

Caring for My Wife's Parents?: Reconciling Practices, Masculinity and Family Relations

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Introduction

1. Social and family relations in Japan have changed extensively since the post-war period. The scope of these changes has been wide-ranging, encompassing parent-child relationships, demography, marriage patterns, ageing, child-care, residential patterns, and gender roles, as well as the decline of Confucian worldviews. One notable sphere of change has centred on the legal basis for family relationships. During the Meiji period, the Family Law of 1898 established male primogeniture as the legal mechanism for head-of-household succession and inheritance with the formal institutionalisation of the *ie* (Japanese stem-household) system. Under this law, an important alternative form of succession in the absence of a lineal male heir was the adoption of an heir (*yōshi*) to succeed the *ie*, often marrying a daughter of the adoptive parents as an in-marrying son-in-law (*muko yōshi*).^[1] More commonly, however, women left their natal households upon marriage to join their husbands' family households as daughters-in-law (*yome*). In this role, women assumed substantial duties of care for their husbands and households, including eventually the care of elderly parents-in-law. Moreover, as married daughters were no longer considered to be members of their parents' *ie* (households), marriage tended to signify the end of substantively meaningful contact between parents and their daughters. Historically, then, sons-in-law were in most cases of only marginal importance to the Japanese family structure, which has been reflected in the relative lack of attention given to sons-in-law within the study of Japanese family relations. Although the *ie* system was legally abolished through the Family Law of 1947 enacted under the Allied Occupation, the *ie* system continues to retain a normative influence on family relations.^[2] The Family Law instituted the nuclear family as the legal basis for family, which has gradually become the prevalent form of family in the post-war period.^[3]
2. Especially amongst nuclear families, Japan's industrialisation resulted in the widespread social standardisation of a gendered division of labour. On the one hand, women's increasing full-time commitment to the domestic concerns of housework and child-raising contributed to a 'professionalisation' of the housewife role (*senjyō shufu*),^[4] nurturing the establishment of close and intimate relationships between mothers and their children.^[5] On the other hand, men's pursuit of the *salaryman* life course of dedication to a corporate employer as a means of financially supporting their families and by extension propel Japan's national economy led to the entrenchment of the salaryman experience as a hegemonic model for Japanese masculinity.^[6] The burgeoning of such nuclear families in post-war Japan contributed to the reshaping of inter-generational relations.
3. Not only are sons increasingly less bound by filial duty to care for their own parents, the transition towards interpersonal intimacy as the ideological basis of parent-child relations has also tended to favour relationships with daughters.^[7] Notably, this has fostered closer parental relations with daughters even after marriage. Anthropologist Naomi Brown in 2003 has documented a gradual

but steady increase in the proportion of elderly couples living with daughters, which contrasts markedly with traditional Japanese notions of the agnatic succession of responsibility of care within the *ie* system.^[8] This shift has moreover been underway for some time. Anthropologists Susan Long and colleagues in 2009 have demonstrated that care for the elderly within the context of the family has transitioned from a formal burden fulfilled by affinal daughters-in-law as part of their structural role towards becoming a form of support largely provided by daughters motivated by intimate and affectionate relations with their mothers.^[9] In the case of married daughters, this could be interpreted as a structural change in the orientation of care from the marriage household to the natal household.

4. As daughters are increasingly drawn into the provision of care for their own parents, in this article I suggest that it is instructive to consider the ensuing changes in how sons-in-law are implicated in care for frail parents-in-law. Given their marginality to traditional family structures, such relations between parents-in-law and sons-in-law have remained relatively obscure. Nevertheless, the relatively unprecedented nature of the contemporary form of this relation implies the absence of clear social expectations governing affinal relationships for sons-in-law. Accordingly, this relation may be thought to constitute a focal point for negotiation and reorientation for contemporary families not only in terms of the son-in-law relationship, but for notions of Japanese masculinities more broadly.
5. Men's involvement in caring for the elderly dislocates the conventionally gendered understanding of caregiving as a feminine domain, which has been a touchstone for gender studies and research into the long-term care of the elderly.^[10] Men's contributions in this sphere have received significantly less consideration, though a more recent and growing body of literature is beginning to showcase men in the role of primary caregivers.^[11] Nonetheless, from the perspective of the anthropological consideration of everyday life, male caregivers in the Japanese context are understudied—in particular the roles and practices of men involved in the care of elderly relatives. Further, given the significant normative transition toward the practice of daughters caring for their own parents, it is all the more important to understand caregiving arrangements across the extended family by considering how family members contribute in auxiliary as well as in primary roles.
6. Hence, in this article, I investigate the specific practices by which sons-in-law involve themselves in care of their spouses' parents, their own ideas about what this entails, and how they reconcile these demands and commitments with their sense of masculinity. I draw on ethnographic data collected during fieldwork in Hyogo Prefecture in Japan in the summers of 2013 and 2014, including twenty-nine narrative interviews with sons-in-law and other members of their respective families as well as my own participant observation of various family functions, care facilities, and other social events. I seek to contribute to the understanding of the nexus of gender, elderly care, and intra-familial relatedness. This is important as care provision by sons-in-law will likely become increasingly significant given the pressures of an ageing society.

