THE M-SHAPED DILEMMA: LIFE STRATEGIES AND FERTILITY TRENDS AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN[1]

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This study examines women's fertility and life strategies in relation to older family members in contemporary Japan, a country with extremely low fertility. It focuses on suburban working women of reproductive age who already have at least one child. This study uses data collected in 2007 to investigate how the fertility of these women may be influenced by their mothers and/or mothers-in-law and how they obtain assistance from them. Questionnaire responses from 196 individuals provided quantitative results, which were interpreted with reference to qualitative data from interviews with 56 of these individuals. The quantitative data indicate that the working women's fertility is significantly associated with assistance from their natal mothers, but not their mothers-in-law. Qualitative analyses indicate that assistance from mothers-in-law is also valuable, but may be contingent on how much assistance they get from their natal mothers. These findings provide a new perspective on Japanese fertility and on possible future trends. (Japan, women, fertility, work, intergenerational kin assistance)

Demographic transition theory primarily explains the effects that socioeconomic development associated with modernization has on fertility (see Notestein 1977; Caldwell 1982). While this theory is based on socio-economic changes that have been associated with some Western societies, in large part it provides a logical explanation for fertility decline in Japan prior to the late 1970s. Despite an interruption during the Second World War, the modernization that initially began in Japan during the late nineteenth century has brought about numerous major cultural changes. The economy has shifted from an agrarian, kin-based system to an industrial, capitalistic mode of production, and Western concepts have permeated many aspects of society, especially the importance now placed on education as a means for achieving success. These changes have encouraged people to have fewer children. Japanese fertility has declined without the implementation of any coercive population control programs. In 1938 prior to World War II, the country's total fertility rate (TFR) was already 3.82 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 1987–1988), and it rapidly dropped to a replacement level of 2.1 by the late 1950s.[2] By this time, Japan had completely shifted from high to low fertility. The TFR remained relatively stable for the next 15 years.

Similar to some European countries, Japan has experienced further fertility reduction since the mid-1970s. By the early 1990s, the Japanese TFR had become one of the lowest in the world (Klitsch 1994), reaching 1.26 in 2005. Demographic transition theory does not adequately account for such extremely low fertility rates; it only implies that fertility will eventually stabilize around the replacement level. Today, many post-demographic transition societies have TFRs below the replacement level (Bongaarts 2001). Although scholars have recently attempted to explain such low rates by looking

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at features shared among highly modernized Western countries, some features characteristic of these countries also vary considerably (van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995). Though an Asian country, contemporary Japan is also consistent with this variation, exhibiting several socio-cultural patterns that are unique to the society.

By focusing on Japan, this study contributes to our understanding of post-demographic transition phenomena. There has been interesting research on Japanese fertility (Hiramatsu 2007; Oyama 2006; Yu 2005), but it is important to focus on the aspects unique to Japanese fertility to more fully understand this behavior and its associated phenomena. The objective of this article is to examine the factors associated with relatively high fertility among working women of reproductive age, despite the country's extremely low fertility overall. A strength of the study reported here is that quantitative results are interpreted with reference to qualitative data. Particular emphasis is placed on the issue of how the high fertility of some women may relate to the availability of assistance from their older family members. Few studies in Japan have investigated how the behavior of adult individuals may be influenced by their older relatives (e.g., Kenjoh 2007; Sasaki 2002). This study explicitly explores how older family members relate to recent trends in Japanese fertility.

FERTILITY ISSUES IN JAPAN

Japan and post-demographic transitional Western countries reflect similar phenomena related to low fertility. One phenomenon is that people marry at a later age, and Japan is "one of the latest-marrying populations in the world" (Retherford et al. 2001). Late marriage is partly responsible for delayed parenthood and an increase in the probability of childlessness (van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995). As in some other countries, an increase in the number of women attending programs in higher education also contributes to late marriage in Japan (Retherford et al. 2001; Raymo and Iwasawa 2005). Between 1970 and 2000, the number of women who received two-year junior college or four-year university degrees increased from 18 to 49 percent (Raymo and Iwasawa 2005). Within the same time frame, the rate of first marriages for women aged 25 to 29 dropped from 250 to 120 per 1000.

