

EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN



PHILOSOPHISCHE
FAKULTÄT



*The Demographic Transition in China and Its Impact
on the Elderly Population in Rural Areas:
Lessons in Local Empowerment from Japan*

Sandra Müller

**Greater China Studies
Master Theses Collection**

大中華學優秀碩士畢業論文彙編

August 2011

**Department of Chinese and Korean Studies
Chair of Greater China Studies
Wilhelmstraße 133
72074 Tübingen
Germany**

**THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN CHINA
AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ELDERLY POPULATION IN RURAL AREAS:
LESSONS IN LOCAL EMPOWERMENT FROM JAPAN**

by

Sandra Müller

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in “East Asian Politics and Society”

at

Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies
Department of Chinese and Korean Studies

Supervisor: Professor Gunter Schubert

November 2011

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the people who have supported this thesis and made my research on the demographic transition and its impact on the rural elderly in China and Japan possible.

First of all, I want to acknowledge the support of my supervisor Professor Gunter Schubert of the University of Tübingen. He encouraged me to proceed with my ideas on Chinese demography and further to conduct my research at the Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute (ADSRI). My second supervisor, Professor Robert Horres, helped me choosing my research path and gave me fruitful advice on Japan's demography. His seminar on demographics in Japan was the initiation for my research project.

The academic staff at ADSRI of the Australian National University has contributed immensely on my thesis. I would like to thank Professor Peter McDonald who accepted me as a research student and thus made my research in Canberra possible. I especially would like to thank Professor Zhao Zhongwei who always had a sympathetic ear and provided me with many valuable and helpful advice and suggestions. His support and encouragement was very important to me. Professor Chen Wei was always happy to answer my questions and thankfully arranged my research at the People's University in Beijing. I appreciate the continuous efforts of Alice Falkiner and Anna Reimondos who helped me with linguistics, listened to my ideas and provided me with valuable advice.

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1 Introduction

Population ageing resulting from the demographic transition is a global phenomenon which affects an increasing number of countries. The rapid ageing in the twenty-first century is without parallel in history and the long-term effects are pervasive. Europe has been greying since decades, but Asian countries are ageing much faster and will have less time to adapt to the consequences. Among the Asian countries South Korea and Japan are taking a unique position since ageing has been a central issue for years and policies to increase the fertility rate are on the political agenda ever since. But also less industrialised countries in Asia such as China, Vietnam and Thailand are facing a rapidly greying society.

The situation in the People's Republic of China¹ is exceptional as well: 30 years after the introduction of the one-child policy and accelerated by an increasing life expectancy the population structure is changing much faster than in other countries.² As early as 2035 one quarter of the Chinese population is estimated to be older than 60 years.³ Today, the elderly⁴ account for a mere 13 per cent of the population, a total of more than 177 million elderly – the largest number worldwide.⁵ While China's neighbour Japan has already taken measures to ward off the upcoming demographic problem, China's government has yet to react. Even though Beijing has realised the general problem of ageing and views it as a major concern, no substantial measures have been taken thus far.⁶ Among the most pressing problems are taking care of the growing number of elderly, especially in rural areas, where their number and the dependency ratio are significantly higher than in the cities. The ageing dilemma is going to be exacerbated in the near future when the so-called baby-boom generation, born during the 1960s after the Great Leap Forward, will become the new senior generation. Even though since the 1980s the population growth is decelerating as a result of the one-child policy, the so-called 4-2-1 problem⁷ will challenge the Chinese government all the more. To date, caring and providing for seniors

¹ Hereafter referred to as “China”, excluding Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

² Cf. GUO/ZHAO 2007: 5.

³ Cf. WHO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC 2010.

⁴ The general term “elderly” or “elderly population” refers to the female and male population aged 60 and over. In several analyses the population aged 65 and over is referred to as the elderly; if this is the case it will be mentioned specifically.

⁵ Cf. NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS OF CHINA 2011.

⁶ Cf. UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS/POPULATION DIVISION 2010.

⁷ The 4-2-1 problem is the new phenomenon that due to the one-child policy one child has to support its parents and four grandparents.

functions almost entirely through familial structures, as sons and daughters support their parents with financial or instrumental help. But the inevitable change of the population structure demands state level assistance and special care for the elderly – particularly in rural areas where nursing homes are rare, out-migration leaves behind the senior citizens and pension only applies to around 14 per cent of the population.⁸

The demographic situation in Japan paints a similar picture. The fertility rate in China's neighbouring country is equally low and the life expectancy is, in contrast, one of the highest worldwide.⁹ The trend to migrate to the cities continues in both countries and the generation of the over 60-year-olds is left behind. Even though the reasons for the demographic transition in Japan are entirely different from the causes in China, the problem remains the same: How to take care of the elderly population in rural areas and how to improve their situation? In addition to that, the velocity of this development in China is a problem: the sharp birth decline through the one-child policy allows the government in Beijing little time to shift the traditional intergenerational caring system for the elderly from familial structures to state level.

In both countries, the large rural-urban divide engenders a growing pauperisation in rural areas: the young, productive workforce migrates to work in the cities and is often not able to fully support their families left behind in the villages. Additionally, sole family or governmental financial support does not meet the needs of instrumental support for the elderly such as assistance in daily activities. Thus far, the Chinese government has not profoundly become aware of this difficulty. On the contrary: The Chinese government estimates the role of the traditional caring system as very high, *especially* in rural areas.¹⁰ Japanese communities can serve as a model here in terms of local empowerment: The local population tries to stop the on-going rural exodus itself by establishing new employment fields such as ecotourism, selling local products and opening small businesses, thus ensuring economic growth. This in turn leads to an improved living standard and can attract migrants to come to rural areas and stop the decline. Former migrants are in the same way enticed to resettle in their hometowns and in this way ensure taking care of their elderly parents. In rural China however, the role of the community in coping with the so-called silver tide (yinse langchao, 银色浪潮) is still underdeveloped, whereas in many cities

⁸ Numbers vary; WANG 2005: 7; ADEMA/SALDITT/WHITEFORD 2007: 23; HOWE/JACKSON/NAKASHIMA 2009: 11; HU/STEWART 2009: 6.

⁹ Cf. VOGT 2008.

¹⁰ Cf. INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA 2006.

neighbourhood committees have started setting up old age support through volunteers and nursing homes.

1.1 Motivation

The motivation for this thesis derives from the wish of solving the problem of how to improve the situation of rural elderly in China. This is of particular importance in a time when traditional family structures are vanishing and the demographic transition as well as urbanisation leaves behind a growing number of elderly. Ageing is a pressing problem in both China and Japan and yet the management in the two countries is quite different: Japan as fully industrialised country offers old age pension, whereas China lacks an overall rural pension system and elderly almost entirely rely on family support. But the pension alone is also not sufficient for many Japanese seniors: Numerous elderly people need instrumental support on a daily basis which is often not provided by their children. Furthermore, due to the longer life expectancy of women, there is a high risk of pauperisation as they receive fewer pensions and have higher medical costs in old age.

There are several reasons for choosing Japan as frame of reference. Japan and China share similar cultural values with respect to traditional caring systems and intergenerational support. Furthermore, not only the demographic structure is comparable, but also the situation of the rural elderly has analogous features in both countries. The comparability of China and Japan in demographical terms is therefore my first area of research. It is of special interest to me how the demographic transition has had a similar impact on both societies, even though the underlying causes are completely different: Japan's low fertility rate is typical of industrialised countries, whereas China's low fertility rate originates from government policies. My first research question therefore is: Did the demographic transition affect China and Japan in the same way? As described in the introduction, the demographic situation in the countryside is more challenging. Consequently, my second research question is: How are the rural elderly in China and Japan affected by the demographic transition?

But besides the problem itself, possible solutions need to be the focus of attention. Japanese communities increasingly come up with their own measures to ward off the problem of economic decline, pauperisation and rural-urban migration and not just wait for and rely on government aid.

In China, local initiatives which are able to avert those developments are rare to find. Except models such as the new socialist countryside, China's communities lack this kind of local empowerment. These issues lead to my third research question: How can Chinese communities learn from Japanese experiences? Since there is little available literature on the exchange or adoption of experiences in local empowerment from Japan to China so far, I am highly motivated to fill in a gap of possible improvements for the situation of Chinese rural elderly.

The reasons for choosing to focus on rural areas in China and Japan are manifold: Firstly, both countries face the challenge of abandoned elderly in rural areas due to the demographic transition and growing urbanisation. And even though both countries live in the tradition of filial piety and the expected support of parents and grand-parents, these duties are decreasingly executed through younger generations. Secondly, taking into account both urban and rural situations would exceed the boundaries of this thesis both in size and depth. The situation in urban areas is so entirely different that it would not be possible to explore both. Not only the demographic structure in urban areas is different, but the urban population is also provided with better health care, extensive pension coverage and more nursing homes. Thus, thirdly, the situation of elderly in rural areas is comparatively worse than in the cities. This is mostly due to the fact that in both urban China and Japan social security is available and the conditions of elderly support in terms of intergenerational and state care are generally better.

1.2 Hypotheses

Following the research questions the first hypothesis of this thesis is that the demographic transition has affected both China and Japan in a similar way – China's development follows the same pattern as the Japanese transition, with a gap of approximately 30 years. This means that Japan in the late 1970s and China nowadays are comparable in demographical terms. However, this gap is rapidly closing up and the demographic structures in China and Japan will align in the future. The second hypothesis is that the population in rural China and to slightly lesser extent in rural Japan is strongly affected by the demographic transition due to poor infrastructure, a lack of social security, the risk of impoverishment and vanishing intergenerational support. Since Japan has been dealing with the issues emerging from an ageing society for some time, my third hypothesis is that Chinese communities can learn from experiences in local empowerment and development from Japanese communities. Japan cannot serve as a blueprint for China's

development, nor can China fully copy Japanese initiatives, but experiences can be adopted and serve as a development model. This is because China is larger in size and the number of ageing communities is much higher. This in turn means that the proposed solutions through local initiatives are not applicable and practical in every part of China, but in many rural areas these initiatives could make a difference in the lives of the elderly. Following this hypothesis they can raise the general wealth of the community, prevent migration to the cities and exert a pull on migrants to return. This is demonstrated through the concept of local empowerment which will serve as theoretical basis for the benefits of the initiatives found in Japanese communities.

1.3 Literature review

The challenges raised by the demographic transition are recognised worldwide and scholars have been examining this issue and its many consequences since the 1940s. There are numerous studies on China and Japan's demographic transitions from different perspectives. On the more general issues of demographics in China are "Transition and Challenge: China's Population at the Beginning of the 21st Century" by Guo/Zhao (eds.) (2007) as well as the Max-Planck-Research on demographic changes and ageing challenges in China. The most comprehensive work on demographics in Japan is "The Demographic Challenge: A Handbook about Japan" by Coulmas et al. (eds.) published in 2008. Another source of knowledge about the Japanese demographic transition is the extensive research of the German Institute for Japanese Studies.

The research on the different features of the demographic challenge in China and Japan is extensive, in particular on the fertility and mortality rate as well as on migration and ageing issues in rural and urban areas. The similarities of the demographic transition in both countries are, in contrast, not covered as widely. The situation of the rural elderly in China is discussed in several articles. Family support, kinship ties and intergenerational transfers are examined in "The Care for the Aged in Rural Community Development" (Nongcun shequ fazhan zhong de laoren zhaogu, 农村社区发展中的老人照顾) by Zhang (2003) and "Family Dynamics of 63 Million (in 1990) to more than 330 Million (in 2050) Elders in China" by George/Yi (2000). The situation of the Japanese rural elderly is covered in "Ageing in Japan: Retirement, Daily Lives, Pension and Social Security" by Ishikawa/Maeda (2002) and "Changing Social Concepts of Age: Towards the Active Senior Citizen" by Ogawa/Takeo (2009).

The data for both countries on demographic transition is extensive enough and a sufficient amount of information is available. A broad set of surveys, projections and analysis have been conducted, but most numbers and data in this thesis derive from the “2010 Division of the World Population Prospects” by the UN Population Division¹¹ and the respective statistics bureaus: the National Bureau of Statistics of China and the Statistics Bureau Japan. There have been several attempts to improve UN population forecasts such as “Ageing of a Giant: a Stochastic Population Forecast for China, 2006-2060” by Li et al. (2009) and “China’s Uncertain Demographic Present and Future” by Lutz et al. (2007). However, the UN data remains the most reliable and comprehensive source on demographic structures and profiles and is used by most scholars researching in this area. It also allows a better degree of comparison, since the same variants for statistical calculation and the same methods were used for all the forecasts.¹² The 2010 Chinese census and the 2010 Population Census of Japan are not yet fully released, but the previously available data has been used in this thesis to supplement the UN data.

The literature on local initiatives fighting ageing issues in Japan is adequate, since there has been various field work about Japanese communities, such as Arahi (1998) “Rural Tourism in Japan: The Regeneration of Rural Communities” and Kim/Mitsubishi (2005) “A Study Developing Green-tourism in Mountainous Rural Area of Japan. A Case Study of Ajimu Town, Oita Pref.”. More general information on local revitalisation is offered by Flüchter (2008) “Schrumpfende Städte als Herausforderung: Japan, Hokkaidō and the Case of the City of Yūbari” (Shrinking Cities as a Challenge: Japan, Hokkaidō and the Case of the City of Yūbari). For China the literature and research on communities and local initiatives in the context of the demographic transition is quite scarce and in-depth field studies in this area are equally rare. Most studies about rural revitalisation in China are published in Chinese and the quality varies. Only the general field of ecotourism and local brands is covered more widely. These include “Rural Tourism Development in China” by Bian et al. (2009) and Huang/Li /Li (2007) “The Creation of ‘One Village One Product’ to Boost the Construction of the New Rural Areas” (Dazao yi cun yi pin tuijin xinnongcun jianshe, 打造‘一村一品’推进新农村建设). Literature connecting Japanese experiences and local initiatives with Chinese communities are almost non-existent. One of the few quality ones is Guo/Qin/Zhang (2007) “‘One Village One Trademark’ Revolution in Japan

¹¹ All UN data used here is based on the medium variant for calculation.

