MEANING IN LIFE:
TALES FROM AGING JAPAN

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A NOTE ON CONVENTIONS

All personal names in this thesis are presented using the Japanese custom of writing the family name before the given name. Rather than using Mr or Mrs, I use the suffix ‘san’ when referring to my interlocutors. All names, including the names of locations, have been changed. Romanization throughout the thesis follows the Hepburn system. During the period of fieldwork in 2009 the exchange rate for Japanese yen was approximately ¥150 for £1.

CHAPTER 1

SUBJECTS OF CARE: GROWING OLD IN URBAN JAPAN

IN THE COMPANY OF STORIES

Kato san waited until everyone was settled around the large wooden table with a cup of tea. A slim, lively lady of ninety, she had a glint in her eye as she told the following story.

> Last week, Yamanaka san came in and joined us here for a cup of tea. She's in good health, and delighted that her great-grandson has enrolled in university. Unfortunately, she had to return home a little early. She was feeling tired and her back ached a bit. She had these pretty white sandals with a bit of a heel. 'You know,' I told her, 'you really shouldn't wear those. Once you're past ninety, it starts to get hard to walk around in high heels!'

Though not really meant as a joke, everyone around the table laughed warmly. The conversation continued, and more people joined in, greeted by cheerful smiles as some of the ladies rushed to find them chairs or order tea and coffee from the salon's volunteer staff. A daily routine for some, a weekly treat for others living further away, the Shimoichi Fureai community salon always got particularly busy in the early afternoon, with up to twenty people gathering around two large wooden tables, nestled away in a small townhouse in bustling Shimoichi, a downtown neighbourhood in Southern Osaka.

The Shimoichi Fureai salon was popular among the elderly living in the vicinity, and had been since its opening some two years earlier in late 2007. The story of the salon and its foundation was itself an interesting one: a group of middle-aged women from the neighbourhood, many of whom had experience of caring for their elderly family members, grew concerned with the level of support provided for the local elderly and decided to start a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO). As a base, they had a small rented room in a house belonging to someone's old aunt. Over the past seventeen years since its establishment in early 1995, the NPO expanded the range of its activities and services, until it was able to count on a solid income that could be spent on buying and running a space of their own. And some space it was: a handsome (if small) old-fashioned town-house in a once-famous shopping area, in a spot once occupied by an old fishmonger. The office, for staff, was located right above the salon up a short flight of stairs. This story was often retold to me by both the volunteer staff and the elderly clientele, with a mixture of pride and gratitude. 'This salon is the source of our well-being,' as one of my interlocutors put it. I joined the salon as a volunteer and enjoyed making countless cups of coffee and tea for the visitors, while savouring the opportunity to listen to and join in their wide-ranging conversations.

One day the conversation turned to issues of medication and health. Kondo san, a lady known for her ability to grow vegetables in pots in front of her house, commented:

> I didn't need any medicines at all for years, didn't need to go and see the doctor at all. I even got a letter congratulating me for my good health and for not needing to use the national health insurance, and I got a nice tea cup with it too. Then I had problems with my shoulder for a while, and couldn't cook, so I was eating boxed lunches (*obento*) from a delivery service…and can you imagine - my doctor then told me I have high blood pressure. But I don't want to take a lot of medicine, so I started making myself light food. Most days I just make some vegetables and rice, very mild-flavoured. Bland flavours and very little condiments, that's what's good for health. Then I went to the doctor and my blood pressure had dropped a bit. My doctor was very surprised and praised me.

Kondo san's story led to a lively conversation about food, without doubt one of the favourite topics in the salon. People would talk with obvious relish about the different kinds of food they like, regional specialties they had tried while travelling, seasonal foods and dishes, restaurants and places to eat around downtown Osaka, or about eating together. At first I dismissed such talk about food as irrelevant to the larger goals of my research. Yet over the course of several months, I began to see how these seemingly mundane conversations were an essential part of a people's broader concern with what we might call the good life, a topic explored in some detail in this thesis.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the older people who visited the salon rarely talked about aging, almost never about feeling unwell or being old, and even less frequently about death. Their conversations instead revolved around topics like daily news, politics, family, mutual acquaintances, plans for the following days, changes in seasons or seasonal festivities. Like my friends in their twenties, they could spend hours talking about the best place to buy clothes, or about a new *okonomiyaki* restaurant they had found near Pontocho, describing in great detail how to get there through the complicated maze of streets, alleys, shops and bars that make up downtown Osaka. Yet aging and death were not considered to be inappropriate as topics, and sometimes the conversation would indeed drift in that direction. Several jocular chats about aging and imminent death took place in my presence, as well as a few reflexive, contemplative conversations or monologues. Rather than being ‘taboo’, my impression was that these themes were simply not foremost in people’s minds or their daily conversations.

In contrast to this – doubtless perfectly normal – situation, much anthropological writing about the elderly focuses on older people’s experiences of old age, by questioning them about aging. This brings us to an important question: must an anthropology of the elderly be about aging? I want to suggest that an anthropology of the elderly can potentially reveal a far wider scope of issues. The study of the elderly can be a useful way of getting at issues that affect everyone, but which might nevertheless achieve a special prominence in the everyday lives of older people. Among the issues which most occupy me in this thesis are the role of ‘stories’ in creating the fabric or texture of everyday social life; how people deal with existential issues; and how they decide what kind of life is most worth living.

RELATED LIVES

Older people living in the vicinity of the salon would often pop in for a cup of tea or coffee, but more importantly for a chat and companionship. For a first time visitor, it can easily seem like not much is happening there: just a group of people sitting together around a table, and telling stories. For an ethnographer convinced of the importance of praxis, of observing what people do and not just what they say, this can be frustrating, simply because not much ‘doing’ seems to take place. Yet from another perspective, every narration, every story, is an event. People come to the community salon precisely because, as they themselves put it, ‘there is always something going on’. And that ‘something’, to a large extent, means exchanging stories. Big news stories broadcast nationally to millions of people across the country mix and interact with personal stories from the spheres of the everyday, the mundane, and the intimate. Storytelling can be entertaining, a way of passing time with others, but it can also provide an opportunity for reflection, a chance for making sense of things by relating them: relating them to other people, and also to each other, to other events or happenings. One of my goals in this thesis is to show how these two characteristics of stories make them particularly interesting to an anthropology that is concerned with how broader social worlds, and cultural frameworks, intersect with personal lives and intimate decisions. Narratives and stories have long been favourite topics of anthropologists, not least in the form of myths. As a special class of narratives, which Malinowski calls mythical 'charters', myths have been of particular interest as they are thought to provide an expression of key social and cosmological issues or tensions, while reinforcing principles of social organization:

> …there exists a special class of stories, regarded as sacred, embodied in ritual, morals, and social organization... These stories live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narratives; but are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as how to perform them (Malinowski 1948:108)'.

What of stories in their more mundane form: everyday stories that are told and retold, heard on the radio and read in the newspapers? These may not comprise the 'dogmatic backbone' of a culture, to use Malinowski's expression, but nevertheless may comprise a source of information, a point of reference in decision - making and even a source of everyday moral knowledge.

In what ways, then, do stories contribute to sociality? On the most basic level, they provide a common space for a narrator and listeners, and create a shared experience. Stories bring people together by offering both the tellers and the audience an opportunity for reflection. Furthermore, a story can invoke other people – a protagonist, for instance – and compel us to care about them, at least enough to want to finish listening to the story. Later, the story can be retold to another, different audience, extending its reach and reinforcing connections. Stories, in plural – that is, as a collection – are moreover social in a much more fundamental way. Certain stories are shared by a group, and they form part of a repository of narratives that members draw on in their everyday lives, for examples or sources of understandings of events. The sociologist Arthur Frank, whose work has been a source of inspiration as well as valuable conceptual tools for approaching the narratives that emerged from my fieldwork, introduces the notion of narrative habitus, which refers to a repository of stories that one knows of, including a collection of stories that one shares with a group of people (2010:53). Narrative habitus builds on the idea of narrative identity, which views one's life as a story which one lives out, a story that can only exist in relation to the other stories that are available in one's culture: 'we learn through stories not only which identities are available; more fundamentally, we learn what an identity is. (…) Narrative identity is as collective as it is personal' (ibid.:199). Even stories about oneself are inherently social, as they position the teller in relation to relevant others in the narrative, sometimes explicitly, sometimes not, and place oneself in relation to a given set of expectations and social norms – this being necessary to make oneself understood to others who are listening. Fundamentally, as Judith Butler (2005: 8) argues, '"I" has no story of its own that is not also a story of relations – or a set of relations – to a set of norms'[1]. In other words, no life story can be told entirely without reference to some set of expectations, which make it intelligible to the listener. No story can be told, or lived, without reference to a set of social norms that to some extent may be revealed in the act of telling.

While telling one's own story can obviously provide an opportunity for self-reflection, so too can other stories which do not concern oneself directly. Story-telling opens up a space for self-understanding, albeit only partial, on the part of both the listeners and the narrator, by showing the linkages between past, present and potential worlds and selves (Ochs and Capps 1996:19). Narratives not only promote self-reflection, but can also be used by narrators for making sense of the world, by allowing them to impose order on consecutive events. One can, in other words, make sense of things by situating them in a sequence of events that build on each other. Precisely this characteristic of narratives[2] is often singled out as their main quality: stories can even be defined as a sequencing of events where things build on each other – 'one thing happens as a consequence of another' (Frank 2010: 25). The structure of the narrative, its form, in itself provides a certain logic, so that placing an event within this meaningful whole gives the event itself a meaning (Mattingly 1994: 813).

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[1] Even when one is merely telling the truth, one is bound by historically specific ideas of what constitutes the truth (Butler 2005: 121). This truth is further constrained by the limits of knowability of one's own self, which is in turn related to ideas about moral responsibility: how can one be held responsible for one's own actions if one doesn't quite know oneself fully? Yet Butler argues that precisely this unknowability can provide us with a basis for shared ethics – the parts of self that are not accessible to us are precisely those parts of self that are social, in other words – self is opaque to the extent it is formed in relation to others, prior to one's conscious knowledge (ib. 20). These issues of self-understanding and morality are of interest in reading and interpreting some of the life stories that form the core of this thesis.

2 Narrative and story are used interchangeably here. Some authors make a distinction between the two, considering stories to be a type of a narrative, or referring to narrative as a structure underlying a story (Harrington 2008; Frank 2010:121, 199), but this distinction is not relevant for the argument I set out here.

This capacity of narrative to provide meaning through coherence, and its link to the issue of the coherence of one's own self, has been explored by some medical anthropologists initially interested in narrative as a way of getting at personal experiences of illness and suffering (e.g. Kleinmann 1988: xii, 28), and as a way of coping with the challenge of illness (e.g. Mattingly 1994, Frank 1995). For instance, talking about a traumatic experience may help to incorporate it into one's life story and to give it space within that larger whole, whereas on its own it may appear utterly arbitrary and meaningless. An illness, especially chronic illness, creates a 'biographical disruption', an inconsistency in one's life story (Bury 1982 in Frank 2010:115), and a narrative can bridge the gap between the self before the illness and the self after the onset of the illness, thereby comprising a narrative re-construction (Williams 1984 in Frank 2010:114). Undoubtedly, illness is not the only 'biographical disruption' that can occur during one's life-course, and narratives are used to make sense of a wide array of events and situations in one's life. In particular, I want to suggest, they can provide an insight into the existential issues that occasionally surface in every person's life. In this way, stories make life more meaningful, and more bearable.

Interesting methodological issues arise from the characteristic of the narrative as a kind of framing device[3], the very structure of which enforces coherence. The narrator can resist this compulsion to tell events in a coherent manner, but the narrative structure exposes these attempts, and reveals seeming inconsistencies. This capacity of narratives limits a narrator's conscious control of the image she wishes to project of herself (e.g. in an interview situation), while also revealing the underlying cultural frameworks and expectations that structure the narration tacitly (Wengraf 2001: 115). The Biographical Narrative Interviewing Method aims at making the most of this characteristic of a narrative, which is initially solicited without prompts from the interviewer. In consecutive sessions, the interviewer may pick up themes raised in the narration, but even then only in the order in which they appeared in the original delivery. At all times the focus is on events, rather than the narrator's interpretations; the latter can be solicited in the final sessions. Discrepancies in the story, or conspicuous silences or omissions, can then be raised in the final stages (Wengraf 2001). Most of the life stories in this thesis have been collected following this method[4]. As such, they stress the authorship of the narratives by the narrator, and allow for the exploration of inconsistencies or omissions in the narrative as a way of accessing deeper issues or conflicts in personal lives.

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[3] An issue related to this capacity of narrative is the cultural specificity of narrative forms and expressions. In Chapter 6 I touch upon some of these issues, by exploring the specificities of the Japanese language in relation to narrative analysis.

A narrative does not merely reveal unintended slips and silences through a discrepancy with its coherent and rounded framework. It is itself structured around a discrepancy, which comprises an important part of its 'plot'. This discrepancy around which the story is structured is that between expectations and 'reality', or that which occurred: 'Narrative activity attempts to resolve the discrepancy between what is expected and what has transpired' (Ochs and Capps 1996:27). This aspect of the narrative can allow for the counterposing of cultural norms and expectations with events in the protagonists life, which makes it particularly interesting as a tool for an ethnographic approach focusing on the intersection between the social and personal values, taking into account the complex interplay between cultural expectations and personal choices. Whereas expectations are often structured – particularly, perhaps, in a Japanese setting, the course of one's life contains uncertain outcomes and insecurities.

Narratives may help to deal with uncertainty in everyday life, by focusing on the discrepancy between expected and lived experience and the modes of the resolution of this tension. For instance, one's life story can be cast against the backdrop of the dominant life model, which provides a point of reference for the narrator. Sometimes what I term 'dominant life stories', such as those of the 'good wife', for example, might provide guidance in our life decisions, or cause distress because of the constraints they impose. At times when one is frustrated by a lack of options, or cannot change one's circumstances easily, it may be possible to 'change one's story': to transform or choose a different story in relation to which one's own life is viewed. This aspect of the narrative has enormous ethical consequences, as it may allow someone to create an understanding of themselves as a valuable person, with a meaningful story. More broadly, stories provide one with a repository of knowledge about potential 'endings', and allow one to imagine a range of futures, informing what we wish for and what we do not want – 'the endings we dread' (Mattingly 1994).

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[4] I have not strictly adhered to other principles laid out by Wengraf (2010), as many of the more meticulous procedures were not compatible with the ethnographic method. Moreover, probing of the most delicate topics that arose from the omissions and inconsistencies in the life story narration was not always possible, in the interest of the emotional well-being of my interviewees. As I have only asked for life stories of people with whom I was well acquainted, I often had some additional information about them and their lives, which made some of the more delicate questions unnecessary. In some cases, out of respect for my interlocutors, I had to leave some questions unasked. Finally, my analysis is not based on Wengraf's method, but instead combines a number of different approaches, some of which are discussed in this chapter. I have sought to present the content of the life stories in a form very close to that in which they were delivered to me, for two main reasons. Firstly, the wording, phrases, and order of statements are often relevant for the analysis. Secondly, the narrative has an internal coherence that I wished to preserve, not only for analytical purposes, but also out of respect for my interviewees. I have, therefore, only lightly edited the translated text, to make it more easily accessible in written form. Given this editing process, I did not want to leave text voiced in the first person, as this would imply a verbatim statement, of the kind that would be more suitable for a discourse analysis.

EXISTENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

> …however being is symbolically expressed, the *question* of being is universal, and constitutes a starting point in our attempt to explore human lifeworlds as the sites of perennial struggle for existence – theorising this as a dynamic relationship between the human capacity for life, and the potentialities of any social environment for providing the wherewithal of life. (Jackson 2005: xii, emphasis in the original)

Stories, as we have seen, can play a role in making sense of events in one's life and in dealing with existential issues. To a careful listener, stories can also reveal something of the narrator's deep preoccupations and existential anxieties. To the extent that they emerge out of a tangle of multiple (and interrelated) tensions between expectations, historical circumstances, and one's own wishes and characteristics (as given by birth and as shaped through socialization), these existential anxieties and issues are as much social as they are personal. Paying attention to them and to the ways people interpret or make sense of them may therefore provide insight into the way meaning in life is constructed - or more often, emerges.

Tokuda san was a lady in her late eighties when I met her. One cold winter's day she arrived in the salon soon after opening time, while it was still empty. She sat down at the table, and after ordering a cup of tea, she revealed to me that her husband had been hospitalized over a serious heart condition.

> I am alone now. Now I live alone. Do you know, before, people used to live with their children, especially with their oldest son. But not anymore. I have two daughters, one lives in the vicinity with her family and the other lives in Kyoto. Most people coming here [i.e. to the salon] are living alone. Their husbands and

> wives have passed away. At least I have two daughters. At least sometimes they invite me for dinner.

It became clear to me in later conversations that Tokuda san felt that other women who had lost their husbands some time ago did not really understand her, and that made her feel isolated. She was feeling anxious: about her husband's condition; about the possibility of his death; and about her own days drawing to an end. But more than anything, she was facing the fear of loneliness.

Most people, in the course of their lives, face some existential issues; they ask themselves questions about their lives. According to the existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom (1980), these issues include death; freedom (with its flipside, responsibility); isolation; and meaninglessness. In the Western world, most contemporary psychopathologies are centered around one of these existential anxieties, and surface when they become so powerful as to appear as some other fear or problem. It is noteworthy that existential anxieties are thought to surface in relation to some major event in one's life, or a life course related event: a childbirth; a serious illness; retirement. The freedom desired so strongly by human beings refers, in existential terms, to a lack of structure and guidance, which emphasizes personal responsibility (Yalom 1980: 8). Certain life stages or life situations may leave one feeling an intense sense of isolation: of being left alone to deal with one's problems. This is not always a consequence of being alone, for one need not always feel lonely when alone, but it can reflect the feeling that one's values or actions are at odds with the expectations of others. These feelings, therefore, must be understood or interpreted as much in the broader socio-historical context as in the context of that person's life. To be sure, many of Yalom's observations may not have a direct counterpart in some non-Western contexts. Rather than taking for granted that this framework will work wherever it is applied, I wish to use it as a point of departure for questioning the forms taken by existential concerns in a Japanese context. I am convinced that on a certain, deep level there is a universal aspect to human experience, which at a minimum concerns how to live well in the world with others. I will use the term existential in this broader sense, referring to various aspects of human existence in the world. Which brings us to one of the central questions explored in this thesis: what do the experiences of older people in Japan, and of those caring for them, tell us about how people discern for themselves the kind of life worth living?

The concept of an 'existential anthropology' has been invoked by Michael Jackson (2005: xii), who succinctly summed up concern for the 'existential' as follows: '… human wellbeing involves far more than simple adjustment to a given environment, natural or cultural; it involves endless experimentation in how the given world can be lived decisively, on one's own terms'. To this I would add: how one can make the flow of life one's own, sometimes seemingly without assertive action, yet not without agency? Jackson chooses to focus on what he calls the 'space of appearances'- a phenomenological intermediary space which he claims offers a way of surpassing the dichotomy between society and individual, or the group and the subjective, focusing the gaze instead on what is in-between them (ib.: xiv). As a way of avoiding the pitfalls of generalization (ibid.: xi), Jackson proposes an anthropology that would focus on events in order to 'explore the interplay of the singular and shared, the private and the public, as well as the relationship between personal 'reasons' and impersonal 'causes' in the constitution of events… [with ramifications].. beyond the sociocultural' (xxvii).

While this focus on events that puncture the everyday monotony[5] undoubtedly offer important insights into various aspects of social and personal realities, it also seems relatively unsuited to the analysis of the tranquil space of a community salon in safe, stable, urban Japan. Here, existential dramas did not play out in the form of ruptures or discreet events, but quietly, in everyday life. I therefore had to look further for useful conceptual tools. In some ways, the tool that I have chosen for this task – the story – bears some resemblance to Jackson's 'event'. A telling of a story is an event. Events, like stories, can and do have a 'life of their own'[6]. And they both have an irreducible meaning (see ibid.:xxvii), which makes stories a remarkably appropriate counterpart of life.

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[5] Jackson's longstanding interest in events began with his fieldwork experiences, which he notes often felt like long stretches of uneventful life punctured by more dramatic events - which then seemed like a perfect starting point for unravelling multiple meanings and tensions (Jackson 2005:xxvi).

[6] For more detail on how stories have a life of their own see Frank (2010), and on events see Jackson (2005; especially chapters 1 and 4).

UNCERTAIN LIFE-COURSE: STRUCTURED OR CONTINGENT?

> Given the manifest shakiness of our lives, what is surprising is that we act, think and write as if we were in control of ourselves and our world. It is our assiduous denial of existential vulnerability and limits that is extraordinary in American culture. (Kleinmann 2006:7).

While horrible dangers may not lurk around every corner, uncertainty and contingency are no strangers even to people living in apparently stable and safe industrialized societies. While the myth of control or mastery over nature is perhaps particularly prominent in American culture, as Kleinmann implies, it is not restricted to it: 'It is as if modernity itself were predicated on fostering this fiction, a falsehood at the center of global culture' (Kleinmann 2006:7). If correct, it is little wonder that modern industrialized capitalist societies are so often described in terms of the 'risk society' (see Beck 1992), where the concept of risk implies calculability and manageability. Even in a relatively predictable[7], stable social context such as Japan, it is impossible to rule out unexpected life events and uncertain futures.

By bringing uncertainty back into view, we may begin to observe the tension between an unexpected, precarious reality and the structured expectations in everyday lives. The latter can take the form of an organized life course, with clearly defined life stages. Anthropologists have often paid very close attention to life stages, being particularly interested in transitions between them, such as from a child to an adult. These stages are not always clearly defined: in the case of the Beti of Cameroon, for instance, entry into adulthood is not defined by single events, but rather the occurrence of several separate events related to childbirth, graduation from school, work and marriage, which need not occur in a neat sequence (Johnson-Hanks 2002:865). What this case elucidates, according to Johnson-Hanks, is the institutionally constructed quality of life stages: the fact that they 'emerge only as a result of institutional projects: their coherence should be an object, rather than an assumption, of ethnographic enquiry' (ibid.: 866).

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[7] The idea that our lives are safe and highly controllable, that dangers are in fact manageable and risks calculable, does not leave much space for uncertainty, and therefore strips us of equipment to deal with it. If true, one would still need to wonder where an idea such as this originates and how is it perpetuated. One may need to enquire if such a discourse, if it exists in Japan, co-exists with a discourse about dangers and crises, outbursts of which one may find at regular intervals in the media (Goodman 2002:7). If such a discourse were to exist, it would most certainly have an impact on the way people cope with uncertainties in everyday life. For instance, despite relative wealth and high living standards, the feeling of bleak hopelessness and crisis has descended upon Japanese youth in recessionary years, following years of economic prosperity and stability, and have shaped popular expectations. Relative uncertainty thus becomes incredibly distressing. Perhaps it could even be argued that the structured expectations of stable societies create a new field for the formation of anxieties and uncertainties. Under those circumstances, where uncertainty and danger are rendered invisible, they do not necessarily play out in the open, in a public sphere in the form of conflicts, but are rather contained within one's personal life. That is to say, they do not take a form of dramatic events, but sometimes move inwards and materialize in the form of anxieties. This is one of the themes explored in relation to life histories in this thesis.

While there is no doubt that certain aspects of the life course in Japan are institutionally ordered, it is also clear that certain statuses, such as that of an adult, or 'elderly', are not attained as a result of a single[8] clear-cut transition. In the chapters that follow, I will cast a look over structuring forces and personal experiences of the life-course (and of belonging to a certain 'life stage'), especially among older people in Japan. The tensions between such forces may have important consequences for our understandings of the relationship between aging and time, in which chronological time and 'life story' time need not fully coincide. Which is to say, aging can proceed within the framework of 'contingency'. Such a framework posits that 'a person ages (that is becomes senescent or 'worn out'…) as a result of the traumas encountered over the course of personal history' (Bledsoe 2002:20).

OLD AGE AND ANTHROPOLOGY

> Age meanings, like the sexual meanings discussed by Ortner and Whitehead, 'do not simply reflect or elaborate upon biological 'givens', but are largely products of social and cultural processes' (1981:1). (Thompson 1990:103)

With the increase in life expectancy and decreasing birth rates in industrialized societies, anxieties surrounding an aging population have precipitated an increase of interest in aging. At the same time, in some parts of the industrialized world, aging has begun to be perceived as a problem (Gardner 2002), and older age has become associated with negative stereotypes, in terms of decline and loss (Kaufman 1986). Yet the alternative discourses of active and independent aging that have emerged are not themselves without problems. In her ethnography of Bengali elderly in East London, Katy Gardner examines the discourse used by professional carers and institutions in contact with older people. This discourse associates independence with well-being; though this is at odds with the ideas and values held by the elderly themselves: ‘embracing the independence that the professionals often urge upon them is a negation of what is seen as their due, as elderly relatives and citizens’ (Gardner 2002:165). This negative image of the elderly as frail and dependent is in sharp contrast with the ethnographic descriptions of older people in power in many societies, where status comes with age, and older people control knowledge and resources (Holy 1990: 168-9).

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[8] Several ages are of considerable importance regarding the transition to older age: the retirement age of 60, the official designation of older age at 65, and the age of 88 (beiju) which is sometimes still celebrated. I discuss the category of the elderly in Japan in more detail in Chapter 2.

Loss of status and negative stereotyping of the elderly has been linked to the very processes of modernization. Modernization theory, as first proposed by Cowgill and Holmes (1972), posits that increased mobility, longer life-span, and fast changes related to industrialization, contribute to a shift of power towards younger people and lead to the decreased status of the elderly. This theory has elicited much interest and invoked almost equal amounts of criticism, some of which has pointed out the widely differing nature of responses to modernization (see Spencer 1990:26). For instance, the case of Japan employed by Palmore and Maeda ([1975] 1985) demonstrated that high levels of industrialization do not necessarily lead to loss of respect or decline in the status of the elderly[9]. Palmore and Maeda focused on another social gerontological theory that has attracted a lot of attention and criticism, namely ‘disengagement theory’. This proposes that as people age they gradually disengage socially and economically, which is not only a natural process but also a factor that contributes to the well-being of the elderly: those older people who disengage are said to be healthier and happier than their counterparts (Holmes 1983). Again, the large-scale quantitative data in the Japanese case showed that many Japanese elderly maintain active lifestyles, and that active older people often also have higher levels of well-being, ‘suggesting that activity, rather than disengagement tends to promote health and satisfaction’ (Palmore and Maeda([1975] 1985: 5) .

In a bold commentary on the treatment of the topic of aging by medical anthropologists, Mark Luborsky (1995) cautions against their role in the creation of a dominant image of aging as a positive process. While sympathetic to the discipline's long-standing engagement with the task of uncovering culturally entrenched meanings or practices, and undermining stereotypes, Luborsky warns against creating a new kind of stereotype. In this case, medical anthropologists have successfully uncovered unfair and demeaning practices in elderly care and the image of the 'elderly as being mentally and physically infirm and unable to demonstrate basic capacities of full adult personhood' (ib.:278). Nevertheless, the data gathered to demonstrate that these images do not hold are being co-opted for the construction of a new image, again stereotypical - an image focused on active aging. While this is a positive image, it is still restrictive; this kind of category construction and image creation neglects personal, cultural and group diversity among the elderly, neglects the importance of interdependence and communal ties, while stressing self-reliance and individual autonomy, in effect neglecting the responsibility of the larger community.

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[9] The situation might not be as clear thirty-five years after the publication of Palmore and Maeda’s work on Honorable Elders (1985[1975]). John Traphagan’s work on aging in rural Japan explores the alienation of older people from the younger generations (2000:14), while emphasizing the importance of the elderly in performing the ritual obligations on the behalf of the entire family (2004).

Conceiving of old age as a monolithic category belies not only the diverse experiences of older people but also the sense of change in these experiences, which are at times described in static terms: even when there is a focus on aging as a process, older age is seen 'as a consequence of past experience as well as a cause of present conditions' (Hazan 1984:568). Haim Hazan suggests that even the interpretive studies, those focusing on the active construction of meaning by older people themselves, tend to focus exclusively on the past experiences of older people, while disregarding their future plans (ibid.). Rather than taking the lack of a future orientation at face value, Hazan proposes a study of time in a care facility for the elderly, and discovers that time is somehow arrested and self-contained in a form that he refers to as 'limbo time'. This is just one aspect of what makes life in an institution for the elderly a fairly specific kind of experience, disembedded from one's former social networks. My own work, by contrast, focuses instead on active old age, in a context where elderly people are expected to maintain their social networks and relationships while also continuing to improve their 'self' by, for example, developing their skills through courses or hobby groups.

The longstanding interest of anthropology in age has been reflected in the classical work which deals with age-set systems (e.g. Evans Pritchard 1940), and later life-stages theory building on Van Gennep's work on rites of passage (see Spencer 1990: 18). Sarah

Lamb (2000: 8) has suggested that the majority of these ethnographies considered age as one stage in the life-cycle, yet they failed to use them as a means of elucidation of other parts of social life, thus contributing to the current separation of old age into an isolated sphere of inquiry. She instead investigates age in relation to power, gender relations and conceptions of personhood[10] in Mangadilhi in North India, focusing on the 'unmaking' of persons, where people are supposed to loosen their ties to the social world, as well as to places and even to their own body (ibid.: 115). Lamb argues that 'the everyday routines often practiced by older people that constituted *aging* worked also as techniques for loosening their ties of connection to the world or disassembling their personhoods, at least a bit' (ibid.: 124).

In contrast to this view of personhood as involving multiple social ties, Sharon Kaufmann's work in the United States links the processes of aging with a more bounded notion of the self, showing how people create the continuity of their self (1986: 8). The case of Japan fits with neither of these models of aging and personhood: while the Japanese self has often been described as interdependent, aging does not necessarily involve severing ties with the social world. Moreover, while a certain continuity in pursuing one's interests is considered desirable, this is hardly an individualistic pursuit, as I explore in more detail in the following section. In contrast to the view that old age means gradual disengagement from the social world, my argument is that aging in Japan ideally does not allow for disengagement from social ties, and in fact very often entails building new ties, through, for example, the pursuit of new activities or hobbies.

The case of Japan has been particularly interesting for anthropologists writing on aging for a number of reasons, including the long life expectancy and rapid aging of the population. In the context of these social changes, David Plath's work on maturity explores the ways in which 'mass longevity transforms the life-course' (1980:1) by focusing on the narratives which illustrate 'one or more standard pathways of Japanese culture' (ibid.: 15). In my work, I build on the basis of the dominant life stories, not unlike the standard pathways presented by Plath, and explore how these stories that circulate broadly in

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[10] 'Social relations are 'aged' just as they are gendered, though of course the meanings and politics of age alter according to cultural and historical context. Processes of aging (however defined) cut across all of our bodies and lives: they play a central role in how we construct gender identities, power relations, and the wider social and material worlds we inhabit – indeed, what it is to be a person' (Lamb 2000:9).

Japanese society have influenced personal life choices. By deploying the trope of a story I seek to examine the content of some of the national discourses (which in practice often consist of numerous stories bound together) and their interactions with the personal life stories of my interlocutors, under changing social conditions[11]. While Plath's study mostly consisted of interviews, my own data is comprised of a combination of interviews, solicited life histories, and spontaneous conversations in which I participated to varying degrees. As a volunteer in the salon I was able simply to listen in to the spontaneous conversations that took place between older people, often without interruption. At times I could gently steer the conversation of a whole group of people onto topics that seemed interesting, thus complementing the data obtained more directly through asking questions or in informal conversations. While restricting the breadth of the 'sample', this organizational setting thus provided many valuable insights into topics I would have probably never have thought to inquire about. Carried out to a large extent in the community salon setting, my work complements existing work on care for the elderly in Japan (Hashimoto 1996; Long 2000; Wu 2000), but rather than focusing on elderly living in institutional settings, my concern here is with active, healthy older people living relatively independently in their own homes. While Kinoshita and Kiefer's (1992) work on a retirement community included voices of many active older people, I was most interested in working with people who were not artificially disembedded from their longstanding social relationships and community ties, at least not solely on the grounds of their old age. John Traphagan's work on aging in rural Japan makes a valuable contribution to the study of older people embedded in a network of family and community ties, and my work complements his by focusing on older people in a busy urban environment.

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[11] Life decisions are not made in a static environment, but among many social changes and thus may best be understood as a mode of 'social navigation' (Vigh 2009).

NOT JUST A STORY OF OLD AGE

> …[I]t is not simply long life as such that is desired but more especially the right kind of life (Holy 1990:173)

In contrast to existing work focusing on older age or aging as a separate sphere of inquiry, my aim is to focus on ideas of the good life and of purpose in life, as well as notions of life choices. Sharon Kaufmann's (1986) classic work pointed to the importance of the continuous sense of the self, as reported by her interlocutors in the United States. Yet by focusing on their experience of ageing and its associated meanings, there is a danger of separating out and reifying the very life stage of 'old age'. In her well known account of the life of an older Jewish community in California, Barbara Myernhoff (1978) explored successful strategies for aging and adapting to changes by drawing on symbolic and ritual resources of Jewish identity. Her work focuses on personal struggles and dramas of older people attempting to escape meaninglessness of older life, mainly through ritual practice (Cohen 1994:145). Building on these insights, my aim is to explore the issue of meaning in life, as experienced by older people, as part of the larger whole comprising their life, and not restricting it to the meaning of aging.

My interlocutors rarely spoke about aging, being old, or dying. These themes were not so distressing that they were somehow out of bounds, for they were mentioned from time to time. Yet, for the most part, they did not comprise the focus of the conversation. While they were occasionally concerned about aging, even in a reflexive way, my interlocutors simply did not define themselves in terms of their old age. I therefore consider it important not to focus on their age as the central or defining aspect of their identity and lifeworld: theirs is not a story merely of old age. Social scientists sometimes give accounts of others in a coherent, tight and bounded form that make it seem that there is nothing more that could be said about a particular person; as Arthur Frank, who invokes Bakhtin's notion of *finalization*, succinctly put it: 'Social scientific research practice… silences people with its enumeration of all that is significant about them' (2010:98). In short, it is important that we do not only avoid finalizing the accounts of our interlocutors, but that we also avoid their finalization 'as elderly'.

Hazan (1984) has proposed that we focus on change in older people's life course, and criticizes anthropologists for neglecting to understand aging on its own terms and not merely in relation to past experiences. His concern is with the adaptation of older people to the changes of older age. Without neglecting such change in later life, I suggest that these changes and disjunctures are sometimes experienced by older people as essentially no different to the changes and challenges they may have experienced earlier in their lives, and as such should not be separated out into a special category of changes and anxieties related to aging. This need not mean that aging or approaching death do not lead to situations of existential anxiety or reflection, and yet, younger people often also experience anxieties related to aging in their lives, as for instance while caring for an older relative. It may therefore be more fruitful to consider these changes in the context of the broader life course and existential issues. Finally, older age has been often described as a time of loss (see Kaufmann 1994), as illustrated by an abundance of literature about dementia (e.g. Liebing and Cohen 2006), and yet cross-cultural surveys of well-being (Diener and Suh 1997:318) seem to indicate that older people at times enjoy higher levels of satisfaction with their lives than younger ones.

THE GOOD LIFE

Anthropologists have concerned themselves for many years with the different ways in which people live, think about their lives, and negotiate social models and personal preferences. While many ethnographies may have been written guided by an underlying concern with what the good life is or represents for a given group of people, questions of well-being, happiness, and ideals of the good life, have rarely been explored explicitly by anthropologists. Neil Thin (2008) attributes anthropology's evasion of the topic of happiness to four influences in the social sciences: beside 'anti-hedonism' and 'moral relativism' he mentions 'clinical pathologism', and 'anti-psychologism'. The former refers to the attitude of social scientists based on the conjecture that pathologies and problems are more worth studying than the good aspects of life. The latter has constrained discussions of emotions, either through the social constructionist rejection of the psychologists' universalist assumptions about the unity of human psychological make-up, or through a cognitivist resistance to the study of emotions (Thin 2008:138-50). If one were to turn one's attention to the topic of living well, there are several concepts in use in social sciences and comparative psychology, including well-being, happiness, subjective well-being and the good life.

What is the relationship between well-being, the good life, and happiness? Some authors conceive them as basically different expressions of the same notion, or at least do not make an explicit distinction (cf. Thin 2008:134, Diener and Suh 2000). On the other hand, and as indicated by cross-cultural contributions by psychologists in the volume edited by Diener and Suh (2000), happiness seems to be both differently conceived in different cultural contexts, and differently valued in relation to its contribution to well-being. In other words, what happiness means for people and how important it is considered to be for their well-being varies in different contexts and perhaps for different individuals. This has been explored by philosophers through the notion of 'prudential value' or 'final value', which refers to a good as an end in itself. If the good life or well-being is formally defined by philosophers in terms of what has a final value for a person, then one should ask what these values are: is the happiness the only final value? It is possible that there are other final values, like meaningful work, social relations, or friendship, among others (Brülde 2007:1-2). From an anthropological viewpoint which focuses on substantive accounts rather than formal definitions of well-being, happiness cannot therefore be equated with the good life, even though it could represent a central value for some.

One of the main differences between the concepts of well-being and the good life is the evaluative dimension of the first, referring to peoples' evaluation of the quality of their lives, while the good life would be more focused on the content of the ideals concerning how one should live: one does not have to live a good life in order to think about what a good life would or should be for one. By using the term good life, the question shifts from: 'what is the level of your well-being' to 'what makes a good life (for you)'. While the notion of well-being seems to be focused on the individual, the notion of good life as held by persons implies the relation to societal values and ideals, the interplay and dynamics of which emerge as central. As has been argued by James (2008), this dimension is partially obfuscated in the notion of well-being. Furthermore, a person can consider their life as 'good', in moral terms for example, even if they are not satisfied with their well-being, perhaps due to poverty or lack of health. People can think of their life in terms of sacrifice for their family or 'a larger cause'. In extreme cases, ideals of the good life can be envisaged in opposition to personal well-being, as in the case of Jain renouncers described by Laidlaw (2005). Jainism 'devalues worldly well-being to the extent of institutionalising, and recommending for the spiritually advanced as a telos of religious life, the practice of fasting to death ' (Laidlaw 2005:158). I would therefore argue that for all the reasons mentioned above, the concept of the good life is the one best suited as a point of departure in existential anthropology.

The notion of the good life has perhaps figured most prominently in Amazonian anthropology, and is a theme associated particularly with the work of Joanna Overing and her students. In her writings about Amazonian sociality, Overing has stressed the importance of conviviality (from the Lat. literally- to live together, to share a life) and the 'aesthetics of community', a notion which refers to the emphasis these people place on 'achieving a comfortable affective life with those with whom they live' (Overing and Passes 2000:2). At the same time, there is a very strong notion of an independent, autonomous self who belongs to the collective, while autonomy itself is linked with intersubjectivity. The importance of this work lies in part in its attempt to understand Amazonian ideas of the good life in terms that reintegrate morality and aesthetics, along with the social and the political - as implied in the expression 'the art of social living' - since the spheres of aesthetics and ethics are not considered autonomous or separate for the peoples of this region (Overing 1989; Overing 2003). The notion of the good life is closely related to that of living well together with others, which invokes the concept of the good person or even the good citizen. In this sense, the good life emerges as a powerful concept for bridging the moral, aesthetic, and political spheres of human activity.

A PURPOSE IN LIFE: IKIGAI

In Japan, the concept that emerges as central in relation to meaning in life is *ikigai*, which Matthews (1996a:51) renders as 'that which most makes one's life seem worth living'. The etymology of this word, however, indicates that it initially designated the meaning or significance of human life and implied the social value of a person's life, while later in the late 19th century its meaning changed to happiness in life, which was later incorporated into the contemporary meaning (Wada 2001). Despite this, the significance of one's life and the link to the societal remains important (Koyano 2009). This is further elaborated in a famous line from the influential text *Ikigai ni tsuite* (About *Ikigai*) which states that

'People feel [that they have] *ikigai* mostly when they think that their own wishes and duties (to others) are in agreement' (Kamiya 1966, cited in Koyano 2009). As a concept, therefore, *ikigai* is not only related to the purpose and meaning in life, but is also historically linked to ideas of social value and social role. This dual meaning, although transformed in the everyday parlance, seems to underlie the mechanisms of usage even today.

It is reflected, for instance, in the two meanings of *ikigai* in the public discourse: as *ittaikan*, or commitment to the group, or as *jiko jitsugen,* or self-realization. While the first meaning, *ikigai* as belonging to a group, emphasizes people's social roles, the second seems to stress the importance of the inner self, according to Mathews (1996:18). This tension is noticeable in the following excerpt from one of my interviews with Nakada-san, a housewife in her forties. When I asked what *ikigai* means and what her *ikigai* is, she laughed and shrugged. Then she explained that '*ikigai* is something that makes your life liveable and if people lose it they might not want to live anymore. In my case it is my child and perhaps a bit of fun; in my husbands' case his work, his job'. 'So, your husband likes his job?' I asked. 'He does it for a living,' she answered with a serious expression on her face. Her final retort implied that his *ikigai* is his job, though not because he seeks self-fulfillment in it. *Ikigai* is certainly differentiated along gender lines - men often finding theirs in work, or their company; women in their family or children (see Mathews 1996). I would further argue that how *ikigai* is conceptualized differs significantly depending on age and stage in the life course, an issue I return to below.

In his book, Gordon Mathews attempted to formulate a theory of *ikigai* that would be applicable in a wide variety of contexts. Selves, shaped by personal and cultural 'fate', craft their *ikigai* from available cultural material. They negotiate it 'within their circles of immediate others, and pursue their *ikigai* as channeled by their society's institutional structures so as to attain and maintain a sense of personal significance of their lives' (1996b:207). This position seems to draw together the level of social or cultural constraint and influence with the level of individual agency, directing attention toward the various levels on which *ikigai* is fashioned and negotiated. Selves are fashioned in the context of centrifugal and centripetal forces, the former epitomized in the notion of 'cultural fate', which makes our lives more similar to the lives of others with whom we share culture (in the case of Japan, this cultural faith seems to embody 'sociocentrism'); and the latter summed up in the notion of 'personal fate', still beyond the control of the self, and which makes us different (ibid.:209-11).

One point in particular is worth emphasizing here: social values and institutional frameworks shape people's *ikigai* in a direct or indirect way, while people shape their *ikigai* from the available cultural scripts or in contrast to them. What such a formulation would nevertheless underemphasize, however, is the extent to which people actually reshape available cultural scripts over time, through the values they hold and through practice (cf. Bourdieu 1977). In the vocabulary of social constructionism, people construct social reality, which acquires an external and objectified status, appearing to them as independent of their own understanding. This in turn influences the actors themselves: social reality and social actors are in a dialectical relationship (Berger and Luckmann 1967). I would argue that this complex interplay between the personal and the communal is at very core of the contemporary meaning of *ikigai*, and its dual interpretations as group commitment or as self-cultivation.

SELF-CULTIVATION AS AN OBLIGATION TO THE COMMUNITY

> In the case of the elderly, ikigai refers to enjoying life…. Young people have a stronger ikigai, their work or child becomes their motivation (gendouryoku) for life. But the elderly lose that, don't they? They retire from work, and stay at home, deal with everyday things like eating and sleeping. That's why we want to make their life more fun, enjoyable. That way they can also live longer (nagaiki).

This excerpt from an interview I conducted with the organizer of 'Ikigai Classroom', a series of one-year courses for the elderly, indicates how something seemingly as personal as *ikigai* is nevertheless a matter of public concern. Run by the Department of Lifestyle of Senior Citizens, Suita City Hall, the courses offered in this programme include calligraphy, flower arrangement, singing and physical exercise, among many others. Elderly (over the age of 65) can enter the courses, but must subscribe well in advance by filling out a form, committing them to attending for a year with the same group of people. The explicit concern is that elderly people improve their well-being by participating in a group activity. Furthermore, the structure of the courses implies their commitment and responsibility, while the official purpose of the course explicitly focuses on public concern with the *ikigai* of individuals.

This is just one of many examples in which *ikigai* is situated in between self and society, and indeed, while *ikigai* is a personal choice, it also depends on commitment to those others either involved in it or with a similar interest, and thus 'tacitly indexes one's involvement in socially oriented activities' (Traphagan 2004:69). Traphagan suggests that one's maintenance of an *ikigai* is in the interest of the wider community (as in the case of the fear of senility in Japan), and that one has a responsibility to maintain it. This responsibility towards the community is implied in the notion of the 'good person'. He concludes that having an *ikigai* indexes an individual's focus on self-cultivation and discipline, which as such benefits the community. In the case of elderly people this means showing an effort to maintain mental and physical health in order to avoid burdening the family and community (ibid.:74). The well-being of group and individual are, therefore, conceived as closely linked through the idea of the 'good person'. In this way, *ikigai* is contextualized in political as well as ethical realms.

The idea that self-cultivation is at the basis of community development has a long history in Japan. It can be traced to the 17th and 18th century, which witnessed a proliferation of religious and ritual practices considered to lead to material and social well-being and focused on personal cultivation (*mi o osameru; shūshin*; Sawada 2004). The idea of self-cultivation as a path to the advancement and prosperity of the community is an ideologically potent one, and has been exploited in various ways - for example by the state in the Meiji period, as a part of an ideology based on Shinto and Confucian principles[12]. Similarly, although undoubtedly with less problematic aims, it might be possible to understand the mobilization of ideas about self-development in the context of the contemporary 'Japanese-style welfare state', which relies on community support and volunteering, and in which the role of the family is central (see Goodman 1998:141, Ben-Ari 1991, Nakano 2005). This political and moral dimension of well-being as mediated through the concept of the 'good person', which is differentiated by age and gender, provides an important background for an analysis of *ikigai* in public discourse.

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[12] E.g. as embodied in the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education (Luhmer 1990:175)

IKIGAI IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

When I arrived in Japan I was interested in the ideas about the good life and *ikigai*, so in preparation for my conversations with my interlocutors I started looking for articles, both scholarly and in the newspapers that dealt with the issue. While ikigai is usually translated as 'that which most makes one's life seem worth living' (Matthews 1996a:51), referring for instance to one's child, work, or even a hobby, I found that this did not quite fit with the way the term was typically being used in newspaper articles at the time of my fieldwork. I therefore decided to examine more carefully the way this term was used in the public discourse, more precisely in newspapers, popular books, and academic journals in Japanese. I also attended a number of workshops and lectures organized by local governments and related institutions, most of which were effectively attended by the elderly or even targeting them explicitly (such as the '*Ikigai* Classroom' mentioned above). Using 'ikigai' as a keyword, I searched the archive of Yomiuri and Asahi Shinbun, two of the largest newspapers in Japan (December 2009-March 2010), the books in a prominent online bookshop (amazon.co.jp, sorted by popularity), and the CiNii academic database (National Institute of Informatics Scholarly and Academic Information Navigator on http://ci.nii.ac.jp/), as well as the catalogue of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. I recorded the general topics of the articles as well as the context and particular usage of the term ikigai.

The results of my analysis indicated that the great majority of academic texts dealing with ikigai refer to the elderly and to issues of aging. Many were published in the journal *Ikigai Kenkyū* - which literally translates as Ikigai Research, but whose official title in English is Healthy and Active Aging, further confirming the link between elderly, well-being and ikigai. The popular books mentioning ikigai mostly comprised self-help books and popular psychology books for individual life improvement, as well as a variety of books advising on how to cope with illness (particularly cancer) and several biographies. Again, the majority of the books were about or for the elderly. The content of the newspaper articles mentioning the term ikigai was more varied, covering a broad range of topics. In all these various contexts, two main uses of the term emerged: a particular ikigai, pertaining to an individual, and ikigai as a general feeling of well-being.

A particular ikigai has content, it refers to particular things or relationships. This is how most self-help books and popular psychology works use the term: addressing individuals and their particular ikigai. Similarly, when ikigai was used in newspaper articles in relation to individuals, it was usually a particular ikigai. In such cases, the articles often quoted people talking about their own lives, mentioning ikigai in relation to a success, struggle or life choice, referring to their ikigai as a particular thing or person, hobby or work, art or endeavor. A more general, abstract meaning of ikigai emerges from the large bulk of writings in which it is used in relation to groups or categories of people, primarily the elderly, sometimes the chronically ill or disabled people and, from time to time, women. When used in this way, it is often constructed as an 'issue' or 'problem'[13]. This meaning of ikigai is not referring necessarily to a particular purpose in life, but rather to a more general sense of well-being. This particular use is very closely associated with the elderly, and elderly people I spoke to frequently used the term in this manner themselves. The concise and indicative explanation of ikigai given to me on one occasion by my elderly companions in the community salon would seem to exemplify this usage: ikigai is '*ikiru no tanoshisa'*, that is, the enjoyment in life, or the joy of life. This sense of the word does not invite a question of what your particular ikigai is, or in what it consists. Ikigai in this sense can thus be seen to closely resemble the concept of well-being.

The construal of ikigai as having joy in life would seem to further dissociate its core meaning from purpose in life or, indeed, the meaning of life. This could imply a move away from a reflexive existence. The active elderly people I spent time with seemed to find it odd that I would ask about their ikigai, and answered plainly that it simply means having joy in life. Their answers seemed simple and unproblematic. As Bauman (1992) argues, however, it is precisely the unexamined existence, lived fully and without pondering the meaning of life, despite the knowledge of inevitable mortality, that is a great achievement of humans and human culture. Those who can live their lives fully, unburdened by intense reflection on meaning, are the happy ones, whereas examining meaning tends to open up a space for uncertainty and anxiety.

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[13] The number of self-help books dealing with ikigai can also be related to the so-called 'ikigai-theory-boom' ('Ikigai-ron boom') which peaked in the 1960's and 70's, and whose expansive growth of popularity was associated by Wada (2001) with economic prosperity and a faltering stability of lifestyle and standard societal values. As such, I would argue that concern with ikigai emerges as part of the 'condition of late modernity' described by Giddens and Beck. In modern circumstances, individuals are given more choices, but they are not given a choice not to choose. Individuals are forced to choose and as a consequence their own self becomes a reflexive project, as people need to craft their own selves and shape their own biographies, which are not just given to them at birth. Giddens' analysis even stemmed from his own questioning of the reasons for the proliferation of self-help books in the West (Giddens 1991). Thus, the proliferation of this genre in Japan could be seen as evidence for a somewhat parallel process.

IKIGAI AND THE ELDERLY

This brief analysis still leaves us with the question of why there is such a strong link between ikigai and the elderly in public and academic discourse. In other words, why is ‘having a purpose in life’ or ‘ikigai as an issue’ almost invariably associated with the elderly in these writings? While it can become a problem if an individual loses their ikigai, this is a rather exceptional situation for the majority of people. Ikigai is rarely problematized by those with a clear social role. I would argue that, at least on the surface, ikigai is in fact provided by one’s primary social role: thus women as mothers have a purpose in life in bringing up their children, while men typically find it in their work and dedication to company or their family. There is no reason why one should be wondering what one’s ikigai is. This was often stated or implied by my conversation partners and interviewees who, much like the Japanese housewives discussed by Lock (1993:224), are, by occupying a clear social role and fitting into the preordained social universe, spared from pondering the meaning of life, which characterizes late modernity.

People above the age of 65 comprise around one fifth of the population in Japan, and that ratio is expected to grow to up to 40 percent by the middle of this century (Koyano, 2009). The average lifespan after the age of retirement has also expanded significantly and often lasts for several decades. Under these changed circumstances, elderly would seem prone to lose their earlier ikigai, such as work or children, as implied by the local official who organized the ‘Ikigai classroom’ mentioned earlier: ‘Young people have a stronger ikigai, their work or child becomes their motivation (*gendōryoku*) for life. But elderly lose that, don’t they? They retire from work, and stay at home, deal with everyday things like eating and sleeping’. Ikigai seems to become a problem in the case of the elderly whose social role is changing and unclear. Longer life expectancy means that people spend more time in what Burgess (1960) referred to as the 'roleless role'. Ikigai thus becomes a social issue when the social role is not clear, when it is not ‘naturally’ unfolding from the social role itself. While this does not mean that the elderly have no social role to perform, it is likely that this role is changing due to economic and demographic circumstances[14]. In this sense, their social involvement is less clear, or there are fewer cultural ‘scripts’ in circulation that provide a sense of older people’s position in the society.

The connection between meaning in life and aging, as encapsulated in the concept of ikigai and its use in the public discourse, reveals an array of questions, some of which lie at the heart of this thesis. The setting of the research is described in more detail in Chapter 2, which outlines the places, neighborhoods and organizations where research was conducted as well as the wider socio-historical context, including demographic and family changes in Japan and the national system of support for the elderly. Chapter 3 tells quite a different story: one about elderly people who are actively engaged in support and care for other elderly. This is a story of community support and the nexus of state, civil society, and the private institutions involved in this care. Chapter 4 explores further the role of NGOs in community care, and describes the inner workings of a community salon, while Chapter 5 picks up some of the themes that emerged from the interactions that took place in the salon, including family, memory, and sociality, focusing in particular on the form of these interactions and on issues of manners and morality.

At first, the concept of ikigai attracted my attention in part because its typical translation implied a distinct purpose in life. In contrast, many of the institutions I encountered once I began my fieldwork in Osaka used ikigai in the names of departments or services for the elderly that at first sight had very little to do with any reflexive pursuit implied in finding such a purpose in life. As noted above, however, ikigai can refer to a more general form of well-being, and pleasure in life, especially when used in relation to the elderly. This raises certain existential questions in relation to older age: does maintaining a particular purpose in life, a well-defined source of meaning, remain possible or even necessary in older age? Indeed, do even younger people have or need such a well-defined purpose? To what extent are life stories relating to meaning and purpose in one’s life related to stories of expectations and values in the broader society? Some of these questions relating to existential issues will be addressed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, which are built around life stories of selected interlocutors, elucidated with the help of some of the stories that emerged in the salon. In short, I argue that the issues of aging and the good and meaningful life are inextricably connected. In various ways, the chapters of this thesis each shed light on a particular aspect of this connection.

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[14] This is clearly related to the disembedding mechanisms of modernity, which marks off retirement and separation from working roles more clearly than ever before. Ikigai talk often attempts at blurring this boundary, by calling for various kinds of social involvement, including employment for the elderly and volunteering activities.

The chapters are separated from each other by a short narratives, or what I call 'stories-in-between', that stand on their own but provide an important background to the chapter that follows, as well as to other chapters of the thesis. They present stories that are well known in Japanese society, as part of the shared pool or cultural repertoire of stories known in part or as a whole in one of their variants, and provide a point of reference for the issues discussed in the chapters themselves. It is worth noting that while some of these stories belong to public discourse, they should not necessarily be equated with it. Discourse can be understood as use of language (spoken or written, and could in some instances even include illustrations and visual material) conceived as social practice, which is discursive in the sense that it involves the production and interpretation of text (Fairclough 1993:136). On the other hand, stories, in a broader sense, cross the boundaries of particular discourses. While the form is still relevant, the content is emphasized over the actual language used, as stories travel from mouth to mouth, are written down and read and retold again. My use of stories here is both broader (than discourse), as is includes narrative content that has not necessarily been told by any one person or source, as well as clear-cut texts. For instance, our neighbours' life circumstances that are familiar to us may comprise part of our understanding of what a 'normal life' is like, with Mr Sato leaving every morning for work and Mrs Sato sending off the children to school and looking after the household. Their life story (as known to us) may comprise part of a story known to most Japanese, a story of a 'normal family', a story of 'salaryman and a housewife'. The insterstitial qualities of these stories-in-between mean they can also be understood in a double sense as being in an intersubjective space, part of a more or less well known repertoire, familiar to most of my interlocutors but also more generally. In this sense these stories provide a background to my interlocutors' own tales, words and actions, and are an important point of reference. Read separately, they offer snapshot portraits of Japanese society.

STORY-IN-BETWEEN

‘EVERYONE WORRIES ABOUT AGING’: JAPAN AS AN AGING SOCIETY

> 81% worry about the population decline. Anxieties about pension funds breakdown (Asahi 2006)

Newspaper headlines about the elderly seem to be everywhere in Japan in recent years. The descriptive labels used vary widely: from ‘elderly nobility’ (*rōjin kizoku*) to ‘rampaging old folks’ (*bōsō rōjin*[15]) or ‘older criminals’[16] (with an overall increase in the over-65 population, there has also been an increase in the number of people committing crimes in that age group). In a society often described as one in which the elderly command high respect (e.g. Palmore and Maeda 1985), one cannot help but be surprised by such negative imagery (see Goodman 2010). One of the main fields on which this issue is played out is an anxiety over Japan’s aging population. Not so long ago, Japan was a young nation with a relatively young population. After the Second World War, large numbers of children grew up to be the first baby boomer generation. Since then, the birth rate has fallen significantly and fewer children were born, changing the proportion of older to younger people. At the same time, older people in Japan can expect to live much longer than members of previous generations. Combined, these changes have led to Japan becoming the fastest aging population in the world.

As one sixty-eight-year old reader from Aichi Prefecture wrote in a letter to the editor in Asahi Newspaper:

> **We should awake to the frightfulness of a super-aged society**
>
> When I read an article about the interview with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on the occasion of the opening of the ‘New World’ on the 11th, I became worried about Japan’s future.

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[15] A phrase used in a title of a famous book by Tomomi Fujiwara, Akutagawa prize winner.

[16] ‘The number of those over 65 who committed criminal offences increased almost fourfold from 1998 to 2007, up from 13,739 to 48,597 cases annually, according to National Police Agency statistics.’ (Martin 2008)

> At present there is one retiree (including me) for every three working persons in Japan, but according to the PM's secretary's estimates, by 2030 there will be one to two, and by 2055 a ratio of one to one-and-a-half.
> The national community needs to recognize our present situation and that we have to bring under control the enormous national debt, along with the problems that are piling up. I want the politicians to think about the future of Japan in fifty, in a hundred years.
> Improving the ratio of the retirees to the working population will not be timely. Without thinking seriously about our acceptance of immigrants and their voting rights and citizenship bestowal, at the same time as establishing the stability of employment for young people, there might be no future for Japan. We may not yet be aware of the dreadful destructive power of fast population aging. (Asahi 2010a)

This short letter summarizes some of the fears related to the aging of the population that one could encounter time and again in the media, and in countless casual conversations, some of which took place among my interlocutors in the salon. Kikuchi san, a lady in her late sixties, whom many other salon goers called Kiku chan because of her relative youth and a lively disposition, often worried about young people in Japan and the hopelessness that she though they were experiencing, because of the lack of economic growth and the pressure of the aging population.

Demographic change in Japan has been extremely fast-paced and has resulted in the highest proportion of older people (over the age of 65) in the overall population worldwide. The demographic change that occurred after World War II led the Japanese population from a condition of high mortality and high fertility, through a period marked by rapid decline in mortality rate and a slower decline in birth rate (resulting in a baby boom), to a low mortality and low fertility rate. While the demographic transition in Japan is by no means unique – it is in fact considered to be a feature of most industrialized countries (Jones 1997:2) - its pace was unprecedented: Japan is said to be the first society where the demographic transition occurred within the space of just three generations (Ochiai 1997). During the post-war period longevity has increased significantly, with life expectancies moving from approximately fifty after the World War II, to around eighty for men and eighty six for women in the recent years[17]. Combined with a decrease in fertility rates, this has led to an increase[18] in the proportion of older population to the present levels, which exceed 22%. Comparative data shows that the demographic changes have happened at a much faster rate in Japan than in other industrialized countries[19] (see Figure A.2.).

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[17] The life expectancies at birth for men and women respectively have risen from 50.06 and 53.96 years in 1947, to 79.59 and 86.44 years in 2009 (Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare 2009)

Figure A.1. Elderly in the era of high burden. An illustration on the front page of a book with the same title (Nihon Seikatsu Kyōdōkumiai Regōkai Iryō Bukai 2008).

It therefore comes as little surprise that discourses surrounding aging and the aging population became very prominent very quickly in Japan, especially after the 1980s. While demographers were already aware of population trends before this time, they may have underestimated the pace of change, the alarming nature of which came to be a feature of public discourse, which quickly absorbed terminology from the social sciences, such as ‘ageing’, ‘aged’ and, more recently, ‘hyper-aged’ society (Coulmas 2007:5). According to Coulmas, the demographic changes and the accompanying social changes are reflected in the public discourse, which makes repeated use of phrases such as ‘decline in birthrate’ (*shōshika taisaku*), ‘age of population decline’ (*jinkō genshō jidai*), ‘trend of late marriage’ (bankonka), ‘equality in gender participation’ (*danjo kyōdōsankaku*), ‘gap (widening) society’ (*kakusa shakai*) and ‘pension burden’ (*nenkin futan*) (Coulmas, ib.:4). All of these phrases are frequently found in the media and seem to reflect a widespread anxiety over aging, more specifically an anxiety over the aging of the population, a condition pertaining to Japanese society as a whole.

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[18] The proportion of the elderly above the age of 65 increased from around 5% in 1950 to 7% in 1970, followed by a sharper increase to 14% in 1994 and exceeding 22% by 2008 (Cabinet Office 2009).

[19] Even in Canada, where the increase from 14% to 22%[19] of the elderly population happened over 16 years (compared to 13 in Japan), there was a much slower rate of aging in preceding years - the increase from 7% to 14% took place over 61 years, compared to 24 in Japan (see Figure A.3.)

The aging of the population is widely considered to have many adverse effects on the state of the Japanese economy. Social security costs have been steadily growing[20] and have reached the highest level until present and it is predicted that population aging will adversely affect economic growth and raise expenditure on health care and social security (Dekle 2003: 71). This is understood to be the effect of a declining labour force (which can partly be neutralised by the participation of older people in the workforce) and the rising fiscal burden, referring to the transfer of income between generations (Yashiro 1997:245). The latter has been labelled the ‘pension burden problem’, and is related to the decreasing number of people supporting the social security system (Coulmas 2007:13). Initially, the Japanese pension system (see Appendix 1.1) was designed as a fund from which contributors could withdraw what they paid in during their working life. This system has gradually shifted[21] toward a ‘pay-as-you-go’ system, which means that beneficiaries receive benefits from current contributions (Yashiro 1997). This makes it more vulnerable to changes in the demographic structure of the population. The resentment felt by the younger generations, especially young urbanites who work hard and experience financial hardships while feeling that they are ensuring a very comfortable existence[22] for the older generations (Coulmas 2007:13), has led some to speak of ‘intergenerational exploitation’ (e.g. Kunieda 2002) as replacing intergenerational solidarity.

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[20] They costs have reached unprecedented levels - amounting to 91.4305 trillion yen in fiscal year 2007 (Cabinet Office 2010: 4)

[21] 'This shift is mainly the result of a generous increase in pension benefits brought about by political pressures - a generosity not bolstered by sufficiently higher premiums in the 1970s. Moreover, premiums has to be paid for longer period of time due to unforeseen increases in life-expectancy of the elderly... exacerbated by Japan's low (by international standards) eligibility age for public pensions' (Yashiro 1997:248).

22 The annual income for elderly people's households is 2.98 million yen, slightly more than half of the average income for all households (5.66 million yen; Cabinet Office 2010:8)

On the other hand, the media attention given to the ‘silver market’ makes it clear that older Japanese are recognized as a large consumer population with relatively high spending power. For instance, a large motor company recently launched its most popular car model in a shorter version with older buyers in mind, who according to their studies find longer cars more difficult to turn (Wakamatsu 2012). Many stores and coffee shops target older people, especially those over 65, in a less direct way, as goods or services that are marketed ‘for those above the age of 70’ do not necessarily appeal to customers (The Economist 2011). While the resources at the disposal of older people may be considerable – hence the expression ‘elderly nobility’ (*rōjin kizoku*) – not all older people are wealthy and many fall below a poverty line (Cabinet Office 2007:18). Recognition of this fact may mitigate the resentment of younger generations towards the older generations ‘living in wealth’, with the prospect of even more older people in the future living with less income in smaller or single households.

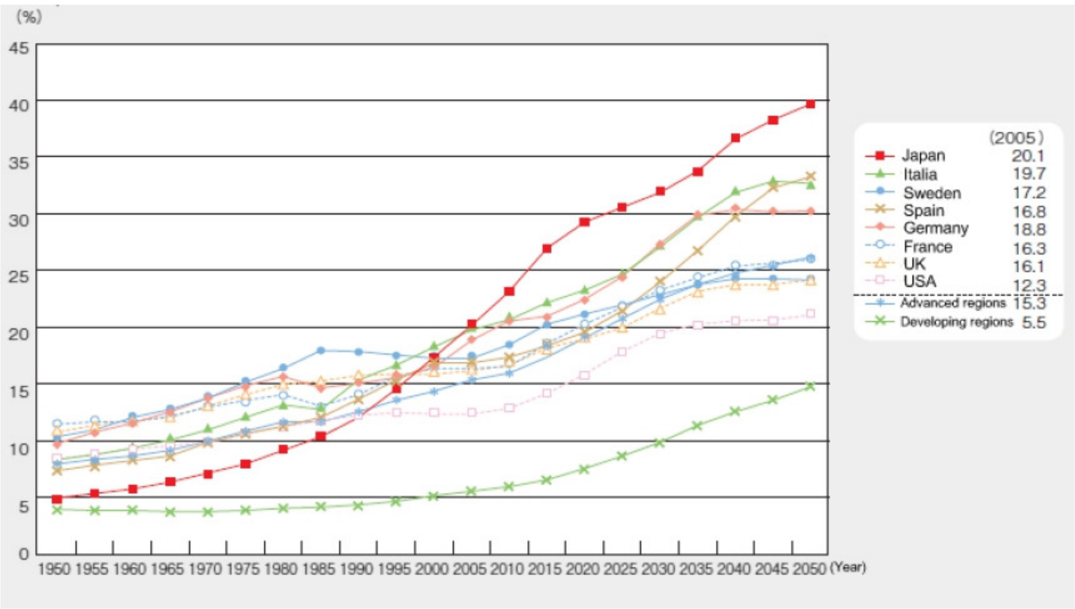
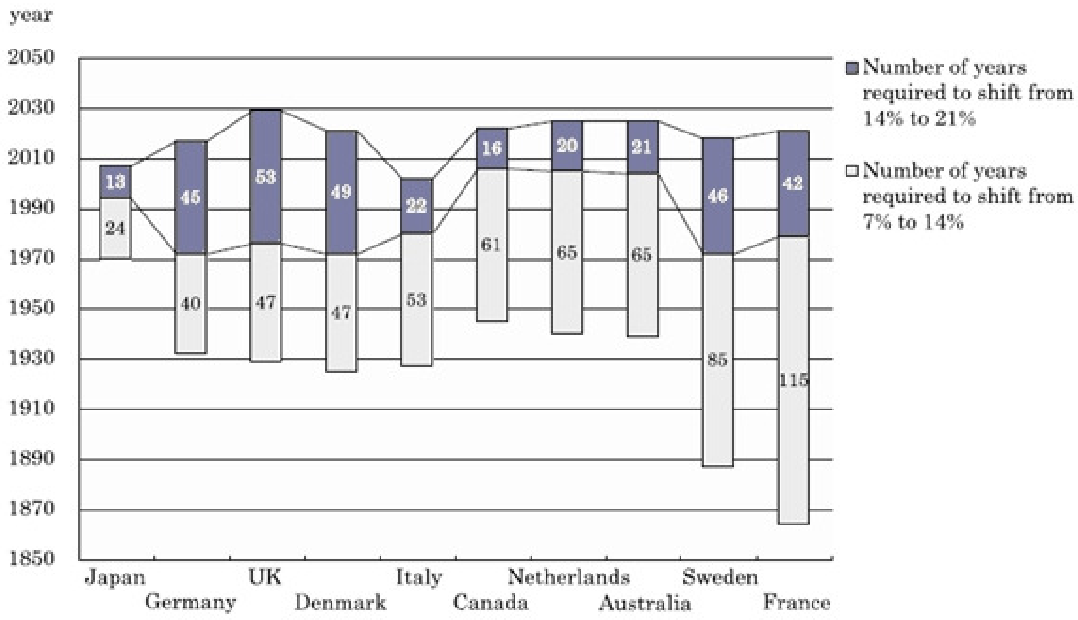


Figure A.2. Trends in the proportion of the elderly population (over the age of 65) compared to European countries. Source: Cabinet Office 2009: 5.



