
Productive Aging of the Elderly in Japan*

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Abstract: This study is a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of the future prospects for the elderly in Korea based on research about the elderly in Japan where advanced policies for an aging society are well established and the family values and the cultural environment are similar to Korea. This study examines the important factors that shape productive living for the elderly in Japan, how they participate in such retirement activities, how they want to construct retirement, and what they expect. The analysis methodology selected elderly people who participate in productive activities, conducted in-depth interviews with them, and analyzed the interviews as empirical cases. The analysis results show that elderly people have an intention to participate in productive activities and this contributes positively to the degree of life satisfaction for them. In addition, the elderly people interviewed were aware of the aging society Japan and the burden of supporting senior members that is now a social issue open for discussion. Therefore, they find their activities meaningful in that those activities help to change negative social perspectives of the elderly. They emphasized the fact that through voluntary participation in productive activities, they spare society and their children the burden of supporting them. In addition, the core factor in the elderly choosing and participating in the activities for their happy old age was an independent evaluation rather than pressure from outside. The conclusion identifies that the Japanese social system enables elderly

Key words: Japanese elderly people, productive activities, old age, in-depth interview.

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people to be financially more independent than elderly in Korea, because the elderly in Japan can rely on the pension for their old age, which affects their independent relationship with their children as well.

I . Introduction

The concept of 'productive aging' is an applicable countermeasure to the global issues of aging and has a significant policy potential that is expected to affect the experience of old age in the future. Active discussions on 'productive aging' are underway in the fields of gerontology, social welfare, public policy, and family sociology. This study examines the elderly in Japan through the concept of productive aging that is believed to have a strong influence on the experience of the life world of older people and their formation of identity in the future.

The aging issue originated in the West and many of the discussions have also evolved from there. The issue, however, has emerged as a common global theme, albeit different in degree and pattern. In particular, aging in East Asia is progressing in a diverse and condensed manner. For example, Japan is the first country to show aging issues, Korea is the fastest aging country in the world, and China is significant in the number of aging individuals. All these countries have distinctive features in an aging society. In 2006, China had 141.9 million people age 65 or over, which accounts for half the elderly in Asia and one fifth of the global elderly population. Such diversity and speed of aging shows signs of becoming an important factor to the tendency of worldwide aging. It is necessary to study how the value of 'productive aging' (that originated in the West) is developing in East Asian countries and how it will affect older people in the society of each country in the future. In this sense, research on 'productive aging' in Japan (a prototype of aging issues in East Asia) is significant as a first step.

Japan is one of the fastest aging societies. The Japanese government has responded to social changes and taken immediate measures. In its demographic structure, with fast aging and population reduction taking place simultaneously, Japan fundamentally sees it as one way to maintain its vitality to create a society where older people can work more actively as a social member based on individual ability and experience. This is a depiction of the desirable image of older people for the future society is reflected in the underlying principle of Japan's 'Basic Act on Aging Society.'¹

This study also identified the real life world of older people in Japan, which is an advanced country in aging policies and is relatively similar to Korea in family values and the cultural environment to verify how their life world is evolving. The study explores the present situation of discussions on the productivity of older people in Japan and the resulting response from the reflection of the central value of productive aging in their life world.

Current research on the elderly in Japan is focused on policy studies and on the results of quantitative data with limited studies that reflect the perspectives of the elderly in Japan through direct description. This study fills the vacuum of previous studies and provides a new social insight into aging issues in both Korea and Japan.

The data on the life world of older people compiled from general surveys show the overall situation, however, they are limited in revealing various backgrounds and factors of their true

1. The Act contains relative measures in five areas — 'Employment and Income,' 'Health and Welfare,' 'Learning and Social Participation,' 'Living Environment' and 'Pursuit of Survey and Research' — described in Article 9 to Article 13. The provision in the part of 'Employment and Income' highlights the promotion of employment opportunities for the elderly, employee skill development throughout career, stable operation of the public pension system, and aid for self-help income activities in old age.

life world. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct in-depth interviews to understand the major factors that shape their living, the background of doing a specific activity, and the desirable image of old age living from a personal perspective.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Productive aging

A productive activity by the elderly means in a narrow sense an activity that has an economic value, but in a wider sense it also includes participation in the labor market that includes economic activities of employment and non-economic activities such as volunteering (Klumb and Baltes, 1999).

