Elderly Couples and Suburban Life
in the Context of Japan's Homeowner Neighborhoods

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Abstract

In Japan, as in many other developed societies, post-war economic development, combined with government housing policy that promoted home-ownership, accelerated the development of suburban homeowner neighborhoods. Housing provision and neighborhood planning systems were organized to form a specific type of physical environment suitable for middle class couples with their children. However, along with the rapid aging of the population, the condition of suburban life has been drastically changed. On one hand, suburban neighborhood developments in Japan sought to emulate the western model of garden city. On the other, Japanese suburban couples have been different to those in western countries in the sense that life-courses and lifestyles have orbited around the combined demands of 'salary-man' working routines of husbands who have had very limited time to enjoy home and family life, and the Japanese housewife who has spent most of her time in the home and neighborhood community. As these suburban populations have aged and children left the nest, Japan's elderly couples have had to substantially readjust their home lives and domestic roles. A growing debate in Japan has concerned conflicts that have emerged among retired suburban couples who have struggled to cope with their new lives together, which has been exacerbated by failures to communicate. While many older husbands and wives dwell together in good quality, single, detached, family houses, a notable phenomenon has been the propensity for such couples to spend their time separately in the home. Retired husbands in particular have found it difficult to adjust to a life at home and set in a suburban neighborhood. This paper draws on interviews with elderly suburban couples to explore the context of suburban transformations peculiar to Japan.

Introduction

This paper explores the situation of elderly couples living in suburban areas in the context of the modernization of Japan. They belong to an age and group which was strongly affected by the system and ideology of post-war Japan, which encouraged people to adopt a conventional life-course, in short to get married, have children and acquire their own homes. Housing designed for middle-class families was spread over Japan as a container where they could have a secure life.

The first section focuses on the process on which the Japanese suburbs were developed, and gives a description of how the modern cities of Japan were built. The suburbs provided families with the chance to have a smooth life while adhering to the conventional life-course. The government adopted the system for suburban planning of western countries. After the Second World War, the government encouraged people to attain home-ownership through introducing various public policies in order to develop the country. These strategies enabled developers to accelerate the spread of western suburban landscape in Japan.

The second section reveals how the life of modern Japanese families is treated in the context of post-war development. Husbands and wives devoted themselves to playing out their expected gender roles. The political system has promoted a conventional household, consisting of the husband as "the breadwinner" and the housewife as caretaker. Moreover, particularly in Japan, companies strongly supported this standard life of middle-class households, and supplied strong social security to employees and their families.

The third section focuses on the fieldwork conducted through interviews with elderly couples, living in suburban areas. These couples are paramount in exploring the transformation of urban life in Japan, since the majority of families now consist of elderly couples, whose children have left home to start their own lives. The interaction between the couples has changed as well, since the husband is retired and is no longer working, and the wife no longer has children to look after. The interviews also look at what these couples use their new found free time for. The interviews are meant firstly to capture the actual conditions of elderly couples in contemporary Japan, and secondly to investigate the changing context of suburban life.

Japan's suburban areas

The industrial development in the modern period had transformed people's lifestyles, economic system, and social structure, and led to the concentration of population, factories,

materials, and transport facilities, in urban areas. This transition occurred in many western countries starting with England. Eventually this concentration led to the deteriorating condition of the city, such as the over population of residential areas, high-level pollution, and increase in crime. The solution need to for a these social problems had become an urgent issue. Urban planning was the given suggestion to improve these conditions. The "garden city" by Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) was recognized as one of the proposals intended to reform the deteriorated condition of the city. His notion making utopia by combining town and country affected lots of planners, architects, and politicians, and some aspects of his idea have been adopted in actual developments of suburbs in many countries.

Modern Japanese city planning was greatly affected by that of western countries. Both the Japanese government and institutions related to city planning were eager to adopt western models in order to progress with development, and the "garden city" had been assigned great prominence both on a theoretical and technological level. As such, this concept was thoroughly studied and copied from to a great extent, as did many other countries. Furthermore, the way of planning suburbs in America was often directly borrowed, when planning suburbs in Japan. The development of the Japanese suburbs was pushed by post-war housing policies and, the government set the housing problem as an urgent issue to solve. This chapter also gives an explanation about what role the public policies played in the context of Japan's post-war recovery.