Another phenomenon characteristic of Japan and other low fertility societies is an increase in female labor in the public sphere. Working outside the home limits the time and energy a woman has for domestic activities, which can promote a tendency for low fertility. In the past, Japanese women in the workforce worked primarily in family businesses (Ikemoto 2003; Shirahase 2007). In contrast, women's opportunities for being employed outside family business have recently increased, particularly since the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986. The law was revised in 1997 to enhance its effectiveness, further guaranteeing gender equality with respect to employment and promotion. The Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society enacted in 1999 was implemented to further promote this cause. As a result, at least in part, in 2000 less than 10 percent of working women were involved in family businesses at a time when the overall female labor force was 48.2 percent (see National Institute of Population and Society Security Research 2006).

While these phenomena are common in many post-transitional societies, there are some features that appear unique to Japan. First, despite an increase in the female workforce, the age-specific pattern of this participation shows a distinct M-shaped curve. This curve indicates that the public labor force of women increases from their teens to their late 20s, declines during their 30s, increases again in their 40s, and finally declines at a continuous rate from their 50s onward. This pattern suggests that Japanese women are less likely to be working between their late 20s and 30s, when they typically have infants and young children. For women aged 25 to 34, the Japanese labor force participation rates fall to between 60 and 65 percent, while those for the United States, Germany, and Finland fall to between 75 and 80 percent (Hiramatsu 2007). These Western countries also show a decline in female labor participation when women typically bear children, but their respective curves throughout the life course more closely resemble an upside-down U shape.

Over the past 20 years, especially after the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, the labor force participation of women in their 20s and 30s has tapered off (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2006:101). It is uncertain, however, whether the M-shaped pattern will diminish in the near future, as has been the case in Western countries such as Sweden, Germany, and the United States (Gender Equality Bureau 2007). One study indicates that close to 38 percent of the Japanese population (both men and women) favor the M-shaped pattern of female participation in the labor force. Close to 45 percent of women aged 20 and 39 interviewed in 2000 expressed contentment with this pattern (Kaneko 2003). This indicates the normative persistence of "the myth of three years old," which encourages the mother's care of a child until it is at least three years old (Hiramatsu 2007). Accordingly, a low level of the female labor force is especially pronounced for married women aged 25 to 34, those most likely to have young children. In 2004, their labor force participation was less than 50 percent, while that of single women in the same age bracket was around 90 percent (Kōseirōdōshō 2005; Iwama 2008).

This M-shaped pattern relates to the strong Japanese gender-based division of labor. Unlike some other post-industrialized societies, in Japan, women are expected to be responsible for most, if not all, of the household chores and members of the family (Ishii-Kuntz and Maryanski 2003; Iwama 2005). Therefore, for households with very young dependents, a woman's domestic load is comparatively high. The expectation of this role for women has coincided with the image of the company man (of the 1970s and early 1980s), who is expected to work hard and long hours for the company and have a wife who cares for the household (Hamada 2008). This image is embedded in Japanese society and has been used to justify a gender-based division of labor and a prevalence of gender discrimination with regard to hiring and promotion, especially in competitive workplaces.[3] The gender bias is consistent with the fact that the employment of married women is not positively associated with their education, a feature that is arguably distinct to Japan (Brinton et al. 1995; Brinton 2007; Choe et al. 2004; Kenjoh 2007). Even with women who have a university degree, their household responsibilities are expected to inhibit their competitiveness in the workplace. Consequently, a significant

portion of such women give up their professional pursuits and become dependent on their husbands for a comfortable income.

It should be noted that the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, aiming to guarantee gender equality, does not necessarily assure penalty-free institutional support for women who wish to take maternity and/or childcare leave. Also, the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society merely represents guidelines for companies to follow. But compliance with these guidelines is not monitored (Huen 2007). Consequently, for lack of sufficient institutional support women in the professional world often must limit their fertility (Mason 2001; McDonald 2000). Many companies and governmental offices have improved their work environment in the past two decades to be more "women/family friendly," (Rebick 2006), and as a result, a greater percentage of women are employed continuously today. Nevertheless, a belief persists that fertility-related leaves of absence often jeopardize a woman's ability to maintain her position or chances for promotion.

Japanese gender ideology has changed to some degree since the late 1980s. For example, nearly 70 percent of survey respondents in 1992 agreed with the statement, "a husband's place is at work, while a wife's place is in the home." By 2002, this number had fallen to 47 percent (Gender Equality Bureau 1992, 1997, 2002). The percentage of men and women with negative attitudes towards women in the workplace before or after marriage has declined from more than 40 and 25 percent respectively in 1972, to about 12 and 10 percent respectively in 2000 (Nakayama 2005). Despite these changes, gender specialization and the expectations regarding the domestic sphere have tended to remain relatively "traditional" (Nakatani 2006; Tsuya and Bumpass 2004; Tsuya et al. 2005). Hence, women in Japan today are increasingly expected to shoulder the dual responsibility of fulfilling domestic duties and working outside the home (Nagata 2004). A recent study indicates that 38.2 percent of men and 43.8 percent of women think that women should both work outside the home and also be the primary household care giver. Of women in their 30s, 49.6 percent agree they should have a dual public and private role, while 43.7 percent think they should only work at home (Kaneko 2003).