Currently, the theoretical approach to 'productive aging' includes a concept that focuses on achievement and contribution in old age, but the definition varies.² Herzog and others Herzog et al. (1989) define it as an activity to produce goods and services including housework, care-giving, and volunteering regardless of wage acquisition. Butler and Schechter (1995) define it as salaried work, voluntary activity, family support, and the ability of an individual to maintain self as independently as possible. Bass,

2. Similar to Productive Aging, there is a concept called Successful Aging, which has been used to mean that it is desirable to maintain a productive activity (paid or unpaid) in old age and this enables a better living (Rowe and Kahn, 1997). In past studies found a close static relation between productive activities of the elderly and successful aging, particularly, concluding that successful aging is an output resulting from participation in productive activities in old age (Rowe and Kahn, 1997). Active aging can be linked to productive aging with a focus on the economic aspect. Productive aging emphasizes the role played by the elderly in a society, while successful aging focuses on the individual, physical health, psychological ability, and achievement.

Caro and others (1993, 1996) see it as a social and economic production of goods and services that create value and the ability to realize such production. It refers to the production of goods and services by older people and activities to help develop such production. For example, it includes education and training that produce effective skills for paid labor, community volunteering, and unofficial activities to help the family or community.

Productive aging can be defined to mean that older people continue to independently exhibit their value, utilize available resources, and contribute to society; productive activities are those appearing in old age to realize a productive old age. In this study, productive activities include paid labor traditionally categorized as productive and unpaid housework, family care, volunteering, and other various self-development activities that facilitate independent activities and the living of older people. The activities for improving skills such as learning and other leisure/hobby activities were included in the category of self-development.

Studies on the concept of productive aging in Japan started by accepting western discussions on the issue and the earlier phase of studies in Japan focused on the quality of life with respect to the activity ability of older people (柴田 博, 1996). In 2005, the productivity of older people (with respect to individual social contributions) was discussed fully and related studies were conducted. In Japanese studies, productive old age refers to the age when productive activities that include paid work, unpaid work, and other activities that contribute to society are still possible.

Until recently, studies have showed a tendency to conduct surveys and quantitative analysis to examine related factors by referring to the concept of productive aging in established studies (岡本秀明, 2008). However, even in Japan, studies are limited to only discussions in relation to the concept of productive aging and little attention is paid to the many differences and stress conditions inside the life world of older people.

2. Qualitative Approach in Gerontology

The purpose of a 'phenomenological interview' is to acquire a direct description of people with experiences in some concrete areas (Thompson et al., 1989). An in-depth interview is a method that is appropriate for investigating social processes, meaning, and experiences that are difficult to quantify, as well as require profound understanding and explanation (Cavalho & White, 1997).

The in-depth interview (one of the possible qualitative approaches) is a method to understand the world of an experienced person from a personal perspective that details the information in the form of statements, not numbers (Woo Kook Hee, 1997). In order to properly understand the experience of old age, it is very convincing that future gerontological studies embrace narrative thinking (Ray, Ruth, 2002).

Many qualitative studies about old age (Oh Kyung Seok, 2002; Kang Yoo Jin, 2003; Park Kyung Sook, 2004; Han Kyung Hye, 2004; Ahn Jean, 2003; Ray, Ruth, 2002) have been actively carried out in recent years. These studies illustrate that a questionnaire approach made from the perspective of a researcher shows only a limited part in grasping and understanding the life world of older people since it excludes the perspectives and thoughts of older people. In addition, they point out that past studies have focused on resources held by older people or on the influence of occasional specific factors and overlook that the current quality of life of older people can be an accumulated output of their various life paths. In addition, gerontological studies aimed at understanding the life world of older people and their life phases have lacked an intrinsic approach to understand the subjective part of older people and just have objectified them (Han Kyung Hye, 2004). Accordingly, a task is required to explore how older people themselves interpret and give meaning to personal

living.

Many previous studies on productive aging were based on quantitative materials and their purpose was to explore factors that influence productive activities of an old age. However, qualitative studies in gerontology, explored what remained unanswered by quantitative studies in the living and care-giving activities of older people. Accordingly, this study intends to re-interpret the pattern and meaning of the life world of older people around their productive old age through in-depth interviews. The study will show how older people evaluate and interpret life by allowing older people to talk about the experiences and factors that constitute a productive old age. In addition, it explores the mechanism of how older people select and determine productive activities that provide answers on how the activities of older people are associated with their life satisfaction.