Introduction of the Garden city model

Ebenezer Howard's "Garden City" concept is known across the world and has had a profound impact and influence on the developments of suburban neighborhoods in many countries. Howard wrote that "Town and Country must be married and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life and a new civilization" (Howard 1898). The remarkable feature of his concept was the idea of self governing communities. As Hall has showed, Howard desired reconstruction of the capitalist society into infinity of co-operative commonwealths. His proposal consisted of not only practical techniques in the ways of city planning, but also a majestic attempt to reform the entire social system (Hall 1988).

In eighteenth-century England, industrialization made rapid progress. This development led to a higher concentration of jobs available in the cities. Factories emerged in urban areas followed by housing projects for the factory workers. However, the housing conditions of their housing were quite poor owing to high density and the lack of sanitation. In addition to this, problems like high crime rates, violence and depression further deepened the misery of the inhabitants.

As such, this form of urbanization led to the abuse of the people living there.

The main problem was how to control urban growth and improve this terrible condition. Howard's proposal was a solution tailored to relieve these areas of the terrible state they had deteriorated into. Howard hoped to develop a residential neighborhood, which would provide housing for people from all social classes. However, in his home country England, his Garden City concept hardly developed as he had wished though his ideas were actualized in Letchworth and Hampstead. According to Hall;

> they [public corporations in England] resolved the perennial problem of how to fund the new towns, but also destroyed the essence of Howard's plan, which was to fund the creation of self-governing local welfare states. Top-down planning triumphed over bottom-up; Britain would have the shell of Howard's garden-city vision without the substance (Hall 1988).

Howard's ideas affected the government in England insofar as both of them regarded urban planning as the solution to urban problem. As such, the government in England actively dealt with the issues of urban planning. At the end of the Second World War, the Labour Party came to power and promised to solve the housing problem. They formulated two policies: first, the government would supply residences directly through local self-governing bodies. Secondly, they would restrict housing construction carried out by private sectors (Urushibara 2000).

On the other side of the Atlantic, private developers had more power in developing cities. The garden city design also had a significant influence on the development of American suburbs. Although many similarities can be drawn between Howard's garden city, and modern American suburbs, there are some great differences. American developers did not adopt Howard's idea to reform the entire social structure through urban planning. The American way of home-ownership, differed as well. Howard believed that one semi-public organization should possess the land of the garden city and at the same time be responsible for its maintenance, and then people would rent a land plot from that company. This is a more public approach. On the other hand, in America private individuals usually own and maintain their own homes, and it was not an important aim of American developers to use urban planning as a tool to reform the social system (McKenzie 1994).

Like the United States, Japan also partially imported the idea of garden city. The Japanese government and Architectural Institute of Japan were trying to adopt a western model into

Japan's urban planning, and as such they studied and analyzed Howard's garden city. In 1907, only a few years after the publication of Howard's proposal for urban reform through the building of new towns in the countryside in England, the Local Government Bureau of the Home Ministry published "Den en Toshi [the garden city]" (Sorensen 2002). After that, the Den en Toshi Company developed two garden cities, Senzoku and Tamagawadai. However these cities were different from the "garden city" which Howard had proposed. The incipient Japanese suburbs of Senzoku and Tamagawadai were not independent cities as had Howard intended. These suburbs were expected to sprawl across the edge of the city parallel to the meet of develop the railroad. The planning by the Den en Toshi Company did not aim to reform social conditions as it did in England, and it was merely a means by which to increase profits. Ironically, as Watanabe says, the exploitation of suburbs by nonofficial institutions promoted the development of suburbs in Japan (Watanabe 1993). Watanabe also indicated that modern Japanese architects or planners lacked the interest concerning the scale and form of the city, even though they thought about the design of housing and living environment extensively. Moreover, Japanese urban planning lacked social perspectives and techniques with which to plan the city, and didn't know how to control the sprawling suburbs.

