

# Attitudes and Sense of Responsibility of University Students toward Their Aging Parents in Japan and Korea

Dongqing Chen & Yoko Hosoe

Joetsu University of Education

Niigata Postal: 943-0815, Japan

E-mail: chendq55552000@yahoo.com.cn

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to clarify the relationship between industrialization and attitudes of students toward their aging parents in two different cultures. The self administered questionnaires were given to students in summer 1986 and 1998, 1999. The 1986 sample consisted of 567 students from 7 universities in Tokyo, 511 students from 8 universities in Seoul. The 1999 sample consisted of 731 students from 7 universities in Tokyo, and in 1998 415 students from 5 universities Seoul.

Though Japan and Korea made a rapid growth of economy, these countries have the common tradition of Confucianism, social norms and cultural values concerning to their aging parents.

The attitudes toward financial and physical support are related to personal experiences in 1986 and 1998, 1999. In Japan, those who were satisfied with family relations showed more willingness to support their parents financially or physically if they became dependent. But in Korea those who had often been told to provide filial piety tended to show favorable attitudes toward filial piety, and willingness to give financial support and care for the bed-ridden parents.

The favorable attitude toward filial piety was significantly associated with the willingness to provide financial and physical support to the parents. However, it is difficult to say which is the cause and which is the effect. Those who are favorable toward filial piety tend to show a strong sense of responsibility toward their parents, but in turn, those who have a strong sense of filial responsibility will show favorable attitude toward filial piety.

**Keywords:** Confucianism, Social norms, Filial piety, Financial supports, Bed-ridden

## 1. Introduction

The degree of social change is inversely related to the status of the elderly in the family and society; that is to say, the more industrialized or modernized society, the lower the status of the elderly. In a modern industrial society, "youth" productivity and achievement are highly valued, and thus old people are looked down upon as unproductive, inefficient and useless.

These ways of thinking are related to the ageism in our society. Vincent (1995) and Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology (1998) study that the historical and cultural value of society has changed the socioeconomic status of elderly.

In the early 1990s, the studies of "positive aging" (Butler, 1998, Abels, 1994,, Haynes, 1993) and "productive aging" (Butler, 1999, Roszak, 1998) are started, and the status of the elderly in the family and society is changing now.

However, the relation between industrialization and the status of the elderly is not always linear but diversely shaped by historical background and cultural values.

Though Japan and Korea have experienced rapid economic growth and both have the common tradition of Confucianism, the social norms and cultural values concerning old people are quite different.

There are 2 concerning Care for the Elderly in 21st Century. That is, the elderly must somehow be supported. What is the most efficient method in our industrialized or modernized society? Two choices are presented. One is a government system such as pension, insurance etc. While the other is a child based support system. We will focus on the children based support system.

However, in focusing on the child based support system we must determine to encourage most children to take

care of their aged parents. There are two models. One is a model of social norms, the other is a model based on emotional ties with in our society. Only a few attempts have so far been made at attitudes and Sense of responsibility of children toward their aging Parents: a cross-cultural study in the contemporary Asian family.

The purpose of this study is to test the hypothesis that favorable attitudes toward aging parents are inversely related to the traditional social norms and personal experiences such as emotional ties. Consequently the more industrialized a modernized a society is, the lower the influence of social norms is while higher the influence of personal experiences is.

## 2. Method

We will begin by considering the degree of industrialization and modernization of a society.

There are several indicators which we are tested by Bengtson, Dowd, Smith, Inkeles (1975) and Cowgill, Holmes (1972), to measure the degree of industrialization and modernization of a society. Here we use (a) economic indicators such as GDP and employment which measure the degree of industrialization and (b) demographic indicators such as longevity and percentage of old people compared to the total population which in effect measures the degree of moderated ionizations.

### (a) The economic indicator

As is shown in Table 1, GDP is larger in Japan, than in Korea. Table 2 shows that the proportion of workers who are engaged in primary industries is smaller in Japan than in Korea.

Insert Table 1 Here

Insert Table 2 Here

### (b) The demographic indicators

Cowgill and Holmes (1972) stated that longevity and the increased percentage of old people is significantly related to the degree of modernization. Table 3 indicates that the life expectancy at birth is longer in Japan, than in Korea. Table 4 shows that the percentage of old people compared to the total population in Korea is smaller than in Japan.

Insert Table 3 Here

Insert Table 4 Here

## 3. Examples

The responsibility of college student includes a sense of living together, financial support, and nursing their aging parents. The purpose of this study is to clarify the differing responsibilities toward aging parents and the relationship between industrialization and attitudes of students by using the survey data conducted in 1986 and 1998, 1999.

