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“Perceptions on Marriage and Changing Family Value in East Asia: A Comparative View”

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Abstract

With regard to East Asia’s preservation of traditional family values, the changes in sex, marriage tend to be slow. This research is based on data collected in 2006 from Japan, South Korea and China on “intergenerational values”. The results show that for the young generation, the choice of marriage partner and values relating to marriage are changing.

1. Introduction

The countries in East Asia are now concerned about the issues of an aging population and decreasing fertility. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the changes in the values of East Asian families.

For most people in East Asia, traditional values seemed to be retained and therefore, family values have not changed much, especially in the areas of sex, marriage and family. The reason for this situation is that there have been no research on East Asian families and in addition, there have been no empirical evidence for generational issues.

In order to understand the changes in East Asian families, it is necessary to understand the gap between the older generation and the young generation. Therefore, this research utilizes the data of two generations, that is, undergraduate students and their parents. The data was collected from three countries - Japan, South Korea and China.

A common problem in East Asia is declining fertility and closely related to this issue is late marriages. For this reason, within the issue of Family, it is necessary to analyze the values of marriage.

In the three-country research on “Intergenerational Values”, questions relating to the

selection criteria of a marriage partner, and views on cohabitation, divorce and so on were selected for analysis.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

In this study, Shanghai-Zemi data was used. Shanghai-zemi is a Joint Research project of Fudan, Yonsei, Waseda University members conceived by Sonoda-zemi Group in 2006. Three universities chose the undergraduates from Shanghai, Seoul and Tokyo and their parents from October, 2006. In Waseda, the quota sampling method was used to select students from larger lecture halls or class rooms within various faculties. In Fudan, the whole sample is divided by student's sex, grade, and major. In Japan, out of a total of 850 questionnaires distributed, 243 were collected, giving a return rate of 29.3%. In South Korea, 800 questionnaires were distributed and 163 were collected giving a return rate of 20.4%. For China, 400 questionnaires were distributed and 300 were collected giving a return rate of 75%.

2.2. Measures

The master questionnaire was developed in the English language and then translated into Korean, Japanese, Chinese using the back-translation method.

Questions regarding marriage are 15 cases.

- ①10-1 I would like to get married and have a family in the future
- ②10-2 I would like to live together with my partner before getting married.
- ③10-3 I would like to have a child in the future.
- ④11-1 It is unavoidable to sacrifice the family for work to some extent.
- ⑤11-2 Family expense should be borne by both the husband and the wife.
- ⑥11-3 Troubles occur easily when the wife earns more than the husband.
- ⑦11-4 A marriage without producing children is an incomplete one.
- ⑧11-5 Being a fulltime housewife indicates the high capability of the husband.
- ⑨11-6 I can accept the idea of "fulltime house husband."
- ⑩11-7 I can accept the idea of cohabiting even if there are no plans to get married.
- ⑪11-8 "Shot gun marriage" is not a bad idea.
- ⑫11-12 Regardless of the parents' opinion, one does not have to be married, if he/she can lead a contented life.
- ⑬11-13 If there is a situation where my parents and my spouse are pitted against each other, I will most probably side with my parents.
- ⑭11-14 Male and female should behave according to their respective accord of masculinity and femininity.

⑮P19/S21-4 Experience of divorce is not a flaw any more

All items of the scales are scored using a Likert-scale ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree.

3. Results

3.1 Choice of Marriage Partner

Japanese children selected “similarity in values and beliefs” as the most important criteria when choosing a prospective spouse. In comparison to the Parents generation, Japanese daughters’ criteria of “Love” is relegated to 4th position.

Table1

Most Important Criteria when choosing a prospective spouse (%)

Japanese Son		Japanesee Daughter
similarity in values and beliefs (92.6%)	1	similarity in values and beliefs (84.7%)
Love (70.2%)	2	income, property (52.5%)
moral (48.8%)	3	moral (38.1%)
house making/child care ability (30.6%)	4	Love (37.3%)
appearance(28.1%)	5	occupation/social status (18.6%)

multiple answer(maximum 3)

Table2

Most important things when chosen spouse (%)

Japanese Father		Japanee Mother
Love (75.8%)	1	similarity in values and beliefs (89.3%)
similarity in values and beliefs (74.7%)	2	love (69.3%)
moral (42.9%)	3	moral (58.0%)
appearance(27.5%)	4	occupation/social status (16.7%)
masculinity&femininity (14.3%)	5	income, property (16.0%)

multiple answer (maximum 3)

In China son selected “similarity in values and beliefs” as for most important thing when choosing a prospective spouse. For Chinese daughters, this criteria was not in 1st position but it was 1 rank higher than the parents’ generation.