1950 and before except Japan : UN, *UN Aging of Population and Its Economic and Social Implications (Population Studies, No.26, 1956)* and *UN Demographic Yearbook*.
After 1950 except Japan: UN, *UN World Population Prospects* : The 2004 Revision
Japan : Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, *National Population Census Survey* (2005) and National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, *Population Estimates* (2007)

Figure A.3. Speed of Population Aging. Source: ILC. A Profile of Older Japanese 2011.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCHING AGING IN JAPAN

This chapter sets out some of the background to my story of growing old in urban Japan – the story behind the story, as it were. Here I describe my field sites and choice of location and methods used, and give an account of the types of national support for the growing ranks of the elderly. I also introduce some of the people who populate my account, anticipating some of the themes explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters. The chapter begins with the geographic locations: an old merchant area in South Osaka, where many inhabitants have had links to the community for several generations; and a new neighbourhood north of Osaka, built in the 1970s. I then describe in detail the field sites and methods used in the research. The second half of the chapter outlines the changing form and new demographic circumstances of Japanese families, and explores the support available for the elderly on a national and prefectural level, especially in terms of the Long-Term Care Insurance system and housing options.

THE SETTING: TWO NEIGHBOURHOODS IN KANSAI

My research was conducted in an urban setting in the Kansai region over a period of 14 months, from September 2009 until December 2010. Kansai or Kinki region is located in the southern side of the central part of the main island, Honshu. While the Kansai region includes Mie, Wakayama, Hyogo, Shiga, Nara, Kyoto and Osaka, the research was conducted exclusively in the latter two prefectures. The Kansai region is one of the two most urbanized regions of Japan, the other being Kanto region (where Tokyo is situated), to which it is often compared. The city of Osaka, where the bulk of the research was conducted, has a long urban history. Already in the early modern period (in 16-17th century) Osaka was one of the two largest cities and an economic centre, the second largest after the capital and political centre of Edo (Tsukada 2012:1). It has been argued that Western and Eastern Japan (with Kyoto and Tokyo as their respective centers) have distinct cultural styles, due to their different political and economic positions in history: 'Comparatively, Tokyo maintains warrior-style local culture with the marks of formality, hierarchy, and face-saving, while Osaka retains a merchant lifestyle with an emphasis on practicality, informality and pragmatism.’ (Sugimoto 2010:64). While Japan has often been described as a ‘vertical’ society, with a strong emphasis on hierarchy (e.g. Nakane 1970), Sugimoto (ibid.) draws on a number of community studies to make the case this is more characteristic of Eastern Japan, and that relationships characterizing social life in Western Japan were somewhat less formal, hierarchical, and patriarchal, with women having comparatively higher status (than in the east), and a more independent position of the family within the local community. The majority of studies of urban Japan to date have been conducted in the Tokyo area, followed by Kyoto[23], two cities that are both in many way atypical in the context of Japan. It has, in fact, been argued that despite a certain degree of homogeneity in Japanese mass society, regional variations play an important role in the everyday lives of Japanese (Daniels 2010).

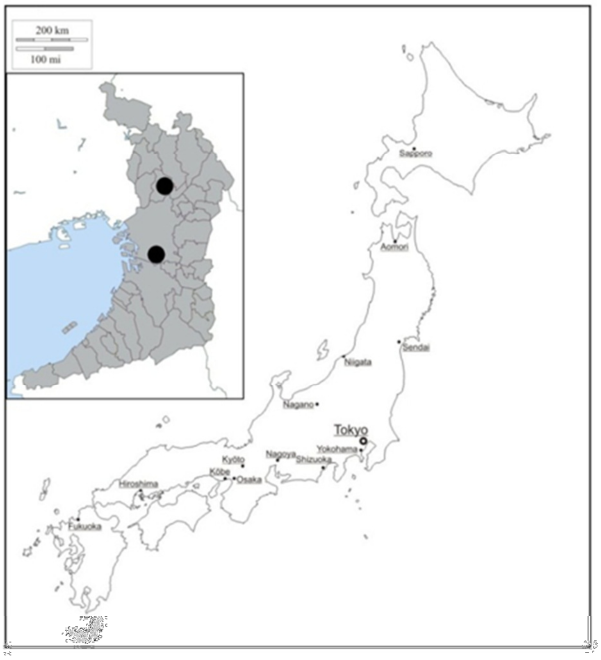


Figure 2.1. Map of Japan and a map of Osaka Prefecture. Two black circles mark an approximate location of the areas of the two major field sites.

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[23] Some examples of such urban ethnographies based in Tokyo area include Dore (1999[1958), Bestor (1989), Thang (2001), Robertson (1994). For a discussion outlining the relevance of this work today see Daniels (2010).

In this light it is clear that Osaka, despite its size and importance, has been somewhat neglected in Japanese studies. Furthermore, given the fact that many more Japanese tend to live in three-generation households in rural areas rather than in cities, the experiences of aging in rural as compared to urban settings may differ considerably (cf. Traphagan 2000). Despite living in a large urban centre, Osakans nevertheless feel that their area is in a state of decline, with business developments and administration functions centralized in Tokyo. Many of my interlocutors' families had moved to Tokyo for work and some mentioned the increased feeling of lack of hope and prospects, especially for the young, in Osaka. On the other hand, as an old merchant city that developed around trade, Osaka has attracted many newcomers over the course of its history, many of them in search of work. Due to the large numbers of migrants, workers and unskilled labourers, which led to problems related to unemployment and poverty, Osaka was one of the first places where social welfare provision first emerged (see Goodman 1998:141).

The main field site was located in Shimoichi[24] - an old merchant *shitamachi* (downtown) neighbourhood in the Southern part of central Osaka, south of the central area of Namba, one of the two central transport hubs and a major shopping area. The neighbourhood, lying south of this busy shopping and central business district, boasts its own small shopping arcade, that once pulsed with activity, and despite its decreasing popularity, was still full of small shops and many shoppers from the local area. The shopping arcade (*shōtengai;* see Figure 2.4.), in the very heart of the neighbourhood, used to attract customers from a much larger area, but was now used mostly by local elderly and housewives living nearby, as it now has to compete with several large supermarkets and convenience stores with long working hours. The shops in the arcade mostly specialize in just one kind of good, such as tofu, seaweed, meat, fish and sushi, vegetables and fruit, green tea, pottery, clothes, or small household appliances. Older people in the area often pointed out to me that they could easily compare the prices and quality of goods in different shops and that they enjoyed the personal contact with the sellers, many of whom they have known for many years. As one of the staff in the organization running the community salon in Shimoichi, Nakajima san, told me: 'For some elderly who live alone, the chat in the arcade is very important – on many days they would otherwise have no reason to open their mouth to anyone'. The salon that became the focal point of this research is located in the shopping arcade, in a refurbished old shop.

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[24] The names of the two neighbourhoods described in this chapter have been changed, in part so that the two organizations in which I conducted research could not easily be recognized or located. Both of the organizations are well-known in their respective neighbourhoods. Both organizations granted me open access and insight into their organizational matters with good knowledge of what my research project entails. All but the most infrequent visitors of the both salons had been informed of the nature of my research project, but as these are open access public spaces, which can be entered by any interested passer-by, it was not possible to explain the details to newcomers in all cases. For this reason, only pre-arranged interviews were voice-recorded, and the rest I attempted to reconstruct in my field notes as soon as I left the field site each day. Some of my informants revealed a large amount of personal information, including their feelings about others, which provides important context for many of the issues I discuss. In order to protect their identities, I have chosen to rename the areas and organizations as well as the people whom I mention.

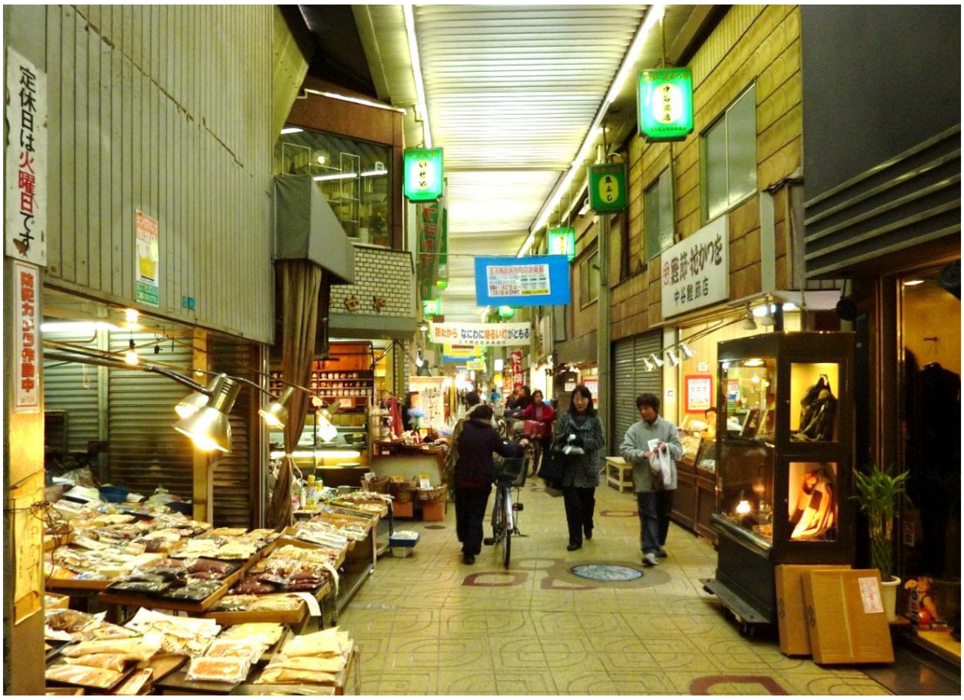

Figure 2.2. Shimoichi shopping arcade (shōtengai) on a typical morning.

The neighbourhood itself has a rather old-fashioned *shitamachi* feel to it, as many of the houses survived the Second World War bombings. For this reason, some of the inhabitants had roots in the area that spanned many generations, while others had moved there in the immediate period after WWII, when they bought the houses that remained standing. Wide busy roads frame an orthogonal grid of inner neighbourhood streets, which are very narrow and quiet with hardly any traffic. Most of these are lined with narrowfronted two-storey family houses, a mixture of pre-war wooden structures and newer, mostly prefabricated ones. In recent years some larger apartment blocks were built in the neighbourhood, mostly on the large roads framing the neighbourhood, close to the underground station. The brightly lit chain cafes, supermarkets, hairdresser salons and ubiquitous convenience stores and high rise concrete structures of these large avenues stand in quite a stark contrast with the atmosphere of the inner neighbourhood streets and alleys (see Figure 2.2. and Figure 2.3.), where housewives tend the pot plants on their doorstep and air the futon mattresses and children can be seen playing in the street. The neighbourhood has a very high proportion of elderly[25].

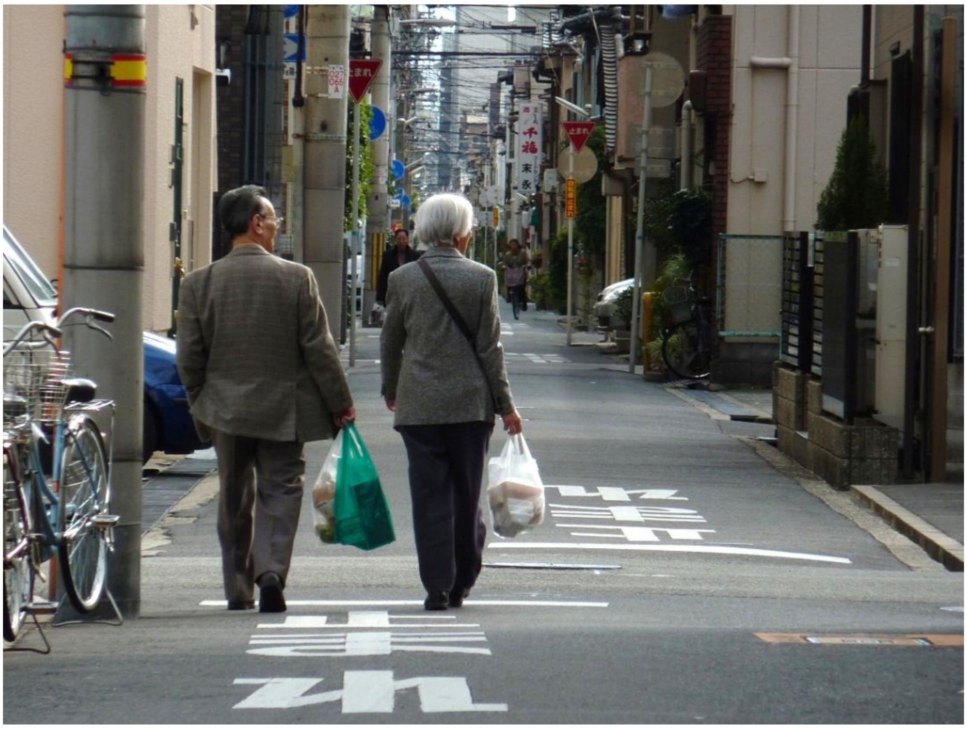

Figure 2.3. An older couple walking in the Shimoichi.

My interlocutors often described it as a very good area for older people to live, not least because the streets were quiet and flat, with the shopping arcade in walking or cycling distance, a multitude of community links in the area, convenient transport connections and a special free bus service for the elderly (available throughout Osaka).

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[25] The neighbourhood is situated in a Ward of the City of Osaka with and above average proportion of elderly population (above the age of 65).

Finally, because of the large numbers of older people in the area the services typically required are abundant and easily accessible: physiotherapy and chiropractors, health clinics and dentists, hairdressers and stylists, shops with clothing in styles more popular among older people. My older friends often pointed out that the neighbourhood was indeed very convenient and easy to live in (*sumiyasui;* see Figure 2.3.).

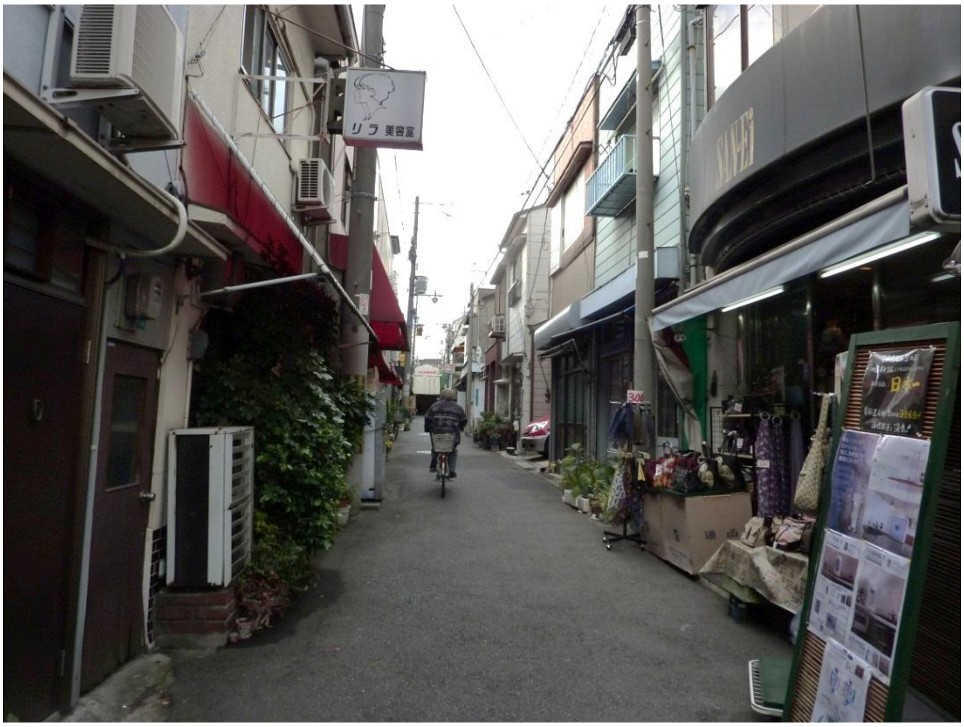

Figure 2.4. Quiet streets in Shimoichi.

My second field site figures less prominently in the ensuing chapters, but informs many of my discussions and analyses as a point of comparison. It is located in a suburban neighbourhood which I will refer to as Awara, in Suita - a city in Osaka Prefecture, on gentle slopes just north of Osaka. The urban landscape in that area continues uninterruptedly from Osaka past the outer boundaries of the city, stretching almost without a break to Kyoto in the north, spanning from Kyoto in the north, past Sakai in the south, stretching from Kobe in the west all the way to Nara in the east. Awara is a relatively new town on the fringe of Osaka that underwent rapid development in the early 1970s. A large road passing through the middle of the neighbourhood at the fringe of the town connects it to train stations on several lines, to the local centre, and to Osaka. The area is hilly, and behind some larger *manshons* (condominiums or residential blocks of apartments of a higher class, built from ferroconcrete) lining the main road lies a network of small winding streets and alleys, and surrounded by newer buildings the old Sugiyama village, with its old-fashioned houses whose inhabitants are unused to seeing an unknown face in their parts, let alone a foreign one. On the other side of the main road, large buildings of schools, *danchi* (a large cluster of apartment buildings typically built in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s as public housing), *manshons*, a town hall and a library dominate the landscape, obscuring a large and well-maintained park in the valley.

While a certain sense of local recognition and pride was exhibited by my interlocutors in Awara, the local allegiance was more to the neighbourhood and local community of Awara rather than to the wider administrative unit of the city of Suita, with all of my interlocutors from the area seeing themselves as inhabitants of Osaka. This is unsurprising, as the good train connections allow for a quick commute to Umeda, the northern centre of Osaka, in under 30 minutes on either a JR line or Hankyu line, with quick and reliable bus connections to the train station from within the neighbourhood. Furthermore, as the neighbourhood expanded and developed its current urban form in 1970, during and immediately after the 1970 World Expo, many of its current inhabitants moved in from other parts of Osaka and perceived it as a new satellite town for commuting. Ben-Ari (1991:15) distinguishes two kinds of suburban residential areas in Japan: the older rural centres that got integrated into larger administrative units whose inhabitants mostly replaced agricultural pursuits with employment outside; and new housing estates (*danchi*) developed by public or private companies, whose inhabitants usually commute to white-collar jobs elsewhere. Awara combines both of these characteristics, as it was rapidly built up and expanded in the 1970s as a commuter town around an older core: the old village of Awara sits in a small but deep valley in the middle of the neighbourhood, surrounded by steep hills and even higher apartment blocks (see Figure 2. 5. and Figure 2.8).

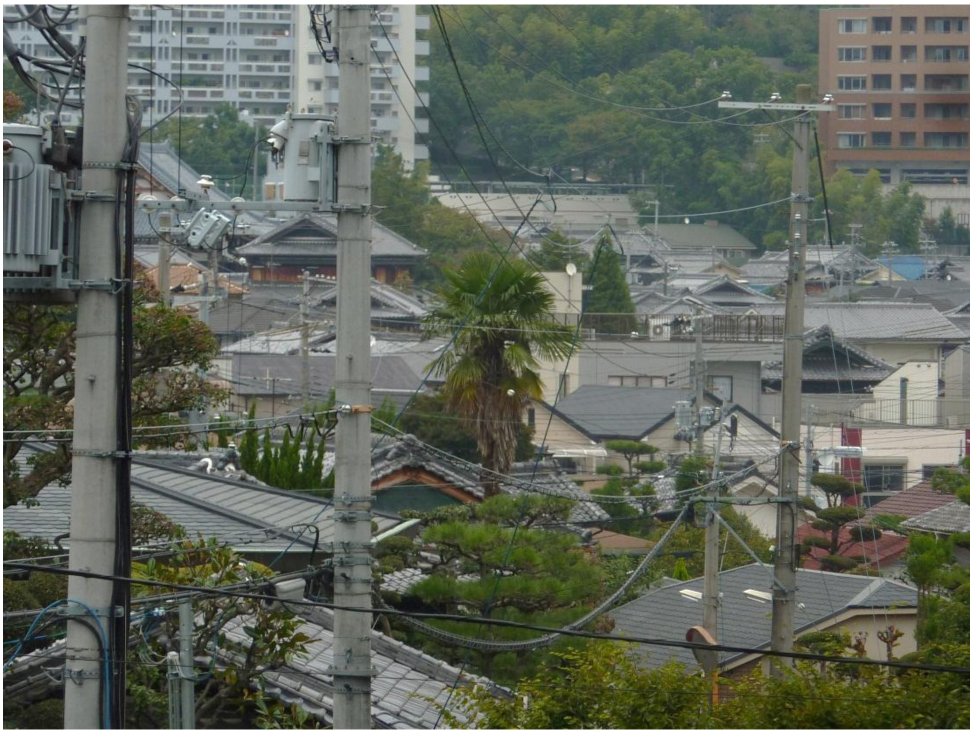

Figure 2.5. Urban landscape in Awara: the old village in the valley and new apartment buildings on the surrounding slopes. The mass of electrical wires is not an unusual sight in residential areas of Japan.

Whereas Shimoichi is a part of the ward[26] of Osaka with an above average proportion of the elderly and rather large numbers of elderly over the age 75, the population of the city of Suita can be said to be aging but not nearly as old[27], possibly due to its status as a 'new town'. Many of my interlocutors in Awara suggested that a large majority of their neighbours moved in at the same time as they did, mostly as young adults, and subsequently had children at around the same time. There were then two large kindergartens in the area, only one of which is still operating. The building that used to house the other one is now used for communal activities, including the community salon which became my second field site. These people, who were in their twenties and early thirties in the 1970s, were recently retired or about to retire around the time of my fieldwork. Many of these young retirees were very socially active, and community activities in Awara flourished: hobby groups (including a photography club, a watercolour painting club, hula classes, a male choir, baking classes, and a local history group); a theatre troupe that puts on free performances in the local temple during the summer; an abundance of voluntary organizations (Non-Profit-Organizations or NPOs[28], but also smaller unregistered groups), such as a large group of park volunteers who maintain the large local park and organize learning tours for children; a group of people in their sixties who read out loud stories to the children; a group of older people who play an instrument and visit the day-care centres for the elderly in the neighbourhood to play for them on a weekly basis; and a group of older men who do gardening with elementary school children on a small plot of land set aside for the purpose by the school.

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[26] Children (under 15 years of age) comprise around 12% , people between the ages of 15-64 comprise around 64% , while the elderly (over the age of 65) comprise around 24% of the overall population in the South Osakan ward in question, which includes 12% of the population over the age of 75. By comparison, Osaka city as a whole has the following proportions of these groups: 11.7%, 65,7%, 22,7% (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2010).

27 In Suita City, children (under 15 years of age) comprise around 14% , people between the ages of 15-64 comprise around 66% , while the elderly (over the age of 65) comprise around 19.6% of the overall population (Suita City 2011).

The citizen groups and NPOs are actively involved in the organization of traditional community events, such as Bon dance[29], where many set up their own stalls with refreshments as a way of raising money for other activities, and a local festival organized by the local community association and the voluntary fire brigade. While many of my interlocutors said they were aware of the distinction between the old and the new Awara, the newcomers are so numerous and active in community activities that they did not feel marginalized. As I did not have an opportunity to speak to any of the inhabitants of the 'old' Awara village, I have little insight into their perspective. Many of the citizen groups and voluntary organizations in the neighbourhood make one of their aims to 'build a community' and 'make Awara a pleasant place to live', by creating 'connections in the neighbourhood' and to help people who have moved to the area to settle in and feel at home. Having themselves once been 'newcomers' to the area many of my interlocutors implied that they knew what this meant and made a particular point of being welcoming.

A new generation of younger families with small children moved to the area after some new large apartment blocks (*manshon*) were built in recent years, providing relatively affordable accommodation, as compared to central Osaka. Inoue san, a young mother in her early thirties, told me how much she liked living in Awara, where there were many parks and lots of greenery and the streets were quiet and safe. She and her husband used to rent a place near Osaka Castle, in the centre, which was very convenient for

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28 NPOs and voluntary organizations are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

[29] Bon dance or Bon Odori is a dance performed during the festival of Obon, a festival in honour of the spirits of one's ancestors, which are returning to the family altars.

commuting and rather fun when they used to go out. But things changed when their daughter was born; suddenly, Inoue san felt somewhat lonely as there were few mothers with children in the area, and at times she felt unsafe talking her daughter for a walk in the pram, past all the homeless living in the park and the often rowdy youth walking the streets in the evenings. She told me she feels that Awara is a much better place for them to live in, with its lively community and greenery, and they even managed to rent a small allotment from the municipal government and spend their weekends growing vegetables as a family, socializing with other families and older people who used the municipal facilities for a very small, symbolic fee.

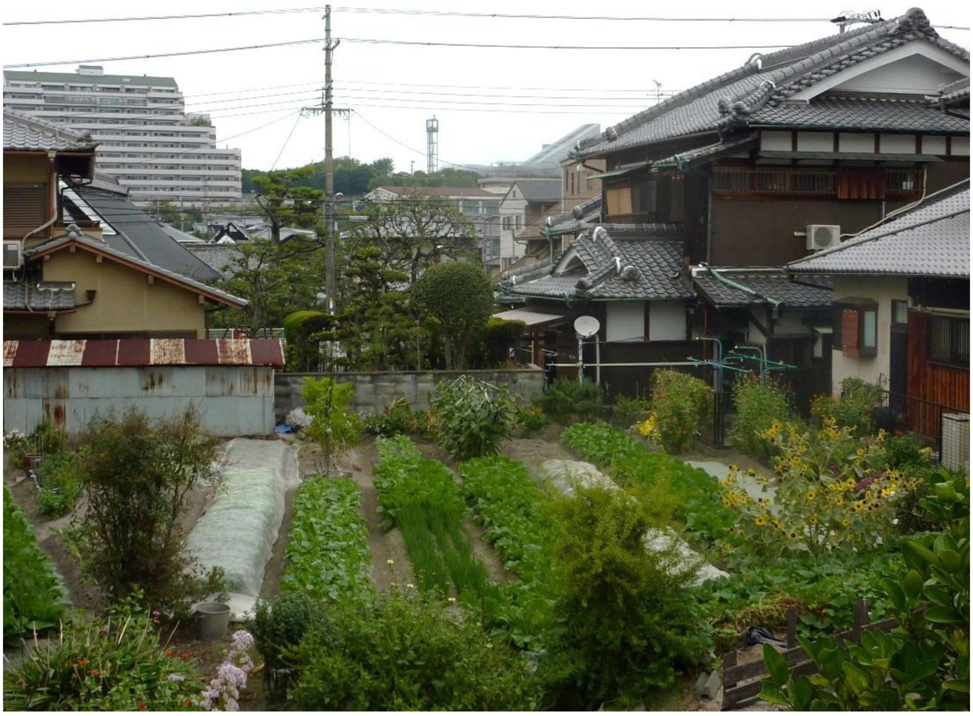

Figure 2.6. The old village of Awara, surrounded by hills and high-rise *manshons*.

From Inoue san’s description one might imagine a suburban dream, and while this is perhaps true to an extent, this is not a typical quiet suburban idyll as a Western observer might imagine it. While there are some small, detached houses in the neighbourhood, many of these young families live in enormous high-rise structures over ten stories high and containing hundreds of apartments, often with an enclosed small inner yard. The apartments are often finished to a high standard and are relatively spacious, with good views (especially from the higher floors). This makes for rather efficient high-density living, though to an unaccustomed observer the sheer size of these buildings and the numbers of apartments may seem disconcerting (see a high-rise structure in the background in the Figure 2.6.). The heavy traffic on the main roads, lack of space for lawns and gardens, as well as the footpaths in many of the narrower streets in the neighbourhood make it seem less friendly for small children, who cannot often be seen playing in the streets like in Shimoichi.

Furthermore, *manshons* with many inhabitants are seen to change the nature of social relationships in the neighbourhoods, as it becomes more difficult to know most of one's neighbours' faces. Saito san, a young woman in her thirties, told me that even in Shimoichi, where the majority of the houses are still old-fashioned small townhouses, parents are becoming more reluctant to let their children play outside without supervision. In the past, almost everyone knew which child is from which house, and neighbours were able to look after them merely by glancing through their kitchen windows. This different mode of neighbourly life was commented upon by Yamada san, a tall and handsome lady in her early sixties. Like many other older people whose children have moved out of their homes, Yamada san and her husband moved from their larger house into a smaller apartment in a nearby *mashon*. This allowed them to save some money for their later life, in case they might need care when they get older, and made housekeeping easier, while staying in the same familiar area. Yamada san told me that compared to her previous house, it was much harder to meet her neighbours in the massive *manshon*, where she shared a staircase with dozens of other families. While high-rise structures and large new developments with many newcomers with few links to the area undoubtedly have an impact on the local community, it would be facile to draw a conclusion that the rise of the *manshon* is a sign of community decline[30]. Indeed, the case of Awara with its unusually vibrant community life and a large number of volunteer-run activities, clubs, and classes, encouraged and supported by the local authorities, may offer insight into the life of communities, beyond the 'traditional' village model[31].

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[30] For a discussion of the discourse of declining communities see Story-in-between 'Society without ties'.

[31] For a discussion of urban communities and their 'traditional' networks that have been said to resemble village community life see Knight (1996:220).

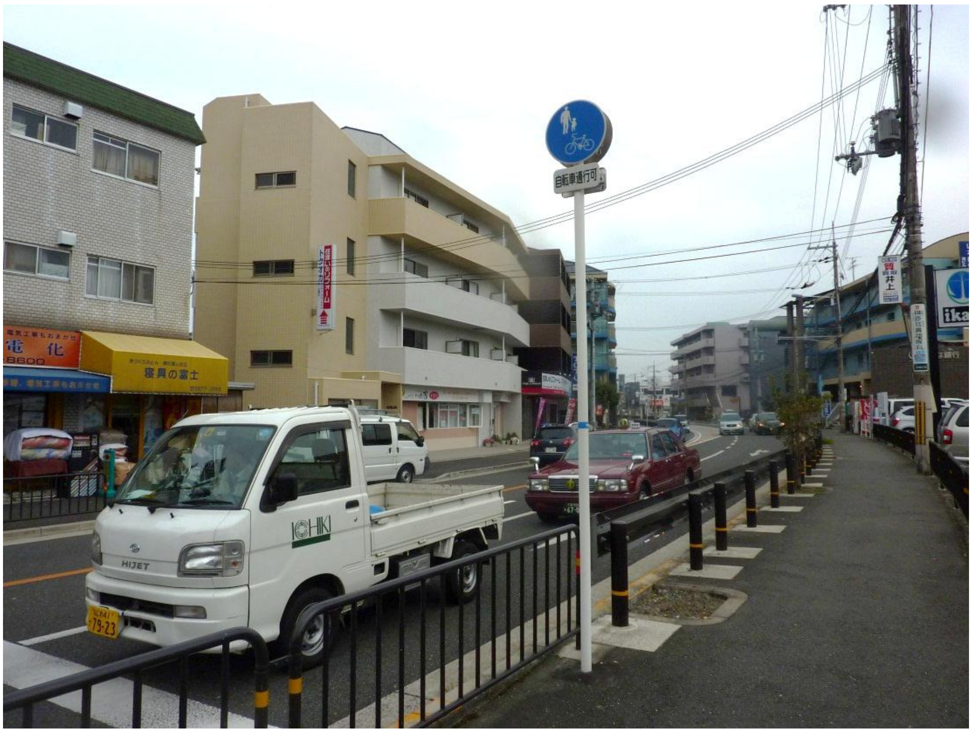

Figure 2.7. Main traffic artery through Awara, along which run the buses to the train station.

In this respect, Awara is perhaps similar to Hieidaira and Yamanaka, two communities in Kansai region described by Ben-Ari (1991). Ben-Ari contrasts the 'breakdown of community' approach (where ties of loyalty and cooperation are dissolved as a consequence of processes of modernization) with the 'transfer of community' approach (1991:4-7), associated with the 'group' model of Japanese society (see e.g. Nakane 1970), which posits that people interact within a hierarchically organised group within which there is a strong emphasis on harmony and loyalty to a leader, which the latter repays by benevolence and care. According to the latter approach, loyalty to the local community gets transferred to the company, while local ties become shallow and lose importance. Ben-Ari suggests that while both of these models capture something important about social changes in recent history, acknowledging that 'there is no doubt that Japanese communities in the 1970s and 1980s are 'weaker' – i.e. less integrated, less capable of collective action' (Ben-Ari 1991:8), he calls for a different approach, one which examines different modes for community action and collaboration that may have emerged in these new contexts. In the case of Awara[32], it could therefore be argued that the citizen's groups and voluntary associations in the neighbourhood complemented and to an extent replaced the older community networks and ties based on personal acquaintance with one's neighbours in the street and quarter.

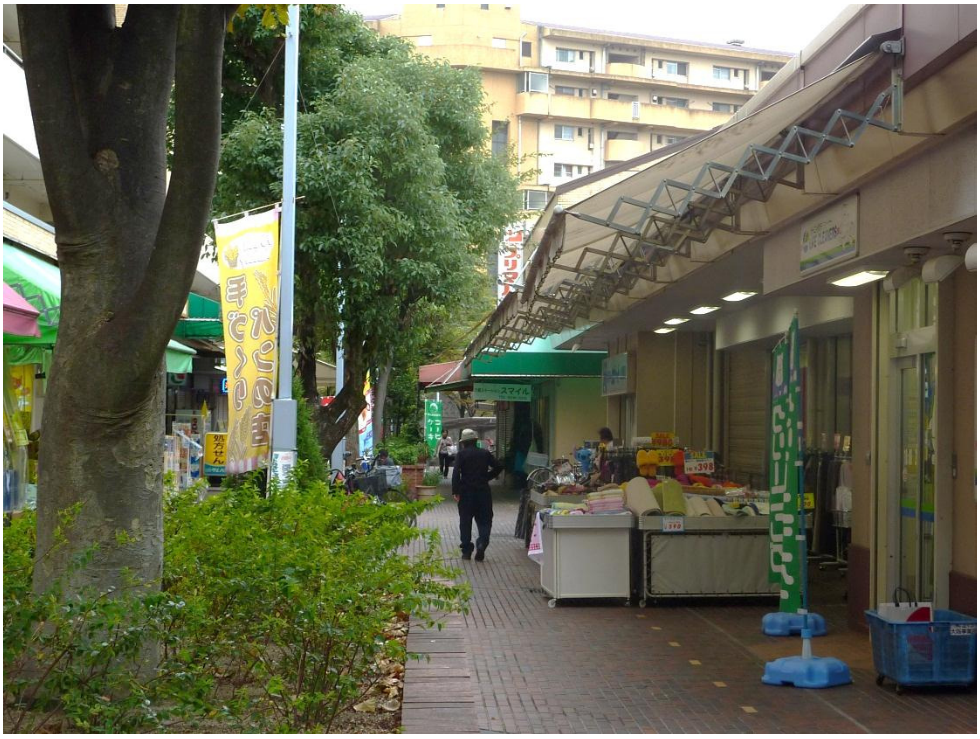

Figure 2.8. A shopping centre in the newer part of Awara neighbourhood, built in the 1970s.

A CLOSE-UP: TWO COMMUNITY SALONS

The bulk of my research was conducted in the community salon in Shimoichi, which as I have discussed is located in an old townhouse in the shopping arcade, managed by a small Non-Profit-Organization (NPO), which I will refer to as NPO Fureai[33] . The community salon functions as a space open to everyone, with a couple of large wooden tables seating at least six, but often many more as spare seats are brought when more people wish to join. It resembles a coffee shop, with a salon volunteer always present to serve a hot drink, but differs in at least four respects. Firstly, the prices are kept low, as the cost of the venture is covered by other activities run by the NPO and the volunteers are unpaid. Secondly, one can stay as long as one wishes, and this is indeed encouraged by the policy of not charging for any second servings of drinks, and by allowing people to bring their own lunch. Thirdly, it is not unusual to see guests chatting freely with each other regardless of whether or not they know each other, unlike in a café, where one is usually expected to converse only with people one has previously arranged to meet. Finally, the community salon was created mostly with older people from the neighbourhood in mind, although it is open to all and some younger people visit occasionally. Most of the salon visitors are in their 70s, 80s or even early 90s, which makes it a very convenient location for fieldwork with older people who live in their own homes in the neighbourhood, rather than in an institution such as a nursing home.

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[32] For a discussion of these issues in Shimoichi, see Chapter 4.

[33] Most of Chapter 4 is dedicated to a description of the NPO Fureai, its workings and history, as well as the foundation of the community salon and its operation.

I found the NPO Fureai with the help and support of the Osaka Volunteer information centre, who introduced me officially to the NPO staff after conducting an interview with me and asking for further details about my research over the course of a couple of weeks. The process may have been somewhat protracted, but they found an extremely well-matched NPO for my project and supported my case with initially somewhat reluctant Komatsu san from NPO Fureai. After the initial interview for the volunteer position at the salon, at which I was accompanied not only by the young lady who helped me find the NPO but also her superior, Komatsu san's concerns about the ability of a foreigner to help in the salon was dispelled and I was warmly accepted and supported in all my endeavours in the NPO and the salon.

I volunteered in the salon twice a week and visited on other days, which provided me with an opportunity to meet older people in the neighbourhood and listen to their conversations. The salon volunteers are not treated by the customers like waiting staff in a commercial enterprise, but rather like a member who happens to be on duty and could at other times be a guest herself, as they often are – arriving earlier or staying after their shift, or just dropping by for a hot drink. As a consequence, like the other volunteers, I was often encouraged by the guests to join them at their table and join the conversation. I was therefore able to participate in conversations, sometimes leading them in a particular direction of interest, or just asking for clarification, but I was also in a position to listen unobtrusively to peoples' conversations as they spontaneously unfolded. At first, my presence there was very noticeable and was itself a frequent topic of a conversation, but as time passed most customers grew accustomed to my presence and did not pay me much attention, other than upon my arrival (just like anyone else's, I should remark – most familiar faces were greeted very loudly and cheerfully). Finally, I was also able to conduct several one-on-one interviews with some of the salon customers or volunteers and to collect six life stories, typically in a series of consecutive interviews. These interviews took place outside the salon, either in the homes of my interlocutors, if they invited me, or in a quiet secluded room in the office space above the salon, and once in a quiet neighbourhood café. I also had the opportunity to talk to the NPO staff on many occasions and to interview all of them.

The salon in Awara, my secondary field site, was established by the local authorities in a building that used to house a kindergarten, which closed due to a decline in the number of children of kindergarten age. The local authorities assigned the building for community use, and its numerous rooms can be rented for meetings and classes, while the management of the building is entrusted to a volunteer group. The largest room on the ground floor, facing the inner courtyard, was assigned to the community salon, also managed by volunteers. As mentioned earlier, Awara is a community with an unusually vibrant social life and a large number of volunteer-run activities, clubs, and classes, encouraged and supported by the local authorities. This is reflected in the structure and membership of the salon: there are around fifty active volunteers, approximately two-thirds of them female and one third male. Men were reluctant to serve hot drinks, but were encouraged to help with organizing woodwork classes or offer handyman services to the members. On all occasions when I visited (20 times over the course of 6 months) volunteers comprised roughly half the visitors to the salon. Many of these volunteers mentioned that they felt like joining the salon, not merely visiting, it as it gave them more opportunities for involvement. Initially I came as a visitor myself, introducing myself as a researcher to the volunteers and soon having a chance to talk to the organizers and interview them. This was followed by an informal chat with other volunteers and guests present, and after the volunteers posted a photograph of me in their online newsletter (a blog they jointly edited), I found that most volunteers and frequent visitors knew who I was before I even had a chance to introduce myself. One busy afternoon I was asked I would be interested in helping out as a volunteer, which I happily accepted, and I had the opportunity to help out on several occasions afterward.

The visitors to Awara salon are mostly in their sixties, several in their seventies and fifties, and a few young mothers with young children. The group in charge of running the Awara salon is not registered as an NPO, but as they are directly responsible to the local authorities who established the community salon, they have a large daily burden of paperwork, including a meticulous daily count of all visitors to the salon categorized by age and gender.

Overall, the demographic and spatial characteristics of the community and the way the salon was organized under the directions of the local government made for the largest difference in the kind of place that the respective salons were, including the setting, events and activities organized, users and volunteer membership. With more *manshons* being constructed, large numbers of newcomers are coming to the area. The salon explicitly targets newcomers by offering a place to make acquaintances in the community, get advice informally about local amenities, and the like. Via the salon one can participate in local festivals, such as Bon Dance or Summer Festival, thus creating a bridge towards the more traditional local associations. Most of the volunteers in the Awara salon have themselves moved to the area in the 1970s, and are therefore well aware of newcomer issues. They try to make the community appear open and welcoming, and make an effort to inform people who recently moved to the area about their activities as well as other events, and local facilities. The details of the community salon as a place to find out more about local events and facilities are available on the internet, through leaflets in the local municipal office, posters in the library and the internet page of Suita City Hall.

Over the course of fieldwork I managed to obtain a considerable amount of relevant background information in a variety of ways. For example, I attended public lectures and seminar series related to aging, wellbeing and *ikigai*, care for the elderly, and housing options for the elderly, mostly organized by municipal authorities or local NPOs; I conducted interviews with some of the seminar attendees and organizers, as well as with City Hall officials in charge of welfare of the elderly. Finally, as an additional but very welcoming and fruitful field site I regularly attended a women’s discussion group in the Kansai region (in a town on the Southern outskirts of Kyoto), attended by approximately twenty women aged between 45 and 70. Many of these women, it turned out, cared for aging family members. I was introduced to the group through a mutual friend and they immediately accepted my presence in a warm and friendly manner. In addition to participating in their weekly discussions and more informal conversations over lunch after each discussion session, I conducted semi-structured interviews with all the regular members of this group.

As anyone who has conducted ethnographic research in an urban setting will be well aware, there can be considerable difficulty involved in maintaining the sustained contact required for creating rapport and participant observation – among the primary characteristics of in-depth ethnography. One way of counteracting this problem is to find more or less bounded groups one can visit on a regular basis, something both of the salons and the women's discussion group provided for me over the course of my fieldwork. In a highly literate industrialized society like Japan, with an incredibly high circulation of texts in newspapers, books, magazines, pamphlets and brochures, it is impossible to ignore the content available to most people in this form. While I have not undertaken systematic and large scale content analysis of any one of these sources, I have attempted to provide relevant background to the discussions in the chapters that follow by quoting newspaper stories or outlining the information provided in newsletters and brochures available to my interlocutors. Without doubt, written media are not the only relevant sources of information in Japan, and radio and television have an important place in the life of many of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, due to time constraints I have not followed the content in either of them systematically, judging that my time was better spent talking to people and attending events, rather than watching TV at home.

This may be a good place to comment upon my decision to change the names of all of these organizations in spite of the good work they are doing and the recognition they deserve. I considered asking for permission to publish the names of these organizations, but after having received such a high degree of support and cooperation in all of them I was relatively confident that permission would be granted[34]. I spent a lot of time in informal conversation with many members and obtained insights into many of their private matters, which was invaluable for a deeper understanding of the issues discussed in this work. All of these organizations were small, and if their names would be published it would be very easy to find out who the individual members were even if I changed their names. I have therefore changed the names of all the persons involved as well as of the organizations and neighbourhoods, as due to their recognition in the neighbourhood even specifying the name of the neighbourhood would make finding the organization very easy to find.

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[34] Perhaps the issue of power and gatekeepers is worth mentioning here: if the permission was granted by the group some members might feel obliged to agree, or reluctant to disagree openly. The organizers and managers of the organization were in any case more likely to be interested in naming their organization as a way to promote its visibility.

CARE FOR THE ELDERLY AND CHANGING FAMILIES

As the story preceding this chapter illustrates, anxieties concerning the consequences of population aging for living standards and the economic situation are widespread. The provision of care and support for the elderly have, since the 1970s, been seen and represented primarily as the responsibility of the family, within the 'Japanese-style welfare society' (*Nihongata fukushi shakai*), based on a discourse of traditional values of filial piety and thus potentially reducing the cost of the care for the elderly for the government (Goodman 1998:150; Traphagan and Knight 2003:14). Yet the provision of such care by families is not seen as unproblematic, and concerns about aging, either of their close relatives or their own, seemed to be extremely widespread among my middle-aged interlocutors. Let us consider briefly two examples: Sasaki san and Yamauchi san.

Sasaki-san is in her fifties and has grown-up children. She is worried about how her future will unfold, and specifically whether she will need to relocate to where her parents live. She works part-time from home, marking essays for private after-school courses for school children, and until recently was very busy with raising children and PTA activities. She recently took up weaving as a hobby to fill up her time, and is finishing a weaving course that would enable her to teach others and thus to have an occupation of her own.

> Rather than just an anxiety, I think it's a big problem that awaits me - the nursing care for my parents. They are healthy now and they live on their own, but my father is 83 and nearly the age when care might be necessary. Apparently, it seems that I'll be the one supposed to take care of them. I have an older sister, but she lives alone and has a job, so if they became sick, I'll be expected to go and take care of them. While they are healthy they can live alone, but if any of them gets sick my husband and I will go and live with them, but… to say to one's parents that one will

> take care of them, that doesn't work. Another thing that I find difficult is the timing - when will the care become necessary. I'm a bit anxious about that, what will become of my situation, and for how long.

Sasaki san and her husband recently agreed to adopt her family name and all the responsibilities that come with it, including caring for her parents should they need it. Her uncertainty is exacerbated by the fact that it is difficult to know if and when the move will be necessary, and because the issue cannot be openly discussed with her parents. She did not grow up where her parents now live, and knows no-one there, so the prospect of loneliness and isolation add to her unease, as she implied in another conversation. It is noteworthy that she wanted to work, and values work highly as a way of developing one's abilities and broadening one's horizons and social world, but was unable to work outside the home while her children were still young. Now she might be prevented from working again.

Yamauchi-san is her in early sixties and lives with her husband. She is a teacher in a specialized school preparing students for entrance exams, while her husband was a middle-school teacher who has just retired, but continues to teach part time. Her two fully grown daughters have part-time jobs and cannot support themselves.

> I think they should get married. The older one has a boyfriend, but he has no money so she cannot marry him.. [laughs].. and the younger one has a part time job in a concert hall. So I worry about their future, it's difficult to get a good stable job in this economic situation. I'm also worried about my future - my husband recently retired and the state pension money is insufficient, especially in the event of sickness. I wonder how it would be. I hope we won't get sick, that's all. My parents lived long lives, they died at the age of 94, but when they got sick my brother had to take care of them and they spent many years bedridden. In the end they had to be put in a care-giving facility, because of serious dementia. Care is my worry, too. I don't want to be taken care of by my daughters.

Yamauchi-san's worries revolve around the job insecurity of her children and her imminent aging. Both her husband's recent retirement and her parents' experience of prolonged care make her anxious about her own future. Even though children are expected to take care of their aging parents, Yamauchi-san would not like to be taken care of by her daughters. Many elderly people to whom I talked in relation to housing issues said that they are looking for a solution to this problem, because they would not like to become a burden on their children.

As the examples of Sasaki san and Yamauchi san show, worries about aging among middle aged and older Japanese include both worries about the aging of one's parents or closer relatives who might need support, as well as worries about one's own aging and the care one may require. As people now tend to live longer, the need for care may extend over many years and it is not unusual to hear of people in their late sixties or early seventies who are looking after their own parents in their late eighties or nineties. This type of family support, referred to by the authorities as 'care for the elderly by the elderly', has risen markedly, with more than half of primary caregivers aged 60 years or older themselves (and almost a third over the age of 70; Cabinet Office 2007:22). This most often involves care by one's spouse, with over 78% of male respondents hoping that in the future care would be provided by their wives, and almost half of the female respondents hoping that any future care would be provided by their husbands (ibid.).

These anxieties should be viewed in the context of changing demographic circumstances and their implications for care for the elderly in the family context. The ideal of care of the elderly in the context of a three-generational household has in practice been affected by an increase in life expectancy among the older generation, as well as decreasing numbers of siblings to care for the elderly. The post-war generation of 1925-50, which had a large number of siblings that survived into adulthood, unlike the previous and subsequent generations, formed strong and large kin networks, 'thus the ability of families in the sixties to care for their infant children and elderly members without seeking help from neighbourhood networks or public institutions was not a sign of greater strength of effort on their part, but was, in fact, made possible by the support of their relatives' (Ochiai 1997:71). This is a generation which formed the mainstream model and perhaps even made the 'Japanese model' of welfare possible.

Gradually, the family structure started changing towards the nuclear family, but at first this did not happen at the expense of the idealized three-generational household, and certainly did not represent an outright rejection of the value of mutual assistance (Fuess 2004). Instead, it was the result of larger numbers of siblings surviving into adulthood and setting up new households: 'contrary to the popular perception, the absolute number of three-generation households remained stable until the end of the century; it was the number of nuclear families - households consisting only of parents and children - that increased' (ibid.: 153). The process of nuclearization reached its limit in 1975, when the generation of children with usually just one sibling reached adulthood and started marrying. Whereas previously the eldest son (or daughter) tended to remain in the household with their spouse, while the younger sibling moved away and formed a nuclear household, now the children would all either marry successors or become successors themselves (Ochiai 1997: 149). This has important consequences, for the pressure to take care of the elderly of the family increases with the diminishing number of siblings in the family. While the issue of care within the family falls outside the scope of this chapter, suffice it to say that family support, in recent years more often expected from a spouse than from one's children, is a very important element of care despite all the pressures that render many families incapable of providing the levels of support they would wish to ensure.

THE SOCIALIZATION OF CARE: LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE

One major response by the government to mounting anxieties about aging was the introduction in 1997 of Long-Term Care Insurance (LCTI) (*kaigo hoken*), which went into effect in April 2000. As the beneficiaries (depending on their needs) are all those above the age of 65, this includes all of my older Shimoichi interlocutors. Furthermore, the organization of which the salon is a part provides some of the services covered by the LCTI, which in turn funds its expenses of running the salon and organizing other activities. Finally, as will become apparent in the ensuing discussion of the system itself, by providing rather extensive support for the elderly through a variety of providers (public and private, making it possible for the older people in need of support to avoid full institutionalization or total reliance on the family), LCTI has important consequences for the conceptualizations of independence among older people, a theme which weaves through many of the following chapters. In view of the above, a brief overview of this (admittedly somewhat complicated) system and its characteristics provides important background for the discussions to follow.

The Japanese programme is considered to be the largest and most radical compulsory long-term care insurance programme in the world. This is considered unexpected given previous welfare developments and the reliance on family care (Creighton Campbell and Ikegami 2000: 27), as sometimes implied by the term 'Japanese-style welfare state'. The change was not as sudden as it may seem, as it followed on from a series of measures in the 1990s that supported the increased use of public professional services, in a transition from an exclusively private, family-based care for the elderly (Robb-Jenike 2003:178). Nevertheless, what was the reasoning behind the change of attitude? According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the aim was ‘to establish a system which responds to society’s major concern about aging, the care problem, whereby citizens can be assured that they will receive care and be supported by a society as a whole’ (Ministry of Health and Welfare 2002:1). The creation of LCTI is, therefore, a move towards the socialization of care, which is argued to be necessary in light of social changes: the lengthening and the degree of seriousness of care for elderly people[35]; the aging of caregivers; the declining proportion of elderly people living with their children; as well as an increase in the number of working women (ibid.).

Despite such convincing arguments and visible pressures, some authors point out that there was curiously little debate over the cost of such a system before the LCTI law was passed in 1997. Creighton Campbell and Ikegami (2000; 2003) emphasise that the introduction of this system should be understood in its historical context, with the first large financial commitment for LTC services embodied in the so-called ‘Gold Plan’ in 1989, which came at the time of an economic boom. This program grew rapidly to respond to increasing demand, and was followed up by an expanded ‘New Gold Plan’ of 1994, introduced at a time when the government was trying to stimulate the economy with large- scale spending. Concerns over budget pressures eventually surfaced, but the LCTI was planned as a system with its own revenues[36] (Creighton Campbell and Ikegami 2003:23). Debates about the shape the system should take primarily concerned the services to be provided and whether it should provide cash allowances for family care. The latter suggestion was opposed by welfare professionals, who called for a rapid expansion of formal services that could only take place if the demand was high, and by officials who pointed out that everyone eligible would be likely to apply regardless of need, thus increasing the need for extensive financing soon after the introduction (ibid.:30). Perhaps most interestingly, many feminists argued that ‘the allowance would just go into the family budget, and family caregivers would continue to be exploited' (ibid.:30), which seemed to have a serious effect on the final decision.

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[35] It is argued that with the number of the elderly growing and the medical expense per capita on the increase, the health insurance in Japan was facing a serious crisis (Murashima et.al. 2003: 407).

[36] In effect, this meant a turn away from the Scandinavian model, which seemed to be a direction in which the Japanese welfare system was moving (with a broad entitlement financed by taxes), towards a German model of social insurance (Creighton Cambell and Ikegami 2000:29).

So, how does the LCTI system work? The beneficiaries (everyone aged 65 years or older, and persons aged 40 or older with an age-related disability) apply to their municipal government, the officials of which assess the level of care needed using a standardized questionnaire entered into a computer system and confirmed by the physician in charge. The levels of needs initially comprised 5 levels of care (*yōkaigo*) (ranging from 1 for the minimal care to level 5 for maximum care) and one level of support (*yōshien*) for the independent elderly in need of assistance (MHLW 2002). This later changed to four levels of care and two lower levels of support. The benefits (in year 2000) ranged from JPY 61 000 to 358 000 per month (roughly USD 560-3260) (Creighton Campbell and Ikegami 2000: 33). For community-based care (such as home-helpers, visiting nurses and day-care) the beneficiaries can choose the provider and draw up a care plan with the help of a care manager (Creighton Campbell and Ikegami 2003:22). The insurance is financed from premiums (which are mandatory for all citizens aged 40 or above), the co-payments for the services by the users (a fixed amount of 10%), and from general revenues (50 per cent national, 25 per cent each from municipalities and prefectures; Creighton Campbell and Ikegami 2000:31).

The LCTI system[37] is based on the provision of formal services, and cash allowances were not included. The insurance covers services both in the home and in institutions, which include 'long-term facilities for the elderly, day-centres, respite care facilities, visiting nurse stations, home-help services, care houses, housing for assisted living, and group homes for dementia patients' (Coulmas 2007: 68). The range of services allow for a more flexible way of meeting the needs for care than the previous system, which was focused on the home or a hospital, and proved to be very costly too, while providing a high level of care for many (ibid.: 67-8). Creigton Campbell and Ikegami list several important aspects and aims of the new system, which seeks to:

> '(1) shift a major responsibility for care-giving from the family to the state; (2) integrate medical care and social services via unified financing; (3) enhance consumer choice and competition by allowing free choice of providers, including

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[37] For an outline of the LCTI system see Appendix 2.2.

> even for-profit companies; (4) require older persons themselves to share the costs via insurance premiums as well as co-payments; and (5) expand local government autonomy and management capacity in social policy. … [The expansion of the plan] leading to a major expansion of community based care…' (2000:31).

My interlocutors generally had a rather positive view of the support provided by the LCTI, but also pointed to some problems with the scheme. The volunteers and staff at NPO Fureai were convinced that the potential of increased cost of the system will lead to stricter screenings and that it will be harder to get the services covered. Some of my older interlocutors with little income found the cost high when more services were needed, as individuals are expected to contribute 10 per cent of the overall cost; if they needed to move to a care facility, the cost would be very high compared to their low incomes or small savings. As the majority of the salon visitors was in good health they were rarely entitled to the 'care' element of the LCTI, but most of them qualified for support levels and could use the entitlements to cover most of the cost of home-helpers once or twice a week, who would come and tidy around the house. Ikeda san once told a group of other ladies how she stopped using the service as she and her sister would spend the whole morning tidying before the arrival of the helper, as they found it too embarrassing to have a stranger enter their house when it was less than tidy, even though they knew well it was the helper's role to do the cleaning. Some of the ladies laughed and remarked that they often feel the same way. One lady wearing a bright pink lipstick and a colourful blouse then said how she liked having all the help she could get, as that freed up the time for her to do other things. In order to get the highest possible entitlement, on the morning of the visit of the person who was supposed to asses her needs, she 'forgot' to put on her clothes, to brush her hair, and to put away her bedding, and opened the door in her nightgown. She advised the others that making sure not to apply any makeup and appearing a little confused was the best way of getting many hours of help at home. Other ladies disagreed, however – as they commented afterwards, when the lady in question left - but merely softly remarked how they prefer not to allow strangers into their homes. This issue was a real concern for many, but overall the impression of the support through LCTI was rather positive.

TSUI NO SUMIKA - THE 'FINAL ABODE'

In the context of the family changes touched on above, it may be unsurprising that there is an increasing number of elderly living alone or with their partner, rather than in the three-generation household. According to data from 2007, the largest proportion of all households with people aged 65 or over (which comprise over 40% of the overall number of households) comprised 'couple only households' (29,8%), followed by 'one-person households' (22.5%). 'Three generation family households' comprised 18.3% and 'parents and unmarried children only households' accounted for 17.7% (Cabinet Office 2009: 6). Furthermore, the data from a national survey indicates that older people living alone have more concerns regarding their health, care issues, loneliness and finances (Cabinet Office 2009:7). In other words, one need not be frail to feel uneasy about living on one's own, and the decline in one's abilities makes this feeling even more acute. This is a situation in which many older people look for a suitable housing solution with an appropriate level of support and care. A new welfare framework under the Long Term Care Insurance, discussed in more detail below, allows for a diversification of care and support arrangements, or 'solutions', by covering services in the public, private and not-for-profit sector. This provides important background for understanding the living conditions of my interlocutors in Shimoichi, and for understanding the issues of autonomy and dependency discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The feature theme of the March 2010 issue of the magazine *Consumer Information* (*Shōhisha johō*) is entitled '*Tsui no sumika'*, or the 'final abode'. It deals with the question of how to choose a 'comfortable' and 'appropriate' place to spend one's final years, and runs through various housing options for the elderly. It implies that the place one chooses will be the place one can comfortably stay in, a solution to one's problems. While the term 'final abode' has a strangely spiritual ring to it, it is not unusual to see it used in the context of addressing a mundane matter of housing. A number of books and publications advising on the topic have the same unusual title, and so did a lecture in the Osaka prefectural consumer life centre (*Ōsakafu shōhiseikatsu senta*) I attended in November 2009. The title of that lecture might provide a hint as to why this expression is often used in this way: 'Where is the 'final abode'? To live a senior life with peace of mind' *('Tsui no sumika' wa doko de? Anshin dekiru shiniaraifu wo okuru tame ni'*). As some of my interlocutors pointed out, peace of mind, or living free of worries and anxieties, is what most people seek when deciding on a place to spend their later years.

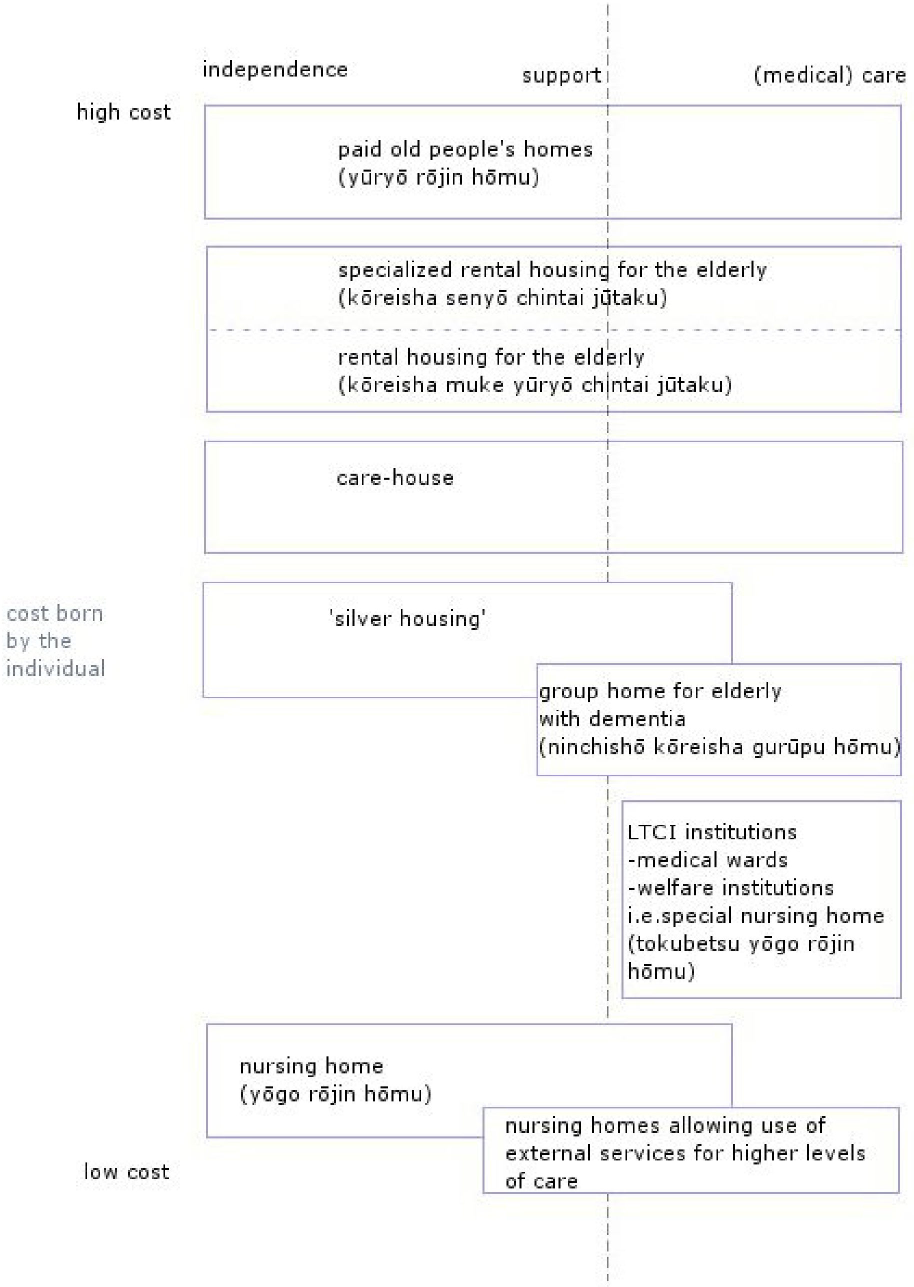
independence
support
(medical) care
high cost
paid old people's homes
(yūryō rōjin hōmu)
specialized rental housing for the elderly
(kōreisha senyō chintai jūtaku)
rental housing for the elderly
(kōreisha muke yūryō chintai jūtaku)
care-house
cost born by the individual
'silver housing'
group home for elderly with dementia
(ninchishō kōreisha gurūpu hōmu)
LTCI institutions
-medical wards
-welfare institutions
i.e.special nursing home
(tokubetsu yōgo rōjin hōmu)
nursing home
(yōgo rōjin hōmu)
nursing homes allowing use of external services for higher levels of care
low cost

Figure 2.6. Housing options for the elderly. Adapted from Foundation for Senior Citizen's Housing.

The main forms of housing for the elderly (Figure 2.6.) vary significantly in terms of the cost covered by the individual, and in the level of care they provide[38]. The cost is lowest in nursing homes (run by local governments and welfare institutions), increasing towards group homes, 'silver housing' (which involves emergency help and a barrier-free environment and does not cover higher levels of care), with care houses being roughly in the middle of the cost range, increasing towards the rental housing for the elderly (with care being provided in one's home by nurses and home-helpers covered by LCTI) and the most comprehensive range of services provided in paid homes, which are also the most expensive. Some of these facilities provide services for those living in the neighbourhood, such as food or day care. As mentioned above, a number of other support services is provided by community networks and NGOs, usually in the form of 'home helper' services, which allow elderly people to stay at home and receive support or care. Some of these elderly might want to carry out modifications or adaptations of their existing housing to make it 'barrier-free' and safer, and this kind of 'reform' or adaptation is sometimes subsidized by local governments.

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[38] Covered in more detail in a table in Appendix 2.1.

This diversity has been made possible with the new LCTI, but at the same time the proliferation of options can easily cause confusion and it is becoming increasingly difficult to make an informed choice. To assist them in this regard, the elderly can gather information in various ways, by referring to specialized handbooks, or lengthy pamphlets published by local governments, or by using the services of advice-giving institutions. Notably, some of these are corporate, and provide information about the private enterprises they have links with, thus targeting the elderly as consumers. I attended a number of public lectures and seminars dealing with the topic and visited several counselling services for the elderly, and in all cases the explanations given were detailed and practically oriented. Significantly, the advice given by professionals, both in person and in writing, focuses on notions of 'safety' and 'peace of mind' (*anzen* and *anshin*). At the heart of this discourse is the idea of moving from one's existing home to a 'safer place', whether this be a place with staff available 24 hours a day, or just a place where potential 'criminals' cannot enter easily, in cases where the rental unit has no particular care services available. While most of the advice centres for the elderly with links to corporations emphasize the importance of moving house for the feeling of safety, this is not the only possibility, as becomes apparent from reading the free handbook available on the website of the Foundation for Senior Citizen's Housing. The authors of this handbook advise readers to consider the possibility of staying in one's own home, justifying this by linking it to the principles of the Danish welfare system, which emphasizes self-determination and continuity in terms of living environment.

The 'final abode' discourse is closely related to issues of consumer choice and making a decision about where and how to spend one's final years in a planned manner, based on a careful assessment of one's needs and material resources. In a sense, it creates a final stage of life as a discreet entity, bounded and somewhat separate from previous life stages. This discourse rarely mentions the relationships one has to other people, which was, by contrast, something my Shimoichi interlocutors emphasized on many occasions. The people to whom I talked after the housing seminars also emphasized their ties to other people and to particular areas, as well as community ties and activities and personal interests. For example, some of the people who came to the counselling centre for elderly housing that I visited expressed intense interest in keeping pets. Most of these housing options do not allow pets, so some people, like Miura san, had decided to move only after their pet passes away (*mi okutte kara*). Objective (financial) constraints play an important role, but were rarely presented by these interlocutors as their primary concern, not least because those who attended these seminars about choosing a place to live had some degree of choice and might not have been heavily constrained by their economic and social circumstances. On the other hand, they are somehow integrated into the attainable 'ideal' or 'desired' options. When I once asked one of my interlocutors, Nishikawa-san, to describe her ideal home, she replied that she simply cannot imagine 'the ideal ideal' - that is, she cannot imagine some big, expensive model home; being a practical person, she thinks only about 'ideals' in the realm of the possible. In other words, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the ideals or wishes themselves are framed by the circumstances of 'real' life.

On the other hand, most of my interlocutors in Shimoichi (and some in Awara) had lived in the same place for many years and had not considered moving, as they valued highly their links in the neighbourhood and had come to rely on them. Kato san, a cheerful ninety-year old lady, lives in a pre-war, narrow, two-storey townhouse in a small alley branching off from the shopping street, together with her younger sister, Ikeda san, who moved in after she once fell ill. At the front of the lower storey there is a small kitchen and dining space, which leads to a narrow four-and-a-half-tatami[39] room that houses a large wardrobe, and this room leads to a larger eight-tatami room with a low table and two low armchairs and a TV, and a refurbished fitted bathroom (which had been fitted a decade ago, though the sisters still often prefer to visit the public bath around the corner, which they find more sociable and much warmer than their small bathroom). The second storey houses two large bedrooms, one at the front and one at the back of the house, with a couple of small rooms filled with large chests of drawers full of kimonos and a couple of Western-style wardrobes. Despite the narrow staircase, the sisters have no problems walking up and down the stairs, and their neighbour, Murata san, helps them with small repairs around the house and by taking out the rubbish twice a week.