Post-war housing policy
Everything in Japan was more or less destroyed because of the Second World War. The war had affected both the Japanese economy and industry deeply. In the early post-war years, housing was lacking and housing conditions were poor. The people were in many cases made to suffer in extreme poverty. The Japanese government had to implement various strategies in order to recover from and change these conditions immediately.

The housing problem had assumed acute proportions. It was estimated that approximately 4.2 million housing units across the nation equal to one fifth of all housing were needed. To improve this situation, the government established three new housing policy strategies entitled "the three pillars": the Government Housing Loan Corporation (1950), the Public Housing Act (1951), and the Housing Corporation Act (1955). These pillars played important roles in supplying housing. The Government Housing Loan Corporation (GHLC) was a government agency, which provided households the chance to acquire their own homes via the provision of long-term, low interest loan. The Public Housing Act worked in the construction and management of housing for low-income people. The central government assisted the local government financially in building these public houses. The Housing Corporation Act (HCA) encouraged the construction of housing for young middle-income households who intended to move to urban areas. (Forrest, Kennett, and Izuhara 2003

Hirayama 2003). Thus, the GHLC encouraged people to get home-ownership and the HCA supported the people who were preparing to get home-ownership. Moreover, Forrest, et al stated that;

> The housing needs of the population were to be met through the private market and home ownership, with the promotion of the latter by the state particularly apparent following the oil crisis and economic downturn of the 1970s. As the Japanese Government sought to stimulate the economy through the further expansion of homeownership the Government Housing Loan Corporation became increasingly important, and to date, it has been the overwhelmingly dominant mortgage lender and finances one-third of all new construction in Japan. It has thus become the main vehicle for the state's aspirations for a higher level of home ownership.

The expansion of home-ownership pushed by the three pillars was strongly tied with the economic growth. The home-ownership oriented housing system created vigorous demand for housing construction and stimulated a whole economy. There was consumption through the purchase of furniture, electric appliances, and cars, as well as the construction of housing.

As a logical consequence of home-ownership promotion, the demand for residential areas increased. Actually, during a high-growth period between 1960s and 70s, many residential areas were planned and built, supplying many people with a place to live. The Japanese private developers in particular were the driving force in the spread of residential areas in Japan.

Introduction of the Neighborhood Unit model
In the development of residential areas, the idea of the neighborhood unit had had a big influence on Japan's city planning. Clarence Parry (1872-1944), an American community planner, proposed this "neighborhood unit", which had a big impact on Japanese city planning. Senri New Town in Osaka, which was the first Japanese large scale attempt at urban city planning in 1961, strictly adopted his proposal. Parry's "neighborhood unit" put the school at the core of the community, and set the border and the size of the neighborhood unit community by the ideal population of elementary schools. He also considered the effect of an automobile society, and had planned to put shopping centers in the intersections in order to prevent big roads for automobiles from passing through the neighborhood units.

Parry mentioned in his book that he assumed the family would consist of the parents and their children as the residents, and this concept proved suitable for the typical life in Japan as

described in the next chapter.

Family life in modern Japan

Modern families

The family model, or the idea of the so-called "nuclear family", which is composed of a working husband and a housewife and their children, was imported to Japan from Western societies after the end of the Second World War.

In pre-modern times the western family worked as a self managing body. They sustained their own lives by farming, and home manufacturing. The family was a unit working together in order to achieve this sustainability. However, industrial development was transforming all other work and workplace ... residential environments would be transformed as well (Hayden 1984). The working place of the husband was severed from the residence. The replacement of hand craft skills by mechanization was widespread in this period. In order to adapt, the family bond had changed from a self managing body in the context of modernization. According to Yamada, Japan imported the vague notion of affection, and the Japanese have never known the meaning of affection. They could experience romantic feelings only in love stories in the social media such as TV, and this is why "affection" did not have any reality in Japan. The Japanese substituted "affection" with gender roles, and tried to the utmost of their ability to play these roles in order to show "affection" for their families.