Table3

Most Important things when choosing a prospective spouse (%)

Chinese Son		Chinese Daughter
similarity in values and beliefs (67.2%)	1	moral (72.2%)
moral (55.5%)	2	similarity in values and beliefs (68.6%)
Love (53.9%)	3	Love (38.5%)
appearance (32%)	4	income, property (35.5%)
Occupation/social status (17.2%)	5	occupation/social status (31.4%)

multiple answer (maximum 3)

Table4

Most important things when chosen spouse (%)

Chinese Father		Chinese Mother
Love (63.9%)	1	moral (72.6%)
moral (61.8%)	2	love (50%)
similarity in values and beliefs (49.3%)	3	similarity in values and beliefs (44.5%)
appearance (32.6%)	4	occupation/social status (22.6%)
family background (16%)	5	appearance (19.2%)

multiple answer (maximum 3)

In Korea both parents and children selected “Love” as the most important criteria when choosing a prospective spouse and chosen spouse. Further, “similarity in values and beliefs” was in 2nd position. In the case of Korean sons, it is one rank up compared to the parents’ generation.

Table5

Most Important things when choosing a prospective spouse (%)

Korean Son		Korean Daughter
Love (74.5%)	1	Love (68.7%)
similarity in values and beliefs (61.8%)	2	similarity in values and beliefs (61.4%)
moral (35.3%)	3	income, property (53.0%)
appearance (26.5%)	4	occupation/social status (44.6%)
income, property (26.5%)	5	moral (14.5%)

multiple answer (maximum 3)

Table6

Most important things when chosen spouse (%)

Korean Father		Korean Mother
love (67.2%)	1	love (62.2%)
moral (49.3%)	2	similarity in values and beliefs (51%)
similarity in values and beliefs (31.3%)	3	moral (41.8%)
appearance (29.9%)	4	occupation/social status (38.8%)
masculinity&femininity (23.9%)	5	Income, property (25.5%)

multiple answer (maximum 3)

In the 3 countries of Japan, South Korea and China, both the parents' generation and the children's generation viewed love, similarity in values and beliefs, moral as important in the choice of a marriage partner. Further, in each country, a generational gap is observed in the ranking of the criteria. In every country, for the criteria, "similarity in values and beliefs", the children's generation ranks higher than the parents' generation.

