

## Mothers' beliefs toward motherhood and their parenting feelings in Japan and China

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### Summary

Four hundred one mothers who live in Tokyo and Shanghai answered questions on working after marriage, working before and after childbirth, parenting feelings, and beliefs toward motherhood. The average figure of mothers participated in the study is as follows: Average age is 36 in Japan, 33 in China; Mothers with bachelor's degree or higher account for 24% in Japan < 42% in China; Working mothers account for 20% in Japan, 80% in China. Both similarities and differences were found about beliefs towards motherhood between Japan and China. For an example of difference, Japanese mothers have a strong belief that "mothers need to concentrate on child-rearing until children become three years old, or children are negatively affected." Many mothers, both in Japan and China, feel fulfilled and happy in raising children. At the same time, they feel burden of child-rearing. Psychological burden is bigger in Japan whereas economical burden is bigger in China. These results were discussed from the viewpoint of the economical development and change of child-rearing culture in Japan and China.

**Keywords:** motherhood, mothers' parenting feelings, cross-cultural study

### Purpose

Many strains have been seen in children's development process both in Japan where declining birth rates have been a serious problem and in China where the one-child policy has been conducted to curb population growth. Many people now become parents without experience in infant-caring due to the spread of nuclear family and lesser communication in local communities in both countries. Quality parenting is needed to maintain children's sound development, and consequently parents' own growth is essential for that purpose.

Many studies conducted in Japan suggest that Japanese young people are of affirmative opinions about the "3-year-old child myth", a traditional thinking that mothers have to concentrate on child-rearing until the child reaches 3-year-old, otherwise the child doesn't grow well. It is thought that keeping this kind of stereotype will make it difficult for mothers to raise children while pursuing self-actualiza-

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tion. Thus, this study was conducted to know characteristics of infant-bearing mothers' beliefs toward motherhood and their relations with parenting feelings, and differences of the two factors between Japan and China.

## **Method**

### **Participants and procedure:**

Questionnaires were handed out via kindergartens to mothers in Tokyo and Shanghai who had preschoolers (below the age of 6) in November 2007 and January 2008. Answers were made anonymously and on a voluntarily basis. The number of collected answers were 204 (recovery rate: 63%) in Japan and 192 (recovery rate: 75%) in China.

### **Items surveyed:**

Mother's age, academic background, working conditions, family structure, working status before and after marriage and delivery, rearer of children, beliefs toward motherhood, and parenting feelings. The original questionnaire was drafted in Japanese and later the Chinese translation version<sup>1)</sup> was compiled.

#### **(1) Beliefs toward motherhood**

Part of the 50 items questioned are as follows:

- Children's matters always come first in the family.
- Working is needed to be financially independent from the partner.
- You should keep working even if that demands you to leave your child to other people.
- It is fun to think about something you can do for your child.
- You are feeling hard because your child doesn't behave as you want him or her to do.
- You have found that your child's personalities and abilities are somehow different from what you have.
- You are pleased to see your child grow steadily and stand on his or her own feet.
- You want your child to live as he or her likes without being bothered parents' expectations and desires.
- You don't care no matter how you are troubled if it is for your child's education or future.
- Fathers should be strict while mothers should be gentle for the growth of children.
- You have sympathies for those who suffer infant-care neurosis.
- Just imaging your pregnant figure makes you miserable.
- You feel irritated without reason.
- Youth is lost sooner when you are too occupied with child-rearing.
- You are or were worried that breast-feeding could deform your body.
- It is OK that some women opt for unmarried life.
- You feel sorry for those children aged 3 and below left to a nursery.
- Mothers should concentrate on child-rearing without working until the child reaches around the age of 3.

- You feel sad when your child live away from you.
- Being mother gives you a sense of secure and calmness.
- You like to be a mother.
- Child-bearing and -rearing have been opportunities for your own growth.
- You feel like your child is part of your body.
- You feel happy when your child smiles.
- You have no confidence in dealing with your child as a mother.

## (2) Parenting feelings

Yes-or-no question method was employed in the questions related parenting feelings, and it was asked that whether the mothers have felt burdens (financially, mentally or physically), fulfillment or happiness in child-rearing. A period during which a mother felt that sentiment most was also asked to those who answered 'yes.'

## Results and Consideration

### Mothers' profiles and family structure (Table 1):

#### (1) Average age and age of the first delivery

36.3-year-old and 29.3-year-old in Japan, and 32.7-year-old and 28-year-old in China.