The 1998 and 1999 (some of 1998 sample) sample consisted of 731 students from 7 universities in Tokyo, 414 students from 5 universities in Seoul, while the 1986 sample consisted of 567 students from 7 universities in Tokyo, 511 students from 8 universities in Seoul. Questionnaires were distributed and completed by students from the two countries between July and October

## 4. Results

Figure 1 indicates students' plans to live with their parents in the future. The percentage of those who responded positively to living with their parents immediately after marriage was higher in Korea (in 1986, 38.4%, in 1998, 10.8%), than Japan (in 1986, 7.8%, in 1999, 5.7%). In 1986, in Japan, one out of five said that they did not plan to live together with their parents and in 1999, one out of four, while the percentage of those who gave similar an answers was considerably small in Korea for both years.

Insert Figure 1 Here

As for financial support, Figure 2 indicates that the percentage of those who would support their parents under any circumstances was higher in Korea (in 1986, 63.5% and 1998 53.5%) than Japan (in 1986, 41.8% and in 1999, 31.2%).

Despite the more advanced systems of social security and of social welfare, very few students would like to depend on welfare in Korea and Japan. In both countries, students would rather support their parents themselves. Differences existed in their willingness to sacrifice themselves in order to meet the needs of the parents in 1986, but their willingness to sacrifice themselves greatly decreased by Japan in 1999.

Insert Figure 2 Here

Figure 3 indicates in 1986 that while more than 88% of the Korean students said they would support their bedridden parents, only two thirds of the Japanese responded positively in 1986; But these percentages have gradually decreased in both countries. The percentages of those who “don’t know “ was higher in Japan (in 1986, 28.2%, in 1999, 29.9%).

Insert Figure 3 Here

As is shown in figure 1, 2 and 3, differences in attitudes of students between the two countries are quite obvious. The sense of filial responsibility is weaker in Japan. In regards to shared living arrangements, the Korean students’ prefer the extended family. Likewise concerning financial support, the Korean students were more willing to devote themselves to their parents. And as for physical support, the Korean students eagerly want to take care of their parents if they are to become bedridden.

The sense of filial responsibility seems to be directly related to the process of socialization; that is, the degree of emphasis on filial piety. Figure 4 shows that the Korean students were more frequently encouraged to provide filial piety for their elders. In Japan, in 1986, 28.4%, in 1999 31.7% had never seamed the responsibility of providing filial piety, while in Korea in 1986, 1998, more than 90% considered it more often sometimes than not. As is shown in figure 5, most of the Korean students showed favorable attitudes toward filial piety, while one out of four Japanese students were rather indifferent to it.

Insert Figure 4 Here

Insert Figure 5 Here

It's a safe assumption to say the industrialization and modernization weaken the sense of filial responsibility, in a society as exemplified in Japan. However this process is modified by the norms and values of a society which emphasizes the perpetuation of tradition.

The societal level of modernization is significantly associated with a sense of filial responsibility. Measured by the willingness to live together and the desire to provide financial and physical support a greater sense of responsibility, does not directly relate to the father's occupation or the size of the city in which one grows up. The experience of living with ones grandparents is also not that significant. In other words, regardless of the father's occupation, the size of the hometown, and the extended family experience, Korean students demonstrated a stronger sense of filial responsibility than the Japanese students.

The results of the variance analysis shown in table 5 indicate that the birth order is remarkably associated with the willingness to live together with their parents; that is, the first or the only son tends to say that he would like to live with his parents immediately after marriage. The sense of the first son's responsibility to continue the family lineage seemed to be quite strong in 1986 in both Korea and Japan and in 1998 only in Korea. In Japan in 1999, the daughter was the one who tended to say that she would like to live with her parents after marriage. Thus it is the daughter's sense of responsibility to continue the family lineage due to strong emotional ties which seemed to be quite strong in Japan in 1998, 1999.

Though attitudes toward shared living arrangement seem to have been influenced by the traditional norms of the matrilineal stem family system in Korea 1986 and in 1998, in Japan by 1999 that norm has changed drastically.

The attitudes surrounding both financial and physical support are related to personal experiences in 1986, 1998, and 1999. In Japan, those who were satisfied with family relations showed more willingness to support their parents financially or physically if they were to become dependent. But in Korea those who had often been brought up with a greater sense of filial responsibility tended to show favorable attitudes toward filial piety, and willingness to give financial support and care for their bed-ridden parents despite their satisfaction with family relation.

Insert Table 5 Here

The favorable attitude toward filial piety is characteristically associated with the willingness to provide financial and physical support to the parents. However, it is difficult to say what is the cause and what is the effect. Those who are in favor of toward filial piety tend to demonstrate an inherent sense of responsibility toward their parents, but in turn, those who have a strong belief in filial responsibility will also show a favorable attitude toward filial piety.

However, this hypothesis needs further consideration. Therefore, we will be examining data collected from 2006 surveying in Japan and Korea.