The sense of masculinity of the caring sons-in-law

7. As daughters become increasingly implicated into caring for their own parents, any understanding of the masculinities of married Japanese men must incorporate a sense of how they contribute to such care arrangements as sons-in-law. This is illustrated by Kazuhiko,^[12] a 44-year-old garage mechanic, whose wife's parents (in their seventies and eighties) live with their eldest son, a bachelor, about twenty minutes' drive away. While his mother-in-law does not suffer from any major health problems, Kazuhiko's father-in-law has been bedridden for the past four years. In an interview, he told me that

I do think that I have a role in care as a son-in-law. But I don't think I could support my parents-in-law financially – they'd feel awkward (*ki o tsukau*) and our relationship could be ruined if money were involved ... My brother-in-law understands this. I can help out, for example, by driving them to the hospital ... I think I should care for them within the scope of my ability ... That's to say, when I have the time – I can't go out so easily due to my work here [in the garage] ... I could maybe feed him if I were asked to ... But I don't think I could change his nappies ... I might be able to do some of the heavier physical work (*chikara shigoto*) like helping with bathing ... I might have to do more if there weren't anyone else around to take care of them (Hyogo, 29 June 2014).

8. Here, Kazuhiko envisions a clear range of activities he considers appropriate to his role as son-in-law taking into account the fact that his wife's parents live with their eldest son. Whereas this might include driving his parents-in-law to hospital, it does not extend to more intimate physical tasks, or to financial support. This delimitation is moreover not based on assessment of needs, but rather based on his view of propriety. Kazuhiko expects financial arrangements to follow traditional norms, and thus considers the financial support of parents to be the eldest son's responsibility. It is worth noting that none of the sons-in-law I spoke with consider financial support to be part of their role, unless other family members are not able to provide financial support. With respect to other aspects of care, as well, Kazuhiko has clear and contingent views on the extent to which his involvement is appropriate. Were neither his wife nor sister-in-law to be available, he would be willing to take on other duties, such as feeding his in-laws. He could also see himself being involved in areas where physical strength might be required. From Kazuhiko's perspective, his involvement most appropriately consists of practical matters such as transportation (particularly but not necessarily only for medical purposes) and, if necessary, practical help with activities of daily living in the home, such as bathing and feeding. Despite the breadth of this range of tasks, this involvement conspicuously does not touch on the more emotional aspects of his relationship with his parents-in-law, such as, for example, providing companionship or sharing in subjective experiences. Kazuhiko's involvement is thus contingent not only on practical concerns such as caregiver availability as it relates to himself and others, but also his perceptions of his own and others' suitability for specific care tasks.
9. When discussing their respective ways of contributing, my informants explain how they perceive the suitability of their roles in a variety of ways. A common theme is the assertion of correspondence between their care activities in the home and their duties at work or with reference to their professional careers. For instance, Yukio, a carpenter in his late fifties, accompanies his wife on a two-hour journey every month to visit her mother:

My work relates to care. My jobs include installing handrails and ramps inside houses and replacing Japanese-style squat toilets to western-style toilet bowls. I've been thinking of putting in ramps for these large gaps between the floors and ground [at my mother-in-law's house] (Hyogo, 8 July 2013).

10. Yukio's account of his involvement in caring for his mother-in-law thus starts with an explanation of his job. His main role, as he sees it, has been to address accessibility problems at his mother-in-law's house by adding handrails and finding a bath chair to help her bathe more comfortably. The flexible terms of his employment also allow him to occasionally take time off from his job to undertake repairs. He affirms that he is more than happy to help his mother-in-law within the scope of his professional competencies.
11. Yukio's mother-in-law, Yoshie, appreciates her son-in-law's contribution, which she contrasts with the experiences of her friends at the day care centre she visits:

I am very grateful. I couldn't find a better person than [Yukio] ... Nowadays, it seems that only sons come back to visit their own elderly parents, leaving their wives at home. Even if sons come back and help with outdoor work (*soto shigoto*), their elderly mothers still have to cook. I don't know why, but the wives [i.e., daughters-in-law] don't come back to visit [their parents-in-law]. I guess they think it's their husbands' responsibility to look

after their own parents ... When we were young, the custom was that women would look after their parents-in-law ... The situation is significantly different now (Hyogo, 8 July 2013).

