

CHAPTER 12

Exchange and Reciprocity Among Two Generations of Japanese and American Women

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The purpose of this chapter is to explore exchange patterns and exchange rules of social support for older persons in two vastly different cultures. We examine them by focusing on the relationships between two generations of women, older women and their adult daughters and daughters-in-law, in the United States and in Japan. Mother/daughter relationships in the United States and mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships in Japan have been traditionally considered vital sources of support for older women. Consequently, these relationships have a significant impact on their well-being and adjustment to aging. Furthermore, given the large proportion of the elderly's social interactions which take place within the family and the central role of women in kinship networks in both societies, it is particularly appropriate to focus on these relationships in addressing primary rules of support exchange in old age.

We explore here the exchange of support between two generations of women by focusing on the concept of *reciprocity*. We believe that the norm of reciprocity governs how individuals accept and provide social support and that reciprocal relationships contribute in complex but important ways to successful aging in both the United States and Japan. To examine this, we begin with a consideration of the concept of reciprocity and its manifestations in the two societies. We then present relevant data from three studies conducted in the United States and Japan. The differences in the intergenerational roles of women and the patterns of support exchange offer interesting insights into how the norm of reciprocity operates in the two societies. The data, from very different sources, suggest that the concepts of exchange and reciprocity are vital parts of the lives of these women, but operate in strikingly different ways in the two societies. Finally, the

data also offer evidence that gradual changes in exchange rules are taking place in both societies.

THE RECIPROCITY NORM OF SUPPORT EXCHANGE

Our definition of the term *reciprocity* is most consistent with that proposed by Alvin Gouldner (1960) in his early, seminal article on the norm of reciprocity. By the term reciprocity, we refer to equal or comparable exchanges of tangible aid, affection, advice or information between individuals or groups. This limited definition is generally accepted without controversy, referring simply to the notion of exchange, that is, of giving and receiving.

The past two decades have witnessed growing interest in support exchange and reciprocity in gerontology. Earlier, James Dowd (1975, 1984) suggested that the norms of reciprocity, beneficence and other social exchange notions are critical to an understanding of the status of the elderly in the United States. His central argument is that old age includes a necessary reduction in the possession of valued exchange commodities. This decrease in valued resources results in a lessened ability of older people to interact successfully with younger people who do have valued resources and who like to seek valued commodities from others.

Gary Lee (1985) has extended the work of Dowd by considering intergenerational supportive interactions and their consequences for the well-being of older persons within the context of social exchange theory. For example, referring to the study of Brody, Johnson, Fulcomer and Lang (1983) on attitudes of three generations of American women toward the care of older parents, he notes that older people are often unwilling to accept the support offered by their children. Lee argues that studies of informal support networks have ignored the tremendous value placed on independence and autonomy by the American elderly. Older persons, even if they really need help, are often hesitant to accept it if they feel unable to reciprocate. Unbalanced exchange relations which develop dependence could have seriously detrimental psychological or emotional consequences. "Thus while older people may experience many concrete benefits from the services their children and other kin provide, and while these benefits may be instrumental in maintaining their quality of life, ironically the receipt of these benefits may detract from their quality of life in other ways" (G. Lee 1985:31).

In Japan, the norm of reciprocity has also been demonstrated as a useful frame of reference for understanding social behaviors (Befu 1986; Lebra 1986). For example, the concept of *on*, which refers to a favor or benevolence granted by A to B and to a resultant debt B owes to A, is clearly defined in terms of reciprocity. *On* has had its root in the Japanese culture for at least several hundred years. It still permeates almost every area of contemporary Japanese society and has played a pivotal role in explaining various social relations in Japan (Bethel 1992; Lebra 1986; Reischauer 1977). Every individual owes limitless *on* to his or her parents for life, for care received, and, therefore, for what he or she is today. Thus, one is compelled to attempt to repay even a small portion of this debt throughout one's lifetime. For many Japanese, this urge to repay the *on* to their parents is a steady source of drive for lifelong achievements. "Successful" employer-employee relationships in Japan are also bound by the sense of *on*, in which *on*-governed employees show persistent loyalty and devotion to their father-figure employer.