## References

- Abels, Ronald P., Gift, Helen C. & Ory Marcia G., eds. (1994). *Aging and Quality of Life*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Bengtson, VL, J. J. Dowd, D. H. Smith & A. Inkeles. (1975). Modernization, Modernity, and Perceptions of Aging: A cross-cultural student. *Journal of Gerontology*, 30: 688-695.
- Butler, Robert N., Grossman, Lawrence K. & Oberlink, Mia R., eds. (1999). *Life in an Older America*. New York: The Century Foundation Press.
- Butler, Robert N., Lewis, Myrnal I. & Sunderland, Trey. (1998). *Aging and Mental Health: Positive Psychosocial and Biomedical Approaches*, 5th edition. Boston, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore: Ajiyn and Bacon.
- Cowgill, D. O. & L. D. Holmes. (1972). *Aging and Modernization*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Gilleard, C. J. & A. A. Gurkan. (1987). Socioeconomics Development and the Status of Elderly Men in Turkey: A Test of Modernization Theory. *Journal of Gerontology*, 24:353-357.
- Haynes, Marion E. (1993). *From Work to Retirement: Making a Successful Transition*. Menlo Park, C A Crisp Publication, Inc.
- Pal more, E.B. (1975). The Status and Integration of the Aged in Palmore, E.B., 1975" The Status and Integration of the Aged in Japanese Society. *Journal of Gerontology*, 30: 199-208.
- Palmore, E.B. & K. Marton. (1974). Modernization and Status of the Aged: International Correlation. *Journal of Gerontology*, 29, 205-210.
- Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology. (1998). Successful Aging. *World planning*.
- Vincent, John A. (1995). *Inequality and Old Age*. London: UCL Press.

Table 1. Per Capita GDP (\$)

	1985	2000
<b>Japan</b>	11,120	37,556
<b>Korea</b>	2,312	9,673

Table 2.

1983	Primary	Secondary	Thirdly	Total
<b>Japan</b>	9.5	40.9	49.6	100
<b>Korea</b>	29.7	23.3	47.0	100

1995	Primary	Secondary	Thirdly	Total
<b>Japan</b>	5.3	31.5	63.2	100
<b>Korea</b>	11.6	32.5	55.9	100

Japan: Management and Coordination, Survey on Labor

Korea: Economic Planning Agency, A White Paper on Economics

Table 3. Expectation of Life at Birth (Year)

	Japan		Korea	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>1970</b>	69.3	74.7	59.8	66.7
<b>1980</b>	73.3	78.7	62.7	69.1
<b>1985</b>	74.8	80.4	67.2	73.6
<b>1990</b>	75.9	81.9	68.2	75.0
<b>2000</b>	77.7	84.6	72.1	79.5

Japan: Ministry of Health and Welfare

Korea: Population Planning Committee

Table 4. Ratio of People over 65 to the Total Population (%)

	Japan	Korea
<b>1960</b>	5.7	3.3
<b>1965</b>	6.3	3.3
<b>1970</b>	7.1	3.3
<b>1975</b>	7.9	3.3
<b>1980</b>	9.0	3.5
<b>1985</b>	10.3	4.0
<b>1995</b>	14.6	5.9
<b>2000</b>	17.3	7.2

Japan: Prime Minister's Office, Census

Korea: Population and Housing, Census

Table 5. Analysis of Variance

		Birth order		Satisfactory with family		Provide filial piety		Attitude to filial piety	
		1986	1998	1986	1998	1986	1998	1986	1998
<b>To live Together</b>	<b>Japan</b>	***			**			**	***
	<b>Korea</b>	***	*	***	**				
<b>Financial Support</b>	<b>Japan</b>		*	***	***			***	***
	<b>Korea</b>						*		***
<b>Physical Support</b>	<b>Japan</b>		***	**	***	*		***	***
	<b>Korea</b>			**		*	*	***	***

\* P&lt; .05, \*\* P&lt; .01, \*\*\* P&lt; .001

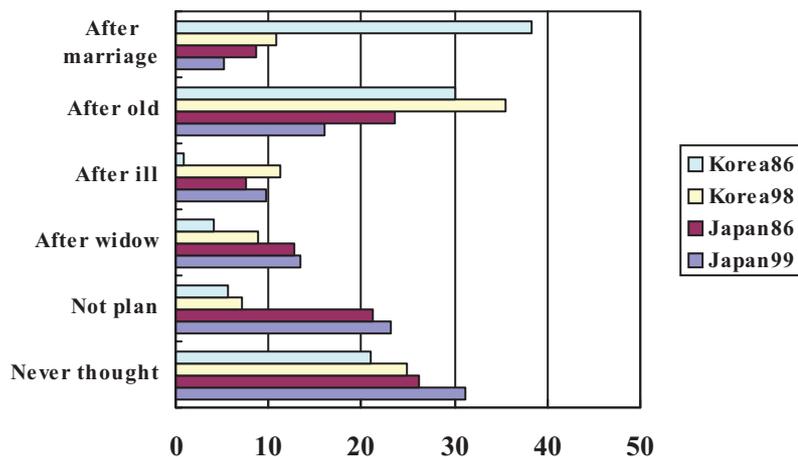


Figure 1. Plan to Live with Parents in the Future (%)