#### (2) Average number vs. ideal number of children

2 vs. 2.4 in Japan, and 1 vs. 1.7 in China.

#### (3) Academic background

31.4% in Japan and 12.4% in China are high school graduate, and 43.6% and 44.4% are junior college or career college graduate respectively, and 24% and 41.6% are graduates from a college or higher institution respectively.

#### (4) Working conditions

About 80% of Japanese mothers are a full-time homemaker while more than 80% in China are working and of them, 70% are full-time workers.

#### (5) Working status before and after marriage and delivery

The largest number of Japanese mothers (52.5%) said they quit job at around the time of delivery, while 57.6% in China replied they kept working even after the delivery with a break with mater-

**Table 1 Mothers' profiles and family structure.**

Mother's age		Average number of children	Average number of families	Home-maker (%)	Academic background (%)			Family structure (%)		
					high school	junior or career college	college or higher institution	nuclear families	three generations	
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>									
Japan	36.3	4.36	2 (2.4)	4.1	77.8	31.4	43.6	24.0	86.1	11.4
China	32.7	3.72	1 (1.7)	4.1	10.0	12.4	44.4	41.6	43.2	53.6

( ) mean average ideal number of children.

nity leave. The second-most common answer is quitting job at around the time of marriage, 39%, in Japan, and taking another job after maternity leave, 16.1%, in China.

#### **(6) Average number of family members living with children**

4.1 in Japan and China alike. Nuclear families account for 86.1% in Japan while 53.6% of the Chinese families consist of three generations. The rate of three-generation families in Japan is 11.4%.

#### **(7) Main rearer other than child-minder until the child reaches 3-year-old**

An overwhelming majority (98%) are a mother in Japan. Grandparents (46%) top a mother (44%) in China. A nursing mother accounts for 7% in China.

### **Mothers' experienced parenting feelings:**

#### **(1) Experienced parenting feelings**

Mothers who have experienced burdens in child-rearing are 78.9% in Japan and 70.5% in China, and who have experienced fulfillment are 94.1% and 97.4% respectively. Happiness was experienced by 98.5% in Japan and 100% in China.

#### **(2) When did the mothers felt above-mentioned sentiments most?**

The largest number of the respondents (49.7% in Japan and 32.1% in China) replied they felt burdens most during the six months after the child's birth. The second-largest number of the Chinese mothers (28.3%) said they felt the heaviest burden when the child was 5 or 6-year-old, before joining a school, while Japanese mothers who said so rank the lowest.

Mothers who felt fulfillment most when the child was 5 or 6-year-old are 22% in Japan while Chinese mothers who replied so rank the lowest. Chinese mothers who said they felt fulfillment most when the child was around 3-year-old are 23.2%.

Japanese mothers who said they felt happiness most during the six months after the child's birth are 32%, while 25.2% of Chinese mothers said that was when the child was around 3-year-old.

Mothers who felt fulfillment or happiness outnumber those who felt burdens both in Japan and China. It was found that mothers have positive feelings for child-rearing, not only negative ones. The mothers in Japan and China felt the heaviest burdens in the same period. A survey conducted in Japan reveals that more than half of the parents have started their child-rearing without prior experience in infant-caring. It is considered that uneasiness and burdens of child-rearing come from their lack of fostering experience.

### **Child-rearing burdens:**

#### **(1) Financial, mental and physical burdens and differences between Japan and China**

As **Table 2** shows, both Japanese and Chinese mothers felt the heaviest burdens in the mental aspect, followed by burdens in the physical aspect and the financial aspect in order. Japanese mothers show significantly higher figures in the three types of burdens. ( $t = 3.31, 3.87$  and  $3.33$  in order,  $p < .01$  for all) (**Table 2**)

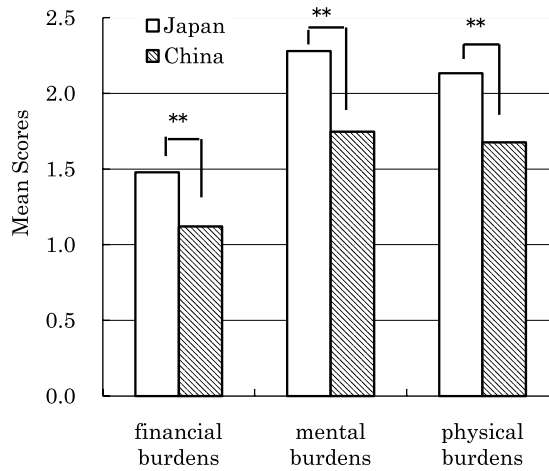
#### **(2) Relations between child-rearing burdens**