¹² The general assumptions underlying the UN projections are different from earlier revisions, especially in forecasting the fertility rate. For more information see: [http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/WPP2010_Highlights-Chapter percent20V. percent20Assumptions_19-May-2011.pdf](http://esa.un.org/wpp/Documentation/WPP2010_Highlights-Chapter%20V.%20percent20Assumptions_19-May-2011.pdf).

and its Inspiration to the New Countryside Construction in China (Riben “yi cun yi pin” yundong jiqi dui woguo xinnongcun jianshe de qishi, 日本“一村一品”运动及其对我国新农村建设的启示). In the literature there is no connection in terms of demographic challenges and the revitalisation of villages in China.

The approaches on local empowerment and local development vary. Since I want to focus on the economic, rather than the political outcomes, I apply the theory presented in Beer et al. (eds.) “Developing Locally: an International Comparison of Local and Regional Economic Development” (2003) and Beer “The Theory and Practice of Developing Locally” (2009) for covering the theory of local empowerment. The theory will be presented in the following chapter.

2 Research methodology and definitions

The method employed in this thesis is a qualitative analysis of China and Japan's demographic transitions, their impact on the rural elderly, and the possible adoption of Japanese communities' experiences for China.

2.1 Conceptual framework

Following the definition of the major term 'demographic transition', I will classify the boundaries of 'rural area' and introduce the theory of 'local empowerment'. The thesis is then divided into three main parts. Chapter 3 provides the reader with the basics of the demographic transition in China and Japan and demonstrates that both countries experience a similar evolution concerning mortality and fertility rates, age distribution, dependency ratios as well as regional disparities. After analysing the population structure, the impact of the demographic change on the situation of the rural elderly in China is displayed in a more detailed way in chapter 4. The focus lies on pointing out the general problems such as infrastructure, social security, impoverishment and intergenerational support. I will illustrate that the absence of social security and the vanishing support from family structures could lead to impoverishment in rural areas, especially for elderly women. The disappearing role of intergenerational support is also analysed, since this is the traditional form of care and regarded as the prime form of old age support by the Chinese government. A short digression to government alleviation approaches shows that there are some forms of government support systems and new strategies to correct the deficits, but they are extremely limited and more of a future alternative instead of a concrete set of measures. Finally, chapter 5 focuses on possible solutions for the Chinese countryside by analysing Japanese experiences. Therefore the situation of the Japanese elderly is first described briefly. Then two case studies from Japanese communities engaging in ecotourism and selling local products are presented which in turn are applied to rural China. This chapter also demonstrates that even though major differences exist, those experiences are practicable for Chinese communities.

There are furthermore general reasons for the lack in local empowerment in China which include historical and political aspects. These issues and the role of the Chinese state in dealing with local empowerment will be addressed in the discussion section in chapter 6.

2.2 Definition: Demographic transition

The term ‘demography’ refers to the study of human populations¹³ or the science of population¹⁴ which include the interplay between the three key sources of population change: fertility, mortality and migration. Changes in the fertility and crude death rate as well as alterations in migration patterns form the basis of the theory of the demographic transition. The demographic transition was a major theoretical preoccupation in the last century due to its unprecedented nature. The classical pattern of the demographic transition is the “movement of death and birth rates in a society, from a situation where both are high – in the pre-transition stage – to one where both are low – in the post-transition stage”¹⁵. Figure 1 shows the classic model of the demographic transition with declining death and birth rates towards the post-transition stage (stage 4, also called industrial) compared to high birth and death rates at the pre-transition stage (stage 1, also called pre-industrial).

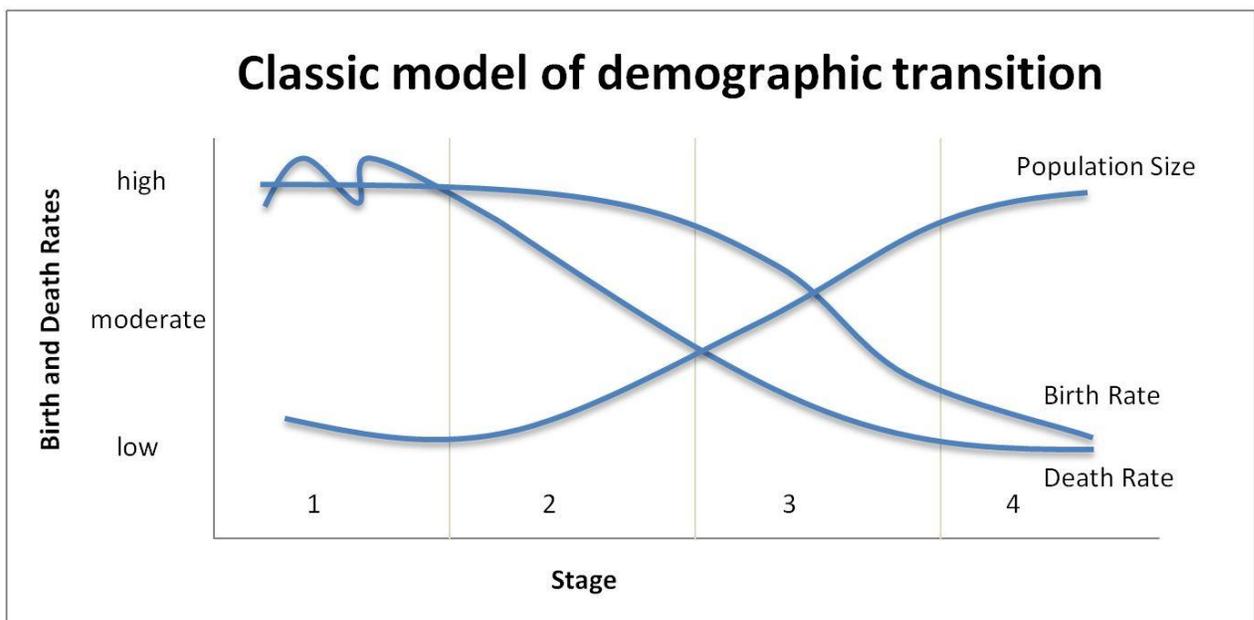


Figure 1: Author's illustration; Source: Rowland 2003.

The reason for the drop of the death rate is the improved living standard due to an enhanced environment, better nutrition and health care. The declining fertility rate derives from various factors. Changing marriage trends (such as later marriage and single households) and the advancement of contraception and birth control as well as the general phenomenon of

¹³ Cf. MCFALLS 2007: 3.

¹⁴ Cf. WEEKS 2002: 4.

¹⁵ ROWLAND 2003: 17-18.

industrialisation, economic development and urbanisation are major causes. Further reasons for a declining fertility rate are increasing education for girls and social policies such as the one-child policy in China or two-child policy in Vietnam.¹⁶ Several side effects accompany the demographic transition: The population age structure changes as there are fewer adolescent and more elderly people. The long-term decline of the general population size is another outcome which concerns developed countries with low birth rates. This includes most European countries, the USA, Japan and South Korea. While the demographic transition proceeded over several decades in Europe, the change in Asia is occurring more rapidly, especially in China and in the long-term in India as well. The future demographic development in China and Japan is determined through the so-called period of “super-ageing”¹⁷ after 2025, when the proportion of the elderly quickly rises to 34 per cent and 42 per cent in 2050, respectively.

2.3 Definition: Rural area

A single definition of rural and urban is not amenable to all countries, therefore “each country should decide which areas are to be classified as urban and which as rural, in accordance with their own circumstances.”¹⁸ However, the more general and broad term ‘rural area’ does require further definition and clarification. There are two traditional classifications for rural, a geographical and a sociological one. The sociological approach argues that there are social and cultural differences in behaviour between people living in low-density areas (rural) and high-density areas (urban). In this context rural is defined as a society which has traditional value systems, adheres to religion, has strong kinship ties, respect for the elderly and is suspicious of changing the social and political status-quo.¹⁹ The geographical approach focuses on the “recent social, economic, land-use, and spatial changes that have taken place in less-densely populated areas which are commonly recognised by virtue of their visual components as ‘countryside’”²⁰. In this thesis I will use a combination of both approaches instead of strictly separating them, since they are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily competitive. By combining them I will cover the whole range of characteristics relating to rural areas: the traditional behavioural aspect, especially when looking at intergenerational support and family structures, and the geographical

¹⁶ Cf. ROWLAND 2003: 18 et seq.

¹⁷ JOSEPH/PHILLIPS 1999: 155.

¹⁸ UNITED NATIONS STATISTIC DIVISION 2011.

¹⁹ Cf. BULLER/HOGGART 1987: 9.

²⁰ BULLER/HOGGART 1987: 6.

part in order to demonstrate the social and economic changes taking place in a certain area. This combination is a common strategy when dealing with rural and urban issues.²¹ Furthermore, for statistical and analytical purposes the term “rural” needs to be defined for China and Japan individually. For both countries the standard OECD model of a rural area having 150-300 persons per km² does not apply, because Japan has generally an extreme high population density and China’s population size itself is comparatively high. The following individual definitions should be kept in mind when comparing rural area statistics of both countries.

The new official Chinese categorisation of “rural” for the 2010 census was implemented in 2008 in the Statistical Classification of Urban and Rural Areas (Tongji shang huafen chengxiang de guiding, 统计上划分城乡的规定) by the National Bureau of Statistics. A region is considered to be rural if the population density of this specific area (danwei, 单位) is lower than 3,000 persons.²² These rural areas are separated into administrative divisions: townships (xiang, 乡), ethnic townships (minzuxiang, 民族乡) and villages (cun, 村). In the new census of 2010 people who lived in urban areas such as cities (cheng, 城) and towns (zhen, 镇) longer than six months were considered “urban” and not recorded as rural. With this approach they are not registered according to their official household registration (hukou, 户口), but to their actual place of residence, thus counting in the so-called “floating population” (liudong renkou, 流动人口). The concept of the floating population is unique to China and “is based on the notion that the *hukou* location is where one belongs and that migration is not considered official and permanent (...). [A] person is counted as part of the floating population as long as his or her usual place of residence is different from the *hukou* location”²³.

The Statistics Bureau Japan distinguishes between urban and rural areas since the 1960s through Densely Inhabited Districts (DID’s). Rural areas have less than 4,000 persons per km² and are administratively divided into towns (machi) and villages (mura).²⁴ The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries further divides “rural areas” in the “Classification of Agricultural Area” into three subcategories: Flat farming area, hilly farming area and mountainous farming area.

²¹ Cf. BROWN 2011: 5.

²² Cf. NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS OF CHINA 2008.

²³ FAN 2008: 70.

²⁴ Cf. MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS JAPAN/STATISTICS BUREAU JAPAN 2011b.

2.4 Theory of local empowerment

Theories of local empowerment or local development have three dimensions: a political, social and an economic component. The political component includes the promotion of community democracy and participation in community decisions.²⁵ The social component of empowerment focuses on building self-esteem, ethical conduct and social cohesion among the community.²⁶ The major factor of the economic component is the creation of wealth in the community by endorsing local initiatives which are valuable for the whole community, rather than relying on governmental support. For this thesis I will apply the economic component in the form of the local and regional economic development theory from Beer et al. (2003 and 2009). It serves as the main theory of local empowerment, which refers to community-centred economic development. Even though social and political benefits may arise as well, the focus of local empowerment here lies on the economic aspect. The main point of argument is that local and regional initiatives often work better than government approaches which do not have the ability and resources to help recessive regions and communities. This is because “large-scale government bureaucracies are too inflexible and too slow moving to deal with the demands of a rapidly changing global economic environment. By contrast, it is argued that locally based agencies can respond to economic opportunities as they arise”²⁷. According to Beer et al., this concept is applicable to every region as “any region, any city, any town (...) has the capacity to improve its economy if it can get mobilised”²⁸. The key strategies to increase local wealth of the community are “encouraging inward investment in the region, fostering innovation, nurturing a ‘creative city’ environment, promoting new business start ups, engaging in regional economic planning, coordinating infrastructure investment [and] assisting small businesses gain access to capital”²⁹. When exploring the two Japanese case studies, I will apply Beer’s theory to the strategies above, thus clarifying the possible benefits of local initiatives. By using the general theory of local empowerment I want to put Japanese community initiatives and efforts into a bigger picture and treat them as a universal strategy which has widely applicable motives and benefits.

²⁵ Cf. PERKINS/ZIMMERMANN 1995: 570.

²⁶ Cf. VISSER 2005: 1.

²⁷ BEER/GRAHAM/MAUDE 2003: 2.

²⁸ BEER/GRAHAM/MAUDE 2003: 3.

²⁹ BEER 2009: 63.

3 Demographic transition in China and Japan

Both China and Japan face the challenges of an ageing society as a result from the demographic transition. The central factors are low birth and death rates, an increasing life expectancy, challenging dependency ratios and regional disparities in consequence of the on-going urbanisation process. Low birth and death rates have led to the elderly making up an increasing percentage of the population at the national level. The challenges of an ageing society in both countries are further exacerbated in rural areas due to the on-going urbanisation processes. The biggest variations in both transitions are the 30 year gap and the different causes – governmental policies in China and a high degree of industrialisation in Japan.³⁰ In order to prove the first hypothesis – the demographic transition in China and Japan proceeds similarly but with a time lag – the main demographic structures of both countries are illustrated and compared in this chapter.