12. For people of Yoshie's generation, the duty to care for elderly parents was regarded as falling naturally to sons (especially eldest sons) and their wives. Sons, as heads of household, were responsible for matters outside the house (*soto shigoto*) such as weeding and cultivating rice, and daughters-in-law for domestic chores. Having been raised with this view, Yoshie appreciates her son-in-law all the more for his spontaneous expressions of kindness, which surpass what she feels she might expect from a daughter's husband. This assistance is also appreciated by Yukio's wife and sister-in-law. The latter, who lives near Tokyo, is too far away to frequently provide support in person. Yoshie has seen a significant shift in the configuration of family care responsibilities over her lifetime. From her generation's perspective, the absence of any expectation of their sons-in-laws' help means that they highly appreciate the care received, even though this is framed through Yukio's perspective as an application of his own professional capabilities and experience as a carpenter.
13. A similar, if perhaps more 'white-collar' example of how care engagements are framed in the language of the masculine sphere of work is provided by another informant, who speaks of his care experience in the idiom of 'management.' Tetsuya, a 57-year-old salaryman, lives with his own parents, who are in their early eighties. At the time of our interview, his mother-in-law had recently been hospitalised after an operation:

I care for my mother-in-law by managing (*kanri*) her household. Since I live nearby, this includes such things as weeding her garden. I maintain her empty house, keeping it in an adequate condition so as not to trouble her neighbours. I can handle the heavier aspects of this work (*chikara shigoto*), the things men can do ... I have never cleaned ... I weed when I have time, as in any case I have to take my child to a cram school very near her house. I keep asking my wife to weed but she always finds some excuse – 'I don't like frogs' or 'I'm too busy.' I think that she just doesn't want to do it. So, there's nothing for it (*shikata ga nai*) but to do it myself when the grass gets too long (Hyogo, 7 August 2013).

14. For Tetsuya, 'management' (*kanri*) is a familiar concept from the workplace, where he is a senior manager. He draws on the experience and idioms of his work role and practices in his subjective engagement with care for the elderly. Looking after his mother-in-law's house is an administrative task, and his primary aim is to ensure that the task is done appropriately. That said, he does not necessarily want to carry out the necessary tasks himself—as he makes clear, he takes care of the weeding because, while he categorises this as a part of household management, his wife will have nothing to do with it. It is also worth noting that he only weeds once the grass is high enough to be seen from the street, which suggests that he is partly motivated by the desire to avoid being seen by the neighbours as being negligent. This means that his view of propriety encompasses the external perspectives of neighbours. Through his approach to its maintenance, though the garden is a private space he makes this to some extent a public space. Conversely, his extension of the scope of 'care' to include property maintenance allows him to distinguish his contribution from domestic care inside the home.
15. For Tetsuya to attempt to prepare meals for his mother-in-law, or otherwise undertake activities with which he is personally unfamiliar, would necessitate learning new skills. In fact, the majority of my male informants in Tetsuya's generation do not cook at all, and nor do they count cooking as a task to which they have any wish to contribute. The popular view of men's authoritarian role in the home, for salarymen of Tetsuya's generation, was connoted by the term *teishu kanpaku* ('master of the house'), a lexical expression of hegemonic masculinity that came into common usage during the Japanese bubble economy in the 1980s, when domineering husbands, returning late from work, expected their wives to serve drinks, run their baths, and prepare their beds.^[13] Such everyday manifestations of power in the household served to reinforce and reiterate a particular

masculine identity. Japanese sociologist Itō Kimio argues that an important component of contemporary masculinity can be traced to the experience of industrialisation, when physical power was a key element of industrial labour and men's authority in the home was rooted in the family's dependence on the husband's income. Itō characterises the sense of masculinity as being grounded in three main elements, namely an orientation towards achieving superiority (*yūetsu shikō*), power (*kenryoku shikō*), and possession (*shoyū shikō*) in relation to women.^[14] For men of Tetsuya's generation, the idea of learning to cook (or how to perform any such domestic task), especially from their wives, may be expected to infringe on their sense of masculinity in so far as it is inconsistent with their view of what is acceptable and expected for men's roles in the domestic sphere. Rather, Tetsuya's characterisation of his contribution to caring for his in-laws emphasises a masculine trope that serves to reinforce his male pride.