A significantly positive correlation is observed between the three types of burdens both in Japan and China. (**Figure 1**)

**Table 2 Descriptive statistics of burdens and result of *t*-test**

	Japan			China			<i>t</i> -test	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>
Financial burdens	1.48	1.13	203	1.12	0.96	175	376	3.33**
Mental burdens	2.28	1.38	201	1.75	1.31	186	385	3.87**
Physical burdens	2.13	1.37	202	1.68	1.32	179	379	3.31**

\*\**p* < .01



**Figure 1 Three types of burdens**  
(\*\**p* < .01)

### (3) Relations with the number of children and family members living together

Living together with grandparents, relatives or a nursing mother is a common practice in China. It is shown that supports provided by those people reduce mental and physical burdens of Chinese mothers.

### (4) Relations with mother's age

It is commonly observed both in Japan and China that the younger a mother is, the heavier financial burdens she has to face (respectively,  $r = -.19$  and  $r = -.20$ , both  $p < .01$ ). In Japan, younger mothers also feel heavier mental burdens than older ones.

### (5) Relations with mother's working status

Unemployed mothers feel stronger mental burdens than working mothers in Japan.

## Analysis of beliefs toward motherhood:

### (1) Scoring

Five options, from "not agreeable at all (1 point)" to "quite agreeable (5 points)," were given to each item.

### (2) Factor analysis of the scale of beliefs toward motherhood

<a> Japan (**Table 3**)

Factor analysis was conducted under the principal factor solution after the items were analyzed. Five factors were extracted and then the Promax rotation was applied. Contribution of 45 items and 5 factors is 41.71%.

The first factor consists of nine items. Items indicating mother-child integrated maternal love such as “The child is your *raison d’etre*” and “You feel like your child is part of your body” are highly loaded. Then the first factor was named “Sense of oneness of maternal love.” The second factor consists of 10 items, and items such as “You may be disqualified as a mother” and “The question is whether you are truly beneficial for the child” show high loading scores. Then the second factor was named “Anxiety and conflict.” The third factor consists of seven items. Items related the “3-year-old child myth,” which is “Mothers should concentrate on child-rearing staying away from working outside until the child reaches around 3-year-old, otherwise it badly affects to the child,” are highly loaded. The third factor was named “mythical maternal love.” The fourth factor consists of 11 items. Items related human development such as “You feel yourself grown with bearing and rearing of the child” are highly loaded. The fourth factor was named “Fulfillment and growth.” The fifth factor consists of eight items. Items expressing women’s refusal to become a mother such as “You are worried that breast-feeding could deform your body” or “You have become impatient because child-rearing keeps you from doing what you want to do” show high loading scores. The fifth factor was named “Self-denial.”

<b> China (**Table 4**)

The same analysis method as conducted in Japan was applied. Contribution of 46 items and 5 factors is 41.06%.

The first factor consists of 16 items. Items such as “You feel yourself grown with bearing and rearing of the child” and “You feel happy when your child smiles” show high loading scores. Then the first factor was named “Fulfillment and growth.” The second factor consists of 14 items, and items such as “The child is your *raison d’etre*” and “You don’t care no matter how you are troubled if it is for your child’s education or future” show high loading scores. Then the second factor was named “Devotion and expectation.” The third factor consists of nine items. Items expressing worries coming from egoism like “Your perspective has become narrow because you are too occupied with child-rearing” and “Youth is lost sooner when you are too occupied with child-rearing” are highly loaded. The third factor was named “Egoistic worries.” The fourth factor consists of four items. Items such as “Mothers should concentrate on child-rearing staying away from working outside until the child reaches around 3-year-old, otherwise it badly affects to the child.” Are highly loaded. The fourth factor was named “motherhood-obsession.” The fifth factor consists of three items, “Working is needed to be financially independent from the partner”, “You have found that your child’s personalities and abilities are somehow different from what you have.” and “You should keep working even if that demands you to leave your child to other people.” The fifth factor was named “Independence.”

**(3) Internal consistency and correlation of each scale**

Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was calculated to consider the internal consistency of each scale.