Some of the salon-goers live in similar houses in the neighbourhood with their families, like Sato san, who lives with her son and grandchildren, for whom she frequently prepares meals and makes cakes. Other houses have been newly built on old plots of land and some of these have been designed to house two generations in two separate apartments within the same house. This type of housing, called *nisetai jutaku* (two generation housing), has become popular for practical reasons, including high land prices and because it offers the possibility for mutual support[40] (Brown 2003). These housing options are not the 'new' options presented to the elderly as a solution for their *final abode*, and are, in fact, the first and only family house in which my interlocutors have lived over the course of their adult life, rather than a separate place to which they have moved for the final stages of their life. Nevertheless, these new housing options are there on offer, and for many other elderly they may provide an important option for pursuing independent living, with some organized support. In this sense, it provides an important background to discussions of the category of the elderly (who are often defined in terms of dependence - see Chapter 3) and issues of autonomy and dependency, so crucial to many of my interlocutors' understandings of their lives (see Chapter 6).

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[39] Tatami mats that are used as flooring in traditional Japanese architecture come in several standardized sizes, with a width half the length of one mat, overall measuring a bit less than 1x2m. It is common to express the size of a room by stating the number of tatami, or in *tsubo*, a unit that equals two tatami mats.

[40] At times, these expectations have not been satisfied for the older couple who felt more isolated within such living arrangements, as the younger couple who was available on a daily basis made less of an effort to make weekly visits and other people in the neighbourhood assumed that the older couple had company, as they lived with their family (Brown 2003: 63).

Okuma san, a white-haired lady in sporty polo shirts and slacks, lives on her own in a rented *manshon* flat. She used to rent elsewhere in the neighbourhood, in a smaller apartment block, but that had to be demolished and she was relocated to the big apartment block just a few steps from one end of the shopping arcade, on a corner of a warmly lit pedestrian street lined with small shops. While most regular salon goers vaguely know where others live, they do not know their precise address, but rather speak in terms of areas ('on a corner near the post office,' or 'in the alleyway past a hairdresser, but not as far as the futon store'). This meant that when Okuma san did not show up in the salon for a while and Kato san wanted to check up on her, she found the large apartment block but had no idea which entrance gate or which apartment it would be, and the downstairs gate was firmly locked. The benefit of Okuma san's new accommodation included a concierge service on the ground floor – meaning that there was always someone one could call for help by pressing an emergency button in one's apartment (in case, one felt suddenly ill, for instance). The concierge and the locked front door also meant that not everyone could come in easily, which was an added safety benefit. Nevertheless, what was advertised as an important security point in the housing seminars also meant a degree of separation from the neighbourhood networks of informal support. In short, while many of my interlocutors in Shimoichi continued to live in their own houses, where they have spent much of their lives, this was in part made possible by more or less formal networks of support in the neighbourhood.

Finally, many of my interlocutors who lived on their own had the material means of moving into one of these supported housing options, as most owned their own houses which they could presumably sell. If they were aware of their existence (some of them who are uninterested may well not know about them, even though the information is abundant – or precisely because so much information about all kinds of things is surrounding them) and yet continued to live in their own houses in their neighbourhood, the explanation for this gives some indication as to the kinds of life that is considered preferable. Firstly, it should be noted that an overwhelming majority of my Shimoichi interlocutors was in good health and almost entirely capable of living on their own (most of them qualifying for support but not care according to Long-Term Care insurance criteria, support referring to two of the lower levels of LCTI). Secondly, the choice to continue living in the neighbourhood, or even lack of interest in other options (at least so long one is not forced to contemplate issues of nursing care), would indicate the high value placed on social relations one has built in the neighbourhood, as well as emotional attachment to place, and the functioning support network in the area. These support networks, ranging from formal to informal, comprise the topic of the Chapter 3.

STORY-IN-BETWEEN

MISSING CENTENARIANS AND THE NEGLECTED ELDERLY

According to neighbours, the nondescript house on the riverbank in a residential area of Tokyo, surrounded by a lush wall of trees, always had the rain shutters closed. The secret that the house held was quite unexpected. In late August 2010, police discovered inside the mummified body of an old man, who was supposed to be 111. His family, who still lived there, later confessed that he withdrew himself into his room in November 1978, saying he wanted to attain Buddhahood during life[41] (*sokushinjoubutsu*). They did not report his death, and even after his wife's death in 2004, his daughter, aged 81, continued to receive his pension. The daughter and granddaughter were arrested, and the story was widely reported in all major media outlets (e.g. Asahi 2010) The local welfare commissioner had visited the household many times since 1992, and each time she inquired about the man, she received an answer such as 'he's down with a cold at the moment', or that he is at a facility for the elderly in another prefecture. When she once attempted to get the details of the institution, she was told he had returned to his old family home. After several attempts to acquire a valid address, something seemed odd and she began to suspect he had died (Asahi 201b).

In preparation for the annual celebration of the Respect for the Aged Day in late September, the municipal governments scoured their data looking for centenarians, who on this occasion receive small tokens of appreciation. For next couple of months, while the search continued, numerous stories appeared about the unknown whereabouts of some centenarians, and a few morbid cases of unreported deaths and bones found in people's houses. While the efforts of welfare commissioners were appreciated, as in the case of the missing 111-old man described earlier (Asahi 2010c), this also raised concerns about the system. Issues reported included concerns over the growing elderly population and the lack of relevant information. As one welfare commissioner usually covers an area of several hundred households, as a consequence of the aging population each commissioner is in charge of a growing number of elderly. Furthermore, according to a sample survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, in around 15% of areas the commissioners are not supplied with the personal information of the people in their jurisdiction because of concerns to protect privacy. Yet as some pointed out, it was precisely thanks to the efforts of the welfare commissioners that the truth was uncovered in this case (Asahi 2010c).

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[41] *Sokushinjōbutsu* can refer to an ascetic practice of self mummification, denying oneself food or drink, in an attempt to become a Buddha.

This story resonated through the media space during the last months of my research visit in 2010, but was preceded by many less bizarre but no less saddening stories of elderly people dying alone with nobody noticing for quite some time afterwards. I propose that all these stories might be understood as contemporary versions of the story of *obasuteyama*. This legend has many forms, but always refers to a mountain to which old relatives were taken to die. Here is a version recounted to me by a friend:

> 'The time has come,' a mother told her son on a cold winter evening. The son sat in silence, refusing to take note of what was said to him. 'Other people of my age have already been taken, and such is the rule in the village,' the mother insisted. Confronted, the next morning the son took his mother on his back to the mountain, struggling all day up steep paths and through dense shrubbery. After a long climb they reached the peak. 'It will get dark soon, you must get back,' said the mother, and urged her son to return. Reluctantly, the son started making his way down the mountain but soon got lost as the darkness and mist thickened. Some twigs cracked underfoot and he managed to find his bearings, realizing that his mother must have strewn some twigs on the way up to mark his way back. Moved, he could not leave his mother to die on the mountain, but instead took her home.

A longer version of this story also mentions that the local ruler set the villagers a series of tasks that they found difficult to fulfil. The man's mother suggested solutions to all the tasks, and when the man was confronted about how he could find all the solutions, he admitted that his old mother helped him. Recounting the events on the mountain, the son explained that he could not bear to leave his mother, when she cared for him so much that she left the markings for him not to get lost. 'Old people may not be able to work, but their wisdom is much greater than ours,' the son said to the lord who ruled that from then on no old people would be taken to die on the mountain again.

This version reaffirms the social role of the elderly and the need to respect them in a society founded on their wisdom rather than their economic productivity, while stressing the importance of filial duties. Other versions may not have a happy ending at all. For instance, a noh version by Zeami tells of a woman left to die on her own in the mountain, who turned into a ghost riddled by the shame of her abandonment (2008:14). The newspaper coverage of stories about elderly dying alone, and their families being unable to confirm their whereabouts, may similarly be read as a warning against the mistreatment of the elderly and an admonition to treat them with respect.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY CARE AND 'BEING ELDERLY'

When Simone de Beauvoir wrote 'The Coming of Age' in 1970, she hoped to break the 'conspiracy of silence' surrounding the topic of aging. She voiced her indignation about the current state of affairs:

> In practice the aged are not looked upon as a class apart (…). There are books, periodicals, entertainment, radio and television programmes for children and young people: for the old there are none (1970:3).

The times have changed, it seems, for the elderly are increasingly perceived as a distinct social category, and also targeted as consumers. This can be compared to the relatively recent emergence of the view of children as somehow fundamentally different to adults, compared to the mediaeval times when children were not given a distinct social status - 'childhood did not exist' (Aries 1962). In Japan, where age is considered an important factor for classifying different members of society, where life stages were clearly marked by transitions that are remarkably consistently timed, and where practices of age-grading still persist in rural areas (Traphagan 2000:9), one might expect that old age would be clearly defined. This chapter outlines the construction of the category of the elderly in Japan, and explores the nexus of community welfare relations in Shimoichi, with a particular focus on community care for the elderly. Without trying to create an overly coherent image of local community welfare as a system, I will try to sketch some of the institutions and actors involved and their ties and connections. I will start with the local authorities, the Ward office, the long established role of the volunteer welfare commissioners (*minseiin*) and the more recent community network promotional officers, the monthly food service for the elderly, and a number of workshops and seminars that the Ward organizes. I will then move on to the not-for-profit organizations, their activities and their links to the Ward and the Social Welfare Office. Finally, I will turn my attention to the private sector, small and larger businesses enabled by the Long-Term Care Insurance (LCTI) Law of 1999 to provide welfare services covered by the plan. Many of the actors involved in providing certain welfare services, such as volunteer welfare commissioners (*minseiiin*), helpers or volunteers, are themselves over the age of 65 and so could be considered elderly. I therefore argue that the category of the elderly (*kōreisha*) is considerably more variable and complex than it might at first appear. It cannot be reduced to an image of frail dependent people, as many older Japanese are involved in support giving and care provision to others and not merely receiving support.

In his study of two neighbourhoods in the Kansai area, Ben-Ari singles out two local welfare institutions concerned with care for the elderly: the voluntary welfare workers (*miseiiin*), which provide formal services and assistance to the elderly; and clubs for the elderly (*rōjinkai*) that are concerned with their wellbeing more broadly, including socializing, cultural activities and recreation (Ben-Ari 1991:125). When examining community care for the elderly, Ben-Ari therefore focuses on local volunteers and voluntary groups and posits their 'interstitial existence' between formalized state welfare provision and local informal networks of family and friends. This observation is important for understanding the position of the local voluntary groups in the broader framework of community welfare, and indicates the multitude of layers and actors involved in community care of the elderly. Building on this approach, and moving on from the 'dual macro' approach distinguishing the State and civil society as the main actors in the field, I will attempt to outline the multiplicity of networks of support for the elderly branching across different sectors of the private and public spheres, as they developed under the new LCTI system. While the community welfare networks cannot be reduced to services for the elderly, I will focus my attention on these, as they provide an important background both for the understanding of the NPO salon for the elderly and the life of the elderly in Shimoichi, a South Osakan neighbourhood.

THE CATEGORY OF THE ELDERLY IN JAPAN

My interlocutors in the community salon in Shimoichi, most of whom were in their seventies and eighties, rarely mentioned their age in the course of their conversations. While some of my younger interlocutors, on the other hand - those in their late fifties and sixties – often joked about their age, saying that they were 'grannies' (*obaachan tachi*). For many Japanese, especially those lucky enough to be in good health in their seventies and eighties, 'being old' may be much less of an issue than 'becoming old'. One afternoon in early January, Okada san, a lively woman in her sixties with a strong presence who volunteered in the salon every week, arrived in the salon to make *zenzai*[42] for the next day. While preparing a large amount of this very sweet winter favourite for everyone to enjoy together, Okada san looked up at the lively group of older ladies chatting loudly in the salon and smiled warmly: 'I hope I won't become like them when I get old. Although, some people tell me already that I'm exactly like them: stubborn and loud.' She laughed and then, in a more serious manner, added: 'I sometimes think how hard the job of a home helper is, physically and emotionally. Old people just become selfish (*wagamama*). I guess we all become like that… I just hope that I won't become a burden, I don't want to get bedridden....' In short, Okada san's concern regarding becoming old is closely related to the idea of dependence and becoming a burden on others.

Despite the legal designation of elderly (*kōreisha*) as those above the age of 65, the precise age at which one is considered to be 'elderly' or 'old' is a contested issue. According to the White Paper on the Ageing Society (Cabinet Office 2009: 17-8) Japanese who were asked at what age is one to be considered 'elderly' (*kōreisha*) only 14% answered '65 and above', almost 47% answered '70 and above', almost 20% answered '75 and above' and 10% answered '80 and above'. When older Japanese were asked to state the age at which one is considered to be elderly in comparison to their own age, three out of four people in the age group 65-69 answered 'above my age', while 16,8 % of the age group of 70-74 thought it was below their age, and 43% of the same age group think it is their age, meaning that around 60% of the people in the age group of 70-74 thought that they were considered to be 'elderly'[43]. Interestingly, the survey included a question 'from what age do you think the elderly should be supported', to which 27% answered it should be over the age of 70, but almost 28% of all respondents answered that it should be above the age of 75, and 22% answered '80 and above'. When asked to compare their age to the age at which one should be regarded as an elderly that should be supported (*sasaerubeki kōreisha*), 83.6% of the age group 65-69 responded 'above my age', as well as more than a half of the 70-74 age group. It appears that respondents in their sixties, especially those just over the age of 65, contest the official designation and particularly the way it relates to an expectation of support and dependency, as echoed in Okada san's comment.

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[42] Red bean soup made with large amount of sugar, eaten as a sweet treat in winter.

[43] The most common term in official use for an elderly person is *kōreisha* (literally – a person of high, advanced age), and it has replaced the earlier term *rōjin* in official use, as a consequence of an effort by the administration to use more neutral terms (Traphagan 1998:346). In direct contact my informants preferred to use the surname of the person followed by –san, or in more informal situations *ojiichan/obaachan* (granddad/granny).

The association of old age with the right to be dependent on others lies at the core of the anxiety over 'becoming old'. According to Traphagan (2000:9-10) this is related to a tension between two distinct cultural norms that are both highly valued in Japanese society: the norm of filial piety and the right of older people to rely on their children for support, or to legitimately depend on others; and a norm not to inconvenience others or burden them. Traphagan stresses that the tension between these two norms in practice means that many older people resist the designation as elderly in order to avoid burdening others, rather than claiming the support to which they are legitimately entitled.

Given the importance of dependency and expectations of care and support for the construction of the category of the elderly in Japan, I will trace different attitudes to the elderly in various institutions and organizations for community care for the elderly and examine the ways in which they contribute to the construction of the elderly as dependent. I will begin by outlining the concept of community welfare and then describe various forms of support and care for the elderly available in Shimoichi. As mentioned in the Introduction, the majority of studies of older people in Japan have focused on the institutionalized elderly living in nursing facilities (e.g. Bethel 1992, Thang 2001, Wu 2004), or on occasion within their families (e.g. Brown 2003)[44]. As recent figures show, however, growing numbers of elderly live on their own or with their spouse, not in an institution nor within a three-generation household. I have chosen to focus in this thesis on older people living autonomously, partly in an attempt to fill in this gap, which gives rise to the question of how this relative autonomy is maintained. Part of the task of filling this gap is therefore describing the complex spectrum of semi-institutional networks of support in the neighbourhood, which complexify our understanding of the distinction between the state and civil society, especially in the context of welfare provision, while also contributing to our broader understanding of how autonomy emerges in situations of dependency.

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[44] A notable exception to this trend is Traphagan's nuanced and detailed study of older people's involvement in rituals (2004), conducted in rural Japan.

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY WELFARE

The English term ‘community welfare’ is often paired with social work and seems to point to the welfare services provided to a community’s residents. The relevant literature in Japanese emphasizes that the concept of community welfare is not easily distinguished from social welfare in general, but it is worth noting that some authors stress that community welfare is not merely a sub-field of social welfare (e.g. Tsuneji et al. 1996: 2). Similarly, Kaneko (1993) describes community welfare as a special kind of exchange of social resources in the community. He distinguishes between four ways in which community welfare is delivered and developed: through public services; through cooperative services; through commercial services; and self-help and cooperation between citizens. While public services are sponsored by state or municipal bodies, cooperative services are sponsored directly by people in the community (Kaneko 1993: 7). Tsuneji and colleagues (1996: 179-187) mention two kinds of actors involved in community welfare: officials or staff (including home helpers and officials of the Council of Social Welfare) and citizens (including volunteers, people taking part in the in-home services and volunteer social workers or *minseiiin*). All of these groups are in various ways linked to local authorities, informal networks and NPOs in the area and all these form a complex network of actors concerned or participating broadly in ‘community welfare’ and services for the elderly. According to Furukawa (see Figure 3.1), providers of social welfare can be divided into the ‘public welfare sector, the voluntary welfare sector, the informal sector and the market welfare organization’ (2008:186). Shimoichi salon is an NPO, which has strong links to other voluntary organizations in the area, and a continuing contact with the local government, while Awara salon is run by a non-incorporated voluntary citizen group established at the initiative of the local government who provided the space and the resources.

According to the Japan National Council of Social Welfare (*Zenkoku Shakai Fukushi Kyōgikai*), ‘community welfare’ refers to a particular way of thinking or an approach to solving welfare problems in the local community through the cooperation of citizens, the private and public sectors and social welfare officials, ensuring the feeling of security for people in the local community. This cooperation is envisaged in the Social Welfare Law (*Shakai Fukushi Hō*). The Councils of Social Welfare throughout the country have so far established the following activities: looking out for people in need of help, establishing communication with them, promoting community-based practices such as home-help services based on citizen participation *(jūmin sanka gata no homu-herpa sabisu*), transportation services, meal delivery service and home welfare services and volunteer activities, and more recently the so called salon activities for the elderly and the volunteers (*Zenkoku Shakai Fukushi Kyōgikai* 2005).

Public welfare sector	Publicly established and managed welfare services and licenced body welfare services
Voluntary welfare sector	NGO's and organizations that may be subsidized by government or financed by citizens
Informal sector	Support networks made up of friends and comissioned welfare volunteers (minseiiin); includes volunteering activities carried out on individual basis
Market-based welfare sector	Enterprises licenced by the government as aid providers or contractors: they deliver, on a commercial basis, livelihood support services such as bathing, meal deliveries or home-help

Figure 3.1. Social welfare providers in Japan (Adapted from Furukawa 2008:187). For a more detailed version of this diagram see Appendix 3.1.

Ogawa and Retherford (1997) argue that the social security system in Japan is increasingly straining under the pressures of population aging, which has led the government to attempt to shift some of this burden back to families (1997:59) and local communities. The Japanese welfare system in general (the so-called ‘Japanese-style welfare state’) has been characterised by relatively low levels of state spending and high reliance on the family and community and corporations for welfare provision (Campbell 2002; Goodman 2008), This Japanese welfare model did not place emphasis on provision through state institutions but rather through publicly funded and regulated private institutions (Watanuki 1986:265). It has been noted that the growth in local citizens groups, NPOs and volunteering associated with regional decentralization was part of a policy shifting responsibility for support to local communities as a way of cutting costs (Peng

2005:90-1; Goodman 2008:102). The LCTI[45] system described in Chapter 2 has led to an expansion of welfare service providers and led to a change in the provision of support for the elderly in the community. This has, for instance, caused a split between those NPOs that chose to provide home helper services supported by the LCTI, which required certification of helpers and assessment of needs of the receivers; and those that continued to provide more informal helper services. Recently, as discussed in Chapter 4, the second group has been reporting problems with finding volunteers, whose remuneration is much lower than under the LCTI. It is possible that as the ability of families to care for the frail declines (see Raymo and Kaneda 2003:27), the expectations placed on community welfare will continue to rise[46]. The Ministry Health, Labour and Welfare (2002) issued guidelines for the support of community welfare with appeals to individual local residents, in which they emphasized the importance of creating community support and renewing community ties. They are trying to appeal to local residents - until now social welfare mostly referred to benefits and social hand-outs to the needy, but from now on there will be stress on personal dignity, equality and a notion of community for all citizens. The cooperation and participation of the citizens will be important. Instead of focusing solely on welfare in its negative (merely palliative) sense, the focus should be on revitalizing local communities. Similar statements have been made by the Ministry of Education and MOHLW in relation to volunteering, referring to the individual efforts of volunteers resulting in communal benefits, including help to deal with the aging society and the creation of rich and warm local communities (Avenell 2010:80). Interestingly, this discourse draws on the change in the local communities and the need to revitalize them and make them less impersonal: in other words, it concerns the reactivation of community ties. At the same time this approach seems both novel and reaching out towards the ‘traditional’.

Several decades ago, according to Bestor's detailed account of a Tokyo neighbourhood in the 1980s, a similar tension could be discerned in discourses in the community, where narratives of tradition were used to legitimize contemporary social relations and to provide a sense of continuity (Bestor 1989:4). The neighbourhood association (*chonaikai* or *chokai*) and associated institutions were concerned with the provision of social welfare, such as support for the elderly and mutual assistance, but in practice its actions were focused more on the promotion of social welfare and recreational activities, while the aforementioned functions were effectively fulfilled by individuals in the neighbourhood and not by formal institutions (ibid.:156-7). The question arises: how much has this changed? The invocation of traditional values such as community seems still to be present, possibly with the addition of a discourse of self-realization that some institutions often use in relation to volunteering (Avenell 2010: 80). It is tempting to argue that since volunteers provide many of the welfare services mentioned by Bestor, this aspect is also largely unchanged, being both in the sphere of interest and responsibility of the local authorities and provided by the people themselves. Nevertheless, this neat picture is complicated by many different kinds of actors involved in the provision of welfare services, including the not-for-profit organizations that coordinate the volunteer’s efforts, which then cannot just be considered individual actions.

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[45] On the other hand, it has been noted that LCTI provides a move away from family-based welfare provision for the elderly as the provision is envisaged as a right rather than based on means-testing, where it could depend on the absence of other sources of support, including the family (see Peng 2005:84; Goodman 2008:103).

[46] Indeed, the discourse of community care is linked to the development of the Japanese-style welfare state – for instance, some of the concepts employed in the discourse promoting Japanese-style welfare encourage ‘self-reliance’ and ‘mutual support’ (Goodman 2002:23).

In general, it is difficult and problematic to draw a clear distinction between the state and civil society. According to Garon, while it is common to hear about the autonomous development of 'volunteerism' in Japan in the 1990s, it is important to remember that the Ministry of Health and Welfare made efforts to recruit community volunteers in the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s and 1990s to support the growing numbers of elderly. Many of today's more than 5 million registered volunteers are members of older neighbourhood associations with links to the local authorities (Garon 2003: 61). It therefore seems that it would not be fruitful to consider community welfare in dual terms, as comprising state on the other hand and those belonging to the voluntary sector, on the other.

I would like to argue that community welfare in Osaka would be better understood as a complex, multi-layered network, including different kinds of actors (see Figure 3.2. and Appendix 3.2). This is somewhat different to Ben-Ari's model of community welfare, discussed earlier, which places its main institutions (voluntary welfare workers and the senior associations) between state and informal networks, describing this as 'interstitial existence’. While usefully pointing to the complex relationship between these entities, this model neglects the distinctions within all three fields. Firstly it elide the distinctions between various kinds of volunteers, ranging from those directly appointed by local authorities to the more grass-roots volunteer organizations which still cannot be considered as part of informal networks of friends and family. Secondly, as a consequence of recent Long-Tem-Care Insurance legislation, large numbers of private businesses have become involved in community welfare provision. While the provision of social care by private institutions funded by public institutions (as a part of the *sochi-seido* system; cf. Goodman 2008:96) is not new in Japan, and while they must be approved by the government and do receive large sums of the funding through the Long-Term Care Insurance, they cannot be entirely conflated with the State, as the logic and practice of these businesses is quite distinct. Finally, all these various actors relate to the elderly in different ways, and contribute to different understandings and images of the elderly. These different images contributing to the constructed category of the elderly will be examined in relation to these multiple actors in the Ward.

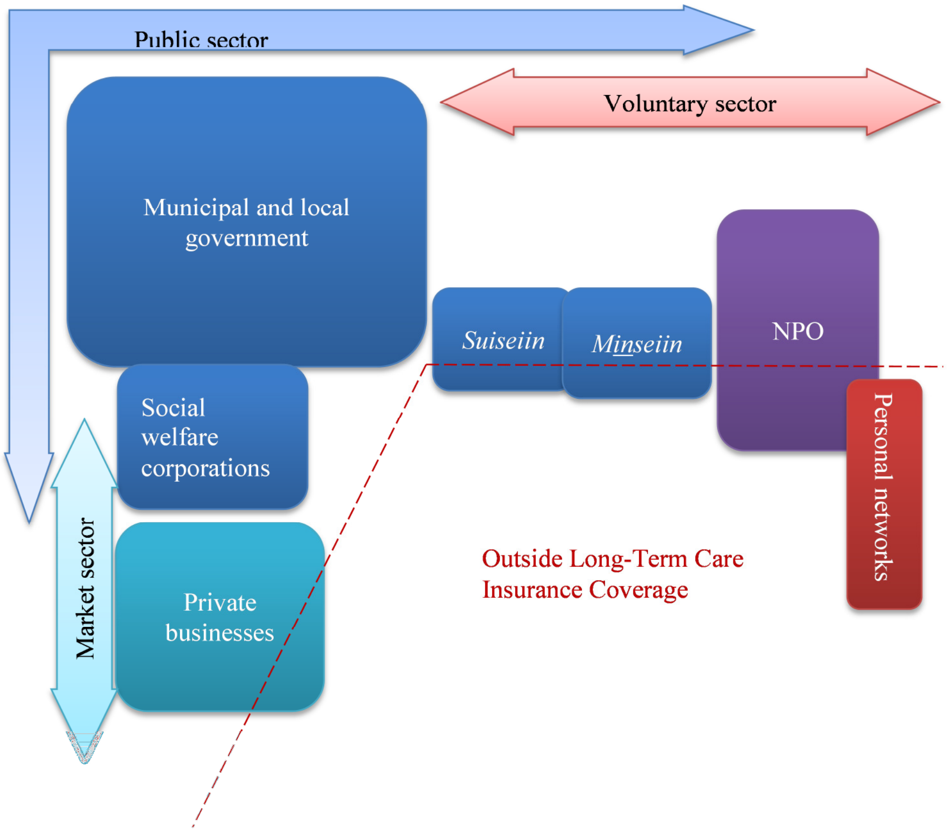
Public sector
Voluntary sector
Municipal and local government
Suiseiin
Minseiin
NPO
Social welfare corporations
Market sector
Private businesses
Outside Long-Term Care Insurance Coverage
Personal networks

Figure 3.2. Community welfare providers. For a more detailed version see Appendix 3.2.

MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY WELFARE COMMISSIONERS

The local government office that every adult inhabitant of Shimoichi is probably most familiar with is *Kuyakusho*, or the Ward Office, a branch of the municipal government (Osaka City Hall or Osaka *Shiyakusho*). Both the Ward Office and the City Hall information brochures refer to two main fields of services for the elderly: healthcare (including Long-Term Care Insurance and welfare - such as housings subsidies and benefits for the elderly, senior citizens free pass for public transport within the city for elderly above the age of 70, contact details of each 'neighbourhood network promotion officer' discussed further below) and other services such as counselling, senior careers services and promotion of well-being or *ikigai* through participation in old-people's clubs, silver volunteer centres, and life-long learning).

A number of services are offered for elderly people living at home through the Ward Health Centres, such as the installation of automatic fire extinguishing systems for people over the age of 65, fire alarms or emergency alarm services. These systems inform the cooperating members (neighbours who agreed to participate in the scheme), but according to some accounts in the local Council of Social Welfare, the number of cooperating members in the area has declined and is insufficient. Other services include the provision of the equipment for home care of elderly and subsidies for the renovation or adaptation of the residences of the elderly people. Most of these depend on the status of the elderly in the Long-Term insurance scheme. Other services provided by the Ward's Home Services Center (*jūtaku sabisu senta-*) include hairdresser's visits for the elderly who have difficulties with mobility, two types of food service (the daily delivery type and 'fureai' or get-together type, which I discuss in more detail below), the bedding dry-cleaning service, rubbish disposal service for the elderly with problems with mobility and a search service for wandering people with dementia. Furthermore, the City and the Ward offer some of the housing options for the elderly such as housing with elderly-care (for independent elderly who feel uneasy about living on their own) and welfare housing, available for elderly above the age of 60.

Another important service is offered at a relatively small fee by Osaka City Social Welfare Council under the name '*anshin*' support, the term referring to the peace of mind of the users, a sense of security and relief. This service is aimed at elderly people with senile dementia or mental disabilities, or the elderly living alone who feel uneasy about the managing their money. After registering and signing the contract, a personal plan of use is drawn up and one can begin using the service. It comprises support for using the welfare services, including information and help with registration and contracts; money management services, such as accessing bank accounts, payment of rent, communal fees and fees for welfare and health services; bank-book and important documents loss and a robbery prevention service.

The local government works closely with appointed volunteers, or so called 'community welfare commissioners' (*minseiiin*), and relies heavily on their service (there are more than ten times more welfare commissioners than social workers[47] (*shakai fukushi shuji*) who are paid employees of the local government (Goodman 2008:98). Community welfare commissioners do not need to be certified social welfare specialists but their role requires that they know the area and its inhabitants well and they are usually local citizens. The Law defines community welfare commissioners as people who have a sense of community service, who always endeavour to promote community welfare, providing advice to citizens and necessary assistance and cooperating with the work of relevant administrative organizations such as the welfare office (Commissioned Welfare Volunteers Act, Article 1). They are appointed for three years, with the possibility of reappointment, and without a salary (Commissioned Welfare Volunteers Act, Article 10). The overall number of commissioners in 2008 was 232,092 (Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare 2012a). The duties of the welfare commissioner are to maintain an appropriate understanding of the living conditions of the residents, to provide assistance and advice, to provide information necessary for use of appropriate welfare services, cooperating with social services, welfare offices and other relevant administrative organs and any other activities with an aim to promote the welfare of residents (Commissioned Welfare Volunteers Act, Article 14). In practice, welfare commissioners dealt with issues related to the elderly in 54,2% of the cases, with issues related to raising children in 19,9% of the cases, and in 6,7% of the cases with issues related to people with disabilities (Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare 2012b). The *minseiiin* system is a direct continuation of the pre-War system known as *homeiin*, comprising locally based volunteers in each neighbourhood, responsible for some 200 households. Their duty was to counsel the poor and support those in need (often from their own resources), and the system played an important role in maintaining social control. The name was changed after the World War II in order to move away from this latter function, and the *minseiiin* were supposed to act from positions of equality with those whom they supported (Goodman 1998: 143), though the role of a *minseiiin* was nevertheless still associated with a rather high status.

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[47] Majority of these bureaucrats in charge of welfare issues are not trained in social policy or welfare (Goodman 2008:99).

At the time of my fieldwork in Shimoichi, it seemed that the visibility of *minseiiin* was rather low, and very few of my interlocutors knew who the commissioner in their area was. As the local Welfare Commissioners Council has relative organizational freedom, not all councils operate in the same way or with the same efficiency. The Head of the local Welfare Commissioners Council is 73 and has a fairly laissez-faire approach, according to one *minseiiin* in the area. There is little guidance or structure and this has led to a minimalist approach among the commissioners. Another problem faced by welfare commissioners is the increasing number of the elderly in the area as the population ages (24% of the population of this ward is above the age of 65, and over 50 people are above the age of 100). As a consequence, according to the Head of the Welfare Commissioners Council, the welfare commissioners (*minseiiin*) face difficulties in tracking detailed information of all the elderly in their area. A new scheme has been introduced by the Welfare Commissioners Council in the Ward to tackle this issue: a programme based on distribution of emergency kits to the elderly in the area. The kits consist of a plastic tube with a lid into which a detailed form with emergency contact and health history is inserted and kept in the refrigerator, it being an easy place to locate in the household in case of emergency. The aim is to distribute it to all residents above the age of 70, who would place a sticker with the logo on their entrance door as a sign of participation in the scheme. The introduction of the programme was greeted with enthusiasm in the local media and commissioners in the other wards seem to be interested in taking it up. Another new programme was introduced recently by the local government which creates a paid position whose role is much like the community welfare commissioner: community network promotion officers (*chiiki netowaku suishinin*). Nevertheless, this should not necessarily be taken to imply a professionalization of community welfare provision, as the promotion officers are not required to have professional training or certificates, but do need to know the area and provide a bridge between the local administration and the inhabitants of the area. This emphasis on the local provision of welfare as the actors involved are from the area themselves (*minseeiiin, chiiki netowaku suishinin* and many of the volunteers in the NPOs) has been noted as a characteristic of the Japanese welfare system (Goodman 2008:98).

'I AM LIKE AN INFORMATION DESK FOR EVERYTHING'[48]: COMMUNITY NETWORK PROMOTION OFFICERS

Takano san is in her early sixties and has a broad smile and lively manner, and has been working as a community network promotion officer for 5 years out of the 15 the position has existed in her neighbourhood. Noguchi san is a talkative but soft-spoken lady in her late sixties, who has held the position in her neighbourhood for last 7 years. I asked them both about their work, and Takano san explained the following, while Noguchi san nodded with approval:

> Our job is to look out for people in the neighbourhood, supporting health and positive participation in society, so that people wouldn't get isolated or withdrawn, encouraging them to get out but also visiting their places. We need to encourage conversation and the creation of a community in the neighbourhood, which makes it easier to locate and discover those in need of help, due to physical difficulties or mental problems such as dementia. We provide advice about connections to various services such as home-helpers, check the conditions for care insurance, the creation of such connections is the main part of our job.

Takano san then added that she felt that their job with the network council (*netowaaku iinkai*) was created because the local administration doesn't know much about detailed living conditions of the people living in the neighbourhood, so they transfer the responsibility for looking out for the inhabitants to the welfare network promotion officers in each neighbourhood or subsection of the Ward. The position was created by the city out of concern for the growing number of elderly causing pressure on the local community, at the same time as communication and links within the community were perceived as weakening.

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[48] Jap. *nandemo sōdan madoguchi*

Certain aspects of the work of community welfare commissioners and community network promotion officers are very similar, involving visiting the elderly and others in need of support, such as single parents. The chief difference, apart from the feeling of responsibility emphasized by Takano-san and Noguchi-san, seems to concern working hours. The promotion officers are supposed to be working on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4p.m., but often work longer and start earlier, to accommodate their elderly clients. They find it difficult not to help the elderly directly but explain that the home helpers should be able to help them, and restrict themselves to putting the elderly in contact with relevant services. Some of the services involve local volunteers, such as the group of retired men who help with the small tasks in the households such as fixing taps or changing light bulbs, while others involve calling in specialists to refurbish homes of the elderly, to make them more accessible, funded by the local authorities. In all these cases, the promotion officers are supposed to be present, so that elderly people can interact with someone they already know and do not have to feel unsafe about letting strangers into their homes. The range of these task seemed so vast that the network promotion officers were working overtime on most days.

Like many other individual participants in community welfare organizations, both Takano san and Noguchi san had been engaged in different community welfare organization activities over the years. After her predecessor had left, Takano san was asked if she would like to take up the paid position of network promotion officer after having participated actively in various voluntary activities for many years, such as engagement in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), a local neighbourhood association (*chokai*), helping in a local community salon-café and a food service for the elderly. As the community network promotion officer is a paid position, I was surprised to hear that she at first turned it down. Takano san felt that if she receives a payment, a salary, the responsibility is also much larger. Finally she agreed and took up the post, since the content of the job was similar to what she was already doing. Interestingly, her predecessor, who was widely respected in the community, acquired various certifications and established a care centre, thus moving within the larger field of community welfare, between quite different sectors: from civil service towards private business.

Noguchi-san's story resembles that of others in this respect, since she was also asked to take up the job as a person of considerable experience with community welfare work, having held the position of community welfare commissioner (*minseiin)* for fifteen years. Her predecessor had to retire, having reached the age of 75, the age limit set for network promotion officers in the neighbourhood. Her experience was different from the younger Takano-san, who fit into her new job with ease and enthusiasm - Noguchi-san was struggling, having taken up the position without much previous knowledge of what it involved. With little introduction from her predecessor and working within the context of a somewhat less organized neighbourhood network council, she started by volunteering in different places in the area and found out little by little what the relevant organizations and institutions were. She realized that the local food service for the elderly did not organize any entertainment, and so initiated an arts and crafts programme, which she mostly organizes herself. My feeling was that this was the main source of her pride and self-satisfaction and comprised a large part of her efforts, which illustrated the fact that the organization in different neighbourhoods is very different. As the heads of the community network in the neighbourhood are given much freedom in the way they organize the activities in their neighbourhood, some neighbourhoods have a range of monthly and weekly events while in others there is little structure to the activities. This was later confirmed by Noguchi san, when she mentioned that her neighbourhood, having a very old head of the neighbourhood association, was relatively weakly organized.

'PUT THE KETTLE ON, THEY'RE COMING!': THE FOOD SERVICE FOR THE ELDERLY[49]

It was a bright but cold and windy morning in November when I arrived in the neighbourhood. The Meeting Hall where I was headed was usually used for a number of neighbourhood services, including meetings for mothers with small children and the like. Surrounded by blocks of high-rise flats, many exceeding 15 floors, the hall felt small and pleasant, and would have seemed even more inviting if it were not surrounded by high wire fence. The park and the playground of the neighbouring elementary school and the low, large building of the local swimming pool made the space seem quite open by cramped Japanese standards. Behind the several high-rise *manshions* to the right ran the central artery of the neighbourhood, crammed with shops and businesses, as well as the subway and tram stations. The rest of the neighbourhood was unusually quiet, compared to the hustle and bustle of the central area. In the opposite direction, behind several more large residential buildings, lay an expanse of small streets lined with family houses.

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[49] Jap. *kōreisha shokuji sabisu*.

Every other Tuesday, a food service for the elderly is organized here by local volunteers. At around ten thirty in the morning, the door to the hall was unlocked by the first volunteer to arrive. The preparations began as the other volunteers started trickling in. Personal items such as coats and handbags were stored away in the closet and shoes were left at the entrance. The floor in the spacious main hall was swept, the tables and chairs piled up in the corners, arranged in such a way so that six to eight people could be seated together. In the kitchen the water was boiled and seaweed stock made for miso soup, the bowls prepared for the desert of sliced persimmon. Particular attention was paid to arranging slices of similar size, with an explanation that everyone must be treated in the same way, otherwise someone might complain. Around 15 volunteers wearing matching aprons and white headscarves rushed around making preparations. Two staffed the reception desk at the entrance, where the elderly people who registered for the meal would pay the fee of 500 yen. The list on the kitchen wall stated who was responsible for each week's food service, and most names occurred only once on the year-long schedule. All the volunteers were female and middle-aged, their ages ranging from forties until well into the sixties. The atmosphere among the women was pleasant, cheerful but efficient. At last the delivery of main dishes arrived from a nearby sushi restaurant in usual box lunch form with disposable chopsticks.

Finally, the elderly started arriving, all above the age of 70 (the minimum age is defined differently in every neighbourhood and varies between 70 and 75), but all of them unassisted. The information about the number of people was sent to the kitchen and steaming green tea was brought out as soon as they chose a place to sit. Groups assembled and some of the visitors were greeting their acquaintances. Very few did not seem to know anyone and they sat down wherever there was a free space. At some tables, especially mixed ones, the conversation was lively. After a few words of official greetings the food was brought out, followed by dessert and hot drinks - green tea, black tea or coffee. The volunteers commented on the speed with which the food disappeared, but did not make an effort to encourage people to stay longer to socialize, and, in fact, started cleaning up before most people seemed to have finished. Promptly, the empty cups were collected and washed, and within half an hour the room was empty and swept, tables and chairs neatly arranged in the corner. With an air of mild relief volunteers sat down to have their lunch, for which they were expected to pay. In the course of the conversation it transpired that most of them are housewives who live in the area, or they recently retired, but some worked part-time (for instance one worked as a care-worker in a day-care facility, and another was a home helper who obtained an official certificate after initially looking after her frail mother).

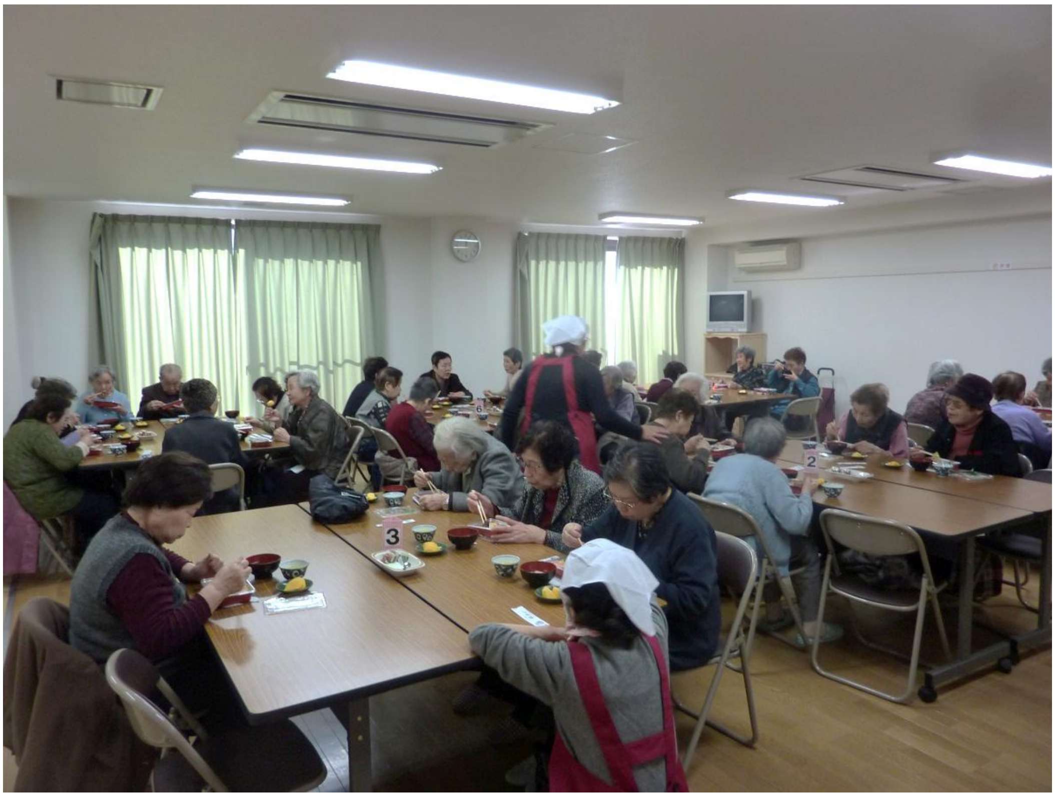

Figure 3.3. The food service for the elderly.

As I participated in the preparations, serving food and cleaning with the other volunteers, I noticed that the atmosphere was busy, even slightly rushed, but at the same time, an effort was made to pay attention to detail: to the way the chairs were arranged, the way the tables were wiped, the way the aprons were worn and tied at the back, the way the tea was served, the way the fruit was arranged on the plates, the way individual grains of sticky rice were picked up from the hall floor before sweeping. I quickly learned that everything needed to be done in a particular way, that is, ‘properly’ (*chanto*). At one stage I had the impression that people were almost seeking to making a kind of statement to the other participants, to the effect that they were indeed keeping busy and doing their best. At some points the organization seemed inefficient, causing tensions among volunteers, and much effort was invested into maintaining a serious appearance. As a consequence, despite the large numbers of volunteers involved, there was little time for conversation and contact with the elderly. They were referred to as *okyakusan* - the guests, or the customers. They included around 35 people (over the age of 70) out of some 1200 elderly living in the area (above the age of 65, around 22% of the local population). The volunteers explained that they get involved only once in a while, in most cases once a year, since the rotation includes many of the women living in the area. As a consequence, the volunteers did not know the guests and were mostly unable to engage with them in a personal manner. The socializing was therefore almost entirely segregated: the elderly were supposed to interact with each other, without much chance of meaningful communication across the generations.

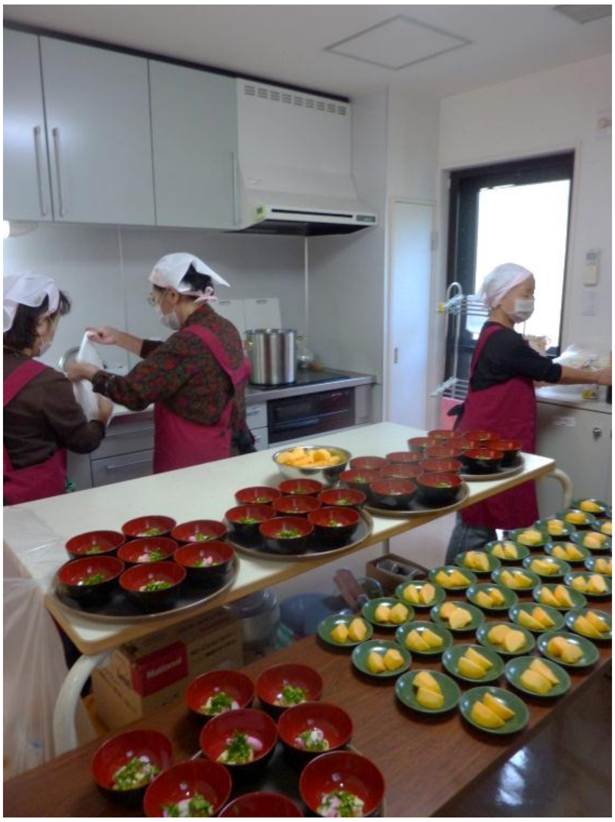

Figure 3.4. Preparations for the food service for the elderly - doing things ‘properly’.

While the volunteers in other settings would include a certain proportion of men, even if small, in this case the volunteers were exclusively female. The institution is one of the older ones, and more directly related to the neighbourhood associations that have a long history in Japanese neighbourhoods, even if their form has changed somewhat since pre-war times. Other activities in the neighbourhood were likely to be organized in a similar way, but for the benefit of a different group, such as children. The participation of the volunteers, and the way they spoke about it, in terms of obligation and involvement in the community, implied a stronger link to the neighbourhood, and an emphasis on community ties, rather than any direct focus on the elderly. Significantly, as in many other contexts, some of which are discussed in more detail below (see Chapter 5), there was considerable importance placed on 'doing things properly' (*chanto suru*), doing them the way they should be done. In this context, doing things properly was closely related to the perceptions of others: of making an effort to participate in a communal activity, of doing one's part and what was expected, of making an appropriate effort to show that one is indeed involved, respectful and concerned for others. This was noticeable in the volunteers great care to arrive punctually, dressed in an appropriate outfit (being dressed for the part seems important in a variety of contexts in Japan, from working in the department store to jogging in the park), serving and tidying.

Of the many questions that emerge from this description, I wish now to address the following: what kind of image of the 'elderly' is under construction, and what do the elderly themselves think of events of this kind? Recall that the elderly here are defined as those over 70, and at times considerably older. As one of the employees of the Social Welfare Council implied, the reason for this was essentially practical: to set the lower age limit in such a way that the group of people invited would not be too large. But she also suggested it was because the older people whose peers were now either immobile or deceased needed an opportunity to socialize. The kind of older person targeted was thus older though still mobile and in need of company. The treatment of the elderly was always respectful, efforts were made to prepare everything in the right way, such that everyone would be greeted properly and served tea at arrival, and the interaction was restricted to this formalized level, largely due to the large scale of the event, limited time and infrequent meetings. In some areas the lunch service was followed by some form of entertainment programme, presumably with the idea of engaging the elderly more actively. Both the lack of engagement and the structured involvement caused mixed reactions among the elderly I knew well, who in some cases complained about the formality and strictness of the proceedings. For instance, Nakano san frowned with disapproval while explaining to me that at every one of these events one's attendance is recorded at the beginning. She found it inappropriate and 'strict', so she decided to stop attending. Others welcomed the opportunity to socialize and fill their time with various activities, and had quite a busy schedule. The elderly who knew many other people seemed to have a good time socializing and kept ordering additional cups of tea for their acquaintances and chatting vigorously. The ladies made sure that all the men, of whom there were far fewer, were comfortable and in lively company. On the other hand, several elderly ladies who didn't seem to know anyone shared a few tables around the edges and did not socialize much among each other, leaving promptly after they finished their meal. It is likely that this event provided a welcome space for many elderly to socialize, and yet those who might have been most in need of company remained quite isolated.

THE BUSINESS OF CARE: A DAY IN A DAY-CARE CENTRE FOR THE ELDERLY

Sato san is 78, and lives with her daughter. This is how a typical day in the Pleasant Day centre, a private day-care centre, begins for her, much as it begins for all the others. First thing in the morning, around 9 am, Sato san is picked up from her house by one of the small vehicles owned by the Pleasant Day company. Others choose to come on their own, either on foot if they live nearby, or by bus, but they are in a small minority. As soon as Sato san arrives, she puts on her white canvas shoes, remarkably similar to school slippers. Soon thereafter she is seated in her usual place, marked discreetly on a layout on a little magnetic board in the far corner of the room for the benefit of the carers. To the right of the entrance is a desk and a staff area, and further to the right is an enclosed kitchen, in which the cook prepares all the meals. A couple of sinks are next to the kitchen counter . The main space is taken up by two large tables, eating seating ten people. To the left of the entrance is a desk and a space for the nurse, and behind it a small, enclosed, empty room with a bed, should someone start feeling weak or tired, as well as the entrance to the accessible toilet. The door in the far left corner leads to a bathroom. Soon everyone will be led one by one to have a bath and have their hair washed and dried, first women and then men, of whom there are significantly fewer - just four out of twenty.

Today, everyone is invited to colour an illustration for this month's calendar, which depicts a young girl in a kimono. The drawing resembles children's colouring books. Sato san is sitting quietly and not painting, so a young female staff member encourages her to participate by asking if she needs a particular colouring pencil. She suggests a few colours, and makes joking remarks to others, encouraging everyone to get involved. Two ladies become engaged in a lively conversation over a cup of tea and stop painting, but resume colouring when the staff approach the table. The staff prepare the colouring sheets themselves, as well as collages, paper folding and other tasks. All the crafts, such as colourings, collages or origami, are prepared by the staff after hours, and they speak about it with enthusiasm and pride. At around this time the nurse begins bringing brings people one by one for a simple health check, enquiring into how they feel, measuring blood pressure and offering a simple massage of the upper back, neck, shoulders, and hands. On the days when I visited, no health complaints were registered.

After the colouring time is over, everybody's work is either packed in their personal transparent folder bag to take home, or filed away with unfinished projects in a folder bearing their name, so they can finish it later if they wish. Everyone has now finished their bath and tea and the exercise is about to commence. A lively young man with a kind smile initiates a series of gentle sitting exercises. Some people at the furthest part of the table have difficulties hearing him, and one of the ladies gets up impatiently and declares she will go home. She is gently relocated to a closer spot where she can hear better and settles down quickly. After the exercise, everyone's hands are sprayed with disinfectant, and lunch is brought out, consisting of minced meat steak, vegetables, soup and fruit. The cook marks each tray with a name and prepares meals according to the tastes of the elderly, and in line with personalized health indications. As the trays are collected, the quantities of food eaten and any other comments are duly noted in a special form by one of the staff. The note taking is extensive, and the nurse writes a short report of everybody's health for their families, and a little note about what they ate and did that day is placed in their personal transparent bag that they will take home with them. The entire staff area is full of colourful folders and young staff members filling in their portions of forms and arranging schedules. At the same time, after a coffee break with free time, the elderly are once again invited for an afternoon exercise and games. Everyone who is feeling well enough participates in simplified indoor version of gateball[50], and each participant is encouraged with loud applause and cheering. After the exercise is finished, everyone gradually makes their way home for the evening, most dropped off in the small van. The nurse leaves around four in the afternoon, and the young carers stay on to finish various tasks and preparations for the following day.

Figure 3.5. Exercise at the Day Care Centre.

Most of the staff are very young and energetic, but subtle and kind. Just a couple of the female members of the staff are middle-aged, including the nurse, and they leave relatively early, to look after their own families, as they explained. A good acquaintance of mine, Murata san, who used to work in the Pleasant Day Care Centre, told me that even though the work was rewarding, it was extremely exhausting emotionally. One had always to be focused and careful, and the responsibility was high. Furthermore, one always had to be attentive and in good spirits. He found it too difficult after a while and resigned from the job several months before I visited the Centre to focus on volunteering in his own neighbourhood. Murata san believed it was a difficult job in the long term, being demanding but not very well paid, and it would be difficult to support a family with a carer salary. Many members of staff were therefore new and very young, and the young female professional in charge of the organization within the centre was also new to the job, with less than a year's experience, though very warm and enthusiastic.

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[50] A popular team sport similar to croquet.

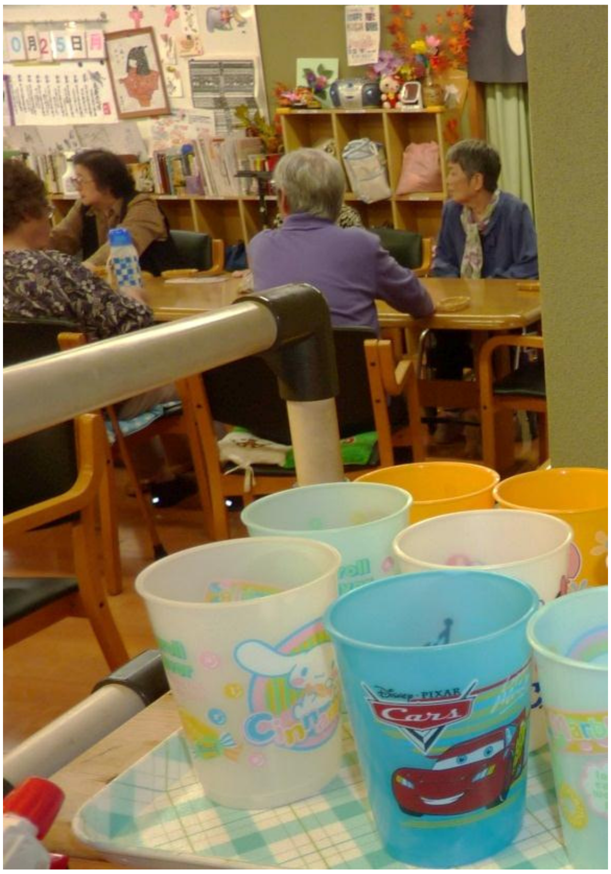

Figure 3.6. Water cups at the Day-Care Centre.

Compared to other settings, including the Salon, the elderly here were slightly more frail, and a couple had mental health problems and could not be left on their own. Though the ages varied between 70 and 90, over half were in good health, and seemed alert and cheerful. While warm and generally pleasant, the atmosphere at times resembled a kindergarten. Because the time was so carefully structured, the elderly were often being told what to do; the tasks designed to be inclusive were at times very simple and perhaps slightly demeaning for the healthier ones, yet everyone was encouraged to participate to the best of their abilities. I was struck by the contrast to the atmosphere in the salon, where the elderly were treated with full adult respect and as active, independent agents. While the care and protection seemed necessary for some of the frailer elderly in the Centre, the focus on inclusion and participation regardless of difficulties, physical or mental, seemed to create a more patronizing attitude. The fact that some of the most independent elderly were frequenting the Centre only once a week seemed to indicate that they were perhaps at least as interested in the assistance with bathing and the health check-up, as in the socializing aspect of it.

'EVEN ELDERLY CAN HELP': COUNCIL OF SOCIAL WELFARE

I entered a brightly lit, well-heated meeting room, with tables and chairs in three neat rows. My eyes met several rows of smiling and lively women in their late 60s, and a stately silver-haired lady in her 80s stood out in the first row. Three men, all of whom seemed recently retired, sporting smart outfits, were sitting scattered around the room. The meeting was for people hoping to start community volunteering, who – as they put it – would like to give a little help, 'chotto tasukeai', in the neighbourhood. The meeting was opened by one of the employees of the Council of Social Welfare (*Shakai Fukushi Kyogikai* or *Shakyo*), who explained that the topic of the first seminar in the series was 'the necessity of (mutual) help among the members of the community'. Whereas contacts in the community were taken for granted in the past, this is no longer the case; and while there are various services available for the elderly in the neighbourhood, one cannot live just using the services. Furthermore, she explained, the reforms in the Long-Term Care Insurance system will make it more difficult to use, so we should be thinking about how people can help each other a bit. She concluded by introducing a guest speaker.

The speaker, a professor from one of the universities in Kansai region, herself in her sixties, spoke a warm and friendly-sounding Osaka dialect and, smiling encouragingly, began her lecture. She asked how many of the members of the audience lived in a three generation household (consisting of children, parents and grand-parents) or even a two-generation household, and only a handful raised their hands. The show of hands confirmed that a majority lived on their own or with their partner, as is increasingly the case in Osaka in general, the professor continued, as statistical data shows. She argued firmly that for most people over the age of, say, 85, even if they are healthy, daily tasks start becoming more difficult, and when thinking about that stage, elderly have basically just three options. The first is to move in with one's children, even if it isn't in the same area, but that should be done much earlier so one can make new friends and find new places to which one wants to go, and when one becomes frail, it is too late. The second is to move into a facility for the elderly, preferably in the neighbourhood in which one already lives, but that can involve a number of problems, not least of which is the financial burden. The third way of thinking is something like this: 'well, I have been involved in community support and have volunteered, so perhaps someone will help me and I can continue living in the neighbourhood I am familiar with.'

Building on this view, the professor argued that support within the neighbourhood is not just some distant general problem, but an immediate concern for everyone. Even before one needs medical care, while healthy, one can start feeling uneasy and isolated, the world of an elderly person can shrink. Many elderly do not want to live with their children, but instead want to live on their own terms, to do what they feel like, especially while in good health in their sixties and seventies. It is therefore important to be proactive, to do something oneself, to increase the numbers of the people one knows and to get involved. ‘Even elderly can help (*kōreisha demo tasukeai dekiru*),’ the Professor argued encouragingly and compellingly. Many nodded their heads in approval.

This seminar was my first encounter with the activities of Shakyo, or the Council of Social Welfare, in the South Osakan Ward. The promotion of social welfare is one of its activities in the area, which taken together aim at making a ‘lively community’. The activities of the Council could be divided into three main categories - cooperation with various welfare actors, promotion of social welfare, and aid and support for members of the community. Cooperation with other community welfare actors includes professional support for the welfare institutions in the Ward, support for the neighbourhood Councils of Social Welfare, administration of the Volunteer Bureau and the welfare goodwill-bank, as well as the ‘loving visit campaign’, a programme sponsored by Yakult, a probiotic producer (volunteer based free deliveries of Yakult produce to people living alone above the age of 85 three times a week), and the management of the activities related to the respect for the aged day. The promotion of social welfare is achieved through the distribution of community newsletters, the organization of workshops and the promotion of welfare education in schools. Finally, the aid and support of the members of the community ranges from providing advice and information about the social services and support available in the community (including a long-time insurance advisor and care manager for the elderly), to wheelchair lending, wheelchair-adapted car lending, a futon cleaning service for the residents of the ward over the age of 65, to the '*anshin*' (peace of mind) support service mentioned above.

It is interesting to note that even though the leaflet advertising the seminar, with the titles of all the lectures in the series, did not mention the elderly at all, issues related to the elderly entirely dominated the lecture and the discussion, and all the following seminars in the series. The Japanese term in the title - *tasukeai*, however, referred not just to helping, but also to mutual aid or cooperation, a concept discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. While I can imagine that in different circumstances the focus of such a workshop on mutual support in the community could have been on working women, education or children, aging and support for the elderly seemed to be such an obvious concern that it did not even need to be emphasized in the leaflet or singled out in the introductory speeches. In a neighbourhood where almost one quarter of all inhabitants were elderly, it seemed that everyone is concerned with aging in one way or another. In the context of community welfare, it is perhaps even more interesting to note that the majority of the people in the room, interested in the first instance in helping out in the neighbourhood, could themselves be described as elderly.

'THE ELDERLY' AND THE CONTINUUM OF CARE

The illustrations from these various settings provide a background for understanding care and support institutions for the elderly in a South Osakan Ward. The elderly might seek support from one or more of these, or from the non-governmental sector, described in more detail in Chapter 4. It also shows that community welfare or community care encompasses more than just the State and the informal sector, or even the mediating institutions in the middle, such as clubs for the elderly and community welfare officers, as suggested by Ben-Ari (1991). Instead, it might be more useful to think of various different actors involved and the numerous links between them: volunteers (with their very different degrees of closeness to the local government - ranging from the community welfare commissioners appointed by the local government, volunteers encouraged by the local Welfare Council, to the informal volunteers in the neighbourhood), private enterprises, not-for profit municipally supported institutions, local government. Furthermore, from the point of view of the individuals involved in the sector, it seems important to conceive community welfare as a continuum, rather than viewing it broken down into segments, such as the voluntary sector and the state. Not only is the distinction difficult to make, as it has been argued that the voluntary sector is under the influence of governmental policies (Avenell 2010), but the individuals involved in community care frequently cross the boundaries, over the course of time. Ueda san, one of my interlocutors (whose life story is presented in Chapter 8) is a good example: after getting married she worked as a volunteer for a while, organizing childcare in her own apartment; later she worked in the City Hall welfare department, at first as a home helper, later moving into an administrative position dealing with matters related to both children and elderly care, and upon her retirement volunteering in the local community salon and organizing karaoke for the elderly in the neighbourhood in her own house. Her interest in community care led her from one position to another, moving seamlessly between the voluntary sector and local government on several occasions. Takano-san was involved in various kinds of volunteering in the community and Noguchi-san was a community welfare commissioner before they took up their paid positions as community network promotion officers. Murata-san worked as a home helper through an approved NPO, before taking up work as a carer in the Pleasant Day Centre, which he left after a while but continued to work as a community volunteer in the Salon. Several members of the permanent staff in NPO Fureai[51], which runs the Salon as one of their activities, have worked in care-related positions (a nurse and a hospital social worker) before starting at the NPO on a fully voluntary basis, only after 7 years of unpaid work securing a stable enough structure of the organization where they could be paid.

Finally, many of these care-related activities are carried out by people who can themselves be described as elderly. Murata san and Ueda san[52] are both in their late sixties. The members of the workshop on help in the neighbourhood were mostly in their sixties and seventies. It is therefore important to note that the elderly are not just receivers of support in the community, but also increasingly participate in providing it, not only within the bounds of their own family, a trend discussed in the previous chapter. In some cases it is even more complicated, as they might be simultaneously receiving support in some way and providing it in another. For instance, the silver haired lady, sitting in the front row in the workshop for community volunteers, lives in a facility for the elderly, with Long-Term-Insurance partly covering the cost. These cases presented, therefore, undermine the homogeneity of the category of the elderly as simply those who are in need of care and support. Not only with respect to the reliance on support and care of others, but more generally with regard to differing life circumstances and lived experiences, the elderly cannot be treated as a homogeneous category, with similar lives and needs (c.f. Matsumoto 2011:6-7). How then do people become defined as old or elderly? Vera-Sanso (2008) argues that these definitions need to be understood with respect to control of resources, as 'being defined as old not only implies particular capacities, needs and rights, but also confers duties of care and support on sons [in the context of South India] and.. these are deeply contested and context dependent... in terms of class, gender and the localized labour market...' (2008:87). Thus the issues of dependence, autonomy and interdependence, as well as the meaning of care[53], are at the very heart of the construction of the category of the elderly. It comes as no surprise then, that the category of the elderly is shaped by the welfare and care provision institutions including the local administration, and that the form this definition takes is itself fluid and in constant negotiation and change.

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[51] The establishment and the workings of which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

[52] See Chapter 8 for the full versions of their life stories, touching on their understanding of the field of care and the motivation for volunteering in the local NPO engaged in community welfare.

The image of the elderly created in these different social settings aimed at community welfare differs somewhat with respect to the degree of reliance on support and care. Not only do these organizations present us with very different images of the elderly, these images are but a handful of those available. Undoubtedly, as all these organizations focus on care and support in one way or another, they involve an expectation of support as one of the main components of the image of the elderly. On the other hand, the elderly consumers and their image created in various marketing discourses (the analysis of which is outside the scope of this chapter) would offer a much more active image of older people, interested in entertainment and travel.

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[53] Haim Hazan insightfully notes that cases of social and moral panics relating to the increasing numbers of older people burdening the younger generations, perhaps even taking more than their fair share of common resources, are often based on the assumption that the constructed category of the elderly and the actual people that it is supposed to include are one and the same (Hazan 2010:213). The issues such as dependence and care are thus differently constructed in the domain of welfare and community care and from the perspective of the older people themselves, whose perspective is in the focus of the Chapter 6.

On the one hand, then, older people are collectively envisaged as a group in need of support and care, not merely due to their frailty but also out of fear of social isolation. Increasing numbers of people living with their spouse (rather than in a three-generational household) are likely to be faced with the loneliness of widowhood at some stage, and as their peers dwindle in number (either because they move away to live with their family or in a facility for older people, or due to illness or death), these older people are considered to be at risk of social isolation (see Cabinet Office 2010:16-18). Such construction of the elderly as generally in need of care has two consequences, as Goodman (2008:216) argues in relation to reminders to give priority to the elderly (including reserved seats on the trains): it casts the elderly as a homogenous category of dependent people, restricting their possibilities for social activism, and reinforces the sense of collective and individual sense of responsibility for the care of the elderly. On the other hand, older people are encouraged to take part in care and support activities – 'even elderly can help' (*kōreisha demo tasukeai dekiru*) in the discourse which builds on the active image of at least some older people, as an attempt by local governments and Shakyo to 'create a lively community'. As implied already in the interlude about the story of *obasuteyama*, the fluid construction of the category of the elderly in Japan circulates around the issue of autonomy and dependence, issues which will be explored from the point of view of older people themselves in Chapter 6.

STORY-IN-BETWEEN

THE FIRST YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING

On Tuesday 17th January, 1995, at 5:46 am, an earthquake of 7.3 magnitude on the Richter scale hit the Kobe area. With an epicentre in the Northern part of Awaji Island, some 20 km from Kobe, the tremors lasted for 20 seconds and wreaked disaster on a grand scale: more than 5200 deaths, 30,000 injured, 300,000 homeless, and 110,000 buildings damaged[54]. The government at the time was severely criticised for their slow and inadequate response, exacerbated by a perceived lack of clear lines of authority for disaster relief. Many of the relief efforts were organized by non-governmental organizations, together with some private companies, which provided basic necessities for the inhabitants. Large numbers of volunteers made their way to the area and actively participated in the support and relief efforts; according to some sources, more than 1.3 million volunteers were involved in the aftermath of the earthquake (e.g. Saotome 1997). Sustained media attention to these volunteer efforts drastically increased the visibility of volunteering on a national scale. The year following the earthquake, approximately 1.5 million volunteers were recorded, leading to 1995 being dubbed the First Year of Volunteering (*borantia gannen*) (Nakano 2005).

When I asked Kuroki san, one of the staff members at the NPO which runs the Shimoichi salon, about the motivation of younger volunteers involved in the NPO, she replied:

> Well, right when our organization started its activities, the Great Hanshin Earthquake happened. They say that volunteer consciousness increased in society. Back then, newspapers wrote a lot about volunteers and people thought, ‘Ok, let’s really do some volunteering,’ and signed up, so we had more members registering. (…) There were plenty of people, and for a while we had enough volunteers to run the activities. That it was right at the time when public consciousness was so high - that was incredible timing. If it weren’t at that time, it’s hard to know how many volunteering members we’d have.