Post war family policy

The features of modern families in Japan can be described in the context of the post-war reconstruction of social system. Japan was utterly destroyed not only materially but also economically. Therefore the most urgent task of the Japanese government was to recover from these conditions and to redevelop the country's economic situation. The strategies of the GHQ (US General HQ) led to Japan's democratization. They conceived five concrete policies of reform: the women's emancipation, the promotion of labor unions, liberalization in education, the abolition of oppressive pre-war systems, and the adaptation of a democratic economy. As a result, many parts of the Constitution and prior laws were amended.

In order to democratize Japan the family structure had to be changed. In pre-war Japan the Ie system (the paternalistic system) had absolute authority over society. It was a unique system that regarded family stability and continuity as highly important. The patriarch of the family would control and regulate the members of the family in order to maintain Ie. They were

even obliged with the duty of supporting the family. The domination of men over women was a main notion in the foundation of the Ie system. In the pre-war era there were even laws that directly discriminated on the basis of gender. After the war the Ie system was abolished and instead of the male-dominated structure, the equality of sexes and individual rights were put into the new Constitution. However the thoughts of Ie, more specifically concerning the sense of family unity or sense of belonging to a family was not to disappear completely. But the new family register assumed a family to consist of only one couple and their children as the standard form. Even though the old system included the history of blood relations also known as "Sandai Koseki", this disappeared from the new system. The new family register considered a family to be a couple and their children, and regarded this as the new social unit. The Japanese government had never treated individual citizens independently in the koseki system. (Yokoyama 2002)

In Japan's high-growth period (1955-73), the ideology that men are "fighters" in the company and women are "carers" of husbands became widespread. In other words, in a family the men were regarded as the breadwinners, and the women were expected to do domestic duties as the housewife. The roles of each gender were strongly facilitated. It was easy for the government to control people by giving specific duties depending on sex. The housewife played an effective and rational role not only to maintain family life but also to develop the modernization of Japan. The Ministry of Education actually mentioned the role of women in an official booklet: "The role of the housewife" is to maintain the family. "The role of the wife" is to prepare and maintain the place where the husband can relax and recover his energy. "The role of the mother" is to have the full responsibility of child-rearing. This booklet also mentioned "The role of the worker" and "The role of the citizen" for women, but put priority on "The role of the housewife, wife, and mother". (Yokoyama 2002)

This ideology was effective in speeding up the development of the country's deeply damaged society at the hands of the war, and also to catch up with the western countries. This was a strong force in pushing people in a certain direction. In this period most people were heading for this typical way of life. On the one hand, the male was expected to pursue a certain course; and after graduation he entered a company, where he would be hired into a lifelong employment scheme, get married with a young woman, and then work hard to provide both for his family and get home-ownership. On the other hand, the female would be expected to manage the housework and raise children, thus securing the future of the nation. She was also expected to quit her job or only work part time when she got married. It was especially important for them to create their own family via marriage and to get their own home.

Conversely, the people who diverted from this typical life-course were slighted. Actually, housing policy, as mentioned in chapter one, did not come into play until the couple got married and had children (Hirayama 2003).

The government established systems to support the ideology of post-war Japan. Three of these are described below. The first one is the National Tax Agency which offered preferential treatment to spouses whose annual income was less than 380,000yen since 1961. The spouse was then by law required to get married, whereby the tax would be exempted from the original amount because the spouse has a small or no income. This system assumed that the housewife relied on the husband economically. Secondly kateika (domestic science) and gijutsu (technical skills) were added as compulsory subjects in the education curriculums in order to encourage the perpetuation of gender roles. At junior high school level, kateika was added in the curriculum but just for girls, and likewise gijutsu were just for boys. The students had the destiny of Japan resting upon their shoulders. They had learned gender roles through these subjects to build the future of Japan. Thirdly housewives were allowed to receive a basic pension and a survivor's pension (unfortunately only after the death of the husband) even though she has not paid premiums for pension. The pension system provided housewives these pensions as a special favor. (Meguro, Shibata 1999, Nishikawa 2000) Thus the establishment of the post-war ideology, in which the male was to be a breadwinner and the female, was to be a domestic administrator.

