, ... I feel [there is] a little unfairness.”

The promise or denial of exclusive rights to inheritance can be used consciously by the older generation in negotiating for, or assuring themselves of, care in old age. Here, too, broader social changes in Japan have made older focus group members less confident than they might have been otherwise that their adult children will provide care when it is needed. One G-1 individual made this very clear: “I live with my oldest son’s family. I may give my house and property if they take care of me well, but if not, and they just send me to an old people’s home, I will not give my property to them.”

When members of the younger adult generation renounce claims to property this can be construed as a refusal to enter into the reciprocal eldercare obligations which are involved. Material reward and providing care for the elderly are so strongly associated that in one case described by a G-2 focus group member, the language of material reward for caring for the elderly was used to express gratitude for good eldercare even in the absence of real material reward:

After I took care of my mother-in-law and father-in-law, my husband began to think that I was worthwhile. He always says that everything is mine.... Even though we do not have any inherited property, I am happy to hear what he means to say. He means that he thanks me for taking care of his parents.

The change in the inheritance law, refusals of property in order to avoid eldercare obligations, and the strong sense of injustice expressed when the sole caregiver will not be the sole heir to material property all create pressure to expand and reshape ideas about who should be involved in providing care to the elderly. This, in turn, broadens the framework within which acceptably negotiated solutions for eldercare can be conceived. Such a broadened framework, including both traditional ‘ie’ elements and non-‘ie’ options, is especially evident among focus group members old enough to have been

involved in solving the actual day-to-day problems of eldercare in their own families. One G-2 individual epitomized the broadened viewpoint which is characteristic of older focus group members by expressing a demand for the redistribution of eldercare obligations along the lines in which inheritance is legally supposed to be redistributed, making it clear to her mother-in-law that she no longer conceived of eldercare obligation within the traditional 'ie' framework and that her legacy goes equally to her three children, regardless of seniority. "A generation ago, the oldest son was the sole heir. Now the law is changed, and if the fortune goes to all children equally, then love and duty must also go equally." Thus, eldercare in this case is still seen to be strongly linked with receiving material property, as is the case in the traditional 'ie'. At the same time, however, both caregiving and inheriting property have been expanded beyond the prescribed limits of the 'ie'.

Instrumental and Emotional Reciprocity

When focus group members were asked if adult children have an obligation to care for their parents, discussions about the nature of obligation, love, and intergenerational reciprocity followed. All age groups spoke of these issues, but not in the same way.

Although most G-3 focus group members agreed that there is some kind of obligation to care for their parents, they pointed out that the obligation is not a contractual one. These young people invoked the traditional Japanese concept of 'on' as the basis for their feelings of obligation. 'On' is the indebtedness you feel towards your parents for having brought you into the world, and for all the love, effort, and hardship which they invested in caring for you when you were younger. G-3 focus group members saw feelings of 'on' as the product of long-term reciprocity. They pointed out that such feelings of indebtedness should come 'naturally', developing out of one's human connection to others, and should not have to be dictated by law, or other contract-like, external pressures. One G-3 focus group member emphasized that it is "feeling that matters". Another young woman explained: "when you say obligation, it seems something like a contract, which in terms of Japanese ways, is something we cannot entirely accept. I feel 'on', so I would take care of them. I felt 'on' when they were raising me, so I would now like to reciprocate". Another G-3 woman said that she thought of caring for her parents not in terms of obligation but as "returning the love I've been given". She wanted to care for her parents herself if they become ill, and not have them enter an old people's home, as they have suggested.

Perhaps most striking, the young women often expressed the desire to care for their own parents out of the love and gratitude they felt towards them. The desire to care for their own parents, rather than, or perhaps in addition to their in-laws, is a clear departure from the 'ie' model, which dictates that a woman care for her parents-in-law, and leave the care of her own parents to her brother's wife. The perceived nature of the 'obligation' to provide care in old

age was very different when G-3 members discussed their future parents-in-law, as opposed to their parents. Care for parents-in-law was seen to be an obligation related to the traditional 'ie', and was not a product of love and life-long emotional reciprocity. While some women said they would try to avoid caring for parents-in-law by refusing to marry an eldest son, others felt compelled to care for both parents and parents-in-law. One young woman expressed these differing motivations, felt simultaneously, quite well by saying that she felt responsible for her parents "because they brought me up and I love them", and for her parents-in-law, "because of some kind of obligation".