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[54] For more detail see The city of Kobe 2009; Fukushima 1995;

Later, I asked what it meant that 'public awareness' or social consciousness was increased:

> In the media one could hear that people went to the place where it happened, many Osakans knew someone in the neighbourhoods where it happened, knew some people who were having hard times. So they knew there were things they needed, drinking water and other stuff. So why is it that in America for instance, or other countries where there is a lot of crime, volunteering is much more lively? It's because there's a risk, you don't know when you yourself or your relatives might be involved in something like that, for instance become disabled and become incapable of doing their job – how people who were rich yesterday descend like that. Some ignore it, pretend it doesn't exist, and some, on the contrary, get involved in volunteer efforts (*borantia katsudo*). I get the feeling that this consciousness is that if there is something you can do, you must do it (*dekiru koto ga attara, shinakucha to iu ishiki*), and this consciousness spread because of the earthquake. Helping and being helped… this was originally contact between neighbours or friends, in the past, but this is slowly disappearing.

I have heard versions of this story on several occasions in the field, usually from people who were in some way involved in volunteering. The very attention given to volunteers and the criticisms pointed at the slow and ineffective response of the government would seem to have made 'volunteering' into a popular term and encouraged people to get involved in what they otherwise may have considered a foreign concept, not to mention a somewhat strange idea: helping people outside their social circle, or group to which they belong in some way and to whom their obligations would normally be expected (see Sugimoto 2010:291). This was an idea about which some of my older interlocutors still expressed discomfort.

In the period following the earthquake, some social scientists pointed to the transformative potential of volunteering for the democratization of society, most notably Honma and Deguchi (1996) who proposed that Japan is undergoing a 'volunteer revolution'. Some even argued that there was no volunteering, strictly speaking, in Japan prior to this time (Nakata 1996:25). Certain forms of voluntary work have nevertheless been a feature of Japanese communal life for a long time, for instance in the form of neighbourhood associations. The work undertaken by these associations (the organization of community events such as festivals, cleaning the gutters or participating in crime and fire prevention) is unpaid, but membership is not really voluntary as the households automatically become members; and the organizations work closely with local government (Sugimoto 2003:274-5). Furthermore, various forms of volunteering have been actively promoted and supported by the state since 1970 (Nakano 2005:2), and as Simon Avenell (2010) argues in an article based on a meticulous review of volunteering and community policies in Japan, the role of the state in facilitating 'spontaneous' volunteering following the Great Hanshin Earthquake should not be neglected. Furthermore, many citizens groups and neighbourhood associations embraced the vocabulary of *borantia* (volunteer) and registered as volunteer organizations. Avenell draws attention to studies indicating that apart from a short period of a rapid increase in volunteer numbers following the earthquake, there was no sudden and sharp increase in the numbers of volunteers in the 1990s, and reviews various policies that supported and encouraged volunteering in the 1970s and 1980s. In this light, he argues, it is important to view the noteworthy rise in volunteering as enabled and made possible precisely due to government efforts to promote it (2010:81). But, to complicate this picture further, in his nuanced reading of state directives, laws and policies surrounding the issues of volunteering, Avenell (ibid.: 90) concludes that there is no evidence to suggest that the government managed to recruit people who would not have otherwise become volunteers (attributing the increase to a change in values observable in other post-industrial societies), but it did develop a system that promoted spontaneous volunteering in spheres considered to be of strategic importance (and thereby directing them away from anything resembling political activism).

Despite the importance of recognizing the continuity, the question of what changed with the First Year of Volunteering begs attention. For instance, as Nakata (1996:22) argues, the new volunteering following the Earthquake attracted a much broader base of volunteers, including young people unused to polite and respectful liaising with local government officials, in contrast to the quiet youngsters, middle-aged housewives and older people 'doing whatever they were told by the supervising ward officers'. Nakata predicted that this may bring about a new type of real volunteer that will act on equal footing with officials. His predictions may have been true to the extent that the term *borantia* caught on, and its role and meaning differ from older forms of voluntary work (such as *minseiiin*, welfare commissioner, for example). On the other hand, it was the introduction of the NPO Law (officially designated the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities) that largely shaped the volunteering scene from then on, and this was envisaged to promote particular kinds of activities deemed relevant for society, focusing on one of the seventeen activities specified by the law (focusing on community building, education and welfare), while leaving out more politically oriented activist organizations (Avenell 2010:89). While some of the NPO staff were aware of this background to the story of volunteering in Japan, most of the actual volunteers in the salon and elsewhere did not use the word *borantia* or even necessarily identify with 'volunteering' as such. As I explore further in Chapters 4 and 8, they described their activities merely as something they do in the community.

CHAPTER 4

THE STORY OF FUREAI: MUTUAL HELP AND A COMMUNITY NPO

It is a cold, crisp, sunny morning in February. I am walking from the underground station towards the community salon where I have been volunteering for the past few months, since November. I walk down the wide road lined with tall buildings and large apartment houses (*manshon*), dotted with glossy new shops: a large, brightly lit supermarket on the corner, a convenience store with an ATM, a shiny, stylish hair salon, a bakery selling French-style bread and pastries, a shop with high-tech toilet seats, air conditioners, rice-cookers and other small electric appliances. As I turn into the small streets just off the main road, the surroundings change radically. Most of the buildings are small old family houses sitting close together. The streets are quiet and few cars pass by. A group of children are laughing as they play with a ball in an alley. A small three wheel lorry passes by with the driver announcing through a megaphone that that he is collecting old paper. The further I walk into the narrow streets, the less traffic but more activity there is to be seen on the streets. A young woman is hanging out the bedding on her small balcony to air it; an old lady is re-potting the plants on the curb of the road in front of her house; a young man and his son are washing the family car. I finally enter the shopping arcade (*shōtengai*) in which the salon is located – a narrow, roofed street lined with small shops. There are a few older shoppers buying vegetables, but some shopkeepers are still busying themselves with preparations for their first customers of the day.

Many of the shopkeepers are elderly: a short, sturdy lady with her hair dyed black in the dried goods shop with a darkened dusty interior; a delicate, white-haired lady in the shop selling tealeaves - a particularly charming old-fashioned wooden shop, not unlike the Edo period replicas in the Osaka Housing Museum. The same dusty, cramped space with large wooden boxes with goods and containers with tea on rough wooden shelves, dimly lit with just one bare light bulb. A few steps further, I pass a brightly neon-lit bookshop, neat but overflowing, owned by an old couple in their early seventies, who are listening to the radio and doing sudoku. A fishmonger with a sushi stand attached, recently refurbished, is run by a relatively young married couple, and their produce sells steadily throughout the day. A lively old man standing outside a shop with ladies clothing is cheerfully greeting all passers-by. His goods are all carefully arranged on hangers and hooks outside the shop: rows of jackets in subdued colours; comfortable trousers with elastic waistbands, of the kind that the older ladies in the salon often sported with floral blouses; and dozens of sensible hats, warm and pretty. A few doors further down on the other side of the arcade, two middle-aged ladies are making *okonomiyaki* and *takoyaki*[55] - Osaka street-food favourites - on one of the stands where visitors to the salon would often buy boxed lunches, alternating between sushi, steamed rice with vegetables and okonomiyaki, occasionally buying instant noodles from the supermarket when the shops were closed on Wednesdays.

As I slide open the door of the salon with a greeting, a chorus of lively voices replies cheerfully. I step inside and see Saito-san, a young volunteer in a pretty yellow skirt, listening politely to the conversation at one of the two large tables seating guests in the salon. In the background I hear the barely audible regular buzz of a photocopier emanating from the office above the salon. Kato san and her younger sister are cheerfully chatting to Abe san. Two small children stop to look at the ornate dolls displayed in the window for the upcoming Hina Matsuri[56], much to the delight of the older guests in the salon. Kato san rushes to the door and beckons them in for a cup of tea. The children and their mother enter somewhat hesitantly, encouraged by nine smiling older faces and loud greetings, followed by a commotion to find them three seats on the same side of one of the two big wooden tables. Only after their coffee was served did they have a chance to look around the warmly lit interior with its exposed wooden beams, just large enough to accommodate up to twenty people around the tables, with additional chairs lined up walls on left and right, and a small kitchen counter and a toilet in the back of the salon that was once a fish shop. The children found a small wooden shelf at the back where various crafts, including colourful origami, were on display, and before long a packet of coloured paper appeared on the table. Suddenly everyone seemed to be making paper dolls for the young visitors, chatting casually to their mother.

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[55] These are some of the favourites among the street foods in Osaka. *Okonomiyaki* is a Japanese-style pancake with cabbage and pork or seafood; *takoyaki* are small balls made of batter with pieced of octopus in them.

[56] Hina Matsuri (the Doll Festival) or Girl's Day is celebrated on the 3rd of March. Ornate dolls representing the Emperor and the Empress with attendants in court costumes form the Heian period are displayed on a stair shaped platform.

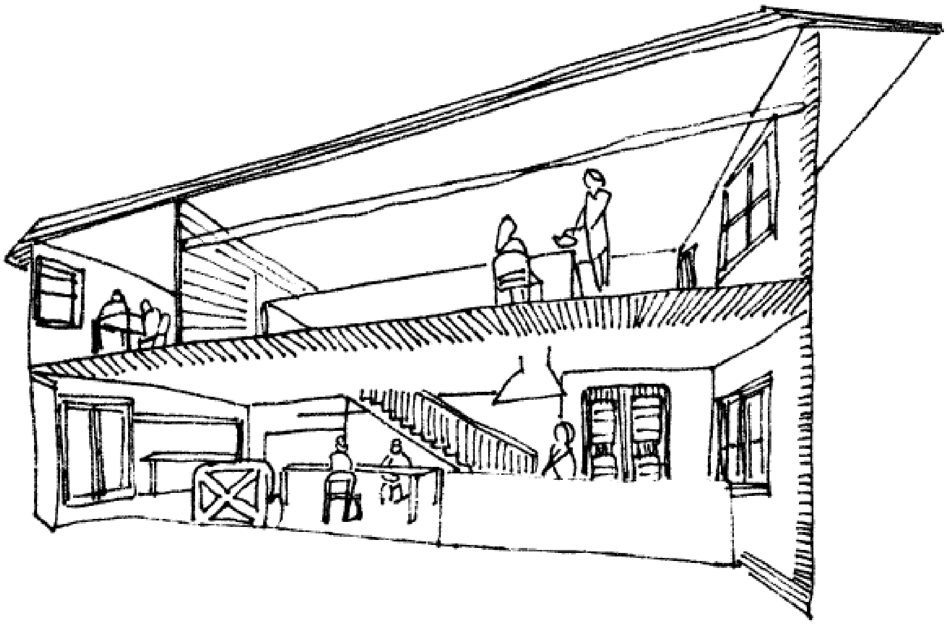

Figure 4.1. Inside Fureai. Above the salon and a small kitchen there is an office (top right corner) and a meeting space (top left).

By the time I started work there, the salon had slowly won recognition in the local neighbourhood as a place to enjoy a conversation or just a quiet morning in the company of others. It began operations in late 2007 as a part of an NPO[57] (non-profit organization) established in early 1995. After years of running its services, including a volunteer home-helper system, from the founders’ own apartments and from rented rooms, it now had an office and a space for community activities (see Figures 4.1. and 4.2.). This chapter examines how the salon emerges as both a place and a social network: a physical site as well as an ideological project of community help and mutual support. Along the way, I raise a number of related issues for discussion, including motivation, community, sociality and exchange relationships. The establishment of the salon must be understood within the broader context of the interest of the inhabitants of Shimoichi in the nature of their community and the kind of society they would like to be a part of.

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[57] NPO, pronounced in Japanese as (enu-pi-o). For discussion of this term and its status see Ogawa 2004.

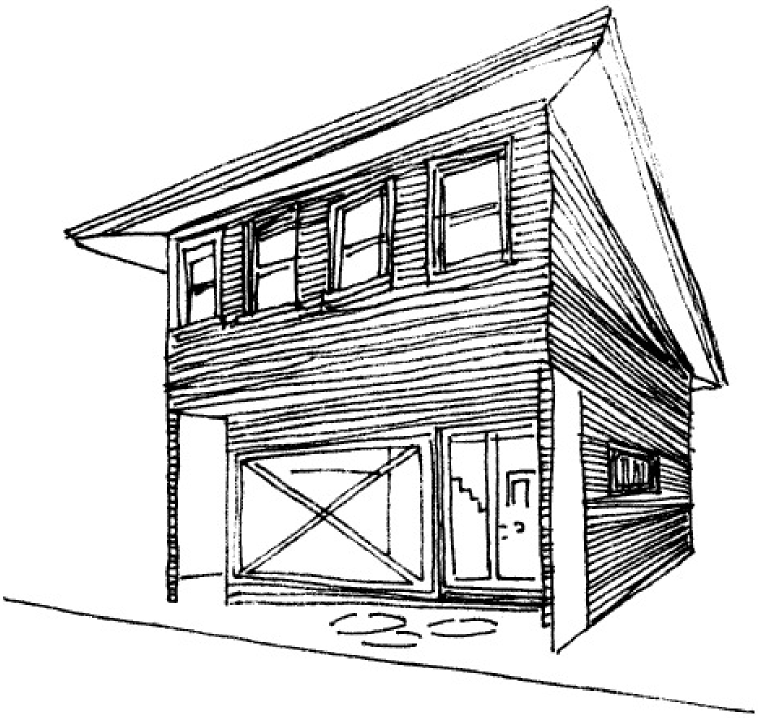

Figure 4.2. Fureai from the outside.

While voluntary activities in the community have usually been discussed in relation to the state, its responsibility and intervention in the voluntary sphere (see e.g. Avenell 2010), and the importance of government agenda on the opinions of Shimoichi welfare workers and volunteers should not be underestimated, this chapter instead focuses on the perspective of volunteers who established Fureai and their concern with the well-being of others. These volunteers, now managing the NPO (and referring to themselves as staff), are well educated, highly reflexive, and very aware of the wider societal context, including trajectories of demographic change, the deficiencies of the medical system and care services, and the atomization and perceived decline of community ties. This sets them apart from other volunteers, with whom they nevertheless share some motivations, discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. I begin with a story of the establishment of a volunteer group around the notion of mutual help (*tasukeai*), and chart the development of the NPO and its services. I then turn my attention to the experiences of the staff members who established the NPO, and the associated issues of motivation and community. Finally, after turning my attention to issues of place and community, I conclude with a reflection on how community ties and exchange relationships are perceived and re-shaped through volunteering and mutual help.

‘HELPING AND BEING HELPED’

Nakajima san was involved in establishing Fureai from the very outset. She told me the story of its early days:

> It all started sixteen years ago. At that time, in 1994, there was no Long-term Care Insurance system in Japan, and the local administration had just started a programme of support visits to households in need of help [e.g. looking after a sick child while the parents had to go to work, looking after a sick relative or an older person, etc.]. The level of support provided in this way was quite low, and it was difficult to get an immediate response, for instance one family whose grandfather suddenly became bedridden applied for help, since they were finding it hard to balance out all the other obligations with full-time care. They waited for two years, and finally a letter arrived from the government saying they’d been allocated a helper a few weeks after the grandfather had passed away. This was quite terrible, of course, and some of us started thinking about what we could do to help somewhat (*chotto shita koto de*). We were thinking of help by fellow citizens (*shimin dōshi*), a form of mutual help (*tasukeai*) –healthy people could help those who needed support in times of trouble, and the people who had a hard time, if they got better in future, could do some…volunteering themselves. We were wondering if there was something like that we could do.
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> Around that time, Hotta Tsutomu san appeared in a television talk-show program called Tetsuko’s room, by the well-known actress Kuroyanagi Tetsuko. Hotta san talked about the Sawayaka Welfare Foundation (*Sawayaka Fukushi Zaidan*) and proposed the creation of mutual help (*tasukeai*) in every neighbourhood, calling out to the people suggesting that if everyone does this then the creation of a costly system funded by taxes won’t be necessary. Kitamura san, a lady who now sometimes volunteers in the salon, had watched this programme and thought that it would be good if people in the neighbourhood would do such a thing. She was involved at the local Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in my children’s primary school, where I was serving on a committee, when she brought up this topic and asked what we thought about it. We thought of it as a challenge (*kono yobitomare de* – after being called upon this way) and decided to give it a go. We started a learning group, at first some forty-two of us gathered to find out more about the mutual-help system and establishing an organization. In Tokyo there were several organizations involved in mutual-help since about 30 years ago, 15 years before we started, so we organized a visit to a branch of one of those organizations in the Kansai area. I wanted to find out more about the good aspects of the system and the parts we might want to do differently, and by cobbling those bits and pieces together we started Shimoichi Fureai, this NPO. By then, it was not all the 42 of us

> who participated in the learning group, but nine of us. The nine of us gathered at Kitamura san's place, where we rented a room on the second floor. After we had our phone line sorted out, we started our activities on the 30th of May, 16 years ago.

Over the past 16 years, NPO Fureai has engaged in a wide variety of activities: starting with a volunteer project (*tasukeai* – mutual help), later developing a home-helper service registered as a care provider under the Long-Term Care Insurance system; collaborating with other institutions in the field and supporting some of their projects; up to opening a community salon and activities in the neighbourhood in 2007. I will now briefly describe the content of these various projects and the actors involved. I will then present the main characters of the story of the salon – the members of staff of the organization, the story of their involvement and how it influenced their lives and ways of thinking.

NPO DEVELOPMENT, STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

TASUKEAI: MUTUAL HELP

The organization started its volunteer activities in 1995, under the banner of *Tasukeai,* or mutual help. Tasukeai is a volunteer system based on Hotta Tsutomu san's idea of creating networks of exchange in the local areas based on exchanging coupons for small volunteer help with things like household cleaning, cooking or looking after children, helping with the commute to the hospital for a check-up, or tending to a garden. Many of my interlocutors have heard him speak on the television and some of the NPO staff members have read about his work – it was a story that inspired them to start up the NPO. The proposed system is simple: members register with the local organization, pay an annual registration fee and gain the right to use the services and provide them. The coupons – worth 300 yen for half an hour - are purchased in advance and volunteers can themselves exchange them for services or for money. Bookings are made per hour, with two additional coupons for transport expenses. The organization does not charge additional expenses for overheads or for coordinating the users and volunteers, apart from the small annual fee. The users and the volunteers are treated in an equal manner, even if their equivalence, or interchangeability, was more a theoretical possibility, a normative ideal, rather than practice. After the Tasukeai system gained momentum, various kinds of people joined up, from young mothers in their early thirties whose children had just started kindergarten to much older people. While the majority of the volunteers are housewives, there are also people working part-time or with jobs that permit other involvement (for instance one school teacher helps out during the school holidays), who volunteer in the afternoons or on weekends.

Anyone who wishes to become a member must call up the office and arrange a time for a staff member to visit them at home for a short interview. They are informed about the details of the services, and after registering they are carefully matched to a volunteer and are entitled to make their appointments by telephone. The users of the services are either the elderly, or young people who need someone to mind their child for a short while. These days there are around ten regular users of volunteer help services, and several more who are registered. In some cases, older people who are hospitalized need some help, as the Long-Term Care Insurance does not cover helper support during their stay in the hospital. They may need laundry[58] done, for example, or small shopping services, if they have no family members who could assist them. Furthermore, older people sometimes book services not covered by the Long-Term Care Insurance home helpers: tidying the garden, or cleaning rooms they are not using personally, or their spouse's laundry. Some people feel uneasy about going to the hospital on their own and, if they have no one else, ask for a volunteer to accompany them.

At the time of my fieldwork Tasukeai had just ten active volunteers, though there were many more on the register. There are times when they are too busy and have to decline requests from users, which they do if it is not an emergency. In the event of an emergency[59] - for instance, someone lives on their own and suddenly falls ill, or having returned from hospital they feel weak and need some food - then rather than trying to find an available volunteer, the staff members rush to their aid. At the peak of their volunteer activities Fureai had up to ten bookings a day and such things would happen on a weekly basis. According to the NPO records, they had accumulated 38 000 paid volunteering hours by September 2007. These days they have one or two time slots booked a day, as the number of users and the hours they book has decreased significantly over the years. The main reason for this is the introduction of the Long-Term Care Insurance (LCTI) system, as explained further below. According to Kuroki san, another member of staff, the situation has changed considerably due to economic circumstances putting a strain on family budgets:

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[58] Hospitals in Japan allow patients to wear their own nightgowns and pyjamas and in most cases do not provide laundry services on the premises. For more detail about hospitals see Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:189-210).

[59] The organization provides an emergency phone line available 24/7 to all their members.

> As you know, we had a recession here in Japan for the last ten or twenty years. As soon as their children are old enough to go to school, many women start working, looking for paid employment to supplement their husband's income. Also, from the users' perspective, since the introduction of Long-Term Care Insurance the economic burden of getting a helper through the insurance system is somewhat lighter than asking for a paid volunteer to come over. Among volunteers, whoever could get a helper certificate did that, in the hope of earning a little money. Some of those who started working as helpers stayed with us, and some moved to other organizations. Therefore, those who are left are mostly women in their sixties and seventies. […] In terms of content, they only provide support with things they can do. Before the establishment of LCTI, volunteers not infrequently did things that helpers now do – changing diapers for bedridden people, or wiping the body with a cloth. This all changed some ten years ago with the introduction of LCTI and the long recession.

HOME HELPERS

In 1999 the Fureai organization obtained the legal status of a Not-for-Profit Corporation (*NPO hōjin*), and after the introduction of Long-Term Care Insurance[60] (LCTI) the following year it launched its Golden Star Care services – home helper services funded through LCTI. The home helpers must possess a certificate (awarded after taking a short course, something the Fureai NPO does not organize itself) and are paid 1200 yen per hour. The users, as explained in the previous chapter, have their needs assessed and their care plan drawn up by a care manager, who helps them to choose services from different providers (including the private provider and NPOs). The NPO in this case matches the users with helpers, runs support sessions for the helpers and coordinates the activities on a weekly basis. The number of helpers with Fureai has recently decreased significantly, something that worried my interlocutors very much. While at the peak of their activities they had around twenty, there are presently twelve. Despite the low numbers of helpers, Fureai tries not to decline any requests from users. Only when users require that they only come on weekends[61] every time, then they might decline. The helpers have different and flexible schedules and many work just one day a week, on average around 4 hours a week. While some places allow users to book for hours in several bursts over the day, this is something that Fureai cannot do due to the lack of manpower. As the helpers only receive remuneration per hours of work, the commuting and preparation time are not included and this breakdown of hours of work would be very inconvenient for the helpers. Among the helpers at Fureai, there are many housewives, as it is a job that can be easily taken up with little specialist experience, as it isn't strictly speaking a care job, a nursing job. It mostly involves housework, but it requires sensitivity and patience, as one is required to be responsive to the user and to perform the duties while amiably conversing with them, should they wish that. As Komatsu san, a staff member at Fureai in charge of the helper organization, who also organizes support and training meetings for the helpers, put it: 'One can't get engrossed in the work and forget that the beneficiary is a person.'

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[60] For more detail on LCTI in Japan see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

According to Komatsu san, there are several reasons for these dwindling numbers:

> After a while [some helpers'] personal circumstances have changed – they need to care for their own parents, or they've had a baby. Also, well, the helpers' job is a service: they go there, to the [customer's] house for a couple of hours. But, as I often tell helpers, it's ultimately an interpersonal service. Yet, the older people sometimes have a different idea about how things work. How shall I put this…there are issues of compatibility. Not everyone is grateful (*mina san wa kansha shite kureru wake dewanai no ne*), there are cases when they just take the fact that they come for granted. […] Some elderly have dementia, and it takes a lot of energy and patience to work with them. Some people get very stressed from this and at times they decide they can't continue their work anymore. It seems there are many helpers with a certificate, but it's also a job with the highest rate of turnover. Moreover, when they leave the job once, they don't come back. Furthermore, as the helpers are paid through the Long-Term Care Insurance system, their remuneration is fixed. Even though many men have helper certificates, the income is nowhere near the income most men are accustomed to receiving. So there might be good intentions, willingness, but at times it just isn't viable, when they get married and if they have a child. When they think about the future, people want proper (*chanto shita*), regular employment with an insurance. Everywhere in the care world these days, most places have trouble finding full-time helpers. Mostly, like us, they have one or two full time, and a few more for shorter stints on the register. … One more reason is that the helpers need to take notes on the user's records, and those who aren't good with words can't keep working, so they leave.

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[61] Many users, especially if they live alone prefer them to come on weekends, to keep them company.

> The majority of those who work with us, are the ones who've been with us for over ten years, those who joined in the beginning.
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> There is also the possibility of taking a state certificate (from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) of care worker (*kaigofukushishi*) and moving one's career ahead. … Large institutions, such as old people's homes (*tokubetsu yōgo rōjin homu*) have been increasingly hiring them.

Komatsu san's explanation, just like those of my other interlocutors, emphasised the low wages and lack of security of the helper job, which makes it hard to earn a living if one is not supported by someone else. Mostly, as in Fureai, this is a job done by either young people or housewives. If something changes in their personal circumstances they may become unable (or unwilling) to continue this work. The issue of low payment, but remuneration nevertheless, is not irrelevant. The low levels of remuneration have consequences for the perception of this work as having low prestige. On the other hand, as it is not remuneration-free, it can be perceived by the users as something they are entitled to and thus taken at face value. The care and support jobs are very demanding and psychologically and emotionally exhausting, as Murata-san, a man in his late sixties who had worked as a helper in a Day Care centre for the elderly, told me on more than one occasion. Many of the other helpers from that centre shared his opinion, as I learned during a visit to the Day Care centre, described in Chapter 3.

The Fureai-run Golden Star Care has around forty users using the services of helpers. Some of them have a long-standing relationship with Fureai (*nagai otsukiai*): they have been using the services of volunteers through Tasukeai (the mutual help system, or tasukeai) and after the introduction of Long-Term Care Insurance they started using their helper services, so there are some users in their eighties who were users since their seventies. The users differ somewhat in the levels of support and care required, but the majority are healthy and require just the minimal level of support (LCTI Level 1 and 2 of support), while just under half are classified as care Levels 3 and 4. Those requiring higher levels of care usually live with and are cared for by families .

NETWORKS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Fureai is involved in various forms of social education and operational support for other similar institutions, as well as in the work of networks and associations in the field. It is a member of an association of paid volunteer organizations in Osaka, comprising 8 NPOs and 3 volunteer groups throughout Osaka, all cooperating with the Osaka volunteer information centre. NPO Fureai is also a member of an Osaka City association of old people's homes and group housing, which draws together community salons, day care centres, small retirement homes and group housing for the elderly. Furthermore, it took over responsibility for the administration of a volunteer organization in the neighbourhood called Open House, located in a small, two-storey, empty, old-style family house owned by one of the members of that organization, who wanted to put it to good use by refurbishing it and opening it up to the people from the neighbourhood to use for informal meetings, playgroups for children and as a space for community activities. NPO Fureai coordinates the volunteers who open the house in the morning and take turns in keeping it open to visitors.

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES – A CLEANING SERVICE

In 2005 NPO Fureai launched a new project, a commercial cleaning service which they named Golden Star Cleaning. Even though they are not-for-profit, NPOs are permitted to run commercial activities so long as the profit is used for another activity, rather than distributed among its members. In the beginning, as with the other activities, there was a lot of preparatory work, mostly done by Sakamoto san, one of the newest members of staff. She set up the system, arranged the legal and accounting side of things, spoke to prospective customers, and found interested workers. Sakamoto san's enterprising attitude was made clear to me on several occasions, as when she explained the reasoning behind this development:

> As you know, the NPO operates Helping Hands, which doesn't earn any income, and Golden Star Care. Many of our users, users of Golden Star Care, told us that unless one has family to help out, the care provided solely by LCTI is insufficient. While the Helping Hands volunteers can help out with some of the easier tasks, many of them aren't young and fit enough for more demanding kinds of housework. So the idea came to us, perhaps we could earn some income by providing for these needs. That way we could create a third pillar of support for our organization. At

> the time when Fureai started thinking about new options and activities, I was working here only one day a week and the rest of the time as a career consultant providing work advice. At that time, after the economic bubble had burst, many middle-aged people lost their jobs in the restructuring, and found it very hard to find another job. That's when we got the idea to open this activity and offer the job to some of these people who lost their jobs but have no special skills or certificates.

At present, Golden Star Care has six employees: some in their sixties; a few in their thirties with small children who work a little on the side; and one in full-time employment but who wants an additional income and claims she really enjoys cleaning. On average they work some four hours a week, or a couple of cleaning jobs, as one job consists of a two hour time slot, and receive 900 yen per hour, while the service costs 4000 for a two hour slot. Golden Star Cleaning has eight permanent customers, who receive one or two cleans a week, or one slot every two weeks. Mostly the customers are families where both parents work, or where the elderly couple needs help but only one of them qualifies for the LCTI; there are also some older people living alone and some single-parent households. They sometimes do one-off jobs, such as spring cleaning or post-removals cleaning, but they are hoping to get more work through their networks and recommendations.

Salon

In the end of 2007 after having found a space in an old two-storey townhouse in a *shōtengai*, a shopping arcade in their neighbourhood, the NPO started a community salon and finally acquired its own office space. The house which they bought was previously a shop and they had it refurbished with the help of an architect specialising in the restoration of old townhouses in the area, in a mix of minimalist contemporary and rustic traditional style. They only had enough money for the most basic work, and had to paint the walls themselves with the help of a few volunteers. They thought carefully about the furniture and decided to get two large heavy wooden tables. These two tables are indispensable actors in many of my field notes, as the dynamics between the visitors could be almost perfectly mapped onto the seating patterns around them. At first, the tables were joined and served as one long surface, but as tensions grew and some of the newcomers felt it was difficult to join in the conversation around a big table immediately after entering the salon, they were separated into two tables with six chairs each. Of course, when more people joined, the number of chairs increased. The tables are heavy and one can lean onto them while getting up from one's chair without the threat of it overturning. The lavatory in the corner of the room has a sliding door, wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. The space around the entrance is left empty, for any strollers to be parked or large shopping trolleys and bags to be left, and there is a parking space for bicycles at the front. All in all, the space is very accessible (see Figure 4.1.), yet has none of the institutional atmosphere of an 'accessible' space, with its standard ramps, railings, lino-covered floor and industrial finish. The aim of careful refurbishment was to make a space that is inviting for everyone, a place where one feels comfortable (*ibashō*). Here one would be able to have a tea or coffee every day between 10 am and 5 pm, or come to an event such as a concert, *rakugo* (traditional comedy performance), a singing or origami class, a children's book reading session, or a film screening, all of which were held on a regular monthly or weekly basis.

Most visitors to the salon live in the neighbourhood and arrive on foot from the little streets branching out from the *shōtengai*. Not infrequently, they would decide to pop back home for lunch, or an afternoon nap, and return again in a couple of hours. While the majority of the visitors are older, above the age of 65, and the oldest three ladies are in their nineties, some young women would come for a cup of tea while shopping in the arcade with their children, and a few middle aged women would meet regularly in the afternoons for coffee, once or twice a week. Some of the older people were coming from a little further away, some by underground train; a couple would come on the 'red bus', a free bus service for the elderly funded by the local administration; and several cycled. According to a survey conducted by the NPO staff, the average age of visitors was 88. The majority are women, with elementary school education, and only a few with junior high school education, which according to Nakajima san would have been fairly unusual for the women at the time of their youth. Many of these women are widowed and while some live with their families, most live on their own. In terms of their financial situation[62], it is likely that some would have savings but (according to the NPO staff) most would be receiving a low old-age pension from the state in the vicinity of 50 000 yen,.

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[62] I have not collected detailed data on income levels, as this was not considered an appropriate question to discuss and people were clearly uncomfortable when asked and mostly evasive.

The volunteers in the salon are mostly in their late sixties (17 of those working regularly, and another six or seven helping out on occasion) and typically work one or two times a week for 3 hours. After a while, I realized that volunteers in the Tasukeai were not volunteering in the salon, even though they sometimes visited the office upstairs or on occasion came to the events held in the salon. As it sometimes happened that someone had to cancel their shift in the salon at the last moment, I would wonder why the staff never asked one of the Tasukeai volunteers to help out. The answers I got suggested that there was no need for this, as there were many more salon volunteers on the records, who were willing to take up short time slots once every few weeks, and were not regularly scheduled. But there was also a feeling that it was a good idea to keep different activities separate. This meant that the Tasukeai volunteers were recruited separately (and as mentioned earlier, they had to become members and pay a membership fee), as there was always the danger of gossip. According to Komatsu san, it was important to protect the privacy of the users of Tasukeai services, as well as the evaluative comments of the volunteers and helpers among the salon visitors. Futhermore, Komatsu san and other staff members did not want to restrict access to the salon to the users of other services, but wanted it to be used more freely.

CHANGING STRUCTURES: INTRODUCTION OF THE LCTI AND THE JAPANESE WELFARE STATE

Tasukeai refers to mutual aid or cooperation, but was used by my interlocutors as a keyword to refer to a particular type of volunteer organization, as promoted by Hotta Tsutomu of the Sawayaka Welfare Foundation. As mentioned above, it is a form of cooperation based on a ticket system, where the tickets or money vouchers are exchanged for services for a set duration of time, usually in 30 minute intervals. Fureai founders have studied the set-up of Sawayaka and based their organization on this model, but have not mirrored all aspects of it, being well aware of some differing circumstances. For example, as Hotta was a prominent public figure who gained public attention during his time as a public prosecutor, Sawayaka had been receiving significant amounts of money in donations, which was not something Fureai could rely on. One of the more interesting differences in the institutional organization of Fureai is the absence of a single leader: all six staff members reached their decisions together, by consensus. Upon establishing an NPO they elected a nominal President for legal reasons, a position they all used to take in turns until they offered it to a sympathetic Professor of Social Welfare, who was aware of the nominal nature of the appointment and agreed to take it as a way of increasing their social visibility. Their lack of a leader and democratic way of making decisions had one downside, as they somewhat reluctantly admitted to me: it was more time consuming, as they had to confer on most issues.

The decision to register as an NPO was a strategic one, and linked to the introduction of the Long-Term Care Insurance in 2000. The introduction of this system brought about a significant change in the provision of the care for the elderly, in which not all the voluntary citizen groups did equally well. For instance, one of the organizations based on the model provided by the Sawayaka Welfare Foundation had ceased to exist as a mutual aid system five years after the introduction of the LCTI. The case was well known to the staff at Fureai, as they had visited it prior to the establishment of their group in order to learn more about the ticket system. As Nakajima san explained:

> Throughout the country Tasukeai organizations mushroomed [in the 1990s], but then the LCTI was introduced by the state. At that time, they all split up in two camps: some organizations continued their Tasukeai based on volunteer activities and started to provide the helper services through LCTI, while some decided to keep their activities volunteer-based as a citizen's group (*shimin dantai*). The latter were thinking that, being a national initiative, LCTI and helpers were the government's business, or somehow profitable and not for them and they continued to provide volunteer services with all their might. Those organizations that provided support through LCTI started receiving profits and gradually forgot about their initial aim of providing Tasukeai, and so these organizations split into two categories. Surprisingly, our Fureai continued both activities. The group where we studied had gone the LCTI way and stopped the Tasukeai activities.

The government's introduction of LCTI thus had a significant impact on Japanese civil society, especially on welfare-oriented organizations. It could be argued that the introduction of LCTI (allowing for the provision of welfare services by private institutions and non-profit organizations) co-opted the voluntary sector efforts for the state aims. On the other hand, Japan's voluntary sector and the state have historically been intertwined, and do not conform to the simplified understanding of civil society as separate from the state or as a site of resistance (see Hann and Dunn 1996). Volunteers were recruited throughout the 1970s for various welfare-related tasks and cooperation was established with earlier voluntary associations in the local community, such as neighbourhood associations or *chonaikai* (Garon 1997:172; Garon 2003; Avenell 2010). While the academic literature on civil society often posits its separation from the state [63] (Hann and Dunn 1996: 1-26), my interlocutors emphasized their close relationship to the state and to various level of local government.

Mori san, one of the staff members, emphasized the role of the state in promoting Tasukeai through education, and believed the state had a responsibility to support various mutual aid endeavours of the kind Fureai was engaged in. She was convinced that the state could create more room for social engagement, primarily in the school curriculum (which is currently focused on examination and preparations for entering the university), but also in people's daily lives:

> It is not enough for it to be recognized [by the government and in the society] that this is a valuable activity, because if there is no room in one's daily life, and mentally no leeway to engage in this activity, then it will be impossible to continue with the operation, even if people know that it can be socially fulfilling and good for health.

Nakajima san, another staff member, explained the complex relationship between the NPOs and public administration in the provision of welfare:

> It is believed that if one could create links between ordinary citizens, public administration (*gyōsei*) and NPOs, that would make for an ideal civil society where all cooperate on the same level, equally. In reality, the NPOs have way less power, and as it is, the space of cooperation is not as large as one would hope for, but this could change, if the NPOs grew and gained power. For this to happen the NPO have to be recognized [as partners] by the administration, who would provide funding. It would be good if they could suggest what things NPOs could do to help to receive more money, or to raise funds from the private sector. The administration is happy to request things and ask for cooperation, but it needs to do more in return. There are not many NPOS that receive recognition from the administration.

While there is little doubt that the state is delegating responsibility by mobilizing people through NPOs and other voluntary organizations to provide the services that are expected from it[64] , it is easy to overlook the attitudes of the actors towards the role of the state and the relationship of the voluntary sector to the local authorities. Nakajima san was not only aware of the links of the NPO sector to the local government, but also hoped that these links could be strengthened, albeit on more equal footing, as partners. Both she and Mori san were calling for more, rather than less, engagement with the state.

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[63] Whether it is even useful to think of the state and civil society as in opposition is questionable, not least because the voluntary sector is not homogenous and includes the NPOs closely collaborating with the government, as well as civil movements opposing government policies. Ogawa goes so far as to call volunteers under the NPO system apolitical (2004: 114, see also ibid.:99-100, 125). Furthermore, the state itself is not monolithic (Trouillot 2001) and comprises a number of actors and local governments that have a degree of autonomy (Schwartz 2002:199).

Ogawa, in his ethnographically rich study of an education-oriented NPO in Tokyo, argues that the power and involvement of the state in the voluntary sector is not on the wane, and moreover 'continues to be strong, and NPOs - a product of the state's deliberate institutionalization of civil society – are now even synonymous with the state. The state is an unusually strong actor, retarding development of a healthy, dynamic civil society' (Ogawa 2004: 4). While the involvement of Fureai (and similar NPOs in the field) in grassroots policy formation is very limited, not least because of lack of interest among their members, it retains a high level of autonomy in its operation and managerial freedom in pursuing the values chosen by the staff. Rather than focusing on the ability of NPOs to influence policy change, one might begin by asking if this is even a concern or aim for them. Ogawa notes that, unlike the members of some social movements, citizens (*shimin*) involved with NPO activities are typically apolitical (ibid.:106) and often did not realize that they are being mobilized or used by the government (ibid.:100, 117). While certainly not interested in revolutionary movements or subverting state agendas, my interlocutors had clear ideas about the social values they held in high esteem, and worked toward them, thinking of the state as a resource (see Wallman 1984) or a source of support, rather than as an antagonist. The role of the state and the local government, its support and guidance, are seen as desirable, and Komatsu san mentioned on several occasions that state support, funding and policy input were very important. On other occasions, when Nakajima san or Komatsu san criticized the actions of the local government, this was often precisely because of the lack of intervention or appropriate action, rather than too much intervention. In close contacts with government officials, NPO staff, especially Nakajima san and Komatsu san (who did most of the direct liaising) often found the attitude of officials deficient, and somewhat stern and unyielding. This could be ascribed to a power structure differential, the officials demonstrating clearly who wields greater power. Nakajima san explained that she did not mind this much, as it was understandable that they were representing powerful systems. What she did begrudge was the lack of effort to conceal it, and lack of signs of genuine attempts to take the suggestions that stemmed from their long-term experience in the field with appropriate consideration. Overall, though, Nakajima san and Kuroki san found that with increased visibility and prolonged contact with the officials their relationship improved, as the officials themselves started to rely on the favours of the NPO staff, including running seminars or giving public lectures that were organized by local institutions and authorities, including the *Shakyo*, the local welfare council.

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[64] This can be viewed as a cost saving mechanism and lead to exploitation of volunteers by the state, as they are not receiving adequate compensation and may even feel constrained in their actions (Ogawa 2004: 30, 37, 66-67).

COMMUNITY AND NPO

As earlier outlined in the brief description of the field sites (see Chapter 2), Shimoichi is an old, downtown Osaka neighbourhood with a long tradition and an unusually high proportion of older population, with almost a quarter of the overall population being above the age of 65. Interestingly, there are also quite a few young couples and families in their twenties or thirties; but, a fact pointed out to me by Nakajima san, there are relatively few people of her generation, in their fifties, something she was increasingly aware of as the numbers of volunteers and helpers in the NPO were dwindling, since this was the group that did most support activities, unlike young families who had small children to look after, and often require volunteer support themselves (such as babysitting). Demographic circumstances of this kind vary greatly between different parts of Kansai, or even Osaka, with considerable impacts for the NPOs and provision of support for the elderly. Furthermore, class[65] may be an important factor, as most volunteer and community activities are undertaken by professional housewives, who are for the most part supported by their husbands in adequately remunerated employment. On the other hand, the downtown neighbourhood of Shimoichi has been described to me as having a fair proportion of family-run businesses as a main source of employment. Like Kuroki san, some young wives are helping with the family business, and most of the women in the area knew each other and occasionally helped out in times of need, but had limited time for or interest in the elaborate community activities of more middle-class areas. As Kuroki san put it: ‘There aren’t many housewives in my neighbourhood. There are many families in which everyone is involved in the business, which means that the relationships were not as closely knit (*bettari no otsukiai dewanai desu*)’. Yet, to an outsider like Sakamoto san, the community relations in Shimoichi seemed close and caring (*ninjo ga aru*).

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[65] While Japan has often been described as a classless (and indeed, homogenous) society (e.g. Nakane 1970), issues of class in Japan have been tackled in the work of William Kelly (2002), who points out a discrepancy in attitudes towards the term class, contrasting the theorizations and analyses of class by social scientists with the avoidance of the term by public officials and the majority of people, who do not conceive themselves in terms of class position. The class structure in Japan as described by social scientists is based on a distinction between blue-collar and white-collar workers, albeit complicated by differences in company size, as well as by the fact that the distinction is not consistent in all dimensions - for example income, education and home-ownership (Robertson 2003:128). A much more pervasive term is *chūryū* or 'mainstream', identification with which is widespread and unrelated to the objective differentials used by sociologists to define social classes (ibid.:234). Kelly traces the rise in identification with 'mainstream consciousness' (*chūryū ishiki*) to the 1960s, when the expansion of white-collar occupations occurred, at the same time noting that these never reached the point of forming the majority of the working population. Nevertheless, "it was in the 1960s that certain

There are many pre-war houses still standing in the neighbourhood, and some neighbourly links between families stretching over several generations. Nakajima san said that she never felt a sense of belonging fully: many of her children’s classmates’ parents and grandparents went to the same school and knew each other well. Despite being born and brought up in the neighbourhood, she did not feel entirely an insider. That said, many people moved to the area after the Second World War or even more recently, and felt accepted, even if not fully on the ‘inside’. By way of example, she mentioned people’s habit of referring to each other, not by their surname, but by nick names, or by mentioning what their grandfather did for a living, which would be quite incomprehensible for a newcomer. Sakamoto san, originally from a large satellite town in Kansai region, felt that the dynamics of native and newcomer was much more pronounced in this kind of place than in more recently developed areas. It could, under these circumstances, be argued that those with less developed links in the community would be more interested in joining a volunteer group or an NPO. According to Ogawa, those who moved to the community in Tokyo where he worked found the NPO a good way to build community links, especially if they found entering the local territorial-based organizations, such as neighbourhood

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key elements of middle-class life and location became nationalized into a model of “mainstream” life that has since powerfully represented designs for living’ (ibid.:236). This can in turn be linked to the creation of ‘mass culture’ in the 1960s. During this period of economic growth and media expansion, Japan witnessed the formation of ‘uniform and standardized taste groupings’ (Ivy 1993:241). As Ivy notes in her article about the formation of ‘mass culture’ in Japan, these groupings were differentiated along the lines of gender and age and not so much of region or class, which led the majority of Japanese people to identify themselves as being in the ‘middle’ or as ‘middle class’ (ibid.:241).

associations, difficult to join (Ogawa 2004: 26). This may have been the case with both staff and volunteers at Fureai, as well as visitors to the Salon. On the other hand, those with strong connections to the neighbourhood thought of volunteering as an extension of existing networks, and moved freely between them (see Chapters 3 and 7). This ability to create relationships that seamlessly blended with the old ones while also having a somewhat new form is at the core of the work of a community NPO.

HEDGEHOGS, OR, THE BURDEN OF THE GIFT

When I asked Nakajima san, one of the founders of the Fureai about the purpose of the NPO, she gave me a little set speech that was clearly well-prepared:

> The purpose, or what one may call the mission of this NPO is to make the neighbourhood a nicer place to live, a place in which it is easy to live. In a way, it has to do with making a place where people want to be and stay. More specifically, it is about creating a place, like the salon, where people can gather, and raising the consciousness of the people, fostering the public spirit (*kōkyōshin*[66]), and a spirit of mutual help, thinking about the way everyone can live together well. We have various activities, organize lectures, connecting different generations from babies to the elderly.

She then began to elaborate, and as the pauses in her speech grew longer, she gave a more personal account with a smile:

> So that people wouldn't become isolated, live somewhat spaced out, private…. You see, while hedgehogs might want to pile up for warmth, they might also feel uncomfortable when they are too close. Being too close can create annoying relationships (*okorisuru yōna kankei*), so we want to create a place where people can cordially live together (*minna de nakayoku kurashite*) while still maintaining a sense of distance (*kyōrikan*), that is our purpose.

Other staff members described the purpose of the NPO as fostering relationships in the neighbourhood. Kuroki san emphasized having fun and creating a comfortable living environment (*sumiyoi*), and 'creating links between people'. She believed that if people came to the events and to the salon they may be able to make acquaintances, to get to know people by sight (*kaomisihiri*). Similarly, Sakamoto san thought that the purpose was specifically to create a place where one can widen one's social horizons in an urban environment, creating a place for oneself (*jibun no ibasho to shite tte iu tokoro*). This may at first seem like a programmatic statement, especially when uttered in terms used by local government and prevalent in funding applications: *sumiyoi machizukuri* (making a town for good living). Nevertheless, the sentiment repeatedly expressed by my interlocutors, in various forms over the course of my stay, seemed genuine: they felt a need to create certain kinds of relationships in the neighbourhood, but in some ways quite different from the old 'traditional' community, that resembled a village despite being in an urban neighbourhood (see Knight 1996:220). The latter was seen as a very cohesive social group, with responsibility shared by the members of the community, for instance through the local neighbourhood association (*chonaikai* or *jichikai*) (see Sugimoto 2003:273-4).

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[66] This term (*kōkyōshin)* is a compound of three characters, kou- public, kyou- together and shin-spirit and refers to fostering a communal feeling in the public. This rhetoric of fostering relationships in the community resonates with a number of official discourses: the call for creation of participatory (sanka-gata) welfare in which most people would be able to spontaneously and freely participate in welfare, and the related notion of New Community (*aratana kokyō*) emphasizing self-reliance of the citizens (for more about the policies promoting these concepts see Avenell 2010:83). No doubt, this little presentation was prepared for official situations, where referring to official discourses would be seen as clearly showing why the activities of this NPO are relevant. In fact, staff members of NPO mentioned on other occasions that they participated in some events organized by government officials and needed to submit written reports on a regular basis.

Watanabe san, one of my interlocutors from a Women's discussion group in Kyoto, described her neighbourhood as 'rural' in terms of social relations. When I once asked her to tell me more about her daily activities, she started by explaining how much her daily routine has changed in the previous three months:

> Until now I was really busy with raising children and neighbourhood duties, things like being a neighbourhood association officer, organizing events for children, helping out, there were always things to do. This year there is none of that, for the first time since I got married I'm free, I have some time on my hands. (…) Before, I served as an officer (*yakuin*) [in various roles]. Last year I was an accountant for *jichikai*, and because I live in the countryside (*inaka*), it was really busy, like having a proper job. The neighbourhood *jichikai* duties are done on a rotation basis, like distributing the newsletter, the removal of rubbish… Accounting is a lot of work, because all the fees or contributions need to be recorded and a receipt issued to everyone who contributed. When an event is organized and the food and drinks bought, all the receipts need to be collected. The summer festival is the biggest, and that is a lot of work – it involves a lot of stalls with various snacks and games for children, for which we issue coupons and then these can be bought. Then there is the Sports Day (*undōkai*), and other festivals… It's unimaginable, I'm from Kobe and we don't have so many there. Most of these officer positions are done on a rota basis, which with 12 houses means you won't need to do it again. But I didn't have a job so I was asked to do the accounts last year. Not entering the association is not an option, you wouldn't receive the newsletter, your rubbish wouldn't be taken away and … you probably wouldn't be able to live [normally] (*tabun seikatsu dekinai*)… Otherwise we are all on good terms, the neighbours – everyone knows where everyone lives and so on. When I get off the bus it is hard to get to the house

> without talking to several people: ‘Oh hello, what are you up to today’, ‘Where are you going,’ someone would shout out, ‘Oh, isn’t that Watanabe san?’ another person would call out…

Watanabe san, who is not originally from the suburban neighbourhood she now lives in, explained later how she felt surprised at the abundance of these ties and obligations and various communal activities. Being from Kobe, she thought of her new neighbourhood to be in this respect quite like a village (*inaka*). While she appreciated the support and involvement of her neighbours she frequently found the intensity of social relations to be rather onerous. Watanabe san’s account gives us some flavour of the old-style, village-like community relations, sometimes described as ‘sticky’ relations in the community (e.g. Imamura 1987:65), and invoked by Nakajima san in her reference to ‘hedgehogs’ . In such a place , relations between neighbours are close, which can bepleasant, but also constraining. One probably ‘wouldn’t be able to live’ there, as Watanabe san said, if one were to opt out of the neighbourhood association and the obligations it involves. Kuroki san, and all the other staff members at the salon, mentioned the need for having community relationships, but made clear that overly close relationships in the neighbourhood are undesirable, as they are *okorisuru yōna*, they are annoying, or literally, prone to cause anger.

On numerous occasions, they mentioned the importance of privacy, using the English-derived word *puraibashii*, and noting that people nowadays find this important. This is also a term that some of my older interlocutors used when explaining why they were wary of strangers entering their houses, even as home helpers. In this case becoming a member of the same organization, like this NPO, was a solution, as the NPO guaranteed privacy (which is why separation of home-helper services users and salon guests was seen as important, and why helpers were not to discuss private living circumstances of the people in whose houses they were helping out). The bounds were set for the relationships and the expectations of reciprocity as a part of the system and the members were all part of the same organizations, which then meant that people entering their houses were not, technically speaking, strangers. That this was an important concern is confirmed by the fact that when I initially suggested that I would be interested in visiting some older people in their homes through the NPO network as a part of my research, this was greeted with a polite but firm refusal on the part of the NPO staff. Furthermore, during the *chotto tasukeai* seminar described in the previous chapter, a session was dedicated to the discussion of important issues regarding helping out a little in the neighbourhood. Participants were divided into six groups which were supposed to brainstorm on a couple of case studies and then invited to give comments. Independently, four out of six groups mentioned the issue of privacy as an important concern and at the same time as a great obstacle: it is difficult to enter older people's homes in order to check on them and see how they are doing, as they feel reluctant to let strangers in. In this sense, privacy seems to refer to a protection from imposition, from the judging gaze of a stranger, of one outside the immediate social circle of kin and friends. And yet, as many of the friendly relationships required proper behaviour, it was difficult to not feel the imposition even when one's friends were visiting, or staying overnight. This was reflected in a statement by Okuma san, to the effect that she was exhausted after her friend visited her for a several days, which kept her very busy, trying to do everything the way it should be (something that she did not do for herself, when she was alone). Distance, or a certain degree of separation, is required to maintain harmonious but cordial relationships, and avoid sticky relationships that can prove to be too onerous.

VOLUNTEERING AND MEANING

1995, the year of the Great Hanshin Earthquake[67], is often dubbed the First year of Volunteering (*Borantia Gannen*). The term *borantia*[68] (volunteer) is a loanword that has since been in frequent use. Even though numerous volunteer activities and efforts long preceded both the Earthquake and the introduction of the NPO Law[69] in Japan soon thereafter, a new era of volunteering was expected to ensue. The new volunteers were expected to be different: self-driven and not enlisted by the state, through local government initiatives or institutions. The separation of these new volunteer efforts from the state has since been shown to be questionable, as it has been facilitated by the state and coaxed in the direction of state agendas (Avenell 2010). Nevertheless, in contemporary usage, the term *borantia* preserves a sense of newness and difference, as implied by its foreign origin. I would like to argue that use of the term *borantia*, and the related activities of volunteering, is aimed at reforming relationships within the community, albeit not in the ways envisaged by its early advocates (e.g. Nakata 1996), promoting the development of a civil society as a sphere separate from the state and even as a site of resistance to government agendas. As I have already noted, community volunteer groups like Fureai seek out and actively cultivate their relationships with the local government. The reframing of relationships and community ties that is sought by these volunteers is rather more subtle, aimed not merely at reinvigorating the community and bringing back its tightly knit networks, but at establishing altogether new kinds of relationships, under the old banner of community[70]. I will explore this subtle change with respect to ideas of exchange and obligation.

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[67] See the Story-in-between 'First year of volunteering'.

[68] The word that was repeatedly pointed out to me as the most similar in Japanese is *otagai sama*, referring to a mutual relationship (of support), implying equality, usually within a local community.

[69] The introduction of the NPO Law has been described in great detail by Pekkanen (2000).

Undoubtedly, neighbourhoods such as Shimoichi pride themselves on multiple community ties supported by relationships of exchange, where the items exchanged include travel gifts, seasonal gifts and 'meaningless' gifts (Rupp 2003:29), in addition to gifts given on important ritual occasions such as weddings and funerals. While seasonal gifts may be given to some members of the community who have played a patron role in one's life, such as helping one or one's child to find a job or a marriage partner, ritual gifts may be exchanged with neighbours, with the gift varying in monetary value depending on the 'gravity' and closeness of the relationship. Yet the somewhat neglected class of 'meaningless' gifts may be the one that is most important for the constitution of neighbourhood community. It is precisely these small gifts of food, prepared meals and distribution of surplus delicacies one had received or managed to acquire while doing the shopping, that supports the numerous loose neighbourhood links. Visitors to the salon would often bring cakes and sweet treats that they had made themselves, or perhaps a surplus of mandarins to share with everyone present. 'Meaningless' gifts are labelled as such because they are not necessarily given in return, or as a part of a set exchange (unlike the seasonal or life-events related gifts; see Rupp 2003), and they do not require a formal return exchange within a set period of time. A number of little favours can be classified within this kind of relationship. Yet while they may not demand an elaborate response, they may still require some form of kindness, perhaps an offer of a hot drink, or a small thank-you gift on a later occasion.

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[70] In a broader sense, this use of terms like 'community' and 'tradition' as discourses for the creation of an image of stability in changing urban communities is nothing new. Thus Bestor argues that 'apparent continuities … are the results of a process of traditionalism – the interpretation, creation, or manipulation of contemporary ideas about the past to bestow an aura of venerability on contemporary social relations' (1989:4).

The volunteer-user relationship seeks to minimize this kind of obligation felt by the receiver, as it is often perceived as burdensome. As the volunteer help and support activities usually take place at the receiver's home, the formalized polite relationship might require the receiver to offer a cup of tea and a snack to the visitor, and to have the house in a presentable state - something that a few of my older interlocutors in the salon gave as a reason why they did not use the services of volunteers and home helpers. Being too embarrassed to receive them in a messy house, they always spent the morning tidying and preparing for their arrival, and so were more exhausted on the days they had such 'visitors', as Tamura san explained laughingly on one occasion. The volunteer system is aimed at changing this dynamic, not necessarily by making the interaction much less formalised, but by explicitly changing the rules of the game. When signing up, both the volunteers and the users are given booklets with guidelines. The volunteer booklet describes the procedure when visiting the user, designed to minimize awkwardness and chances for misunderstanding. It suggests that one always make all the arrangements through the coordinator, and notify them of any changes, to make sure they understand precisely what the task requested involves, and to pay attention to how the user likes things done - where the utensils are kept, what quantities of spices they like in their meal, and so on - to pay attention to safety, to check they have switched off the stove and appliances before leaving, and to check the time when they begin the work and to announce it to the user. Furthermore, they are warned not to give their address and phone number to the user, even if they are asked, and not to accept any hot drink, such as tea. Similarly, the users are asked to make all the arrangements through the coordinator, not to change the services once requested through the coordinator without contacting them, not to ask the volunteers directly to stay longer or to come again tomorrow, as they may feel uncomfortable declining (see Figure 4.3.) and not to offer them any hot drinks. In this way, the Tasukeai system aims to minimize the sense of personal obligation, and the burden felt on either side.

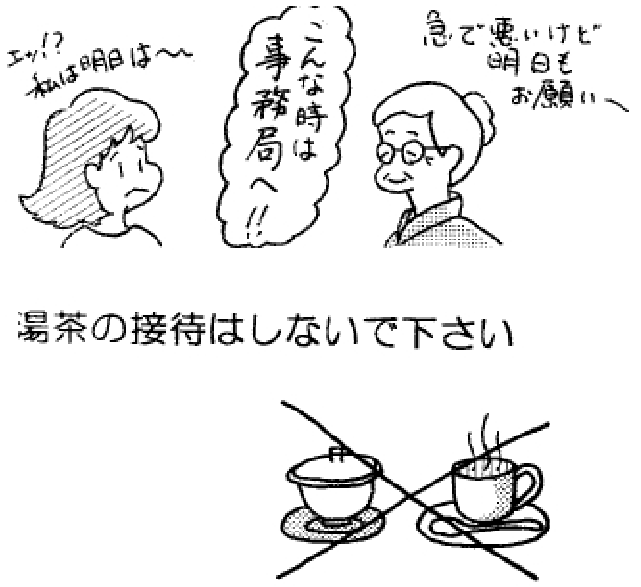
急で悪いけど
明日も
お願い〜
こんな時は事務局へ!!
エッ!?
私は明日は〜
湯茶の接待はしないで下さい

Figure 4.3. Illustrations from Fureai volunteer and user handbooks (unpublished and circulated in a form of stapled printouts). The older lady, presumably the user, asks the volunteer to come again tomorrow, who replies ‘But tomorrow I…’. The caption in the middle instructs to contact the office in such situations. The illustration below has a caption that reads: ‘Please do not serve hot drinks [to the volunteers]’.

The avoidance of burden is often invoked as one of the main reasons behind the introduction of the voucher system, or ‘paid volunteering’. Kuroki san explained this to me as follows:

> Basically, things that were done in the neighbourhood, connections, now every family does itself, (…) These things were something that used to be just normally done in amongst neighbours… So borrowing from that system we started our mutual help – doing a little bit instead of your family, helping and being helped, that is what we had hoped to put together. Why paid [volunteering] (*yūshō borantia*), one may ask. Well, as I’m sure you’ve heard from Nakajima san and others, even in close friendly relationships, if you keep asking for favours there’s a feeling of burden (*futan*)... So we thought, let’s get rid of that feeling of burden from the beginning, that’s why we introduced the voucher system. When the volunteering is free, totally free, the users are the ones who are concerned (*ki wo tsukatte*), and put some money in an envelope, or prepare things… (…) So we charge both volunteers and users a membership fee, as one never knows when one might oneself need some help… And there are many cases when someone who was a user wants to help out, for instance someone who needed help with baby-sitting,

> and the child is now going to school – so we make it an equal relationship, we make membership ‘flat’.

Kuroki san mentioned the decline in community ties and in help between neighbours, but did not seem to think that things were all rosy in the past, or that old neighbourhood relationships should be resurrected. She mentioned the concern and care expressed by users: *ki wo tsukau*, or literally ‘using one’s spirit’, which involves gifts and formal expressions of gratitude. This expression of concern and gratitude for a service or help received is quite pervasive in Japan. For instance, some hospital wards have a sign advising against ‘ki wo tsukau’, or in other words, against giving presents to the hospital staff. Patients’ families often circumvent this rule by sending presents directly to the doctor’s house (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). This kind of relationship can be seen as vertical or hierarchical, as it creates an inequality, something that is to be avoided. Indeed, the fees paid by both the users and providers of services within the Tasukeai system are equal and indicate that these roles, at least theoretically, could be swapped. In contrast to a vertical relationship of obligation, the emphasis is on keeping them equal and membership being ‘flat’.

This resembles the explanation Mori san offered for the disappearance of the old neighbourhood sociality (*mukashi no kinjo tsukiai*), when the mutual help occurred ‘naturally’ (*shizen ni*):

> Well, there is the issue of privacy (*praibashii*), but also of concern – Japanese are very concerned (*sugoku ki wo tsukau*) and restrained (*enryo suru*). And this became larger and larger: one helps someone a bit and there they are, coming with a thank you gift, showing concern (*ki wo tsukau*), so the small help became very difficult. Before, the neighbours used to help with the funerals… helping with the preparation of food, all of that was taken care of by the neighbours. But people started feeling reticent, restrained (*enryo*), and stopped getting help. The same happened with other kinds of help, even very small favours. Really, when one now has a little problem it feels like one has no-one to ask. Neighbourhood sociality had its good sides, but also its bad sides: the gossip, being told things by one’s neighbours [about one’s behaviour], annoying things like excessive meddling [in one’s affairs]. Trying to avoid these annoying things, people stopped doing it.

While it is easy to romanticise the communities of the past, with their caring character and thick networks of relationships, the inhabitants of Shimoichi, one of the more ‘traditional’ neighbourhoods in Osaka, found these burdensome[71]. The salon visitors negotiate the links and burdens carefully, as I discuss further in the following chapter. As is apparent from the above explanations, finding ways to balance community ties and associated burdens was a central concern for many of my interlocutors, and it provided a motivation for the NPO staff members to establish the group and mutual help system, Tasukeai. While volunteering efforts such as Tasukeai aim to reduce the burden felt by the recipients of support, they do not aspire to turn it into a 'free gift', an idealized gift (in this case, of goodwill) with no strings attached and no expectation of reciprocity[72] (Laidlaw 2000:627). Recognizing the difficulty, or indeed impossibility of a free gift, Tasukeai instead introduces token payment for its volunteer services, thus distinguishing itself from a semblance of charity and the necessity to reciprocate by gifts or in kind in future. It is still 'volunteering' as it is not based on one's duty or a feeling of responsibility stemming from a personal relationship, nor is it perceived as commodified: a service provided for an adequate remuneration. The aim is to make the relationships lighter, less 'sticky', something that is as important for the users as it is for the volunteers, who might otherwise feel that to be a part of a relationship is as obliging for them as it is for the users[73] and may find it difficult to withhold additional favours. Tasukeai seeks to make these relationships less personal, and the sense of reciprocity and benefit more generalized and diffused.

In other words, in their attempts to create a good community, of a kind where one can 'live well', NPO staff and residents of Shimoichi grapple with the issue of separation. This may be considered as an important aspect of the existential issue of autonomy and dependency. In his work on separation and reunion in China, Charles Stafford proposes that we can understand separation as a universal human constraint, of which death is just a subset (Stafford 2000:1). He notes that physical separation generates crises of relatedness, with two aspects: 'we are often obliged to part with those with whom we wish to remain, and often obliged to stay with those with whom we wish to part' (ibid.:13). Yet the broad-ranging material in his book largely deals with the undesirable separations and desirable reunions. In everyday relations in Shimoichi, and probably other urban neighbourhoods in Japan, a degree of separation is nevertheless highly valued, as reflected in the emphasis placed privacy, a notion to which I will return shortly. The Shimoichi material forces us to take seriously the importance of separation for harmonious relations.

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[71] A similar point regarding the less positive aspects of 'traditional' sociality has been made by Ben-Ari (1998:70) – he refers to earlier works by Dore (1978), Bestor (1992), and Martinez (1990), which show the emphasis of local community discourses on the positive images of the 'past' as harmonious, but gloss over the negative aspects, such as conservative and anti-democratic attitudes towards authority.

[72] The 'free gift', as conceptualized by Derrida, could only exist if there is no reciprocity (past, present or future), and in order to prevent this neither the recipient nor the donor can acknowledge the gift or recognize it as such (Derrrida 1992 in Laidlaw 2000:621).

[73] The agency of the weaker or dependent should not be neglected (see e.g. Mahmood 2011; Walker 2012).

Ideas surrounding the relationship between the self and others would seem to be crucial for understanding anxieties such as isolation anxiety, as well as their opposite – the need to maintain a separate identity. In contrast to Western notions of selves as essentially separate, Roy Wagner (1977) writes of the Papuan ideas of relationships as given, and of the social order as innate, rather than crafted or created. Viveiros de Castro (2004) offers a similar insight in his writings concerning the difference between Western and Amerindian ontologies. Where Westerners assume that we are individuals and have absolutely singular minds (it is our biological bodies that are similar), Amerindians assume the opposite. To oversimplify the matter grossly, we tend to assume that while our physiology and bodies work in similar ways, but are character and 'mind' is separate from others and only our own; Amerindian cosmologies presuppose the interconnectedness of selves and similarity of characters but bodies are more problematic. This leads to very different kinds of anxieties: 'Our traditional problem in the West is how to connect and universalize: individual substances are given, while relations have to be made. The Amerindian problem is how to separate and particularize: relations are given, while substances must be defined' (ibid.:476). Not only is the difference in the ideas of innate based in very different understandings of the body, but we could also imagine it has consequences for the understanding of the relationship of self to others. If one assumes that relationships are 'given' and the link to the other is assumed, the task is to distinguish oneself from others, and one fears incorporation or assimilation. With the boundedness of a personal unit, like in the West, unique identity is a given, but one must strive to build bridges towards others. The Shimoichi case holds both of those tendencies in balance, striving both for connection and separation, as the relationships in question are not understood to be given in the way ties of kinship might be, and the community ties can no longer be taken for granted.

This relates to a changing sense of public and private, with privacy often invoked as something that precludes the old kind of 'thick' (Knight 1996) communal relationship. In its extreme form, it could lead to isolation, as mentioned by Nakajima san, especially among older people. As implied by the term's foreign origin (*puraibashi*), privacy is often associated with Western modernity and concomitant alienation (e.g. Giddens 1991:151), and as foreign to the Japanese 'sense of self', typically considered to be 'group-oriented' and enmeshed with other members of one's group, who are inside (*uchi*), as opposed to those who are outside (*soto*). While this distinction is relevant, Daniels points out that it is not absolute, but rather a difference in emphasis: 'The stress is on us versus others instead of the individual versus society' (2010:75). The emphasis on the group rather than the individual need not mean that there is no distinction between private and public, or that the distinction is irrelevant. What it may mean is that the privacy of individuals is less important than the privacy of the family-household in relation to the community, at least in this case. Undoubtedly, as we shall see in the following chapter, the visitors to the salon guard their privacy carefully, by keeping to themselves certain kinds of personal information, and not least by employing polite and formal forms of speech, thus maintaining a minimal distance from potentially intrusive others.