Furthermore, the Japanese language is rich in a vocabulary of words which expresses one's indebtedness to another. One example is *sumimasen*, which literally means "I have not cleared off the debt" but is widely used to mean "I am sorry." The frequent use of those words in daily conversation distinctively indicates the cultural emphasis on the reciprocity norm in Japan.

However, it is not clear that the same reciprocity norms which Dowd and Lee have observed among the American elderly can be applied to the support exchange among the Japanese elderly as well. In the following sections we examine this question based on the empirical data from three studies, each of which provides information about the intergenerational support exchange between older women and their daughters or daughters-in-law. In particular, we attempt to identify and compare how the reciprocity norms operate in these intergenerational relationships and how the norms differentially affect the adjustment to aging in the two societies.

RECIPROCITY AND EXCHANGE: RECENT FINDINGS

The first study was originally conceived as a cross-cultural comparative study of the rules for support exchange among family members in the United States and Japan (Akiyama 1984). The study explored how people in the two societies exchange six kinds of basic interpersonal resources (i.e., money, goods, services, information, status and love) with their family members and what the underlying rules of exchange behaviors are. There were two parts to this study. The first part involved a questionnaire about the views of female college students on resource exchanges in various dyadic family relations at different stages of the lifecourse. The second part consisted of in-depth interviews with older women focusing on the rules and rationales which explain their resource exchanges with family members.

In the initial part of the study, approximately 500 college students in each country were asked how likely people are to engage in a certain kind of resource exchange with a family member. The central question here was, what do people give and receive in the family? A respondent was presented with six hypothetical exchange situations, in each of which a family member X (e.g., daughter of age 45) gives one of six resources (e.g., services) to another family member (e.g., mother of age 70). Each situation was followed by fifteen pairs of statements, where each statement described the behavior of Y reciprocating X with a certain resource. Two different resources were paired in those statements. Because there were six classes of resources, fifteen pairs allowed for the combination of each resource with every other one. The respondent was asked to choose from each pair the statement which was more likely to be observed in actual family settings.

Analyses of these data from the two countries identified two distinct exchange patterns. College students in Japan reported that the exchange of different kinds of resources (e.g., money and love) was quite common in the family, whereas American college students reported that they were more likely to exchange similar resources (e.g., money and money) rather than different kinds of resources. Specifically, compared with the United States, expressive resources such as love and status are granted a much broader range of exchangeability in Japan. They can be exchanged not only with other expressive resources but also with material resources such as money and goods. Material

resources and expressive resources are unlikely to be exchanged for one another in the United States.

We examined family dyads relevant to this chapter and asked what the appropriate response might be to the receipt of various resources in mother (age 70)/daughter (age 45) and mother/daughter-in-law dyads at similar ages. In both types of dyads, the Japanese were considerably more likely than their American counterparts to feel that love or status was the appropriate resource to reciprocate with, regardless of type of resources originally received. Americans were significantly more likely to feel that the exchange of similar resources was appropriate. Thus, the Japanese might report that when mother-in-law received services from daughter-in-law, she was likely to reciprocate with love and/or status, but Americans were likely to feel that the appropriate response would be reciprocating with the same resource, that is, services.

The in-depth interviews of 32 elderly Japanese and 30 American women replicated the findings from the questionnaire study. In the interviews the respondents were given hypothetical exchange situations involving older women and their daughters or daughters-in-law and asked whether or not the exchange would be typical, appropriate, fair and emotionally satisfying. A content analysis of the interviews with those 62 older women identified two exchange rules distinctive to each of the two family systems, and evidence for more acceptability of elderly dependence in the Japanese system than in the American system.

Analysis of these interviews suggests that the American family system prescribes one exchange rule, symmetrical reciprocity, which mandates repayment by a resource in kind and of equivalent value in a relatively short time period. This American rule suppresses one-way transactions characterized by the failure of equivalent repayment and thereby reduces the development of dependence which not only embarrasses a debtor but may also disrupt the relationship between a debtor and a donor. When one cannot maintain reciprocity, it leads to the disturbance of stable relationships. Even in casual exchanges of services or goods between mother and daughter (also between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law), reciprocity needs to be carefully maintained in order to secure a good relationship.