Japan is distinctive because of its relatively high incidence of adult-child and parent intergenerational co-residence (Rindfuss et al. 2004). Such co-residency may influence the fertility of adult children because grandparents can assist with child care. The traditional Japanese norm is for the eldest son and his wife to live with the son's parents, with all family members sharing the household activities and responsibilities. When there is no son, one of the daughters (most likely the eldest) will remain with her parents and have her husband join the household.

Modern economic practices have led to a considerable decline in the prevalence of this traditional family norm (Inglehart and Baker 2000). To maintain privacy and good familial relations, many young people today prefer not to live in three-generational households, choosing instead to establish their own (Ogawa and Retherford 1997). Domestic space is limited for the majority of Japanese, now congested in urban and suburban areas, a factor that makes it difficult for three generations to live together comfortably. Still, some people practice intergenerational co-residence, and when a husband is the first son, the probability of co-residence is highest (Sasaki 2002; Ando 2004; Ogawa et al. 2006). The incentive for such an arrangement may not solely relate

to traditional norms. It may reflect situations related to economic efficiency, such as young couples who cannot easily afford their own housing, aging parents that require daily care, and the provision of child-care assistance that a grandparent can provide (Ishikawa 1997). Because of the advantages associated with sharing household responsibilities, intergenerational co-residence has also had a positive effect on the participation of married women in the labor force (Choe et al. 2004; Ogawa and Ermisch 1996). Even when adult children establish their own households, they tend to live relatively close to their parents (Ishikawa 1997). As with co-residency, family members who live close to each other can frequently interact and support one another. Whether living together or relatively close, young mothers can conveniently reap the benefits of a major source of trustworthy assistance. Such a convenience may markedly affect a woman's fertility, especially those who work and have small children.

METHODS

Sample and Data Collection

With the foregoing Japanese socio-cultural and family-demographic characteristics in mind, this study explores several factors related to fertility in modern Japanese society. The focus of the study was on working women with small children. Even though these women are a minority in the workforce, their behavior is important for understanding the present and future characteristics of Japanese fertility. This study investigated the life strategies and familial interactions that may contribute to their relatively high fertility in a society where fertility is extremely low. The following interpretations and conclusions are based on first-hand data collected by the author.

The study sample consists of women who have at least one child under the age of seven, the age when children typically begin their elementary education, whom they send to a day nursery. In Japan, there are currently two institutional categories of formal child day-care: day nurseries and kindergartens (although there has been a recent movement to establish institutions that offer a combination of both options; see Nakayama 2005). Some of the differences between day nurseries and kindergartens include a child's age, the hours of available service, and the working status of the parents. In general, kindergartens look after children who are three years old or older for about four hours a day, usually between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. The mothers of such children may have jobs. In comparison, day nurseries accept children up to six years of age from households of working parents. To accommodate these mothers and fathers, nurseries typically have much longer hours, usually offering service between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Two day-nurseries helped with the recruitment of the study sample. They are in Kanagawa Prefecture, which shares numerous characteristics like schools, hospitals, parks, and a variety of stores, restaurants, and other businesses with other suburban areas in Japan. The residents have relatively easy access to larger metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Yokohama, the capital of Kanagawa Prefecture.

Data collection was conducted in two phases during the summer of 2007. First, questionnaires were distributed to parents at the day nurseries. Parents voluntarily answered the questionnaires and returned them in sealed envelopes to the nurseries. A total of 206 questionnaires were filled out, representing a response rate of about 70 percent. Questionnaires were supposed to be filled out by mothers, although in four cases they were answered by fathers. Ten of the 206 questionnaires were not appropriate for this study, resulting in a total sample of 196 respondents.[4]

The second phase of data collection consisted of face-to-face interviews with 56 women who had filled out the questionnaires. The day nurseries were the intermediaries for this recruitment. All interviews were conducted at the day nurseries, which provided rooms facilitating an atmosphere of confidentiality (the directors' office at one nursery and a conversation room at the other). Some of the interviewees brought their children with them, and if the child was an infant, held the child during the interview. If the child was older, it typically busied itself playing with toys in the room, occasionally asking his/her mother for something. During the interviews, mothers were asked about their daily activities, household members, domestic work, fertility, working conditions, intergenerational family relationships, and future perspectives. Each session lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. Although the interviewees' enthusiasm varied, they generally became more talkative as time went on.