3.1 Demographic development since 1950

The basic demographic structure in China and Japan was very similar until the 1950s with a relatively young population in both countries. The median age³¹ in 1950 was at 23.8 and 22.3 years respectively and the proportion of persons aged 60 or over accounted only for around 7 per cent of the whole population in both China and Japan. In the 1960s both countries experienced a population growth of 1.5-2 per cent as seen in figure 2. This growth was greater in China and lower in Japan and started declining relatively simultaneously in the late 1970s. The slight rise of the population growth in China in the late 1980s is the result of the loosening of birth policies further described in 3.1.2. While Japans growth rate is already negative, Chinas population will start a negative growth in 2030. The UN figure and other projections show that the growth rate of both populations will align in the 2040s at a negative level of -0.5 per cent. Differences in the demographic structure in the 1950s mainly existed in the total fertility rate, which was high in China with 6.11 children per women and lower in Japan with 3 children per women.

³⁰ Cf. GUO/ZHAO 2007: 7.

³¹ The median age divides the population in two parts of equal size, half the people are younger than the median age and half the people are older.

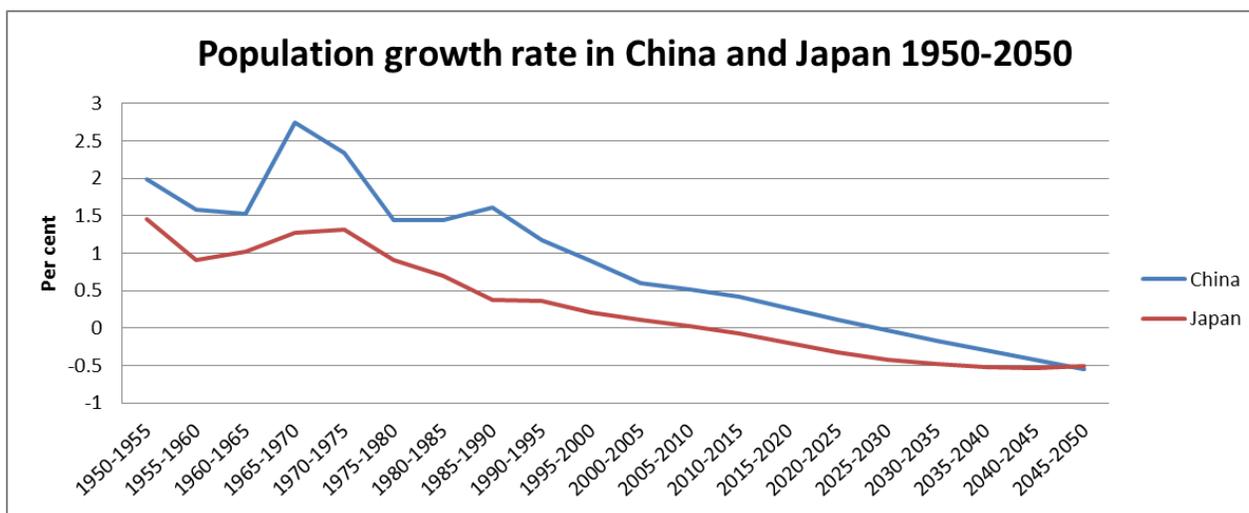


Figure 2: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

Due to a decrease in fertility and mortality in Japan and a high birth and death rate in China, both countries had developed quite different general population structures by the 1980s. In Japan the percentage of people aged 60 or over in 1980 was already at 12.8 per cent, whereas China's was at 8 per cent and just reached a similar level of 12.3 per cent in 2010. The median age in 1980 was at 32.6 years in Japan and still 22.4 years in China before reaching 32.2 in 2005.³² These figures give the first evidence that in terms of population ageing there is a gap of about 30 years between Japan and China. This gap started to close up in the 1980s, when China introduced the one-child policy and fertility dropped rapidly. Another factor for the on-going population ageing in China is the rising life expectancy at birth as shown in figure 3. The general rise of life expectancy in China, but also in Japan is due to better health care, proper housing, improved food and water quality as well as education. Life expectancy was only at 44.6 years in China in the 1950s and stayed low until the end of the 1960s, due to the severe consequences of the Great Leap Forward and several famines. Life expectancy in Japan was 62.2 years in the 1950s, which China reached only in the beginning of the 1970s. Today Japan's life expectancy is the highest worldwide with 83.7 years (compared to currently 73.8 years in China) and is likely to continue rising further in the future. Especially the life expectancy of women is high in Japan as well as in China and has to be kept in mind when talking about the situation of rural elderly later in the thesis. The causes of the comparatively high longevity in Japan have been subject to several

³² Cf. UNPOP 2010a.

studies which will not be further explored here.³³ In China the differences in terms of life expectancy between cities and rural areas remain high. The average life expectancy in the cities Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin lies between 74-78 years. Conversely, in more rural provinces such as Guizhou, Yunnan and Gansu it is only between 65-67 years.³⁴

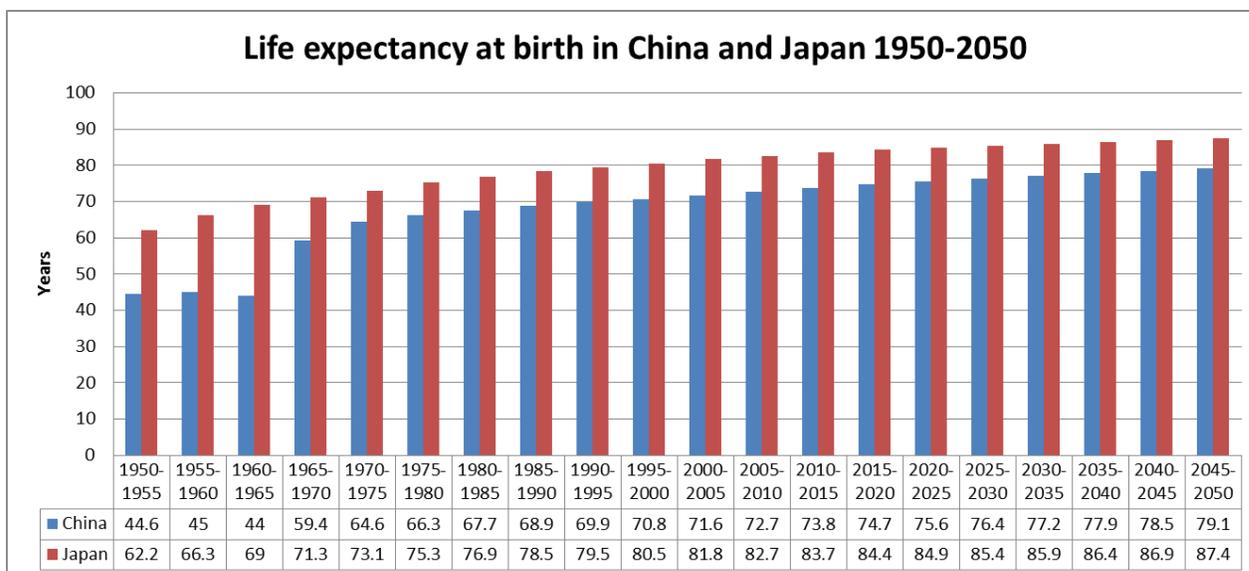


Figure 3: Data for both sexes; Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

3.1.1 Fertility and mortality

The demographic structure of a country is mainly based on fertility and mortality as well as on migration. Figure 4 shows the total fertility trends in China and Japan since the 1950s with projections until 2050. It is conclusive that the total fertility rate in China and Japan was different from the 1950s until the 1980s, but started to align after the introduction of governmental birth policies in China in the late 1970s.

While Japan's fertility rate was low and declined gradually (from 3 children per women in 1950 to 1.75 in 1980), China's total fertility was in contrast at a high level and decreased slower until the middle of the 1970s with still 4.77 children per women in 1975. After the beginning of the one-child policy in China in 1979 however, China's fertility rate dropped significantly to 2.61

³³ For Japans life expectancy see: SUGIURA, Yasuo/JU, Young-Su/YASUOKA, Junko/JIMBA, Masamine (2010): *Rapid increase in Japanese life expectancy after World War II*. In: Bioscience trends, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 9-16 and SAITO, Yasuhiko/YONG, Vanessa (2009): *Trends in healthy life expectancy in Japan: 1986 – 2004*. In: Demographic research, Vol. 20, No. 19, pp. 467-494.

³⁴ Cf. CHINA POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING YEARBOOK SOCIETY 2010: 483.

and since then the fertility levels of both countries remain similar. Today the fertility rate is equally low in both countries, with 1.42 children per Japanese woman compared to 1.56 children per Chinese woman. Both rates are among the lowest worldwide and together with Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea the lowest in Asia.³⁵

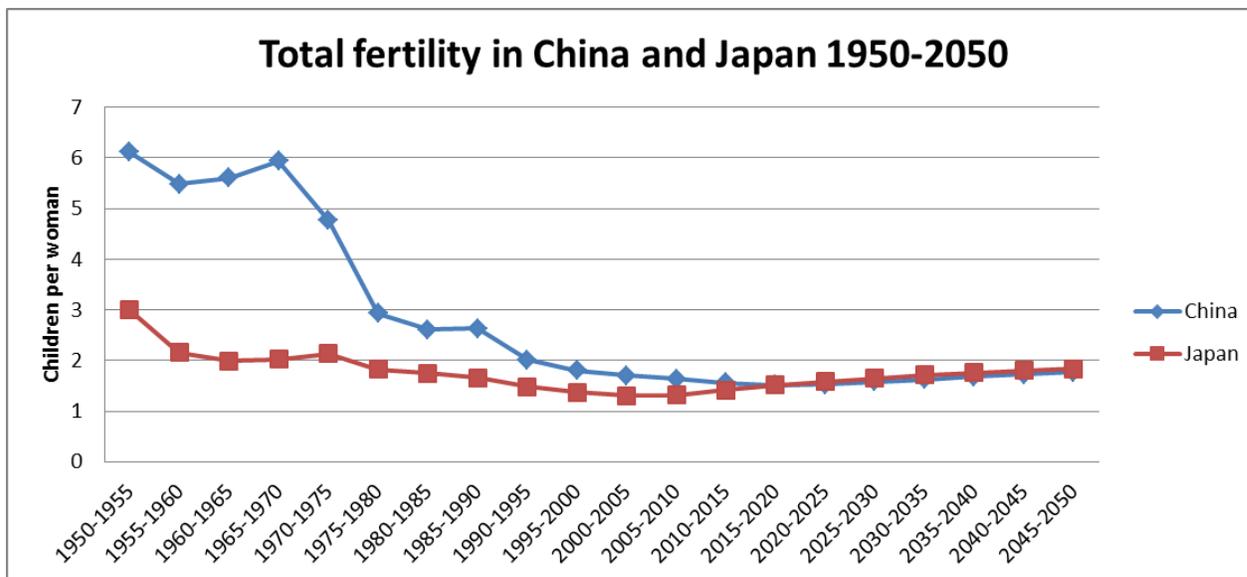


Figure 4: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

The crude death rate indicates the number of deaths over a given period divided by the person-years lived by the population over that period. As shown in figure 5 the crude death rate was fairly high in China in the 1950s with 22.2 deaths per 1,000 population. Japan's crude death rate on the other hand was at a low rate of 9.4, which was reached by China only in the 1970s. China's crude death rate declined considerably in the late 1960s to 10.6. This great drop was due to the end of the Great Leap Forward which caused countless casualties. The crude death rate started rising in the 1990s in both countries and currently ranges at 7.5 in China and 9.6 in Japan. According to the UN projections the rates will align to the same level around 2050, which again illustrates the time gap between the demographic changes in China and Japan: Japan started ageing about 30 years before China did. While in under-developed countries the crude death rate is higher due to diseases and malnutrition, the reason for the rising rate in China and Japan is based on the ageing process and the changing demographic structure taking place in both countries – the older the society, the higher the death rate.

³⁵ Cf. UNPOP 2010a.