<a> Internal consistency and correlation of each scale in Japan

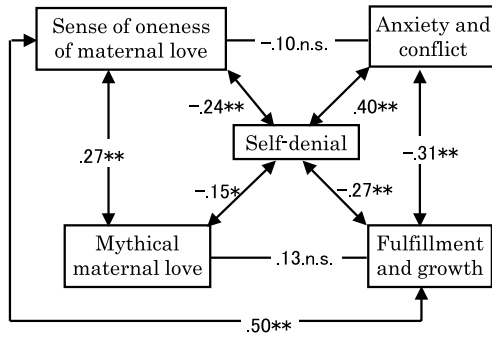
**Table 3 Result of factor analysis of beliefs toward motherhood in Japan**

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
m42	.931							
m43	.798							
m04	.635							
m18	.558							
m38	.541					3.81	.56	.79
m27	.502							
m40	.455							
m39	.415							
m10	.310							
m48		.655						
m46		.628						
m22		.623						
m25		.574						
m47		.524						
m45		.442				2.79	.54	.76
m13		.421						
m21		.351						
m20		.328						
m23		.316						
m36			.760					
m37			.747					
m34			.718					
m05			.665					
m07			-.498			3.25	.67	.78
m03			.465					
m09			.344					
m14				.635				
m31				.563				
m16				.545				
m41				.495				
m32				.446				
m44				.394				
m17				.372		4.24	.39	.77
m01				.363				
m12				.345				
m50				.319				
m02				.298				
m28					.523			
m29					.511			
m24					.479			
m26					.459			
m30					-.398	2.33	.50	.64
m33					.325			
m06					.311			
m08					.287			
	I	II	III	IV	V			
I	—	-.27	.46	.53	-.29			
II		—	-.21	-.36	.30			
III			—	.19	-.23			
IV				—	-.28			

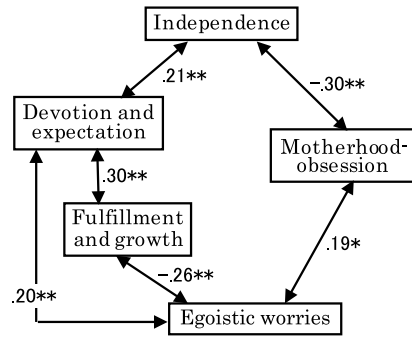
**Table 4 Result of factor analysis of beliefs toward motherhood in China**

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
m41	.750							
m32	.726							
m44	.697							
m50	.556							
m45	-.533							
m16	.530							
m40	.525							
m30	.511					4.25	.37	.80
m17	.481							
m31	.436							
m01	.387							
m27	.385							
m10	.338							
m24	-.334							
m02	.328							
m39	.283							
m42		.765						
m43		.690						
m18		.638						
m38		.585						
m20		.571						
m19		.537						
m21		.499				3.54	.53	.80
m11		.492						
m13		.452						
m12		.388						
m04		.358						
m33		-.308						
m22		.299						
m03		.205						
m47			.594					
m26			.580					
m48			.513					
m25			.489					
m23			.451			2.31	.55	.72
m28			.367					
m46			.353					
m29			.312					
m08			.304					
m36				.794				
m37				.646				
m34				.368		3.02	.79	.59
m05				.320				
m06					.596			
m14					.427	3.78	.68	.46
m07					.420			
	I	II	III	IV	V			
I	—	.290	-.247	-.037	-.267			
II		—	.169	-.102	-.083			
III			—	.154	.091			
IV				—	.088			





**Figure 2 Structure of BTM in Japan**  
 (\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ )



**Figure 3 Structure of BTM in China**  
 (\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ )

Coefficient alpha of each scale are from .64 to .79 as indicated in **Table 3**. Those figures are highly enough to be employed as a scale in the study. Close correlations are seen between the scales as **Figure 2** shows. The stronger of a mother’s belief toward the myth of Japanese traditional maternal love, the more stable the sense of oneness of maternal love becomes and the more fulfillment and growth she feels. Such a belief is thought to lessen the sense of self-denial as a mother and reduce worries and struggles for child-rearing. On the other hand, mothers in modern Japanese society who don’t believe the myth of traditional maternal love are likely to feel strong self-denial as a mother and experience less fulfillment and growth in child-rearing. Besides, it is thought that they become worried and troubled in child-rearing and feel little a sense of oneness.