A good life, then, is one with rich social relationships, a multitude of links to others in the community, on whom one can rely for support, but one in which the intrusive and constraining aspects of these relationships is minimized, and the social 'burden' that one feels towards others is kept manageable. It is about maintaining links to others without being fully absorbed into the thick social fabric through its excessive demands. Wellbeing in this context may be precisely about balancing sociality and a sense of freedom. Such a balancing act may be universal, even if its form is undoubtedly specific. The following statement, referring to the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, resonates with the concerns expressed by my interlocutors: '[w]ell-being is …dependent on an adjustment or balance between our sense of what we owe others and what we owe ourselves' (Jackson 2011:195). While the Kuranko place their demands on others loudly and explicitly, in contrast to the more formalized interactions and internalized expectations experienced by the inhabitants of Shimoichi, they share the concern with finding a difficult yet valuable balance.

SOCIETY WITHOUT TIES? 'THE SHOCK OF 32000 LONE DEATHS'

> '[Mr. Sano] is in his mid-sixties and lives alone in a small apartment in an urban area of Japan. He has been divorced for many years, has no children or friends, does not know his neighbours, and has not contacted anyone in his family for decades. His employer barely speaks to him but knows him as a sad, silent man. Because he neglects getting regular medical check-ups, he collapses in his home from what would otherwise be a very manageable medical condition, and dies because no first responders are aware of his existence. His body is not discovered for several weeks. After some effort by local authorities, a few members of Mr. Sano's family are successfully contacted, but none want anything to do with the matter. No-one will take charge of Mr. Sano's remains or personal effects, or see to the funeral or interment. A *tokushu seisō gyōsha* ('special cleaning') crew is engaged to clear out Mr. Sano's living quarters. The local government arranges to have his remains interred at a temple. Some of its priests offer occasional prayers in a small structure housing the remains of Mr. Sano and others like him' (Taylor 2012).

This is just one of the stories presented in the course of a series of programmes entitled *Alienated Society* (*Muen Shakai*), society without ties, broadcasted in January 2010 by NHK, the Japanese national television. Muen Shakai[74] is described as a society in which family, community and company ties are fading, leading to an increase in numbers of isolated people. The relatively dense relationships that in the past that characterized Japan - within the family, the company, and the local community - formed a system of ties of mutual assistance. Yet such ties are today perceived as rapidly dissolving. This is related to the transformation of the family, an increase in numbers of people who do not marry, an increase in numbers of single-people households as a result of increased longevity, changes in forms of employment, and lifestyle changes. The television programme revealed to the general public the many cases of people who have families but have broken off contact with them, who have little or no interaction with the people in their neighbourhood, and who would have no one to contact should they fall ill or in case of an emergency. The programme problematized the issue of how to foster new societal ties once the supportive function of the family, community or company is lost (Harada 2010).

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[74] The word 'muen shakai' was later voted one of the new top ten buzzwords, new words that describe the world of today for 2010 (Harada 2010).

The participants in the seminar about 'little help in the neighbourhood' (*Chotto Tasukeai*[1]) mentioned the programme and the concept of *muen shakai* on several occasions, as did some of my interlocutors in the salon – as a story, in the seminar context it was used a s point of reference, while in the salon it was retold and discussed briefly among the salon goers.

One of the keywords singled-out in the programme is *tanshinka*, which can be translated as 'atomization'. We are facing a time of increased atomization, with growing number of people living alone, projected by the National Research Agency to rise from around 20% in 1980 to some 40% in 2030. To give the viewer a flavour of a place with such a high degree of isolation, the programme then focused on a housing estate (*danchi*) in Tokyo in which 30% of the 900 households were comprised of a single person. 75-year old Fujiwara san had withdrawn into the apartment in which he now lives alone some fifteen years ago. He used to work as a scaffolding constructor and worked surrounded by many colleagues, and had a son and a wife, but since his health deteriorated he lost his job and divorced 19 years ago. He has had no contact with them for years and does not even know where they are. 85% of the people living alone on this estate are over the age of 65. A ninety-year old lady is reported to have said that her legs are weak, so she does not leave the house. Another keyword that was introduced was a 'unmarried for a lifetime' (*shōgai mikon*), accompanied by a prediction that by 2030, one in three men over the age of fifty will remain unmarried throughout their lives. Many of these men are liable to experience a sense of isolation during their lifetime, and some may even die alone, like Sano san, a man described in the story above. Every year, approximately 32 000 lone deaths are recorded in Japan.

The producers of the documentary programme series started thinking more about the lack of social ties and noticed connections to phenomena they had reported about previously following an interview with a homeless man living in a Tokyo park. This fifty year old man had lost his job in a delivery company and been evicted from the company dormitory, to find himself on the streets. Despite being able to work, he was unable to find a job, and grew lonely and isolated, with a radio as his only source of human voice. When asked how he came to be in this situation, and why he had not sought help from relatives, friends or even the state in the form of benefits, he replied that at his age he is still capable of working and should be able to provide for himself. Moreover, he stressed, he didn't want to cause trouble for anyone (*meiwaku wo kaketakunai*). The producers then posed the question of what had happened to social ties of a kind where mutual support could be taken for granted, and the trouble that one may cause was forgiven, permitted by both sides. If the number of people living alone continues to increase, they go on to suggest, one must then ask what is necessary for a society 'where one can live alone at ease (*anshin shite*) and where one can at ease face dying on one's own' (NHK 2010a).

The initial broadcast caused a great stir among its many viewers, a number of whom wrote in to the NHK. According to one of the programme producers, what was surprising was not just the amount of attention the programme received, but the widespread concern it caused. Many people who were not old, but only in their thirties and forties, wrote that the programme made them feel worried and anxious that they, too, might one day die alone (Nakajima 2010). One man in his thirties wrote in his letter to the NHK (one of the 2300 that they received during the month in which the series was first screened): 'I too am still single. In the present conditions of an economic depression and an unstable society, I hesitate to marry. I struggle to support myself' (NHK 2010b).

This man's anxiety would seem to be closely connected to those that usually surround the issue of aging in its many forms – worries about one's own aging, about that of family members one will have to look after, as well as the most generalized yet palpable feeling of worry about the aging population. It could be argued that the documentary series led to such a large number of agitated responses from people of different ages and generations because it stirred some deep-seated anxieties of a kind that could be considered existential. The psychotherapist Irvin Yalom (1980) argues that there are four basic existential anxieties that all people may experience, though they may surface in a variety of forms: fear of death; fear of isolation; freedom (and the responsibility it brings); and meaninglessness. Yalom's work aims at universality, but refers to the English speaking Western countries, and so it is possible that these anxieties do not take the same form, or spring from the same roots in different cultural contexts. It would nevertheless appear that the responses to this particular broadcast reveal some deep seated anxieties, and may have proven to be such a stirring topic precisely because it raised issues pertaining to all four of the existential anxieties discussed by Yalom. Fear of death and isolation were addressed explicitly (‘Maybe I am one of those who will die alone, too?’), while other anxieties were related to the issue of responsibility (‘Why did I not get married?’ ‘The external circumstances may be difficult and I do not have a high income, but I chose not to have children…’), and it is not hard to see the fear of meaninglessness lurking behind many questions of the kind: ‘What kind of life is that?’.

The need for privacy and the wish not to burden others with one’s troubles appear to be widespread in industrialized societies, and as such could be understood as pertaining to the individualizing tendencies of modernity. While this may certainly be the case, the use of the term *meiwaku* begs the question, as raised by the NHK show producers: to whom can one cause trouble? They ask: if we ‘cause trouble’ to people we know and, indeed, engage in causing trouble mutually, not something expected? Indeed, perhaps it is not seen as trouble at all? Certainly, in the Japanese context, *meiwaku* is caused to people with whom we do not have a close relationship, and polite restraint (*enryo*) is mostly exhibited towards those above us in the hierarchy. It appears that the producer’s question implies that reciprocal relationships, where one mutually ‘troubles’ each other, are those relationships that one can rely for help. If those relationships are disappearing or weakening, what is one to do? This kind of society, without ties, seems to be the opposite of the society comprised of village-like communities, bound up in ‘thick’ (Knight 1996) or sticky relationships, reliable but constraining. What would a space carved out in the middle look like?

CHAPTER 5

MANNERS AND MORALS: LIVING WELL TOGETHER

Many shopkeepers were still arranging the goods displayed out the front of their stores as Sato san walked past down the shopping arcade. Exchanging nods and smiles with most and a few words with some, she arrived in front of the Salon just before 10 a.m. She unlocked the door and went straight to the kitchen to hang her coat and boil water for the first customers, then wiped all the surfaces and swept the floors. The first customers arrived soon enough: Ikeda san and Kato san, the 87 and 90 year old sisters who frequented the salon daily. They were content to chat to each other while she made them tea. Sato san later told me how relieved she was, as it was her first day volunteering on her own and she was rather nervous. Luckily, the two ladies and a few other customers who arrived during that morning shift seemed quite comfortable and used to the routine of the salon. A short white-haired lady slowed down in front of the entrance and peered in curiously but hesitated to enter. Kato san sprung up to her feet and rushed toward the sliding door with a smile on her face. *Irrashai! Irrashai!* (Welcome! Welcome!), she exclaimed, using a less formal version of the phrase used by shopkeepers to greet their customers or invite in guests. Ikeda san prepared a chair at the table at which she and her sister were sitting with Obāchan (Granny), an older lady in her nineties, and a quiet dark-haired lady with glasses in her seventies. A man in a baseball cap was quietly sipping his coffee at the other table and flicking through a newspaper. Cheerfully talking over each other, the ladies made sure to explain how the system worked: one can order a hot drink – coffee, black tea or green tea – for which one pays a hundred yen upon receiving it and one can request refills or even order a different hot drink without paying more. They inquired about the area in which the lady lived, and deduced that they knew a tofu seller a street away from her house. Making sure that the newcomer participated in the conversation, the four ladies and one man chatted about a famous singer who (according to the news) was celebrating her eightieth birthday.

Lunch time in the salon always causes a certain amount of commotion. Some customers leave to eat at home with their families, just like Obāchan did that day. Others strolled down the shopping arcade (shōtengai) and chose one of the boxed lunch options, such as *okonomiyaki*, *yakisoba* (fried noodles), boiled rice with vegetables, or sushi. Hidehira san and Kimura san wandered down from the NPO office upstairs to heat up their lunch in the kitchen, joking and chatting with the customers, while Nagafuku san rushed away to a meeting in the City Hall. Kato san went to get some soba for herself and a couple of *onigiri* for her sister and came back to have it at the salon, saying to the ladies sitting around the table: ‘My sister was sick and now has many likes and dislikes (*suki kirai*). She doesn’t like soba, she prefers udon or rice. And some things are too greasy’. Her sister explained somewhat apologetically that she had a stomach sickness and still has some problems. A conversation started up about different tastes in food, with everyone volunteering information about their likes and dislikes. The conversation turned to restaurants in the area and how to get to them, with people offering recommendations and singling out places which were definitely not worth visiting. As we were chatting, we were joined at the table by Ueda san - a tall, sturdy, bespectacled lady in her sixties, who sometimes volunteered in the salon and was always smiling. She had brought me a belt for the yukata she had heard I had recently received as a present. Kato san, one of the two sisters coming to the salon on a daily basis, suggested: ’This is good, you don’t need to spend money. You could give this as a present to your friends when you go back home and you won’t need to buy something for them. You don’t earn any money here, but Ueda san has her pension, she worked as a civil servant.’

Feeling that this might be disrespectful to Ueda san, I replied I would prefer to keep my present and explained that I do indeed have some income through fellowships. I knew that Kato san was worried about me not being paid for my volunteer work in the salon. But Ueda san retorted that it is not good to assume things about people. She did not in fact have a pension, she informed us, as she had stopped working for health reasons just a month before fulfilling the minimum employment requirement. After she recovered somewhat she found out that she would need to work for another year to compensate for that month, and felt that would be too difficult for her. She had her husband’s small pension and devoted her time instead to voluntary activities. Quietly but firmly, she insisted that one hears good and nice things from people because they do not always mention difficulties, but that doesn’t mean that one can assume that their life is all set and easy. ‘This is a salon. People come here to enjoy themselves and don’t feel like talking about difficulties, or burdening others with their problems’ Ueda san concluded. The sisters seemed quite surprised at her situation, and readily agreed with her point, while another lady said: 'That’s exactly what I thought when I was talking to Sumiyoshi san the other day. She complains a lot about her situation and assumes that everybody else’s life is easy. But people have hard times (*kurō*) too.’ Ueda san then concluded: ’Everyone has hard times, even if they don’t mention it. If you’re going to talk like that, you have to hear the other side of the story. Even when people are all right, they have difficulties that you may not know about. Other people’s lives always have another side that you need to ask about, if you’re going to speak about that.’ Everyone seemed to agree with Ueda san and nodded approvingly.

A tall, handsome man in his late sixties known as Shachō (literally ‘company director’), who came regularly in the afternoons, pulled up a chair at the busy table next to Kato san and joined the chat. Now retired, Shachō had once owned a company that made writing brushes, and the ladies rather enjoyed calling him a director. He was in turn always careful to pay compliments to the ladies, and to ask after those he hadn’t seen in a while. Ikeda san ordered some more green tea for everyone, and when I brought it over she poured it into cups with an elegant gesture. She couldn’t quite reach all the way across the large table, and another lady took over on that side. She poured some for me too, insisting (as she often did) that I sit down with them to chat when I was finished serving at the other table. Our unspoken agreement was that I would pour the first round of green tea for them when I was serving, but that they would subsequently serve each other in the following rounds. Then, with her usual whirlwind of greetings, Kikuchi san entered and joined the table. She had brought some seaweed crackers for everyone and the chat took on a friendly and cheerful tone, with people from both tables participating. The theme was local politics and the promises made ahead of the local elections. Unlike the serious conversation that ensued in one of the days to follow, this one was full of jokes and throwaway remarks. Someone then brought up the issue of a murder covered in the news. One of the ladies remarked: ‘He was crazy, the murderer. He was young, in his thirties, and lived all alone in a *manshon* flat. He didn’t have any friends and spent all his time alone. That would make one crazy.’ They all agreed it was important to talk to other people, and one of them replied: ‘One can also get senile (*boke*). It’s so important, talking to people every day.’ An elegant silver-haired lady in her eighties, wearing a pale blue dress with a lace collar nodded approvingly: ‘Yes, this is my talking training (*hanashi no okeiko*). I come here to have a chat and a laugh.’ she added with a cheerful smile. This caused a round of warm laughter and approving noises. Another lady exclaimed: ’This is the source of our health (wathashitachi kenkou no moto)’! Closing time was approaching, and after half an hour or so everyone started getting ready to leave. Some of the ladies helped me to collect the empty cups while the others said their goodbyes. Ueda san and Kikuchi san stayed behind to keep me company, chatting away while I tidied up and closed the salon.

WELCOME, WELCOME: THE SALON AS A PLACE TO BELONG

This chapter explores the dynamics of interactions in the salon: from greetings and seating patterns to informal alliances and sharing and avoidance relations, all of which one might discern in the above description of a typical day. The salon itself is seen by some as a place to drop in occasionally, and by others as a place to spend time on a daily basis, but always as an opportunity to meet others and socialise. For most visitors, it is their ‘place’ (*ibashō*), that is, somewhere they feel a sense of comfort or belonging - a theme explored further in this section. Subsequent sections explore the nature of conversations and a variety of issues related to living well, such as food and sociality, the importance of looks, local geographies and the relevance of place, health and aging, form and manners. With respect to the latter point in particular, I argue that underlying many of the issues mentioned is a preoccupation with politeness and above all with ‘doing things properly’ (*chanto suru*). These are part of an abiding concern with ‘form’ that has important implications for wellbeing and for ideas about *how* to live well. While the constraining aspects of formality have often been noted, my older interlocutors made it clear to me that doing things the way they should be done can induce calm, pleasant feelings of competence and satisfaction.

A visitor to the salon is usually met by a chorus of greetings from all corners of the room. Particularly in the afternoons, after lunch, a larger crowd gathers and the atmosphere is jovial. This is the time when greetings are numerous and cheerful, mixed with calls to sit in a particular spot, or questions about the length of or reason for one’s absence, or just cheerful statements that so-and-so has arrived. Instead of just a plain hello (*konnichi wa* during the day, or *konban wa* in the evenings), people are sometimes told how nice it is of them to have come (*yō kite kuremashita, ne*). This cordial phrase has a subtle host overtone, and while it mostly reflected a warm, genuine feeling it also indicated that the addressee is more of a guest than the speaker, who is 'at home'. The more frequent customers have a good idea about who came when, and pass on the information to each other, while some of the regulars who come less frequently inquire if someone was in recently and how they are doing, if they had not seen them of late. People in the salon frequently expressed their concern for others if they have not been in for an unusual amount of time – with those who come daily this could be a day or two, while with those who come once or twice a week one week would suffice. Some would inquire with the shopkeepers or acquaintances and neighbours, or less frequently, they would drop in to check on them. This appeared to be a spontaneous extension of neighbourly behaviour, even though some of the visitors lived considerably further away and arrived by bus or by bicycle. On the other hand, the expression of concern was rather casual and would rarely lead to a full conversation about someone who was absent. Most visitors were nevertheless aware of their links to the group of people who came to the salon on a regular basis, so they made an effort to poke their head in on their way somewhere just to say hello or let others know what they're up to.

One afternoon in late March, Okuma san came in after a longish absence of two weeks. She had short, white hair and was sporting a polo shirt and trainers. Upon greeting everyone she apologized for her long absence and explained that she had been very busy for the past few weeks, during the cherry blossom viewing season. She had a couple of house guests and complained how exhausted she was from all the cooking and serving of elaborate, Japanese-style meals, though she had also had a lot of fun, going to interesting places while showing her guests around. Her explanation was listened to attentively, and her story attracted the attention of most people gathered around the table. Three ladies and Shachō were very happy to hear she was well, because they had been getting worried about her, and thought she might have fallen ill. Kato san had even walked to her place, but was baffled at what to do, as Okuma san lived in a massive apartment block (*manshon*) with hundreds of apartments and a securely locked front door. She realized she couldn't just knock and check on her so she left. Okuma san thanked her for her concern and took out a big box of biscuits from Nara, which she had brought as an *omiyage* (a present from a trip, a souvenir) from a trip she had made with her friends during their stay, and offered them to everyone. This little episode highlights the expressions of concern for others, or a particular mode of care, among the frequent visitors to the salon.

Concern or care seems to colour the common phrase used when someone leaves the salon and which follows a farewell: ’take care’ (*ki wo tsukete ne*). The expression used in this context is of course formulaic and usually does not reflect an interest in personal particulars, but rather refers to a general sense of keeping safe and looking after oneself: walking without tripping, being safe in traffic and in the street, looking after one’s health. On particularly cold or hot days, or if the salon visitors noted that someone’s health is somewhat diminished, farewells might be followed by *karada wo daiji ni*, a slightly less formal expression translating roughly as ‘look after your body/health’. The person leaving might also exchange a few words with other visitors about when they will next be in the salon and when they might meet again, or mention their plans for the coming days, all of which helps others to notice if one is absent for a longer period of time than expected without a known reason. The concern expressed in statements or acts such as these could easily pass unnoticed to an external observer. Unlike the very tightly-knit network of a small community such as a village, or some urban neighbourhoods, where everyone’s movements and actions are closely observed and monitored, the ‘neighbourly’ relationships of the elderly salon-goers are somewhat looser. Older people of the salon spoke fondly of their sense of (sometimes newfound) freedom and took care to protect their privacy (an issue explored in more detail in chapter 5). Nevertheless, the concern they express for others is personal, founded on their knowledge of the personal circumstances of their peers, even if such knowledge is partial or circumscribed. This type of concern reflects a broader characteristic of the relationships between the older people visiting the salon, which I would argue are personal, but not intimate.

The relationships of the salon visitors in many ways resemble the neighbourly networks of support, described in Chapter 4, and in some cases form an extension of these networks. The modes of interaction thus resemble neighbourhood greetings, a superficial knowledge of other people’s circumstances, including the rough whereabouts of their home, the exchange of small or ‘meaningless’ gifts such as food, particularly redistributing a surplus or bringing delicacies such as any seasonal specialties (chestnuts in autumn, mandarins in winter, yuzu citrus tea in summer, and so on) that one managed to obtain. On the other hand, the salon provides a space to meet other older people from the neighbourhood to whom one might not otherwise have a personal connection, which is especially important for those whose acquaintances of similar age have passed away or become immobile. The salon also proved an extension of these networks in another important way, as it provides a space for people who seek the company of peers, but who do not live in the immediate vicinity. Many salon visitors - at least a third - arrived from neighbourhoods further away, by bicycle or public transport. Most importantly, according to both the volunteers and the visitors, the salon provides a place to be, a place to interact and meet. Entertaining at home can be tiring, and perceived by the guests as a burden on the host, as Okuma san made clear in the story above. Moreover, receiving less well acquainted visitors in one's home is perceived as dangerous, especially for older people living on their own. Thus, among all the salon visitors, entertaining at home was extremely rare. Finally, the salon provided more than just a place to spend time in - it was perceived as a meaningful place (*ibashō*), where one feels comfortable and has a sense of belonging. On several occasions, I heard people mention in spontaneous conversations how good it was to have a place to be (*ibashō*), or that salon was their source of health (*kenkō no moto*).

This sense of belonging to the salon as a place can be contrasted with the feeling of discomfort that newcomers experience when first entering. This feeling of the salon being in some ways 'hard to enter' (*hairinikui*) at first, was mentioned by almost all the salon visitors, especially those who came on their own for the first time. As one of the veteran visitors mentioned once:

> This place is hard to enter (*hairinikui*). When I first came here I was reluctant, because you don't exactly know what this place is. It doesn't look like an office or a shop, but it's somewhat different from a café, because you can see from the large window at the entrance that everyone's sitting at one of the two large tables. Also, there's no menu or price list out the front. I didn't know what to expect!

This feeling of being out of place in the salon is, paradoxically, linked to the feeling of it being a warm, welcoming and cheerful place. The laughter and lively chats coming from the inside can be equally inviting and intimidating. The reason for this is a lack of clear information about how open or closed is the circle of people inside, that makes one feel as an outsider. In literature about Japan the twin concepts of inside (*uchi*) and outside (*soto*) is often mentioned as an important principle of classification: one either belongs to the group, or is on the outside. This group may be a family, a company, or a class, and the social world comprises a number of such overlapping circles. A public place such as a café, by contrast, does not usually house a tightly knit group, but rather an assemblage of strangers who do not communicate with each other, except with the person whom they arranged to meet: space is divided between strangers and friends. The salon aims to create a different kind of place, where one can talk to others who may not have been acquaintances but are not strangers either. Equally, one may come to meet a friend in the salon, but most would be reluctant to display particular closeness and intimacy with one person in particular in a way that isolates them from the overall conversation. Around a shared table, common courtesy demands that the conversation can be shared. Frequent visits and many familiar faces undoubtedly create a sense of belonging, especially when even one's short absence is noted by others, but the relationships between the salon goers could not be described as close or intimate.

The aim of the NGO management was to create a place where people could make acquaintances in the neighbourhood and to keep it open for all newcomers. That is why polite notices state the rules and prices on every table, in place of a menu, and an information brochure with a description of the aims and upcoming events is placed on a stand near the entrance. The discomfort of newcomers is often eased either by a previous invitation by one of the regulars, or by an impromptu invitation on the very threshold. Just like Kato san sprung to her feet when she saw a lingering silhouette near the front door, most visitors would make sure to invite the reluctant newcomer in and make sure they feel comfortable even before the busy volunteer would have time to approach the table. Furthermore, the management organizes numerous events in the salon, such as workshops and concerts, which they advertise via leaflets and posters in the shopping arcade or advertisements in local council publications. Once one has visited on one of these more formal and therefore public occasions, at least the place becomes familiar. An effort is made by all the staff and volunteers to serve hot drinks to all the visitors after these events, a task which is rather difficult with only one small water boiler and a very small filter coffee machine. On these occasions, visitors have a chance to converse informally with each other over a cup of tea, as well as to become acquainted with the way the salon operates. The system is very simple but quite different from a café or a teahouse, as only a few kinds of drinks are served and prices are kept very low. Coffee, green tea and black tea are priced at JPY 100[75] and additional servings are free, as is cold water. No food is served and one is encouraged to bring lunch, provided that one takes away all the rubbish. Smoking and the consumption of alcohol are forbidden. Some events and weekly workshops are free, but those that require a small fee are clearly marked on the printed schedules available near the door.

CHATTING OR SITTING TOGETHER: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SALON SOCIALITY

While some visitors use the salon as a place to quietly enjoy an inexpensive hot drink, and the occasional person comes in order to meet up with a friend as in a café, a large majority comes to enjoy other people's company: whether quietly listening to a conversation nodding occasionally, having a quiet chat with one or two others during a lull, or participating in a loud and cheerful exchange within a larger group. Conversation lies at the core of salon sociality, and for those living alone or with a working family, a visit may offer a valuable opportunity to talk. This point was made on several occasion by the elegant slim silver-haired lady who mentioned that she likes to laugh and chat and would call the salon her 'talking practice' (*ohanashi no okeiko*), choosing an old-fashioned term for artistic practice, *okeiko*, usually used in the context of self-development. Conversations in the salon covered a wide array of topics, some of which are discussed in this section. They include food, local geographies, politics, self-development, appearance, aging and health, death, family, leisure, and old times. Recent work in gerontology shows the importance of communication for 'successful aging' (see Nussbaum and Fisher 2011), but I would argue that as a mode of sociality, communication is directly linked to a sense of well-being and a meaningful life. While this chapter as a whole outlines different modes of relating in the salon, this section focuses on communication and relations in the salon, achieved through being together, chatting, sharing stories or merely sitting together in silence.

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[75] A price of JPY 100 was relatively low, as typical café prices ranged from JPY 180-250. According to Nagafuku san, even the salon price was not low for many of the older salon visitors with low incomes.

Mornings in the salon are usually quieter, and the conversations more subdued, taking place between just two or three people. On the quiet days, when it is unusually empty, some private and more personal conversations take place. Sometimes people grocery shopping in the arcade would stop by and have a quick coffee before rushing home in time to make lunch. During lunch hours (between noon and one o'clock), some people leave but may stay or even come to eat their lunch and enjoy a cup of coffee after their meal. During this time people usually conversed in a low-key manner about everyday matters. Afterwards, some would return home to rest, and few guests would enter, as they also might be enjoying a nap at home. A peak time was around three in the afternoon, when the largest crowd usually gathered and the mood was particularly cheerful and loud. Conversation topics ranged from politics to olden times, often involving some banter and jokes. This was the time that regular customers who did not come on a daily basis, but less frequently, perhaps twice a week, would choose for their visits, as well as some volunteers who lived in the neighbourhood. Many such regular visitors were men: Shachō – the handsome, retired company head; Harada san - a stocky man who particularly enjoyed learning unusual kanji characters; or a loud thin man sporting a baseball hat and large wooden bead necklace over his sporting top.

It may be useful at this point to make a few remarks on gender. Overall, there were fewer male then female visitors to the salon, perhaps comprising around a third of the customers during the day. Several of the salon goers explained that men were perhaps playing go and preferred not to sit and chat. Murata san, a male salon volunteer who used to work as a helper in a day-care centre where there were even fewer men, commented that many men have no social skills (*shakōsei ga nai*) and felt uncomfortable having conversations with unknown people, a statement that sounded like much of the popular discourse of the time. A couple of regular morning visitors seemed to conform to that description entirely. One, in his late sixties, arrived early, ordered a coffee and sat in silence at an empty end of one of the tables and left as soon as he finished his drink, no more than half an hour after arrival. Another, in his seventies, also chose an empty part of a table and read his newspaper without a word, constantly ordering refills of coffee and leaving a couple of hours later. On the other hand, the three men mentioned above appeared to be at the very heart of the social life, arriving at busy times and drawing their chairs up to the most crowded part of the table to enjoy a lively chat. The ladies responded in kind and often made quite a fuss when they arrived, making sure their drinks were ordered promptly and calling them and making space. If the first group of male salon goers seems to support the stereotype of poor social skills, the second group are positively at the heart of salon social life and challenge the image of the impolite, stern and demanding older man with the sense of entitlement known as *oyaji* (Bardsley 2011). In general, the modes of sociality, behaviours and conversations in the salon often challenged stereotyped images of older Japanese[76].

SHARING: FOOD, NEWS AND INFORMATION

Ono san always comes to the salon on Thursday mornings to enjoy a cup of black coffee and some dark chocolate that the volunteer lady would happily keep in the refrigerator for him until the next week. This man in his late sixties runs a shop with pictures and decorations he makes himself from wood. After a stroke his command over the right side of his body is weakened and he has difficulties walking longer distances but gets by on a bicycle. ‘I like Thursdays, it’s my rehabilitation day’ - Ono san has a free day on Thursdays, when he gets to rest from the woodwork in his shop, which he finds increasingly exhausting with his weak right hand. He finds it difficult to admit it to his wife, and goes to work daily so as not to disappoint her, as he admitted quietly to the volunteer lady on one occasion. After having finished a vocational school, Ono san worked in a large publishing house as a designer and some years ago, after he retired, he designed the first logo for the NPO. Ono san was convinced that years of stressful lifestyle, long hours made even longer by massive work-related drinking sessions, had cost him his health and eventually led to his stroke, so he always complained that work and drinking made his head weak, in a well humoured manner and continued his conversations with the ladies in the salon, offering them chocolates he brought. Some accepted, but most declined, saying that they avoid sweet things and prefer simple food, especially light Japanese dishes.

As a topic of conversation, food deserves attention as it was probably most often mentioned and discussed with much relish among the salon goers. Furthermore, the salon is a place where people occasionally have a meal or a snack. Not a day would pass without someone bringing a small snack to share, just like Kikuchi san in the opening story, usually packets of foodstuffs that they themselves received as gifts and wanted to share with others. Those who had travelled somewhere, for instance to visit their family or to a hot spring (*onsen*), would always bring packets of food to share as souvenirs (*omiyage*). These beautifully wrapped boxes of biscuits or traditional sweets or other foodstuffs, all portioned and individually wrapped inside the box, are usually presented as a local specialty. Others brought local specialties that their families sent them from their native village or town (*furusato*), most commonly fruits such as mandarins, pears or persimmons. All of these gifts were consumed together, and only if there were a few extra pieces, the person who brought it, or one of the more assertive older ladies, such as Kato san, would encourage others to take one home. The importance of sharing food and eating together for the construction of sociality or relatedness is widely recognized in the anthropological literature, and eating patterns in the salon are somewhat indicative of the types of relationships created among the loose group of salon goers.

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[76] For a discussion of this see Yoshiko Matsumoto 2011:51.

While the snacks brought to the salon were always promptly and efficiently shared with the help of several of assertive regulars, not all food is expected to be shared. Lunches, brought in individual portions, were not meant to be shared and there was no pressure to offer food brought as lunch. On the other hand, people would offer to go and buy something for others if they were going to the shop and were given the right amount of money upon their return, which they were not reluctant to take. As paying for other people's food, or treating them to a meal, may indicate a higher status, the attention to paying back the money spent created an atmosphere of equality. This was further maintained by careful attempts not to single out anyone in particular when bringing gifts of food and by keeping extras for those who might come in later. One day, Shacho san came in late in the afternoon and was offered a cracker by Ikeda san, but seemed reluctant to take it, until others confirmed that they had already received one and that it was an *omiyage* from Murata san's recent hiking trip, which he had brought for everyone earlier in the day. Similarly, if a group of a few ladies wanted to go to have dinner in a restaurant, or eat cake together without inviting everyone present, the arrangements were made very discretely, usually over the telephone before arriving at the salon, as Kato san and Ueda san explained to me on separate occasions. If salon goers knew each other well and spent some time going places together outside the salon, what they did was not discussed in front of others, lest they felt left out. In short, food sharing in the salon is an important part of everyday sociality and the creation of a warm atmosphere, but it was limited to the occasional sharing of snacks. It did not extend to sharing meals, which could be seen as creating an overly close and familial atmosphere considered by many to be intrusive or burdensome to others.

Despite the fact that they do not often eat in restaurants (roughly a third of salon goers never goes to a restaurant, and the majority goes to restaurants once or twice a month) salon visitors happily discussed the types and quality of the new restaurants opened in the area, or the places they particularly like for certain specialties. Murata san, a man in his sixties who lives on his own, explained that he eats in restaurants a couple of times a month and enjoys eating those dishes he cannot make at home for himself, either because they are complicated or not the kind of food one would prepare for one person. Murata san on several occasions pointed out that he looks after his health and his body by carefully choosing what he eats – mostly cooked food with lots of vegetables and fish, and limiting the consumption of alcoholic drinks, making sure to have at least one day a week that he doesn't have any alcohol. Most women visiting the salon claimed that they were not able to drink more than half a glass of beer, and drank rarely, only on social occasions. The importance of healthy food was often discussed and some of the salon guests were very proud of their health, seeing it somewhat as their own achievement. Kondo san's case is a good example: she grows her own vegetables and cooks her own meals with little salt or seasoning – *usukuchi* (lightly flavoured). She was proud that she did not need any medicine and her physician praised her good health. In contrast, a lot of meals that could be bought, such as boxed lunches, were considered to be much less healthy. Okuma san told us of a time when she was in the hospital and after her return she was too weak to cook. During her recovery period of several months she ordered boxed lunches and when she visited her physician she was told she had high blood-pressure and heightened cholesterol in her blood. Instead of taking the medicines she was prescribed, she started eating only *usukuchi* meals, and after a couple of months her readings went back to normal. She was convinced that the meat and fried foods in the boxed meals were one of the main things that harmed her health.

Usukuchi or lightly flavoured food, without much added salt or soy sauce, was generally considered to be key to healthy nutrition, mostly comprising vegetables and rice, a little fish and very little meat. Restaurant food and more extravagant meals, sweets and seasonal treats were considered to be much less healthy and as something to be consumed only on occasion, but not necessarily something craved and desired. Kondo san and others did not deny themselves these pleasures, but many found that they were happiest when they were eating lighter food. A petite grey-haired lady who always left before lunchtime to cook for her brother and came back in the afternoon often commented that she enjoys cooking but would not cook much for herself if she lived on her own, as she would be quite content with *chazuke* (a simple meal made of rice with tea poured over it) almost every day. Simple and humble meals were mentioned by many as a source of contentment. The wholesome foods that were of particularly high quality in particular areas were sometimes a topic that sparked a conversation about the food available a long time ago, or something that people used to eat in their home town. Many of the salon visitors (probably close to a half) were not originally from Osaka, much less the neighbourhood – most had moved to Osaka as a regional centre in their youth. Conversations about food could therefore often lead to stories about the past and childhood, mostly fond recollections of cheerful times and special events and holidays, such as New Year, and rarely melancholy.

On most days, however, the conversations about food revolved about more everyday matters, such as grocery shopping. Salon visitors, especially women, exchanged information about certain grocery stalls in the shopping arcade and other nearby arcades, commenting on the prices but especially on the quality of goods and their freshness. This exchange of information extended to other topics, such as services for the elderly, municipal services such as transport, news and interesting events such as free concerts. Kondo san was particularly well informed about food service for the elderly in the area and happily recommended particular ones to her interlocutors: the one on Wednesdays in A-chō has the best menu, as they serve miso soup for free with every meal, whereas the one in D-chō on every first Thursday in month has the most interesting music programme after the food is served. The one in B-chō is very strict, as they read out the names of all older people registered and check attendance, which she finds rather annoying, but the one in Cchō is really friendly and one gets a little gift and a photo taken for one's birthday. The amount of information on various services, including health and welfare schemes and cultural events run by the municipal authorities and voluntary associations, is extremely large and one could easily become lost. Some of the information was available through newsletters that were delivered to all the inhabitant's houses, some was circulated through the leaflets in the salon and town hall, a lot was available through the internet, but all of these were not equally accessible to everyone (not to mention difficult to use and find) and the sheer abundance made it difficult to follow. Recommendations by acquaintances were considered by most salon goers as the most convenient and reliable source of relevant information. This made the salon a valuable resource for older people who might have otherwise lacked a wide network of acquaintances of the same age group or similar interests. Sharing information one had acquired with the others can thus also be understood as a form of expressing concern and care.

PUBLIC FACES: POLITICS AND NEWS

Kikuchi san's passage through the shopping arcade could be noticed by an onlooker from afar, by the sheer intensity and number of greetings she exchanged on the way. Everyone seemed to know her. With a broad smile on her bespectacled face, Kikuchi san asked about the newsagents' daughter's entrance exams, the butcher's wife's health, the florist's visit to the dentist. A thin, slightly stooped woman in her sixties who had survived a serious disease, she has an air of determination and positive energy around her. Her laughter and smiles immediately fill the room with energy whenever she enters the salon, often bringing treats for everyone present. Somewhat younger than other salon visitors, who call her Kiku chan (a diminutive form usually used for young women or girls), Kikuchi san often expressed delight at having a chance to meet people in the salon and shouted from the door 'All my favourite people in one place!'. On one occasion when we walked together, I expressed amazement at how many people she knew and helped, to which she replied pragmatically that she has no close family other than her brother and her twenty-five-year-old niece who lives abroad, so she needs to make an effort to help people and support her friends as much as she can, so that she can get support and care when she needs it. One day, after a longer absence, Kikuchi san arrived in the salon even later than usual, just half an hour before closing time. Some of the regular salon goers knew through acquaintances that she was involved in a political campaign, so we were all curious to hear how that was going. Kikuchi san explained that she is helping in the election campaign of the local representative of one of the two major political parties and her role was to educate young campaigners who were visiting the people in the neighbourhood that was their constituency. She fondly recalled the days when she herself did this job, and even made speeches through a loudspeaker on a truck that cruised the streets as a part of the campaign. Kikuchi san was interested in getting to know as many people in the neighbourhood as possible, and the campaign was a real social event for her. On several occasions, though, she expressed a genuine worry about the future for young people and a diminishing sense of hope: ‘We lived in times when every year our salaries would gradually increase. Young people today can’t even count on a stable job. There is no hope (*kibou ga nai*), everyone feels a lack of hope’.

Far from being uninterested in matters of national and local politics, the salon goers kept abreast with daily news through the media, mostly national television and major radio stations, but also through the newspaper and local newsletters. Local politics and daily news comprised a large part of conversations in the salon, mostly revolving around matters mentioned in the morning news, or the day before. Given that these news were available to everyone and thus an inclusive theme for conversation, it is unsurprising that they were very popular topics in the afternoons, when larger groups gathered and chatted together, rather than in two or three smaller groups which often happened when the salon was emptier in the mornings. While the conversations usually took the form of a lively discussion, often interwoven with jokes, the opinions expressed were restricted to worries about the competence of the Japanese Government, or the way a particular statement was formulated, or about the trustworthiness of a particular politician – the general themes that everyone shared an opinion about. Open views about certain political matters were almost never expressed, and while the conversation was rather loud, it rarely took a form where anyone could disagree much with anything that was being said. These conversations appeared heated and seemed genuine, with no veiled sentiments being expressed afterwards on the side or concealed with difficulty. In relation to this issue it might be useful to look at the Japanese concepts of *tatemae* and *honne* that have attracted much attention among anthropologists - the former denoting the way one is expected to behave, and the latter one's true feelings and the way one would like to act with one's own interest in mind. In other words, *tatemae* is associated with an external rule-bound social persona, while *honne* is supposed to be an expression of one's true self (e.g. Sugimoto 2003:28). It could, therefore, be concluded that what was expressed in these conversations was simply tatemae, while true feelings about matters were kept to oneself. This view could, then, assume that the views expressed were insincere and less than fully true, but rather a façade in a public situation, a necessity to maintain a harmonious relationship in the group. However, the conversations in the salon, combined with a number of private conversations conducted with some of the salon goers with whom I developed a closer relationship, complicate this picture based on a duality between private and public spheres.

Firstly, different themes, as will slowly become clear throughout the remainder of this section, were treated in different ways and taken up in different social settings within the salon: in smaller or larger groups, with a more or less personal attitude. Secondly, the heated discussion about politics was genuine and the opinions expressed were most likely really held by the participants. The level of discussion was limited, and certain lines were not crossed often so that the kinds of opinion offered could not really be expressed in antagonistic or irreconcilable ways. In other words, what was said was sincere, if somewhat circumscribed. The variety of themes taken up in the salon coincide with different modes of sociality, which taken together might provide insight into the balance between public and private spheres, while revealing something of the nature of relationships more broadly.

No Idle Pastime: Self-Development And 'Study At Sixty'

Harada san is a tall, sturdy man with heavy, dark-rimmed glasses and a golf hat, who visits the salon regularly two or three times a week. He could most often be seen in the afternoons, enjoying a lively chat with Shachō and the ladies. A retired shopkeeper in his early seventies, Harada san amused the company with his knowledge of unusual kanji characters, or word play based on them. He once told us that the study of kanji and calligraphy were his favourite pastimes for a long time, but that after retirement he had more time to pursue them. Similarly, Murata san, a youthful looking man in his sixties who often volunteered in the salon, often told all present about his hiking trips and brought albums of photographs he took in the mountains. The ladies present were always very curious and happy to have a chance to see the photographs he took, of breath-taking views or rare wild mountain flowers, conversation about which could continue for a long time. Murata san was grateful that he had more time since retirement to go hiking with a group of companions, men of a similar age. With more time on their hands, they could go away for longer and this allowed them to reach places that were considerably more remote. This required planning and preparation, as they climbed for longer stretches of time, and he often spoke of the next challenge they planned. While Harada san and Murata san both continued their hobbies from long before their retirement, they both spoke of the challenge and the need to make progress: to learn more, or to climb higher. Other salon visitors set themselves different challenges: rather than improving a skill they already had, they decided to embark on a new hobby. Okada san, a very vigorous lady in her sixties, took up weaving and attended weaving workshops held in the salon twice a week. The fruits of her labour were clearly visible, as both she and her husband wore colourful hand woven vests on cold mornings. Like her husband, who took up carpentry in the past few years since retirement, Okada san liked the idea of learning something new, some skill she did not have before.

This tendency to take up a new hobby and focus on developing a skill in later life is sometimes termed *rokujūdai no tenarai*, or study in one's sixties. Another man in his late sixties whom I met in Awara salon (my secondary field site) told me about his own new hobbies and those of his friends: he started a drawing course and joined a choir, while his wife attended a hula dancing class with her friends and his neighbour enjoyed photography classes. I spoke to all of them and they explained that they enjoyed the group learning as it gave them an opportunity to make new acquaintances, other than their work colleagues or neighbours. They explained that the sixties were an ideal time for studying something new, as one was finally free of many obligations, one's children having grown up and having retired, one finally had more free time. They also spoke of the fear of becoming too dependent on the routine that their work (or care for the family and housework) provided, so learning something new was a way for them to move away from their earlier roles. The conversations that took place in Fureai salon, in contrast to the conversations among the somewhat younger and more dynamic elderly people in Awara salon, rarely mentioned their pastimes as hobbies or the pursuit of ikigai, the popular discourse described in

Chapter 2. They talked less about in terms of pastimes and more in terms of practice, or the importance of being in the moment and becoming immersed in the task (*muchū ni naru*). They emphasised the importance of dedication for doing things properly, but also for feeling a sense of achievement and relaxing by not thinking about anything else. Pastimes and daily activities, whether artistic or mundane, were often guided by the principle of 'doing things properly' (chanto suru), the way they should be done and not sloppily. While this principle may seem constraining in its formality - especially in its more mundane forms, such as being aware of the proper way to serve coffee to customers - knowledge of the rules and mastery of the pleasing form of an action may bring genuine pleasure, as explained by Murata san on one occasion. Doing things properly need not be restricted to mastering new skills, but when it is, it can further be linked to a notion of self-development, or self-cultivation.

This striving for self-development should nevertheless not be understood as a merely individualistic pursuit, aiming at one's own pleasure. Conversely, self-cultivation can be understood as equally important for the advancement of the community, and indeed may even be presented as an obligation to a group. The notion that self-cultivation is at the basis of community development has a long history, as mentioned in the introduction. In her book about ritual and religious practices in nineteenth-century Japan, Sawada attempts to explore the interplay between different coexisting groups engaged, for example, in divination, Shinto purification rituals and Zen practice, out of which emerged a common concern with 'personal cultivation' (*mi o osameru; shūshin*) or 'learning' (*gakumon*) - that is, the moral, ritual, physiological and/or educational process by which individuals were believed to attain well-being (ibid.:3).

A noteworthy contribution to the discussion of self-development that elucidates some of these issues of individual-society dynamics can be found in the work of John Traphagan (2004), concerned primarily with well-being and aging in contemporary rural Japan. Here he expands on his previous work (Traphagan 2000) in which he argued that senility in Japan should be understood less as a biomedical category and more in relation to ideas about the 'good person', defined in terms of activity (Traphagan 2004:9). He thus makes a connection between the notion of the 'good person' and well-being, which 'is closely related to physical and mental health, but also includes broader ideas of success and avoidance of calamity, is interwoven with values of family, self-discipline, and control that are constructed not only in terms of biomedicine, but in terms of social interactions' (ibid.:21). Thus, well-being should be understood as pertaining both to the individual and to the group or community. Furthermore, Traphagan argues that well-being and health in the Japanese context can be thought of as a type of embodied social capital[77], representing individual and collective abilities, a capital accumulated by investing in self-improvement (ibid.:58). The very engagement in hobbies or pastimes (sometimes linked with the notion of ikigai, as discussed in Chapter 2) indicates an individual's focus on self-cultivation and discipline, which as such benefits the community, and which in the case of elderly people means showing an effort to maintain mental and physical health in order to avoid burdening the family and community (ibid.:74). The well-being of group and individual are, therefore, conceived as closely linked through the idea of the 'good person'.

Another important aspect of 'study at sixty' is the age itself – while one of the meanings of this phrase is a sentiment that it is never too late to learn, the age of those of my interlocutors who took up new hobbies and dedicated their time to self-development was indeed the sixties, and less frequently early seventies. Some of my older interlocutors explicitly expressed a lack of interest in learning something new or taking up a hobby, dismissing it as something fanciful or frivolous. This need not mean that this generation, now in their nineties, has no interest in pastimes, but usually they cultivate those they were already involved in, such as origami or growing vegetables. While they happily participated in singing classes organized in the salon, comprised of singing traditional or old popular songs, several of the ladies in their nineties and late eighties flatly refused invitations to participate in workshops that involved mastering new skills, such as weaving. When Kato san was presented with a leaflet advertising 'fun classes' designed to improve mental ability, she just giggled and waved her hand saying she does not need such things (*sonna koto iranai ne*). The reason for this was not just that she thought of herself as mentally agile enough, but did not feel a need to maintain her abilities for a future far ahead. In another conversation this sentiment was made even clearer. When one of the ladies in her late eighties expressed concern about her memory and the need to socialize and talk to other people as a form of mental practice, the reaction was positive and encouraging. Ikeda san and other ladies in their eighties and nineties confirmed the importance of conversations and keeping active, but they also agreed with Kato san, who suggested that if you get to the age of ninety or thereabouts without becoming senile (*boke*), there was really no more reason for concern, as one is most likely to stay bright enough until the end of one's life.

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[77] This proposition seems to be supported by examples given by Diana Bethel (1992) in her work about the residents of a home for the elderly in Japan. Many residents were too ashamed to admit to their friends and neighbours that they had moved to an institution of the elderly, while others believed that they had brought shame onto their children, in spite of the latter's disapproval of the move, since they were condemned by the community and by relatives as being insolent and egoistic (ibid.:131). In other words, those who do not have 'social capital' of well-being are in a difficult situation.

FAMILY

Kondo san is a calm, broad faced lady with a dark complexion, who spends a lot of time outdoors. She grows her own vegetables in pots in neat rows in front of her house, which she checks every morning as soon as she combs her hair, even before breakfast. On several occasions she spoke of growing vegetables with passion and was asked for advice by others enjoying gardening in the narrow streets, with barely enough space for narrow Japanese cars to drive through. Having read quite a bit about gardening, Kondo san has both a theoretical and practical knowledge, which had earned her a nickname: 'a vegetable expert' ('*yasai no hakase*'). Kondo san is in good health and seems no older than sixty five, so everyone was surprised to hear she is in fact seventy six, something she put down to a healthy diet. Kondo san lives on her own, a situation that she described as very comfortable: 'This is heaven (*gokuraku*)! I had many hard times in life and now I'm finally free, everything is so easy, I don't have to look after anybody.' Her son invited her to live with him and his family in another prefecture, but she didn't get along with her daughter in law, who demanded that she move away. Kondo san then moved in with her daughter, but realized that to live harmoniously with her daughter's family she had to be the one to adapt, and had a feeling that in order not to be a burden she had to endure many things, mostly small annoyances. She then decided to make do on her own and now takes pride in living independently with her very limited means. Kondo san was not the only happy person who lived alone and was comfortable with her living arrangements. Perhaps around half of the salon goers lived alone, and most of them spoke of a sense of freedom and their comfortable way of life.

On the other hand, like Kondo san, many salon guests happily discussed their family relationships and complained about their daughters or daughters-in-law. These issues were mostly discussed in smaller groups and more quietly, especially if they voiced concerns or worries, or wanted to complain about a difficult or unfair situation. Furthermore, they were much more likely to occur among women, and I have only witnessed three occasions when men spoke of their family problems. In all three cases men were speaking quietly with an older woman whom they knew fairly well. These concerns were often voiced in a jocular or comical manner. In her work with older Japanese women, Matsumoto (2011) similarly found that painful self-disclosure was often comical or humorous. I suggest that the need to share one's worries is accompanied by a sense that in order not to make the atmosphere overly grim and so as not to burden others - much as Ueda san argued in the opening episode - one must maintain some humorous distance.

Conflict And Tension

While the Salon is perceived as a place to relax and enjoy company, and efforts were made to maintain a good atmosphere and harmonious relationships, this does not mean that there was no conflict or tension. Not all the conversations made friends - some alienated people or caused strain. One such occasion with heightened tension occurred one warm morning in early May, when not many people were present in the salon. Ikeda san, the younger of the two sisters frequently coming to the salon, came in for a cup of coffee and noticed Abe san, a short round faced lady in her late seventies, sitting at the table closer to the entrance diagonally from a quiet man reading a newspaper. They exchanged greetings and Ikeda san made her way directly to the furthermost corner of the other table. The atmosphere grew tense, until another couple of ladies came in and joined Ikeda san's table. After Abe san had left Ikeda san hissed nervously to the lady sitting on her left that Abe san brought her friend to the salon the day before and she was getting along well with her and having an interesting conversation about an old film. They broke into a song together, one of the famous songs form the film. Later Abe san accused Ikeda san of stealing her friend, and now they were both too upset to speak to each other. Even though these remarks were made quietly and somehow on the margins of the conversation, the tension in the room was palpable. A public display of tension and conflict, something that this event came close to, was uncommon. More often, small annoyances were kept to oneself, and a careful choice of seat and timing of one's arrival was used to avoid people with whom one had a disagreement.

Salon goers usually strove for a pleasant atmosphere and avoided confrontation or visible tension. One might assume that this 'rule' of cheerfulness and conviviality was somewhat constraining, but on several occasions my interlocutors explained that they would rather leave some problem in peace or just somehow avoid the person with whom they had a disagreement than lose the opportunity to enjoy themselves and have fun (*tanoshimi*). This echoes the statement of Ueda san in the opening episode: the salon is a place where people come to enjoy themselves. They don't often feel like talking about unpleasant things themselves, nor do they want to burden others with problems. Yet, as some of the above examples show[78], this does not mean that the conversations were shallow or insincere.

DOING THINGS PROPERLY: EMOTION AND FORM

A long and heated conversation arose in the salon one afternoon when Mori san, after ordering a cup of coffee, told us about an experience in a printing equipment shop earlier that day. Wanting to print out some photos that he took of some of us on a local festival to exhibit in the salon, Mori-san went out to buy some ink for his printer. But the shop owner had run out of ink cartridges for that particular model of printer, and refused to help. Mr Mori got infuriated and walked an hour to the next closest shop stocking the ink. He was adamant he will never return to the local shop again. The conversation now focused on what the actual problem was, and soon it transpired that Mori-san did not expect a different service in terms of actions taken, such as taking an order, but was much more concerned about the form in which this lack of ability to be helpful was conveyed. Instead of just stating plainly that they have none, the shopkeeper could have offered an apology or an explanation. This sentiment, that the way the shopkeeper spoke was inadequate, was soon confirmed and restated by everyone in the group, and numerous examples of similar behaviour listed. On other occasions, more closely related to the interactions within the salon, the sentiment was not that something should not have occurred, but rather that the message was to be conveyed in a particular way. This focus on a particular way things should be done seemed to be present in many other situations - tea should be served properly, guests on salon events should be greeted properly, or in Japanese: *chanto suru*.

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[78] These conversations show a range of interactions, 'styles of relating' (Overing 2000:xi) – some involve a larger group and are very open; others are conducted quietly in smaller groups or pairs, and appeared more exclusive and private in character, usually among closer friends.

These examples indicate that when people express displeasure about the words or actions of another, this generally relates to how they behaved or expressed themselves rather than to what was said. The intentions of the speaker seemed less important than the forms used. Conversely, the feeling often present in the West, that a polite or pleasantly worded utterance might have been insincere and fake - stressing the importance of expressing one's 'real' feelings - was conspicuously absent. It would appear that while Western discourses of intimacy assume the truthfulness of the essence, or content, such that the intentions of the speaker may be concealed by the words themselves, this may be quite different in Japan. Enquiring into how form may be considered more or less revealing of intentions than 'essence' could help shed light on particular epistemologies or local ideologies of knowledge. In her book about gifts in Japan, Joy Hendry (1995) proposes that in the Japanese context wrapping might be at least as important as the content of the gift, if not more. In fact, in case of a prestation, it is impossible to separate the content and the wrapping. Extending this idea to language as a form of wrapping, especially polite language, one could infer that form and content change places in terms of priority. Yet rather than investigating this simply in terms of essence and form, it might be more productive to consider the issue with reference to theories of language ideology, formalization in language, and politeness.

In linguistic theories of politeness a dominant concept is that of 'face work', based on Erving Goffmann's concept of face; actors manage their face, avoid losing face, and so on. A criticism of some of the most prevalent theories and a new model has recently been offered by Watts (2003), who suggests that:

> Some people feel that polite behaviour is equivalent to socially 'correct' or appropriate behaviour; others consider it to be the hallmark of the cultivated man or woman. Some might characterize a polite person as always being considerate towards other people; others might suggest that a polite person is self-effacing. There are even people who classify polite behaviour negatively, characterizing it with such terms as 'standoffish', 'haughty', 'insincere', etc.

In order to understand these differences, Watts wants to introduce a social model of politeness which is based on the idea that individuals use language as a symbolic resource to manage their ‘face’, their public persona. ‘Face work’ is used here to refer to the management of these appearances to the others, to avoid losing one’s ‘face’ or being sensitive about the ‘face’ of others. When linked to specific threats, face work can be evaluated negatively by the listener, since it doesn’t do much more that emphasize the threat itself (ib.:247). In those cases the speaker’s intentions are obscure and politeness can be read as a lack of sincerity (ib.:253), an issue to which I will shortly return.

In his introduction to a volume about political language and oratory, Bloch (1975) points to a continuum of speech forms ranging from everyday forms of speech to formalized ones, such as political speeches. While I am interested in everyday speech acts in the salon and other daily situations, as described by my interlocutors, these speech acts, especially when problematic, were not formal enough or did not satisfy the polite form. Polite behaviour on occasions such as serving tea, receiving and requesting favours, or greetings, which comprised a large part of interactions in the salon and a connective tissue of many relationships in the community, were similarly guided by this principle that things should be done properly, or that there is a specific way things should be done. It is therefore reasonable to think of these speech acts as somewhere on Bloch’s continuum of speech acts, between informal everyday speech acts and fully formalized speech. According to Bloch, formalized speech removes it from the particular towards the ‘eternal’ thus ruling out disagreement, since it is harder to disagree with the ‘right order’, and the speaker seems to speak less for himself and more for his social role (Bloch 1975:16). This seems important since polite language, as a form of formalization, is used in non-intimate situations and the social role may be important.

In his work about the efforts of early Dutch Protestant missionaries to convert the inhabitants of Sumba in eastern Indonesia, Keane elaborates the concept of language ideology or ‘people’s assumptions about language’ (2002:66), local ideas about how language works. He argues that Sumbanese and missionaries had very different language ideologies, leading to disagreements over the nature and efficacy of prayer, among other things. While Sumbanese felt that the words used in prayer should come from a repertoire given and approved by ancestors, Protestant missionaries stressed that in order to be sincere, the prayer must come 'from the inside'. The efficacy of words and language is judged in opposite ways: as coming from the inside or from the outside (of the self). The missionaries thought that if the words coming from an external source were used in prayer, this implied a lack of autonomy and responsibility. He links this to modernity and the processes of purification, broadly similar to disembedding: 'The subject, to the extent it aspires to modernity… seeks to act as the source of its own authority' (2002:74). The idea of sincerity, as implied in this kind of language ideology, is based on an assumption of a specific relationship between the language and thought and interior states: 'sincere speaker makes that interior state transparent' (2002:74). Keane's argument ties different language ideologies directly to the issues of modernity and self, posing a connection between interiority and truth.

An interesting point on a similar matter is made by Richard Sennett (2003[1974]) in his historical sociology of the changing notions of private and public from the 18th century onwards; in which he traces the emergence of a notion of authenticity based on the character of the actors, their internal qualities or their character, rather than the actions they perform. As the presentation of emotions by men as actors was gradually replaced by the expression of 'authentic' emotions, the fears of involuntarily expressing inappropriate emotions in the public realm rose, and led to a withdrawal into a private sphere. At the same time, formalized behaviours in the public sphere were seen to be insincere and inauthentic, and the need for mimicking the intimate relationships of the private sphere are transferred to the public sphere which is thus eroded: 'Playacting in the form of manners, conventions and ritual gestures is the very stuff out of which public relations are formed, and from which public relations derive their emotional meaning. The more social conditions erode the public forum, the more people are routinely inhibited from exercising the capacity to playact' (ibid.:29). Sennett illustrates this change in the understanding of formality and roles as 'empty' as damaging to a meaningful public sphere, as individual character becomes a key to social relationships, even in the public sphere. For example, in community groups people may feel the compulsion to get to know each other in order to have meaningful relationships, but in the process of getting to know each other they become focused on each other's characters and lose sight of their communal action (ibid.:11). Sennett shows that the idea of sincerity and authenticity based on interiority is peculiar to a particular historical period, bound up with processes associated with modernity. Having analysed the trends toward intimacy in the public sphere and some of its consequences, Sennett argues that a healthy public sphere requires a certain level of formality and role-play as a form of protection that allows communication and thus joint action, making a point that ‘boundaries around the self are not isolating, but can actually encourage communication with others’ (ibid.:10).

Both Keane’s work on sincerity and Sennett’s work on private and public spheres provide a backdrop for understanding the importance of form and manners in the salon and their relevance for morality. In the case of older Japanese, it could be argued that formality serves as an enabling device for creating new relationships (like those in the salon), and the maintenance of sociality while protecting oneself and others from the burden of emotion. This chapter described the themes of conversation in the salon, modes of interaction between the salon goers and the construction of well-being through sociality, with respect to manners and the emotions of others. The next chapter will explore the place of emotion in communication, the distinction between the public and the private sphere, and the meaning of intimacy.

MODEL LIVES - SALARYMAN AND HOUSEWIFE

> They become successful, but not too successful, middle-class, white-collar workers. They are married, have one or two children. Their homes are in the suburbs. They commute long distances to the offices where, after working long hours, they go out drinking with their fellow workers. (McCreery 2000:52)

During the period of growth and expansion that marked the 1960s, Japan witnessed the creation of 'mass culture': the formation of 'uniform and standardized taste groupings', differentiated more along lines of gender and age than region or class, which led the majority of Japanese people to identify themselves as being in the 'middle' or as 'middle class' (Ivy 1993:241). Kelly traces the rise in identification with 'mainstream consciousness' (*chūryū ishiki*) to the expansion of white-collar occupations during the 1960s, at the same time noting that these never reached the point of forming the majority of the working population[79]. Nevertheless, he writes, 'it was in the 1960s that certain key elements of middle-class life and location became nationalized into a model of 'mainstream' life that has since powerfully represented designs for living' (ibid.:236). This orientation towards the mainstream definition of aspirations and ways of life was so powerful due to its embeddedness in public discourse and the 'institutional fields' of work, family and education. Thus work was idealized in the form of the 'Japanese company', based on life-time employment, salary and a seniority system based on years of service, but which at the same time relied on the existence of smaller firms and non-regular employment. The system was described as meritocratic, based on 12 years of formal education, mostly in public schools and structured by a uniform curriculum. The prevalent and widely promoted form of the Japanese family was the nuclear household, consisting of a conjugal couple - a working husband and a care-giving wife - with children. This family model developed through an interaction of legal reforms, demographic shifts and economic changes, and was conceived as an extension of institutions such as schools and workplaces, rather than as a refuge from the outside world. These institutions shaped a 'mainstream' ideal, but did not unify or homogenize the population - it created new differentiations while providing a unifying frame for people's experience (ibid.:241).

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[79] Contributions to the volume entitled *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan*, while exploring a diversity of masculinities, mostly locate these in relation to the 'ideological and representational dominance of hegemonic masculinity embodied in the middle-class, white-collar, heterosexual salaryman' (Robertson and Suzuki 2003:12). In his discussion of manual day labourers, Gill explores the negotiations of masculine role on the margins of society. Day labourers, though, have a relative freedom and mobility envied by many other Japanese men, especially salarymen, 'whose lifestyles are generally static and intellectual, (…) where permanent is valued over temporary, and brainwork over bodywork. When men do move, it may well be involuntarily, in the form of forced transfers (*tanshin funin*) to distant branches of their company' (Gill 2003:145). His analysis concludes with a stress on the starkness of the choice faced by Japanese men, between having freedom in work and having a family.

The dominant or 'mainstream' life model therefore consists of a working husband - a 'salaryman' (*sarariiman*) - and a housewife in charge of the household and the children's education. In his book about the Japanese new middle class, Vogel (1963) refers to the salaryman as a man with a stable salary, usually a white-collar worker, and describes the appeal of becoming a salaryman (or of marrying one, instead of, say, a farmer or a merchant) in terms of stability (of salary and working conditions), and the appeal of a 'bright new life' (*akarui seikatsu*) bound by fewer formalities and facilitated by electrical goods. This model has been somewhat transformed and extended, sometimes even to include all men receiving salaries (Robertson and Suzuki 2003:7). Masculine identity in this model is linked to the position of household head and bread-winner, an identity bound to work and 'the outside', separated from matters 'inside' home, which are the wife's realm. This distinction of labour and responsibilities was not always so clear-cut, and it often remains more blurred and cooperative, as in the case of blue-collar workers or farmers for example (Allison 1994:91) and the other side of the social spectrum, among influential business families for whom women's contacts were essential for successfully conducting business (Hamabata 1999:29-30).

In her ethnography of a Tokyo hostess bar, Anne Allison analyses attitudes of salarymen towards various aspects of their work and reveals subtleties of differentiations between generalized expectations and roles and their personal opinions. Salarymen are often expected to stay overtime, to not take days off and to participate in the company entertainment in the evenings. Company drinking and entertainment is depicted as 'human', as a unifying process between workers of different ranks, but is clearly recognized as work, in opposition to personal life, by some of her interlocutors (Allison 1994:99). Some are absent from home on most nights, spending an evening with the family once a month or even once in six months, but in the jocular male setting of a hostess bar they would take pride in their absence from home, as a representation of hard work and devotion to the company (ibid.:102).

The image of the salaryman as an ideal type is not complete without his female partner: the housewife. As mentioned above, the salaryman life model is based on the strong division between a domestic and a working role. While women may work, their role as a wife and mother, caring for and nurturing their family, remains primary. Imamura (1987), in her ethnography *Urban Japanese Housewives*, emphasizes that new Japanese housewives do expect to have a right to engage in some activity of their own, unrelated to their homemaking role, yet are still expected to prioritize their family and the educational results of their children, for which they are held directly responsible: ‘Children's education is based on the premise that a mother will be free to devote a lot of time to helping the child - not only with the homework and at the examination time but making nutritious and varied lunches, seeing that a child does not forget to bring items to school' (Imamura 1987:19). Interestingly, Imamura devotes space to the type of housing in which women live: detached family houses, or social apartments (*danchi*), or company housing (*shataku*). All have significant influence on women’s lifestyles. Company housing places a great deal of pressure on a woman surrounded by the wives of her husband’s work colleagues, where she needs to observe the strict hierarchy related to their positions in the company (ibid.:4). The *danchi* women do not participate much in the life of the community except via their children, through school meetings and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Some of Imamura’s interlocutors living in apartments admitted that they enjoyed freedom from ‘sticky social relations’ - from close community ties and obligations towards parents-in-law - but also that they do get lonely more often (ibid.:56).

The dominant model of family, like that of work, does not remain unproblematized by those who live by it. An excellent example is given by Amy Borovoy (2005) in her book about women attending a support group for wives of alcoholics or mothers of drug abusers. Through discussions of their personal stories, women often came to problematize the dominant construction of family and the female role within it, focused on prioritizing the family’s needs and nurturing family members. In their case this led to a ‘codependency’ -

the unconditional support they were providing to their husband or child had enabled the latter to continue with their addiction. But, as Borovoy stresses, these women

> do not explicitly position themselves outside or in the opposition to dominant cultural ideologies; nor do they set out to criticize the system in which they live. They are largely middle-aged, middle-class housewives who conceptualize themselves within the mainstream; yet, owing to unfortunate family problems, they confront a fundamental barrier to continuing to make dominant cultural assumptions work (ibid.:31).