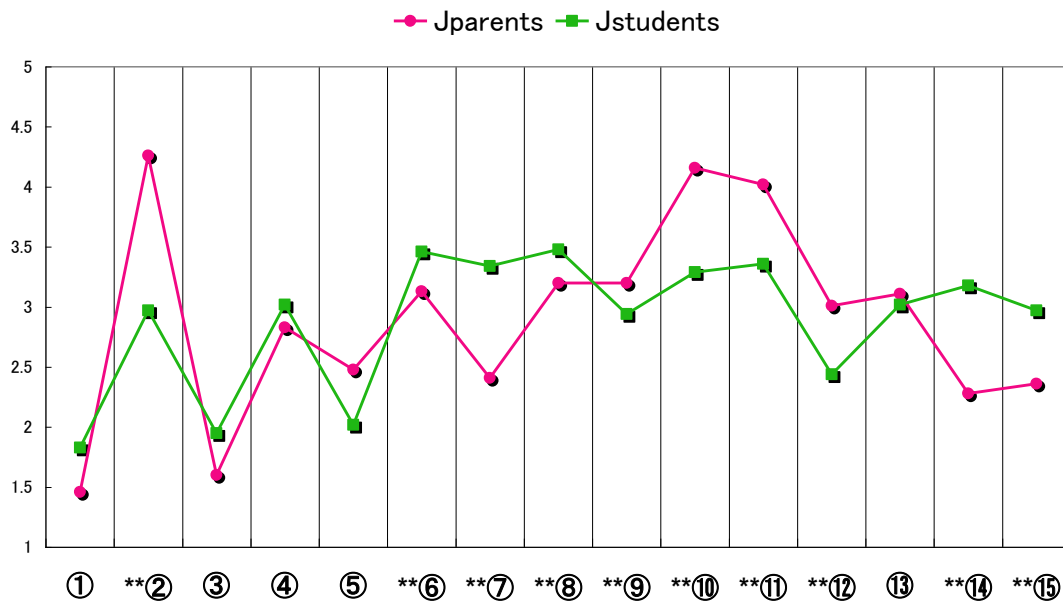
3.2. Changes in marriage values

The following 3 graphs compare the 15 selected questions for the parents' generation and the children's generation for Japan, South Korea and China. Using the paired T-test, * indicates that between the parents and children $p < 0.05$ and ** indicates that $p < 0.01$.

For all the three countries, a gap is observed between parents and children in most of the questions. In addition, for every country, the largest difference is observed in the attitude towards cohabitation.