16. Transportation is another theme frequently framed by my informants as a key contribution to caring for parents-in-law, as seen above in the case of Kazuhiko. Some are happy to drive on a regular basis. One informant explains that 'I drove my wife once a week to visit the hospital where my mother-in-law was staying, as my wife was unable to drive herself [due to problems with her legs].' Some are willing to drive parents-in-law to hospitals or shopping centres if no one else is available. For my informants, and for the vast majority of people in the region, driving is an everyday activity, especially as most employees commute by car. As a means of supporting parents-in-law, driving thus recapitulates a familiar everyday activity that sits comfortably within the realm of masculinity.
17. Notably, it is the literal act of driving that tends to be the focus here, even if this is not the end that such transportation serves. One informant describes a recent experience of a father-in-law who had been institutionalised at a nursing care facility: 'I take my father-in-law out for a drive, as I figure it's boring to sit around all day long [i.e., at the care facility], though we don't go far. Usually I pick him up, take him for a drive, and then head back to the care facility in the late afternoon' (Hyogo, 30 June 2014). Although his description emphasises the driving itself, vehicular transportation is in fact incidental in this case. Rather, driving is instrumental to the provision of companionship and diversion. Notwithstanding the underlying purposes, it is in terms of activities they associate themselves with, such as the act of driving, that my informants tend to describe their care of elderly in-laws.
18. Informants also tend to foreground activities they characterise as requiring physical strength (and which are thus associated with masculinity). For instance, weeding does not necessarily require strength, though my informants narrate this as a physically demanding activity. Such activities are characterised as 'heavy physical labour (fit for a man)' (*otoko ni dekiru chikara shigoto*). This association with strength, however, is not the only factor governing an activity's suitability. One informant, for example, while willing to weed his mother-in-law's garden, does not do so for his own octogenarian mother with whom he lives, explaining that she says she is perfectly able and does not need his help. Taking into account his mother's own inclinations and abilities, he does not weed though he could do so. A common thread throughout my informants' accounts is that they purposefully choose from a range of familiar masculine activities while giving due consideration to whether such activities are necessary and appreciated from the perspective of other family members. Such labour is thus a selective expression of involvement in the provision of care.
19. My informants' implicit understanding of caregiving contrasts with the definition of 'care' (*kaigo*) stipulated by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), which is prescribed in a list of sixteen support activities, namely bathing, washing hair, wiping the body, cleaning inside the mouth, accompanying on walks, cleaning, washing the face, assisting with toilet activities, helping to adjust the position of the body, changing clothes, preparing meals and tidying up, shopping, feeding, doing the laundry, helping with medications, and facilitating communication.^[15]

This narrowly focused list, which enumerates nursing care and communication activities that the government aims to apply universally for all caregivers, purports to be gender-neutral with regard to caregivers and care recipients. Such a claim, however, begs the question of how gender affects caregiving in practice (as well as the needs of care recipients). In contrast to this official definition, notions of care for my informants differs markedly in terms not only of who would be involved in its provision, but also the actual scope of everyday practices entailed, which are considered much more broadly. Considering everyday practices thus challenge 'official' governmental notions of what constitutes care. Moreover, recognising caregivers' 'gendered' proclivities enables identification of what specific care practices are likely to be carried out.

20. Seen in spatial terms, sons-in-law tend to relate their contributions to care of elderly parents-in-law to recognisably public roles. For example, they often take part in local community meetings on behalf of parents-in-law. This is in marked contrast with their wives' contributions, which tend to be more focused on domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and helping with toilet activities. Here too, while leaving more domestic affairs largely to their wives, men are engaging in matters with which they are already somewhat familiar. Thus, rather than a negative resistance against involvement in activities deemed 'feminine,' my informants are choosing actively to become engaged in care (and care-related) activities in areas where they feel capable and able to draw on their experience in other spheres. Thus, by expanding notions of care to encompass public engagement and physical labour, sons-in-law are able to rationalise and be comfortable being involved in the provision of elderly care for their parents-in-law while drawing on their existing sense of masculinity.

Son-in-law as a main carer: Dislocating masculinity?

21. Although sons-in-law are increasingly involved in the provision of support for elderly and frail parents-in-law, they only rarely serve as primary caregivers. Nevertheless, such cases do exist. Further, in view of Japan's ongoing demographic shift towards an aging society, increased participation by women in paid work, and increasingly precarious employment patterns, such relationships may become more common in the future. I discuss one such case in this section as an illustration of how such a relationship comes to be formed and understood by its participants.
22. Minoru, aged 58, lives with his wife Natsuko and adult son in the same household as his own mother and his wife's father. Minoru is the eldest son and his younger sister lives an hour's drive away with her own immediate family. His father has been institutionalised at a care centre, while his mother-in-law is deceased. Minoru's mother's health had been failing for several years. Even so, she has remained mostly independent and regularly visits a day service centre. Minoru and Natsuko were thus able to look after her while both working full-time jobs. A year before our interview, however, Minoru suffered a breakdown from overwork. After he recovered, he decided to quit his job, which he felt was too much for him. When finding another job proved difficult for him, Natsuko suggested that Minoru stay at home to look after his mother. Both she and their son worked full time and so Minoru had no need to worry about the family's income. Around the same time, his father-in-law seriously injured his leg in a fall, and was no longer able to live on his own. Natsuko's older brother already lived with his own parents-in-law while his wife was bound in a wheelchair. Taking pity on Natsuko's father as a man who had always shown him kindness, Minoru invited his father-in-law to move in with them. His situation as the principal family caregiver thus emerged due to a convergence of contingent circumstances.