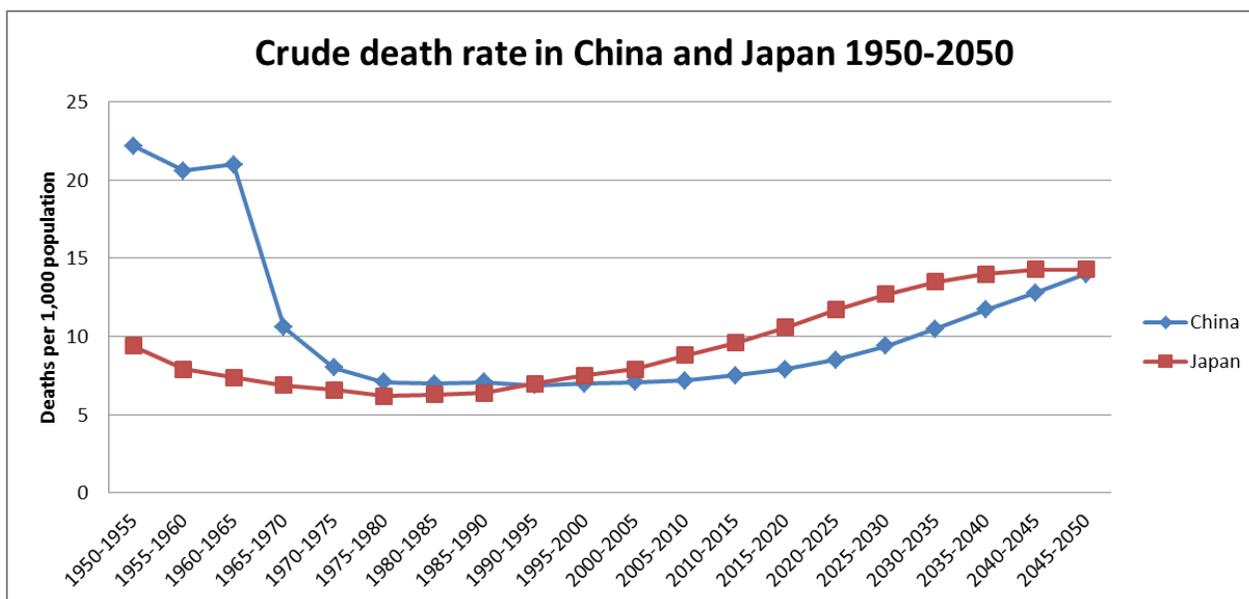


Figure 5: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

3.1.2 One-child policy in China

As argued earlier, the most influential effect on the demographic transition in China was the introduction of the one-child policy (jihua shengyu zhengce, 计划生育政策), which needs to be examined in more detail. The to date unique policy and other preceding birth planning policies since the 1970s aimed to reduce the high birth rate in China. The present one-child policy had several precursors which were introduced in the 1970s, mainly through campaigns such as the “later, longer, fewer” promotion (wan, xi, shao, 晚, 稀, 少). It encouraged later marriages, longer periods between births, and fewer children in general, thus enabling enhanced economic growth which was not considered possible with a large population.³⁶ In the late 1970s, after Mao Zedong’s death, birth planning policies became part of the social modernisation process of the country. They were justified with a shortage of food supply and a rising unemployment rate due to the closure of state enterprises.³⁷ Even though population science existed in China, it was underdeveloped and out of date due to the isolation of China during the Cultural Revolution. The research was renewed in the late 1970s to “assist the state in solving the country’s population problems, a solution that, in turn, would accelerate the achievement of the four modernisations in industry, agriculture, national defence, and science and technology”³⁸. The one-child policy was

³⁶ Cf. GREENHALGH 2003: 167; GOZA/ZHANG 2006: 152.

³⁷ Cf. SCHARPING 2007: 54.

³⁸ GREENHALGH 2003: 167.

finally introduced and turned into national law in 1979 with the goal to limit the total population to 1.2 billion by the year 2000.³⁹ The policy was revised between 1985 and 1987 and certain exceptions were granted. Rural residents are allowed to have a second child if the first is a girl. This exceptional rule is also called the ‘one-and-a-half children policy’. Parents without siblings themselves are allowed to have two children and most Chinese minorities have no legal restrictions on their number of children per family.⁴⁰ Considering all the exceptions, the one-child policy only applies to 35.9 per cent of the whole Chinese population⁴¹ – but it nevertheless has a huge impact on China’s demographic future. Due to the policy, the total number of births per year in China as seen in figure 6 dropped from 28.9 million in the late 1960s to 16 million in 2010. The slight rise between 1980 and 1990 is caused by the baby-boom generation of the 1960s, who, 20 years later, had kids themselves. Another reason was the revision of the policy in the 1980s which caused a slight baby boom in rural areas.

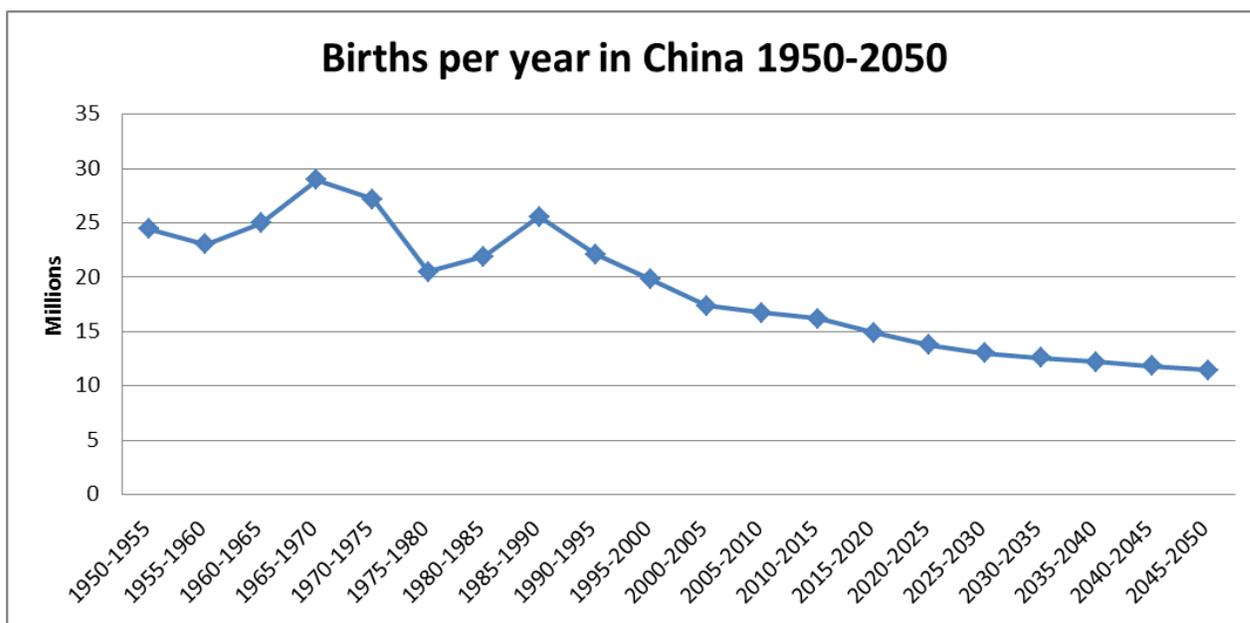


Figure 6: Data for both sexes combined; Author’s illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

Today, 30 years after the introduction of the one-child policy, it is widely debated if the policy is still useful. Not only the already existing 4-2-1 problem is cause for concern, but also the aggravation of the ageing issue caused by the baby boom generation of the 1960s who will age in the next 20 to 30 years.⁴² Additionally, the growing pressure on the social security system,

³⁹ Cf. YAN 1988: 165.

⁴⁰ Cf. NATIONAL POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING COMMISSION OF CHINA 2011.

⁴¹ Cf. NATIONAL POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING COMMISSION OF CHINA 2007b.

⁴² Cf. MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT 2008: 21.

especially the pension system, calls for an adaption of the policy. Other problems are forced abortions and female infanticide, which causes the current gender imbalance⁴³: for every 108 males born there are only 100 females. As early as in the midst of the 1980s there have been several academic suggestions on how to re-adjust the policy, for example by replacing it with a two-child policy similar to the policy in Vietnam.⁴⁴ The main problem of the policy is the fact that the current fertility level is below replacement and needs further revision in the near future.⁴⁵ The government stated however that the current policy will remain unmodified until at least 2015.⁴⁶ Former head of the National Population and Family Planning Commission, Zhang Weiqing, assured that a “smaller population is always more beneficial to the nation’s prosperity, environmental protection and construction of a harmonious society”⁴⁷. However, the province of Guangdong in southern China recently also pushed forward an approach for a two-child policy.⁴⁸ Officially the purpose is to release the pressure on younger generations, but the ulterior motive is to secure its high economic growth rates.

3.2 Current population structure

The current population structure of China and Japan shows a 30 year gap, but it will align further in the future. Fertility and mortality are already at a comparable low level and contribute to an ageing society. When contrasting the population pyramids of China and Japan in 2010 and 2050, as done in figures 7 and 8, it becomes evident that in China the current age structure starts to change towards less young people to support the elderly. The structure in Japan on the other side implies that already there are not enough young people to care for the elderly. The figures show a forecast on how the ageing structure will shift and that the current population in both countries will age tremendously in the next 30-40 years.

⁴³ Cf. CHEN 2007: 106-107.

⁴⁴ See: BONGAARTS, John/GREENHALGH, Susan (1985): *An Alternative to the One-Child Policy in China*. In: *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 585-617 and WANG, Feng (2005): *Can China Afford to Continue Its One-Child Policy?* In: *Analysis from the East-West Center*, No. 77.

⁴⁵ Cf. CHEN/GUO 2007: 70.

⁴⁶ Cf. NATIONAL POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING COMMISSION OF CHINA 2007a.

⁴⁷ NATIONAL POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING COMMISSION OF CHINA 2007a.

⁴⁸ Cf. ZHENG 2011.

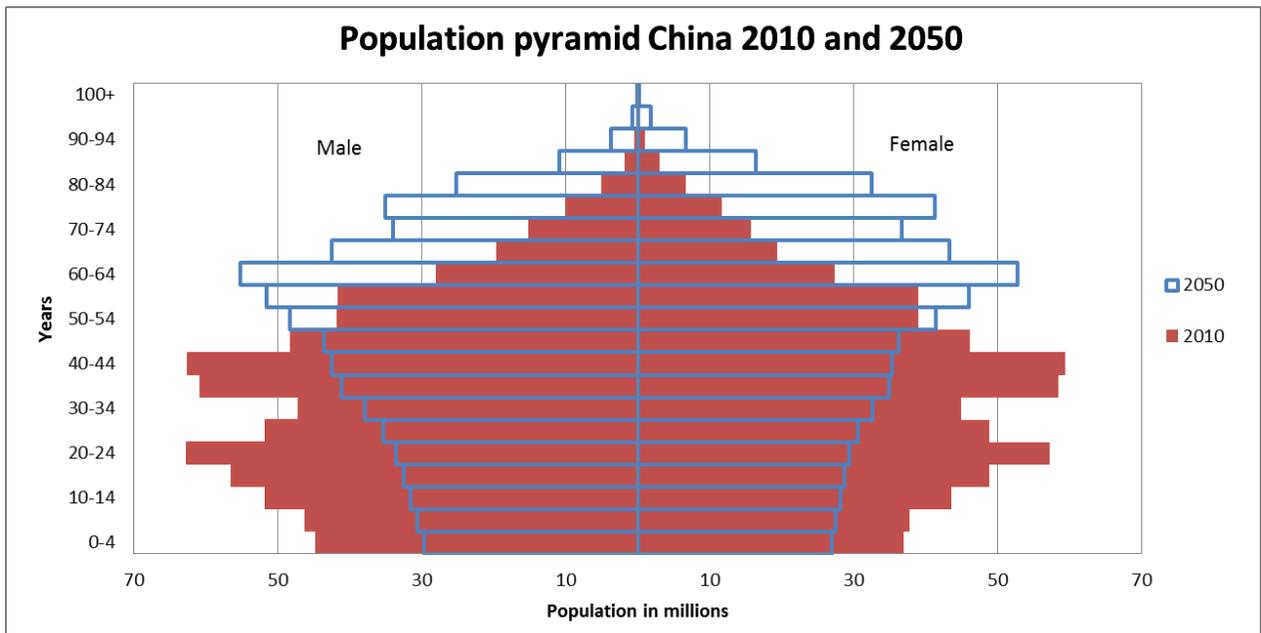


Figure 7: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

Japan, together with Germany and Italy, ranges among the oldest societies worldwide and has the greatest share of elderly population. China is ranked 64th out of 192 countries.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, considering the recent developments, the elderly will form the largest population group in both countries in 2050 and cause severe pressure on infrastructure, social security and intergenerational support.

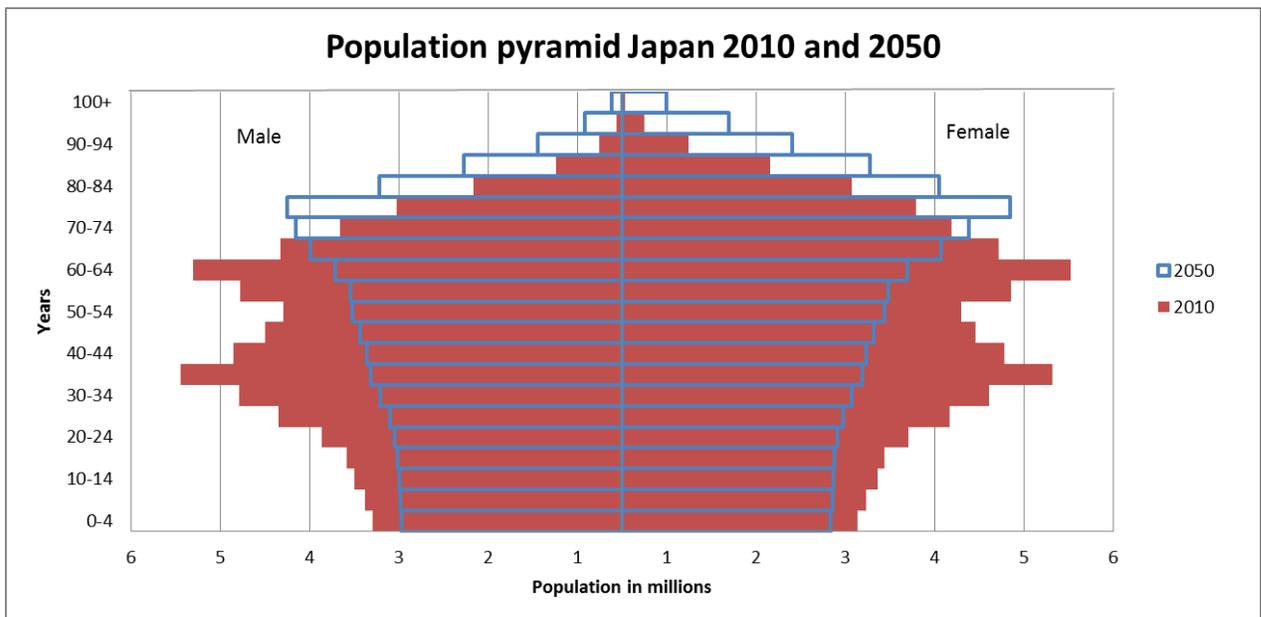


Figure 8: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

⁴⁹ Cf. MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT 2008: 21.