Measurement and Variables

The questionnaires included demographic items such as the participant's age, educational level, marital status, workforce participation, number of children, children's gender and age, living arrangements, and information on their husbands, mothers, and mothers-in-law. To examine the factors associated with the relatively high fertility of working women, ten variables were created. The dependent variable consisted of the current number of children that each woman had. The independent variables measured the availability of various types of intergenerational family assistance, and so focused on obtaining information about the mothers and mothers-in-law of the interviewees, which was gathered with four variables. Two variables consisted of the age of mothers and mothers-in-law, respectively. Age was used to assess how able a woman was at providing familial assistance. Making the general assumption that younger women are typically stronger, younger mothers or mothers-in-law are more able to provide assistance to their adult daughters or daughters-in-law. Also, even though mothers or mothers-in-law may be healthy, as they get older there is a greater probability that their spouses will have physical problems requiring their attention and care. In such cases, their capacity to provide assistance to their daughter or daughter-in-law may be significantly limited. No value was entered for a deceased mother or mother-in-law.

Two additional independent variables consisted of the residential context of a study participant in relation to her mother and to her mother-in-law. These variables were assessed by determining the residential location of a woman and her mother and mother-in-law. Similar to age, these variables were regarded as indirect measures of the assistance available to young mothers by looking at how close they lived to their

Table 1
Characteristics of Women (N=196)

	Valid N (Valid %)	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Devi.
Number of children	196	1	4	1.78	.724
1	75 (38.3%)				
2	93 (47.4%)				
3	25 (12.8%)				
4	3 (1.5%)				
Natal mothers' age	179	46	79	61.07	5.991
Mother-in-laws' age	167	44	83	62.70	6.500
Natal mothers' residence	182				
1 Together	12 (6.6%)				
2 In city	98 (50.0%)				
3 Other	72 (39.6%)				
Mother-in-laws' residence	172				
1 Together	15 (8.7%)				
2 In city	62 (36.0%)				
3 Other	95 (55.2%)				
Women's current age	192	20	46	33.52	4.966
Women's first-birth age	191	17	42	28.23	4.747
Women's education	193				
1	14 (7.3%)				
2	89 (46.1%)				
3	56 (29.0%)				
4	34 (17.6%)				
Husbands' current age	176	23	48	35.28	4.847
Husbands' education	180				
1	23 (12.8%)				
2	87 (48.3%)				
3	5 (2.8%)				
4	65 (36.1%)				

mothers and mothers-in-law. Women were placed into three categories for these variables. Women who were living with their mothers or mothers-in-law were assigned a code of 1. Women who were living in the same city as their mothers or mothers-in-law were categorized as "living near" and assigned a code of 2. All others were coded 3. Mothers and mothers-in-law who had passed away were treated as missing cases.

Five controlling variables were also coded: the age of a study participant, how old she was when she first gave birth, her level of education, the age of her husband, and her husband's level of education. Older women were regarded as likely to have had more children, while younger women were more likely to be still engaged in childbearing. A woman's age at first childbirth was controlled because women have a greater potential for high fertility if they begin having children early. It was necessary to control for a woman's level of education because it could influence fertility by delaying the onset of parenthood. A woman's age at first birth was expected to be the primary control regarding this issue. Educational level was coded with four categories: 1–completion of middle school, 2–completion of high school, 3–completion of two-year junior college, and 4–completion of a four-year university degree or higher.

The age of a woman's husband is important because couples may make childbearing decisions based on how many more years a husband can reasonably expect to work full-time. His level of education was also controlled to measure the socio-economic status of a family, which was coded using the same four categories used to classify a woman's level of education. For these particular variables, the husbands of divorced women were treated as missing cases. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants according to the study variables.

RESULTS

To assess factors associated with the relatively high fertility of working women, this study conducted a linear regression analysis, using SPSS software (version 12). The dependent variable was a woman's current number of children; all the other variables described above were incorporated to examine how they might relate to higher fertility. Table 2 shows the results of the analysis.