The following responses in the interviews with older American women demonstrate such characteristics of the American exchange rule. Receiving a small gift from her daughter-in-law, a woman said, "Of course, I would accept it with love and a thank you. But I would also find a way to return a gift. You can't always accept without giving." Given a hypothetical situation in which a married daughter came a couple of times to do some chores around the house when her mother had a bad cold, another woman responded by saying, "If that happened to me, I would offer my daughter some kind of help such as staying with her children when she and her husband go out. I would feel better if I could reciprocate, even though I know my daughter is not expecting anything in return for what she does for me. Just receiving would hurt my spirit . . . or pride, you know. Reciprocity is very important even between mothers and daughters."

The following case of a seventy-two-year-old American respondent, a retired store clerk, exemplifies how the same exchange rule operates in a somewhat more deprived situation. Mrs. B. had been living in a small midwestern city for the past 50 years. She raised thirteen children there. All of them have completed college and are doing quite well. She proudly showed their pictures to the interviewer, pointing out who is a

physician, accountant, teacher, rancher's wife, and so on. She is now widowed and living alone in a one-room converted garage apartment. Due to severe arthritis and heart problems, she is confined to a wheelchair and requires help in daily domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. During the interview, a volunteer of the local meals-on-wheels program delivered a hot lunch. She repeatedly apologized for the mess of her apartment.

After completing the interview, she pointed to one of the shoe boxes piled up in a corner of the room and asked the interviewer to open it. In the box, there was a stack of uncashed checks sent from the woman's children, along with birthday cards and Christmas cards. She was tickled to report that, on her birthday a couple of years before, the children surprised her by presenting a blueprint of a small house designed for a wheelchair-bound person. She was also amazed how creative her daughters and daughters-in-law were in making excuses for bringing "leftover" food and for offering to scrub the floor and to do other household chores because they needed the exercise or wanted to lose weight. She had gratefully declined to accept all these offers. She said she would not feel comfortable accepting a gift or favor when she could not reciprocate. Even if she sometimes experienced inconvenience or scarcity of resources, she preferred living this way.

As shown in such interview cases, the American women appear to apply basically the same exchange rule, that is, symmetric reciprocity, to both daughters and daughters-in-law. This finding is also supported by a national survey study of social support of older persons in the United States (Kahn and Antonucci 1980; Antonucci and Akiyama 1987) in which detailed data were collected on the exchange of six types of support: confiding, reassurance, respect, sick care, talk when upset and talk about health. Respondents over age 50 were asked to provide specific information about who they provided each type of support to and from whom they received each type of support. Focusing on support exchanges between older women and their daughters and daughters-in-law, an analysis revealed a quite similar exchange pattern in the two types of family dyads. The older respondents reported they *exchanged* supports and maintained reciprocal relationships with both their daughters and daughters-in-law. In general, however, they were much more likely to exchange supports with their daughters than daughters-in-law. In other words, the support exchanges in those two family dyads in the United States differ in frequency or quantity but they appear to be quite similar in terms of the exchange rule.

By contrast, the Japanese family system applies two clearly distinct exchange rules for family members and for non-family members. The rule for family members is asymmetric reciprocity wherein expressive resources hold high value and broad exchangeability. On the other hand, the rule for non-family members is one of symmetry and equal exchange within a prescribed time period. The latter is similar to the American rule. The single exchange rule in the United States and the double rules in Japan may derive from the different family structures in the two countries. A nuclear family, defined as the favored basic unit of organized relationships in the American family system, usually forms strong bonds with its close kin through frequent contacts and mutual aid. Thus, a kin network emerges, which has been conceptualized as the "modified extended family." It assumes equal partnership and autonomy and often results in strong collateral relationships among members (Sussman 1976).