III. Data and Analysis Method

Based on past studies, this study interviewed elderly Japanese and conducted a qualitative analysis on those who are engaged in productive activities that are understood in terms of 'productive aging.' It was referred to the categorization of productive activities by older people introduced in past literature (Herzog et al., 1989; Bass, Caro and Chen, 1993; Rowe and Kahn, 1997; Jung, 2005; Hong, 2005). Interviewees were selected by the categories of paid labor, self-development, volunteering, housework, and family care-giving, and then in-depth interviews were conducted to analyze the empirical cases.

The in-depth interview in this study were conducted with unstructured questions and observation. It consisted of open-end questions and there was no fixed order of questions. The background or socio-demographic questions of the interviewees were not asked separately but were inserted in the course of conver-

sations to a degree not to interfere with the flow of the interview. Observations were made towards the appearance, tone, behavior, and atmosphere of the interviewees. The interview content was collected by a voice recorder and brief notes were taken.³ All the recorded content was transcribed into a written text on which the data analysis was based. The content used for data analysis consists of the transcriptions, a research journal, and facts about the current situation and basic socio-demographic data of interviewees.

1. Interviewee Selection

Older people who can show the characteristics of each productive activity scope were intentionally sampled in the interview.⁴ The sample size was ten people. For the selection of the interviewees, the elderly who met the following conditions were sought out. To begin with, two or three people were grouped by

3. The interview content of Japanese older people was transcribed into Japanese at the first stage and then two Japanese narratives (involved in Japanese language teaching) separately checked the correctness of the transcribed text by comparing it with the original recorded content. In the second stage the text was translated into Korean for the convenience of research.

4. One thing should be noted regarding a qualitative study. With increasing assertions that the life world of older people is so diverse, this kind of study should be carried out by collecting a broad range of cases to represent the whole group of older people, but the interviewees in this study were selected by purposive sampling, or according to the judgment of the researcher. This method is used when the researcher selects cases with certain criteria appropriate to the purpose of the study. Regarding the study object, this study examined the cases of representative productive activities by older people. This study does not show the entire life of older people but it focuses on what their productive activities are composed of and how they interpret their activities themselves, so it can avoid the controversy of the lack of representativeness, if any.

their activity category of active participation in paid labor, self-development that occupies their daily life, volunteering, housework, and family care-giving. In addition, efforts were made to look for older people with different living styles, i.e. living with adult children, living with a spouse or living alone, but it was difficult to find older people living with their adult children especially in the urban areas given the changing family structure in Japan. Currently, the family structure of Japan (similar to that of Korea) shows a tendency of more older people living alone or only with a spouse. In a 2006 survey by the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, elderly households living alone reached 22.4% and those living with a spouse 29.5%. In addition, even in the case of living in the same building with their adult children, most of the elderly were found to live independently (two households in one building). The selection process was made through various routes in order to decrease a possibly lopsided selection of the interviewees that might belong to the same institution or association.⁵ Table 1 shows the profile of the interviewees.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from June until August 2008. The interview lasted for about one to two hours and was conducted two times per person except for specific cases. Data was voice recorded and written. Voice was recorded with the permission of interviewees and the recorded content was fully transcribed. Before and after the interview, an interview journal was written to indicate the interview place, situation, expressions and appearance of the interviewees, and problems (if any) during the interview.

5. Tokyo Senior Club, Tokyo Shinjuku-ku Welfare Association, Waseda Hoshien's local activity organization, and a nursery in Shinjuku, Tokyo.

Table 1. Profile of Interviewees

Interviewees (Sex, Age)	Primary activity	Education	Family type	Income (1,000 Yen, monthly)	Job Before Retirement
A(M,73)	Paid labor (apartment manager)	2-yr. college	Living with a spouse (children in the same building)	Pension 170 / salary 150	Self-employed
D(F,84)	Paid labor (restaurant worker)	Middle school	Living with children	Allowance 50	Self-employed
G(M,75)	Paid labor (building manager)	High school	Living with a spouse (children in the same village)	Pension 180 / salary 164	Employee
C(F,68)	Paid labor (conciliator at a family court)	University	Alone	Pension 400 / salary 150	Employee
H(F,68)	Self- development	University	Alone (children in a neighboring building)	Pension 400	Full-time housewife
F(M,69)	Self- development	University	Living with a spouse (children in the same village)	Pension 500	Employee
B(M,73)	Self- development	University	Living with a spouse	Pension 300	Employee
E(M,71)	Volunteering	University	Living with a spouse	Pension 250	Employee
I(F,69)	Family care-giving	University	Alone (children in the same village)	Pension 260	School teacher
J(F,65)	Family care-giving	High school	Living with a spouse (children in the same village)	Pension 200 / support from children 100	Full-time housewife

Transcriptions after the interview were compiled according to the interviewees. Then the contents were grouped into large themes and keywords were inserted next to the interview content, which was perused repeatedly to classify them into sub themes. After these processes, the content was arranged according to each interviewee and re-arranged according to each theme.