<b> Internal consistency and correlation of each scale in China

Coefficient alpha of from the first to third scales are high, from .72 to .80, as shown in **Table 4**. On the other hand, coefficient alpha of the fourth and fifth scales are .59 and .46. Further examination is needed on these points.

Correlations between each scale are less close than those of Japan as shown in **Figure 3**.

Factor analysis revealed that Japanese mothers have both negative aspects such as anxiety, conflict and self-denial and positive aspects such as fulfillment and growth in their beliefs toward motherhood. It is also learned that Chinese mothers’ beliefs toward motherhood are mostly positive such as fulfillment and growth.

**(4) Relations between beliefs toward motherhood, age and academic background**

**Table 5** and **Table 6** show the correlations between mother’s age, academic background and beliefs toward motherhood. It was found that Japanese and Chinese mothers’ beliefs toward motherhood have relations with their age and academic background. The younger a Japanese mother is, the more anxiety, worries and self-denial as a mother she feels. The higher a Japanese mother’s academic background is, the stronger fulfillment and growth she feels. On the other hand, it is suggested that the higher an academic background and the older a Chinese mother is, the more motherhood-obsession becomes.

**Table 5 Correlations between mother's age, scores of each burden and beliefs toward motherhood in Japan**

JAPAN	Financial burdens	Mental burdens	Physical burdens	Sense of oneness of maternal love	Anxiety and conflict	Mythical maternal love	Fulfillment and growth	Self-denial	Mother's age
Financial burdens	—	.59**	.57**	-.06	.28**	.01	-.13	.37**	-.19**
Mental burdens		—	.82**	-.15*	.42**	-.10	-.11	.49**	-.19**
Physical burdens			—	-.05	.31**	.00	.00	.41**	-.07
Sense of oneness of maternal love				—	-.10	.27**	.50**	-.24**	.01
Anxiety and conflict					—	-.09	-.31**	.40**	-.17*
Mythical maternallove						—	.13	-.15*	.07
Fulfillment and growth							—	-.27**	.03
Self-denial								—	-.27**
Mother's age									—

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 6 Correlations between mother's age, scores of each burden and beliefs toward motherhood in China**

CHINA	Financial burdens	Mental burdens	Physical burdens	Fulfillment and growth	Devotion and expectation	Egoistic worries	Motherhood-obsession	Independence	Mother's age
Financial burdens	—	.76**	.72**	-.18*	.04	.30**	.14	.06	-.20**
Mental burdens		—	.84**	-.20**	-.09	.28**	.23**	.01	-.09
Physical burdens			—	-.17*	-.08	.27**	.16*	.08	-.13
Fulfillment and growth				—	.30**	-.26**	.04	.05	.01
Devotion and expectation					—	.20**	.02	.21**	-.05
Egoistic worries						—	.19*	-.02	.01
Motherhood-obsession							—	-.30**	.24**
Independence								—	-.11
Mother's age									—

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### **Correlations between beliefs toward motherhood and child-rearing burdens:**

Correlation coefficient was applied to reveal relations between each factor of beliefs toward motherhood and scores of mother's burdens. It was found that Japanese mothers' negative beliefs toward motherhood have close relations with financial, mental and physical burdens as shown in **Table 5**. Mothers who feel more burdens have more negative beliefs toward motherhood such as anxiety, conflict and self-denial. It is also found out that mental burdens reduce when mothers feel more sense of oneness of maternal love.

In China, on the other hand, it was found that mother's positive beliefs toward motherhood have a significantly negative correlation with financial, mental and physical burdens. Mothers who feel more burdens have their positive beliefs toward motherhood restrained and have stronger anxiety coming from egoism. (**Table 6**)

### **Summary and conclusion**

It was found that infant-rearing mothers in modern Japanese society believe in the myth of 3-year-old child. Japanese women retire from their job when they get married or give birth to a child as indicated by Ohhinata (2000). Mothers feel more tiredness and stress from child-rearing because they have to be faced with most burdens of child-rearing.

It is also learned that there are close relations between mother's beliefs toward motherhood and parenting feelings. Japanese younger mothers feel more anxiety conflict and self-denial as a mother than older ones. It is suggested that more supports to young mothers are crucial to improve child-rearing conditions.

### **Note**

- 1) Minor changes were made to the questions and options in the Chinese version in consideration of its social system and culture. For example, since China has no such system as child-rearing leave, maternity leave was instead given as an option in the question about working status before and after marriage and delivery. The question about ideal numbers of children was given under the assumption of no one-child policy.

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