Regarding the independent variables, the age of a woman's mother shows some relation to her fertility, but the significance is borderline ($p=.090$). This result implies that when other variables are held constant, women with younger mothers were likely to have more children. The residential context of a woman's mother appears to be more significantly associated with her fertility ($p=.038$). This result indicates that women with mothers living in the same household or city are likely to have more children than women whose mothers do not live in the same city.[5] In contrast, neither the age nor the residential context of a woman's mother-in-law are statistically significant. Among the controlling variables, a woman's current age is positively correlated with her fertility ($p<.001$); older women tend to have more children. The age of a woman at first birth is negatively correlated with her fertility ($p<.001$); women who were relatively young when they had their first child tend to have higher fertility. The other remaining controlling variables are not significant.

Table 2
Results of Linear Regression Analysis on Women's Number of Children

	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.153	.604		3.562	.001
Natal mother age	-.019	.011	-.152	-1.710	.090
Mother-in-law age	-.006	.012	-.051	-.494	.622
Natal mother residence	-.161	.077	-.126	-2.098	.038
Mother-in-law residence	.025	.062	.023	.404	.687
Women current age	.163	.020	.991	7.988	.000
Women first-birth age	-.149	.014	-.886	-10.803	.000
Women education	-.008	.059	-.009	-.136	.892
Husband current age	.009	.018	.058	.493	.623
Husband education	-.023	.045	-.035	-.513	.609

DISCUSSION

The number of children a woman has appears to be associated with the age of her mother and her mother's residential context. These results likely indicate the capacity of her mother to provide childcare assistance. During a lifetime, an individual's physical strength declines and this condition limits an individual's level of able-bodied activity, lessening available assistance. Also, the provision of frequent assistance is difficult when the receiver and provider live far apart. Women who have relatively young mothers and/or live with or near them are more inclined to have additional children because their mothers are able to help them with childcare.

Compared to residential context, the age variable reflects a borderline level of significance. It is important to stress that age is used as an indirect measure of one's ability to provide assistance. As such, it is a limitation of this study. If "ability" had been measured by examining one's actual health status or physical capabilities, this variable might have yielded different results. Despite this note of caution, age is a reasonable indicator of vitality, especially for people who are middle and old aged.

Interview data gathered from the study participants generally support the conclusion that they receive valuable assistance from their mothers, especially if their mothers are healthy and live relatively close. For example, a 38-year-old woman with a one-year-old son said, "I am an office worker. I am lucky because I can usually leave my office right at 5 o'clock." Many Japanese workers feel compelled to stay late at the office, a practice consistent with the normative Japanese business work ethic. This woman considers herself lucky, therefore, because she can leave promptly to get home to act as a mother and wife in the household.

> But the company division I work for has few employees, so I don't feel like I have the option to unexpectedly take a day off, as it will create a difficult situation for my fellow office mates. My husband works long hours, and he usually comes home after 9 o'clock in the evening. I feel fortunate to have my

parents living only ten minutes away. I often ask my mother (66 years old) for help, especially when my son gets a fever or when something comes up and I cannot pick him up at the nursery. I sometimes even ask my mother to shop for me when I am at home with my son. I really rely on her. If I did not get help from my mother, I would have a nervous breakdown.

Some of the interviewees mentioned that they were unable to rely on their relatively young and healthy mothers who worked full-time. This factor may be partly responsible for the borderline statistical significance associated with the mother's age variable. However, other women said they received significant assistance from mothers who were still working. An extreme case was that of a 34-year-old school teacher with two children of pre-school age. Her husband was not home much of the time because he left for work at 6:00 a.m. and returned as late as midnight on weekdays. She and her husband used to live near her parents-in-law, but partially as a result of her inability to get along with them, they moved and now live about one and a half hours away. Moreover, she lives several hours away from her parents who both still work. These conditions limit her ability to receive frequent familial assistance, and she must occasionally rely on help from neighbors and a few retired teachers with experiences like hers. But when she needed extended assistance, as when her children got the flu, her 58-year-old mother would take a day off from work to help her. In those cases, her mother would often stay the weekend and then return to her home to get back to work on Monday.

Several women mentioned being able to have children largely because of the availability of family assistance. A 36-year-old woman who was living with her parents compared her situation to that of her childless friends. At the time of the interview she had two children and admitted that she would like to have another, although she was concerned about her age. She said:

I got married when I was 30 years old. At the time, I had no particular desire to get married nor have children. Having my first child when I was 32 was happenstance, but forced me to suddenly think seriously about matters related to raising children. I was the first one of my generation to have a child among my immediate friends; overall, most of my friends did not get married and start having children until relatively late. Even now, few of them have children. The difference between me, with two children, and some of my childless friends is that they live in a metropolitan area, far away from their families. Unless you live with or near your family members, having two or three children is very difficult. If you have family close by, you may be able to manage even if you live in an expensive metropolitan area. But houses in such areas are typically small so it can be challenging for you and your parents to live together.