3.2.1 Age distribution

The large scale ageing of both China and Japan's societies becomes more evident in the median age pattern as shown in figure 9. The figure illustrates similarities in the 1950s when both countries had a median age of around 22 to 23 years. The previously portrayed development of the fertility and crude death rate in both countries since the late 1950s causes the different median ages today. The Chinese population remains younger with a current median age of 34 years, while Japan aged more rapidly since the 1950s. The current median age of 44 years in Japan also points to the fact that it is one of the greyest populations worldwide.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, China will be closing the gap and aligning to Japanese standards over the next 30 years.

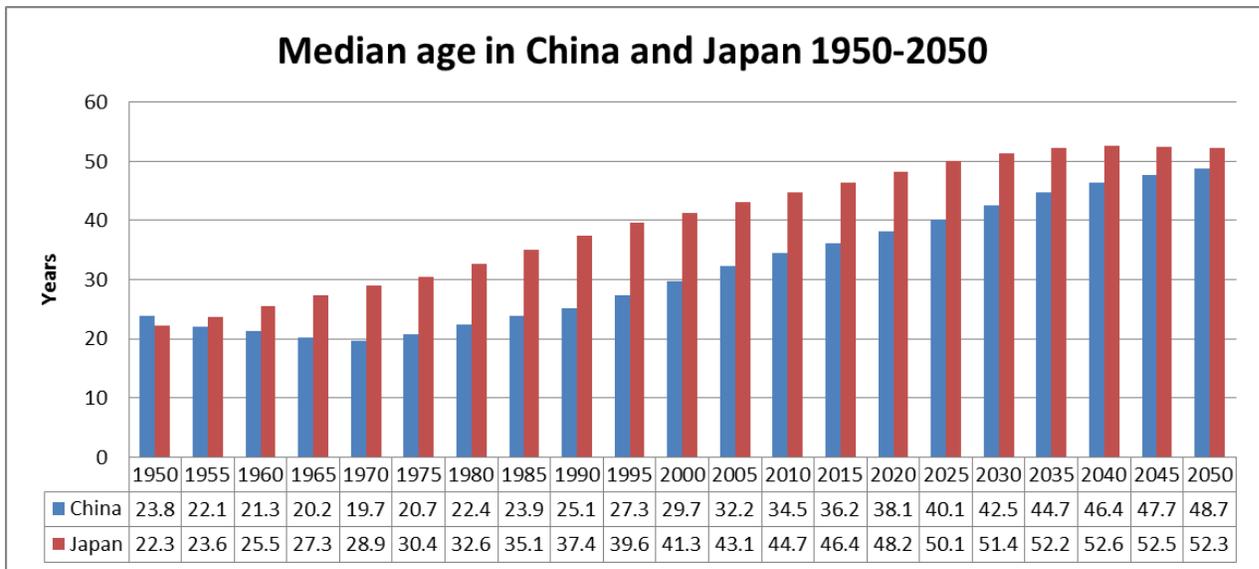


Figure 9: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

Another indication of the two ageing societies is the decreasing number of the youngest age cohort from 0 to 4 years and the rising share of the generation of 60 years and older as shown in figure 10. While both countries had a similar high percentage of the 0-4 year age cohort in 1950, around 14 per cent, the number in Japan dropped to just 4 per cent in 2010. The percentage of China's youngest age cohort only started decreasing in the 1970s and is at 6 per cent today due to the effects of the one-child policy. The share of the cohort aged 60 years and older has been increasing steadily in Japan since the 1950s, while China remained at a low level until the beginning of the 1980s.

⁵⁰ Cf. UNPOP 2010a.

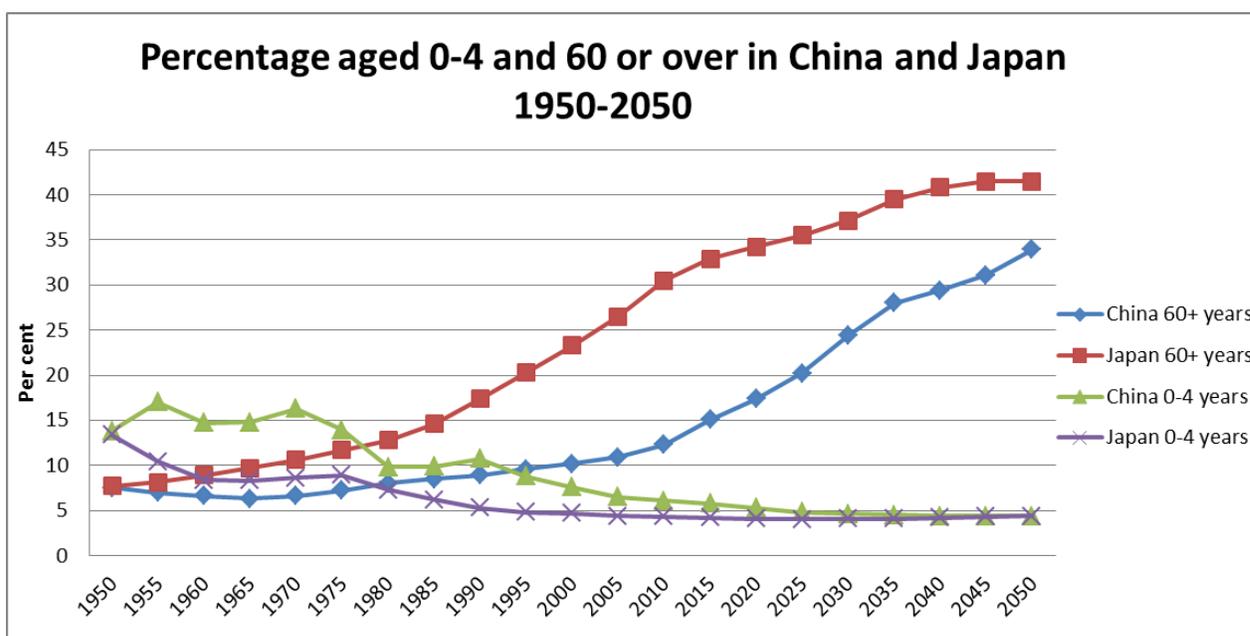


Figure 10: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

China's rapidly rising proportion of the population aged 60 and older is a special development. Usually it takes most developed countries "about 50 to 80 years for the older population to increase by five to seven per cent. It has taken about 18 years for China to develop the same level of growth"⁵¹. It is apparent that in the near future the old age cohort of 60 years and older will further dominate the youngest age cohort of 0-4 years, while the middle age cohort of 15-59 years remains approximately the same. The main problem is evident: the middle age cohort has to take care of a much larger number of old people. This also highlights the fact that the old age dependency ratio will rise in the future as analysed in the following chapter.

3.2.2 Dependency ratios

The dependency ratios are used to determine the pressure on the productive force of ageing societies. The total dependency ratio is the ratio of the sum of the population aged 0-14 (youngest age cohort) and those aged 65 and over (oldest age cohort), against the population aged 15-64. Figure 11 shows that there has been a shift in the total dependency ratio in the year 2000 between China and Japan. In the 1950s 63 and 68 people in China and Japan respectively depended on 100 people in the labour force. China's total dependency ratio remained high due to a large young

⁵¹ Li 2005: 249.

age cohort as a result of the baby boom of the 1960s. It started dropping after the introduction of the one-child policy. Japan's total dependency ratio declined early, in the 1950s, because of the general low fertility rate and a consequently small young age cohort. It then started to increase in 2000 and is currently 56:100. China's ratio will only start rising significantly in 2030. At present the ratio is relatively low at 38 dependants per 100 persons of working age. But the difference between rural and urban or richer and poorer areas in China remains high. While the dependency ratio in Beijing and Shanghai ranges at 25:100 and 27:100 respectively, it is 44:100 in Guangxi and in Guizhou even 49 people depend on 100 persons of working age.⁵² The inevitable increase in the number of dependants in both countries causes several problems for the productive population: they have to provide for health care, social security and education, which are mainly used by the oldest and youngest shares of the population.

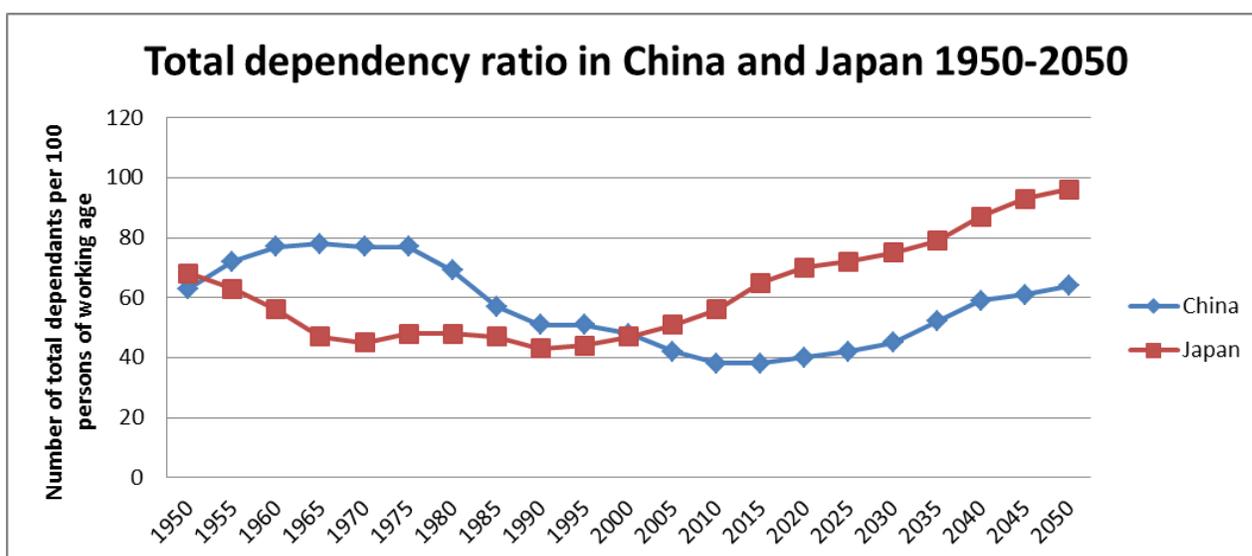


Figure 11: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

Even though the current number of dependants in both countries is low compared to the 1950s, the proportion shifts to a larger number of the old age dependants and lesser young cohorts. This is evident in the old-age dependency ratio, which is the ratio of the economically inactive population aged 65 years or over to the working aged population between 15-64 years. Figure 12 shows that the dependency of the old age cohort is rising constantly. While in Japan currently 100 working aged individuals have to provide for 35 old age dependants, the ratio will double by 2050. In China the development has started to rise in 2010 with a low ratio of 11:100, but it will

⁵² Cf. CHINA POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING YEARBOOK SOCIETY 2010: 489.

continue to increase from now on. It will reach 37:100 in 2040, where Japan was in 2010, again pointing to a 30 year ageing delay of Chinas population compared to Japan. The increasing ratio in both countries indicates that the social pressure on the working aged and tax-paying population will rise and pensions and old age support are becoming more difficult to enforce.

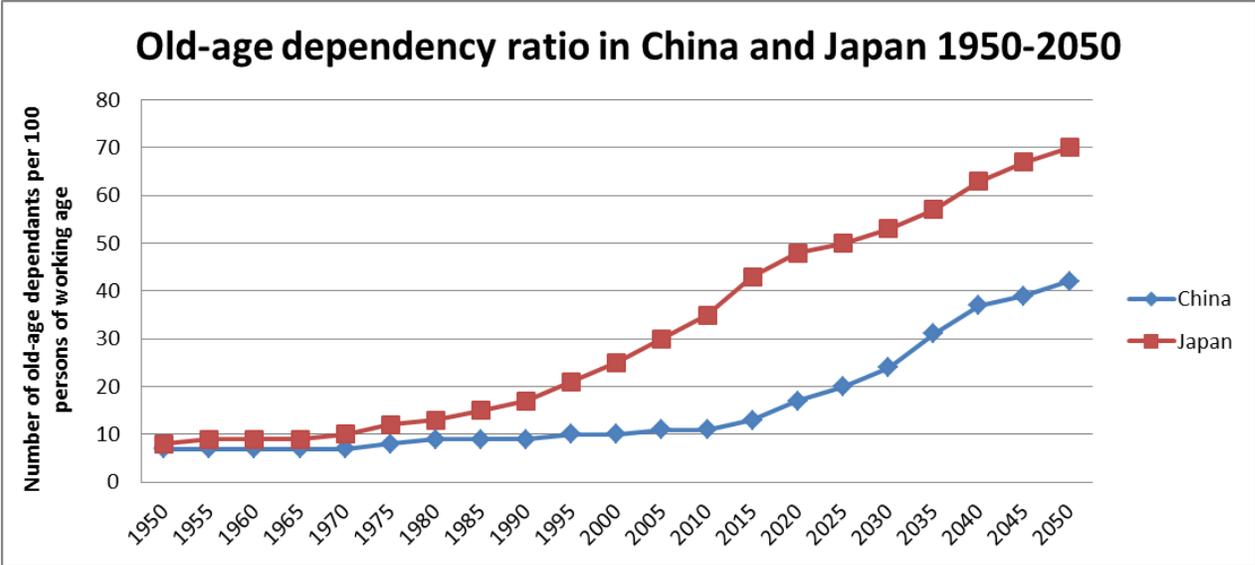


Figure 12: Author’s illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

3.2.3 Sex ratio

The last phenomenon of the changing population structure is the increasing imbalance of the sex ratio, measured in two ways: in number of males per 100 females at birth and in the general population. The sex ratio in China and Japan is considerably different. China suffers from a chronic and consistent disproportion of males, the so-called phenomenon of the “missing girls”⁵³, with currently 108 males per 100 females of the total population as seen in figure 13. The sex ratio at birth is even more disproportionate with 118 male children to 100 female children in 2010. Japan on the other hand has comparatively less males in the total population: 95 males per 100 females. The sex ratio at birth is also considerably different from China with merely 106 males to 100 females. The difference of sex ratio at birth and the general population sex ratio mainly derives from the fact that women have a longer life expectancy and make up the larger share of the elderly. This implies that the share of the female population rises with higher age and

⁵³ GRANSOW 2008: 220.

an increasing “feminisation of ageing”⁵⁴ becomes evident. The gender ratio at old age in China confirms this: when in their 70s, there are 92 males per 100 females; in their 80s there are 71 males per 100 females and in their 90s only 39 males to 100 females.⁵⁵ The high ratio of elderly women is similar in Japan. In contrast, the share of women in the working population aged 15-64 years is lower in both countries.