The traditional Japanese family system, however, has the stem-family structure in which descent and inheritance pass from the father to the eldest son. The eldest son

remains in the family home with his wife and offspring, while younger sons form branch houses. In such stem-family systems, “family members” consist of the members of a three-generation stem household and its branch households. Others are regarded as “non-family members.” The fact that in Japan, family and non-family are formally defined may be particularly relevant here. For an older woman, her daughter-in-law is a formal family member and the mother and daughter-in-law relationship is completely governed by family member rules. However, again formally speaking, her married daughter is no longer considered to be a family member. Since the married daughter formally belongs to her husband’s family, the mother and daughter relationship is expected to abide by the non-family exchange rule.

The exchange rule for family members in Japan prescribes repayment for virtually any type of resource by an expressive resource. Repayment with a material resource in the family is often perceived to imply distance or even insult toward the exchange partner. Resource exchanges governed by such exchange rules are both diffuse and lacking in specificity in terms of equivalence of return within a specific time period. Reciprocity involving expressive resources is difficult to recognize, because love and status are not always quantifiable. Due to this unquantifiable nature of expressive resources, one can never feel the debt is completely discharged.



Image 12.1
A ninety-year-old grandmother with her two-year-old and one-month-old granddaughters.

This indeterminateness of debt discharge was demonstrated by interviews on mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, in which older women reported that they were uncertain of fairness when they repaid their daughters-in-laws' services with love and/or status, although they considered such exchanges to be quite common, appropriate and satisfying. With a certain amount of ambiguity as to whether the debt has been repaid, one is never free psychologically from the obligation to reciprocate with more expressive resources such as affection and appreciation. Before one debt can be repaid, more material resources are usually received, so that the recipient can easily be placed in a *perpetual debtor* position in which one must be continually vigilant for another repayment opportunity.

Therefore, it is quite common that resource exchanges in the Japanese family are carried out over time. A classic example is the repayment by adult children to their aged parents for what they received as dependent children many decades before. Furthermore, under certain circumstances where direct repayment within a dyad is difficult or inappropriate, a third party, sometimes fourth and fifth ones, could be involved as an intermediary of resource exchanges. More than a few older Japanese women reported in the interviews that, in repaying the devoted services of a daughter-in-law, it was more effective to address affection toward grandchildren than to address it directly to the daughter-in-law. However, it should be noted that these daily family interactions are not usually perceived as a flow of resource exchanges. The prevalence of these long-term indirect exchanges among the Japanese is another factor which contributes diffuseness to the Japanese family exchange rule. Such diffuseness and indeterminateness of the Japanese exchange rule acts as a mechanism that inhibits complete repayment, thus maintaining indebtedness and dependence. It consequently serves to regulate and sustain family solidarity based upon dependence.

The following case exemplifies how the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship works in a typical working-class family residing in an urban area of Japan. Mrs. M. is a relatively healthy seventy-one-year-old widow who is living with her son, a taxi driver, and his family in a small, four-room house in a suburban community outside of Tokyo. She shares a room with her granddaughter. On typical days, she gets up at 5:30, sweeps around the house, and waters the shrubs. Her daughter-in-law calls the family to breakfast when it is ready. After breakfast Mrs. M. usually goes to a local senior citizen center. She told the interviewer that since she started going to the center, the amount of family dissension, particularly between herself and her daughter-in-law, had significantly decreased. "Our house is too small for two women," she said. On her way to the center, she often buys some candies or fruits to share with her friends at the center. "I receive 100,000 yen [about \$1,000] yearly from the government. Although the amount is small, having my own money is something new. My mother never had any money of her own. I can buy snacks to take to the center and can occasionally give my grandchildren extra spending money. It is a really good feeling to have my own money," she said with a smile. She spends most of her time at the senior citizen center talking with her regular group of friends and participating in a few of the activity programs such as folk dancing and doll making. Her favorite part of day is soaking herself, along with her friends, in a hot tub which is heated by the city garbage. After dinner, she usually helps her daughter-in-law clean up the table and watches television with her grandchildren.