It was mentioned above that the salaryman life-model should be situated historically, economically and politically. Thus, while the normativity of the housewife life-model is so strong that it almost came to be equated with womanhood, it should also be understood in a historical perspective, as Emiko Ochiai (1997) notes in her book about the transformation of the Japanese family system. She reminds readers that the variety of images of womanhood - a young bride in the farmer's families, a wife in the merchant family taking an active part in family business, among others - came to be replaced by the standardizing image of housewife (*okusan*) in the postwar period. This was followed by a similar 'standardization' of the size of the family, with two or three children (ibid.:43). Furthermore, the image of the family as a nuclear one, formed around the conjugal couple, was becoming dominant, and the ratio of nuclear families rose, mostly due to the demographic boom. Whilst the oldest son was usually expected to stay with his parents, younger siblings were expected to move away and to form households of their own. Therefore, at the time this did not mean that the number of three-generational households was decreasing (ibid.:61). As Harald Fuess summed it up, in line with Ochiai's argument:

> From the 1960s on, fewer couples lived with their in-laws. The main reason for this was less a rejection of older ideals of cohabitation, mutual assistance, and obligation than the result of a sheer surplus of children reaching adulthood who had been born in the demographic transition decades of high fertility and low mortality. Contrary to the popular perception, the absolute number of three-generation households remained stable until the end of the century; it was the number of nuclear families - households consisting only of parents and children - that increased. (Fuess 2004:153)

The dominant life-model of salaryman and housewife has recently been undermined by various practices, but no other dominant unitary concept has replaced it (Mathews and White 2004). While alternative lifestyles have proliferated in recent years, the dominant life model still often serves as a point of reference, implicitly or explicitly. The story of a salaryman and a housewife, here reconstructed from works of ethnographers and social scientists, is well-known in some form to all my interlocutors. They have seen it represented on TV (for example in serial dramas such as Sazae san), from literature and comic books, and they all know a ‘Mr and Mrs Jones’, or a ‘Sato san’, in the form of their neighbour, their relative, their work colleague, or even themselves, who fits this broad description. Once they are aware of this story, they might conform to it, aspire to it, resist it, or attempt to ignore it – but they cannot pretend that they have not heard it. As Frank (2010) makes clear, a story such as this can also be seen as related to memory and a sense of identity as a person and as a group:

> Lives and groups require constant reassembling, which is Bruno Latour's general descriptor, and stories reassemble, both individually and collectively. But reassembling is as much about change as continuity; the act of reassembling does not mean keeping things, including memories, as they are. Reassembly enacts what Norbert Elias called process: what is reassembled is never exactly what was, but always a slightly changed version. Most of the time these changes are imperceptible, and the process proceeds unnoticed. Mundane stories - kitchen table stories - imperceptibly reassemble. (Frank 2010:83)

In this sense, the various retellings of the story of the salaryman and a housewife, and even those that tell us about the 'diversification' of lifestyles (implicitly refering to the point from which they have diversified), reassemble lives, or at least put them in perspective, which allowed some of my interlocutors to interpret their own life story in relation to this other story, using it as a point of reference, like Kawasaki san in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

A LIFE IN A STORY: THE LONE PHOTOGRAPHER

> A man is never an individual; it would be more fitting to call him a singular universal.
>
> (Jean-Paul Sartre 1981: ix)

In more ways than one, no-one's life story is just their own. To a greater or lesser degree our lives are entwined with those of others, and the stories of our lives are crafted from a range of available narratives that provide meaning to our actions, and which more or less directly inform our ideas about the options available to us. In his well-known work on aging in Japan, David Plath puts forward the idea of the 'convoy', or a group of 'consociates' with whom one shares one's life over a long period of time. This concept is based on a recognition of the importance of our interactions with others for affirmation and support (not unlike the idea of 'significant others'), but with an added element of temporal depth, as prolonged engagement with others allows for a layered, nuanced interaction in more than one role (Plath 1980:227). While the impact on our lives of others with whom we are in direct interpersonal contact is readily apparent, the influence on our life choices and life story of those with whom we are not in close contact - some of whom we do not know in person at all - is more difficult to capture. One way it may be described draws on the idea of narrative identity, in which one's life is viewed as a story one lives out, a story that can only exist in relation to the others available in one's culture or which circulate in society. Such stories provide examples of how to live: 'we learn through stories not only which identities are available; more fundamentally, we learn what an identity is' (Frank 2010:199). Stories of this kind can present themselves to us in any number of forms: told to us by people we know, enacted in films or theatre plays, referred to in newspapers or on television, among countless other possibilities.

In her work on death and dying in Japan, Susan Long (2004) explores different end-of- life choices, building on sociologist Clive Seale's (1998) concept of 'cultural scripts' for dying: narratives available in a particular culture that contain representations of death. These scripts are available as a framework for making sense of events surrounding dying, outlining a potential course of events and providing guidance for making choices. People can draw on multiple scripts both simultaneously and consecutively (Long 2004:914). Similarly, people in any culture may draw on a number of different stories available to them in order to make sense of their lives at any life stage. In this context, I suggest that the notion of ‘story’ might even be more appropriate than ‘script’, since it implies a degree of elasticity: stories can accomodate various life circumstances, which allows different people to find their place in the plot (Frank 2010:39). Moreover, the notion of story implies a degree of ambiguity or even uncertainty that allows for multiple interpretations, a feature that may be particularly well-suited to the transmission of complex moral messages. Arthur Frank draws out this point: ‘Stories are good at being several things at once, and they are good at equipping humans to live in a world that not only is open to multiple intepretive understandings but requires understandings in the plural' (Frank 2010:34). Stories have a capacity to make a particular point of view particularly compelling, which can help us understand someone else's predicament (thus people feel a need to hear someone's story, or to tell their own story) and develop our understanding and empathy for a different point of view. Yet this quality of the stories may also make one perspective particularly prominentand overly compelling, to the point of becoming constraining, prescribing the right way to do things. In contemporary Japan, the stories of 'salaryman and housewife' that comprise the dominant life model may provide guidance in making life decisions, but may equally cause distress because of the constraints they impose. It is virtually impossible to be unaware of this story, as one rather prescriptive model for leading one's life.

In exploring these issues, this chapter presents the life story of Kawasaki san, a slim, bespectacled man in his sixties who in some respects aspired to this dominant story and in other respects resisted it, as well as a brief outline of the story of Kato san, a lady in her early nineties who in many ways lived her life in alignment to the story. Kawasaki san’s story, as well as the life stories presented in the chapters to follow, were told to me in the form of an uninterrupted flow. This allowed the speakers to give voice to their stories in the order of their choosing and with an emphasis on those events and aspects of their lives they thought appropriate. As I discuss in more detail below, the framework of narrative form can potentially reveal interesting themes when dealing with life stories. For this reason, I retell the stories here more or less in the form I received them - thus with occasional repetitions and omissions, or events sometimes not in chronological order but rather in order in which they were told to me, with minimal editing to make the story easier to follow for the reader. Because of this light editing, I have elected to recount the stories in third person, to avoid giving the impression that a statement is verbatim, with only occasional direct quotes when the phrasing was particularly interesting. I have also removed stutters and pauses, as I do not attempt here a linguistic or discourse analysis. Nevertheless, I have made every effort to keep the phrasing as close as possible to the original. Of course, the very fact that these stories were solicited by me - a young female foreign researcher - doubtless had some impact on their form, and I doubt that either of my conversation partners – or indeed any of my interlocutors - would have given an account of their life as a whole before. That is not to say that storytelling or narration were foreign to them, however. On the contrary, most of them quite frequently told stories of events to those gathered in the salon, and sometimes told stories from their lives.

KAWASAKI SAN

Kawasaki san has an interest in photography and on several occasions he proudly opened large albums to show me his recent work. It seemed mostly to depict landscapes and seasonal plants and flowers in bloom, some of them captured up-close, in minute detail. These seemed to be quite like the photos taken by other retired people, mostly men, who could often be seen taking photographs in the local park with a pond. They could be seen alone, but most often in small or large groups, gathered around some, often small or insignificant-seeming object. But unlike many other retired men in Japan, Kawasaki san doesn't like taking photos in a group or with a club. As he once told me, they usually just have one model and all have the same view, and time constraints, but he doesn't like that. Instead he goes out on his own, when and where he likes – he laughed and said he was a bit selfish (*wagamama*).

Before we started with the interview, Kawasaki san put the kettle on and started preparing the coffee. He was wondering what to tell me about his life and where to begin. He worked in a fire insurance company. His job at the time was not restricted to office work, but he also had to go and speak to people from all walks of life, from the top to the bottom of society. He got up and poured hot water over the freshly ground coffee and turned a small cooking timer on. Kawasaki san prides himself on his meticulously brewed coffee and serves it with small dark chocolates. He had many enjoyable experiences in that job, he said, and sometimes dangerous, with yakuza. He had to interact with people ranging from 'high society', such as a judge, to people living in slums in the Nishinari area of Osaka (famous for day-labourers and homelessness). People there sometimes rebel. He went to such places and spoke to such people and had various life experiences and learned a lot and really likes having conversations. 'Would such a story be all right?' Kawasaki san asked. I nodded and sipped my coffee, trying to interrupt him as little as possible. That is why, he opined, he had experienced things that other people hadn't, through that job. In that sense, that was really good.

Noticing my recorder, he paused to gather his thoughts and proclaimed he will start from the beginning. For ten years, he worked in a fire insurance company in a section that involved talking to various people, ranging from the high society to the people living at the very bottom. Of, course, he interacted with the people in the middle, too, but he often had to interact with the kind of people one otherwise might not have a chance to meet. In his job he had to interact with them. One of the more unusual things was talking with yakuza, right-wing people (*uyoku*), who easily explode, but also with university professors, lawyers and judges. Not only people from Japan were his clients, but also people from abroad. There weren't many Europeans, but there were Americans, Chinese, Koreans and Taiwanese who came to Japan. One of the more interesting people was a Peruvian man who ran a Peruvian restaurant in Kobe and seemed to be an important person back in Peru, he even had a photo taken with the Peruvian president. During the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that Peruvian man helped a lot, his volunteering efforts were even noted in a newspaper. Kawasaki san spent a lot of time talking to him about Peru. Kawasaki san believes that through his job he spoke with many different people and he achieved a certain balance in his life (*baransu ni natta*).

During his lifetime, Kawasaki san also experienced quite dangerous situations, especially while talking to yakuza. But then, he was sometimes deeply moved by a conversation. Having being exposed to such different worlds, what most strongly stays with him is the overwhelming impression that rather than people with lots of money, it was the people from the lower sections of society who were amazing, good people. After pausing for a moment, Kawasaki san said in a low voice that he had learned a lot, through his job, through successes and failures. He felt very strongly that one must learn new things, no matter how old one is.

What else could he tell me? He worked in that section for 10 years; he started his job there in 1989. Before that he had a job as a teacher, but halfway he changed jobs. Before working in the insurance company he taught children. It wasn't a usual primary school, but one could say it was a school, not a cram-school. But he didn't like that job. It had nice moments, but he often asked himself if that was the right thing to do, and so he decided to change occupations. It didn't have particular ups and downs, it was an ordinary job. A kind in which one feels like one could just continue it until retirement without thinking. Kawasaki san missed some motivation, he always liked challenges. Admittedly, he never liked ordinary, mediocre things and always looks for stimuli. He is that type of human being, that makes it his ikigai. Therefore, he thought, to continue this life that he knew so well, just as it is, until his death - he couldn't bear that. So he changed his job, to something less ordinary. In his new job, he had to talk to different people, and talking to them in the same way, using the same pattern, just wouldn't do. One has to think how to phrase things, which phrases to avoid. In that sense, his job was a challenge every day. And those ten years in that job were lots of fun, he thinks the world of those times. Sometimes, in an average household, the conversations would gradually move away from work, and they would decide to call it a day and continue their chat. Getting along like a house on fire. 'We'd have conversations about hobbies until late at night.' Those were the times when he was really glad he had a job like that. 'What else shall I tell you', he wondered. After a while I asked if he had left that job. Kawasaki san replied he had retired at the age of 63. After retirement he decided to dedicate his time to his hobbies: listening to music; taking photos; that is what he does these days.

A silence followed and it lasted for a long time. I remembered the day when Kawasaki san came to introduce himself formally as our new next-door neighbour, bringing a box of washing powder. Rather than being surprised, I actually felt relieved, since I was quite unsure if the old-fashioned custom of bringing small token gifts to one's new neighbours was still practised – though I had done precisely that myself a few months earlier. Some of our other young Japanese friends had laughed at my partner and I for being so old-fashioned, but given the nature of our old *danchi* built in 1955, we figured, it would probably still be a good idea. And here, finally, was proof that the custom was still alive: a neighbour at our door, a tall, slightly tanned man with greying hair and a beard, with a friendly smile. I asked Kawasaki san, who was now nervously looking around his house, as if not being able to find anything worth telling, while smiling quietly, where he lived before he moved to Osaka.

Kawasaki san replied very briefly – he lived in Aichi ken for 6 years before moving back to Osaka, after his retirement. ‘Did you move to Aichi Prefecture straight after your retirement?’ I asked. ‘Well, not quite straight after, in two years’ time.’ After his retirement from the insurance company he heard about another job. That was an ordinary job, more like a part-time job (*arubaito*), which he did until he was 65 and then in one or two years he moved to Aichi Prefecture, where his wife is from. Her father is 95 and needs care – he is bedridden and cannot speak any more, he is in such a condition. But Kawasaki san missed Osaka. He had lived in Osaka for a long time and he started to feel that Osaka was indeed his hometown. So he told his wife he decided to return to Osaka and this year he came back – Osaka is a good place. I asked where he was originally from. From Shikoku, from Ehime Prefecture, he replied, looking out of the window. It is a place full of hot springs (*onsen*), famous spas. It is on the coast of the Sea of Japan (or the East China Sea) and the climate is warm, so the people who live there aren’t stressed, they are rather reckless, Kawasaki san mused. That is the place where he is from, but he left when he was eighteen and since then he moved around, through company transfers and changing jobs. For a long time, though, he didn’t much like Osaka as a city. Osakans, especially middle-aged women, can be quite cold. Before he got to know Osaka well, he had such an image of it and didn’t think it was a good place at all. He moved to Osaka for work and during that time, he saw other faces of the place and he grew fond of it. Now he thinks that people living in Osaka are rather warm and kind. In Aichi ken people are a bit wary of outsiders, and Osaka is good in that respect, Kawasaki san understood over time. He would dislike moving anywhere again.

After a long moment of silence he asked what else he could say. The silence continued for a while longer, so I decided to ask him how he met his wife. They met at work, he said. She was the secretary of the company president. He had to take documents to her office every day, and one day while she was preparing tea he said ‘good morning’.

He surprised her and she replied in a shaky voice. He thought she had an unusual voice, and that was the beginning.

Back in her natal home, he wasn't getting along with her family, Kawasaki san continued without much of a pause. Somehow, no matter what, they just couldn't get along. For six years they lived relatively close to each other and whatever he did… there just wasn't a way. This continued for a while and Kawasaki san couldn't take it anymore. One day he said to his wife, with an apology, that he will go back to Osaka ahead of her. And so he moved to Osaka. 'Human beings are difficult, aren't they?' - he asked and looked at me with a troubled smile on his face. During his working days he met many people, had many different conversations and realized that there are many different kinds of people. If they (the family of his wife) were similar to some of those people he had met, he could live next to them, he thought then. But with people of opposite character (*sei hantai no hitotachi*), somehow, it seems, they just couldn't get to like each other (*otagai ni ukeireru koto ga dekinai*). There are such types, of course, there are many kinds of people, and somehow whatever he did, things just wouldn't work out between them (*umaku ikanai*). Kawasaki san's face grew darker as he spoke of this and he asked that we change the topic.

I recalled that he said that there were dangerous (*kiken*) times at his work and wondered if he could tell me more. He replied in an invigorated manner that at those times, the conversation just couldn't continue. If he realized, while he was having a conversation he realized, oh, the atmosphere is getting loaded and dangerous, well, he would stop the talk. If the conversation is going in this direction, there is nothing to be done , one can only propose to talk through the lawyers then, if that is the shape it took. Don't poke your nose into our matters, would be the implication. When it comes to yakuza, common sense would sometimes not get through to them. They can get upset very suddenly, at times when they feel pressured, when you suggest you need to take a closer look at the accounts, or for that matter, while having a perfectly normal conversation. One had to recognize signs from the very beginning, know how to look for them. Because, when things start going strangely, there is not much that one can do; one can only communicate through a lawyer. When he said that, some of those people got flustered, embarrassed, since they are not good with lawyers, so they say: 'wait a minute, I hear what you're saying'. That would happen quite often. At such times it is important to follow the atmosphere, the flow of the conversation.

I wondered aloud how one recognizes the warning signs or, for that matter, knows if someone is related to the underground world of yakuza. Kawasaki san launched with panache and more than a little pride into a detailed explanation. Firstly, there are people who tell you themselves, that they are a part of such and such *gumi* (criminal organization). Furthermore, you could be warned in advance - for instance in Kawasaki san's company there was a section that deals with that kind of information. Also, there are times when you find out for yourself - for example, if they have a *gumi* emblem on the wall. But most easily one can tell something about what people are like by the expression in their eyes. Doing that kind of job, one's sensitivity to such matters increases and one can pretty soon tell, regardless of what job they do, what kind of person you are talking to, what is their way of thinking. But people who work in offices, at their desk, they mostly cannot tell, I think, said Kawasaki san. While actually having a conversation, through such experiences, it comes naturally. Of course, there are ones that you straight away think – this is yakuza or a right-wing guy (*uyoku*), judging entirely by appearance, the surface. On one occasion Kawasaki san suspected that one of his clients might have ties to criminal organizations, and soon after, when he visited his office, he noticed an emblem on his wall, indicating membership. Then the client himself said – 'Kawasaki san, I think you have already noticed, but I am right wing (*uyoku*)[80]'. So there are some people who tell you. But mostly, it would be during a conversation, one would realize, this person thinks in a particular way. That said, not all of these people are involved directly in criminal activities as such. Many of the lower grade members of these organizations (*soshiki*) work, for instance, in street stalls selling things like yakisoba during festivals. In Japanese, this is termed *tekiya* (的屋 – translated variously as a faker, charlatan, racketeer or stall-holder, usually run by lower-ranked yakuza). But, they also surprise people and cheat them out of their money. They also run gambling enterprises, and are generally up to no good.

'One time in Nishinari, doing my job, I really got a fright', Kawasaki san told me with a smile. He had already been there many times and that time he had to go to talk to a client in their office. It was just a regular company. While he was there, his client turned his attention to a large gathering outside the window. They were on the second or third floor of a low building, and below there was a small garden in which many people were assembled, perhaps ten of them, creating a lot of commotion and noise. Their intentions seemed hostile and if they climbed the telephone pole they could easily break in. That was the time he was most scared. He then suggested I take a look at Nishinari before I leave, but warned me that a woman should not walk around there. There are no ordinary people, wearing suits or such, walking around there. But there are many people working as day-labourers. The whole town has an oppressive atmosphere and the streets are comprised of slum quarters.

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[80] *Uyoku dantai* – Japanese nationalist right wing groups, are sometimes affiliated to Yakuza syndicates.

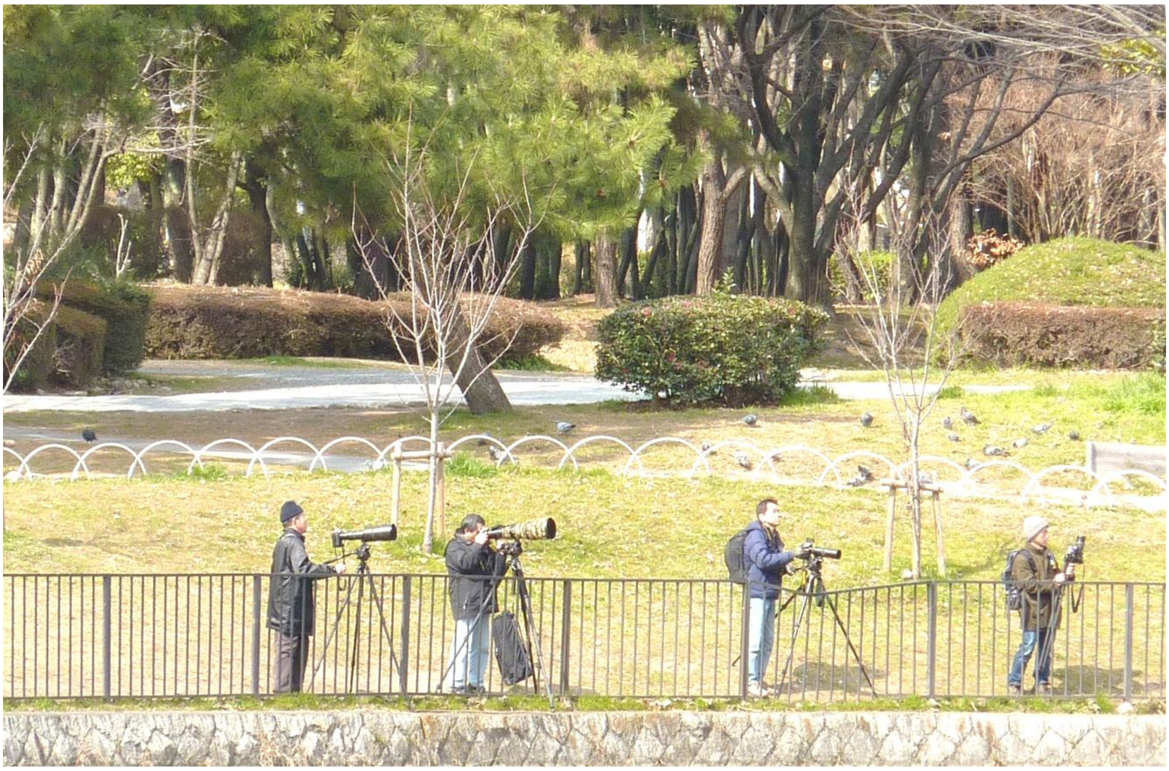

Figure 6.1. Amateur photographers in a park.

People are interesting, aren't they? Many are forward-looking, regardless of what is going on, they have a proactive way of thinking (*maemuki na kangaekata*). Even though they are in a hard position. There are people who are thinking about pulling themselves out from these circumstances. Even if they are struggling financially, eventually, they believe, things will pan out. Those people seem like they should be desperate. I really just think, please hang in there, do your best. Living in the world isn’t just the money, these people are down to earth, they support the world (*sasaeteru*). One wants to see something beautiful, worthwhile. Kawasaki san was really grateful that his job was a chance to learn about people. For instance, some people put their titles ahead of themselves. His acquaintance, whom he mentioned earlier, phoned him and told him that he had become a judge, with not much by way of an introduction. That sets up a conversation in a certain way, commanding attention, starting with a sort of calculation. It is as if he was letting you know that he is now speaking to you as a lawyer and wants you to respond appropriately…. Kawasaki san concluded that he is always on the side of the people who are struggling. He just wishes them to try hard and do well.

WHAT’S IN A STORY?

Kawasaki started his story with a preface, what one might call a summary of his biography. This abstract of sorts singled out a part of his life related to work, rather than family, for example. But instead of a conventional achievement in terms of status within the workplace, Kawasaki san chose to mention that aspect of his work that brought him into close contact with people and occasionally into dangerous encounters. His overall feeling was that that particular job, with the insurance company, was very good for him: through his interactions with various kinds of people he learned a lot. His previous job as a teacher quickly became routinized and almost went unmentioned in his account. Kawasaki san felt that his work in school was utterly ordinary and unchallenging, and he felt he couldn’t bear to think that he would spend the rest of his time in such a way. He is a human being who needs stimuli, ‘that is my *ikigai*’. It seems that Kawasaki san sees himself as a person who likes a challenge and dislikes routine, who replaced the security of this mild employment with a challenging and often dangerous environment of his insurance company work.

It is interesting to note that Kawasaki san dedicated much more space to some parts of his life than to others. The reasons for this might be numerous, and not least because of my presence: certain topics might be more appropriate than others in a conversation with a younger female researcher; but both the repetitions and the omissions in the narrative do reflect the placement of stress and focus. Just like his other employment, before and after the insurance company work, the period of his life outside Osaka received little attention, indicating that Osaka and that job carried most relevance for Kawasaki san and his sense of identity. His affection for Osaka grew over time and the true appreciation of its openness came after living in Aichi ken, where his wife's family was from. In this particular narrative, Kawasaki san spoke of that period of his life so little that he even left out details that he mentioned in previous conversations, for instance that he ran a café there. Such omissions are revealing: one forms a certain idea of oneself, and any narrative of oneself will reveal aspects of this self-image. In conscious and unconscious ways, one reveals elements of one's self perceptions, of what one thinks one is like (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985:63).

A narrator of a life-story also wishes to control one's created self-image and the way it is represented. Kawasaki san was well aware that his story was being recorded and did not hide the wish to control its contents. The interview situation is slightly threatening in its boundedness and finality; a person in such a situation may feel as though as he or she has only a single opportunity to present one's account. Both the problem of power imbalance created by an interview situation and its time limitations were less pronounced in this case: as a young woman with a junior status as a student, my presence as an interviewer was hardly imposing or threatening. Yet the interview situation can nevertheless be perceived as threatening to some extent, and therefore 'the self-representation of the interviewee is also a self-preserving self-presentation…' (Wengraf 2006 [2001]: 117). On the other hand, in literature dealing with narrative as a form, it has been argued that the conventionality of the narrative form exerts certain limitations on the tellers, thereby limiting their ability to manipulate the presentation:

> [O]ne of the singular aspects of biographical narrative is that the genre, once the speaker agrees to 'do narrative', has certain compelling effect of its own upon the verbal flow of the speaker. …the attempts by the interviewee to avoid the compulsions of narrative - sometimes by a simple refusal to narrate, sometimes by inadequate detailing or peculiarities of 'drawing the moral of the story', sometimes by interrupting the story-telling by digressions into other sorts of speech-activity and in other ways – provide the researcher with as many clues to personal and cultural reality as does the explicit narrative content itself (ibid.:117-8).

Omissions in the narrative, silences and diversions all therefore form a part of the story. At least on one level, Kawasaki san thinks of himself as an independent man, who seeks out challenge and new experiences, and that is part of his self-presentation. The omissions and disruptions in his narrative were no less interesting – for instance, when talking about how he met his wife, he cut the story short and said nothing about his life with her, but instantly switched to an account of their present situation in which they are effectively separated. Another disjuncture occurred when Kawasaki san told me about the most threatening experience on his job: when he was in the neighbourhood with lots of slums and a group of people acted in a rowdy manner in a park below. Rather than explaining what happened and how he felt, or what his reasons were for feeling afraid, he changed the topic and suggested that I should visit that part of town if I get a chance.

In a similar vein, it is possible to infer that it is relevant that certain issues were brought up a number of times, albeit not always in a straightforward way. Kawasaki san returned to the issue of being unable to live with his wife on several occasions. While embarrassing and difficult, this was obviously an issue that weighed on his mind. He felt he was doing her an injustice by leaving her alone to care for her increasingly dependent father, but still felt compelled to move away. He felt he couldn’t get along with his wife’s family but did not place all the blame with them. He also felt that people in rural areas were not open to newcomers, even after a long period of stay, which made his life there difficult. In his later years, Kawasaki san made a decision to live alone and independently.

READING A LIFE STORY

A life story does not simply tell us what our storyteller thinks she is like, and how she wants to present herself. It also reveals something about the ideas of the person in the given society and about internalized cultural expectations (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985:63). The interplay between these ideas and personal choices is not straightforward, but can be gauged against the backdrop of cultural context, which will be explored in more detail in the following section. Narrative also has a more direct link to personhood and self, since it is closely related to self-understanding and the creation of meaning. Narrative, or story - I use the terms interchangeably[81] - is a specific sequencing where events build on each other, or as Frank put it, in which ‘one thing happens as a consequence of another’ (2010:25). In some cases, can be understood in relation to the concept of ‘emplotment’, which refers to ‘making a configuration in time, creating a whole out of a succession of events’ (Mattingly 1994:812). This characteristic of the narrative allows us to create order out of a sequence of events that would otherwise just appear as a succession: one thing following after another rather than one thing following from another, or events building on each other.

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[81] In some cases, narrative and story are understood to be quite distinct entities (cf. Frank 2010: 121).

The telling of a story allows the narrator to impose order on consecutive events and to create a link between past, present and imagined worlds and selves, providing both the teller and the audience with an opportunity for self-understanding, albeit only partial (Ochs and Capps 1996:19). By recasting events within the narrative framework, we situate them among other events and create a meaningful whole, with a beginning, middle and end. Through emplacement within this framework, as a contribution to the plot, the event is given meaning[82] (Mattingly 1994: 813). As not all endings are equally desirable, and some are even feared, the story is often structured as a striving towards a preferred outcome. Lying at an intersection between past, present and imagined, the story is focused on what is expected and what actually occurred (Ochs and Capps 1996). But to be able to avoid or wish for certain outcomes and endings we have to be able to imagine them. Certain stories form our own personal repository that shapes our imagination of events and influence our actions. This repository is sometimes associated with what is referred to as narrative identity: 'we learn through stories not only which identities are available; more fundamentally, we learn what an identity is. … Narrative identity is as collective as it is personal' (Frank 2010: 199). The concept of narrative identity points to the link between the social and the individual, and to cultural resources for identity formation. I would argue that the dominant life model is one such resource, and can be usefully viewed as a story. In practice it consists of a number of smaller everyday stories, concerning people we know and people we hear about in other ways, in the media and elsewhere. The dominant life model figures as a point of reference, whether it influences one's expectations in more or less direct ways. Kawasaki san's story, like the stories to follow in other chapters, can therefore better be understood against the backdrop of this dominant life model in Japan, comprising a story about a salaryman and a housewife (see Story-in-between 'Model lives')

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[82] The process of understanding works in a similar way, by situating the new information in relation to what we already know (see Gadamer 2004).

THE STORYLINE

> Narrative activity attempts to resolve the discrepancy between what is expected and what has transpired. (Ochs and Capps 1998:27)

Kawasaki san's life story as presented above is just one of many possible narrative accounts of his life that he could potentially give; it is the one given to me when I asked for it. Like the other possible accounts, it is therefore only partial. Yet it nevertheless provides a (partial) insight into issues of self, self-representation, identity, and choice. In his account, Kawasaki san focuses on his job, which in itself is not an unsurprising choice given the dominant Japanese life model, in which prevailing focus for men is their work. Yet Kawasaki san places his job somewhat in contrast to the expected career path, when he refers to his decision to change occupations: he describes the change as happening 'halfway' or 'midway' (*tochū*) through his career. This implies that this discontinuity was in contrast to the expectations (of the listener), such as the model of life-time employment. Kawasaki san provided a detailed explanation of dissatisfaction with the job that he described as routinized, unchallenging and generally mediocre. This part of the narrative is recognizable as what is sometimes referred to as a 'problem' or 'complicating event', towards resolution of which the plot is driven.

In this case, the resolution is preempted, since we already know that Kawasaki san found a rewarding job, a challenging activity that he found rewarding and that provided him with opportunities for learning. In the process, he reveals that his *ikigai*, his aim in life (or that what makes life worth living) as he told me, is challenge and stimulus. He stressed that he 'achieved a certain balance in life' in social terms, as he was in contact with people of different social backgrounds and status. This is a central point in the narrative: the value of getting to know many kinds of people, and coming to a realization that certain underprivileged people are in many ways more impressive than people with a higher status. In some ways, it can be read as a moral of the story. This creates the core of the main narrative frame: a life story that is about challenge and learning through getting to know various kinds of people. Another complicating event emerges repeatedly, surfacing from within this outer frame: a story of the problem with his wife and his inability to get along with her family. The resolution to this problem is reached to an extent when he decided to move back to Osaka on his own, though he percieves this as problematic for his wife. This ties into his perception of himself as independent and 'a bit selfish' (*wagamama*). The second narrative strand is absorbed back into the first by linking it with the idea that there are different kinds of people, and if only his wife's family were more like some of the people he met through his work, things might have worked out better between them. The disjuncture remains, and the issue that bothers him is not wholly subsumed within the larger coherent narrative. The life story in this sense can provide an opportunity for recasting one's life in a meaningful form, but can also point to issues of existential importance.

A LIFE FULFILLED – KATO SAN

I spoke to Kato san in her house just around the corner from the Salon, when I paid her and her sister Ikeda san a visit one day, as she suggested I do. A slim lady whose calm and cheerful disposition and ability to laugh off troubles made her a favourite presence in the Salon, Kato san greeted me cheerfully and invited me in. Her sister was feeling a bit cold and weak that day so they decided to stay in and sip tea and watch television. Kato san agreed to tell me her story and wondered where to begin – when she was young she worked as a shop-girl, should she start there? As I reassured her that she can begin wherever she would like, she wondered if that would be too long. She then started by telling me that after working in a shop she was married at the age of twenty-one and her husband was twenty-nine. Twenty days later, her husband was enlisted as a soldier and sent away for two years. When he returned they had two daughters, and when they were aged one and two he was sent away again, this time to China. Luckily, his job was base-bound so he did not participate in fighting, but he never said much to her about his time in the army. While he was away, during the Second World War, her house burned down and she had to run away with two small children, and made her way to the countryside. On another occasion, she told me, she grabbed a curtain from the window, put in a couple of things to make a bundle, tied her baby onto her back, and ran with the other baby and the bundle in her arms while the fire was raging and bombs dropping all around her - a traumatic and life-changing episode she recounted many times. She then went to Hiroshima, to live with her uncle, and her mother joined her to help out with the children. Later, her older brother and younger sister (Ikeda san) found a house in Shimoichi (one of a few areas where not many houses burned down), where the brother was hoping to live with his lover. But when the parents found out they made him move, and made him give the house to Kato san to live in with her children.

Sometime after the war finished, her husband returned from China and got a job in the City Hall with the Board of Education, where he advised on designs for school uniforms, as he had a background in tailoring. They had two more babies soon thereafter, a boy and later a girl. They lived in Shimoichi, in the same house her brother had found and the very same one we were sitting in chatting. She stayed at home with the children, as her husband thought it would be bad for the children if she were to go out to work, so she stayed at home as a housewife. She spent most of her time making sure they all got healthy food, lots of fresh vegetables. She did not know many people in the area, and many were difficult to get along with, and enjoyed gossip, so she kept to herself then, even though she found it quite hard to look after the family with no-one nearby to lend her a hand or to ask for advice. She made sure not to argue with her husband, as that was not good for the children. She then said that some people say bad things about their husband, but that she was very grateful to hers, as he supported five people and was always hardworking and kind. She then offered advice on living a long and happy life: you need to respect your husband’s parents (and your parents) and be kind to them, to get along well with your husband, and then the children will grow up to be good, and that is most important, they will grow up to be caring and considerate. Her daughters, all three of them are volunteering – ‘always working for others’ - and luckily all have supportive husbands. This was clearly a source of pride for her, and she considered all her children to be very kind people. Of course, having a good relationship (*nakayoku*) with your husband is important, she said. For a woman, her husband is life (*inochi*), as even children get married and move away, and you can spend time with your husband until death. In order to maintain one’s health one must think about small things in life, like being careful with what one eats and enjoy it, not snack between meals, and be grateful. Every night before falling asleep, she thinks how grateful she is to be this healthy, how lucky she is, and expresses gratitude to the ancestors.

Kato san told me her story very briefly, even herself concluding that it may have been a little too short. She went back and expanded on the war years, recounting in more detail her memories of having her house burn down, but not expanding much on her daily life after the war – summing it up with a brief 'and then it was all pretty much the same as now'. As her children all grew up, moved away, married and had children, and were themselves now in their mid-sixties, and had even become grandparents themselves, as she told me on another occasion, clearly there was no lack of subsequent events. What Kato san was implying, like several of my other interlocutors, was that there were no more unusual, extraordinary events. When things are no different from what is expected, there just is no story, which is not necessarily a bad thing, as exceptional elements may well be distressing or traumatic. The story of running from a burning house with her two children was singled out as an extraordinary event, and being one she survived and coped with, perhaps even a source of pride. On a number of other occasions in the salon, Kato san told me about the joy of small, everyday things such as fresh food or a small flower in a vase in the salon, but also about the freedom she enjoyed from having fulfilled her duties. For instance, in a conversation about living alone in which some ladies mentioned the feeling of freedom that they enjoyed living on their own, mentioning how easy things were for them now. One of them then said that living with her late husband was very difficult, he was very demanding. Kato san then pointed out: 'you have to think of the good things that your husband did, supporting you. Now that you don't have any more obligations, you can enjoy yourself'. Kato san agreed that being free from duties is enjoyable, but thought that holding onto bad thoughts makes one unsettled. Since one has already endured things, she said (and fulfilled one's role), one can have fun. Kato san's story, as she told it to me, but also as it transpired from numerous other conversations in the salon, was one lived out in quite close accordance with the dominant life model. Having accepted the story of 'housewife' as her own, Kato san achieved a certain contentment, finding meaning in her life from her sense of a role fulfilled.

ACCOMPANIED BY STORIES

> The power of stories is the problem with stories: they are far too good as doing what they do, which is being the source of all values. (Frank 2010:69)

Kawasaki san's story presents him as a loner, who goes his own way and spends his days on his own. Nevertheless, his story, like every other, does not exist in isolation; it is not his alone. In fact, he presents himself clearly in relation to the 'model life' story. His own life diverges from this storyline in certain crucial respects, and it is precisely those elements of divergence, or difference from expectations, that comprise the focus. His choice to leave his first job, as well as the content of his second job, are set against the expectation of lifetime employment and stability, which in his view verge on boredom. His second job offered challenges and opportunities for excitement, such as dealing with the yakuza, something he seemed to take considerable pride in, as well as in his abilities to communicate with people. In short, Kawasaki san positions himself in relation to the 'model life', and both compares himself to it (at times unfavourably, pointing out his own 'selfishness') and resists it. The explanations surrounding such points of divergence from the 'model life' story are crucial in more ways than one. They do not merely offer justifications to others, but also allow for an explanation of his motives and achievements, which then allow for an interpretation of his life story as a meaningful whole. On the other hand, while Kato san contrasts her own life implicitly with the 'model life' and initially only expanded on elements of divergence, much like Kawasaki san, she ultimately represents her life story as one that very much followed the model sequence. In many ways Kato san draws meaning in her life from the very convergence with the model, from the feeling of having fulfilled her role. These two cases show how the stories available to us provide us with material for making sense of our own life, but also that the ways in which we position ourselves in relation to such stories can vary widely. In turn, the ways in which a sense of a meaningful existence, or of the good life, is narratively constructed, may differ significantly. We can make the most of full identification with one of the stories available to us, or alternatively attempt to make the points of divergence precisely that which makes our life meaningful.

STORY-IN-BETWEEN 6

BEING AN ADULT - DEPENDENCE, CONTROL, LIFE COURSE

In 1970s Japan one could read about ’life course’ and be enticed to reflect on one’s life plan, encouraged to think about what life stage one is at. In his work on maturity, David Plath (1980) tells a number of personal life stories, and furnishes one of them with this graph from an advertisement for a savings company, as background to what salaried men could expect in their life course. While Plath is careful to point out that only one in three men could expect such predictable stability in their lives, the advertisement stresses the synchronicity between people’s lives.

Figure E.1. ‘For an Unhurried Life-Plan. Life brings different times when you will need much more money than you might expect. The key to casual living is to choose a savings plan that fits your needs’. This life-course chart appeared in newspapers and magazines for several months in 1972 as part of an advertisement for a savings and loan institution (Plath 1980:88).

Today, one hears more often about a ‘diversification’ of life styles and life courses. An article in *Perigee*, for example, Yomiuri’s magazine for marketing research, explains that women’s life-courses have diversified (*tayōka shita*). At the centre of an image supplied to illustrate the argument is a full-time professional housewife surrounded by a number of alternative life-styles (clock-wise from top-left): Parasite OL (an ‘Office Lady’ living with her parents, and thus with a considerable proportion of her income at her disposal – hence a parasite); Independent career OL; part-time working wife; and DINKS (dual income no kids).

Figure E.2. ‘Diversified women’s lives (*Tayōka suru jōsei no ikikata*), in case of the women in their thirties.’ (Perigee: 2007).

While it could be argued that the recent focus on diversification emphasizes divergences from an earlier state of more homogenized life courses, it is clear that both discourses remain strongly gendered: ‘In contemporary Japan, the discourse of gender has privileged an obligatory marital heterosexuality and a mutual social dependency at home, at work, and at play’ (Kelly 2002:239, emphasis removed).

What does it mean to be an adult in Japanese society? In her book on transitions to adulthood among young women in Kobe, Kaori Okano (2009:8) shows that young people understood becoming an adult in terms of finding a feeling of achievable purpose, a sense of independence (economic and in decision making), but also a balanced sense of responsibility (in terms of groups they belonged to, their significant others and their personal needs). Many anthropologists of Japan mention the importance of recognition of one's dependence on others and maintaining harmonious relationships as major characteristics of adulthood (e.g. Goodman 2008:60). Adolescence as transition to adulthood can therefore be understood in terms of gradual taking responsibilities and recognizing dependence on others. In Japan, adolescence is understood as a period of great importance for the future life course of the young person. The attitude of parents and teachers, as well as other 'relevant others', tends to be marked more by high expectations than by suspicions - the latter being not unusual in the case of adolescence conceived as a liminal period in the West (White 1993). Merry White points out that the main difference between the 'messages' that children in Japan and in the West receive is that while those directed to the latter can often be contradictory, Japanese teenagers receive 'complementary contradictions', based on the 'understanding that the gap between the ideal and the real provides an acceptable area of freedom. Japanese teens learn that they will have more responsibilities as they grow up but that remaining in dependent relationships will provide support and solace' (ibid.:10).

The Japanese view of adolescence, as well as the transition from other life stages, emphasizes continuity rather than conflict between generations (Clammer 1997:21). Furthermore, the process of maturation is considered (at least ideally) to be a lifelong process 'in which individuals come to understand themselves first and foremost as social beings, as products of units and forces larger than themselves and without which they could not exist' (Lock 1993:202). In becoming an adult in Japan, the notions of autonomy and dependency are not in opposition, but in a complex relationship: 'independence leads to adulthood, but interdependence with others is necessary for full adulthood (*ichininmae*)' (Rosenberger 2007:92). In his seminal work on maturity in Japan, David Plath (1980) links personal growth to one's consociates, people to whom one relates with a level of intimacy, who participate in the making of one's biography, and to whom he also refers in his term ‘convoy’. As the title of his book indicates, in understanding the process of maturity it is necessary to focus ‘upon human character as it evolves through the long engagements of a web of intimate consociates’ (ibid.:222).

It is in this context that the importance of marriage as an important stepping stone to full adulthood for both sexes should be seen. A young man is considered to become a responsible adult only upon marriage, thus proving his serious commitment (Hamabata 1999:119), while the ‘postwar concept of maturity for women (...) includes patience and self-sacrifice achieved through marriage and motherhood’ (Rosenberger 2007:92). Although considered important for both men and women, marriage is often seen as more vital for the latter (Lebra 1984:78). The centrality of marriage for adulthood and personhood in Japan should nevertheless not be confused with the centrality of the husband-wife bond. The modern nuclear family in Japan was not crafted around a romantic relationship between wife and husband, but rather around the rearing and education of children (e.g. Sand 2003:24). It is important to note, as Sand points out, that there was nothing natural in the concept of the ‘modern’ nuclear family in Japan, that it was constructed in the discourse of ‘modernizers’ and policy-makers (Sand 2003). The typical relationship between husband and wife, at least among older generations, is described in terms of mutual dependence and segregation, husband and wife being in charge of separate domains (Iwao 1993:78). Among older generations of Japanese, marriage is described as being ‘like air’: ‘the relationship, like the air we breathe, is vital for the survival of both sides even though it is hardly ever felt. If we find ourselves gasping for air, it is usually indicative of a serious crisis’ (Iwao 1993:75). While conjugal love is not usually of the romantic or passionate kind[83], it involves a special kind of intimacy: a relationship in which both sides can be at ease and not obliged to communicate verbally. Indeed, the very lack of any need for verbal communication can be seen as a reflection of the level of intimacy within the couple (ibid.:77). Nevertheless, segregation often imposes distance between husband and wife, especially since many families are not engaged in the family business together and the spheres of domesticity and work became more radically separate, as in the dominant model of salaryman and housewife, compared to a couple who both worked together in farming the land or in family business (Iwao 1993:96-7).

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[83] Many young Japanese are challenging this basis of marriage, but some still believe that the kind of stable love that stems out of a good arranged marriage is more desirable than unstable passion. Hamabata mentions, in disbelief, an example of a young Japanese man educated in United States of America who believed strongly in the benefits of arranged marriage (Hamabata 1991:122)

The difference in gender roles is reflected in discourse about the need for men to find a meaningful way of spending time, a hobby, to avoid a feeling of void after retirement, since their identities have been so closely tied to the sphere of work (Iwao 1993:121-3; Traphagan 2004:62). This does not, however, mean that women do not potentially face a similar problem once their children grow up and move away, but the role of housewife usually entails considerable community involvement as well as care of the family's elderly (Lock 1993:170). The prospect of retirement, as well as other changes in their lives related to the life cycle, may call for a rethinking of one's identity, in accordance with their new social role. But even before that happens, various aspects of middle age may force people to reflect on their lives, even to rethink their identities and purpose. This is nicely encapsulated in David Plath's statement that middle age, or 'middlehood', 'is a stage when the life history intersects with the life cycle' (Plath 1975:51).

Plath considers middle-age to be a product of modernization and increased life-span, creating more space in the active part of adult life and postponing the onset of senility. According to Plath, middle-age is not a clearly demarcated period, seen by his interlocutors as gradually approached from the age of thirty and moving away from the age of sixty. The prevailing positive attitude to middle-age as a period of life is perhaps reflected in the expression 'prime of life' (*sōnen*), the term Japanese people seem to prefer to the label of middle age (*chūnen*). Plath underscores the importance of events happening to others that influence our passage from one life-stage to another, as in the case of our children giving birth and our becoming grandparents as a result (ibid.:54-5), as well as the inescapable belonging to historical generations, for example the first Showa generations (Showa *hitoketa*[84]) who grew up in the years during and soon after the war, typically described as hardworking and frugal (ibid.:56-7). From the point of view of the life cycle, middle-age is considered to be a time which enables a comparative perspective, allowing the comparison of one's own youth to that of one's child, as well as one's middle-age to the recollections of one's parent's middle-age, sometimes leading to a realization of the constraints of the life cycle and a rethinking of one's life, and resulting in a kind of boldness or nerve (*atsukamashisa*; ibid.:60).

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[84] See Kelly 1993:192

The later years of life, referring to the period after one's children have become adults and including old age, are often described as the stage at which women can obtain power and leadership in the domain outside the home, and can enjoy, free from the burden of childcare, more autonomy as well as a sense of accomplishment (Lebra 1984:253). Is should be noted that, particularly in the case of women, this sense of accomplishment is achieved through others (Lock 1993:202). This ideal depiction does not take into account the fact that many women are burdened with the care of the elderly in the family. Precisely because they are so caught up in familial networks, women often experience problems stemming from other family members' situations, as often mentioned by the interlocutors of Margaret Lock (1993) in her book about aging and menopause in Japan. One of her important conclusions is that *kōnenki* (approximately translatable as menopause) is just one of the problems these women face, and they often emphasize other concerns, such as family problems, over the physiological symptoms of menopause.

An important part of old age is community participation, through various groups with entertainment, recreational and educational programmes and associations for the elderly (*rōjinkai*; Lebra 1984:269). The importance of organizations providing community involvement and care for the elderly seems to have increased with the growing number of elderly in Japan and the nuclearization of the household, which will be further discussed in the following section concerning social change. The importance of social involvement is often stressed by local authorities and expressed in terms of the responsibility of the individual to participate in the community and develop the self, to maintain health and well-being and to contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole (Traphagan 2004:65).

The processes of aging and deterioration of one's health is, in the case of many Japanese, accompanied by a feeling of *shikata ga nai*, which can be translated as 'it can't be helped', an expression very often used in a variety of contexts indicating that something is out of one's control (Traphagan 2004:64). In her analysis of the seriously or teminally ill, however, Susan Long (1999) argues that while the term was usually understood in terms of resignation and loss of control, it is sometimes an indication of the desire to take over control of one's life, ranging from exercising power over others to choosing to be passive or subordinate in order to achieve a more important aim. Long thus stresses that control should not necessarily be taken to imply having control over others, but rather a form of self-control, closely related to the concept of *seishin* (spiritual or moral development) (Long 1999:15). Her analysis focuses on ill or elderly people, but could be extended to all kinds of constraints, including social roles and expectations, as one of the possible ways of negotiating limitations and restrictions.

Finally, one can also try to exert control over the way one dies, as indicated by the existence of the Buddhist temples known as *pokkuri dera*, or sudden death temples, where old people pray for a sudden death (Long 1999). According to Long's (2003) work on the ideas people have about 'good death', *pokkurishi* is considered to be a good way to die by many people, one where prolonged pain and suffering is avoided and, equally importantly, where one does not become a burden for others. Another kind of good death is *rōsui*, which by definition applies to people of old age and signifies a gradual process of decline. Neither of these terms refers to death due to illness. The good death was also expressed through the idea *yasuraka ni shinu*, to die comfortably, without pain or suffering, and *daiōjō* or 'peaceful death' that includes ideas about 'natural' death as opposed to a 'medicalized' one: 'while it is possible to have a good death from illness, even in the hospital, it must be a death without pain and suffering and without futile attempts to prolong the dying process' (Long 2003:61).

This story, while it may not necessarily circulate in the media or conversations as a whole, forms a kind of background to the way people think about the life course in Japan. It also shows that the life course vocabulary and life stages are not unfamiliar to most Japanese, and that there is a degree of uniformity in what is expected in a 'typical' life course. The recent attention to 'diversification' in some ways confirms the existence of a prototypical life sequence. The aim of this story was to illustrate what those assumptions might be, as the life stories of my interlocutors are, in a sense, cast against these expected courses. Indeed, socio-narratology teaches us (Frank 2010) that the narrative is built around the tension between what is expected and what occurs: my interlocutors often only spoke of things in their lives that in some ways diverged from this 'expected' version, and, as Ueda san (whose story I recount in the last chapter) said – ‘the rest was usual’ (hoka wa futsū), cutting the telling of their life story short after having recounted the ‘unusual’ or ‘unexpected’ parts. The evaluation of both expected and unexpected aspects of life, their moral quality and their role in my interlocutor’s lives, brings us a step forward to understanding what a ‘good life’ can be, or what it should not be, depending on what they make of it in their life stories.

CHAPTER 7

INTIMACY AND INDEPENDENCE: CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS IN LATER LIFE

It was a particularly hot and sticky afternoon in August, and the heat was heavy, so I was not too surprised to find that the mood was not very lively in the lightly air conditioned salon. The two large tables with six seats each were only half occupied. Abe san, a white haired lady in her late seventies, was sipping her green tea in her usual place near the door, while at the same table, Harada san, a tall, sturdy man in his mid-seventies, was flicking through a newspaper. The two sisters, Kato san and Ikeda san, both well dressed as usual, sat at the other table, closer to the counter. The older sister was chatting quietly to the volunteer in charge before my shift, while the younger sister, in her early eighties, was reading a book. Even the stifling heat, only somewhat eased by the air conditioning (as it was dangerous to lower the temperature too much in a place with so many comings and goings) could not account for this subdued atmosphere. The younger sister always enjoyed conversations and I had never seen her withdrawn like this, but it was not until Harada san left that I found out what had happened. Apparently, a couple of days earlier, having seen the younger sister engaged in a cheerful conversation with Oku san, a man in his late seventies, Harada san got upset and demanded her attention. After that unpleasant incident she started avoiding Harada san even though she previously always liked to spend time with this educated, well-informed man. Later in the afternoon, when a few more ladies, frequent customers, joined in, she told them what happened. ‘Boyfriends are many; one can have many male friends. Lover is one, but boyfriends are many!’ one of them cried out in dismay. Using the English word for boyfriend, she implied that the silly possessive jealous behaviour of Harada san was unacceptable.

This anecdote reveals the variety of feelings and expectations related to friendship and closeness, as well as the multiple meanings of intimacy. Generally speaking, ‘intimacy’ refers to relationships that are personal and close, emotionally and/or physically, private and caring or loving (Constable 2009:9). The term is somewhat ambiguous, as it may refer to the feeling of closeness, but also be a euphemism for sexual relations. Furthermore, its meaning in the Western context has changed over the course of the past couple of centuries, once referring to the very state of being a family, or being married, and as a result being closer than with outsiders. With the rise of discourses of intimacy, by the late twentieth century the term acquired a meaning of a special kind of closeness, based on verbal openness, and therefore something to be achieved, rather than assumed. This specific notion of intimacy is associated with the rise of capitalism and concomitant processes of alienation (Shumway 2003:25). It is therefore useful to bear in mind that in order to be useful in understanding various social circumstances and relationships in different cultural contexts, intimacy must be understood in a broader sense, perhaps best understood as a quality of closeness and trust that can be found in an array of different relationships: with parents, siblings, close friends, spouses, children, or indeed, lovers.

In case of the elderly in Japan, it is often noted that while the numbers of older people living with their families in three-generation households is still relatively high, concerns are growing over the rising proportion of older people living on their own[85] . While the links of the elderly to their children and family members are often discussed in the academic literature, it would seem that non-familial relationships are becoming at least as important in many elderly people's lives. Indeed, while the attention given to the intergenerational ties of the elderly is laudable (Thang 2001), recent work with Japanese elderly points to the importance of *intra*generational communication, that is, communication within the boundaries of one's own age-group. Matsumoto (2011) draws attention to a number of psychological studies indicating that in Japan (as well as in China and Hong Kong), communication between older adults, or intragenerational communication, has primary impact on the psychological health of the elderly (Cai, Giles and Noels 1998; Noels et al. 2001; Ota, Giles and Gallois 2002; all cited in Matsumoto 2011). Based on ethnographic material presented in the chapters in her volume, Matsumoto concludes that

> [a]mong peers and friends, older adults engage in verbal and nonverbal activities that may not fit with the images and standards held by younger people. The elderly may feel free to keep their 'old' values or talk about topics that the younger may not consider appropriate (ibid.:3).

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[85] For more detail See Chapter 2; and Story-in-between about Society without ties.

This chapter focuses on the close relationships elderly people have built around them - with their friends, siblings, within the community, and with romantic partners. It explores the meaning of marriage and of intimacy within it, of the narratives of reconstructing their lives after the loss, and friendship ties in later life, drawing on an analysis of the life stories of two women. The emerging themes of closeness, family relationships, friendship and independence are all explored in more detail with reference to other ethnographic examples.

Both of the women whose life stories are presented here have lost their husbands, and in the salon there were many other women who had been widowed, albeit not all so early in life. Widowhood is differently represented by my interlocutors for men and women, especially in the later years. Whereas a woman widowed while her children are still dependent on their natal family for support might experience significant practical difficulties (like Takahashi san, whose case I describe below), it was not unusual to hear that women enjoyed their freedom in widowhood. My interlocutors would sometimes hear of a case of an acquaintance whose wife had passed away, and wonder with a sense of concern how he would be able to take care of himself. In contrast, some of the elderly ladies who frequented the salon whose husbands long since passed away, frequently noted how comfortable and easy their life alone was, and occasionally pointed out how much fun they were having now. ‘I’m in heaven now, it’s all so easy. I had a really difficult time during my life, I went through a lot of hardship (*kurō*). I’m in heaven now’, Kondo san told me one afternoon, referring to her life alone. Tall and healthy at the age of 73, she enjoys growing vegetables in pots in front of her house and coming to the salon every day to enjoy a chat with her friends, who call her a ‘vegetable expert’ because of her abundant knowledge about planting and sowing. On one occasion, she told me of a singing class she was taking in the salon and how much she enjoyed it, but more surprisingly, how much better she was than she used to be: ‘Since I became single again, I can let my voice out, I can sing like I couldn’t before’. She feels healthier and stronger now, she said - and, I presume, more confident.

This perception that women can experience freedom in older age after their husband has passed away and they had fulfilled their duties seems widespread and some men in the salon commented upon it on several occasion, often in a self-deprecating manner. One cold and damp afternoon, for example, Kondo san - a tall and healthy-looking lady in her eighties - was discussing health with two younger ladies in their mid-sixties who always arrived together and a grey-haired, bespectacled man in his late seventies, and a couple of others. Kondo san said that the medicine her doctor had prescribed for her shoulder was much too strong and made her sleepy, but that she'd healed herself by regularly visiting the hot baths and hot springs. Another lady in her eighties replied that it was good that she managed to get better, as injuries and related problems take so much longer to hear after you reach seventy-five or so. The bespectacled man jokingly added that Japanese women seem suddenly to get healthy once their husbands are gone. One of the two women in their sixties, a widow, commented that it is very lonely when you '*hitori ni naru*', when you become single. Although many agreed, the conversation soon resumed a cheerful and bantering tone. 'This is your chance!' said one of the ladies to the man, referring to the widow in question as everyone laughed.

FUKUDA SAN

With her hair cropped short and pastel coloured clothing, Fukuda san does not look her age. A smiling 65-year old Kyotoite, whom I met in the women's discussion group, she has a surprisingly busy social schedule. Most days she goes to her local gym in the mornings. After lunch she visits her mother who lives with her brother, and in the evening she attends a karaoke group or a social dancing class. At first she did not like living on her own. She felt lonely, she said, but now enjoys her freedom and comfort. A cooked meal lasts her for a few days, and everything is very easy – 'like heaven'. But her life was not always easy, she confided to me on one occasion. That was when I asked her to tell me her life story, which she agreed to do on another day. Several days later we met in Kyoto, and she insisted on telling me her life story in front of one of the many Buddhist temples. The day was rainy and rather chilly, but we managed to find a quiet and dry spot under the overhanging roof on a porch of the temple, overlooking a large garden. At first, this seemed a bit impractical, but as her life story unfolded, I realized it was the way Fukuda san took ownership of her life-story, by providing a backdrop that meant something to her, and framing it, much like the worn wooden beams holding up the roof framed the tranquil view of the pebble-covered garden.

Fukuda san's parents were from Niigata Prefecture, but moved to Kyoto after they were married in the 19th year of Showa era (1944). During the war, as things became more difficult, they returned to Niigata, and soon her father was dispatched to China - something she does not know much about as he never spoke about it. After he luckily returned safely (*buji ni* – literally, without any events, problems) she was born in a small town in Niigata. When she was four or five they moved back to Kyoto, where she has lived ever since, thinking of herself as a Kyotoite. They lived in the centre of Kyoto until she was 18 in a house where her father ran a shop selling silk goods produced in his hometown by his relatives. Her mother took care (*osewa*) of his employees, preparing their meals and looking after their accommodation, and for all the years Fukuda san was going to school her mother was working. She was a very shy child but liked looking after her younger brother. Growing up surrounded by all her father's shop staff, who were paying attention to her and spoiling her, she felt she was being treated like a princess (*ojōsama*). She was very sturdy and healthy, and was even given an award for being the student who was the healthiest and has not missed any classes for six years, even though she did not excel at study. Being very tall for her age, 160 cm, she really stood out in elementary school. She started various *okeiko* (training in artistic pursuits often thought as crucial for a young woman to get married), like playing the piano. During middle school she enjoyed studying – as she was getting better at this she felt a sense of accomplishment (*tasseikan*) and started studying hard, particularly enjoying English. It was a very strict Catholic school and their behaviour was strictly monitored - for instance walking the streets on your own was not acceptable. But as it was one of those schools that had its own elementary school and there were many girls who continued on from the lower grades, the groups were already formed and she felt like she couldn't fit in. She had friends, but did not have much fun, there or in high school, so (she laughs) she had no other choice but to study.

After finishing high school, she enrolled in a 4-year course at a university. After spending so much time before just studying and not having fun she now started enjoying herself, she giggled. In fact she did not study at all after entering the university. She spent a lot of time with her walking society, rambling around Kyoto (something she loved since childhood and got into the habit of doing with her parents) and neglected her studies, and soon decided to transfer to a 2-year degree. After graduating, she continued *okeiko*, study in fine arts, and waited to get married, not for a moment thinking she could do something else. She did not have a boyfriend at university, but did meet one young man. But at that time, she pointed out, it was not the kind of relationship where they would say to each other that they liked each other, or meet frequently, it was mostly through correspondence. But there were many difficulties. He had to go back to his natal home and was engaged to be married, but they continued their correspondence for 7 years until she got married, at the age of 23. She went to several *omiai* meetings, to meet prospective husbands, and soon her parents found her a husband. Given that his parents were close friends of her parents she felt really safe and content with the choice.

At first they couldn't say they liked one another, but as they lived together they grew close: while living together one looks for that love (*isshō ni seikatsu shiteiru uchi ni sono aijō wo sagasu nan no*). That was a frequent pattern in the past, she said. His father bought a tiny house in Kyoto. He was a salaryman and she was a housewife, and they got along together and had fun (*kekko nakayoku tanoshiku kurashiteta wa yo*), she assured me. Two years later, their son was born, and she had to spend some time in the hospital because of a hormonal imbalance. When her child was born, that was the time when she was the happiest in her life, that's what she thinks, she told me with a gentle smile on her face, as if recalling those moments. Her husband was soon transferred to Nagoya and they moved there for three years. But as she had just had a baby, she made friends with other mothers whose husbands were moved there, and had a lot of fun. But when they came back to Kyoto, her son was of kindergarten age, and she was still a housewife. There were many days when there was nothing to do (*zutto kabe ni mukau hi ga ooi*). She started feeling a bit blue, and worried if what she was doing, the way she was bringing up her son, was the right thing to do. She remembered worrying a lot in that period… But when he enrolled in school she felt somewhat better. During all that time the three of them got along well and her husband was very gentle. Even if she got upset or kicked up a fuss, he would not get upset with her. He was a very kind and gentle person.

And then, one day he suddenly died in an accident. It was so sudden that she could not cry when she heard the news. Her son was in the first grade of elementary school, and she was thirty two. It was the biggest shock of her entire life, she told me. Her parents suggested she could work in the office of their silk shop, but she thought she would be a burden on them. Even with the loveliest parents, when you see them every day and depend on them, there are tensions, she said. She always had a bit of an independent spirit, so she had that feeling that she will somehow be able to make a living. Luckily, they owned a house so her financial situation wasn’t very bad, and she started working part-time as a receptionist in a dentist clinic, and started marking English tests for schools at home. With those two part-time jobs, they somehow got by. Her son was doing well, but she often felt lonely. She felt a lot of stress and anxieties about the ways she was doing things, particularly with regards to bringing up a male child. Raising children is strewn with worries and things you don’t know, she told me. She felt it was very difficult, but did not have time to cry. There were many good times, and her parents frequently took her and her son out to restaurants or on little trips and holidays, so she felt really grateful to them.

After a while she felt it was difficult to live on her own and asked her friends if they knew anyone for her. She was introduced to a man named Fukuda, and for a while they were seeing each other, going to the theatre or to the cinema. It was fun, and they enjoyed each other’s company. In the end, she decided, if she was going to marry, Fukuda would be a good man. Without consulting her son, who was now in middle school, she decided to marry again. Her father agreed to break the news to the boy. Now she regrets that, and she knows she had hurt her son very much by not talking to him then, but she knew he would disagree and was afraid she would stay unmarried for the rest of her life. Both Fukuda and her sold their houses and moved into a larger house together. He did not have children so he did not know how to treat her son, who mostly just withdrew to his room to study. They never argued, but the atmosphere was often strained and she felt caught up in the middle, and her husband often criticized her. Even though they had had so much fun and lively conversations during the year when they were seeing each other, now she realized he was a difficult man. Soon he became ill and was diagnosed with cancer, and within two years of their marriage he was in and out of hospital. Four years later, at the age of 46, she was ‘single’ again.

Unexpectedly, at the age of 50 she became more outgoing. First she joined a gym with her friend and made some new friends there. She became slim and less shy, met various men, and had several boyfriends. Soon she met a nice man there, who liked hiking and they enjoyed travelling together around Japan and abroad. They spent 5 years together, but he was 12 years older and sometimes she could sense a ‘generation gap’. Which is why she broke up with him when she met her current boyfriend. He knows many things, she told me, and is an interesting conversation partner. He helped her learn social dancing, and they trained for hours at a time. They do many things together, such as study English or learn how to use email, and for the first time she feels like she met someone who she can grow with, which makes her very happy and excited.

A STORY OF CHANGE

This is how Fukuda san described her life to me, focusing on the relationships that meant most to her, and leaving out the details about her several jobs, for instance. She openly admitted that she was frequently anxious about how she should go about bringing up her son, and that she regrets she did not ask him for his opinion about getting married again, even though she felt like she had no choice. She is grateful to her son that he studied hard and even though he was often sulking in his room, he successfully passed all the entrance exams and eventually graduated from university. But she is not close to him, and sees him and his wife and child only once in a while. Interestingly, she almost never mentioned her grandchild, on that occasion or others. She is attached to her mother, whom she visits almost every day, and is grateful to her parents for their emotional support throughout the years and occasional treats. At least twice a year, they go together on a trip to her mother’s favourite mountain spa. She has a number of female friends that she meets at least once a week, at one of her regular activities, such as karaoke. The way she describes her life, though, focuses on her close relationships with her male partners, her husbands or boyfriends.

Her first marriage was arranged with the help of her parents, a decision she was very satisfied with, and she was adamant that she had no way of meeting a partner since she was not even employed. The marriage was a successful one and she grew close to her husband. The second marriage was not arranged, but neither was it entirely different, since she asked her friends to find her a potential partner. In this case, even though she thought she knew her future husband well, in everyday life he turned out to be a difficult man. She emphasised the importance of making sure you are compatible with someone in everyday life, since that is where problems begin. Perhaps it was the proximity and closeness of everyday interactions that made it more difficult for her and her husband to enjoy each other’s company. Several years after her second husband’s death, Fukuda san decided she needed a change in her life, and after embarking on a more active lifestyle she became more outgoing. While her relationships were still long-term, she did not commit in the same way, and felt free to break up when they did not suit her. She also came to expect a degree of verbal openness, and as one of the reasons for the break up with her previous boyfriend, she mentioned that he was not very good at ‘conversation’, and that she often felt like she was doing all the talking. Her current boyfriend is married and aware of the instability of their relationship, but enjoys the time they spend together, and believes they share a special connection and interest in learning new things.

Fukuda san is proud of herself for being able to make this gradual transformation - from a shy woman towards the energetic, cheerful, open person that she is now - even though it amuses her that it mostly took place after she entered her fifties. Her personal transformation parallels the movement from so-called ‘traditional’ marriage towards forms that more typically characterize modernity. An extreme form of this is what Giddens (1991) calls a ‘pure relationship’: a close and continual emotional tie that lasts only as long as it provides the emotional benefits of shared intimacy and is a relationship for its own sake. On the other hand, Fukuda san did not make a value judgement about these various kinds of relationship, never suggesting dissatisfaction with the ‘traditional’ pattern. Rather than considering it constraining, and on this basis moving towards more modern forms, she believed that arranged marriage offered a feeling of security that she appreciated. It was instead a series of events in her life that brought about the change in the types of relationships she entered, rather than any dissatisfaction with potential constraints.

TAKAHASHI SAN

Takahashi san is a soft spoken lady who is almost always smiling. She has dark hair and clear dark eyes, and her tanned complexion has a healthy glow. She is seventy four years old but still working to support herself. I noticed at first that Takahashi san came to the salon regularly but infrequently, almost always on weekends. She works as a cleaner in an office building, so she starts her work around six and is usually finished by noon. As she often felt tired after finishing her job and housework she would rarely come in during the week. She often told me about her previous job in Osaka, in a traditional Japanese-style restaurant (*ryōtei*), which she recalled happily. I asked her if she could tell me her life story, and she chose a small, quiet café in Shimoichi, several streets away from the salon to avoid running into anyone we knew so she could talk freely. After sitting down and ordering, I briefly explained that I would try not to interrupt her while she speaks, and Takahashi san started her story.

> Where to begin… Well, I was born in the 11th year of Showa era (1936), and when the war finished in Showa 20, I was in the second grade of elementary school […] In third grade I was sent to a factory and started working. I wasn't going to school, but worked in this weaving workshop. I worked there until the age of twenty and when I was 21 I got married. My oldest son was born when I was 22 [laughs]. Later, in Showa 35 (1960) my oldest daughter was born. And my younger son was born in Showa 38 (1963). Well, back then, I had a husband (*danna*) who was working in construction, building houses and the like. That is what he did… He worked, all that time.. and then the [economic] bubble burst. And then there wasn't much work, so he stopped. We had 14-15 workers, living in [our house]. I was cooking for them, looking after all of them, just me. But after the bubble burst, he stopped working. And then one or two years later, he died. My husband died when I was in my forties. We lived in Gifu in Aichi Prefecture so I moved to Nagoya to work and then to Osaka. I had a friend who had worked here and through an introduction I got a job in the restaurant... I worked there until I was sixty, for over ten years.

Takahashi san described in detail the large and lively inn in which she served food, the kinds of customers they had and the big parties they often held towards the end of the year. She recounted her memories of a time when the inn - the largest in Osaka, located in Soemoncho, near Dotombori River - was a famous establishment where wealthy customers would entertain their guests, often calling for dancers. Eleven years later, as the 'bubble economy' in Japan burst, the place went out of business and she had to look for another job. It was those times, though, that she recounted gladly, and her descriptions were vivid and engaging:

> Every day there would be around five geishas. They would come and wait and people would call them over to dance. Wearing beautiful kimonos, all, properly. … The largest rooms, we had two of them, were 60jo[86], and there were fifty smaller private rooms – some for four, some for ten people, and so on. All of them had karaoke, everything, they were spacious. … Everyone was eating and drinking, and some called up the *maiko* (geishas). When it was *bōnenkai*[87] time we were so busy, some days we would have 1100 guests, and one time 1500 - unimaginable. In one

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[86] Jo is a size unit, 60 jo equalling 91.83 m^2

[87] Bōnenkai are End-of-year parties, or literally 'forget-the-year parties', usually with co-workers and often organized (or even sponsored)by the company, but sometimes also among friends, with an aim of forgetting the problems of the past year.