One young man expressed the desire to care for both his own and his wife's parents. Like the young women who wished to be involved in the care of their own parents, this young man, by extending his feelings of responsibility to his parents-in-law as well as to his parents, was perceiving eldercare in a manner which goes against the clearly defined eldercare obligations of the 'ie' system. At the same time he was not sure if he could support four elderly people, a dilemma which many young Japanese are likely to face in the future as more only children marry each other and feel responsible as a couple for four elderly individuals.

G-3 discussions about the obligation to care for parents centered primarily around cultural norms and ideals, much as the G-3 discussions about inheritance had. As in the case of inheritance, this is probably due to a lack of practical experience in caring for an elder, despite the fact that these young people had observed and sympathized with the problems their mothers had had in caring for their grandparents.

While conceptions of inheritance among the G-3 groups were consistent with 'ie' patterns, conceptions of 'on' and eldercare obligations among these same focus groups had, as illustrated above, already been expanded beyond the limitations imposed by the 'ie' system. Young women spoke frequently of caring for their own parents, often in preference to their in-laws, and they talked much more about love than familial duty as the primary reason to provide care to elderly individuals.

In contrast, G-2 focus group members explicitly saw themselves as part of a generation which is caught between the traditional 'ie' framework for eldercare and more recent cultural frameworks. Both G-2 men and women asserted more strongly than did G-3 focus group members that adult children do have an obligation to care for their older parents, or parents-in-law, and saw this obligation in terms of the 'ie' family system. G-2 individuals acknowledged that they had been raised to believe in the 'ie' values associated with eldercare. They had cared for elders in the past, or were caring for elders at the time of the focus group discussions. However, as in the case of inheritance, direct experience with eldercare had tempered their views about the traditional pattern. The burdens and hardships had made them hesitant about imposing similar burdens and hardships on their own children in the coming years. They were also very aware that ideas about eldercare have changed in Japan. This made them less certain about the kind of care they would be able to get in old age from their own

children. Both G-3 and G-2 focus group members felt that care for the elderly, including financial support, could be provided in a variety of ways, including ones which do not require sharing the same household with the elders concerned.

In discussing eldercare, reciprocity, and intergenerational living arrangements, both G-2 and G-1 focus group members wrestled with how changed living arrangements would change instrumental and emotional exchanges within a kinship network. They agreed that conflicts were common in three-generation 'ie' households. However, they also repeatedly expressed the belief that the very fact of living together day-in and day-out for years creates a sense of emotional intimacy in which even "strangers" originally from different households – such as mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law – could come to know and care for each other.

By helping each other in various ways at different points in the developmental cycle of an 'ie' household, household members could establish a strong, compelling, and meaningful sense of long-term reciprocity. The moral recognition of interdependence as quintessentially human, and the development and intensification of love were seen to be 'natural' outgrowths of the kind of daily familiarity and exchange of emotional and material resources characteristic of living together in an 'ie' household.

The positive moral impact on children of living in the same household with their grandparents was frequently stressed. One G-2 focus group member described her daughter as having learned 'humbleness' and 'gentleness' from living with her grandmother. Another G-2 individual emphasized the long-term reciprocal benefit for the middle generation in a three-generation household: "if you are nice to old people, the children will see this, and when you grow old, they will be nice to you. This is teaching through your own actions".

Other G-2 and G-1 individuals felt that grandchildren would be less likely to reject their frail, sick grandparents as 'dirty' if they had shared a household with these elderly family members when the old people were stronger and healthier, had helped to care for the children, and had taught them traditional Japanese crafts and customs. The dependency of the elderly upon younger family members thus has a meaning which many focus group members believed it could not have outside of a reciprocal three-generation living context, and both G-2 and G-1 individuals pondered what the newer kinds of elder dependency in Japan could ultimately mean in the absence of this context.

As members of the age group receiving certain types of care and support from younger generations, G-1 focus group members spoke of their emotional needs and the implications for their personal well-being of eldercare given by family members. In discussing reciprocity, G-1 individuals expressed their need to be visited, supported emotionally, and acknowledged as human beings who are loved by other family members. One G-1 focus group member expressed this well by pointing out that children and grandchildren who have 'human' feelings "come to your house and take care of you.... Feelings as a human being are important".

DISCUSSION

Traditionally the successor to the 'ie' headship inherited all 'ie' property in exchange for fulfilling his duties as successor. He, or, more accurately, his wife, was responsible for caring for the successor's elderly parents until they died. Thus, material reward through unchallenged claims to 'ie' inheritance was traditionally one of the established parameters of providing care to the elderly.