In her household, as in those of most women interviewed, the daughter-in-law does most of the domestic chores. Mrs. M. helps, as expected, whenever she is needed. A couple of years before the interview, she had surgery to remove blood clots in her leg. During the entire period of hospitalization and recuperation at home, her daughter-in-law spent countless hours caring for her. She has reciprocated these hours of service by her daughter-in-law with appreciation and praise. She always tells her neighbors, friends and relatives how caring and diligent her *yome* (daughter-in-law) is and how happy she is to have such a wonderful *yome*. Responding to a question of whether or not she might have reciprocated her daughter-in-law's services in any other way, she said she had never thought of giving a gift or doing something special for her. "She [daughter-in-law] enjoys her reputation of being an ideal *yome*. The good reputation and respect from others, not a piece of jewelry or clothes, are the most rewarding things you get from your hard work, I think," she added.

While resource exchanges between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are prescribed by the family exchange rule, a married daughter is formally defined as non-family and the mother-daughter relationship is expected to be governed by the non-family exchange rule. In fact, women reported in the interviews that it is not *common* in Japan for a married daughter to provide her mother with services. The daughter is expected to maintain certain distance from her "parent family" as a measure of her respect for the wife of the brother with whom her parents live. It is not appropriate for a mother to visit her married daughter to provide help, either. This is particularly true for the daughter who lives with her parents-in-law, although it is becoming more acceptable for a mother to visit and help married daughters who are not living with their in-laws. The relationship between mothers and daughters in Japan has been undergoing substantial change during the past few decades. It is now more acceptable to provide each other with some degree of support beyond that traditionally prescribed.

Interestingly, and perhaps indicative of a new trend, the exchange rules for such informal transactions between mothers and married daughters have not been clearly defined. It appears to be common and acceptable for a mother to reciprocate her married daughter's minor services, if she receives any, only with affection and/or respect. However, when the daughter provides a considerable amount of services such as spending several days caring for her sick mother, the mother is likely to reciprocate with a material gift to both her daughter and her daughter's family in acknowledgment of her services and the patience of her family for the inconvenience caused by her absence. On the other hand, a mother would not reciprocate her daughter-in-law's services with a similar material gift, because the mother and daughter-in-law belong to the same family. It is considered *mizukusai* (lack of intimacy) to reciprocate any kind of resource with material resources such as goods and money within the family.

Similar revisions of the traditional exchange rules in the Japanese family system have been observed in the transaction of goods between mothers and married daughters. Gift giving among non-family members is a minor institution in Japan, with complex rules defining who should give to whom, what occasions require a gift, what sort of gift is appropriate on a given occasion and how the gift should be presented (Befu 1986). It has been the custom for a mother and her married daughter or, in a more restricted sense, their families to exchange gifts on specified occasions. Such gift exchanges are strictly governed by the rule of symmetric reciprocity. Besides such formal gift giving, more

informal transactions of goods between mothers and daughters are now becoming increasingly common. In the interviews, the older Japanese women reported receiving small gifts such as a box of their favorite candies, kitchen scissors or a new hairbrush from their daughters. Those gifts were often given without the knowledge of the daughter's husband and in-laws. Unlike formal gift exchanges, both mothers and daughters seem to apply the exchange rules for family members to such informal gift giving. It is most appropriate for a mother to reciprocate such small gifts only with affection and appreciation.

Clearly, the mother/daughter relationship in Japan is undergoing transition. The trend is that mothers and daughters are choosing to maintain continuously close relationships and frequent support exchanges as family members even after the daughter's marriage. It is obvious that such changes in the mother/daughter relationship are affecting the current mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. This is demonstrated in the findings from a third set of data which compared the family relations of two groups of older Japanese women, those who live in three-generation households and those who live independently from their children. We can see here the direction of future changes in family exchange relationships in Japan. In this study (Campbell and Brody 1985), two groups of women were compared: (1) a joint-living group composed of 128 mothers-in-law and 136 daughters-in-law and (2) a separate-living group of 136 mothers and their daughters. About 80 percent of the older women living with their sons and daughters-in-law also had daughters living separately. The findings reported here pertain to the older women's relationships with their daughters and the younger women's relationships with their mothers.