Japan's corporate society

Modern Japanese families are strongly connected with Japanese companies. Japanese companies regarded each employee as a member of a "family". It means that the company is organization such as large family. Yamada gave a definition of "the family relationship" as a link that in the long term has to be stable and reliable (Yamada 2005). In other words, the person who is a member of a social group such as a family does not have to worry about losing their attachment in that group. The employee was promised the opportunity for lifetime employment and a seniority-based wage system, and as such acquired the guarantee of an economically stable life in exchange for labor and time.

The employees were expected to identify themselves with their corporations. The companies believed that the employee's sense of belonging to them would lead to more effective employees. This expectation from the companies was not only for the employee, but also for their families. The company had an additional allowance for families on top of the monthly salary. Moreover the company showed deep concern for the welfare of employees. The

employees of a given company and their families were given access to welfare facilities at the expense of the company, and as such were given the opportunity to live in company housing, have hospital bills paid by the company, and the use of recreational facilities such as tennis courts and so on. Thus the Japanese companies succeeded in enhancing their employee's sense of belonging. They demanded the employees to greatly sacrifice their own spare time in compensation for these generous services. In addition the families of the employees were made to accept that the husband (or father) was always out. (Meguro, Shibata 1999, Yamada 2005) A strong interdependency could be found between Japan's companies and the family of each employee.

Elderly Couples in Suburban areas

The structure of Japanese families has been changing in recent decades. Through the 1960s and 1970s, nuclear family proliferated and became a major family type for the young. It was also the dream of many, to work toward this nuclear family. This family structure, with one's own family gathered under a single roof, appealed especially to the emerging middle class of Japan. The aspiration for most therefore lied in securing a home for one self. As a result, most families comprising of a salaryman and a stay-at-home wife, would own their own homes. Moreover, the construction of new towns and suburban areas designed for residential purposes increased rapidly. Since then however, many forms of family structure has emerged, such as single parents, elderly couples and middle aged parents with grown up children still living at home. This is a natural effect from the shift in the composition of Japan's population.

The profile of the interviewees

The condition for the interviewees was that they were families where the husband was retired. This was in order to observe the changes that happened to the couples as the husband loses his role as the bread winner, and is no longer engaged in his gender role. How does this new situation affect the wives? Is there a profound change when the salary-man turns retiree? The couples interviewed are between 60 and 80 years of age. Another requirement was that the husband had reached retiring age, and no longer engaged in active employment.

The interviews included the questions concerning, occupation record, the layout of the family's home, and the usage of it, the structure of their dairy lives, and their wishes for new facilities (e.g. amusement facilities, supermarkets, gyms, restaurants) in their neighborhood.

This fieldwork was mainly conducted in the suburbs and residential areas of Hyogo, Shiga, Nara, Kyoto, Osaka and Aichi prefectures. These prefectures are located in mid and western

Japan.

The average age of the interviewees was 66.6 years for husbands and 63.9 for wives. In 65% of the interviewed households, only the elderly couple resided there. 74% of the women had stay-at-home wives, while the other 26% had at some point worked part time.

Spacious home

All of the interviewees lived in their own houses varied in building type and size. Furthermore, most of the couples also owned a car and garage. In terms of housing, these couples had two distinctive features which separated them from the situation of other homeowners.

Firstly, the houses of the elderly couples are quite spacious. The average floor space amounted to 120.8 square meters, while that of all housing units in Japan in 2003 is 94.8 square meters (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2003). The interviewee's houses are not only larger, but also contain more rooms. 65% of the homes had four or five useable rooms excluding dining rooms, living rooms and kitchens. In addition 27 of 34 houses had rooms that were not in use at all. The couples had approximately one and a half extra room available.