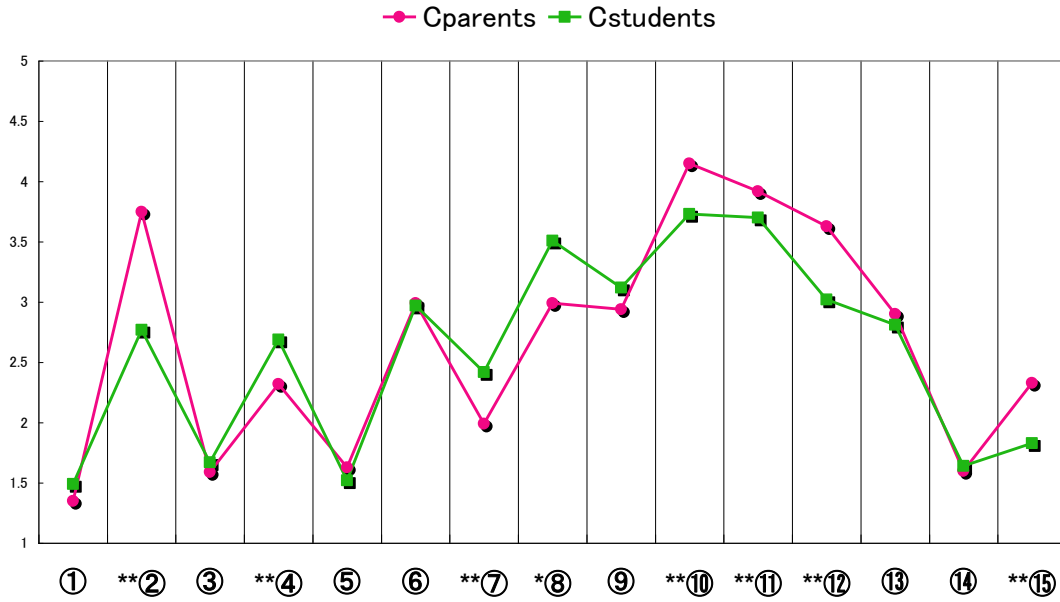
Graph1

Paired t-tests comparing students and parents : Japan



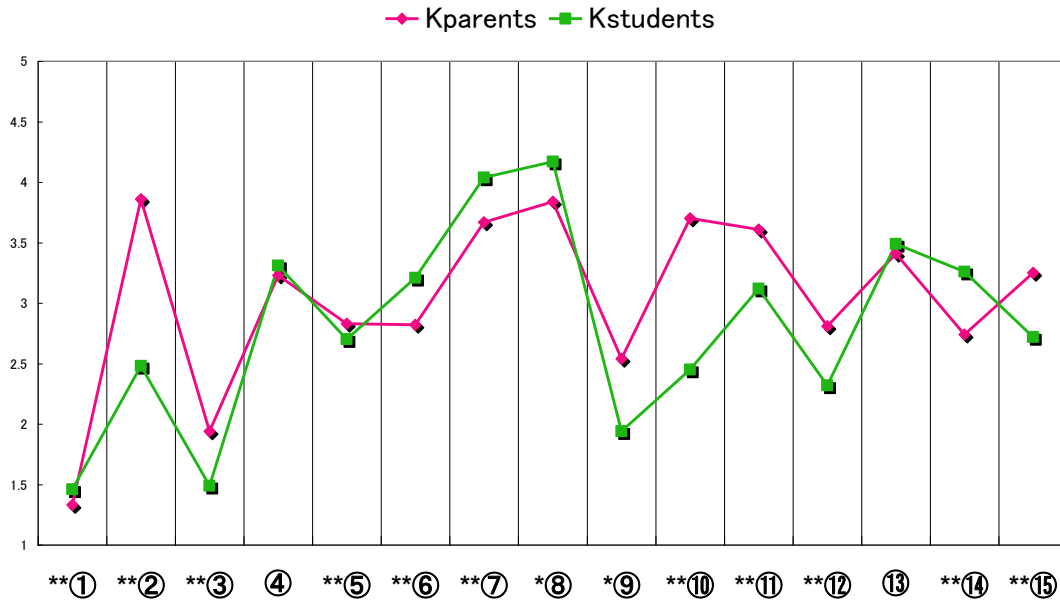
Graph2

Paired t-tests comparing students and parents : China



Graph3

Paired t-tests comparing students and parents : Korea



The next 2 graphs show the largest differences between parents and children and also the differences by country.

Figure1

Differences in Cohabitation, divorce, shotgun marriage among three countries' students.