Quantitative results indicate that although the age and residential contexts of a young woman's mother are significantly related to the number of children the woman has, those of her mother-in-law are not. One implication of this finding is that a woman's fertility behavior is not affected by her mother-in-law's assistance. However, this does not mean that a mother-in-law provides little assistance. To the contrary, qualitative information from interviews reveals that many women receive substantial assistance from their parents-in-law. For example, one 35-year-old woman lived 30 minutes from her parents but only 5 minutes from her parents-in-law. Occasionally, both she and her husband were required to work evenings. On those evenings, her children were usually taken care of by her parents-in-law.

Some women in three-generational households also appreciated the advantages of being able to rely on their mothers-in-law for regular, daily assistance. For example, one 30-year-old woman with a 2-year-old had been living with her husband's mother for a year.

I work from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In the afternoon, my mother usually picks up my child at the nursery. Therefore, when I finish work for the day, I first go to my parents' house to pick up my child; their house is about 10 minutes from mine. When we get home, my mother-in-law has already prepared dinner for the entire household. My mother-in-law does nearly all of the domestic chores, leaving me little to do around the house. I see many of my friends living in nuclear family households struggling to manage their lives. I feel lucky to be living with such a helpful mother-in-law.

While some women receive substantial assistance from their mothers-in-law, this may be contingent on how much help they get from their natal mothers and whether they have healthy parents-in-law who live with them or close by. For example, one 35-year-old interviewee with three children lived within seven kilometers of her parents and parents-in-law. She said:

While my parents and my husband's parents provide me with assistance, I probably receive about 70 percent of it from my parents-in-law. Today, my father requires a caretaker because his physical health is not good. Although he receives in-home visits from a community care service, my mother also must help care for him. In addition, my mother works full time. She is so busy.

A 32-year-old study participant had healthy parents living about 20 minutes away, whereas her parents-in-law lived about 10 minutes away. She normally worked between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., five days a week. During the busy season, however, she often was unable to leave the office at 5 o'clock to pick up her child. Her husband also worked long hours. She was able to get extended care from the day nursery until 7 p.m., but when she had to work even later in the evening, she would ask her parents-in-law to pick up her child. In addition, she added that her parents-in-law often enjoyed playing and eating meals with the child. During the interview, she did not identify any specific assistance that she received from her parents, but only mentioned that they "seem to enjoy most of their time by themselves."

Another factor contributing to differing levels of parent and parent-in-law assistance is the emotional closeness a woman has to her older family members. Some women declared that it was easier for them to ask their mothers for help rather than their mothers-in-law. Two study participants who had been living with their mothers-in-law said that co-residency was initially a mental struggle, although they later felt thankful for the household help they had received from their mothers-in-law. One of them said that she was uncomfortable when she first began living with her mother-in-law, who controlled the household. As a result, she often spent time after work at convenience stores to delay her return home. The other woman said she refused to return to her natal home for a while because she feared that seeing her mother's familiar and comfortable household approach would only increase her negative opinion of her mother-in-law. These examples suggest that in-law relations require extra effort to achieve a mutual understanding and a comfortable level of familial interaction in a new setting.

Nonetheless, a few interviewees said they preferred living with in-laws rather than with their parents. They reasoned that living with natal relatives might create frequent or constant conflict because family members would be more at ease directly expressing their feelings and desires. In comparison, in-laws with some social distance tend to refrain from direct confrontation. Therefore, in terms of establishing extended family households, these women preferred patrilocal residence.

How women locate their residence relative to their parents and parents-in-law may indicate the emotional closeness that they feel for specific relatives. Among the women in this study, the majority of three-generational households were patrilocal; out of 196 women, 27 of them lived in three-generational households, of which 15 were patrilocal (i.e., living with their mothers-in-law, see Table 1).[6] The remaining 12 women were living matrilocally. Of the 56 interviewed women, 10 of them lived in extended family households; 7 were patrilocal and 3 were matrilocal (see Table 3). With one exception, the patrilocal households were composed of husbands who were first-born sons. This patrilocal tendency may not relate to the emotional closeness a woman has to her in-laws. It may instead reflect the traditional Japanese family norm in which the first son is expected to live with his parents even after marriage and child-rearing has begun.