> evening. And all would have banquet dishes, seven kinds (*kaiseki ryōri* – formal meals served on individual trays). It was amazing.

Her description of her days working in the inn went on for quite a while, detailing the daily routines and the esteemed guests who were entertained there, including actors, and her memories of the loud and lively streets that surrounded the place, the gaudy river processions during Tenjin festival[88] that they could see from the windows, with Kabuki actors passing on river boats. She worked very hard, making preparations in the restaurant all afternoon, serving food all evening, preparing orders for the next day late at night at home, but she spoke cheerfully of those times, when she laughed every day, as she told me. She described how you could see the dancers while working. While she was serving food she would open the back door to the private room and would be able to see the customers and the dancers. She laughed mischievously when she told me that she looked a lot. The place she worked was a very interesting place, quite fun. It was a place with a flavour to it, and she felt it was a bit more of an experience than most other people would have had. Without a hint of regret, she said that she doubted that she would ever have a chance to have so much fun again, not just because of her age but because the times had changed – the economy is in recession and there is just not enough money around for such entertainment, geishas and so on. While the economy was growing, they were all spending money left and right, having fun. She then spoke in some detail about the closing of the restaurant, the fate of the owner and the economic downturn in Japan. She only said a couple of sentences about her life in Osaka today, though she did tell me more about it on other occasions. She was still working, at the moment as a cleaner in an office building, and hoped to be able to retire soon.

When she indicated that she was finished and did not know what else to say, I decided to ask her for more detail, memories and events associated with certain times in her life, in the order she had mentioned them. I first asked about her childhood and war time, and she told me about a large earthquake when she was in the second grade of elementary school, during the war. She was in school when it happened and the teacher had sent them home. She was running, and suddenly the ground broke open and water started gushing through. Even now when she thinks of it, she gets scared, she told me. There were several smaller earthquakes in those times too, they happened quite frequently.

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[88] Tenjin Matsuri or Tenjin Festival, held every summer (July 24 and 25th) in Osaka, is considered one of the three largest festivals in Japan and sometimes described as one of the world's largest boats festivals. It is associated with Tenman shrine and involves 3000 people dressed in 8th-12th century style court costumes in land procession, followed by a boat procession (Japan National Tourist Association 2011)

She also described the area where she lived, the big river nearby which was used for watering the rice paddies. At the time it was clean and nice and people would go there to fish or to swim. All of that was built up now, she said with regret, but it was such a nice river back in her day. She remembered the times when she was going home from school and it would start to rain and they would pick the big leaves that were growing there and used them as an umbrella, running home as fast as they could. She happily recalled those times when she was little, emphasising that things were good back then and the place was quiet. They lived in a rented house then, but later her parents bought some land and built a house of their own. Soon the war started and there wasn't much to eat, no rice. She said that they were lucky, as there were lot of vegetables so they didn't starve and they ate sweet potatoes every day. In their village no bombs were dropped, but they could see the bombings of Nagoya. She said that they could see it rise up to the sky, and then her father would comment, 'they dropped it again'. She talked a bit more about the war damage, and the stories she'd heard in the salon about what had happened in Osaka, with so many houses burned down and people forced to live in cramped conditions, sharing kitchens... Eventually she indicated she was finished, and I asked her to tell me about the time when she started working, after World War II.

When she was in the third grade of elementary school, she replied, she went to do an apprenticeship as a weaver (*hataori*). She lived in a dorm with other workers, twenty of them, but they were all much older than her. She was still very little, she said, she could not work in the workshop but helped out instead, by looking after the children and cleaning. She had to stop school, so she doesn't have much education, she confessed somewhat embarrassedly. But there was no other way, as she had to work. When she was a bit older, seventeen or so, she started work in the workshop. At the time, they did not have bonuses in money but were given gifts for New Years and Bon, such as a yukata or kimono, which the girls would put away, saving it for when they got married.

I asked her about her experience of living in the dorm, and after a moment of silence, she replied that her story is somewhat embarrassing, but that her mother had died when she was five. When she was six, her father remarried and her 'second mother', as she referred to her, had two sons and a daughter. But she was also very sickly and often unwell. When the youngest baby girl was born, Takahashi san was in the first grade of elementary school and her stepmother was in hospital for four months. During that time Takahashi san looked after the baby and the other children, being the oldest sister. There was no milk, not even cow's milk, so she fed her rice water. Her father had to earn the money, so he had to leave the house and leave her with the children. The stepmother came out of hospital, but after a few more months fell sick again. She was very weak. They never got along and always argued, so Takahashi san left to do an apprenticeship. Her father was running a *kushikatsu*[89] shop at the time, and one of his customers who came often noticed this tension and offered to take her on, to take care of her, and she moved into the dorm. Takahashi san thought that if the step mother hadn't had the little daughter, perhaps she would have taken better care of her, but she wasn't her real child. So when her father came with the suggestion, she agreed, thinking it might be for the best.

She told me that she needed to look after the children and prepare the rice for all the workers in a massive pot, all on a fire oven. Together with the family and all the workers, there were thirty of them, so the quantities were enormous. It was quite hard, and they were a bit strict. She also needed to do the washing up, dusting and other kinds of cleaning. The work in the weaving workshop later was not light either, but working with others was fun. When the work for the day was over they would sometimes go and see a play or a movie. There were three of them sleeping in a room, and they would always chat. That was lots of fun, she concluded.

After a short silence, I asked her to tell me more about getting married. Somewhat reluctantly, she told me she met her husband through *omiai*, it was an arranged marriage. But, she said, it was no good. He was the second son of a family acquaintance and her step-mother introduced them, but she did not put any effort into checking properly what kind of man he was. But, Takahashi san was eager to be free of her family, and accepted the first offer. ‘That was the origin of my failure,’ she laughed. Their marriage hadn’t been a good one, and even though they did not hate each other, they argued a lot. He worked in the construction business and they ran an inn for their workers, for whom she had to cook and sometimes also help out on the construction sites, while looking after the household and their three children. She was always overworked, and he often had to entertain them until late, a task which involved alcohol. She would often complain and he thought it was annoying, so they argued. She really wished she would be able to just look after the household and children but had to work, getting up before everyone else, often woken up by the workers on the days they had off, because they wanted to eat something cooked. But she was young then, so she somehow managed.

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[89] *Kushikatsu* is a Japanese-style snack made from deep fried meat, seafood or pieces of vegetables on skewers.

She complained and he would get upset at her, and they would argue. He would get angry that she is complaining when he was tired from working hard, but she thought it was pointless when they had nothing to show for it in the end, as he would just go out to drink all the time. His workers would invite him, ‘Boss, come and have a drink with us’, so he joined them. But going out like that every night, she said, he got into the habit of drinking and started drinking on his own, spending all the money they earned, ‘Until he died.’ He damaged his liver from drinking too much and died when he was forty five years old. Her oldest son was in the third year of university and her husband did not leave them any money, so she had no choice but to start working to support the children. Her daughter was in high school and the youngest son was in year six of elementary school – ‘So I just worked and worked, to pay for the school fees’. She moved to Nagoya, where she worked in a business hotel, a kind of residence for workers who were living away from home. The pay was good, but the work was very hard, preparing breakfast on her own for hundreds of lodgers every morning, cleaning and the like. She felt like she couldn’t move her legs or arms, it hurt so much, and she felt she couldn’t go on like that. Luckily, while working there she met a friend who used to live in Osaka. Through her recommendation she got a job in Osaka. Her friend married and remained in Nagoya, so they lost contact.

At present, she is quite satisfied with her life and likes living in Osaka very much. She does hope she can stop working soon, as she is starting to notice it affecting her health. She enjoys living alone and socializing with her friends. Although it is difficult to make friends later in life, she told me on one occasion. It is easy to have acquaintances, but hard to create close friendships (*shitashii*). Older people seek comfort and they withdraw when they do not feel like doing something, she said, after mentioning one of her friends. Nevertheless, she would not like to move in with one of her children. Her daughters live in other prefectures and she visits them a couple of times a year, and enjoys those trips a lot. She talks to her daughters on the phone and feels quite close to them, but also values her independence and life in Osaka.

On several occasions, Takahashi san's recollections focused on her life in Osaka and her work in the exciting environment of a high-end inn in the entertainment area of the city. She spoke vividly of her experiences there and of the responsibilities she was later given, having to do accounting every night. Even while explaining how hard she was working then, a smile did not leave her face, just as when she spoke of having fun with her friends. This part of her life was not just the most recent, she implied, but also the one that defined her, that made her who she is now: a sociable, confident person, who meets new people with ease. The friendships she made, while numerous, are not very close, but rather focus on spending time together cheerfully. In many of her later life relationships, the focus has been on conviviality rather than intimacy.

LIVING IN CLOSE QUARTERS OR 'INTIMACY AT A DISTANCE'?

Takahashi san's relationship with her children is close, but she does not want to live with them, and values her independence. Yet she says she enjoys a close relationship, especially with her daughters, with whom she speaks frequently on the telephone. In this case, as in many other similar cases, it may be necessary to rethink conventional ideas of physical proximity and closeness of living together and intimacy, especially with respect of the co-residence of the elderly and their children's families. The three-generation household is no doubt still often considered an ideal, and while some older people are prevented by unfortunate circumstances from enjoying it, many, like Takahashi san and Fukuda san, simply choose not to live with their children. It is therefore essential to distinguish between isolation and living on one's own, just as it is necessary to differentiate between co-residence and intimacy - issues that are often conflated in relation to the elderly in Japan. For instance, many older persons living in new houses constructed as two-generation units (*nisetai jutaku*) felt increasingly isolated, since their friends and neighbours checked on them less frequently as they assumed that they are taken care of by their children, whom they would in some cases see as rarely as once a week (Brown 2003).

Writing about older women in the United States, Gratton and Haber (1993) noted that while the public discourse idealizes the situation of the elderly living with their family on farms as having most authority and the urban pattern of separate residence is equated with neglect, their research showed that women living in three-generational households in rural settings had the least power. In contrast, women in urban settings often felt closer to their families while living in their own homes, which they label 'intimacy at a distance'. This is an important point that requires careful consideration in relation to the changing living patterns of the elderly in Japan[90]. Gratton and Haber further relate the possibility of 'intimacy at a distance' with an increase in social security: 'rather than neglect, the living arrangements of the older women may reflect the impact of Social Security' (1993:183). While Takahashi san's example may not be a good case in point for this, since she has to work to support herself, Fukuda san's example supports this idea, along with numerous other cases I encountered in my fieldwork, some of which I describe in the following section.

To sum up, I argue that the close relationships of older people need not always include their family, especially children. In cases where they do, they are not necessarily based on co-residence, nor does living alone necessarily equate with social isolation and loneliness. It often reflects a conscious choice and is connected with the high value placed on independence. Such independence, however, can often only be maintained with the help of friends and community ties or social security. Furthermore, close or intimate relationships in later life do not always take place within marriage, as illustrated by the case of Takahashi san. The nature and meaning of intimacy can also vary significantly in these close relationships, ranging from the kind of implicit understanding that comes from living together, to an emotional verbal openness.

The case of Ikeda san and Kato san, the two coresident sisters who were frequent customers in the salon and therefore appear in these pages quite often, is particularly illuminating with respect to ideas of co-residence, interdependence and intimacy. In her mid-eighties, Ikeda san is a feminine, cheerful lady. Always well-dressed in dark trousers and a burgundy or lighter coloured cardigan, Ikeda san made sure that she never left the house without powder or lipstick. Several years ago, she had an operation for stomach cancer. Having partially recovered, but still weak, she moved in with her older sister who has a house a few minutes away from the salon. Ikeda san has no children, and while she really likes her sister's company, finds it a difficult not to have her own house and her freedom. Ikeda san's husband was a tobacconist, and she frequently helped out in the shop. While far from affluent, they had a comfortable life, occasionally going out and travelling with a group of friends from a society for people with disabilities where her husband held a position of responsibility. Having no children of their own, they took care of a young niece for a number of years, while she was attending school in Osaka. On one occasion, Ikeda san told me, not without pride, that she brought up her niece, who now lives in her house with her family. Yet she chose not to live with her, but with her older sister. Even though her sister is sometimes a bit strict and controls the household budget with a firm hand, she enjoys being in her company as the recipient of her caring attention, and the two of them could always be seen together, chatting or laughing.

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[90] The number of older people living in single households in Japan has increased to nearly a quarter of all households with occupants over the age of 65 (Cabinet Office 2007).

Without children of her own, Ikeda san led a fulfilling life and seemed to have been quite close to her husband, with whom she often went out and travelled, often with a large group of friends and acquaintances. Unlike some women her age, she is therefore used to socializing in mixed company and enjoyed chatting both to men and women in the salon and making friends. This sometimes led to misunderstandings, as in the opening anecdote. But most of these relationships were not particularly close or intimate. On the other hand, her relationship with her sister was quite caring and affectionate. Yet when I visited the sisters at their home, Ikeda san's whispered confession to me while her sister was in the other room made it clear that sisters avoid certain topics with each other. Ikeda san's eyes glazed over with tears as she told me of her husband and the life they had together in their home, and how she missed her home and her freedom and was sometimes tired of her sister's authoritarian attitude. The sisters did not talk about their feelings for each other or their life together. Ikeda san was grateful to her sister for her care and felt close to her and very fortunate to have her. Yet, the close bond and intimacy that they share should not be equated with intimacy of the kind (mentioned in the beginning of this chapter) described by Shumway (2003), based on verbal openness about emotions.

FREEDOM AND INTIMACY IN OLDER AGE

The life stories of Fukuda san and Takahashi san, and the case of Ikeda san, raise important issues of co-residence, freedom and independence, and like so many other cases in the salon, require us to rethink the link between co-residence and intimacy as represented in the ideal of the three-generational household. Although intimacy almost everywhere in the world, and perhaps especially in Japan, can be created through embodied practices such as sharing food, as well as bathing together[91], co-residence is a balancing act between familial involvement and private, individual comfort:

> Truly 'happy' homes are those that achieve a delicate balance between the need for intimacy among the family group and individual yearnings for relaxation and escape. One may relax during family oriented activities such as sharing a delicious meal, but activities such as soaking in the bathtub or sitting or lying on the floor with a cold beer in front of the TV are equally important for the wellbeing of the family and the production and reproduction of a home-like atmosphere (Daniels 2010:47).

The issue of wellbeing of individual family members extends beyond the boundaries of the home, for they may have various involvements with networks of people in the neighbourhood, for instance. Many of my interlocutors, like Takahashi san, mentioned ties to the area in which they lived as one of the main reasons for not wanting to move to their children's house. Of course, in situations of tensions within the home or even just restricted space and conflicting daily routines of older and younger generations within the household, this balance may be disturbed and the effort to maintain harmonious relationships can feel overwhelming. Kondo san, the 'vegetable expert' mentioned above, told me that she found living with her daughter too difficult because she always had to adjust and keep out of everyone's way. She eventually decided to move back to Osaka to live on her own, precisely in order to keep the relationship healthy. When Fukuda san's first husband died, she decided not to accept her parent's offer to live with them and help out in their company, but to look for a job instead. She decided against co-residence precisely because she so valued her warm and close relationship with her parents. ‘When you spend a lot of time together,’ she told me, ‘even the most beloved parent might feel tired and you might argue.’ In this light, it is necessary to distinguish the kind of embodied intimacy of people living together from emotional closeness and warmth. Yet the latter need not necessarily be based on revealing one’s emotions verbally, or discussing problems, as it too can take the subtle form of co-presence, or of ‘being there for one another’. The availability of support and ‘dependability’ are among the more important features of relationships such as those cultivated by Fukuda san with her son, her mother and brother, as well as with her lover - whom she had no interest in moving in with or of marrying.

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[91] Importantly, this kind of embodied intimacy achieved through communal bathing, for instance, is not connected to privacy (Daniels 2010:47).

While some of my interlocutors obviously enjoyed living with their children and grandchildren, others were of a different opinion. For example, a short grey haired lady who came to the salon every day clearly enjoyed her grandchildren’s visits, and seemed always to be baking cakes to take over to their house. She mentioned that she preferred living on her own, as the young ones would stay up late and the children would play their video games and music quite loud. At the age of seventy five, she was in good health and found that occasional support from her children living nearby and from her neighbours was sufficient for her, though were she to become weaker she would try to get home-helpers and nurses through the Long-Term Care Insurance[92]. Similarly, Oku san, a man in his late seventies who frequently visited the salon, clearly stated his discontent with his grandson living with him in his apartment. ‘I wish he’d return home, he’s a nuisance (*jama ni naru*)’, he told us on more than one occasion. Even though his daughter was of the opinion that it would be a good idea for them to live together, on the grounds that her son needed accommodation closer to his university and her father could no doubt use a hand with occasional shopping and the like, Oku san insisted that it was in fact much more of a burden having his grandson over. He had to do much more cooking, cleaning and tidying, he said, and also shop for larger quantities than before, while his grandson was often oblivious to household costs such as heating or air conditioning.

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[92] Unlike welfare benefits or the need to be housed in a nursing home prior to the introduction to the LCTI that were stigmatized and implied a lack of support from one’s family (Bethel 1992, Traphagan 2004), the compulsory character of participating in the LCTI and pervasiveness of its use meant that most of my interlocutors were not weary of claiming the support through it.

Many older people to whom I spoke worried about becoming a burden on their children. One lady in her late sixties whom I met in a workshop on housing options for the elderly, for instance, explained that she was looking for a serviced apartment or a small private nursing home because she did not want to become a burden on her children and 'cause trouble' (*meiwaku*) to them. Such people were also explicit in their belief that living alone was better and more comfortable. On the other hand, to maintain their independence they were reliant on friends, neighbours and/or social services. A similar case is described by Nakano (2005: 137):

> After the death of his wife and his eldest son, the two people who are most closely associated with eldercare, Abe decided that the best way to live his life was to assert his independence. He would not be one of those old-fashioned elderly who stayed at home all day watching TV, nor would he burden his family. He would live on his own and make an effort to make friends and become involved in social life by participating in the eldercare programs. Becoming a recipient of social welfare was part of his strategy to demonstrate independence as an elderly person.

How is one to understand this kind of independence that inevitably involves dependence on others? In the Japanese context, as perhaps elsewhere, the notions of dependence and independence form a complex relationship that may not be best understood in terms of a simple opposition. The idea of adulthood (*ichininmae*), for instance, implies a complex interplay between the two: to fully become an adult in Japan, and therefore an individual who is recognized as independent, one must recognize one's dependence on others (Rosenberger 2007:92). Similarly, for an elderly person to lead an independent life, maintaining social ties and related dependencies is essential. To further link this with existing ideas about personhood and responsible adulthood, it might be useful to draw on work in the field of childhood socialization in Japan emphasizing the idea that Japanese children are encouraged to feel dependent on their mothers, and are indulged by them (as expressed in the much-discussed term *amae*), while at the same time learning to accept authority - both emotions that are later transferred onto one's group and the need for social approval (Reischauer and Jansen 1995: 144). This group-centred attitude of the Japanese is of course both well-known and widely disputed on the grounds that it has been used to express some unique Japanese essence. Such criticisms notwithstanding, it remains a dominant ideology, another kind of story drawn upon by Japanese people themselves.

The concept most often used to refer to 'independence' (in writing) is *jiritsu* (dating from at least the 15th century), which literally means standing on one's own. In the case of young people it often refers to financial independence from one's family of upbringing (Okano 2009:250). It also implies independent decision-making. Understanding of adulthood are underpinned by three main principles: '(1) having 'a sense of concrete and achievable purpose' (*mokuhyo*), (2) acceptance of responsibility, and (3) independence (autonomy). The last two were also generally agreed criteria for adulthood in the eyes of young adults in the West, but what these young Japanese meant by these terms seemed to differ slightly...' (Okano 2009:247).

In relation to responsibility, the ideas of responsibility for oneself and for others seemed equally important (248), which is particularly interesting in relation to ideas of independence and dependence on others. Autonomy (or self-direction) has been singled out as a key component of the concept of individualism (Lukes 1979[1973]), a concept central to Western thought but which comprises many different ideas and intellectual traditions. Other important components are privacy, or the right to a sphere of existence which is not the concern of others, separate from the public; and self-development. The latter is an idea of Romantic origin, which developed in two distinct directions. As Lukes (ibid.:71-2) writes: 'The notion of self-development thus specified an ideal for the lives of individuals - and ideal whose content varies with different ideas of the *self* on a continuum from pure egoism to strong communitarianism. It is either anti-social, with the individual set apart from and hostile to society…, or extra-social, where the individual pursues his own path, free of social pressures … or highly social, where the individual's self-development is achieved through community with others'. Interestingly (and as discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter 5), in the Japanese tradition, the idea of self-development is not at odds with the value placed on the community (Sawada 2004; Traphagan 2004).

The concept of independence as deployed in public discourse and in public policy is often restrictive. The elderly accepted into certain kinds of care - homes are expected to be 'independent', in the sense of being able to take care of their bodily needs. The restrictiveness of the official definition of independence was demonstrated Gill (2005) in relation to policy for the homeless. The policy makers coined the term *jiritsu-shien*, or independence - support (lit. ‘support of self-reliance’) which has the pleasant connotation of not presenting the receivers as passive, and also establishing a third category between dependent and independent in the state system. In the practice, though, this often meant institutionalizing the homeless in restrictive settings and making them fully dependent on various social services: ‘Ironically, people who have been living self-reliantly - often in quite well-constructed shacks some with petrol-driven electricity generators, often with incomes from recycling tin cans or magazines - emerged from the shelter to state-dependent lifestyles in various welfare institutions’ (*ibid*.:201-4).

The notion of independence as used in the printed materials of various elderly housing agencies, homes, or counselling services (some of which were mentioned in Chapter 3), refers to a specific, bounded kind of independence: in the most restricted sense it refers to independence in caring for one’s basic bodily needs; in a wider sense it includes independence of choice. When elderly people speak of thinking about where to live, they are talking about not becoming a nuisance for their family. Many who lived alone and separately from their children emphasized that they live independently. In fact, they either rely on support networks in their community, or look for a place where support is readily available. Therefore, dependence and independence are clearly not mutually exclusive, even though they can seem opposed. Elderly can live independently because there are home helpers to support them, or community ties or institutional care to help them.

What, then, is the precise nature of the relationship between autonomy and dependence in Japan, especially with regard to older people? How can these seemingly opposed notions coexist without contradiction? In his well-known attempt to move beyond simple binary oppositions, emphasising that every differentiation includes at the same time an act of valuation, Louis Dumont (1980) has suggested that certain pairs of concepts can best be understood as ‘hierarchical oppositions’. In his seminal writings on ideology and hierarchy in Indian society, he defines hierarchical opposition a kind of opposition in which the term with higher value (within an ideology) at the same time opposes and encompasses the lower one, as it stands for the whole. Thus, for example, in societies where economic activities are considered lowly, their profanity stands in direct opposition to the realm of the sacred or of ritual activities. These economic activities are nevertheless important for ritual activities, and are necessary for the latter to be carried out at all. The higher ideological level of ritual thus encompasses the seemingly opposed realm of the economical (Parkin 2009: 5). Another example is the English concepts of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, considered to be opposing counterparts, but where ‘man’ is accorded higher value and can also stand for all humankind (ibid.:52).

It may therefore be revealing to consider the notions of dependence and independence in the Japanese context in terms of hierarchical opposition. Dependence, particularly in the form of mutual dependence, or interdependence, encompasses the notion of independence, which is seen as its opposite, yet cannot exist without it. The value of dependence is high in a variety of different contexts in Japan. Take for example the aforementioned case of adulthood: to fully become an adult in Japan, and therefore an individual who is recognized as independent, one must recognize one’s dependence on others.

Dumont’s theory also allows for an inversion of value between the two poles in particular contexts, on a lower level of ideology. In this case, however, the previously lower pole takes on a higher value, but cannot stand for the whole (ibid.:52). The independence asserted by older people may therefore take precedence in some situations and be valued highly, but total autonomy can never be expected. Similarly, for an elderly person to lead an independent life, maintaining social ties and related dependencies is essential. Prompted by studies showing that women in Japan are much more autonomous than often represented, Lebra focused on strategies for maintaining independence among older Japanese women, concluding that ‘[t]he claimed autonomy of the Japanese woman, however, turns out to be grounded in her dependency, if not upon her procreative family, upon her mother or close friends’ (1979:337).

Ethnographic data seems to confirm that the priority of these two concepts can be inverted in some cases, but that independence cannot encompass dependence. One example of an inversion of the value of the two is described by Satsuki Kawano (2004) in her work on pre-funerals in Japan - celebrations organized by older people in which they express gratitude to their families, ‘ceremonies of later life celebrating their agency, self-sufficiency, and personal pleasure in steering the remaining years’ (ibid.:155). Kawano argues that these (still rather infrequent) ceremonies, organized by older people, represent a different vision of their own later years to the official policies that tend to emphasize the dependency of the elderly on society and their families: ‘Older persons take charge, command attention, and enjoy being central figures. Sometimes going against the wishes of their children and those around them, they publicly announce egocentric orientations against cherished ideas of mutual dependence’ (ibid.:163).

Another useful perspective comes from Lebra’s more theoretical work on the Japanese self, in which this Japanese anthropologist proposes a distinction between oppositional logic and contingency logic. If oppositional logic focuses on distinctions between concepts, contingency logic posits a contiguous relationship between terms, with the possibility of their partial overlap. The concepts placed in the contingency relationship are not independent or opposite, but entwined, their existence conditioned by each other (Lebra 2004:8). Both kinds of logic are universally available, according to Lebra, and can coexist, but particular cultures may express a preference for one or the other, and while Westerners more readily choose oppositional logic, Japanese tend to employ contiguous logic more often, or at least more readily recognize when it is at work (ibid.:9). With regards to dependence (*izon*), Lebra suggests that instead of pairing with its opposite, autonomy or independence (*jiritsu*), in everyday use dependence would more often be paired with nurturance or indulgence (*amae*[93]; ibid.:19).

Taking Lebra’s theory in conjunction with Dumont’s ideas about hierarchical oppositions may offer further insight into the dynamic between dependence and independence, if these are understood to operate alongside each other. Dependence can be related (through contingency logic) to nurturing care, to reciprocity (as embodied in the notion of mutual dependence and support (interdependence), based on a more generalized[94] reciprocity enacted through a network of people rather than in dual relationships). Dependence can also be related to burden (such as expressed in the form of concern that one may become a burden on one’s children – *futan*, or a worry not to become a nuisance or cause trouble – *meiwaku*). At the same time, on the level of ideology, as Dumont would put it, the norm of interdependence is in most contexts valued higher than independence, and can be understood to enable and encompass it.

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[93] For more on notion of *amae* see Doi (1973).

[94] A relevant discussion of Generalized reciprocity can be found in Sahlins (1972)

To conclude, in order to lead a good life one needs to strike a balance between maintaining intimacy and a degree of independence. These two were sometimes in tension, but, as pointed out by my interlocutors, including Fukuda san, at times it was precisely by maintaining a degree of independence that warm, intimate relationships were thought to be preserved. In addition, older people in Shimoichi were intent on cultivating various sources of support - like Kikuchi san, described in Chapter 5, who had no children and made an effort to help out her friends whenever she could, in order to have more people she could rely in times of need. In this context, LCTI and state resources (including the pension) were understood as one among many possible sources of support, alongside family and neighbourhood relationships, including those established through the salon. On various occasions people commented on the limited nature of these resources; a couple of ladies who attended the '*chotto tasukeai*' seminar aiming at giving a 'little help' in the neighbourhood told me one cannot expect that one will be able to get all the support covered by the LCTI (especially in times when the increase in number of older people meant an increasing pressure on the limited funds). Similarly, one man who was reluctant to rely on his family as his only source of support, lest he become a burden on them, was looking for accommodation in a serviced apartment with some support funded by LCTI. Lebra suggests that it may be fruitful to focus on dependability, which implies that 'the more dependable people one has around, the more options one has for dependency and therefore the more autonomous one can be' (Lebra 2004:20). In fact, the systems in place may also be perceived as dependable, including the large-scale systems such as LCTI[95], as well as the small-scale networks of support such as those organized in the neighbourhood. The stories in this chapter and my other interlocutors made it clear to me that maintaining multiple sources of support or 'dependability' is the best way to maintain a degree of independence: yet another necessary balancing act along the way to wellbeing.

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[95] The addition of the state and LCTI to the list of sources of support that one can depend on is very relevant, as they expand what Lebra wrote in 1979: 'Autonomy and dependency are compatible insofar as the latter is based on well-balanced reciprocity' (ibid.:350). It may appear that with the possibility of relying on LCTI for support one's reliance can become entirely one sided, but it is important to bear in mind that the perception of LCTI as a system that is compulsory for everyone (see Chapter 2) means that one seen as being involved in long-term generalized reciprocity.

STORY-IN-BETWEEN

FROM BABY BOOMERS TO HERBIVORE MEN AND CARNIVORE WOMEN – JAPAN'S CHANGING GENERATIONS

While stereotyping of different generational cohorts was popular in Japanese public discourse at least since the Meiji era (1868-1912), in the early post-war years the trope of generations was invoked in an attempt to differentiate attitudes to the war and to judge degrees of responsibility. A distinction was made between the generation that had experience of pre-war life, and those who grew up in a society already involved in the war in Manchuria (Kelly 1993:197). The following generation, labelled *Shōwa hitoketa*, or those born in single digits of the Showa era (1926-1934), were given much attention and served as a benchmark for subsequent generations.

This was the generation whose childhood and youth spanned the 'dark valley' (*kurai tanima*) of the depression and the war, the generation that was old enough to have suffered but young enough not to have inflicted suffering. They had managed the psychological divide and social chaos that was the transition to peacetime to become the bedrock of postwar recovery and boom. They became, in the popular imagination, the workaholic company men (*mōretsu shaiin*) and education mamas (*kyōiku-mama*), whose selfless efforts on behalf of company and children insured present and future prosperity (Kelly 1993:197).

They were also described as corporate warriors, especially at first by marketing agencies, and later in popular discourse. The corporate warriors found jobs at the beginning of the 1950s period of rapid growth and worked long hours, spending little time with their family. They had childhood and youth memories of hunger and scarcity, but were driven by a vision of Japan catching up with the West (and later of overtaking it), a vision that created a joint sense of purpose that later generations lacked (Mc Creery 2000:53). The generation that followed, Showa *futaketa*, or the double digits Showa (usually referring to those born from mid-1930s to mid-1940s) continued this tendency in commitment to the workplace, but were described as more family-oriented and labelled *mai-homu gata* (my home type), placing their family life higher on the list of priorities (Kelly 1993:198).

The Baby Boomers, the following cohort, were born during the ‘baby boom’ that ensued after the World War II, in the years between 1947 and 1949. In comparison to the United States of America, this was a very short and condensed period of peak number of births, yet this was the generation that in many ways marked the post war period and created the image of a typical and ‘mainstream’ way of life (Mc Creery ibid.) – the white-collar, middle-class salaryman, married with two children living in a house in the suburbs, commuting long distances to work and going out with their work colleagues in the evening. They are characterized as being aware of the benefits of fitting in, of not standing out: ‘[they] preferred not being too visible; liked being offered novelty more than creating new things for themselves. They would seek security and avoid risk. As consumers of information, they also preferred a variety of choices. They would cultivate taste instead of creativity’ (Mc Creery ibid.:50). They found their jobs in the period of high growth and filled the lower ranks in the life-long employment system, but they would not all be able to proceed to these higher positions in their lifetime and thus overall became successful, but not too successful. In their youth they were involved in the student protests of the 1960s but later lost much interest in politics, and disappeared from view (Mc Creery ibid.). The youth of the 1970s (born between 1950-1960) were labelled apathetic or ‘reactionless’ (*shirake sedai*) for their disinterest in politics and lack of enthusiasm for both work and home life (Kelly ibid.:198). They were followed by a generation that, especially from the point of view of senior management (who mostly belonged to the corporate warrior generation), behaved in an outrageous manner, demanding more free time, taking holidays and making friends outside the company. This discontinuity with their predecessor’s values is captured in their label: The New Breed (*shinjinrui*). They grew up in the 1980s, in families with fewer siblings (as birth rates started to decline), in times of opulence, and their parents lavished them with material goods that the latter did not have themselves in youth (Mc Creery ibid.:54).

In more recent years a new social phenomenon has been identified as ‘Herbivorous men’ (or ‘grass-eating men’) (*sōshoku danshi*), characterised by their somewhat unmanly preferences and interests. They are kind, interested in family and long-term relationships, and personal appearance and grooming; but not interested in corporate careers, sex, cars or the consumer culture of excessive spending. Their shunning of corporate roles is interpreted as a sign of disillusionment with such normative modes of success, ever more difficult to attain in the post-bubble economy in which they came of age (Otagaki 2009). This general rejection of dominant models of masculinity was later more narrowly represented in some women's magazines and elsewhere as a kind of 'feminised' men, focused on their own looks and fashion, and insecure (Morioka 2009). This negative image was then complemented by its female counterpart: the carnivorous woman, assertive and career-oriented. Some social scientists have suggested that their predominance and incompatibility of this pair is at the root of the low birth rate in Japan (see Tachibanaki 2011).

These stories of distinct generations capture some of the common lived experience of people born at particular times, reflecting some of their distinct social and demographic circumstances. They also provide a kind of shorthand explanation for social phenomena, allowing observers to resort to stereotyped ideas about the values and aspirations held by each generation. Yet as stories that circulate widely in the media and in everyday conversations, they come to form a backdrop to peoples' self-understandings, a resource for making sense of their own life stories, as with Ueda san whom I introduce in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8

LIFE AS A PATH: CHOICES, JUNCTURES, CONTINUITIES

From the moment I met Ueda san and Murata san, two volunteers in the Salon, I immediately noticed the warm relationship they had with the Salon's customers. Each in their own way enlivened the conversations and cheered up anyone who seemed to be feeling slightly down or isolated. Ueda san was a smiling, mild, matronly presence, who would converse on a wide range of topics and express her opinions openly, without hesitation. Murata san was a short, slim man who would from time to time bring treats or photos from his recent hiking trips, including impressive landscape vistas and close-ups of rare mountain flowers. Both were active in a range of community endeavours, volunteering almost every day for a few hours, or supporting the older people in the neighbourhood.

This chapter presents their life stories. Although I met both these people as volunteers, I deliberately seek to avoid reducing their stories to merely their experiences as volunteers, allowing them to instead provide a larger context within which their engagements with the salon can be better understood. As well as providing insight into important issues such as how people come to perceive themselves within a larger societal framework and face life decisions, I suggest that the accounts provide a different and somewhat novel perspective on volunteering and community involvement to that offered elsewhere. By giving an account of an entire life history, one can get a better sense of the place volunteering has within a person's life, including how it relates to other experiences and to important other people. In contrast to existing accounts which focus on the volunteer identity of those engaged in community volunteering and seek to provide an in-depth account of this engagement and its meaning for the actors (Stevens 1997, Nakano 2000, Nakano 2005), I believe that a different kind of meaning emerges when one places this engagement within the larger whole of a life experience or life story. Such positioning allows us to see relevant experiences – in this case of volunteering - in their relation to other events and aspects of the narrator's life, and to assess their meaning in this broader perspective, including their weight and relevance in relation to the other aspects of lived experience and the self-identity of the narrator. The issues of motivation and engagement with community life that emerge here are also explored with reference to extracts from conversations with NPO staff members, who see their efforts in the NPO as neither a job nor as volunteering.

‘I SAW AN ERA CHANGING’

I arrived at Ueda san’s house slightly late and a little confused. Although her house was just a few paces away from the Shimoichi Salon, it was difficult to find, as my directions instructed me to continue past the fishmonger’s and turn into an alleyway. As it happened, there were several fishmongers in the shopping arcade at the heart of the neighbourhood, and any number of small alleyways. When I finally arrived, I was surprised at the house’ s tranquillity, in spite of its proximity to the bustling arcade. Ueda san’s house was an old, wooden two–storey town-house, with a kitchen window facing the alley, a small living area and downstairs bathroom, with two rooms upstairs that could be reached by a narrow staircase. In all, a fairly typical size and layout in this old merchant area. Ueda san made me a cup of cool yuzu tea, a popular citrus drink on hot summer days, and we sat in her living room looking out over a tiny garden, no more than two square metres, with pebbles and a miniature pine tree. She explained that the chairs on which we were sitting were made by Okada san, a neighbour. He was handy with woodwork and made this furniture in such a way that it could be used on tatami mats, Ueda san told me proudly. In return, she helped Okada san and his wife with their computer and would print their photographs for them. Okada san and his wife both sometimes volunteered in the Salon.

After a short silence, Ueda san started her story with some hesitation, wondering where to begin. A tall, stout lady of 64, with large glasses, usually smiling in a friendly and open manner, she was now serious and immersed in thought. More to herself, she recalled her life in a nutshell- ‘born as the ninth and last child in the family, I got married, lived as a professional housewife, and as I couldn’t have children I went out to work… I worked as a public servant in Osaka, for twenty-four years and eleven months.’ Having gathered her thoughts, she began to tell her story, slowly but unwaveringly.

Ueda san was the ninth and youngest child born to parents who were of the Meiji (pre-war) generation. The upbringing was different before and after the war, especially in terms of gender expectations; before the war women were expected to stay at home. One had to obey anyone senior, including one's older brothers and sisters. That was the way to bring up children, and that's how it was in her case. She was born in 1947 as a final, unexpected child after her father returned from the War. The war was a break, it marked a generational change; the teachers in her school were of the new generation, and so were the parents of the other children she went to school with, so she felt she was different from people born just three years later, especially in terms of gender equality. In her times, it was not an era of gender equality, and girls were sent to do *okeikogoto*[96] rather than to school, and after middle school she started working.

She lived in Hiroshima prefecture in her natal home until she was 23, after which she moved to Osaka where she got a job in a company. At that time women were expected to do particular tasks such as cleaning and making tea. After four years she married and left her work to become a professional housewife. As she didn't have children, after seven years she was encouraged mildly by her husband and neighbours to get a job. She found one with Osaka City Hall, in a Ward Office. At first the workplaces were still unequal, women were still expected to come early and clean up the workplace before their male colleagues arrived, and serve tea during the day, even though the difference wasn't so pronounced for public servants. Gradually, after ten or fifteen years, one began to hear that women shouldn't be expected to serve tea, and the way of thinking emphasizing equality spread. Around Heisei year 3-4 (1992-3) the new female employees declined to serve tea. This is the Japan we now live in, Ueda san concluded, reflecting on the change in gender relations.

Born at the very beginning of the baby-boom, whatever she did from then on, either looking for work or applying for a pension, was influenced by the large number of people in her generation. She felt she lived amidst all the major changes of that time, while things were being rebuilt. In her case, she felt, she didn't live 'within an ordered flow with everyone, somehow changing flow midway'. For instance, at the time there was much American influence, to which she wasn't accustomed, though others from her generation took it in their stride. Her parents (Meiji people, as she called them), being much older than most of her peers' parents, still had a pre-War mentality and were quite old-fashioned, strict and authoritative. They always warned her about manners and the polite way of speaking to everyone who was older than her, including her teachers and older siblings. They made her sit in *seiza* (a formal way of sitting in a kneeling pose) for many hours, and wouldn't let her go out on New Year's Day; instead they would all eat together and on the following day would dress her in a nice kimono and let her go out. She was taught how to make *osechi ryori* (traditional New Year food), which she continued to make every year until her husband died. All the traditional customs were truly observed at that time. Traditional festivities and food were important, until some time around EXPO (the World Exposition) in Osaka in 1970, when Ueda san recalled there was a change in social customs and schooling. Before that time, families with nine children, like hers, were not uncommon.

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[96] Okeikogoto- learning traditional skills and arts, playing a musical instrument or, more recently, learning a foreign language as a part of the practice of self-improvement, particularly appropriate for young women that are to be married.

Her parents might have been old-fashioned, but they let her do things she liked, such as travelling and hiking, which she enjoyed so much. But after marriage she stopped all that – she didn't do anything, she told me in an agitated manner. She didn't even think of doing things; in 25 years of working she perhaps went on company-organized trips less than ten times. 'I didn't even think I'd like to go!' Ueda san said strongly, in a raised tone. Well, after leaving her job she went a bit, when she was invited by her friends. But, she warned me, her story would not be representative, others might have had a very different life history. She felt that her life was interrupted, cut by the war, and that she was always witnessing transitions. 'I saw the change of an era, I witnessed my parents aging', she said, as if summing up her youth, marked by care for her parents.

She was born when her mother was in her forties, and her father retired when she was in middle school. For that reason, she said, she doesn't know the concept of getting something done by your parents. If she wanted something done she would have to do it herself, she reiterated, since her parents were older. Ever since she was in elementary school she had to help with preparing food and participating in the kind of family obligations that young children were mostly unconcerned with, such as attending the funerals of neighbours and kin. She was the same age as her cousins' children, having been born after her father came back from the war. Her parents thought that they wouldn't be able to have any more children, but then she was born. Because of that timing, everyone else in her class was the oldest son or daughter. In terms of family circumstances, Ueda san repeated once more, her childhood was very different. Her life was also marked by the number of people of the same age, during the boom. Even though there were many jobs, the salaries were low, because there were so many of them. Jobs were mostly for men, though, and unless a woman was a professional, like a nurse, she would usually marry after finishing school and become involved with the household, with the money the husband brought home, and that was the pattern she fell into. What time did everybody [i.e. women] get back out to work, she started wondering. Maybe just before the EXPO, everyone was buying houses (*maihomu*) and the wife would start a job part-time, to help pay off a mortgage, around the age of 50. She also became a housewife in Showa 49 (1974), and went back to work in Showa 57 (1982). At the time there were really many housewives, but now many more women work. If you compare your mother and your grandmother's way of life, she told me, many things have changed. In her case, social change was very rapid. She had experience of so many different things. She began to wonder what else to tell me.

She decided to tell me about her job, when she entered the Ward Office. She started part-time work at the Ward office of the City Hall and was soon offered permanent employment there. For twenty-five years she was in charge of services for people with disabilities and the elderly. At the time there were two kinds of jobs on offer there, home helper and administrator, and she chose the former. As a result of an administrative reform seven years later, she became an office-bound administrative employee, a helper-coordinator. During her time, the system changed several times, and as she was working various new tasks were assigned to her. Her position become a more general welfare-related position and she was even placed in charge of all the public nurseries in the Ward. After Long-Term Care Insurance[97] was instituted in Heisei 12 (2000), she worked on that too. Even before that time the Ward office was dispatching home helpers to the elderly and disabled, through *Shakai Fukushi Kyōgikai* (Social Welfare Council). When the Long-Term Care Insurance Law was enacted, and Independence Support (*Jiritsu Shien*) payments for the disabled were started, she really took over everything not covered by those. Around Heisei 15 (2003) Osaka City started up neighbourhood networks (*chiiki netowaku*) and the Health Care Centre (*Hokensho*) came under the auspices of the Ward Office, and matters that were dealt with elsewhere until then, became their responsibility. It made sense, since they collaborated a lot before, but after that the job become very difficult. There were more people responsible for different things, but the counter for customers was staffed on rotation, so that was added to her many duties. Finally, the use of computers was becoming more and more ubiquitous in her work, which she felt uncomfortable about as she couldn't really use a computer (I was surprised to hear this, since she was the one person in the Salon that all the customers asked to help them with computer-related issues, including burning CDs, searching the internet and printing photos or preparing presentations for events). After an accident that made it hard for her to walk down the stairs and walk much, she struggled more and more with her work tasks such as going out to other offices or people's homes and she had to take a taxi. This proved unviable and, getting really tired of it all, she resigned, only later to realize it was just a month before the minimum requirement for the state pension, which is 25 years of employment. To qualify, she would now have to work for one more year, which she didn't want to do.

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[97] For more detail on Long –Term Care insurance Law see Chapter 2.

Reminiscing about her times at work, Ueda san remembered some difficult times dealing with people with dementia. In one case, a lady had a home helper who came to do house cleaning, but every time after the helper left the lady made an incredible mess. Whenever her daughter came over, sometimes soon after the helper left, she found the place in total disarray. She said to her daughter that the helper doesn't do anything, so the daughter filed an official complaint. Other times there were complaints about stealing money. One particularly difficult episode was when a helper came over to the apartment of a lady with dementia, bringing food. Having arrived there, she couldn't get in: the lady wouldn't open the door for her, having locked herself in and gone to hide on the balcony. Luckily, her next door neighbour went in through the balcony and opened the door for them. When they got in they found the lady holding up a cushion, shouting, 'the soldiers are coming, the soldiers are coming!' and leaning out from the balcony. The fire brigade arrived to help, but since she didn't have any relatives, someone had to calm her down. Suddenly the lady asked her who she was, and began to talk. From that moment until she finished talking, saying, 'thank you for listening to me,' it took five hours. There was another difficult case, a woman with dementia who would wander away. Her wandering caused so much trouble to her family, they couldn't leave her alone without her leaving the house, sometimes without clothes.

It was harder back then. Before the Long-Term Care Insurance, the Ward Office had to deal with all kinds of things. Towards the end of that time, before the Insurance, the number of helpers in the Social Welfare Council branch in the neighbourhood was constantly rising, until it reached around one thousand. The process of starting up a new system, the transfer of duties - that time was the hardest. Before the Long-Term Care Insurance was launched it would have all been impossible without the volunteers, Ueda san emphasized. Without their help, she thought, she wouldn't have been able to do her job. For instance, she was able to set up a rotation with helpers and volunteers to be with a blind young mother for twenty hours a day when her child was just born. Then she recalled a young blind mother who couldn't read picture books to her child. Having heard about her worries, Ueda san recorded on a cassette the content of several books and got the lady's husband (who was also blind) to write it out using a Braille typewriter. Then she pasted it into the picture books so the mother could read to her child. She helped them make quite a few volumes this way. The girl really got to like reading books, and came to visit her many times afterwards.

Another time, a young woman who knew her through her welfare job came to ask her for help. She was pregnant and bleeding, and even though her mother assured her she was all right, the young woman felt uneasy so she came to speak to her welfare worker whom she knew, Ueda san. Ueda san was concerned and took her to the local hospital, where she had an emergency delivery. Ueda san knotted her brows thinking about what might have happened if she hadn't made it to the hospital. But the baby girl grew up healthy, she told me as her face brightened, adding with pride that the girl later decided she wanted to become a social worker and had just enrolled in a welfare course at the university. She also remembered the case of a young couple with disabilities, both of whom were in wheelchairs, and at the stage when their baby was crawling and just starting to walk it was very hard for them to look after it, to bathe it and the like. She sent out volunteers and helpers every day to help them out, especially with bathing. 'Volunteers helped so much,' Ueda san said gratefully. 'Even after I've left my work, I still think about how with the support from the volunteers the elderly and the people with disabilities could lead their lives, before the Long-Term Care Insurance Law'. The volunteer coordinator at that time was a marvellous person, organizing all kinds of events for the volunteers. 'Those are the kind of things I remember of when I think of my work', Ueda san said smiling, as if to finish. After a short silence, her expression stiffened a bit as she recited another summary of her life: 'Other than that, we were a childless couple, we didn't go travelling… there wasn't much interesting… I came from a big family (*kodaku san*), we played a lot outside with friends [and had to look after ourselves]… That's why I haven't been led much by self-interest.'

After a short break I asked Ueda san some questions, in the order in which the themes appeared in her story. I asked if she could tell me something more about her parents. Her mother became very sick and was unconscious for forty-five days. Even though Ueda san was already married she stayed in the hospital with her mother, feeding her sticky rice until she regained consciousness. Because she hadn't been on an intravenous drip, she was strong and her recovery was quick, and soon she was able to walk. Her father suffered a stroke at the same time, so she looked after both of them and stayed with them in the hospital in a double room. The nursing of both of her parents lasted some six months in total. Her father was half-paralyzed so she had to give him water, take him to the toilet, help with his rehabilitation and exercise. She helped her father to practise using the drinking cup. After the stroke he suffered a speech disability, and when he was finally back home she would call him every day to practice speaking, doing speech therapy exercises for two or three hours a day. The bills were so high that one day she got a call from the phone company asking if she was running a business from home, suggesting that she switch her account to a business one. After two years he really became quite like himself again, his speech mostly recovered. His paralysis almost unnoticeable, her father was able to look after himself. He would make his own meals three times a day until he died at the age of eighty three. When her parents were in the hospital for a long time and she was looking after them, she fell ill from exhaustion and got a chill that made it impossible for her to stand, her back hurt so much. Her husband then came to get her. Because her parents were older, she never thought that parents are the ones who do things for you, she always thought that the child was the one to do things. Looking after her parents like that made her do her best. Even though she had other brothers and sisters, she cared for her parents, as the last child. She then made the decision she would look after them until the end.

When that happened, she received a call. She had spoken to her father that evening at around half past eight and he had mentioned he was a bit hungry. She suggested he have a mandarin. After he ate the mandarin he started feeling unwell and was taken into hospital. Some of her brothers and sisters made it to the hospital, they were all there. Then Ueda san received the phone call: he had just died. She was told how he went: in the very end, as a nurse was giving him a drip, she asked him how he was feeling. He told her that he was quite well, that he now felt much better, he livened up – Ueda san described his last moments with a tear in her eye and a smile on her face. He got to live until the age of eighty three. Her widowed mother lived for another ten years, on her own. Every day Ueda san would check on her by telephone, of if she needed anything she would go over, that was the kind of life she was leading. Her mother lived until the age of ninety three. Ueda san thought of her looking after her mother as a matter of course, she felt the obligation (*on*). And this feeling extended to the people who supported her when she assisted her mother, the volunteers and kind people in the neighbourhood. They looked in on her mother, and so she was able to support her without having to live with her. What she couldn't do then, she feels like she would like to repay now, by volunteering. That was the beginning. One day, after retiring, she heard about this new activity [organized through the Fureai Salon] and got involved, through Okada san, a lady whose mother helped her mother. So she started a volunteer course run by the Salon, feeling that everyone helped her when her mother needed support. She felt she wasn't an especially good child to her mother, who really wasn't very demanding and never reprimanded her. She was married so she didn't live with them, and her parents returned to normal life after their illness. When her mother was approaching the end, she spent the last week with her. But her father passed away so suddenly she didn't have a chance to be there, Ueda san said with some bitterness. All his children were there, but she, who cared for him for so many years, did not come in time.

After a moment of silence I asked about her time as a housewife. She smiled and replied that coming from a traditional family, and because she liked cooking, she would prepare all her husband’s meals with care. She wouldn’t think of serving him anything ready-made for breakfast. She got up early and made him a proper meal, comprising various different things. Her husband said that was too much and asked her to just give him bread and instant soup, regular food, that was by then considered as normal. He asked her to sleep longer and not worry so much about his food, but she felt she couldn’t do it. She would do all kinds of things around the house, and then one day someone suggested she take up a job at the newly opened branch of a shop owned by the same company her sister’s husband worked for. She worked there in a cafeteria and met many other girls. The company made karaoke equipment, so she obtained a machine and would entertain her young colleagues at home. Then she became quite sick from exhaustion and after that she did not go back to work, though she continued to do karaoke at home for five years, as a job. Every night someone would come over, two or three people. She was also doing some child-care at home, the local children would come over to play and she would make treats for them. It was quite lively and noisy at times. Towards the end, she said that there were many things she had forgotten, like her three near-death experiences in various accidents as a child, of which she remembers just the stories, ending her story after a short pause with a smile and the words: ‘and the rest was usual…’.

LIVING IN A SOCIAL WORLD

Ueda san reflected a lot about her position in society and how her experiences reflected particular historical and demographic circumstances, such as being part of the large cohort of baby-boomers. She emplaced her own life within a change of gender norms, which she described minutely and with marked reflexivity, emphasized by her understanding of herself as between generations, between ‘eras’. It is useful at this point to cast a glance over the specific demographic and social circumstances that Ueda san experienced first-hand and felt as directly influencing her life. While the demographic transition in Japan was by no means unique, and is considered to be a feature of all industrialized countries, its pace was unprecedented as it happened in the space of merely three generations (Ochiai 1997). This resulted in specific demographic conditions that influenced the shape of social structures. The post-war generation of 1925-50, which had a large number of siblings that survived into adulthood, unlike previous and following generations, formed strong and large kin networks, which were able to look after small children and aging relatives without external support (ibid.:71). This is the generation that formed the mainstream model and perhaps even made the 'Japanese model' of welfare possible (ibid.).

Like Ueda san in her account, Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2008) insists that demographic conditions should be taken into account because of their close link with social, political and technological changes, but particularly because demographic changes have contributed to the most radical changes in human lives. On the other hand, by focusing on the level of the population, Johnson-Hanks makes an argument against methodological individualism, asserting that populations have systemic characteristics that surface only at the aggregate level (ibid.:310). These, in turn, have serious consequences for individual lives. Demographic conditions thus have important consequences on various levels: the institutional, the level of family structure and the level of the individual. As Emiko Ochiai (1997) shows, the level of predictability in post-war Japan achieved by low mortality rates, which meant that one could expect to live one's life course without fearing the loss of a partner or children, combined with financial security in times of economic growth, would have been likely to alter people's understandings of institutions such as family and marriage (ibid.:179). Ueda san is strongly aware of this influence, as she stated several times explicitly, and of her particular situation as differing or conforming to the typical model.

Anthropologists focusing on life histories have warned against using them as tools for generalization about cultures or societies, questioning the legitimacy of treating the people narrating them as 'types'. In contrast, Sarah Lamb (2001) is interested precisely in this aspect of the narrative of a widow she spoke to, not least because she maintained that her interlocutor actively assumed such an identity, fashioned herself within this model: 'All people, not only anthropologists, tell stories partly in order to make generalizations about the broader forces and conditions that shape and contain their lives.' (Lamb 2001:27-8). She goes on to show that her interlocutor, by voicing her story, shows how different she is from what the cultural model would have her be (a widow, who is therefore a danger, a potential 'slut'), but at the same time situates herself within this model by depicting herself as a 'good wife'. It is not impossible that this is the only way she can obtain legitimacy, to have the chance for her narrative, and therefore her questioning of the dominant model, to be heard.

I would argue that in order to criticize, expose, question or even scrutinize the dominant model, the narrator of a life story feels the need to situate herself somehow within it, even if her own position is decentred or marginal. Ueda san represented herself as a working woman, who liked entertainment and socializing with her female friends, who valued her own engagement highly and did not consider her wifely identity to be the primary one. She rarely talked of her husband, who passed away some time ago, his ancestral photo looking down on us as we talked. Yet, she felt the need to say that she was a diligent housekeeper, a wife who rose early to prepare breakfast for her husband, almost as if that were the only way the other aspects of her identity could be legitimized. To be fair, this aspect of Ueda san's story is not very strong, unlike in some of the other stories that more explicitly relate to the dominant life model (see Story-in-between 'Model lives'). Nonetheless, Ueda san felt that she needed to place her own life firmly within a social and historical context, precisely because she herself sometimes felt caught up within various, sometimes conflicting value systems.

Being raised by parents with traditional values, she felt she lived a life that was somewhat out of sync with everyone else's, that she didn't live (as she put it) within an ordered flow with everyone else (*minna kō junban ni ikitairu nagare to wa chigatte*). That said, Ueda san's life course did not seem to diverge much from one we might consider typical, except perhaps for the fact that she had no children - she started work and left home in her early twenties, married and left work a few years later, returned to work several years later. The difference Ueda san referred to was in terms of values: while other couples may have occasionally travelled together (for instance, as described in Ikeda san's life story in Chapter 5), it did not even occur to her that that was something she might have done, something she might have suggested to her husband. She was diligent and dutiful, and focused on her obligations and care for her parents. Ueda san felt she was caught in between changing generational norms, but that this allowed her to perceive the changes, always witnessing transitions (*itsumo kawari me wo mieru*). In this sense she felt that she was lucky, with an interesting perspective on things: 'I saw the change of an era, I witnessed my parents' aging', she said.

It may seem somewhat unusual that she cared for her parents in old age, rather than her older siblings, in particular the family of her oldest brother. While they were not averse to giving parents some support, this came about naturally. As the youngest child, Ueda san spent a lot of time helping her parents in her youth, and developed a strong connection with them. The care in their later years, as they got sick, was something the decided to take on: she decided to feed her mother and practiced speech with her father, and spoke of it as her own decision. Yet she also described it broadly in terms of obligation (*on*). This was not at all expected of her, as it is considered the duty of the oldest son and his wife, who are to inherit the parents' house. Ueda san did not inherit her parents' property, as I found out later when I asked her, nor did she even think about it. Nevertheless, she described the caring relationship to her parents in terms of duty and obligation. In contrast, Daniel Miller describes the actions of young mothers in North London as based on the 'modernist concept of freedom, where responsibility is felt to be an outcome of their own agency rather than merely an obligation (…) or unreflective compliance' (Miller 2004: 36-7). Ueda san might have stubbornly insisted on caring for her parents, to the point of her own exhaustion, when her husband had to take her home to rest, but she framed her actions in terms of obligation. Moreover, by letting her mother live on her own and relying on help from neighbours, she managed to keep her job and continue working, which she considered important, where she could perform other forms of care. Care may thus be seen as an obligation, though it is also a great deal more.

'MY LIFE WAS AT THE CROSSROADS…'

Murata san was a dark-haired man in his late sixties, with a boyish look about him. Our interview took place in the quiet, pleasantly lit room upstairs from the Salon in which we met as volunteers. When I asked him to tell me about his life, he didn't hesitate much: 'Well, in my childhood, there were no particular problems, but since I started working, there were many things….'. When he was in his thirties, the company for which Murata san was working started to struggle and he was told he would be transferred to another city. At that time, one couldn't decline a transfer, but Murata san didn't want to leave Osaka, so he resigned and started working as a cook with his cousin. That period of his life was perhaps the hardest, he told me and laughed. It was a big company and there were all kinds of problems, different kinds of things to look after. He worked from the age of thirty until he was fifty five, from early morning till late at night. Getting up and starting work while it was still dark, finishing work when it was dark again. In that manner, he worked for twenty five years, until around the age of fifty.

That was the time when Murata san's mother started requiring 'full-time' care. She had helpers coming, arranged through the Fureai salon, but he would take care of her when he was home from work. He looked after her until she passed away at the age of 87. At the very end she had gall bladder cancer and was admitted to hospital. Being of an advanced age she couldn't have surgery, she didn't have enough strength. So he wanted to take her home and had to make a sudden choice. Within three days he left his job. He was not yet 56 when he resolved to leave his job. His circumstances were such that he still needed to work, but he felt he would somehow be able to make do. He had some savings and somehow he managed to resign. When his mother returned home she was bedridden so Murata san had to look after her needs, including toilet care. A nurse told him around her birthday in early December that she might not live until Christmas. And just like she said, Murata san's mother passed away in less than a week. She didn't like hospitals and said she would like to die at home. So that was it. Well, so Murata san thought he would look after his mother until the end. In Japan even now, that is the way people want to go, in their own home, Murata san told me, so one could look after them until the end.

For half a year after she passed away, Murata san took it easy. Then his neighbour suggested that he find some work. His mother's friend from the neighbourhood suggested a job in care for the elderly, that would be flexible and he could take time off. So he went to a course, obtained a home-helper certificate and started working through Fureai Salon and at a day-centre for the elderly, doing those two jobs at the same time (*nisoku no waraji*). The work thorough the Fureai Salon was about ten per cent of his overall commitment. Just a couple of months ago he had left that job after working there for exactly five years. It was quite strange, Murata san thought, that he worked for so long as a cook and then did care work for five years… 'It was hard,' he concluded.

Of course, it was emotional labour (*seishin rōdō*). Care involves a great amount of emotional labour and that exhausts one much more than physical labour. Murata san really enjoys mountain climbing. On many occasions his friends would invite him to go climbing with them, but as he had to request days off one and a half months in advance at work, he sometimes couldn't go. Now that he had left his job, he could take it easy. From next year he will be eligible for a pension, though not a large one. So he's thinking of living like that - and of course of mountain climbing. One needs to consider one's health, Murata san started to think recently. He is not sick, but has had some problems. When he was around the age of fifty five he had some health problems, he had a lot of blood in his stool. That coincided with him leaving his job, until then he was too busy to go and see a doctor. Only after that he started thinking about his health a bit more seriously. When his mother became unwell, he thought a bit more seriously about his own condition. The timing was good, he said, because if he'd continued working as before he'd probably die soon, he was defeated (*haiji ni natteta to omou*). He had surgery and part of his long intestine was removed. It took him around two years to recover, and even though he is still concerned about that, he tries not to worry. That time was hard, though, when he was fifty-five. He really felt his life was at a crossroads, Murata san told me quietly, and had to decide which way to take. But he made the right decision. Himself bleeding, his mother sick and him wanting to let her be at home until the end…That time was the hardest for him, emotionally. But, he added with a smile - now he's enjoying himself.

Murata san is conscious of his health now, and tries not to eat or drink too much, to not eat meat but eat lots of vegetables every day. Once a week he takes a break, and makes sure that every Monday he doesn't drink any alcohol, to give his heart a rest. Those are some of the things he thinks about. He lives on his own, so once a week he goes out to eat things that are more complicated to make, or are not worth making just for one person. He tries to make the best use of eating out and making things at home, to find a balance in terms of nourishment. 'That's the kind of life I lead,' Murata san concluded with a little laugh.

I decided to ask Murata san a few questions about his story, in the order in which items were mentioned. I started by asking about his first job. He replied that he was working for a nylon stocking producer, dealing with general affairs. It was a very ordinary *salaryman* job, there was nothing in particular worth mentioning, it was a very boring life - Murata san was almost apologetic. I asked if he nevertheless remembered any events from that period of his life. Well, there was nothing special…he went hiking in the mountains on occasion, but nothing much comes to mind…Murata san persisted, admitting that in his next job in a school cafeteria there were quite a few things. For instance, there were times when he would work without rest for two nights in a row, when they were making *obento* (boxed meals). He would really lose all the colour in his face, become quite greenish. That was the most challenging time, he thought. He was in charge of stocking all the ingredients for food, which was quite nerve-wracking at times, because if any of the ingredients were not available they wouldn't be able to work. Every day they made around one thousand meals. That was by far the hardest, Murata san said, so after that everything was easier, nothing was as trying.

I asked him why, in his first job, he wouldn't accept a transfer to Nagoya. He replied that he needed to look after his mother and really didn't want to leave Osaka himself. Maybe if he was on his own he would have thought differently. Also, he really likes Osaka, there are so many good places to eat, it's an easy place to live. Public order is good too. A few miles south from this neighbourhood, there used to be fields and that area used to change a lot, people moving in; areas that feel unsafe, unlike this area with many old houses and inhabitants from a long time ago. Some of them are quite old too, this is the area with the largest proportion of older inhabitants in all of Osaka - this and the neighbouring Ward, which is why there are so many jobs related to elderly care. Murata san was born and raised in this neighbourhood. Just once, when he was eighteen, he felt he would like to live on his own, so he moved away for a couple of years, but later he returned. His parents moved here after the war, into a dilapidated house, a bare skeleton, that they repaired. Twenty years ago, the local shopping arcade was so full you couldn't pass through; it was a well-known arcade back then. Gradually some of the shop owners passed away, supermarkets opened in the area, and the arcade began to decay.

I wanted to know more about Murata san's work in the care sector, as a helper. He replied that he didn't work much as a helper, only helping one older man with his bathing once a week. That was hard during the summer, he would really be drenched in sweat. The man, his friend's father, who was in his nineties, had his bed on the second floor, but the bathroom was on the first floor, so he had to carry him downstairs and upstairs on his back, which was by far the hardest part of the job. He was not a heavy man, weighing some fifty kilos, but later he gained a little weight, maybe five kilos. Murata san's back stated aching, and he was thinking of looking for someone younger to take over, but in the meantime the old man passed away from pneumonia. He had led a long life – 'living until ninety is quite a bit, it’s heaven,’ Murata san said. That friend of his was looking after his father at home, together with his wife, for five years. In any case, that was real physical labour, he concluded with a laugh.

I asked him about the day care centre he worked in, so he described its daily routine. In the morning a van picks up the elderly from their homes and brings them to the centre. Everyone in turn is given a bath, then there is exercise, lunch and leisure time with playing games, until 3 pm, when the elderly are returned to their homes and the centre closes around five. The clients are people not too unlike those in the Salon downstairs, but some were in a worse shape, and weren’t able to walk. The fees were largely covered by the Long-Term care Insurance. Murata san believes that the fact that Japan developed the system with helpers and day care for the elderly is very good, and something he would have never been able to imagine before. ‘During that time the family can get some rest, it really helps.’

It’s a very good system, but it seems that the country doesn’t have enough money, Murata san worried. It’s a great help for the beneficiaries and their families, but people working in the system receive very low salaries. Many leave their jobs because of that. For instance, as long as young people work in such a job, they don’t have enough money to get married and start a family. It barely suffices for one person to live from that salary, so the future is a worry if they continue such a job. The salary might not increase much with seniority either, Murata san said thoughtfully, almost to himself. In the day care centre he worked in, the employees changed a lot, which was noticeable especially for permanent employees. It was understandable: the pay was low and it’s hard labour. Hard physical labour and emotional strain. One must stay alert so that no accidents occur… Once a lady fell over and she is still in hospital, and even though it wasn’t the carer’s fault, it was hard on her, she felt responsible since she was the one standing closest to her. That aspect is enormously emotionally straining. Then I asked him about his volunteering in the salon. He laughed cheerfully and replied that this takes no effort at all, he just needs to make hot drinks and chat, nothing particularly taxing. The conversation slowly moved on to everyday issues, gradually bringing the interview towards the end.

CARE AND SHARED LIVES

Despite the gender and other differences (including the extent to which they felt happy to talk about their lives at length), there is something remarkably similar in these two accounts, not least in terms of their involvement with the local community. Both volunteer in the Salon, serving coffee and tea to the elderly who come to enjoy some company or a quiet moment away from their (still) demanding families. Murata san also helps out his elderly neighbour, a cheerful, lively lady in her nineties, by doing odd jobs around the house and taking out her rubbish, or taking heavy blankets to the dry-cleaners - as I had found out from the lady in question. Ueda san runs a small karaoke at her home as a side job, but often entertains children and elderly in the neighbourhood free of charge, always happy to chat and make a cup of tea, as well as organizing karaoke sessions for them. She took her 'opening hours' for the community members quite seriously and would decline invitations to outings if they collided with the usual times when she was at home and available. Ueda san also organized collections of old and used clothes for sale at a charity fair in the neighbourhood and led craft workshops in the upstairs space in the Salon, for example teaching young women from the neighbourhood how to make *nuno zori*, slippers made from recycled fabric.