When asked about visits within the past month, women living apart from their children report both paying more visits to and receiving more visits from their children than did those living in joint households. Consistent with the discussion above, mothers appear reluctant to visit their daughters who are living in joint households. Only 9 percent of daughters living with the husband's parents report receiving visits from their own mothers, as compared to 31 percent of daughters living separately. However, it is important to note that over half the women living in joint households were visited by their own daughters within the past month. The women living in joint households are, on the average, older than those living separately and perhaps would have more difficulty going out to visit their daughters. That many of them receive visits from their daughters demonstrates the diminution of traditional norms of distance between households.

Yuzawa (1994) writes that the weakening of the *ie* system has led to married women feeling more comfortable about visiting their parents as often as they like. He reports that a 1990 survey conducted by the Economic Planning Agency found that 38 percent of women in their twenties thought of their mothers as the person who understood them best, underlining the strong mother/daughter bond which continues through the daughter's marriage. A five-nation comparative survey on the frequency of contact with children living separately, conducted by the Management and Coordination Agency in 1990, showed that contact between elderly parents and their children living separately was less common in Japan than in Britain, Germany or the United States. However, 61.5 percent of older people in Japan reported that they had contact with their children living separately at least once or twice a month. Although the traditional structure of

intergenerational relationships still carries considerable force in Japan, the more “natural,” affective ties seem to be gaining in strength.

In the area of gift giving, there is somewhat more gift exchange reported by women living separately. The exchanges of food and clothing are high and relatively equal between the two groups, supporting the findings from the previous study that informal exchanges between mothers and daughters in joint-living households are gaining in frequency. A striking difference appears when daughters are asked if they have had dinner with their mothers within the past month. Forty-four percent of those living separately reported having had dinner with their mothers as compared to only 9 percent of those living with their husband’s parents.

The question of living arrangements came up frequently in interviews with both generations. Although the majority of older Japanese live with their children, the percentage of those over age 65 living separately has increased from 13 percent in 1960 to 41 percent in 1994 (Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1994). Furthermore, recent surveys indicate that Japanese of all ages view living separately as a reasonable option when the older couple is healthy. As older persons become ill or widowed, they are more likely to prefer living together with children. Overall, although the Japanese seem to be widening the boundaries of what is possible, the staying power of traditional patterns of support exchange, despite modernization, is remarkable.

EXCHANGE RULES AND AGING

From an exchange theory perspective, the problems of aging are essentially problems of decreasing exchange commodities. Older people as a statistical aggregate suffer from lower income and poorer health than younger people. Consequently, they are physically and financially limited in entering into exchange situations. They might not be able to afford to exchange holiday gifts with children and grandchildren in the way they used to do, or to watch grandchildren in return for the help which they receive from their daughters or daughters-in-law. This is particularly true for the very old. Many of them have very little of any instrumental value to exchange.

How do the exchange rules affect the support relationships of older persons in the two societies? As described in the previous section, the American rule is characterized as symmetric reciprocity, which prescribes repayment by a resource in kind and of equivalent value within a relatively short time period. Under this rule, faced with diminishing instrumental resources, the American elderly would find it difficult to repay with resources in kind in order to maintain reciprocal relationships. There is a widespread fear that the failure of equivalent repayment develops dependency. On the contrary, the exchange rule in the Japanese family prescribes repayment by an expressive resource regardless of the kind of resource received. Since expressive resources are essentially inexhaustible for any individual, Japanese elderly are expected to be better able to cope with declining material resources by reciprocating with expressive resources.

Thus, due to their exchange rules, American elderly seem to have more difficulty than their Japanese counterparts in adjusting to their decreased material resources. How do American elderly cope with this difficulty? There are several observations and explanations for adjustments in exchange behaviors as well as exchange rules which

older Americans make as they age. For example, it is commonly observed that older individuals withdraw from exchange situations. This is clearly considered to be a coping strategy in which older persons still maintain the norm of reciprocity and simply choose not to enter exchange situations to prevent nonreciprocal relationships when they do not have resources to reciprocate.