Table 3
Household Types of Interviewed Women

Household			
Extended			10
	Patrilocal	7 (6 cases of first son husband)	
	Matrilocal	3 (1 case of divorce)	
Nuclear			46
Total			56

In contrast to the extended family households, nuclear family households show some tendency for matrilocality, a characteristic that has been identified in some other post-modernized communities that were traditionally patrilocal (see Nosaka 2009; Ng, Phillips, and Lee 2002; Lievens 1999). Table 4 shows that out of 196 women, 98 (55 + 43) lived in nuclear households that were located in the same city as their mothers, whereas 62 (19 + 43) were living in nuclear households located in the same city as their mothers-in-law. These numbers include 43 cases in which both parents and parents-in-law lived in the same city. The 55 women who live only near their parents contrast markedly with the 19 who live only near their in-laws. While some women were obliged to follow the traditional Japanese norm and reside with their parents-in-law, it seems that those who established their own nuclear households were more likely to live close to their parents. This tendency would be consistent with a desire to get assistance from natal family members, especially for women with small children who might be most comfortable interacting with their own parents. The implication of this tendency in turn indicates the significance of a woman's mother's age and residential location to the woman's overall fertility.

Table 4
Household Type and Residential Location of
Mother and Mother-in-law of Women in Study Sample

Household	Location		
Extended			27
Nuclear			169
	Only Mother in city	55 (32.5%)	
	Only Mother-in-law in city	19 (11.2%)	
	Both Mother and Mother-in-law in city	43 (25.4%)	
	Other (neither in city or deceased)	52 (30.8%)	
Total			196

CONCLUSION

Considering some of the social features distinctive to Japan, this study examined how the fertility of working women with small children relates to intergenerational family assistance. Quantitative results reveal that women whose mothers are relatively young and reside nearby are likely to have higher fertility. This suggests that such behavior enables women to more conveniently receive assistance from their mothers, and is supported by qualitative data indicating that young mothers receive significant help with household chores and childcare from their mothers.

In contrast, the quantitative data do not support a significant measure of association between the fertility of women in the study and the age and residential location of their mothers-in-law. Although qualitative data indicate that women receive mother-in-law assistance, it appears to be less essential than that provided by their mothers. Help from natal family members may be most comfortable, and when conditions allow, young mothers seem more likely to reside where they can take advantage of this assistance.

These study results suggest the emergence of two alternative trends regarding Japanese fertility. On one hand, intergenerational contributions to fertility may increase if older family members become better able to provide assistance. Prolonged longevity, consequent of healthy old age, may give elderly individuals more time and opportunity to help younger family members than in the past. Considering the low fertility-rate trend, the ratio of aging individuals to their younger family members will continue to increase. Therefore, younger people may benefit from having even more older family members who can help. This added benefit may allow greater variation in the fertility of Japanese women in the future; women who reside where they can comfortably receive assistance from their older family members, particularly their own mothers, may have significantly more children than those who do not.

On the other hand, an increasingly elderly Japanese population may actually threaten to lower Japanese fertility even further. Recent cuts by the Japanese government in welfare support for the elderly are in part a response to the increasing number of older Japanese people, making individual responsibility for old-age security more important. With fewer children being born, the future burden of taking care of their aging parents will increase. Such developments may lead to an increase of older people in the

workforce. Consequently, the availability of assistance they can provide to their grandchildren will decrease.

At the same time, the participation of women in the labor force may continue to increase. Low fertility equates with the decline in the availability of young male labor, a trend that could increase the need for women in the workforce, partially to support an increasing number of elderly Japanese citizens (Mason 2001). Furthermore, if the current Japanese economic recession continues, it will become increasingly difficult for companies to adequately compensate their full-time workers, resulting in pay cuts and/or layoffs. This would encourage an increase in the demand for women to contribute to the household income. Because full-time job opportunities are rare and wages for part-time jobs are low, women may feel compelled to work multiple part-time jobs. Even so, households may still face a lack of economic wherewithal, especially in cases where the availability of intergenerational family assistance is limited. Such households may limit their fertility. Consequently, the long-term cost of continuously declining fertility may promote the government implementation of more comprehensive public systems of support, especially for working mothers with young children and for households with limited income.