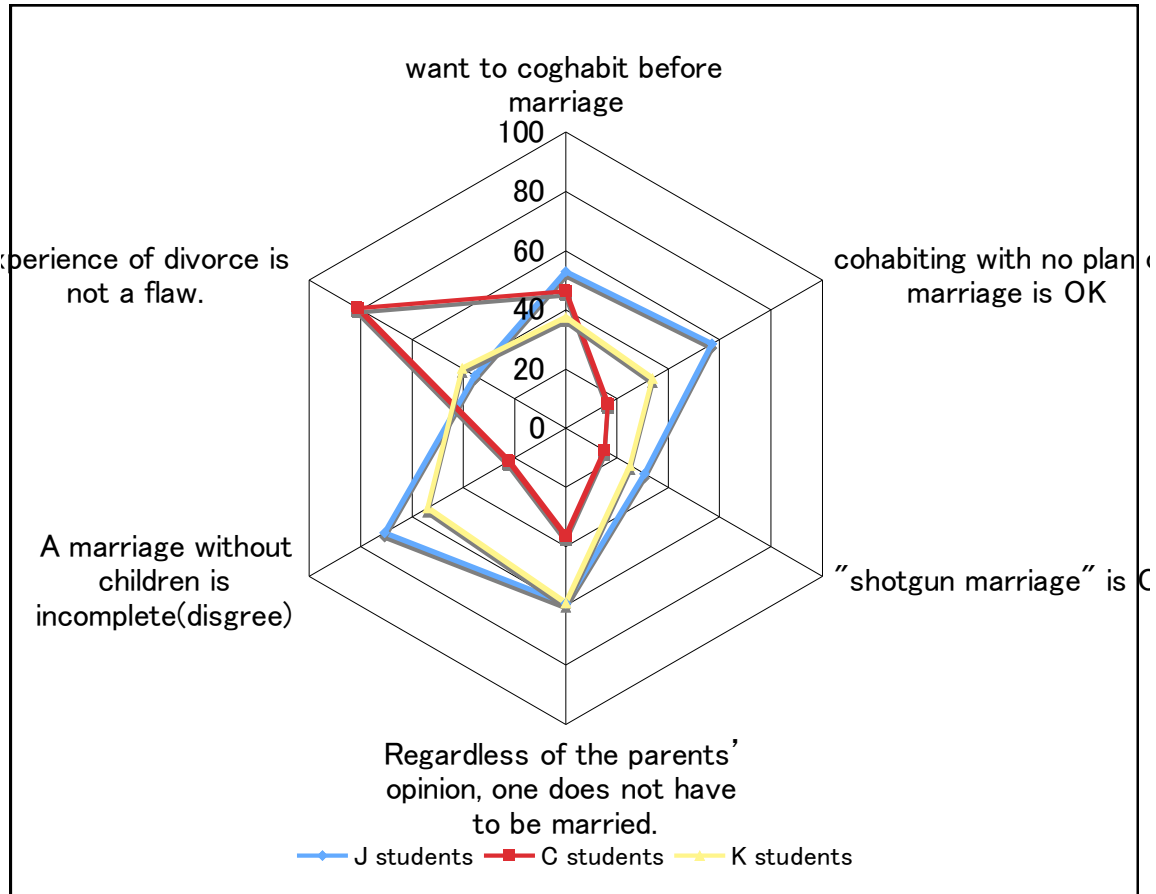
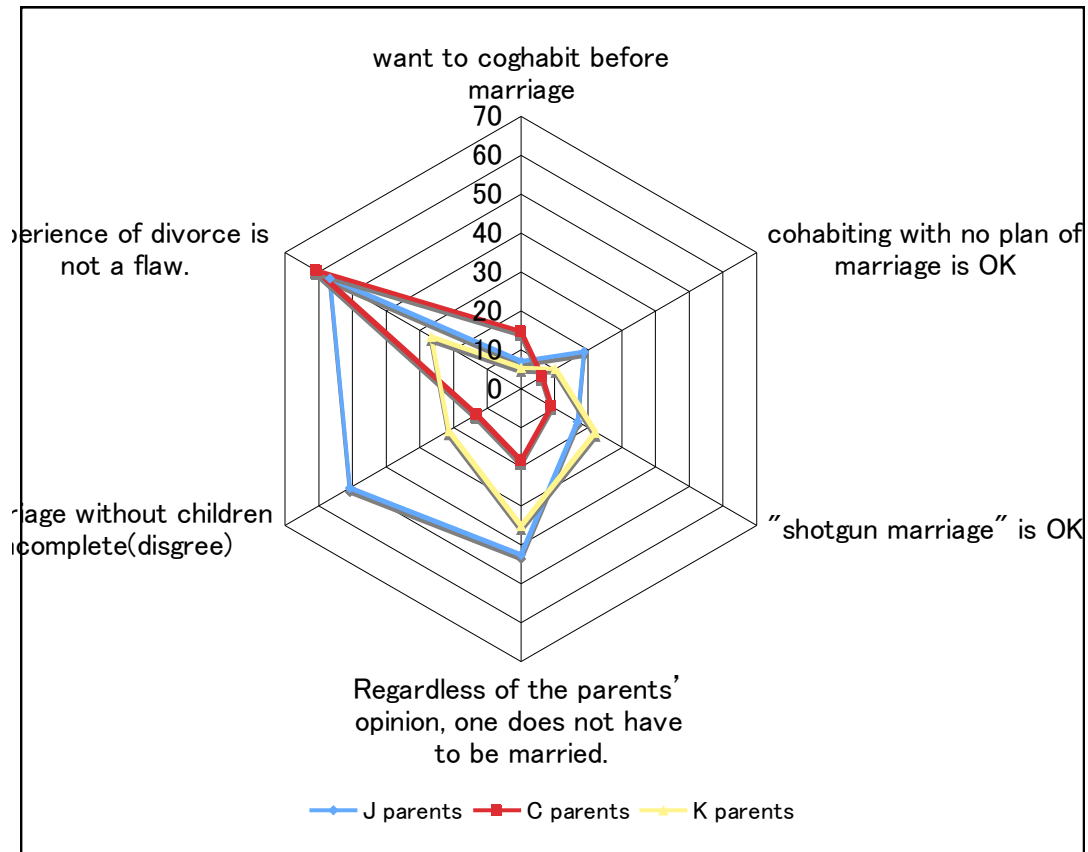


Figure 2 shows the differences of the parents generation in the three countries on the questions of cohabitation, divorce and shotgun marriage. For the three countries, the parents' values are found to be diverse. For Korean parents, their attitude towards divorce is much more open than that of Japan and China.

Considering Figure 1 and 2 together, the differences in values for the parents' generation for the three countries are high. For all three countries, compared to the parents' generation, the values for the children's generation is much closer.

Figure2

Differences in Cohabitation, divorce, shotgun marriage among three countries parents.



4. Discussion and conclusion

Although for most East Asian people the traditional values of sex, marriage and family tend to be preserved, this research shows that the children's generation has significant changes in values.

For Japan, South Korea and China, as compared to the parents' generation, the children's generation puts high importance on intimacy. In addition, for all three countries, the children's generation is more open to cohabitation, shotgun marriages.

The result of this research shows that firstly, East Asia's younger generation's attitude and values of family are changing and secondly, compared to the parents' generation, the value changes are more similar among the three countries.