Other explanations indicate modifications of exchange rules applied to older people. Antonucci's (1990) concept of a Social Support Bank seeks to explain support exchanges across the life span and help clarify the reciprocity issue in old age. The notion of a Social Support Bank emphasizes the enduring aspect of interpersonal relationships and long-term reciprocity in a continuing series of exchanges of support in close relationships. It suggests that individuals utilize a generalized accounting system in the supportive exchanges they experience. That is, they maintain a mental record of how much and to whom they have provided supports as well as how much and from whom they have received supports. This accounting system is thought to be informal and, for the most part, a cognitive activity conducted with little conscious attention on the part of the individual. This cognitive support account can be considered analogous to an individually maintained savings account at a local bank. One can think of the Support Bank account in a similar fashion, as an attempt to "save up for a rainy day." One strives to maintain, at minimum, a balance between what is deposited and what is withdrawn, but the development of a support reserve, which can be drawn on in time of need, is optimal. Thus, one is motivated to provide support to people in close relationships. These essentially constitute deposits.

On the other hand, receiving support from others is similar to making withdrawals from one's savings account. In time of need, one can rest assured, at least if deposits have been made in the past and interest accumulated, that support will be available. It is conceivable that, with diminishing exchange commodities, older people (and probably their social network members as well) come to emphasize this long-term reciprocity notion of a Social Support Bank and define their support exchange by this norm. Therefore, they can receive a great deal of support from others who are close and important, potentially for an extended period of time, and yet feel relatively unindebted.

James Dowd argues that a completely different rule governs the exchange of social support involving older people, particularly the very old who are largely limited in resources. Even in this contract-oriented society of reciprocity, noncontractual elements are not completely absent. No longer bound by the norm of reciprocity, older people are entitled to benefit by the norm of beneficence. "The norm of beneficence requires individuals to give others help as they need and without thought of what they have done or can do for them" (1984: 103). It is acceptable, in other words that the very old receive more than they are owed under the norm of reciprocity. These observations and explanations are obviously not exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Today's old-old population lives in an uncharted territory in terms of behavioral norms.

SOCIAL CHANGES AND EXCHANGE RULES

Both American and Japanese societies have been undergoing substantial changes in many aspects. Demography, social systems, values and norms are changing. Some of the changes are common to the two countries. The others are more country-specific. In this

final section of the chapter, we consider how social changes affect the intergenerational exchange rules in the two countries, focusing on changes in societal age structure, family structure, distribution of wealth and women's social roles.

The past several decades have witnessed dramatic increases in life expectancy. People not only live longer but also stay relatively healthy longer. Also, economic statistics indicate that the current elderly population is better off compared with previous cohorts. These historical changes in the health and economic status of the older population mean that the current cohort of older people, particularly the young-old (aged 60–70), have more exchange commodities (i.e., money, goods and services) than their predecessors. In fact, the statistical profile of the intergenerational transfer of wealth in the United States indicates a significant increase in the flow of wealth from older persons to their offspring during the past decade (Soldo and Hill 1993). Such resource increase has allowed contemporary older Americans to maintain reciprocal relationships until more advanced ages than their preceding cohorts.

At the same time, however, the lengthening life span has resulted in a rapid growth of the old-old (aged 80+) population who tend to have fewer exchange commodities. Today a large number of very old people live with few valued commodities for many years. This segment of the population is expected to continue to grow in both countries. As noted earlier, the traditional American exchange rules of symmetric reciprocity often hinder the old-old from maintaining their social relations, because they may not have appropriate resources to reciprocate in exchange. Currently, there appear to be no rules commonly accepted to apply to support exchanges involving an older individual in this familiar situation. The old-old and those who associate with them are applying whatever rules (e.g., immediate reciprocity, long-term reciprocity, benevolence, etc.) which, they think, work best for a particular exchange situation. The two parties involved in the exchange might not necessarily apply the same rule. Such exchange may leave awkwardness, hurt feelings and/or resentment in the relationship. Thus, the lack of rules guiding exchange behavior can be detrimental to older persons' social relations and consequently to their well-being.

The living situations of American families are also changing, influenced by the increased longevity, socioeconomic status and cultural norms. Most older Americans strongly prefer to live alone or with a spouse if economically or physically feasible. With the increased longevity of most Americans, a two-stage process appears to be evolving wherein the young-old live alone in their own homes until such time as they are no longer physically able. At that time they are likely to move closer to or in with an adult child, most often a daughter and her family. A smaller number of older people enter a skilled care facility.