According to the life history research method, this study belongs to the categorical content approach. This is an approach to draw a common theme from many life history cases (Lieblich,

Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998; Ahn, 2003). Instead of choosing a qualitative research strategy to categorize the activities of older people through questions about their living, this study applied a method used in past studies on productive activities in old age, as well as the category and definition shown in the empirical study on the productive activities of older people in Korean society. It made an intentional categorization of the life world of older people into several productive activities to show explanations by linking those activities to a social context and the concrete situations of older people (categorical content approach).

IV. Result of Analysis

1. Participants in Paid Labor

Among the interviewees, three persons were participating in paid labor activities (A, D, G). They supported themselves by working at respective working places and they said they feared paid work to earn a living; their participation in such work was voluntary and self driven. They participated in paid labor to overcome some economic constrains but they seemed to work actively, motivated by the thought they were still able to work. They showed confidence that they were able to earn a living without burdening their adult children or others because they have work they have done since their early years, and still have the ability to continue at that work.

It's a productive living. This comes from the fact that I can make money for myself. It is also productive since I make a living in an appropriate manner and I do not receive help from others. (A)

As you see, I give some help with restaurant work and I stay fit

so I can live without trouble with my adult children. Otherwise, it would be a tough world for old people. (D)

D who has been working in a restaurant all her life said that she continues the work because it is something she can do in her old age. The fact she can give help to her adult children by working at a restaurant served as a meaningful medium in her life.

In contrast to A, D and G, C shows her participation in paid labor in order to realize her ability in old age. Although economically stable, C is involved in a paid activity that is related to her job before retirement. Therefore, it is not the case of doing paid labor to earn a living because she receives an adequate pension. She said she currently lives as busy a life as the young generations. She has a busy schedule from morning to night for work related to her past career and various group activities. In this case, the main motivation of her activity is the recognition from others about her ability, as well as her satisfaction. The case of C appears in those older people who have experience in professional jobs and in the management of an organization. Although they do not need additional economic activities in old age due to secured economic resources, they continue to participate in paid labor to confirm the existence of their social ability.

I work as a conciliator at a family court. If possible, I will continue working until I die. I think about many ways of working and I also consider quitting this hard work by the end of this year...I don't feel lonely because I am busy. When I get up in the morning, I seldom think that way due to my busy schedule. (C)

This case shows participation in paid labor has a very positive effect on the evaluation of old age. Emphasizing that one's role achievement is not different from the past in his prime time

becomes the driving force behind such positive evaluation. In particular, the necessary condition to maintain a high level of independence is an economic ability for which participation in paid labor is emphasized. This concept is linked to the perception in old-age that they are not burdensome to their adult children or others in the ability to earn a living independently.

Elderly participants in various paid labor activities try to put more value on an independent working existence as a social member in evaluating their old age. This is because labor occupies an important position in their life and they take pride in their old age when they are able to work. The meaning of old age is in the ability to continue paid work. It is necessary to note that they make a positive evaluation of their life from the fact they still play the same role as they did in their prime rather than they recognize old age as a new life stage age and put some value on it.

2. Participants in Self-development Activities

Among the old aged, many spent significant time on self-development after retirement. In this case, most of the interviewees lived on a pension and joined a club or an association to continue with their hobby or interests. There were three such persons among the interviewed people. They were all living on a pension and participating in activities they wanted to do after retirement. The activities were linked to society and self-development as a hobby. B participates in a community senior club to study a Japanese society and F provides marketing consulting in a meeting for retired businessmen. H also attends various events in her community while being involved in a Japanese traditional dance study in a senior club.

These people make a basic living on pension so they can adjust their standard of living to the level of the pension and spend on cost of living to fit their pension received. Instead, they

often participate in a hobby or join a social gathering to meet their needs. They look for new meaning in old age through a hobby or social gathering activities. With those activities they were maintaining a social relation.