Given the family's situation and support available through the day services centre, it might be seen as only reasonable that Minoru should look after his mother and father-in-law. However, he sometimes finds everyday life tough on his masculine self-regard:

Still, I struggle [with the transition from working to caregiving]. I sometimes wonder if I'm doing the right thing. I think I'd rather still be working. If my situation were normal (*furatto*, i.e. 'flat'), it would be absolutely impossible to stay at home. Absolutely impossible. I still want to work despite my back pains and poor health. I'm still a man! ... At the moment, I'm something of a jack-of-all-trades (*nandemoya*). If somebody asks me to do something, I do it. If somebody asks me to fix their machines, I fix them. I tell people I'll do whatever I can do for them. My friends call me 'NPO Minoru' or 'volunteer Minoru.' Some people bring beer [instead of money] ... I've dropped by the community centre to see if they need my help. They pay 1,000 yen (about 6--7 GBP) an hour for me to cut grass and take care of odd jobs ... I spend the money on cigarettes and gear for my car, now not so much as before ... As a man, it feels good to earn money, even though it is only a little ... People in the neighbourhood see [my work] and trust me to do a good job ... The other day I was asked to do some pruning! ... I think it would be very hard if all I did was provide care for those two. Definitely hard if I had to do it all day long ... I go out to drive my car at least once a day: I like to listen to the roar of the car engines – I need to listen to the roar of the engine of my car; otherwise I lose my motivation for everything. I sometimes I go to a car circuit to release stress ... Still, I feel kind of trapped. I sometimes ask myself if it is all right (Hyogo, 28 July 2014).

23. For Minoru, being a caregiver is a role that conflicts with masculinity. In his view a man should keep working (i.e., outside the house) even in times of poor health; staying home caring for the elderly is clearly unsatisfying in this regard. To solve this problem, he seeks out irregular part-time work. While not necessarily generating much income, the gratitude and trust he earns from people in his neighbourhood from performing such jobs well are much more significant. While the little income he does earn allows him to pay for pastimes like smoking and driving without imposing on his wife's income, his income is by no means sufficient to support his family. This is in marked contrast to the hegemonic notion of masculinity that strongly associates men as family breadwinners through their characterisation of men as *daikokubashira* (literally the central pillar supporting the traditional Japanese house).^[16] Minoru's case interestingly presents an instance where work is not to sustain the family financially; rather it is the very act of performing tasks outside the house that serves to maintain his sense of masculinity.
24. Even so, in practice Minoru's household chores continue to rankle. He often needs to prepare lunch, which he says he keeps simple, and while he may help with preparations for dinner, such as by washing and cutting vegetables, he leaves the final preparation of meals to his wife. That way, she remains 'in charge' of dinner preparation, if only marginally. He explains that he once worked part-time as an assistant chef, emphasising that this experience is the only reason he is able to help with cooking at all. In other words, (and consistent with the accounts of my other informants), rather than having learned a domestic skill, he has repurposed a professional skill for domestic use. Further, he counter-balances these domestic chores with masculine pastimes that he enjoys, such as revving the engine while driving his car.
25. Despite his de facto role as principal carer, Minoru remains reluctant to accept this role fully, and has cultivated activities that offer temporary escape from the household and moreover sustain his sense of masculinity. Although social approval for male carer roles is deemed important in sustaining masculinity,^[17] in Minoru's case the support of his wife and understanding and acceptance on the part of his neighbours and friends are not sufficient in themselves. Rather, the incongruity between his sense of being a man and the reality of his daily care activities are a source of struggle. His situation complicates any simple masculine identification, and he feels that he must make an effort to sustain his manliness. It is also worth noting that while he is for the moment a son-in-law taking on the role of a primary caregiver for a parent-in-law, the prospect that this situation will be temporary is an important factor in helping him to reconcile his care obligations with his sense of masculinity.

Cohabitation with elderly parents-in-law

26. The specific daily practices of care in which sons-in-law become involved depend largely on the particularities of family living arrangements. The case of Toshihiko, a 58-year-old salaryman, presents a situation that is in some ways the inverse of Minoru's. Toshihiko is married to Tomoko, a 54-year-old nurse. The couple lives together with Tomoko's parents, while Toshihiko's 92-year-old mother lives with his elder brother. His father-in-law, aged 83, is blind in one eye and has mobility problems. His mother-in-law, aged 79, suffers from Parkinson's disease. Toshihiko describes the couple's decision to move in with his wife's parents to care for them as follows:

My wife told her mother, 'It might be time for us to come to live with you [to provide care]. But if we move in, it won't be easy to live in this old house. Even more so for my husband. Toshihiko will be giving up his own house to come live here, so we need something good for him. He's making a considerable effort, and I don't want him to have to live in the house in its current state. So, I'd like to renovate ... would it be possible for us to use your savings to pay for it?' And they did (Hyogo, 3 August 2014).