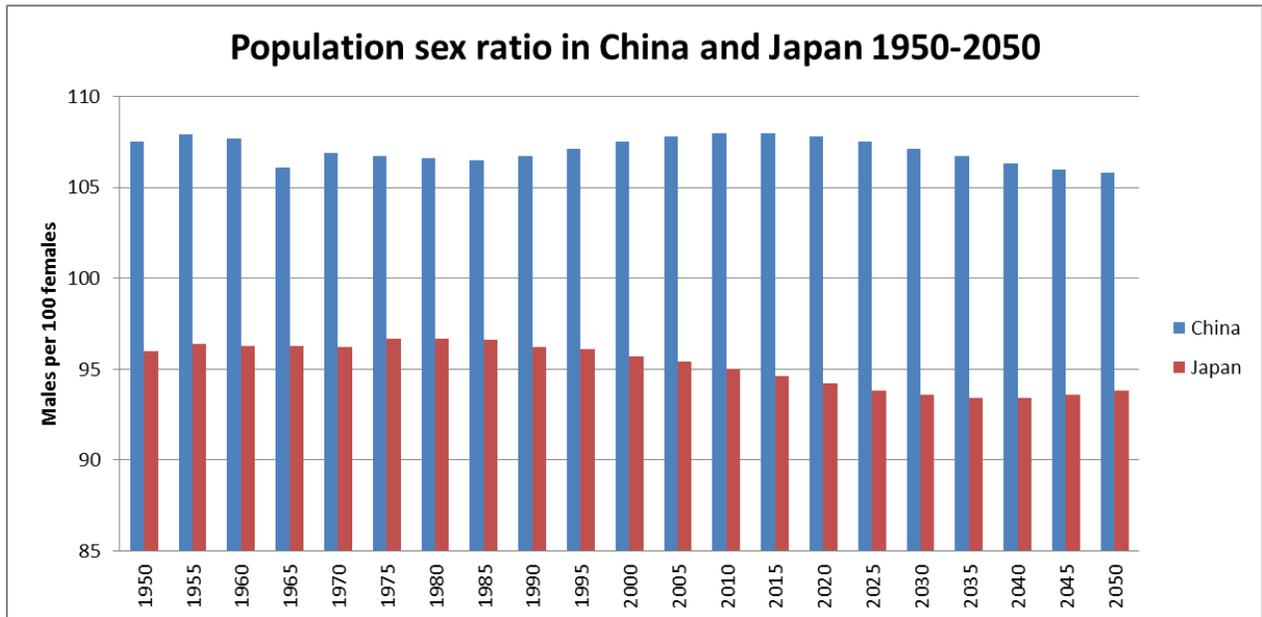


Figure 13: Author's illustration; Source: UN Population Division: 2010 Revision of the World Population Prospects.

The high incidence of males at birth in China is arguably due to the strong preference for male children. Farming, providing for the elderly and a working income is considered a man's responsibility, especially in rural areas. The one-child policy has further strengthened the desire for male descendants, since the entire family relies on the son for support. Even though Japan has a similar tradition, the pressure on the family to have a son is not as high as it is in China. Firstly, Japan offers a high level of social security and secondly there is no limit on births per women. If the parent's first child is a girl, the option of having a second child who might be male is always available. This in turn means that abortion of female foetuses is not as common as in China.

⁵⁴ HUSA/WOHLSCHLÄGL 2006: 50.

⁵⁵ Cf. CHINESE ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES/INSTITUTE OF POPULATION AND LABOR ECONOMICS 2009: 310.

3.3 Migration and floating population

Migration is the third factor influencing demographic changes to be examined. The term 'migration' has various manifestations and a whole set of definitions to it. For the purpose of this thesis migration is defined rather broadly as "a permanent or semipermanent change of residence"⁵⁶. This standard reference of "A Theory of Migration" by Lee (1966) leaves room for interpretation, since internal and external migration as well as time and distance fall under no restrictions. For the following analysis of the effect of migration in China and Japan on their respective demographic structure the focus lies on domestic migration, primarily rural to urban migration. However, international migration in China and Japan is worth mentioning briefly, since it has an effect on the ageing process as well. The net migration rate⁵⁷ for international migration in China in 2010 was -0.3⁵⁸, meaning that during this year 350,000 emigrants left the country, mostly for job or family related reasons.⁵⁹ Since the majority of out-migrants are of the young working age cohort, this has an effect on the general ageing development of the country. Japan, in contrast, gains inhabitants every year through increasing in-migration. The net migration rate was 0.4 (a total number of 54,000 immigrants) in 2010⁶⁰, which in turn provides a new source for the labour force. Many of the immigrants are from the Philippines or Indonesia and work as nurses and caregivers for the elderly. The Japanese government started encouraging the labour immigration since it faced serious shortages of employees caring for the growing elderly population.⁶¹

Domestic migration in China is comparatively large in numbers. According to the new population census of 2010, the total number of the floating population, who lived in a town or city other than their household registration for over six months, is around 221 million. The number rose about 81 per cent compared to the census in 2000.⁶² For Japan the number of internal migrants in 2009 was approximately 5 million persons with a decrease of 4.2 per cent compared to 2008.⁶³ The general

⁵⁶ LEE 1966: 49.

⁵⁷ Net migration rate according to the UN Glossary of Demographic Terms: The number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants over a period, divided by the person-years lived by the population of the receiving country over that period. It is expressed as net number of migrants per 1,000 population.

⁵⁸ Cf. UNPOP 2010a.

⁵⁹ Cf. LI et al. 2009: 35.

⁶⁰ Cf. UNPOP 2010a.

⁶¹ Cf. MINE 2011: 293.

⁶² Cf. NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS OF CHINA 2011.

⁶³ Cf. MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS/STATISTICS BUREAU JAPAN 2009.

direction of these migration flows is from rural to urban areas, because of better working and income opportunities as well as more convenient living conditions in the cities. Even though migrating means leaving the family – mostly the parents – behind, a common view is that “it is better to be apart to earn more money than to stay together to be poor”⁶⁴. In China over 60 per cent of all migrants are male,⁶⁵ which leads to the problem that in rural areas often the entire active workforce is absent and women have to take over the field work. The rural exodus is furthermore contributing to an increasing urbanisation and large regional disparities.⁶⁶

3.3.1 Urbanisation and regional disparities

In both China and Japan urbanisation is not a new process, but rather a phenomenon which both countries have experienced for a longer time period. According to the 2010 Chinese census, 49.7 per cent of the population live in urban areas and 50.3 per cent are rural residents. In comparison to the 2000 census, the proportion of urban residents increased by 13.5 per cent.⁶⁷ A study conducted by Du and Wang (2010) estimates that the growth of the urban population in China will stop in the 2040s with the satiation of the labour market in the cities. The city population will then age faster and its ageing structure will align with that of the countryside.⁶⁸ Japan is even urbanised to a higher degree. In 2005, “44.9 per cent of the entire national population was concentrated within a 50-kilometer radius from the centres of the three largest cities of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya”⁶⁹. According to the UN the total proportion of the urban population in Japan is 66.6 per cent.⁷⁰ Due to the different approach of the term “rural” as explained in chapter 2.3, the calculations of the Japanese Statistics Bureau are different and give a higher number of 89 per cent urban population.⁷¹

The mounting urbanisation in both countries engenders regional disparities between rural and urban areas, impairing the social and financial situation of rural areas. In China the coastal provinces are economically more developed than the provinces in the middle and west of China. The income in the less developed provinces is lower, the infrastructure insufficient and public

⁶⁴ BIAO 2006: 187.

⁶⁵ Cf. BIAO 2006: 182.

⁶⁶ Cf. MASON/WANG 2007: 194-195.

⁶⁷ Cf. NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS OF CHINA 2011.

⁶⁸ Cf. DU/WANG 2010: 8.

⁶⁹ MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS/STATISTICS BUREAU JAPAN 2010.

⁷⁰ Cf. UNPOP 2010b.

⁷¹ Cf. MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS/STATISTICS BUREAU JAPAN 2011a.

services oftentimes not available.⁷² The “Western Development Policy” of the late 1990s improved the situation, but the regional differences and the developmental gap remain. In Japan the situation is similar. Regional differences between the developed coastal region and the rural areas are vast. An extreme urbanisation (kamitsu) has caused rural depopulation (kaso) and even the disappearance of several towns. In Japan another factor plays an important role in terms of urbanisation: because of the mountainous geographic conditions, 46 per cent of all Japanese inhabitants live on only 8.8 per cent of the territory.⁷³

3.3.2 Problem of the shell villages, left-behind and empty-nesters

In both countries urbanisation together with the demographic transition accounts for the fact that rural villages are in decline and the pressure on the local population grows steadily. The villages and their inhabitants are often underprivileged and at a constant risk of poverty due to no income opportunities and no investments from outside. In China these villages are called “shell village” (kongke cun, 空壳村), referring to a village that just exists on the outside, but is empty inside “without income, unable to pay its officials, finance the local school or provide benefits to its members”⁷⁴. In Japan this phenomenon is known as “unpopulated villages” (kaso chikii) and refers to the same set of problems.

Concerning rural areas, the key issues are the same in China and Japan: the young, working aged cohort leaves the countryside for working opportunities in the city and the elderly remain behind, thus the Chinese term “left behind” (liushouzhe, 留守者). The elderly in China will account for 33 per cent of the rural population in 2050 – compared to 22 per cent in urban areas.⁷⁵ The problems arising are for example the prevalence of the so-called “empty nesters” (kongchao, 空巢). This term describes the “elderly living alone without the company or immediate care of their relatives.”⁷⁶ Their number is rising rapidly and 37 per cent of all rural elderly are affected, a total number of 40 million.⁷⁷

⁷² Cf. WIJGERS 2008: 3.

⁷³ Cf. LÜTZELER 2008: 61.

⁷⁴ EYFERTH/HO/VERMEER 2004: 79.

⁷⁵ Cf. MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT 2008.

⁷⁶ CHINESE GOVERNMENT’S OFFICIAL WEB PORTAL 2011.

⁷⁷ Cf. CHINESE GOVERNMENT’S OFFICIAL WEB PORTAL 2011.

Japan's numbers are even more concerning: there the proportion of elderly aged 65 years and over has already reached 30 to 50 per cent in several rural areas.⁷⁸ The situation for those elderly who remain behind in China and Japan is equally problematic. Among the most common issues are the deficient infrastructure, insufficient social security in terms of instrumental support and vanishing intergenerational support as well as loneliness and pauperisation. These problems will be analysed in the following chapters.

⁷⁸ Cf. LÜTZELER 2008: 69.

4 Situation of the rural elderly in China

How do the rural elderly in China cope with the demographic transition and the problems caused by it? In most rural communities the high share of elderly inhabitants and a lack of the middle-aged working population are brought about by an on-going rural exodus and results in an economic downturn. This in turn leads to a growing number of elderly who have to take care of themselves. Sole reliance on their children and kinship structures as it is the tradition in Confucian China is a dwindling option for the elderly population.

Among the most common challenges for rural elderly in China is not only the economic decline of their village, but also the neglect by the central government – the absence of social security and a deficient rural pension system are probative. Especially elderly women suffer from many disadvantages. Because of their longer life expectancy the share of elderly women increases faster, they are more likely to be widowed and economically dependent.⁷⁹ Their self-rated health is worse than that of elderly men, because of “lower mortality and longer expectation of life, older women suffer longer lasting disability and lower quality of later life than do older men”⁸⁰. Another factor is the pension. Since women work less in official roles, and more in domestic labour, they are often not covered by any pension. The general neglect by the central government is being lifted by several attempts to provide old-age insurance or offer employment alternatives, if for example farm land was taken away due to construction projects. Nevertheless, so far nothing has helped to stop the rural exodus of the young working force and improvements for the elderly are not yet in sight. This chapter will first outline the support available to the rural elderly in terms of technical and social infrastructure and social security, before discussing changes in patterns of intergenerational support and recent policies by the government to address the issue of impoverished rural elderly.

4.1 Infrastructure

In terms of technical infrastructure enormous progress has been made in the past years. Improving public transportation in rural areas and the highway network connecting towns and

⁷⁹ Cf. Li et al. 2009: 46.