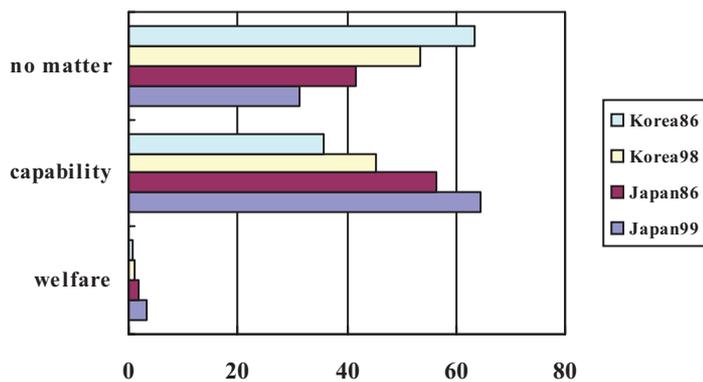


Figure 2. Financially support Parents when they become Incapable themselves (%)

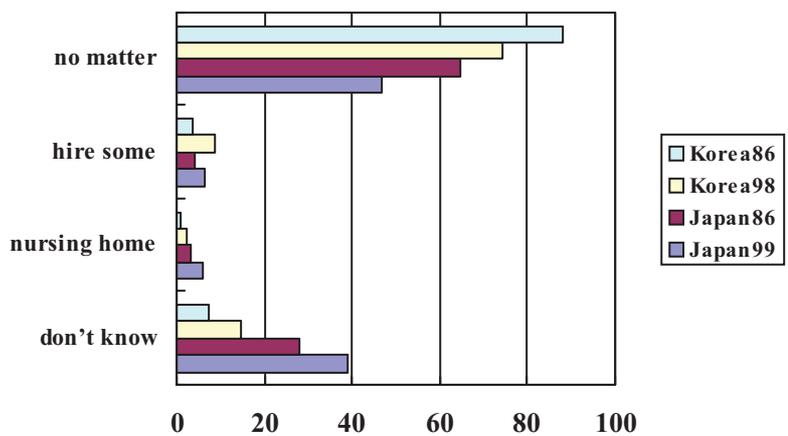


Figure 3. Physically support Parents when they become Bedridden (%)

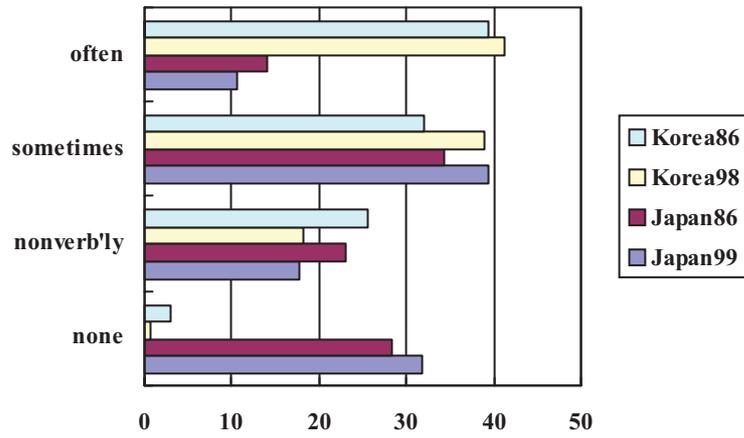


Figure 4. Told to Provide Filial Piety (%)

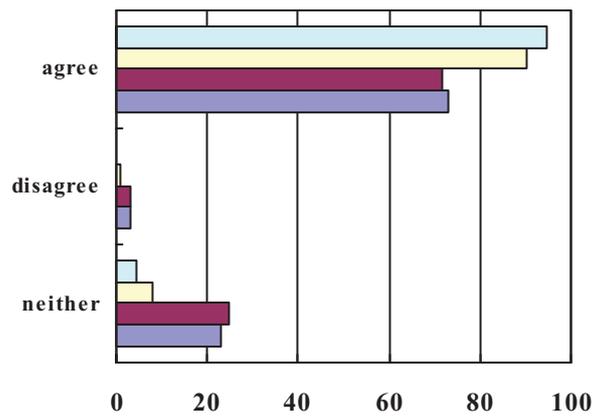


Figure 5. Attitude toward Filial Piety (%)