More studies are needed and they must be designed to not only contribute to understanding the interplay between fertility and intergenerational family relationships, but also to provide a clearer view of the future. First, it may be informative to examine in depth the actual health status or mental and physical capacity of family members who could potentially provide assistance. Relatives who are limited in functional capacity increase the domestic workload for women because caring for ailing family members is typically a female responsibility in Japan. Such obligations may in turn inhibit the number of children a woman is able to bear. Second, the working status of older relatives is another factor in need of examination. Some of the interviewees indicated that after their parents or parents-in-law retired from full-time work they received considerably more assistance from them. Indeed, the decision of women to bear children may correlate rather closely with the retirement of their parents or parents-in-law.

Third, the distances separating the residences of family members and residential locations in relation to day nurseries and workplaces also require investigation. This study has revealed that some women have arranged for their relatives to pick up their children from the nursery in the afternoon. Other women, however, must pick up their children themselves on their way home from work. Mothers in the latter category constantly worry about what to do if they must unexpectedly work longer hours; many of these interviewees admitted that they would have to ask for help from family members in case of such an event. Regardless of whether they are regularly or occasionally assisted by their relatives, it appears that there is a significant difference in the degree of necessary time investment and physical hardship which varies according to how closely the residence, nursery, and workplace are situated. This issue may heavily influence a woman's desire to have an additional child.

Fourth, it would be helpful to more thoroughly investigate how a woman's fertility relates to her working status and the availability of family assistance. The number of hours that Japanese women work and the types of positions they have vary greatly. In

this study, women were not categorized according to their work status because the sample size was relatively small. One previous study has revealed a positive relationship between the participation of married women in the labor force and their co-residency with parents or parents-in-law; such relationships appear to be particularly strong for women who are employed full-time (Kenjoh 2007). Assessing whether family assistance relates positively to the number of children among women of varying work status would be informative.

Finally, a focus on the issue of conjugal co-operation in household activities will contribute to an understanding of the relationship between intergenerational assistance and family fertility. Some of the women in this study enjoyed a significant amount of help from their husbands with household chores and childcare, but the majority of husbands' participation in such activities was limited. According to one previous study (Hiramatsu 2007), women's perception of their husbands' involvement in household chores and childcare does affect their desire for additional children. A husband's domestic investments, therefore, may correlate significantly with the number of children in a family. Nevertheless, it is also possible that the influence on fertility brought about by limited husband co-operation in these affairs is to some extent mitigated by inter-generational family assistance. For example, while differences may exist according to household income, women who get little help from their husbands may be particularly likely to seek out intergenerational family assistance. Those who are unable to acquire such assistance easily may tend to have relatively low fertility. To investigate this issue, data must be collected not only on household income, but also on who does which household chores and how much time each individual invests in each one.

Future research examining these issues will reveal information on key features related to fertility behavior in Japan and enhance an understanding of how fertility in post-demographic transitional societies varies cross-culturally. Although many of the phenomena characteristic of post-demographic societies cannot be fully explained by demographic transition theory, Bongaarts (2001) predicts an increase in the TFR for those societies where women are postponing childbearing to a later age. Japan is one such society, and the two possible future trends suggested in this conclusion would generally be in line with Bongaarts' prediction. The Japanese TFR may increase once the childbearing age for women stops rising. In this case, as addressed in the discussion of the two possible future trends suggested above, intergenerational family assistance and public support systems may become key factors influencing a significant rise in the TFR, eventually stabilizing it around the replacement level. If so, the implications of demographic transition theory for fertility per se are still valid.

NOTES

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2. TFR (total fertility rate) is the average number of children expected to be born to a woman over her lifetime based on current age-specific fertility rates.
3. This relates to late and fewer marriages. It is difficult for married women to work in a competitive, demanding work environment because of their household responsibilities. Therefore, women who are highly educated and ambitious for success in their profession are likely to postpone marriage or remain single (Tsuya et al. 2004; Ono 2003).
4. Five women who were not working were excluded because the study was on working mothers, and another three were excluded because they did not indicate having jobs. In addition, two questionnaires were omitted because they were answered by divorced fathers who did not include sufficient information about the mothers of their children.
5. Because these data are not longitudinal, this result is best understood as an association between a woman's elevated fertility and her residence with, or close to, her mother. Some women had not moved after marrying, while others had moved to be closer to or live with their parents/parents-in-law after becoming pregnant or having children. Still others had moved away from their older family members after marriage, and some parents had moved to live closer to them. Regardless of such variation, the qualitative data indicate that women are most likely to receive substantial childcare assistance when their parents/parents-in-law live with them or close by. Therefore, women with access to or the prospective for receiving such assistance are more likely to have additional children.
6. In one three-generational household, a woman was not living with her mother-in-law but with her father-in-law. This case was not included in the 27 three-generational households.

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