27. Tomoko acted as the mediator, coordinating their move into the parents-in-law's house in a way that would ensure comfort for everyone involved, but especially for her husband, the incomer. The move required a renovation, with Toshihiko and his parents-in-law each agreeing to pay half the cost. However, his own mother was very much against him giving up his home to move in with his in-laws while even having to pay. From her perspective, the idea of moving in with parents-in-law to provide care for them was almost inconceivable. Toshihiko has in fact kept secret from his mother the fact that he had to secure a loan to cover his share of the renovation. Toshihiko's choice is one that others in his natal family may find difficult to understand, let alone agree with. Even so, as son-in-law, Toshihiko's more significant contribution to the provision of elderly care is important but indirect. Rather than contributing directly, his decision to give up his own independence and move his family means that Tomoko will be able to provide her parents with constant and active care in the home. As Tomoko is an only child, Toshihiko is happy to support her desire to take care of her parents.

28. The considerable outlay for the renovation suggests that Tomoko's parents appreciate their son-in-law's willingness to move in with them. Yet, in practice his status within his wife's family is not one of dominance or even centrality. As a son-in-law, he prefers to avoid confrontation and conflict with his parents-in-law, with the result that Tomoko serves as a mediator to strike a delicate balance across the extended family in daily life:

It's fine if my wife says something to her parents – she's their child. But if I were to speak up, it might create conflict. I try to let my parents-in-law know what I want to tell them, but I won't say it directly to them. I tell my wife to ask them to do certain things differently (Hyogo Japan, 3 August 2014).

Tomoko illustrates the situation with an anecdote:

For example, my parents don't close the door of the toilet completely when they are using it ... I told them, 'Please close the door. Toshihiko doesn't like it *either*.' I mentioned it to them because Toshihiko complained to me [my emphasis] (Hyogo, 3 August 2014).

29. As Toshihiko explains, in her own way 'my wife passes on what I'm thinking to my parents-in-law.' Tomoko tries to mitigate points of possible conflict between her parents and her husband and makes an effort to create a nice environment for him. By indicating that her husband feels the same way ('Toshihiko doesn't like it *either*') Tomoko strengthens her position with the implication that she is the aggrieved party, even though the resulting change is one sought by her husband. As son-in-law, Toshihiko would prefer to avoid saying anything negative to his parents-in-law, let alone impose his will on them under their own roof. Toshihiko's status in the household is thus ambivalent; he is catered to, but does not have the same authority as he might have had in his own house.

30. The household's division of labour is otherwise conventional. Tomoko handles most domestic chores, including meal preparation, laundry, and cleaning, while Toshihiko attends local community meetings, takes out the rubbish, tends the moss garden, and takes care of other odd jobs such as hanging reed screens over the windows. Toshihiko has not allowed himself to be drawn into daily care tasks that he would prefer to avoid. While he does not consider himself to have gone out of his way for his parents-in-law, he does make some effort at companionable interaction:

Honestly, I don't like spending time with my parents-in-law! It is sometimes annoying ... For example, I was having a cup of coffee one weekend morning. My father-in-law came in to read a newspaper, flipping pages noisily just in front of me. I thought 'give me a break!' So, I don't like being with them. But I sometimes ask my parents-in-law if they want to join me and talk together ... I try to make time to talk with them. I think that talking about various things and asking them how they're doing can be a form of psychological care (*seishinteki kaigo*) ... My relatives told me that my father-in-law was very pleased to be living with us ... It was a real effort to move in here, so we have to make it meaningful. I hope they do appreciate having us here. So, I make efforts to talk as much as I can, so as not to make a wall between us ... Before moving, my wife and I wondered if we could live with them for ten years. We do hope they will live a long time, and enjoy living together with us. When they eventually leave us, my wife and I hope they will know our deep gratitude towards them ... my parents-in-law have raised our three children as much as we have. So, I'd like to repay my gratitude (*ongaeshi*) ... by talking to them, to make sure that our everyday lives together are meaningful (Hyogo, 3 August 2014).

31. Toshihiko makes sure to greet his parents-in-law every day. On weekend mornings, he spends time chatting with them over a cup of coffee, working against his personal feelings of reluctance. He does not regard fostering such companionship with his parents-in-law as an end in itself, but rather as recompense for their help in raising their three children. As both he and Tomoko worked full-time, his parents-in-law were often able to look after their three children, since they lived nearby. As I have shown elsewhere, a commonly expressed reason why grandfathers are willing to involve themselves with their married daughters' childcare is partially their wish to be looked after when they require care in later life. Furthermore, grandfathers also provide financial support for their married daughters with occasional cash gifts, paying meals at restaurants, and sometimes even buying them property. In this way, such men try to channel their daughters' agency into repaying their gratitude to their fathers in the form of care.^[18] In fact, many of my informants share their wives' feelings of gratitude, citing the repayment of gratitude (*ongaeshi*) to explain their felt need to care for their parents-in-law.