I retired at age 67 but my company still assigns work to me. It comes via an email, for example, it requires me to come here by around a certain time on a certain day of a certain month, and then I can receive payment as long as I work. I did this until I turned 70. Now I want to do something that I like more. (B)

I think this (hobby) is a social activity for me. For example, there is a person that I do a social gathering with. I have been a housewife throughout my life so in reality I think my stage and my role are limited to that degree, so I think this is enough and I satisfy myself. (H)

The interviewees who participated in self-development activities were not as active as those who participate in paid work in evaluating their life as productive. They found meaning in their life by not inconveniencing others.

As for me, unfortunately what I am doing has nothing to do with 'physical productivity.' What matters more is to end my remaining life without causing an inconvenience to the environment surrounding me. (B)

My goal is not to depend (on others and my children). Most of my peers also think like this. I believe 95% think so. (F)

In the self-development category (which belongs to an extended concept of productive aging) people recognized they had entered a life stage of old age after retiring from active service and focused

on an activity different from their previous life stage. However, they did not actively place value on new activities. By participating in an activity of their choice, they lived a satisfactory old age and did not feel they were a burden to others since their activities did not inconvenience others. In particular, they hardly regarded their self-development activities as productive. This was largely affected by established perspectives that productivity is made based on a monetary value. In these cases, the older people acquired independence (physically and economically) but they seemed to fail to form a meaning of independent old age as their evaluation on their own old age is affected by the established value system.

3. Participants Involved in Volunteering

Among the various activities to realize productive aging, volunteering is categorized into an official activity for social contribution so it is defined in the established studies as a representative productive activity along with paid labor. Its productivity is also accepted by economists as their volunteer activity helps lower social costs.

E (among the interviewed) is an old man who lives on pension. E has volunteered as a Japanese teacher for low income foreigners for about 11 years. Compared to other cases, the pension received is not so much but he has managed his cost of living within the range of his pension.

My pension is about 250,000 yen per month. Combined with that of my spouse, we manage to live. We are not so flexible living off the pension; the cost for meals, utilities, and other expenses makes it hard to travel. I seldom spend money on social gatherings. I paint for pleasure and I spend little on that. There is no problem as long as I live at a common level...(E)

I am really happy because I can meet many people and talk with them. Most of all, there is no stress I feel because this is different from salaried work. When I left my company, I decided to start a whole new life, not to think of company work anymore. As for money, my pension is enough as it is within a scope of my living. I don't need a lot of money, but it's just for my basic living. (E)

It is rather difficult to say my activity is productive, but it is meaningful to the extent that it can generate some help and it brings hope to someone, or gives him or her a new chance or something. (E)

The reason to participate actively in volunteering that is not economically advantageous while living with frugality is that those activities can bring vitality to life and meaning in old age. E (who put some value on his old age and showed satisfaction) did not go further to the meaning of social contribution or productivity through his volunteering, but was evaluating his living positively. The recognition of his old age activities in helping others serves to make his old age abundant and meaningful.

4. Participants in Family Care-giving

Like past studies that show there are many (particularly among female older people) who do unpaid housework and family care-giving, the activity for housework and family care-giving is considered a productive activity to realize productive aging in the living of female older people. Among the interviewees, two were spending their old age doing housework and family care-giving. In the case of I, preparing lunch for her grandchild and picking up him at a nursery school was her primary activity. In the case of J, more time was spent doing housework and taking care of her grandchildren.

As for the case of *I*, she worked part time in an education-related area after serving as a school teacher for nine years. Since then she started taking care of her grandchild to maintain her busy life pattern. Therefore, the family care-giving service is a component of her life world that she independently determined. What is interesting, especially with the case of *I*, is that she was considering her housework and family care-giving as a very official and socially meaningful activity, which is usually considered as an unofficial activity for social contribution. In the case of *I*, the activity seemed to be linked not to personal but to social dimensions in that she put some value on her current activity and showed considerable pride in doing that activity.

The everyday life is not so leisurely...(laugh)...I raised a son and a daughter while I worked full time. Then I was beholden to many people, so I was able to raise my two children. Then I was thinking that I would repay someday. So after I became a grandparent, I started doing this work. If I didn't have a grandchild, I might take care of the children of others. I just return what I received. It's a feeling that I return what I receive from former generations to the next generations. (I)

Meanwhile, *J* shows another aspect as she said her housework and family care-giving activity was not made freely, but through a sense of duty as a full time housewife who could help her children. She admitted that family relations became smoother through her activities and she endured the hard work by concentrating on her beneficial role.

