

Is there "individualization of the married couple" in support exchange with parents and parents-in-law in Japan?: An analysis of the Third National Family Research of Japan (NFRJ08)

Reiko YAMATO

"Welfare mix"—a combination of public and private resources—is required in order to tackle the increasing need of elderly care on the one hand, and the cutting back of public welfare on the other. In order for welfare mix to function well, it is important to know how private family relationships work. This study pays special attention to an important feature of East Asian families, namely patrilineal, as opposed to other more modern types of intergenerational relationships. Four hypotheses can be identified on how modernization has transformed family intergenerational relationships. The first hypothesis, a "traditional norm" hypothesis, posits that relationships biased towards the husband's parents will be maintained for both the wife and the husband. Second, a "modernization" hypothesis proposes that with the weakening of traditional norms, bilateral relationships will prevail where both the wife and the husband have an almost equal relationship with the parents of respective sides. These two hypotheses presuppose that the wife and husband are one unified unit. This study, in contrast, takes into consideration the possibility that the wife and the husband are *not* one unit, and examines a third and fourth hypotheses. The third hypothesis of "individualized intergenerational relationships" posits that the wife and the husband behave individualistically where the husband exchanges more support with *his own* parents and the wife does so with *her own* parents. The fourth hypothesis of "the wife as a bilateral kin-keeper" proposes that because individualization does not proceed to such a high extent for women, wives are more likely than husbands to exchange almost the same level of support with parents of *both sides*. The data obtained from the Third National Family Research of Japan (NFRJ08) conducted in 2009 are analyzed. The analysis reveals that which hypothesis is supported depends on which generation is the support giver. When *adult children give* support to their parents, the "individualized intergenerational relationships" hypothesis as well as "the wife as a bilateral kin-keeper" hypothesis is supported. In contrast, when *parents give* support to their adult children, only the "wife as a bilateral kin-keeper" hypothesis is supported. This suggests that there is a generation gap in Japanese people's intergenerational relationships: for the adult child generation, both the wife and the husband behaves individualistically in that each of them gives more support to his/her own parents than to the spouse's parents. In contrast, the parent generation treats their adult child and the child's spouse as one unit. On the basis of these findings, it is suggested that when one studies married children's relationships with their parents and parents-in-laws in Japan, it is important to separately consider and compare the relationships for the wife and those for the husband because the wife and the husband may behave differently.

Key words: intergenerational relationships in the family, financial support, care-related support, individualization, women's kin-keeping role