32. Importantly, sons-in-law such as Toshihiko experience this feeling of gratitude towards parents-in-law, whereas traditionally husbands' contact with parents-in-law was quite limited. Historically, eldest sons and their wives cared for the husbands' elderly parents within the system of *ie* family succession as a repayment of gratitude due in part from the older generation's participation in the care of young children. The experiences of my informants suggest the practice of such repayment of gratitude in contemporary families is much less structural than negotiated, and has in many cases the locus of such return has shifted from the parents of husbands to the parents of wives. This finding reaffirms the need to shift discussions of elderly care in the context of the Japanese family away from structural-functional paradigms, such as those that privilege the norms based on the *ie* family system, toward more relational and intimacy-based models.

33. Notwithstanding Toshihiko's view of repayment of gratitude, from his perspective the desire and need to move in with his parents-in-law remains a challenge to his masculinity. Unlike Minoru, whose masculine identity wrestled with the fact that his time is now chiefly devoted to caring for elderly relatives rather than his career, for Toshihiko the salient change has been the decision to give up his own house. Consequently, Toshihiko is forced to deal with the ambiguity that exists between himself and his father-in-law in terms of the relative distribution of authority, power and economic resources associated with hegemonic masculinity in the family. In practice Toshihiko and his father-in-law address such concerns on a case-by-case basis. On some matters, they

coordinate with each other, such as by contributing equally to the renovation. On others, such as toilet habits, Tomoko negotiates as intermediary in the roles of daughter and wife. Other matters are addressed through some degree of spatial separation, as with recognising and respecting the mutual compartmentalisation of the renovated home space between the two generations. These mechanisms and arrangements compensate for Toshihiko's relatively limited authority within the home. Further, in a way somewhat analogous to Minoru's case, the fact that Toshihiko also considers his situation to be temporary, likely to last no more than a decade or so, may also be interpreted as another means to reconcile himself to his situation and preserve his sense of masculinity.

Conclusion

34. The increased involvement of daughters in caring for their own elderly parents invites consideration of the emerging relationships of middle-aged men with parents-in-law in need of support and care in the context of the extended Japanese family. This article has demonstrated the significance of understanding how men today perceive their roles as caregivers in increasingly diverse families and the significance of their gendered choices when delivering care. For some of my informants, their involvement with care of the elderly deeply challenges their notions of masculinity, but this is not always the case. In all cases, however, how these men address their sense of masculinity is contingent on the re-shaping of family relationships.
35. While appreciated by other family members, sons-in-law limit their contributions to familiar activities they consider to be appropriately masculine. They characterise their selectively undertaken activities using idioms that appeal to professional and recognisably masculine spheres, thereby allowing them to reconcile their involvement in the care of elderly relatives with an existing sense of masculinity. Thus, they introduce an element of continuity in crafting novel masculinities related to their evolving parents-in-law relationship.
36. While becoming a primary caregiver for parents-in-law can potentially challenge a son-in-law's sense of masculinity, this can be mitigated by extending the notion of care to include compensatory non-domestic activities and, critically, considering the caregiver status to be temporary. Further, contributions by sons-in-laws should also be understood not only in terms of active everyday involvement, but in the opportunity costs arising from their choice of living arrangements. Nonetheless, co-residence with parents-in-law may still allow a son-in-law to carve out a role compatible with his sense of masculinity in a domestic setting through the mediation of his spouse. This points to how addressing elderly care is embedded in wider family negotiations, including those that take place between husband and wife, siblings, and both sets of parents, all of which are questions that must be addressed in future research. Care of the elderly, then, must be seen as being embedded in the wider context of changing family relations, which importantly includes the increasingly prominent roles of sons-in-law in the support of new caring arrangements. Such roles are contributing to the ongoing societal move away from vertical *ie* norms of patrilineal family structures by situating the traditionally marginal son-in-law relationship more centrally within the contemporary Japanese family.

Notes

[1] In this article, I do not include cases of adopted sons-in-law as this is beyond the scope of this paper.

[2] Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese*

Workplace, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990; Marry White, *Perfectly Japanese: Making Families in an Era of Upheaval*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Tomoko Hidaka, *Salaryman Masculinity: Continuity and Change in Hegemonic Masculinity in Japan*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010.

[3] Cf. Ochiai Emiko, *Kindai Kazoku to Feminizumu* [Feminism and the Modern Family], Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 2000.

[4] Kazumi Ishii and Nerida Jarkey, 'The housewife is born: The establishment of the notion and identity of the *shufu* in modern Japan,' *Japanese Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2002): 35–47.

[5] Anne Imamura Anne, *Urban Japanese Housewives: At Home and in the Community*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1987.