With increased home care services, day care and care management, older Americans will be living longer in the community and entering institutional care at a much more advanced age. Already, adult children spend more years caring for their parents than they did for their children. The issue of reciprocity and support exchange will become even more important in the future, complicated by the large number of women in the work force and the divorce rate and questions of responsibility for parents of former spouses as well as present ones.

Compared with the American exchange rules, the traditional Japanese rules are more accommodating to the reduction of material resources in old age. However, other aspects

of social change have been slowly but irreversibly undermining the Japanese exchange rules. First, the transformation of family structure has had indisputable effects on people's exchange behavior. A review of the Japanese census data over the past several decades suggests that older persons' living arrangements have become increasingly diversified. Three trends are particularly pertinent to our topic. First, as noted earlier, the number of older persons who live independently of their children has been steadily rising (see Figure 10.1, Jenike 1997). Second, the number of people who live with their married daughters instead of sons is increasing, although the number is still relatively small. Third, it is becoming more common to maintain semi-independent households even if three generations of family live under one roof. Many recently built or remodeled houses for three-generation families have two sections, each of which has a main entrance, kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms. They often have separate utility meters. The two units may be built side-by-side under one roof and connected by a door or hallway; or one unit may be on the first floor and the other on the second. This growing trend of nontraditional living arrangements makes the boundary between family and non-family less clear. It also often creates ambiguous exchange settings which make it more difficult to apply customary exchange norms, either the rules for family members or those for non-family members. Japanese families are experiencing these situations without clearly defined alternatives.

This flexibility in living arrangements seems designed to minimize the conflict inherent in the traditional situation, particularly between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. One young man described how his family built an annex onto their house where his parents and sister lived. He and his grandmother continued to live in the main house, easing the tension between his grandmother and his mother. As one middle-aged woman described it, "I have one daughter. On the same land, I built two houses. We live separately. We do everything separately... meals, bath" (Elliott and Campbell 1993). When family relationships are so tied to living arrangements, the road to change for strained exchange rules is to alter the structure of the living situation.

Moreover, as Jenike shows in Chapter 10 (see Sokolovsky's 2nd Edition 1997), a marked increase in women's labor force participation has brought a powerful addition to women's social roles. This additional role has affected women and their families' lives in various ways. It certainly has fostered obligations which compete with duties toward family. It has considerably reduced women's time and energy that used to be available for providing services to family. Yet, probably more significant is a shift in the relative importance among women's social roles. Today, a woman who is successfully juggling her career and motherhood generally gets more respect than a diligent *yome* (daughter-in-law) who stays home and cares for her frail in-laws. Consequently, being an ideal *yome* does not give a woman as much status as it did in the past. In other words, an inexhaustible expressive resource (praise for being a good *yome*) which older women have been using for generations to reciprocate for services from their daughters-in-law is gradually losing its exchange value. At the same time, similar to their American counterparts, the Japanese young-old are healthier and financially better off compared with the preceding cohorts. It means they have more material resources such as money, goods and services, which provide them with alternatives and flexibility when facing uncharted exchange situations.

Parallel to these changes has been the growth of community services such as adult day care, home helpers and private retirement centers for people with means. The Golden Plan, adopted by the Japanese government in 1989, proposed a ten-year strategy to greatly increase the availability of medical and social services both in the community and in institutional care. The acceptance of these services has increased along with their availability. Furthermore, a proposal for a national long-term-care insurance system by the government has gained wide support from political parties and the general public (Jenike 1997). However, monetary compensation for services provided by family members is certainly a novel concept in the tradition of Japanese family relations. These community services and the widespread debate on a national long-term-care insurance system have contributed additional force to the pressure to alter exchange situations and rules.

Today, in the United States and Japan, older persons often encounter exchange situations in which they find it difficult to apply the conventional exchange rules. Both Americans and Japanese appear to keenly recognize the urgency of a transformation in their respective family exchange patterns and are searching for customs more suitable to the “aging society” within its distinctive sociocultural contexts. Such changes will affect the well-being of virtually all members of the societies where over eight out of ten newborns are expected to live to old age.