Secondly, their relatively spacious houses encouraged both husband and wife to spend times separate room each other. 20 couples had their own separate rooms. 18 of them even slept in separate rooms. Two of them who slept in the same bedroom together had other separate rooms of their own. In addition the couples often attached a certain function to extra rooms, such as study, computer room, hobby room or just a place for relaxation. This was why they could go about their lives with little communication with their spouse.

All of the couples purchased these homes in the 1970s and 1980s, at that time the homes were situated in residential areas on the fringe of the city. The husbands would commute to their companies in city center, while the wives would stay at home and care for the household and the children. About Twenty years after the purchase of the homes, most of the couple's children had grown up and formed families of their own. Thus many rooms in the house used by the children now stood empty. This is one of the reasons for the amount of living space these couples have available to them, and might have promoted a more separate lifestyle between them. Since the couples have this ample space available to them, they have the luxury of doing any kind of activity within the confines of their own house, and this has in part caused these couples to spend most of their time in their homes.

On average, husbands would stay at home about 9.7 hours each day, while the wives would stay in the house as much as 11.8 hours a day. These numbers are quite large compared to a survey by NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute. The wives spent a lot of their time with household duties, such as preparing meals, washing clothes and keeping the household neat and clean. Though the husbands had no work, they would not engage in these activities, but instead read books or magazines, or use computers at their leisure. Most of the husbands meant that the household duties were the sole responsibility of the wife, an idea strongly influenced by the ideology of the post-war family.

Couple life?

The post war family was observed to affect the couple's lives very deeply. The couples had spent their entire lives in separate social groups, devoted to their role in society, and these differed from each other's greatly. In the case of the husband, he would spend the majority of his time at the company far away from his house, and even on weekends he would have to go out with co-workers or the boss, or to entertain his clients. In fact there was no choice in how to spend this time. One of the interviewees even said:

> Before my retirement I could spend almost no time with my family, because I would fall asleep instantly when I returned on weekdays. Because of my job, I was always tired and exhausted. Moreover on days off I had to play golf with clients and colleagues

While the husbands were hard at work, the wives engaged in child rearing and household chores. Often the wives would take on extra duties like volunteer work, such as helping some subjects in elementary schools or be taught in various hobby classes. They were the ones who built and kept the relationships they had with their neighbors.

These separate lifestyles that had been going on for more than two decades, was hard to combine after the husbands retired and returned back to the household. Since the wives in particular had enjoyed their home lives before their husbands had returned as retired.

This might be visible in that 76% of the couples spend less than four hours in each other's company a day. (I.e. being together, in the same time and space. Not including sleeping.) Likewise, more than half of the couples spend less than two hours a day together, outside of their homes. For many of the couples, mealtime was the only time they spend together. These elderly couples had continued separate life after the retirement of the husband, though they were living together under same roof. This tendency is caused by the policy of the post-war

system of Japan. During their lives they had to be separate in order to fulfill their role in society, in the context of post war development. The strong dynamics that kept the couples in the main stream life also became the force that intervened into their relationships and forced them apart.

Thus the post-war social system actually is to blame for the separate lives of the elderly couples. Moreover the environmental factors also influenced and promoted the separation of their lives. The elderly couples who were interviewed for this report all lived in Japanese suburbs, which were influenced by American suburbs. The idea of the neighborhood unit actually affected Japanese city planning. As Parry wrote in his book, he assumed that the young parents and children who dwelled in the suburbs adopted the notion of neighborhood unit. The elementary school was the center of one basic unit. Besides, shopping centers, hospitals, community centers, parks and so on were arranged within the neighborhood unit.

The residential area in which the interviews were conducted, practically imitated the neighborhood unit model. As can be seen from studying the facilities in the surroundings of the elderly couple's houses (3 km from their house), their surroundings consisted mainly of facilities required for daily life: dry cleaners, beauty salons, barber shops, retail stores, restaurants, medical facilities (hospitals, pharmacies), and educational facilities (schools, cram schools, private class).