[6] Romit Dasgupta, 'Performing masculinities? The 'salaryman' at work and play,' *Japanese Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2000): 189–200; Gordon Mathews, 'Can "a real man" live for his family? *Ikigai* and masculinity in today's Japan,' in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*, ed. James Roberson and Nobue Suzuki, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 109–25; Hidaka Tomoko, *Salaryman Masculinity: Continuity and Change in Hegemonic Masculinity in Japan*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010.

[7] Lynne Nakano and Moeko Wagatsuma, 'Mothers and their unmarried daughters: an intimate look at generational change,' in *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?* ed. Gordon Mathews and Bruce White, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, 137–54; Toshiko Himeoka, 'Changes in family structure,' in *The Demographic Change: A Handbook About Japan*, ed. Florian Coulmas, Harald Conrad, Annette Schad-Seifert and Gabriele Vogt, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 235–53.

[8] See Naomi Brown, 'Under one roof: the evolving story of three generation housing in Japan,' in *Demographic Change and the Family in Japan's Aging Society*, ed. John Traphagan and John Knight, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003, 53–72.

[9] Susan Long, Ruth Campbell, and Nishimura Chie, 'Does it matter who cares? A comparison of daughters versus daughters-in-law in Japanese elder care,' *Social Science Japan Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2009): 1–21.

[10] Nancy Finley, 'Theories of family labour as applied to gender differences in caregiving for elderly parents,' *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 51, no. 1 (1989): 79–86; Glenna Spitze and John Logan, 'Sons, daughters, and intergenerational social support,' *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1990): 420–30; Jeffrey Dwyer and Raymond Coward, 'A multivariate comparison of the involvement of adult sons versus daughters in the care of impaired parents,' *Journal of Gerontology: Social Science*, vol. 46, no. 5 (1991): S259–S269; Dennis Hogan, David Eggebeen, and Clifford Clogg, 'The structure of intergenerational exchanges in American families,' *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 98, no. 6 (1993): 1428–458; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'Creating a caring society,' *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2000): 84–94; Susan Long and Phyllis Harris, 'Gender and elder care: social change and the role of the caregiver in Japan,' *Social Science Japan Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2000): 21–36; Amy Hequembourg and Sara Brallier, 'Gendered stories of parental caregiving among siblings,' *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2005): 53–71; Kristen Schultz Lee, 'Gender, care work, and the complexity of family membership on Japan,' *Gender and Society*, vol. 24, no. 5 (2010): 647–71.

[11] Phyllis Harris, Susan Long, and Miwa Fujii, 'Men and elder care in Japan: A ripple of change?' *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* vol. 13, no. 2 (1998): 177–98; Edward Thompson and Betty Kramer, *Men as Caregivers*, New York: Prometheus Books, 2004; Matsuura Tamie, 'Hatarakuhito niyoru kaigo no jittai [Report on working caregivers],' *Jerontorojī jānarū* [Gerontology Journal], vol. 12, no. 019 (2013): 1–14; Hirayama Ryo, 'Kazoku kaigo-sha no sapōto-gen to sono keiji-teki henka: kazoku kara no kyōryoku to kaigo hoken sābisu ni shōten o atete [Longitudinal changes in support sources for family caregivers: an examination on the association between family members' support and public care services],' *Rōnen shakaikagaku* [Japanese Journal of Gerontology], vol. 36, no. 1 (2014): 43–47.

[12] I have changed the names of my informants to preserve their anonymity.

[13] Laurel Kamada, *Hybrid Identities and Adolescent Girls Being 'Half' in Japan*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009, p. 178.

[14] Kimio Itō, *Otokorashisa no Yukue* [The Direction of Manhood], Tōkyō: Shinyōsha, 1993, pp. 113–14 and 166–71.

[15] Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, *Heisei 25nen Kokumin seikatsu kihon chosa no gaiyo* [Comprehensive survey of living conditions] (2013), Online: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/k-tyosa/k-tyosa13/dl/05.pdf> (accessed 22 February 2016).

[16] cf. Tom Gill, 'When pillars evaporate: Structuring masculinity on the Japanese margins,' in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*, ed. James Roberson and Nobue Suzuki, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 144–61; James Roberson, 'Japanese working-class masculinities: Marginalized complicity,' in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*, ed. James Roberson and Nobue Suzuki, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 126–43; Hidaka Tomoko, *Salaryman Masculinity: Continuity and Change in Hegemonic Masculinity in Japan*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010.

[17] Oscar Ribeiro, Constança Paúl and Conceição Nogueira, 'Real men, real husbands: caregiving and masculinities in later life,' *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol. 21 (2007): 302–13.

[18] Hiroko Umegaki-Costantini, 'Grandfathering in contemporary Japan: Altruistic and self-serving means to happiness,' in *Happiness and the Good Life in Japan*, ed. Barbara Holthus and Manzenreiter Wolfram, London: Routledge, 2017, 86–105.

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Published with the support of Gender and Cultural Studies, School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

URL: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue41/umegaki-hiroko.html>

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Last modified: 20 December 2017 0645