Yet, evidence exists to indicate that the Japanese have become more pragmatic and strategic in the way they view inheritance. In opinion surveys conducted in the 1950's "a majority of respondents favored the prewar ideal of primogeniture, or the right of the eldest son to inherit all family property, even though it was outlawed in the American-influenced constitution of 1947" (Tsuya and Martin 1992: S46). However, Tsuya and Martin point out that attitudes towards inheritance have become "more pragmatic or compensatory in recent decades", as reflected in the Mainichi Newspapers' biennial family planning surveys (p. S46). "The percentage of wives of *childbearing* age who said that it would be preferable to leave property to the children who took care of them and their husbands increased from 18 percent in 1963 to 32 percent in 1977" (p. S46). At the same time, "the proportion in favor of leaving property to the oldest child declined from 15 to 8 percent, while the proportion favoring equal distribution to all children fluctuated between 44 and 50 percent" (p. S46).

Similarly, Akiyama, Antonucci, and Campbell (1990) observe that "the Japanese seem to be widening the boundaries of what is possible" with respect to support exchange and the elderly (p. 137). At the same time, Tsuya and Martin (1992) make the point that while "continued change in ... living arrangements and attitudes towards inheritance would not be totally unexpected", they do not see these social features as converging to a Western pattern (p. S53). They suggest, instead, that co-residence will become increasingly linked to "other events in the life cycle, such as loss of a spouse or a sickness" (p. S53). This view is consistent with that of Hiroshima, who believes that co-residence is "moving away from an obligatory behavior urged by ideology" and "becoming a strategic behavior based upon ... choice and a give-and-take relationship" (1987b: 15; 1987a). Just this kind of shift is clearly reflected in our focus group data.

Strategic flexibility in negotiating particular solutions to particular problems is traditional in the context of family life in Japan (Bachnik 1983; Lebra 1989: 185-186). In that sense, the kind of negotiating and flexibility present in the accounts given by focus group members reflect cultural continuities. However, the traditional negotiation of solutions occurred within a framework of rules upon which Japanese could agree. Today, this framework is itself changing as the Japanese family and indeed, aging itself, are being redefined.

Tsuya and Martin caution against making value judgments about the changes occurring in Japan with respect to the context of eldercare and intergenerational relations, and point out that we need to know more about "the quality of family relations both in the same household and across household boundaries"

(1992: S53). In our own focus group data the degree to which love and emotional interconnectedness among different generations were stressed by each age group is striking. Instrumental reciprocity was seen by all three age groups to be the natural expression of underlying emotional reciprocity. It is true that there were differences in the way age groups conceptualized this emotional reciprocity, and in what they would choose as the context most conducive to the well-being of individuals and family units. However, it is clear, at least for the focus groups interviewed, that changes in the way the care of the elderly is conceived have not meant the exclusion of feelings of concern and love for elderly family members. In fact, newer conceptions of eldercare may well have enhanced these feelings.

In assessing postwar changes in intergenerational reciprocity within the 'ie', and the impact of such changes on eldercare, Lebra (1979) emphasizes the traditional cultural and structural underpinnings of this reciprocity. She notes that long-term, or "long-cycled", reciprocity over the life course requires a continuing awareness of the many accumulated debits and credits involved, and suggests that this awareness may have to be supported "by a 'cultural memory' in the form either of collectively shared ideology such as filial piety or ancestor worship, or of social structure such as the Japanese stem-family called 'ie'" (p. 338).

Postwar legal changes affecting the 'ie' as an institution have "undermined the structural support for the entitlement of the older generation to the younger generation's gratitude and long-cycled obligation to reciprocate.... Deprived of structural and ideological armament, the filial obligation to repay the aged parent is largely left to interpersonal memory and the affective bond of kinship" (Lebra 1979: 339). Under such circumstances, Lebra (1979) does not find it surprising that "the elderly woman today would rather have her own daughter than her daughter-in-law to depend upon in her old age" (p. 339). Certainly both younger and older members of our focus groups expressed the desire for an emotionally close, caring connection with their own kin, whether living in the same household with these kin or not.

In this article we have approached changes in the family context of eldercare in Japan from a sociocultural and structural perspective, focusing on the 'ie' as a social institution which is being reconstituted. We believe that this approach markedly improves our qualitative understanding of the shifts which such scholars as Hiroshima, Tsuya and Martin, and Akiyama et al. have described as being so significant in modern Japanese society.

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