⁸⁰ FELDMANN/LI/SONG 2009: 14.

villages is a focal point in the country's 12th Five Year Plan.⁸¹ However, various rural areas in China are still isolated and the communities are difficult to reach by public transportation. Especially for infirm and bedridden senior citizens it is not always easy to access public transport in order to reach the nearest hospital. In emergencies it is even more difficult to request an ambulance which will arrive in an appropriate time and provide sufficient medical support, especially if no relatives or other sources of help are available at the time.⁸² Another problem induced by the lack of proper transportation is the constrained possibility to buy provisions not sold at the local market. Due to their remoteness, some communities are difficult to reach and “for want of adequate roads or other means of access, cannot profit, like small towns and a fortiori cities, from the presence of markets. The food available is, therefore, less rich and varied than in areas open to trade, and most rural inhabitants can rely only on local products”⁸³. This leads to the problem that the diet of rural citizens is quantitatively and qualitatively lower than the one of urban residents. Malnutrition is therefore a common issue in rural areas.⁸⁴

Concerning the social infrastructure, there is a lack of hospitals and doctors in rural areas. The 1970s scheme of the so-called “barefoot doctors” (chijiao yisheng, 赤脚医生), who came to rural areas periodically and covered more than 400 citizens per doctor, does not exist anymore.⁸⁵ It leaves most rural areas uncovered by any medical support. Today there is one doctor for every 950 citizens in China.⁸⁶ But most of the doctors practice in urban areas, so that rural inhabitants have to travel far for a doctoral appointment. The older the people get, the more they need medical care and the less they are able to travel further distances. This is also argued in a survey conducted by Feldman et al. in 2008, displaying that “as age increases the percentage of respondents reporting ‘good’ self-rating of health decreases”⁸⁷. Daily assistance and instrumental care as part of the social infrastructure is among the most pressing problems for rural elderly. In particular, rural elderly without children or with migrant children are affected by a lack of institutionalised care and the deficient number of nursing facilities.⁸⁸ Additionally, the one-child policy and the low birth rate put all the pressure of caring for the parents on the only child.

⁸¹ Cf. PEOPLE'S DAILY ONLINE 2010.

⁸² Cf. JI/XU 1999: 265.

⁸³ CHESNAIS/WANG 1990: 17.

⁸⁴ Cf. XINHUA ONLINE 2003.

⁸⁵ Cf. DE GEYNDT/LIU/ZHAO 1992: 1; JI/XU 1999: 263.

⁸⁶ Cf. CASELLA 2009.

⁸⁷ FELDMANN/LI/SONG 2009: 12.

⁸⁸ Cf. LI/TRACY 1999: 364.

Nowadays the average family household size is only 3.10 persons⁸⁹, compared to 4.81 individuals in 1973⁹⁰. The shrinking of family sizes brings about severe shortage of care and support for the elderly. There is also only a very low availability of nursing homes for elderly without families – they only accommodate 0.8 per cent of the total ageing population.⁹¹ Even though it is a government target to establish 29,000 new township health centres, it is clear that currently there is an enormous undersupply.⁹² Other institutions which will take care of abandoned elderly are almost non-existent. Even though rural villages often have a village committee (cunmin weiyuanhui, 村民委员会) at their disposal, service-providing neighbourhood committees generally only exist in urban areas.⁹³ The most common solution for everyday care of the elderly without co-residing children is the employment of a maid (baomu, 保姆). Live-in maids can provide for the elderly and help with daily assistance. Nevertheless, due to the low income in rural areas, few families can afford hiring a maid (cost ranges from RMB 600 to 1,000⁹⁴ per month)⁹⁵ and it is therefore more common in urban households. Another issue is the low rate of training standard for the largest part of the maids. Even though daily assistance can be secured through a maid, severe illness or special treatment is rather problematic.⁹⁶ A survey conducted by the China Research Center on Ageing in 2000 reveals that only 13 per cent of the elderly with needs in daily assistance actually receive it. Another 36.7 per cent of elderly in rural areas feared that they will not get taken care of when needed.⁹⁷

Furthermore, the remoteness of rural communities exposes the elderly to a security risk. In case of house fires, fire brigades often have to come from far away counties and this in turn puts the health of rural citizens in jeopardy. This is also the case for the police who are not always promptly available.⁹⁸

⁸⁹ Cf. NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS OF CHINA 2011.

⁹⁰ Cf. CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL WEB PORTAL 2004.

⁹¹ Cf. FLAHERTY et al. 2007: 1298.

⁹² Cf. WHO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC 2010.

⁹³ Cf. WU 1996: 16; GOZA/ZHANG 2006: 156.

⁹⁴ At the time of writing RMB 1 (Yuan) was equivalent to USD 0,1573.

⁹⁵ Cf. FLAHERTY et al. 2007: 1297.

⁹⁶ Cf. FLAHERTY et al. 2007: 1297.

⁹⁷ Cf. CHEN/FU 2009: 46.

⁹⁸ Cf. ZHONG 2009: 161.

4.2 Social security

In terms of social security a lot has changed since the 1950s and the iron rice bowl (tie-fan-wan, 铁饭碗), when collectives provided for the needs of the citizens. Today the coverage with social security is quite low and cause for social unrest in the population. Social security is defined as “any programme of social protection established by legislation (...) that provides individuals with a degree of income security when faced with the contingencies of old age, survivorship, incapacity, disability, unemployment or rearing children.”⁹⁹ For this thesis pension, old age support and medical care will be at the centre of the analysis. In China, the government continues to work on a national social security scheme as part of the promotion of a harmonious society (hexie shehui, 和谐社会). As shown in figure 14, the Chinese government has steadily increased its expenditure of social security and general public services since the 1990s. Nevertheless, a basic social security net which comprises all Chinese senior citizens does not yet exist.

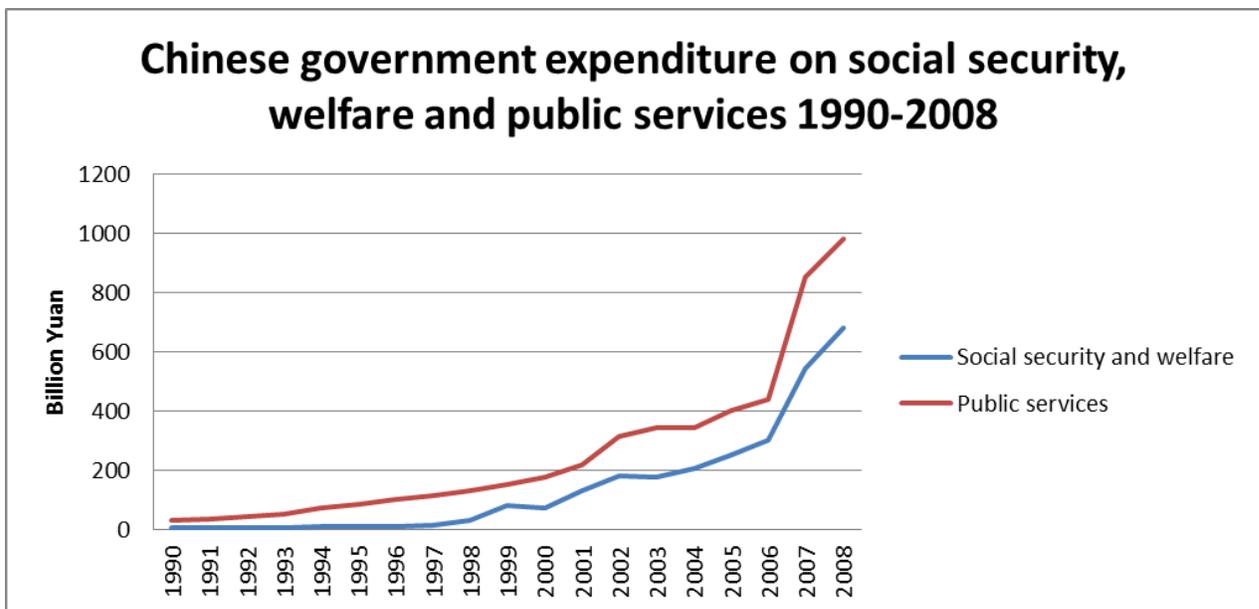


Figure 14: Author's illustration; Source: Asian Development Bank 2010.

Concerning the pension, the situation in China is improving slowly. The state pension system is divided into an urban and a rural system. The urban system is split into a pay-as-you-go basic pension system and a civil service system for officials. The general pension coverage is low as seen in figure 15. Today the share of the rural workforce benefiting from a pension is around 14 per cent, while about 76 per cent of the urban workforce is covered. It is safe to say that in terms

⁹⁹ INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION 2011.

of pension, the urban areas are better off since most citizens are or were employed in companies, often state-owned, which offer at least a small pension. Residents in rural areas however are mostly peasants and therefore obliged to rely on their own savings and their family for old age care. According to the 2000 China Urban and Rural Elderly Survey, 85 per cent of rural Chinese elderly relied solely on family support.¹⁰⁰ The current rural pension system “consists solely of personal accounts, but participation is voluntary and the benefits are tiny. (...) Beneficiaries on average receive a pension of 85 yuan (...) per month.”¹⁰¹ The Chinese government has become aware of this issue and aims at equalising social services across China by 2020.¹⁰² By the end of 2010 the Chinese government had already introduced new rural pension programs in 23 per cent of the rural counties.¹⁰³

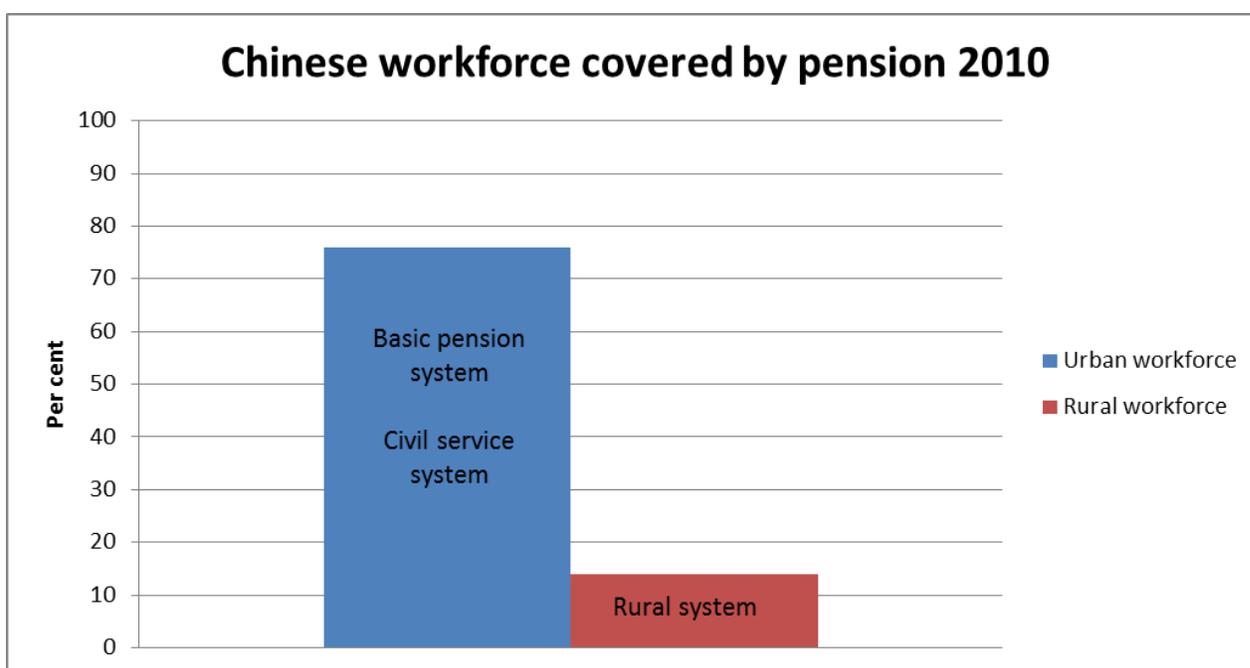


Figure 15: Author’s illustration and calculation; Source: Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People’s Republic of China 2010 and Howe/Jackson/Nakashima 2009.

The employer-sponsored, private pension system in China, called the “enterprise annuity”, is just emerging. It covers 9 million employees as of 2007, which is 1.2 per cent of the total workforce and is only available for urban employees who already participate in the basic pension system.¹⁰⁴ The problems elderly in rural China face today become evident: They are generally not covered

¹⁰⁰ Cf. WANG 2005: 7.

¹⁰¹ HOWE/JACKSON/NAKASHIMA 2009: 11.

¹⁰² Cf. KUHNLE/SANDER/SCHMITT 2010: 5.

¹⁰³ Cf. WANG 2005: 24.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. HOWE/JACKSON/NAKASHIMA 2009: 12.

by any pension scheme and have to rely on other forms of social security, their family or the state old-age support.

Other financial support as part of the social security coverage is provided by the Chinese government through several different social security schemes. The most basic concept is the Minimum Living Standard Guarantee (dibao, 低保) which covers 39 million people.¹⁰⁵ It is a means-tested system which helps poor households to not fall below the poverty line¹⁰⁶ and is therefore only an emergency scenario for those without any capital.¹⁰⁷ An extra program exists for rural China: the Five-Guarantee Support Scheme (wubao, 五保). It was promulgated in 1994 and provides food, clothing, heating, education and burial costs for childless or disabled elderly.¹⁰⁸ Today it covers about 6 million households¹⁰⁹ who suffer from the “three no’s” (san wu, 三无): no family to support them, no ability to work and no other source of income.¹¹⁰ With technical support from the Asian Development Bank, the Ministry of Civil Affairs established a new voluntary support system for the elderly in rural China in 2009, the New Rural Elderly Social Support Scheme (xinxing nongmin shehui yanglao baoxian zhidu, 新型农民社会养老保险制度). The central government provides RMB 55 monthly and the local governments can make additional contributions depending on their financial situation. The personal contribution of the enrolled participants is 4-8 per cent of the country’s average personal income for a minimum of 15 years. The currently 60-year-olds have a shorter minimum contribution and the 65-year-olds can apply for the RMB 55 basic insurance coverage.¹¹¹ Current Minister of Human Resources and Social Security, Yin Weimin, recapitulates that the “new social old-age pension insurance mechanism has greatly harmonised relations in rural families and improved the lives of old people in rural areas”¹¹². But due to the novelty of the program there have only been a few studies about the development and progress. One of the already revealed weaknesses is the low

¹⁰⁵ Cf. SUN/ZHANG 2009: 12.