Before I became a grandparent, I heard from others that having a grandchild is a big burden. They said it would cost me much more for everything, like something to wear and to eat. I just think it is my role. It would be cold if I say it is my duty but it can be half duty

and half role. (J)

Do I have any complaints? Yes, I have, I get exhausted sometimes, but it's hard to speak out. Japanese women have a thought that everything goes smoothly if they endure. We are immersed in that kind of thought so I do it unavoidably. (J)

In the case of I who has working experience, the same activity of housework and family care-giving was recognized as a social role to provide one's ability to others, having a very positive effect on her recognition of old age. However, the case of J (who spent her life as a full time housewife) showed a passive recognition of old age that she just continues her wife and mother role taken for granted in old age, revealing a stereotyped gender role as well. The two did the same productive activity in old age but showed a difference in finding the meaning of productive aging; these differences led to the perceptions of how they eventually evaluated their old age.

5. Productive Activity, Meaning of Old Age and Life Satisfaction

Older people determine whether they participate in various productive activities by considering their current situations and available resources. The matter of participation in a specific productive activity is a result of personal choice but there is a need to explain why this choice affects the life satisfaction of older people as an important factor. In some established studies that analyzed the relation between the productive activity of older people and their life satisfaction (Kim, 2007; 杉原陽子, 2002; 岡本秀明, 2006; 片桐恵子, 菅原育子, 2007), the participation in productive activities was found to play a role as an important factor in life satisfaction. However, there might be a difference in the life

satisfaction of older people not because their participation just affects them positively but because the type of their productive activities and their characteristics that interact with each other.

The analysis of the in-depth interview results about the productive activities of older people in Japan helps to understand that there are many different patterns. To begin with, the case of paid labor among the productive activities showed a high satisfaction level in that their personal abilities are useful even in old age. In cases of A and C who independently participated in paid labor, they were highly satisfied with their current living, showing a large difference from D who felt her paid labor was not based on her decision and determined passively. When asked about life satisfaction in old age, A and C answered they were the most satisfied with the present, whereas D answered that it was the best time when she ran a restaurant with her husband in her early days.

H and B who belong to the category of self-development evaluated their present living is the most satisfying time in their life, whereas F chose his prime time when he worked energetically as the most satisfying.

I enjoyed my past time. You know what? In Japan, people in my age say that they spent the happiest time of their life as a salaried man. Ten out of ten say so. In short, they spent a career as salaried employee during the high economic growth period in Japan. I think all of us received a benefit. (F)

In the case of H, she answered she liked her current solitary living because she can spend her time more freely than in the past when she had to make efforts to support her child and husband, while B answered he had high satisfaction in challenging new tasks by participating in a community, which is different from his past work.

Satisfaction level? Well... I am the most satisfied now. I raised four children. I had to take care of my parents. My husband was very often away from home due to overseas travel. So I had to do much of the house work alone. I think there was little time for me. But now I have a lot of time for me so my satisfaction level is higher now than ever. It sounds cold and selfish but I can't help it. I am happier now than ever as I can spend my own time. (H)

In the case of E who had a productive activity through volunteering, he recognized that his activity was socially meaningful, showing strong pride. It leads to high satisfaction in the sense that his role is still helpful to the society despite the economic constraints of old age.

Satisfaction is high. Looking back, it is hard work, there is an economic issue and there is time to go strict against myself but there is a bigger dimension. That is what satisfaction is to me. (E)

Meanwhile, in the cases of I and J who help family members through unpaid housework and grandchild care-giving, their life satisfaction in old age was relatively lower than others. Although they considered their care taking of grandchildren as a meaningful activity, I chose the past over the present as more satisfying, and J thought her younger time was happier than the present.