The interview research showed that because of the arrangement of the neighborhood in the areas where the elderly couples lived, the husbands would go further when leaving the house. While outside of the home, the husband would venture out in a zone such as much as 9 km from their house, while the wife usually spent her time in a zone less than 3 km from the house. The wife would often spend her time outside of the house in a zone very similar to that of the neighborhood unit, while the husband would spend more time in an area very unlike that of the wife. Nishikawa mentioned that the receptacle suitable for modern families ironically led to the alienation of the husband from his own home (Nishikawa 2000). Much the same is true on residential suburb. Thus the lives between the elderly couples are separated because of the physical factors such as the big residences and the arrangement of the residential area.

Conclusion
The results of the interviews with the elderly couples illustrates that their lives are separated in both terms of time and space. They dwelled in large, good quality detached houses together, and the husbands and wives spent time in different rooms from each other. Moreover they

rarely go and spend time outside their home together. This is a result of the suburban life and the post-war ideology that was expected of them in their primary lifestyle.

The Japanese government imported the western theories and technologies of city planning such as "garden city" and "neighborhood unit" in order to emulate and to catch up with them, whereas the Western countries' aim of city planning was to solve the social problems that had occurred during industrialization. The suburbs in Japan, which were built based on these theories and technologies, were quite suitable for the lifestyle of majority of middle-class households. Furthermore in suburbs many people could be accommodated, though in developing the suburbs the coming of the aging society was not anticipated. The driving force behind building suburbs was those couples who wished dwell there while raising their children. As a natural consequence, the suburbs mostly included facilities for wives and children, such as schools, supermarkets, and parks. Eventually these arrangement of suburbs played a significant role in individualization of elderly couples' life. In short, the suburban life seems have not been very attractive for husbands.

The Japanese lifestyle based on post-war family ideology was strongly connected with the western model of suburban planning. Husbands and wives who were regarded as a "standard family" were each expected to carry out their gender roles completely. That is to say, the males would have to work hard with almost no spare time, and the females were expected to do domestic chores and raise their children. Fulfilling their gender roles was considered as an "evidence of the love of their family" (Yamada 2005). The government and public institutions attempted to spread this ideology among people through the political and economical system, education curriculums, and social media.

Most of elderly couples in Japan have been going through their life following this ideology. The idea of a main life-course was strongly anchored in the population. While the husbands commuted to a company in order to earn living expenses of the family and thus devoted most of his time to the work, the wives had to spend long time in their home to do house work and care for the children in order to comfortably support the life of the family. This sort of lifestyle was suitable and rational for the ideology the government intended to spread. Besides, Japanese companies played an important role in solidifying the stereotypical life-course and gender role ideology through supplying wide range of welfare. Families relied heavily on the social securities, which the companies provided to the foundation of their lives. However, as the husbands retired from the company, the family lost its identity as a "standard family". They have lost their "direction" of life which in part was supported by the companies that led the

men down the mainstream way of life. They dwell together in quality houses, where they even have extra rooms to spare. Yet their lives are quite separated. The husbands have largely been unable to find a place and a new role in their neighborhood and within their own home. The long absence of the husband from the residence and neighborhood makes him struggle to adjust to life when his commuter life comes to an end. Furthermore, they might have to endure separate lives in their old age after retirement for a long time, because of the very high life expectancy of the Japanese.

The reason for their current lives can be seen not only in the context of the rapidly aging society, but also through post modernist theories. As Giddens described, the relationship between male and female has been transformed. The systematic connection between couples, which expected them to carry out gender roles, is gradually destroyed and "intimacy" has appeared on the scene of current gender relationships based on communication. The condition of elderly couples certainly reflects this transformation. The male comes back to his home at the end of his "commuter life", and then the aging couple starts new life, where "gender roles" is no longer needed socially. The standard life of the nuclear family was formed by the suburban area suitable for their households, and the system pushed by post-war dynamics had to adjust to speed up the development of the Japanese economy. Therefore the bonds between the couples have gone from being based on gender roles, and is now based on communication in the present suburban areas. The strong force that kept the couples together has disappeared, therefore the lives of the elderly couples turn into separate ones. This distinction has started become more visible in everyday life. The elderly couple's lives showed how the standard life transformed at the hands of modernization.

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