Over the course of their lives, both Ueda san and Murata san became involved in various forms of care, some of which were remunerated but many of which were not. When she married, Ueda san organized child-care for the children in the neighbourhood for a small fee; after that she worked as a home-helper employed by the Ward welfare department, at first on a part-time basis and eventually full-time. Several years later she worked as a social welfare worker in the Ward office, when she was switched to desk work; during that time she performed many tasks that were not strictly part of her job but were a form of care, such as helping to adapt picture books for a blind mother. She cared for her parents full-time when they were sick, and supported them in their later years while continuing to work. After leaving her job she started working as a home-helper (helping with household chores such as cleaning, laundry and airing the bedding) through the NPO running the Fureai Salon, paid at an hourly rate; she also helps in the salon, which is not remunerated. Murata san, on the other hand, left his job to care full-time for his mother; later he became a remunerated home helper once a week (helping to bathe a bed-ridden elderly man) while working part-time in a day-care centre for the elderly (helping with bathing, serving meals, leading exercise classes and organizing joint entertainment for the elderly). The transitions between these various forms of care occurred gradually and sometimes overlapped, and unpaid care in the community and paid home-helper jobs were not strictly distinguished by either Murata san and Ueda san, nor, for that matter, by my other interlocutors who were engaged in care. While their care-related appointments were circumscribed, both of them always stressed the importance of emotional support and warm relationships, and did a number of additional small favours for the people they cared for. Murata san eventually resigned from his day-care job, precisely because it was taking a toll on his health, as it involved a lot of emotional and psychological labour. This lengthy, yet merely cursory list of the care related activities performed by Murata san and Ueda san, indicates the amount and complexity of care relations in the community. Additional meanings emerge when such care activities are viewed in the context of a life story. For instance, movements across institutional and organizational boundaries indicate that exploring different forms of elderly care in separation may contradict the experience of those involved in the provision of care[98].

Involvement in caring for parents is of significance here for a number of reasons. Murata san became involved in elderly care after gaining the experience of caring for his mother. Many of my interlocutors confirmed that this was not unusual. One lady whom I met at a meal service for the elderly, described in Chapter 3, mentioned that she became a home-helper after many years of caring for her bed-ridden father. Three members of the Salon's NPO management, and the founders of the NPO (whose stories are detailed in Chapter 4), were involved in care for their aging relatives, which increased their awareness of the problems faced by the carers and motivated them to organize some form of support. Furthermore, both Murata san and Ueda san felt that they were indebted to the community for helping them to care for their increasingly frail parents, as they had received various forms of support: some neighbours would offer useful advice, tell them about a useful service or organization; others checked in on Ueda san's mother, who lived on her own, which meant that on most days it was sufficient for Ueda san just to phone her several times a day and visit her every couple of days, without the need to give up her job. Ueda san connected this feeling of debt incurred to her volunteering now, as a way to repay it, at least in part. Care, in this sense, may best be understood as enmeshed in circles of reciprocity.

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[98] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of care provision.

It may seem surprising that, having no children of their own, neither of my companions were particularly concerned with their own aging. When I asked Ueda san about this, she said she was not really thinking about it much at all, but that she guessed that things would work out somehow, that people would help her and she would get by. Another childless lady whom I have met in the Salon, Kobayashi san, told me once that she cultivated many friendships because she did not have any close family of her own. We were walking down the street together and Kobayashi san was stopping every few minutes to greet someone and inquire about their health, or their daughter's English classes, or some such personal detail. She explained she arranged a meeting with her doctor for the first lady, and introduced an English language teacher to the latter. She needs to build her community networks carefully, she said, to rely on in times of trouble. But many people, like Ueda san, had a less consciously calculated approach. She helped a bit, and hoped to be helped, just like the participants of the 'A little help in the community' volunteer seminar described in Chapter 3, who explained that they wanted to contribute to creating and supporting an environment in which people help each other in the community. Rather than moving away, either to live with their children or into a care-facility, they would like to be able to keep living in the familiar surroundings, for which the support of Long-Term Care Insurance alone may not be sufficient, especially as strain on its budget increases. The underlying ideas of expected reciprocity here are not straightforward, with people helping others to receive help in return, as a kind of repayment of debt. More broadly, they wished to support the existence of a system of community support.

Undoubtedly, the fact that neither Murata san nor Ueda san have children has influenced their attitudes toward community involvement. Nevertheless, as indicated by the example of a whole seminar room full of people, many of whom had children, they were far from alone in their way of thinking. More likely, I think, they provide a good case in which some of the important motivations for involvement in community care and volunteering are emphasized. This may be related to what Lebra (1976:102) labels 'generalized reciprocity', referring to the obligation (*on*) that can never be fully repaid but must be always kept in mind, by the receiver of kindness. Lebra (1979) mentions the strategy employed by some older Japanese women of inducing ‘generalized obligation’ by caring for their grandchildren, hoping that they will accrue debt with their sons and daughters-in-law to be looked after if they become frail. It is not merely a reciprocity between a mother and child, but involves care for the grand-children. The principle of generalized reciprocity in Lebra’s work indicates an obligation that is not easily defined or singled out, but which involves a variety of acts of care. I would like to argue that it could also be extended to a meaning that involves an exchange in a wider community, where the obligation does not rest with particular people, but can be repaid to the community as a whole. By ‘helping out a little’ (*chotto tasukeau*) one supports a system of support, that may be there for one to rely on in times of need. Furthermore, it is possible that the family circumstances of my companions somewhat influenced their engagement in care as a potential source of purpose in life. While care for others provided them with a sense of meaning, they did not define themselves in terms of a narrow volunteer identity. These issues bring us back to the question of motivations of the people involved in the care of others, including their parents. The concept of obligation is undoubtedly relevant, but its meaning is broader than it might at first have appeared. One must also bear in mind the various meanings of care and its potential to provide a sense of purpose in life, as revealed in these life stories.

INVOLVEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT – NPO STAFF

A similar set of issues emerged from my conversations with NPO staff members, who effectively receive a paid volunteer wage, but do not think of their efforts quite in terms of a job or as volunteering. In this section I focus on issues of motivation, the difference between a job (*shigoto*) and activity (*katsudō*) and its relationship to remuneration and gratitude. Through the words of my interlocutors I attempt to paint a picture of the Fureai NPO as a workplace, with its leaderless structure, democratic decision-making, egalitarian relationships and cooperative attitudes of staff in balancing their significant workload with their responsibilities as wives and mothers. They also speak of meaningful work and express feelings of pride and achievement, even if these are mitigated by the modesty of their aims and a sense of worry about the future.

NAKAJIMA SAN

Nakajima san is a friendly and calm lady in her fifties with a motherly air about her. She was born in Shimoichi, the neighbourhood where the salon is located today. Yet when asked if she was originally from the neighbourhood she answered:

> Not at all, I am…my parents were traders from a neighbourhood not too far from the entertainment are of Shinsaibashi, where they had a large house, until it burned down during the air-raids in World War Two – there was nothing left of it. This area wasn't struck and there were plenty of pre-war houses left around here, so they bought a house in Shimoichi. So I am a second generation here, but it hardly feels familiar (*najimi no nai*). I was born and brought up here, but I'm not a core member of the community, it feels more like I'm further out in the surroundings. So when people are talking about others, I don't know all the stories.

Here Nakajima san presents us with an image of a community with ties spanning several generations, not quite closed to outsiders, but permitting them access only to the margins. The sense of community is enacted by referring to these links, knowing who people are and exhibiting knowledge of their background. I often witnessed this myself: people would often relate that, for example, 'the son of that lady who used to make kimonos, whose grandfather was a fishmonger, came over from Tokyo', or give directions to someone's house in this vein: 'it's past the *okonomiyaki* place that's around the corner down the street on the right, opposite the florists and past the post office, which stands where the old bath house stood, before the war, you know, not too far from Seo san's house'. This being the shopping district, there were several post offices, florists, and okonomiyaki stands down the street, so without knowing the detailed spatial relationships of one to the other, it would be truly impossible to decipher which one they referred to and which way to go (more abstract directions such as left, right or fourth corner to the left were never given). As Nakajima san's statement shows, the community itself is thus woven from the stories one knows of others - stories that are more important than names. One knows the others through stories.

After obtaining a university degree in social welfare, Nakajima san worked in a hospital as a medical social worker. She married her boyfriend from her university days, who worked for a large electrical goods company. He soon received a transfer and they had to move to another prefecture, though twenty years ago he was sent back to the headquarters in Osaka, and they returned. Her parents had decided to move to the suburbs so she and her family moved in to the house where she grew up, where they still live today, with two adult daughters who are both single and who work in a bank. Twenty years ago, when they returned to Osaka, she was trying to find a job, but 'the system of reemployment for women, after they once leave to have children, is bad', as she once told me with a clearly unsettled expression on her face. The working hours of a medical social worker are very long, as one of the responsibilities includes meeting the patients' families, who can only come to visit after their working hours. While still single, Nakajima san would often work as late as 10 pm, starting at 9 am. With young children this kind of schedule would not be possible, and even though she tried to look for a similar job with flexible hours or part-time, this was hard to find. At that time, she started thinking that it might be a good idea to create a support group for sick people in the neighbourhood, something of that kind. At that time Kitamura san had heard of the Tasukeai system, and then it all began.

On one occasion I asked how she felt about her job at the NPO. She answered somewhat reluctantly:

> The social recognition [of our work] is very low, even though we work to make the neighbourhood a more pleasant place for everyone to live in. The situation is difficult, economically speaking, there is no security. In a sense, it's not really considered a job. Although, recently the attitude of the public administration has finally started changing – they've begun to make more connections, doing things with NPOs, as they realized that that way things could be done at a smaller cost to the economy. In the beginning, when one interacted with local government officials, from the city hall for instance, they would really be reluctant and showed little understanding of the work of some small NPO. This disparaging attitude is slowly beginning to change, but even though we've been around for 16 years now, I'm not sure if most of the people in the neighbourhood really know what we do, although they have a vague sense that Fureai is doing many useful things. One reason why this is so, is that we provide many services in the home, one volunteer comes and visits a lone person or a family and as they work inside, no one else knows that they are doing something useful. So, in a sense, the evaluation is impossible, the effort is invisible. That's why it's hard for them to understand what we do. So, while we know that the people we helped are happy and grateful for our support, that's a relatively small number - in the last 16 years it might be some 750 people. But our neighbourhood (*ku*) has some 100 000 inhabitants. Moreover, our users are the socially weak, so they don't get in much contact [with people], in the society, nor do they communicate widely about the support they get.

I wondered aloud if working at this NPO, which she established together with Komatsu san and the others, had an impact on the way she thought about things and viewed society. Nakajima san answered my question forcefully and clearly:

> It had. How shall I put this…Japan is a male-dominated society, and while there are women working as CEOs of companies, while we were at university it was really hard to imagine women working in managerial positions. I hadn't thought that within my very ordinary life plan I could be involved with an NPO, or be running one. So I entered regular employment in my profession in the hospital, but later when I went back to work [things were different] we started this NPO. So on some level it seems strange to me that I'm in a managerial position. I wasn't even sure I'd be able to do this, that I'd have the abilities, so now when I look back I have a feeling: 'so that's what I'm doing.'

MORI SAN

Mori san, a slim, quiet lady with a shock of curly red-dyed hair in her fifties, is in charge of accounts and the LCTI subsidies. She also works as an instructor with Sawayaka Fukushi Zaidan (Sawayaka Welfare Foundation) and presides over the annual meetings of the Osaka branch of the Association affiliated to it. She was involved with Fureai from the very beginning. When Kitamura san heard Hotta Tsutomu san (the founder of Sawayaka Welfare foundation promoting mutual aid, who was mentioned by all the founders of the Fureai) speak on television, she was immediately interested and ordered materials explaining the system setup in more detail. When she realized that this was quite complicated she decided to talk about it with her acquaintances. One day she brought the materials over to Mori san's house to read, and she passed them on to Nakajima san. They started the study group, and while the core membership shrunk by the time of the establishment of the Tasukeai, Mori san emphasized the cooperative and egalitarian nature of the group:

> Establishing a group and organizing its activities was, unsurprisingly, a very difficult task, so we were down to eight members when we started Tasuekeai. Gradually the organization grew, but what matters is that no-one was at the centre – we all studied together and discussed matters and decided what we were able to do and how to do it. We looked into how Sawayaka did it and made our own decisions along the way, when we thought of different new activities or ways of doing things.

Mori san did not make much of this, but when asked, she told me that working in Fureai had indeed had an impact on her way of thinking and everyday life:

> I had the chance to meet various people and gained many friends. I did lose some friends, too, but probably my circle of friends got broader. While I was a housewife I knew many people in the neighbourhood, but through my involvement here I realized that people do many different things, which is really interesting. I also realized through the activities in Fureai that you can achieve a lot, things you wouldn't be able to do on your own.

Mori san thinks that from her family's perspective, she is not doing much at home at all. When her daughter was still in elementary school she was 'properly' making meals, doing school-related activities, but now she has stopped preparing meals that are very time consuming, which her family sometimes mentions. But they do not express too much discontent and have been very supportive. Mori san also pointed out that all of the staff at Fureai are wives (*shufu*) who know what it means to have family responsibilities, and help each other out, covering for each other should they have to go to take care of some family business.

> When one receives such support at work, it becomes much easier for women to work. That said, the salary is very low, so this is not a place for everyone. It is not a company salary, we receive 600 yen per hour, like the paid volunteers. So no matter how much you work, that is not quite… Strictly speaking, this cannot be thought of as a salary, as it's below the minimum wage, which is around 760 yen per hour in Osaka. What we receive is not against the law, as we - the staff here - do not think of this as labour (*rōdō*). It's a sum that we've decided upon ourselves, so we think it's all right. We think of it as of remunerated volunteering. The staff here [in the office] do not have labour contracts, unlike the helpers [through LCTI] who get paid 1220 yen per hour. So we arrange proper contracts and insurance for them, that's the difference. … But if the women working in ordinary companies could somehow create an environment in which they support each other, many more women would be able to work, it would be easier to have and raise children…. It's sad that there's no such feeling in the society.

KOMATSU SAN

Komatsu san is a petite lady in her late fifties, sporting a short hairstyle and practical clothes. She was in the Fureai office all day every day, dividing her time between the helper (LCTI) organization and volunteer support, stressing that the staff share most of the work. She got involved in the Fureai organization through Sakamoto san, who she worked with in the co-operative – an organization that had operated in the community for a long while. She suggested that she could talk to Nakajima san and other people involved in the study group, and she got involved a couple of months before the group was formally established, although by then many things about its operation and its name were already decided. Before she had children, Komatsu san had worked as a nurse in a hospital where she became very aware of care issues:

> While I worked in the children's ward, I thought it was strange that mothers whose children were in for prolonged tests or treatment would be expected to be with them at all times…. That's when I started thinking about the people from the neighbourhood coming to accompany (*tsukisoi*) the children, to allow mothers to leave their bedside, at least for a short period of time. In the new hospital I worked in the cardiac illness ward…. A very famous surgeon worked there and many people brought their family members from far away. One elderly man had arrived here in Osaka for his surgery, but as it didn't go well he was hospitalized for a very long time. He was from Aomori and was really longing to see the sea, he kept saying he would like to die on tatami. I tried arranging his journey, as I knew he wouldn't be able to travel by train. But he would've needed constant care at home, and this wasn't possible to organize at that time... Soon after that I got married and left the job, but that feeling, of wanting to do more than what the hospital can offer, really stayed with me. I wanted to do something socially involved (*sotomuki*) so I got involved in the co-op, just doing simple things in the neighbourhood. But when I heard about the possibility of organizing home-care, I thought that was interesting and wanted to hear more about it. You know, at the time when I worked in the hospital, we took it for granted that people who were dying were dying in the hospital, but I once went to this hospital in Tokyo which was starting its home-care service. That's something I was hoping to do, I thought there might be something I could do to help. Well, whether that was the motive (*kikkake*) of my involvement or not, I don't know, but many things coincided.

Komatsu san is well aware of the problems in the health-care system and the support that patients are given upon leaving the hospital. This is something that led to her involvement in the scheme run by the local hospital, introducing young nurses to the local welfare NPOs in the hope that they would be able to advise patients about support in the community, and generally raising their awareness of the problems. Komatsu san likes her job and finds it worthwhile (*yarigai ga aru*)_and gets to meet people through it, in her job and in the salon. She told me that the salon really changed its relationship to the community: over ten years of engagement in volunteer activities there was little recognition, as one always talks to users in private. The salon gets visitors from different walks of life, something that they are actively supporting by hosting a variety of events for a range of audiences, so that people who visit gradually come to realize what their role is in the community. Komatsu san now feels the physical effort taking its toll on her body (she fills in for the helpers when they suddenly cancel), but for the most part she feels enmeshed in her work so much she does not think about it.

KUROKI SAN

Kuroki san is a tall and youthful lady in her late forties, skilfully switching between a quiet and ladylike mode of communication and a teasing and friendly, cheerful attitude with salon visitors when she would come down into the salon kitchen to make herself a bowl of fresh noodles for lunch. She does general office tasks and helps out with the accounts, but feels most responsible for Tasukeai coordination and matching the users and volunteers. While she is technically working from 10 to 5 on weekdays, she often comes at 9 and stays until 6, but it also means she can pop out to take care of household tasks. With the exception of awareness of children with disabilities, she herself had no previous interest in welfare issues. She therefore emphasized she got interested in the Fureai work through people she knew – Mori san is her close friend's sister, and she knew Nakajima san through the PTA. In the beginning, she didn't become the core member, as her children were still in the kindergarten, but decided to help out a little on occasion. After the official opening, the local edition of the national newspaper ran a story about them and suddenly they were receiving more and more calls, so they needed someone to be available in the office and they divided up the duties. At first she helped two to three days a week, but when her children started school she became a staff member. As her involvement grew, so did her feeling of responsibility:

> I didn't know this, but gradually a sense of responsibility developed inside me, it felt as if I can't just stop doing this, and this is how I still feel today. But at first, the only link was through the people [I knew], and a little bit of interest in children with disabilities.

She also felt she has learned a lot, as she never had a 'proper' job (*kicchinto shushoku*) before this, as she used to help out with the family business, so she felt she did not know much about the world and society (*seken to shakai*). It is common to refer to entering the world of work and employment as becoming a *shakaijin*, literally a social being, but referring to an adult, a full-fledged member of society. It was clear that she considered her current work as different both from a job for a company (or as a public servant) and from work in the family business. In a sense, this was not a 'real' job, but it was real work, which induced a deep sense of responsibility in her, even though she had no particular passion for social welfare or support. She emphasized how satisfied she was with the way things worked out for her, as she learned a lot and developed her skills, met many people she would never have had a chance to meet if she was an 'ordinary' housewife, and realized that there is a lot that she *can* do.

SAKAMOTO SAN

Among the functionally dressed housewives of inner-neighbourhood downtown Osaka, Sakamoto san stands out: a well-groomed lady in her late forties wearing feminine outfits and red lipstick. She works in the salon two days a week and is responsible for the Golden Star Cleaning service, the newest activity in Fureai. As the organization of that service slowly became more routinized, some of her time freed up and she started to think about a new activity she could take up. Sakamoto san also works as a career consultant three days a week. She was hired on a project in a 'job café' for women organized by the City Hall, which involved counselling and advice, as well as organizing public lectures and seminars. Thus, it occurred to her that she could organize a weekly study programme, which she started running a few months before I left the field in late November 2010. The programme is aimed at older people, with an aim of promoting mental agility and preventing the onset of dementia. Before the classes started, Sakamoto san said that she was hoping to involve active elderly who are interested in such activities and want to become even more active and meet people, not restricting it to the salon visitors. The program envisaged various group activities, including mathematics, kanji, guided conversation about the past, reading out loud and the like. While this at first seemed to me quite easy and as potentially infantilizing the elderly, some of my friends promptly joined the course in October 2010. Yoshimura san, a lady in her early sixties, one of the younger ones on the course, told me enthusiastically about her experiences and showed me the materials. I was astonished at the difficulty and complexity of the exercises, especially since I had heard bursts of cheerful laughter from the room upstairs where the course was taking place and assumed it was more a social and a fun event. That said, not everyone in the salon thought that it was a good idea. A few of the older ladies in the salon politely accepted the flyers describing the course and listened to Sakamoto san's invitation and explanation over a cup of tea, but as soon as she had left, commented wryly that they hardly have need of such a thing: 'At the age of 90, you're not so worried about dementia!'.

SAITO SAN

Saito san is a tall, quiet and friendly young women in her late twenties. She had been volunteering in the salon for several months when I started volunteering in October 2009 and helped me learn my way around the salon. Seven months later, she became the youngest member of staff, working part time, mostly producing pamphlets, schedules and the newsletter, as well as coordinating the volunteers at the Open House in the neighbourhood. Having worked for several years in a bank, Saito san was tired of her restrictive working hours. Instead she was planning to attend cookery classes and pottery classes, while waiting to be married to her long-term boyfriend who was waiting to start a new job. She worked in a private medical clinic as a receptionist part-time and over time got more and more involved in Fureai, vaguely hoping that she might be able to continue this engagement even after marriage, if they managed to buy a house in the neighbourhood. She was gradually taking over more responsible tasks and her suggestions were highly valued. While somewhat deferential to the older members of staff, who were of her mother's generation, Saito san did not refrain from making suggestions and was treated with respect.

Saito san, like Kuroki san, did not get involved in volunteering because of intense interest in community issues, but rather through her interpersonal relationships. She joined Fureai at the suggestion of her mother, who worked there as a helper. In contrast, Nakajima san and Komatsu san both had a long-standing interest in support and care, but were nevertheless somehow surprised at their achievements: as women in what they perceived to be a male-dominated society, they never imagined to find themselves in a managerial position. Ogawa (2002: 55) has argued against the hopeful claim that NPOs and civil society could have positive effects on gender equality, since even though the majority of volunteers in the NPO he worked in were women, the managerial positions were mostly occupied by men. The situation in Fureai differs greatly from this description, as women not only managed but also founded the NPO, which did not come into being through state or local government intervention, but rather as the result of their own efforts. In a way, these women created a workplace for themselves that allowed them to pursue the social values they endorsed, while continuing their role as wives. This was made possible through a strong ethos of cooperation and organization that was based on sharing the bulk of daily work tasks. As Mori san emphasized: 'all of us staff here, we are all wives, aren't we?' The NPO is therefore a highly cooperative and quite egalitarian workplace, which sets it apart from the usual company workplace environment, which is hierarchical and gender-segregated (Graham 2003). Nevertheless, from the perspective of the staff working in the NPO, it is not a 'real' job, nor is it considered as 'labour' (*rōdō*), as it is not appropriately remunerated. In a sense, it is not 'just' a job either; it is an effort or a mission, imbued with social value that they hope the wider community will recognize, and help them to create a mutually supportive community. The efforts that are going on behind closed doors are not always readily acknowledged, but this is compensated for by the public activities aimed at raising the visibility of the NPO and its role, as much as creating networks in the community. The staff do not mind that they are not well paid, so long as they receive social recognition for their work. In other words, gratitude is not irrelevant.

From these accounts, an image ultimately emerges of the good life that staff members want for themselves and for others. At the heart of this vision is a community that is not indifferent, and yet not suffocating either; one to which they contribute, and from which they themselves derive benefits. These women are no radical feminists, but they do strive for gender equality. Their vision embodies a sense of meaningful engagement in accordance with their values and resulting in recognition or gratitude for their efforts, just as much as it entails a place to work, a project that provides meaning while not conflicting with their roles or duties as wives and mothers.

RETHINKING LIFE-CHOICE AND SOCIAL ACTION

Interestingly, while often exemplified in their narratives and in other conversations I had with them, this community involvement or their volunteer identity does not comprise a pronounced theme in either of their life stories. In her excellent work on community volunteers in Japan, Lynne Nakano explores the creation of volunteer identity, volunteering as a lifestyle choice and its relation to the self. She situates the volunteer identity in relation to the mainstream identities of salaryman and housewife, and shows the different attitudes of her interlocutors to their volunteering efforts, ranging from significant identification of ‘professional volunteers’, through ‘second-career’ volunteers whose identification is secondary, to the ‘regular volunteers’ who might spend a significant number of hours engaged in volunteer activities but for whom volunteering did not become their primary source of identification. Both Murata san and Ueda san, along with most other volunteers that I knew both in the Salon in Shimoichi, and in Awara, would in Nakano’s classification belong to the last group. The exception would be the founders of the voluntary group who now made the organization their full-time (paid) employment, whose accounts imply that they think about their activities as a job (even if not a ‘real’ one) rather than as volunteering. On several occasions, when she was respectfully introduced as a volunteer to people she didn’t know, Ueda san felt uneasy and pointed out she was just doing her duty. Murata san said that he would not call himself a volunteer (*borantia*), he was merely doing volunteering, or more precisely, ‘being allowed to do volunteering’ (*borantia sashite moratteru*). I would argue that this absence of volunteer identification may be highly relevant for understanding the kinds of community volunteer efforts that were most widespread in Shimoichi.

There are several interconnected reasons for the absence of volunteer identification in these narratives. According to Nakano: ‘When people talk about their experiences of volunteering, they tell stories of how they had weighed the volunteer identity against competing commitments such as caring for their families, taking part-time jobs, or devoting themselves more fully to their careers.’ (2000:95). In contrast, the above accounts do not express a tension with other commitments, but rather a continuity. In this sense it is most likely that the Shimoichi ‘volunteers’ represent a somewhat different case, representative of a particular kind of community volunteering (which was not the focus of attention of Nakano’s work), that is perceived as an extension of family and neighbourhood obligations. Furthermore, there is a conspicuous absence of other commitments; Ueda san is widowed while Murata san never married and neither have children. In this way their situation could perhaps be seen as somewhat exceptional, though in terms of time constraints not too different from people with grown-up children.

Nevertheless, the absence of family commitments may be significant, since it may imply the importance of volunteering and community involvement becomes prominent in absence of family support and commitments. In many other ways, their experience does seem to be quite representative of wider trends. For instance, they slipped seamlessly into these roles through local affiliations within their neighbourhood. As Nakano (2000: 96) observed: ‘In Japan, volunteers and recipients often live in the same middle-class neighbourhood, where they are recruited through local networks’. Their recruitment was gradual and perceived in continuity with other kinds of welfare responsibilities and activities, such as of welfare official in the Ward office for Ueda san, to which she proceeded from local volunteering with the children through a part-time employment as a home helper. The welfare involvement or the aspect of care for the elderly in the community was perhaps a stronger link, including a range of paid jobs, remunerated volunteering and pay-free volunteering. The transition occurred gradually, through local community contacts, and was not perceived as a strategic decision or a life-choice *per se*.

More often, people from the community, neighbours or acquaintances would suggest taking up a job, or getting involved in a project. A common suggestion, as recounted by several of my interlocutors, was along the lines of, ‘there is this thing…why don’t you check it out?’ More often than not, it was not a lack of activities, jobs or projects that was a problem, since the abundance made it just as difficult to consider something seriously. Finding out about an opportunity from an acquaintance made it manageable, and provided a personal recommendation. Ueda san retired from her job and had free time on her hands when she ran into an acquaintance whose mother was a friend of her mother’s, who told her about Fureai. Murata san, on the other hand, was already involved as a home helper through the NPO when he retired from the day-care centre job and had more time to spend as a Salon volunteer. This again seems in contrast with Nakano’s (ibid.) account in which she emphasizes the strategic choice involved in becoming a volunteer. In most cases, Murata san, Ueda san and other volunteers I knew do not appear to have chosen a particular path strategically, but rather as a consequence of other life circumstances and in a more organic way, depending on the chances and opportunities offered. People rarely sought out community activities, but were more often invited by an acquaintance; even in those cases where someone outright looked for a volunteering opportunity, this happened when a niche appeared in their biography, thus presenting itself as an opportunity. In this sense one should perhaps speak not so much of a calculated choice, so much as of an opportunistic action. Focusing on life stories allows us to capture the intersections of lives, the directionality of which is often shaped by such encounters. That life paths may change directions under the influence of others is no surprise, but the fact that they are often influenced by distant acquaintances, people who are in no way our 'significant others', may be something we are far less aware of. Life stories may reveal these encounters and the more haphazard aspects of a life path.

The concept of social action as an intention fulfilled has been criticized for its inability to account for actions not based on strategic thinking, especially at times when planning and the formation of intentions is difficult or even impossible. Johnson-Hanks (2005) made this point in relation to young women in contemporary Cameroon, but her argument has a broader value, since the model of social action as intentional, directed and strategic does not seem to account for many people's life trajectories. As she acknowledges, in the more secure and stable societies such as those in the West, the model of intentional action and planning appears to work better than in the chronically and radically uncertain conditions of contemporary West Africa. In her view, this is partly due to the strong influence of numerous institutions and systems that reduce uncertainty, which shape people's expectations, which are in turn shaped by cultural frameworks (ibid.). In other words, the presence of institutions that ensure certain stability is just one part of the equation, the other being expectations and ways of framing one's experience that affirms one as a calculating rational actor. I would argue that these frameworks influence our understanding of situations and impact our expectations, in a way providing us with a language to speak of our lives as meaningful wholes. It is likely, therefore, that in societies with a high degree of security and predictability, and in cultural contexts that value planning and intentional action, even when life choices are far from strategic decisions, people still tend to relate them or represent them in terms of choices.

In one case related by Nakano, for instance, a man who served as president of the estate resident's association admitted that he had sacrificed the mainstream ideal of career and home-ownership, though his own story seems to imply that this choice was never made explicitly between equally plausible options, since no employment is mentioned (2000:98). Nakano’s convincing argument notwithstanding, it is not inconceivable that he felt that his ‘failure’ in certain aspects of his life was better accounted for by his making an altruistic choice, thus retrospectively making sense of his life. Such a retrospective evaluation is made by Murata san, too, when he speaks of making the right decision to change his life and become a home-helper and an elderly-support worker. In fact, that choice arose within a niche of various social circumstances, including his health problem and his mother’s need for full-time care, all of which led to him leaving his job. Johnson-Hanks’ (2005) concept of ‘judicious opportunism’ is useful here, since it emphasizes the importance of the opportunity without denying agency to the actors, or the capacity for rational or informed decisions. I argue that in order to understand people’s life trajectories and the meanings they attach to them in their attempt to create a meaningful life story and, more broadly, a sense of purpose in life, it is necessary to examine the tension between planned, intentional action and judicious opportunism, within social institutions and the cultural context. Nonetheless, the tendency to represent one’s life as a coherent, meaningful story is in tension with the sense that not everything fits together seamlessly, and that life is always messier than our accounts of it.

CONCLUSION

THE SEARCH FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE: INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE STORY

Much remains unsaid about the lives of my companions in Shimoichi, and this is a good thing. The stories of people's lives, messy and multifaceted, resist final interpretations. Amassing and enumerating facts about our interlocutors, as protagonists of such stories, implies that everything that matters has been told about them. This kind of finalization not only cannot do them justice, but also silences them. The danger lies precisely in the power of narrative to impose order. Narrative provides us with an opportunity to present a life in a coherent form and to make sense of seemingly unconnected events and disjointed episodes, thereby rendering a life meaningful. Yet excessive coherence belies lived experience, which is often messy and inconclusive. Sometimes we are unsure of exactly how events and motivations have interacted with each other, while our own motivations and actions are often not transparent to us. As Judith Butler has shown, too much coherence in a narrative can screen off or hide 'an acceptance of the limits of knowability in oneself and in others' (2005:63), while digressions, omissions and contradictions may in fact tell us more about a person than a neat and polished, overly coherent narrative (ibid.:64; cf. Wengraf 2001).

While a narrative can be powerful and imbued with meaning, its very coherence can at the same time have a totalizing effect. The narrator feels a resistance to being fully known, or known in totality, with an outcome akin to the statement, 'Oh now I know who you are' (Butler 2005:43), something that imposes an end to interaction, implying that there is 'nothing more to be said about you' (Frank 2010:97). While narrators need to express their story in somewhat generalized terms in order to be comprehensible – as we have seen above, for example in Ueda san's account - they also resist this kind of 'finalization', to use Bakhtin's term. This is quite different to the case of, say, the funeral chants of the Chilean Mapuche, which enumerate all the social relations of a recently deceased person, listing one by one all those that were important to them (Course 2007). By employing the totalizing power of narration, the funeral rites in this sense 'complete' the person upon their death. The life stories presented here, by contrast, should not be interpreted exhaustively, with all the aspects of a life spelled out, and resist any such attempt. They resist finalization precisely because they are alive, and therefore, by definition, ‘unfinished’.

NARRATIVE AND IMMEDIATE SELF

Not everyone thinks about their life in narrative form and certainly not all the time. That offering their story was not an equally easy task for all of my interlocutors transpires from the ways in which they were delivered to me: some made their stories very short, others began several times before getting the tone right, while others still began with a summary, a précis of their lives, as if reminding themselves of the key events, the bones of the story. Even if most of my interlocutors would not usually expect to recount their life story in its entirety - this is, after all, a rather peculiar genre - all of them enjoyed telling stories in the course of conversations, in the salon for instance, about events they had heard about or which had happened in the past, or relating to everyday matters, describing shorter episodes. Such stories helped to create and maintain social relationships, keeping salon conversations lively and often allowing for the presence of others who were physically absent. Care and concern for others were expressed by asking about them and expecting to hear stories about them. Narrative activity thus played an important role in salon sociality, as well as in the sense-making attempts of my hosts.

On the other hand, a tendency to be immersed in the moment seemed to carry equal importance in some other contexts. The sense of enjoyment to be derived from focused, immediate experience was reflected in the idea of ‘doing things properly’, something my salon companions clearly considered to be especially important. Doing things properly implies a kind of practical mastery of everyday activities, even something as apparently straightforward as serving a cup of tea, and perhaps also of more specialised pursuits, such as photography or calligraphy. While the insistence that things should be done ‘the proper way’ might be experienced by some as constraining, my hosts showed me how doing things according to a set of rules or customs can lead to sense of control and joy that comes from immersion in the activity. The pleasing feeling that stems from it, even when the activity in question is as mundane as preparing a small origami rubbish box for the coffee tables in the salon, or cutting spring onions for the soup, can be a form of aesthetic[99] enjoyment. Besides skilful activities, taking a moment to observe the changes in weather, a flower arrangement or the colour of tea is something that my older companions would tell me they enjoyed, and as they thought less about what they can expect in the future, this gradually became an increasingly important source of enjoyment in their lives. Such moments, less verbal and thus less often discussed within conversations in the salon, were seen as no less important for leading a good life.

What emerges from these different contexts are two distinct ways of being in the world, which I refer to as the *narrative mode* and the *immediate mode*. The former is a state of being in the world that can involve narration, but more broadly, encompasses sense-making and analytical activities; it is a mode in which a person attempts to make sense of a situation, for example by comparing the existing state of affairs to that desired, and by problem solving. The immediate mode is oriented towards direct experience, a mode in which one's attention is focused on the present and one's immediate sensations and surroundings, without comparing these to what is expected or to some ideal, or relating them to memories, and without trying to order them into a sequence. The distinction between these in everyday life is not rigid or absolute[100], and they do not refer to distinct kinds of persons, but rather different states that can be experienced by anyone at different times.

What are the implications of these two modes for leading a good life? The stories we know of others and from others teach us about how to lead a good life, sometimes directly or by example and at other times by making us aware of what we would rather avoid. The capacity of stories and the storytelling process to create a meaningful sequence from apparently disconnected events makes them an important part of the sense-making process (Ochs and Capps 1996). The narrative mode, then, promotes a good life to the extent that it helps to transform daily events and happenings, including traumatic or difficult ones, into a meaningful sequence, thereby creating a sense of a meaningful existence. By allowing a comparison with other stories we know, this mode can facilitate the assessment of what we want and where we would like to go, guiding our choices and (moral) actions. Yet to the extent that reflection and comparison with others - as in the case of Tokuda san, for example, discussed in Chapter 1 - can make one's life more miserable and increase a feeling of isolation, the narrative mode can also have negative consequences for leading a good life. Tokuda san faced a fear of loneliness as her husband was hospitalized with a serious heart condition. The stories of other ladies in the salon who were living on their own and praised their freedom made her upset and feel even more alienated and lonely. The comparison of her own story with the stories of others kept her in a state of discontent.

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[99] This aesthetic disposition, which really just means a tendency to observe beauty in everyday things and activities, is certainly not a uniquely Japanese trait. See, for example, Overing (2003) for a discussion of the Amazonian aesthetics of everyday life.

[100] The distinction between these is not clear-cut, so I separate them for heuristic purposes only. They might be best thought of as tendencies, as these states in their pure forms may be impossible. For instance, the example of experienced meditators manage to achieve a state of focus on the here and now, in which they barely react to distractions in the outside world by trying to understand them, is an extreme case as close as possible to the state of pure immediacy. Most people can rarely expect to experience this kind of state for more than a few seconds (see Penman and Williams 2012).

The importance of narrativity for leading a good life has been resolutely criticized by the philosopher Galen Strawson. In his article *Against Narrativity* (2004), he formulates two versions of the so-called 'narrative claim': the psychological narrativity thesis, which states that human beings experience their life as a narrative or story, or collection of stories; and the ethical narrativity thesis, which states that perceiving one's life as a narrative is good, and that narrative awareness is positive. Strawson argues against both of these claims, asserting that some people do not experience themselves in terms of a continuity between past and present. This gives rise to a distinction between what he terms 'Diachronic' and 'Episodic' self-experience – Diachronics tend naturally to conceive themselves, their own 'self', as something that extends in the past and future, whereas Episodics do not have this tendency to see themselves as something that was there in the remote past and will continue in the remote future (ibid.:430). Strawson first describes these as distinct types of experience and then uses them to characterise two distinct types of person. He argues that people who are Episodics are unlikely to perceive their lives in narrative terms. Based on his own experience as an Episodic, he argues against the position that narrativity is necessary for leading a good life, and asserts that 'the best lives almost never involve this kind of self-telling' (ibid.:437). He speculates that narrativity can, in fact, stand in the way of self-understanding, because every time we recall something from our past, our memory of it changes, and every retelling alters the facts: 'The implication is plain; the more you recall, retell, narrate yourself, the further you risk moving away from accurate self-understanding, from the truth of your being' (ibid.:447).

While there are several points of Strawson's argument that I find problematic - for instance whether it is useful to think of 'the truth of your being' as something separate from the process of understanding - his warnings against narrative self-refection raise some important issues. First of all, it makes a strong point about the fact that not everyone leads their life narratively, construing their experiences in a narrative form. The narrative claim in this strong form, implying that all people live their lives as protagonists in a story, seems implausible to me, and if it is presupposes a constant activity, certainly is not supported by my ethnographic evidence, which points to a number of occasions where being in the moment is preferred. In a more general sense, Strawson cautions against judging non-reflexivity to be some sort of morally deficient mode of being in the world. In this light, the resistance to narrativization exhibited by some of my interlocutors should not be seen as problematic, but on the contrary, as a potentially equally fulfilling way of leading one's life, and in some cases, even, as an achievement: successfully living in the present free from the resentment or distress arising from comparison to what could be. Nevertheless, this does not mean that some forms of narrative activity are not considered important by my interlocutors nor that narrative does not have an important role in constructing a meaningful existence. While most of my hosts probably did not narratively conceive their self on a daily basis, various narratives, including a diverse range of stories they heard and recounted, and encountered in the media, played a major role in their everyday lives. It is also worth pointing out that narrative activity conceived broadly need not imply a 'diachronic' disposition, and can be 'episodic', in the sense that the story can relate to particular episodes or events, without a claim for an overarching unity of life experience. It is thus important to distinguish Strawson's strong narrative claim, which hinges on people conceiving their own selves narratively, and the many other forms of narrative activity.

The importance of stories in people's lives makes it virtually impossible to dismiss the importance of narrative activity for living well. I nevertheless agree with Strawson to the effect that narrativity, to the extent that it involves a self-reflexive construction of self, may present a threat to one's ability to lead a good life, though not necessarily for the reasons he mentions. To the extent that viewing one's life in narrative terms likens it to a biographical project in the making, as theorists of late modernity have suggested, one may feel an increased sense of responsibility for one's life choices and decisions (e.g. Giddens 1991). While this means that one is increasingly liberated from traditional social institutions, the process is accompanied by a rise in risks and personal insecurities (Beck 1992). Shaping one's life, just like a story, is cast as one's own responsibility, and this may lead to anxiety - ultimately an existential anxiety that links freedom and responsibility (Yalom 1980). The interest in 'mindfulness' as a mode of therapy for depression, helping people to find 'peace in a frantic world' (Penman and Williams 2012), is indicative of the type of problem created by the late modern condition. Mindfulness in this sense refers to a type of meditation practice that focuses on the flow of one's own breath. The intention is to focus on immediate experience and to assume an attitude of observing what is transpiring in one's mind and body, as a way of countering the tendency to compare one's current state to an ideal and to treat the disjuncture as a problem to be solved, leading to the questioning and restlessness that characterize depressive thinking (ibid.). It remains to be seen whether the recent marked increase in cases of depression in Japan (Kitanaka 2011) can be related to the tendencies associated with late modernity, to take responsibility for one's own life and life trajectory and to internalize blame and dissatisfaction[101]. Yet this seems like a question worth serious exploration.

In short, the narrative quest for coherence and meaning, and mindful presence in the moment, each have their benefits, but also their dangers. The ability to lead a good and fulfilling life may well rely on maintaining the right kind of balance between the two. In contrast to Strawson's conception of Episodics and Diachronics as distinct types of person[102], I would maintain that the immediate and narrative mode are states, or modes of being in the world, that anyone can experience, even if some are slightly predisposed towards one or the other. Despite a certain similarity, the good life and the meaningful life do not map neatly onto the immediate and narrative state; for instance, a focused experience of the present moment while gardening, accompanied by a sense of immersion, can be seen to make one's life more meaningful. The concepts of the good life and meaningful life overlap significantly but cannot be reduced to each other – for example, a life can be rendered meaningful by understanding how events within it lead from one to another, but could still be considered morally problematic and thus not be seen as a good life either by the person who lived it or by others. The relationship between the two is a topic that is worthy of further examination, both theoretically and ethnographically. Suffice it to say that the good and meaningful existence, a fulfilling life, requires a careful balance between the narrative and immediate mode.

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[101] Junko Kitanaka's (2011) nuanced and thoughtful study provides a very good overview of the perception of depression in Japan and touches on some of these topics although they are not in the focus of her study.

[102] My understanding is somewhat closer to Bloch's (2011) reinterpretation of Strawson, in which he distinguishes the 'core', 'minimal' and 'narrative' self', and argues that Strawson's distinction between types of person is only valid at the phenomenological level. All people have a narrative self, though some – Strawson's Diachronics – have an 'extra', a deep feeling of having a meaningful biography. They 'are likely to engage in a particular form of activity which involves creating a meta-represenational diachronic narrative self by talking about their feelings, their inner states and their autobiography.' (ibid.) Bloch argues that anthropologists have tended to classify people in two groups (e.g. "pre-modern" and "modern") but that the difference is not nearly so fundamental as it may appear, since it is a difference between Strawson's Diachronics and Episodics, a difference which he describes as 'between those people who got into the habit of talking about their inner states and those who don't' (ibid.). Thus in some societies which encourage discourses about the self, autobiographical and reflective stories will be populated with more Diachronics, whereas societies in which talking about ones' own motivations and inner states is seen as unacceptable or immoral will lead to more discourse about relationships. Bloch argues that anthropologists tend to conflate

THE GOOD LIFE IN BALANCE

In the preceding chapters I have described several countervailing tendencies that my Japanese hosts sought to balance in their everyday pursuits of the good life. By focusing on these tendencies as they emerge from the ethnography, and without purporting to delineate or prescribe exactly what 'a meaning life' is or should be, I shall now try to elucidate some of the ways in which my interlocutors constructed meaning in their lives.

Chapter 4 points to a tension between leading a life with rich social relationships and a multitude of links to other members of the community, and maintaining a desired level of separation in which the social 'burden' of these relationships is minimised. In other words, the good life requires maintaining ties to others without being fully absorbed into the thick social fabric through its excessive demands, minimizing the intrusive aspects of those social relationships. Chapter 5 indicates the need to navigate a tension between politeness or formality as distancing mechanisms, and a sign of respectfulness that allows social relationships and indicates concern for others. Furthermore, it is important to judge the amount of politeness and formality so that one does not offend by distancing someone too much or appearing overly intimate. This in turn is closely related to the balance between autonomy and dependence, which, as Chapter 7 shows, can take the form of a

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the levels and locate the difference within the 'blob' rather than seeing it as a level of meta-representations, which is external to it.

tension between achieving intimacy (and avoiding a sense of social isolation), while maintaining a sense of freedom. Being careful to pre-empt reactions of others and being considerate may take a toll on one's own sense of health and feeling of being able to do what one pleases. It also shows that maintaining a sense of independence relies somewhat paradoxically on cultivating multiple dependencies on others. In conjunction, these three elements reveal the complexity of interactions of people with the community, or in a sense, negotiating the boundaries between others and self, boundaries that can be seen as more or less permeable[103] and that need to be kept open to a degree, but guarded.

Chapter 6 illustrates how the stories that are available to people, such as the 'model life' story of salaryman and housewife, provide them with raw material for making sense of their lives. The ways in which they position themselves in relation to these stories can be very different. A person may, like Kato san, construe their life as being in alignment with this 'model' story line and derive meaning from the sense of having fulfilled their duty or role. Someone else might view their life as diverging from this path and see that as a failure, or as an achievement and mode of resistance, or both. Kawasaki san navigated this middle ground, between a sense of disappointment with himself and a sense of pride, all in relation to this expected 'model' life course. Indeed, the divergences from the model life were presented and understood as part of his *ikigai*, which he described as seeking challenges. In other words, the way the good life or meaningful existence is narratively constructed may differ significantly – one can make the most of full identification with one of the stories available, or seek to make the points of divergence into precisely that which makes life meaningful. The life events that comprise a life story are often understood in terms of choice. As Chapter 8 shows, some of these life choices have been thoughtful decisions, carefully planned, while others were made in more haphazard ways, through the exercise of 'judicious opportunism', and only interpreted as 'choices' retrospectively, narratively brought back into the meaningful flow of life. Emerging from these two chapters is a sense of a tension between experiencing and interpreting one's life as a collection of accidental, haphazard or externally determined events, and as choices that one has actively made. People must negotiate this tension regarding the location of agency in their lives, in terms of control over the events in their lives and control over the interpretation of these events.

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[103] For a discussion of the porous boundaries of self in relation to wellbeing see Kavedžija (2012).

LATER YEARS AND MEANINGFUL LIFE

In Japan, as elsewhere, many of these issues come to the fore or achieve special prominence in the later years of life, but in one way or another concern people of all ages. It may be asked how representative my hosts are of Japanese in general or indeed the older Japanese population. To be sure, they comprise a rather special and perhaps privileged group in many ways. They are in relatively good health and are embedded in a social network within their communities, and for the most part they lead good and fulfilling lives. The daily experiences of those elderly who suffer from debilitating illnesses, institutionalised, frail and bedridden, would of course in many ways be quite different. Nonetheless, the number of healthy older people is significant, and perhaps easy to overlook or underestimate, compared to the institutionalized elderly, whose status as dependent and frail pushes them further into the focus of anxieties about aging in Japan.

Many of the anxieties or torments that derive from one's sense of responsibility for the shape life takes, as fashioned by the choices one must make, and greatly exacerbated in late modernity, lose much of their relevance in later years. Older people understand that while the future is not foreclosed to them, their life is already to an extent set on a trajectory which relieves them of the duty to make life-changing decisions, of the kind that can cause existential distress in the form of anxieties surrounding responsibility and choice. At the same time, as the future is not available as a place where delayed gratification will occur, they are led or compelled to focus on the moment. Many of my older interlocutors had clearly cultivated an attitude of quiet enjoyment and contemplation of everyday things. This does not mean that the existential issues associated with late modernity do not concern older people simply because they pertain to an earlier era, or hold older values that allow them to follow the 'paths of tradition'. The elderly are not exempt from making choices, sometimes diverging from the 'ideal', such as living in a three-generation household. Indeed, they make their choices and take authorship of them. While we often tend to assume that social change is driven by the young, and is primarily their domain, the elderly actively participate in creating wider societal changes, in values and in practices, in no less significant ways.

SELF, CARE AND THE GOOD LIFE

The issue of care is a recurring one in this dissertation, from the state-level policies and local care provision by a variety of organizations supported by the national LCTI, to the personal involvements of community members in giving care to others. The ethnography presented here reflects an abiding sense of concern for others among NPO staff members, volunteers and elderly salon goers, among others. They do so through gifts, express it through balanced statements that are polite yet friendly, by dropping by on each other and giving information and recommendations, taking up volunteering and helping out in the salon. Beyond a merely practical recognition that support is necessary if people become frail, the active everyday involvement of many of these people in caring for others in their community might be seen as a reflection of a certain human existential disposition. This *disposition of care* encapsulates acts of kindness and concern for others as well as an expectation and desire to be cared for and looked after, and in the most general sense encapsulates the tendency to extend oneself towards others. In existential terms, care is intimately related to the idea of purpose in life, as these entwinements with others so often lie at the very heart of one's sense of a meaningful existence. In this sense, care is much more than the one-sided relationship of dependency that so much of the popular discourse on anxieties related to an aging society would seem to imply, and encapsulates a complex interplay of relationships and tendencies that must be held in balance.

The capacity or disposition for care, in this wider sense, may provide a new way of thinking about those core features of personhood that emerge from the numerous balancing acts that people everywhere engage in their attempts to lead a good life. The balance between engaging in a community and maintaining a sphere into which others do not intrude; balancing desired intimacy and excessive or stifling proximity; keeping dependence and autonomy in check; negotiating the agency in one's life: in a certain sense these all concern the boundaries of the self, envisaged as more or less separate from others depending on context, with boundaries that are never completely sealed but which need to be guarded and negotiated. Such blurred boundaries are a reflection of the existential drive to reach out to others and extend the self. A focus on this disposition of care, as the bridge between 'self' and 'other', may help to redirect our attention from their separation to their various modes of coexistence and interpenetration. The task ahead, then, is exploring the diversity of forms this disposition can take, in different places and at different times in life.

APPENDIX 1.1. – THE PENSION SYSTEM IN JAPAN

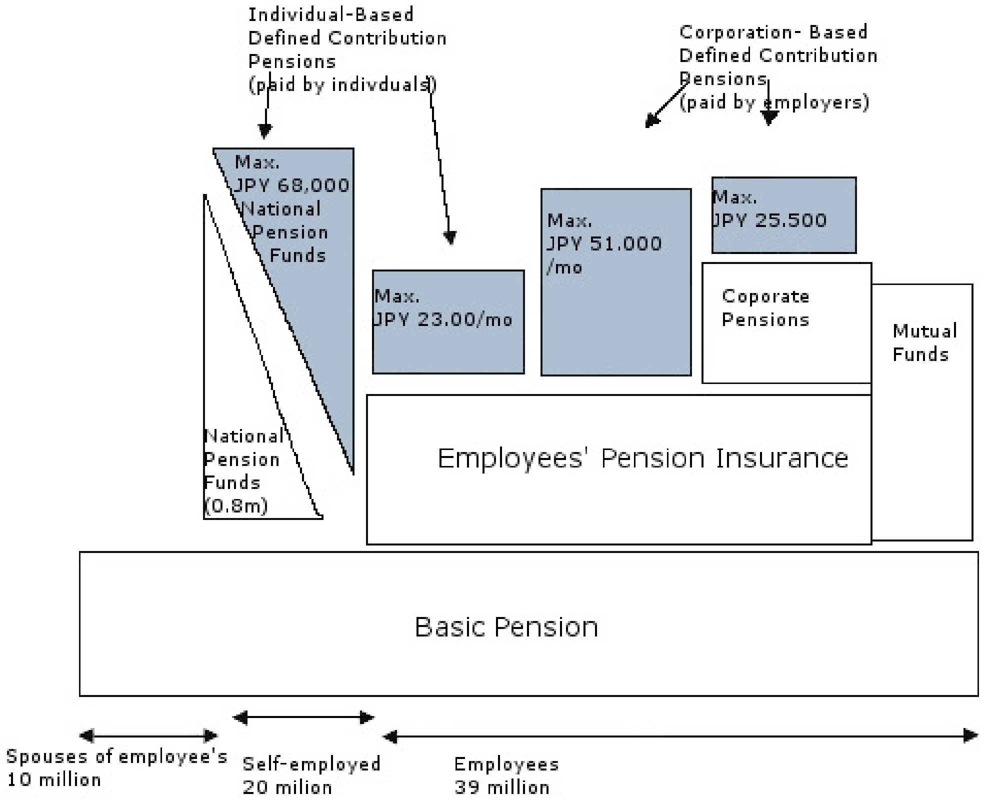
Individual-Based Defined Contribution Pensions (paid by indivduals)
Corporation- Based Defined Contribution Pensions (paid by employers)
Max. JPY 68,000 National Pension Funds
National Pension Funds (0.8m)
Max. JPY 23.00/mo
Max. JPY 51.000 /mo
Max. JPY 25.500
Coporate Pensions
Mutual Funds
Employees' Pension Insurance
Basic Pension
Spouses of employee's 10 million
Self-employed 20 milion
Employees 39 million

Figure H.1. The pension system in Japan. Adapted from NIPSSR (2011) Social Security in Japan 2011. (Note: All figures are as of March 2010. Shaded boxes indicate optional Defined-Contribution pensions. The amount inside is the maximum premium.)

The current pension system in Japan is a multi-tier scheme (see Figure H.1), built on the base of a universal public pension system established in 1961 and restructured in 1985 (ILC 2011). The first and the second tier are public and insured by the government. The first tier, Basic Pension[104] (*Kiso Nenkin*), has universal coverage and mandatory participation[105] for all residents over the age of 20. The pension benefit is not income-related and one becomes eligible for the flat rate old-age benefit after 25 years of premium payments. The second tier, the Employees' Pension Insurance (*Kose Nenkin Hoken*), is income-related[106] and as it is mandatory for all firms over a certain size (with premiums shared equally between employers and employees), it therefore covers most employees. Public sector employees are covered by a separate scheme called Mutual Aid Association. The third tier is optional and it generally refers to corporate pension plans that have developed from severance payments at the end of one's career, and for the self-employed it refers to the National Pension Fund (Coulmas 2007, ILC 2011; Social Security in Japan 2011).

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[104] To avoid confusion, it is worth mentioning that the Basic Pension covering those outside the employee category (such as self-employed, farmers) is called National Pension (Kokumin Nenkin) (see Social Security in Japan 2011).

[105] 'The Basic Pension requires 'flat amount' contributions from all residents aged 30-59. The monthly per person (except employees) contribution of 15,011 yen (as of April 2010) will increase annually until 2010 when it will reach its upper limit (16,900 yen). Contributions can be reduced for low-income individuals. Individuals with a minimum of 25 years of contributions arew eigible to recieve old-age benefits at age 65. The monthly full amount, approximately 66,000 yen as of April 2010, requires 40 years of contributions.' (ILC 2011: 58).

[106] 'Benefits vary according to the income level and contribution period. In 2010, an individual with an average income and 40 years of contributions can receive a monthly benefit (including Basic Pension portion) of approximately 167,000 yen and 66,000 yen for spouses.' (ILC 2011:58).

APPENDIX 2.1. - HOUSING OPTIONS FOR THE ELDERLY

Type of housing	**Characteristics**	**Run by:**
Condominiums for the elderly (*kōreisha no muke bunjō manshion*)	• 24/7 emergency staff, food services • can be inherited or sold • one can move in with children • one enters while independent	Private corporations
Easy-move-in rental housing for the elderly (*kōreisha enkatsu nyūkyō chinatai jūtaku*)	• rental housing registered as housing which does not refuse elderly, otherwise the same as other forms of rental housing	Private corporations
Specialized rental housing for the elderly (*kōreisha senyō chintai jūtaku*)	• registration for such housing was initiated in Dec 2005 • various kinds of services, some places have emergency staff and provide meals • the definition of 'elderly' (age cut-off point) depends on the provider	Private corporations
Rental housing for the elderly (*kōreisha muke yūryō chintai jūtaku*)	• barrier-free • provides emergency calls for a fee and a number of other services • one can enter over the age of 65 and while independent	Private corporations; public or municipal organizations
Group living	• communal living for independent elderly, helping each other out with daily tasks, something like a cooperative • it seems there is none in Kansai • sometimes one can't enter if in need of care	Established by municipal governments or private corporations
'Silver housing' (*shiruba- hausingu*)	• barrier-free • Life-Support Adviser available • emergency assistance available for a fee • one can enter over the age of 60, in case of a married couple only one	Regional public association, municipal or public

	partner needs to be over 60	corporation
Paid old people's homes (*yūryō rōjin hōmu*)	• provide food, care, bathing services • one can enter while independent or while in need of care • when care becomes more complex one can move to a nursing ward • sometimes there are rooms for couples	Private corporations, NPOs, cooperatives or medical institutions
Care-house	• new type of cost (reduced) old people's home, for people who worry about living alone • barrier-free, emergency assistance • when in need of care, can use help of home-helpers • one can enter over the age of 60, while independent	Social welfare organizations, private corporations, medical institutions
Care-house (with nursing)	• provides nursing, one can stay until the end, only in acute situations is it necessary to go to the hospital • infrequent • individual rooms with toilet, bath and mini kitchen	Social welfare organizations
Paid old people's home (*keihi rōjin hōmu*)	• for people without relatives • type A - with food service • type B-without food service • one can enter over the age of 60, while independent	Social welfare organizations, private corporations, medical institutions
Nursing home (*yōgo rōjin hōmu*)	• when one can't live alone for economical, physical or psychological reasons • over the age of 65, while independent	Local governments and welfare institutions
Special nursing home (*tokubetsu yōgo rōjin hōmu*)	• for people in need of nursing care • choice between group rooms (up to 4 people) or individual rooms (in new ones)	Local governments and social welfare

		institutions
Group home	• units for 9 people, small individual rooms • some provide nursing care	Local governments, social welfare institutions, NPOs, private enterprises, medical institutions
Medical institutions (hospital wards, rehabilitation centres)	• usually short-term care, some provide long-term care • rooms for up to 4 people	Regional governments, social welfare institutions, private enterprises, medical institutions

Adapted from unpublished materials from Foundation for Senior Citizen's housing; and Elderly Information Centre Osaka (*Kōreisha Jutaku Johō Senta Osaka*).

APPENDIX 2.2.- LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE SYSTEM IN JAPAN

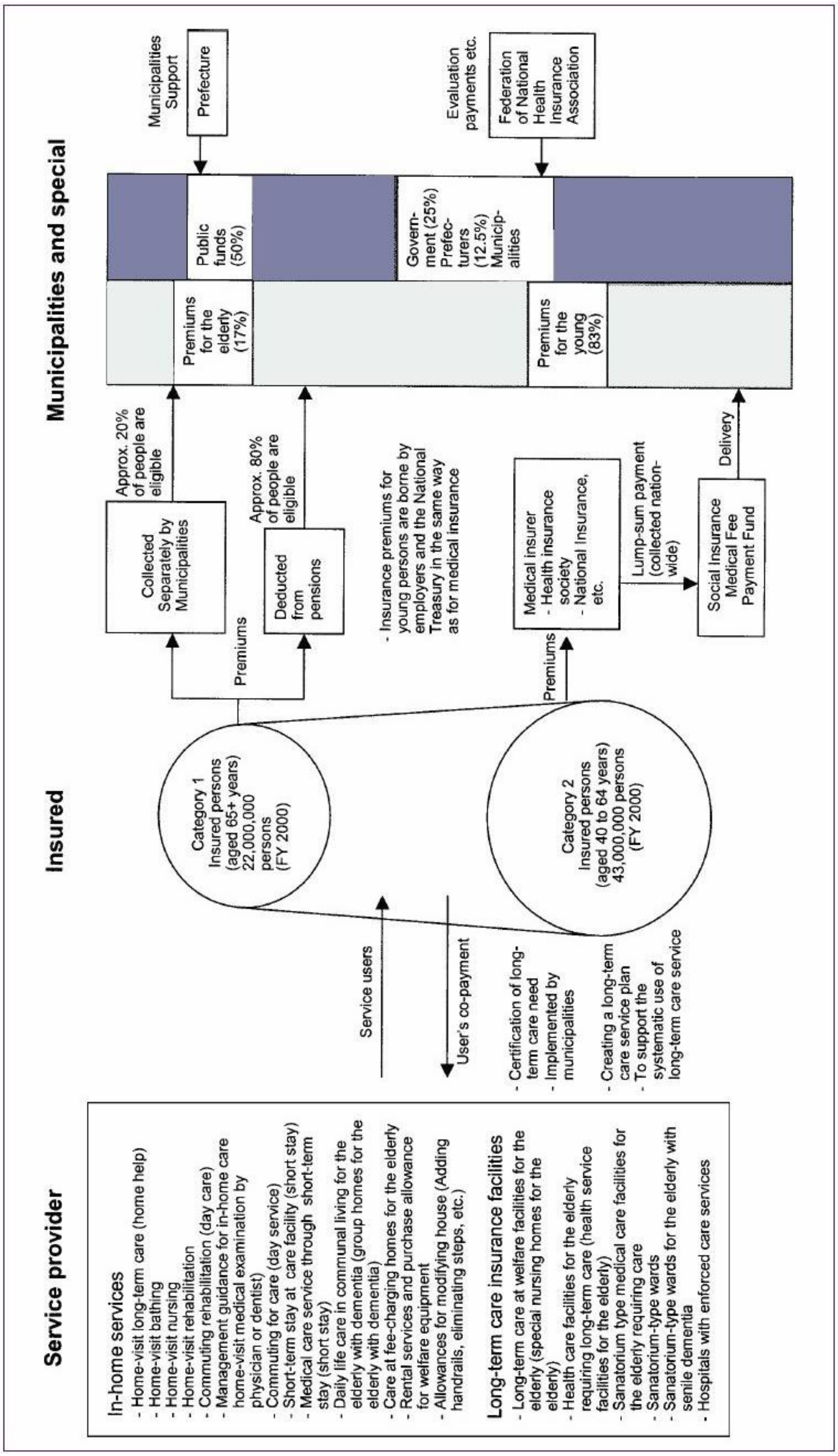
Service provider
In-home services
- Home-visit long-term care (home help)
- Home-visit bathing
- Home-visit nursing
- Home-visit rehabilitation
- Commuting rehabilitation (day care)
- Management guidance for in-home care home-visit medical examination by physician or dentist)
- Commuting for care (day service)
- Short-term stay at care facility (short stay)
- Medical care service through short-term stay (short stay)
- Daily life care in communal living for the elderly with dementia (group homes for the elderly with dementia)
- Care at fee-charging homes for the elderly
- Rental services and purchase allowance for welfare equipment
- Allowances for modifying house (Adding handrails, eliminating steps, etc.)
Long-term care insurance facilities
- Long-term care at welfare facilities for the elderly (special nursing homes for the elderly)
- Health care facilities for the elderly requiring long-term care (health service facilities for the elderly)
- Sanatorium type medical care facilities for the elderly requiring care
- Sanatorium-type wards
- Sanatorium-type wards for the elderly with senile dementia
- Hospitals with enforced care services
Service users
User's co-payment
- Certification of long-term care need
- Implemented by municipalities
- Creating a long-term care service plan
- To support the systematic use of long-term care service
Insured
Category 1 Insured persons (aged 65+ years) 22,000,000 persons (FY 2000)
Category 2 Insured persons (aged 40 to 64 years) 43,000,000 persons (FY 2000)
Premiums
Collected Separately by Municipalities
Deducted from pensions
Approx. 20% of people are eligible
Approx. 80% of people are eligible
- Insurance premiums for young persons are borne by employers and the National Treasury in the same way as for medical insurance
Premiums
Medical insurer - Health insurance society - National Insurance, etc.
Lump-sum payment (collected nation-wide)
Social Insurance Medical Fee Payment Fund
Delivery
Municipalities and special
Premiums for the elderly (17%)
Public funds (50%)
Premiums for the young (83%)
Govern-ment (25%) Prefec-turers (12.5%) Municip-alities
Municipalities Support
Prefecture
Evaluation payments etc.
Federation of National Health Insurance Association

Figure H.2. Outline of the LCTI System. Source: MHLW 2002.

APPENDIX 3.1. - SOCIAL WELFARE PROVIDERS IN JAPAN

Type of sector	Social welfare providers	Type of services
1. Public welfare sector	(a) Publicly established and managed provider organizations (e.g. national and local government organizations)	Publicly established and managed welfare services
	(b) Licensed body providers organizations (e.g. social welfare corporations)	Licensed body welfare services
2. Voluntary welfare sector	(a) Government involvement provider organizations (including mutual-aid groups that receive government subsidies or act as government service contractors)	Government involvement welfare services
	(b) Citizen provider organizations (e.g. mutual-aid groups, consumer cooperatives, agricultural cooperatives and specified non-profit corporations independent form government)	Citizen organization welfare services
3. Informal sector	Neighbourhood support activity organizations (support networks made up from friends, neighbours and commissioned welfare volunteers - *minseiin*, as well as volunteer activities carried out on an individual basis)	Neighbourhood support networks
4. Marked-based welfare sector	Market based provider organizations (Incorporated and unincorporated enterprises licensed as aid providers or contractors by institutions that implement social welfare. They deliver, on a commercial basis, livelihood support services such a bathing, meal and home-help services)	Commercial welfare services

Social welfare providers in Japan (Adapted from Furukawa 2008:187)

APPENDIX 3.2. - KEY BODIES PROMOTING COMMUNITY WELFARE

	Legal basis	Projects & Activities (as stipulated by law)
Social Welfare Committee	Municipal committees: Social Welfare Law, article 107.	• Planning & execution of welfare projects • Supporting residents' participation in social welfare activities • Research, promotion, advertisement, coordination, and supporting of projects related to social welfare • Projects necessary for solid development of social welfare services
	Prefectural committees: Social Welfare Law, article 108.	• Projects that can be implemented widely • Giving of worker's guidance and advice regarding the training & the management of social welfare projects • Coordination & mutual communication between municipal committees, etc.
Community Fund Committee	Social Welfare Law, articles 110, 111, 112.	• Administration of the community fund(donations, distribution, publicity, and so on) • Regulation of the receipt of other donations and private welfare resources • Collaboration with welfare organizations (e.g. Social Welfare Committee) and companies. • Promoting private social welfare activities(e.g. volunteer work), etc. • (From the Social Welfare Law)
Community welfare commissioners & Commissioned child welfare volunteers	Social Worker Law & Commissioned Child Welfare Volunteer Law, article 12.	• Assessing the living conditions of residents • Providing consultation & advice to people who needs assistance • Giving information regard the use of welfare services • Coordination of & Cooperation with the administration & welfare organizations • Activities for promoting the welfare of residents • (From the Social Worker Law)

Private Non-Profit Organizations (Mainly Specified Non-Profit Corporation)	The Specified Non-profit Activity Promotion Law	• [Specified Non-Profit Activities as set out in the Specified Non-profit Activity Promotion Law], restricted to 12 fields (e.g. health/medical welfare, social education, 'machizukuri' [local town development], promotion of culture, art and sports, disaster relief, raising of wholesome children • Exchange and communication, service provision, public education (enlightenment), information provision, networking among related organisations, consultation activities, survey research, submitting requests, training and study, etc.
Social Welfare Facilities	Social Welfare Law, article 2.	• Providing services (e.g. every day-life guidance) to the residents and users of facilities. • Operating housing welfare services and local exchange activities for local residents, etc.
Welfare Offices	Social Welfare Law, article 14.	• Office work relating to the admission (of citizens) into welfare facilities based on the welfare laws. • Consultation for people in need of help; research guidance; coordination and communication across welfare services, etc.
Health Centres	The Community Health Care Law, article 5.	• Activities regarding the improvement of nutrition intake, food hygiene, environmental hygiene, mental health welfare, health nurses; prevention of epidemics; protection of the health of mothers and children as well as the elderly health; dental health etc. • Information collection & research regarding community health
'Silver Services'	Elderly Welfare Law	• Housing services (e.g. fee-charging nursing homes) • Nursing care services (e.g. home help services) • Welfare equipment services (e.g. nursing care equipment and supplies) etc.

Figure H.2. Key bodies promoting community welfare - their legal basis, projects and activities. Source: Hirano et al. 2001: 117. Translation assistance by Naho Nakakubo.

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