My satisfaction level is 60%. Without a doubt, it was the best when I was working full time. That time was the best. It was hard work of course. It was hard but I felt the most vibrant that time. I think one feels most happy when he or she works in a society and determines his or her own way of living. (I)

The interview result of older people shows their life satisfaction varies due to the pattern of the productive activity they

have in old age rather than individual features such as education background or economic situation. According to statistical analysis, the type of productive activity was an important factor, but according to qualitative analysis, the independence and value provision during the process of determination of their participation were more important than the type of their productive activity. People with spontaneity and positive meaning in their current productive activities showed higher life satisfaction than others. The satisfaction in old age was found to be low when having lower pride or accomplishment in current activities than those before old age. On the contrary, the satisfaction level was found to be high when a positive evaluation of a current activity was greater than one in the past. However, there seems to be an important function by the central value of Japanese society behind this spontaneity or value provision. This is illustrated by the mainstream perspectives of the younger generation who emphasize productivity is equal to a monetary value, and by evaluation systems both official and unofficial behaviors based on social recognition and stereotyped gender role perceptions.

V. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study anatomized the situation of older people in Japan by using the concept of 'productive aging' discussed in the sociology of aging. There was found to be a difference according to the pattern of productive activities and the value provision of those activities through the in-depth interviews conducted in several categories of productive activities.

Similar to the results of past studies, this study showed that productive aging was depicted differently according to underlying characteristics of older people, socio-demographic factors, and resource systems. However, this study also showed that value provision played an important role in explaining why and how

older people under various situations participate in various activities that led to life satisfaction in old age.

Among the interviewees, there were people who said their life satisfaction in old age was lower than that of their active working age. There was a tendency that older people (engaged in unofficial and unpaid productive activities like housework and family care-giving) showed lower life satisfaction than those involved in other activities. Satisfaction depended on the definition and recognition of productive activities by the individual.

In the recognition of old age, one's role behavior does matter. The role behavior of older people is realized by various life activities. They participate in various activities while expecting their old age to appear as a desirable image. However, the desirable image of old age recognized by them is likely to be in accordance with the value emphasized by society. There is a close relation between the social value and the concept of 'productive aging' in that older people personally try to give meaning to activities that are associated with positive social values.

The results of previous studies show that the appearance of a productive old age varies depending on the basic characteristics, social variables, and resource systems of older people. However, it is understood that inside the appearance, why and how older people participate in such activities under various situations is associated with the value placed on their old age that leads to life satisfaction in old age.

This study of older people in Japan confirms that the value of 'productive aging' functions very importantly in the formation of the life world of older people and is expected to increase in the future. In addition, socio-economic and family structure factors combined with a sense of duty for the family make the demonstration of 'productive aging' more complex, sending it in various forms from country to country. In future research and policy making related to older people, it is important to pay attention to

the life world of older people around the concept of 'productive aging' and a comparison of the situation and mechanism of 'productive aging' with other countries will provide suggestions for the future of older people in Korea.

In light of the original purpose of this study to better understand aging issues in Korea and to form a research base to deal with a 'productive old age' in a comprehensive manner, the outcome of this study are summarized in several points as follows.

First, as older people in Japan recognize the social burden due to the decrease of social productivity with aging progressing, the value of a 'productive old age' is being realized in an independent manner in their life world. The older people in this study are well aware of socially-discussed aging and a support burden for older people, and view that their activities contribute to the reduction of the negative images of older people ('not burdensome to others'). This point is similar to the case of Korea that shows a high rate of economic activity by older people and active social participation compared to other countries. Due to the social need to be productive by older people in Korea and combined with the personal desire for independence, the value of a 'productive old age' will form an important principle in the construction of a comprehensive old age in the future.

Second, it is likely that Korea and Japan will show a disparity in terms of the mechanism of participation behind the 'productive old age' realized by productive activity participation. For older people in Japan, it was found that participation in productive activities and key influencing factors of their life satisfaction come from an independent assessment rather than from the outside world in forming their life world. This seems to result from possible economic independence thanks to their pension-backed stable living conditions closely affecting the relation with their children. In reality, the interviewed older people maintained a very independent relation with their children in terms of

economic, emotional, and instrumental support which are often discussed in studies on the relation with children. In the Korean case where the old age living is usually formed in a close relation with family members, the mechanism behind the participation in productive activities and positive factors of life satisfaction are likely to result from recognition and support from people nearby and family members.

This study is the beginning of research that examines the specificity and generality of productive aging by analyzing the life world of older people in Japan, where 'productive aging' is projected as a central value, in a comparative sociological perspective.

Further comparative research on productive old age in older people in Korea and Japan is suggested as a means to establish a platform to deal with the concept of productive old age in a comprehensive manner that will help better understand aging problems in Korea.

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