¹⁰⁶ China’s official poverty line is an annual per capita net income below RMB 668 (WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific: Country health information profile China).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. HOWE/JACKSON/NAKASHIMA 2009: 12.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. CHEN/FU 2009: 47.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. SUN/ZHANG: 2009: 10-11.

¹¹⁰ Cf. LOWRY 2009: 6.

¹¹¹ Cf. SHEN/WILLIAMSON 2010: 242.

¹¹² Cited in XINHUA 2011a.

benefit level for elderly at the present time, who will only receive RMB 55, but have a much higher standard living cost per month.¹¹³

The last analysed social security pillar is the state health care provided for senior citizens. Until recently rural citizens had to pay for their medical fees themselves and were not supported by the state. In 2003 the voluntary New Cooperative Medical Scheme was established that covers 814 million participants today, a rate of 91.5 per cent of the population.¹¹⁴ The participants own minimum contribution is RMB 20 per year, depending on the wealth of the region, whereas the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance provide RMB 100 per year.¹¹⁵ The new 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) is focused on the provision of care for the elderly and the annual allowance was raised to RMB 200.¹¹⁶ The government also decided that all elderly in China aged 95 years and over do not have to pay any of their medical bills.¹¹⁷ The weaknesses of the scheme are the cases of severe illnesses and the continuous need for medical care of many elderly. High medical costs still expose patients to the risk of poverty. In particular, elderly with long-term diseases have to spend a lot of their savings or family remittances for their medical care. As the payment of medical fees “depends on the assistance from their children, the level of financial support from children determines the quality of medical treatment and hence the health status of the elderly.”¹¹⁸ Even though the general health care situation improved, the risk of poverty due to severe illness or non-income remains high – especially for women. Women not only receive fewer pensions, but also have a longer life expectancy and therefore higher medical costs in old age. In many cases the low coverage of social security implies that a great number of elderly have to continue to work until old age to secure a minimum standard of living.

4.3 Impoverishment or “getting old before getting rich”

Among the many factors causing poverty in rural areas, the low income from agriculture and the impossibility to accumulate wealth through land-ownership are the most important.¹¹⁹ Even though their cultivated land is the main source of income for the rural population, it cannot

¹¹³ Cf. SHEN/WILLIAMSON 2010: 245.

¹¹⁴ Cf. SUN/ZHANG 2009: 3-4.

¹¹⁵ Cf. SUN/ZHANG 2009: 4.

¹¹⁶ Cf. XINHUA 2011c.

¹¹⁷ Cf. XINHUA 2011b.

¹¹⁸ FELDMANN/LI/SONG 2009: 6.

¹¹⁹ Cf. WANG 2005: 11; GILES/WANG/ZHAO 2010: 187.

guarantee safety in old age.¹²⁰ To have several children as income security at old age is the most common form of shielding oneself against poverty. However, having children also costs money and a great number of children are often responsible for the poverty of many families. This self-perpetuating cycle is expressed through the term “the poorer you are, the more children you have, the more children you have, the poorer you are” (yue qiong yue sheng, yue sheng yue qiong, 越穷越生, 越生越穷)¹²¹. For most farmers it is impossible to save resources for old age and that in turns means they have to continue working in order to support themselves. The indication for poverty in rural China is the high share of 32.9 per cent of the elderly aged 65 and over who are still working. Only 9.4 per cent of the elderly in urban areas need to work past retirement age to maintain a secure standard of living.¹²² The associated phenomenon is called “getting old before getting rich” (wei fu xian lao, 未富先老) and suggests that the country as well as the inhabitants age faster than the economy grows. The largest share of the working male elderly engage in farming, while the women often have their own small-scale businesses and do household chores, including caring for grand-children. “When farmers live in villages that have not reached a standard of living in which these necessities [food, clothing and shelter] can be taken for granted, which is true for most villages in rural China, working appears to be necessary as eating and sleeping.”¹²³ The total number of elderly Chinese living in poverty ranges between 9 and 12 million, 7 to 9 million of those are rural citizens.¹²⁴

According to the survey conducted by De Brauw, Pang and Rozelle in 2004, there is a difference between working in old age and co-residence of children. When living without children, 77 per cent of the elderly continue working after they are in their 60s, whereas only 58 per cent of those aged 60 and over work when children live in the same household. This number is even higher when looking at the elderly aged 70 and over: only 16 per cent of those co-residing with children work, whereas 42 per cent of those living alone still engage in labour.¹²⁵ If the elderly are unable to work, they have to rely on family support or the small amount of old age support provided by the government. When living in deprived rural areas in a poor household, the trend for working aged citizens to migrate to the city is relatively high. Hence, the poor elderly cannot rely on filial

¹²⁰ Cf. QI 2010: 81.

¹²¹ Questionnaire with a representative from the Family Planning Commission in Shijiazhuang. The questionnaire is attached.

¹²² Cf. WANG/ZHANG 2005: 2.

¹²³ DE BRAUW/PANG/ROZELLE 2004: 80.

¹²⁴ Cf. WANG/ZHANG 2005: 6.

¹²⁵ Cf. DE BRAUW/PANG/ROZELLE 2004: 83-84.

support for daily assistance and continue working, when the remittances send home prove to be insufficient.¹²⁶

4.4 Intergenerational support and care

The general concept of care is divided in three main aspects: instrumental, emotional and financial support. For rural citizens with migrant children only the latter one can be applied and “more than two-thirds of the elderly are dependent on financial assistance from their children”¹²⁷. Several studies have shown that remittances from their children can help the elderly maintain their standard of living, but other requirements, especially instrumental and emotional needs cannot be satisfied.¹²⁸ This brings about a growing number of cases of depression among rural elderly in China and their suicide rate is about four times higher than world average.¹²⁹ The mental health problems have been subject to several studies and will not be evaluated further here.¹³⁰ However, besides the psychological determinants, general health issues occur when elderly are too infirm to help themselves. Those factors apply even more severely to elderly couples without children or children who do not feel obliged to help their parents. Best off are the families where the children reside at home to take care of the elderly, but also have a source of income. This is less and less the case in rural areas since the share of elderly co-residing with an adult child fell from 70 per cent in 1991 to 40 per cent in 2006.¹³¹ And since the economic perspectives in rural China are unsatisfying, a regular income is also often beyond reach.

Family-based support systems and kinship ties have always been the fundamental type of support for the elderly in rural China. Intergenerational support in China is a reciprocal model, meaning that “parents are obliged to nurture their young children with the expectation that adult children will take care of the elderly parents”.¹³² But demographic shifts put pressure on the system. One

¹²⁶ Cf. DU/PARK/WANG 2005: 706.

¹²⁷ FELDMAN/LI/SONG 2009: 6.

¹²⁸ Cf. CHI/GUO/SILVERSTEIN 2009: 548.

¹²⁹ Cf. CHINA NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AGEING 2010a; Also see: LI, Xia/XIAO, Zeping/XIAO, Shifu (2009): *Suicide among the elderly in mainland China*. In: Psychogeriatrics, Vol. 9, pp. 62–66.

¹³⁰ See: BIAN et al. 2009.

¹³¹ Cf. CAROLINA POPULATION CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL/NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NUTRITION AND FOOD SAFETY AT THE CHINESE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION 2006.

¹³² LI/TRACY 1999: 358.

indicator is the Parent Support Ratio.¹³³ The ratio is continuously rising in China and currently indicates that as soon as 2025 there are 9.5 oldest-old per 100 young old (compared to 7.7 in 2000)¹³⁴. The rise not only implies that the young old have to support a growing number of oldest-old, but they also have to support them for a longer time period. With increasing age health naturally decreases and the elderly require even more support. Another factor is that the traditional extended family structure with a multi-generation household has been replaced by a rising number of nuclear families in China since the 1980s.¹³⁵ Modernisation and a new modern and more western lifestyle is one of the strongest reasons for this shift. Even though it mostly affects urban areas, it is more and more common in rural China. “Today, the construction of ageing as a ‘private trouble’ to be handled within the family (...) is being re-shaped by the trend to nuclear families, which is as much a manifestation of socio-economic as demographic change.”¹³⁶ This shift in household structure also affects the traditional patterns of intergenerational support.

4.4.1 Financial, instrumental and emotional support

As described earlier, financial, instrumental and emotional support are the three pillars of care. China’s traditional intergenerational support system is based on reciprocity and requires that the elderly take care of the grand-children and carry out household chores while the working aged generation provides the financial resources for the family.¹³⁷ This is especially the case in rural China, where the young children of migrants remain behind in order to attend school, which they are not allowed to do outside of their household registration area. Besides that child care costs are lower and housing is more affordable in rural areas.¹³⁸

Financial support from their children is the most common form of support for rural elderly due to the on-going working emigration to the cities. It mostly is a need-based support, depending on the financial situation of the elderly.¹³⁹ The literature offers different views on the effect of financial

¹³³ The parent support ratio measures the number of persons 85 and older (oldest-old) per one hundred persons 50 - 64 years (young old), who are their presumed offspring. The young old were born when the 85-year old were in their 20-30s.

¹³⁴ Cf. WHO 2002: 15.

¹³⁵ Cf. GOZA/ZHANG 2006: 153.

¹³⁶ JOSEPH/PHILLIPS 1999: 158.

¹³⁷ Cf. FELDMAN et al. 2010: 65; CONG/LI/SILVERSTEIN 2006: 257.

¹³⁸ Cf. CONG/SILVERSTEIN 2011: 95.

¹³⁹ Cf. CHI/GUO/SILVERSTEIN 2009: 547.

support. Some argue that migrated children (especially sons) provide higher remittances to their left-behind parents than co-residing children do.¹⁴⁰ Others conclude that elderly with migrant children are at a higher risk of falling into poverty, because of the lack of instrumental care provided by the children.¹⁴¹ The elderly then need to pay for costly outside care. Even though financial support cannot always make up for a lack of instrumental and emotional support, it nevertheless provides the elderly with income security. This feeling of security can be beneficial to the psychological and physical health of the elderly.¹⁴² However, this argument is widely discussed in the literature and many studies conclude that the left-behind often face a feeling of loneliness and abandonment, which leads to depression and cannot be made up for with economic support.¹⁴³ In these cases kinship ties and social networks in the village become even more important for the well-being of the elderly. Another fact concerning financial support has to be considered here. The traditional view that the more children one has, the more secure one will be in old age is also being challenged. Having several children in rural areas can lead to poverty and is no guarantee for income security, since children are able to neglect their responsibility and pass it on to their siblings. A respondent from a study conducted by Lowry in 2009 expressed that if “you have too many children they will try to pass along the responsibility. You should just have one. That way at least there will be one to take care of you.”¹⁴⁴

Direct instrumental support or physical care provided by children is becoming scarcer in rural China, even though it is still more common than in urban areas. Migration, modernisation and a changing household structure are among the major reasons. Regarding the instrumental support, 58 per cent of the elderly questioned in Lowry’s study expect a son to provide physical care and only 28.3 per cent expect it from a daughter.¹⁴⁵ A lot of elderly women request that their grandchildren to take care of them, as an exchange for caring for them during their childhood. The longer life expectancy of women means that many will need to receive care for a longer period of time, because they often have no spouse to act as a care-giver.¹⁴⁶ Similar to financial support, instrumental support is need-based. The most common form of instrumental support is through a co-residing child, who in turn provides less financial support. If an elderly couple has more than

¹⁴⁰ Cf. ZHANG 2003: 2-3; CONG/SILVERSTEIN 2011: 100-102.

¹⁴¹ Cf. GILES/WANG/ZHAO 2010: 202.

¹⁴² Cf. FELDMAN et al. 2010: 66.

¹⁴³ Cf. ZHANG 2003: 3.

¹⁴⁴ LOWRY 2009: 20.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. LOWRY 2009: 18.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. FELDMAN/LI/SONG 2009: 14; LIN 1995: 131.

two children there are often trade-offs between financial and instrumental support among the children. Studies show that “old people who live in multigenerational households have a higher sense of well-being than those who live in single generational households.”¹⁴⁷ Another possible living-arrangement is the so-called ‘living-in-turns’, when parents reside with one of their children for a specific amount of time and rotate.¹⁴⁸ In this case the elderly have a very low position in the family. Even though many elderly know about the pressure on their children, their own well-being is jeopardised.¹⁴⁹ Notably, instrumental support does not necessarily improve the psychological well-being of the elderly, since they feel intruded in their privacy and it makes them feel helpless.¹⁵⁰ Many elderly actually prefer living by themselves and being independent. They feel better mentally when they take care of their grand-children while their children are working away from home.¹⁵¹

Although the possible effects of financial and instrumental care are contested in the literature, emotional or psychological support is in any case beneficial for the well-being of the rural elderly. It is traditionally expected to be provided by sons and daughters, notably not from their children’s spouses, even though especially daughters-in-law usually care for the aged parents-in-law.¹⁵² If emotional support is provided by family members, it helps to combat the loneliness felt by many rural elderly with migrant children. Feldman et al. (2010) argue that migrated children working away from home provide their parents at home with the greatest emotional support.¹⁵³ A similar view was also argued in an author’s interview with a representative from the Shijiazhuang State Family Planning Commission: “Children working in the cities often cannot accompany their parents in rural areas and in addition to providing material and financial help, it is more important to call often, if possible go home more often, cook for them, talk more with their parents, offer emotional communication. This is what the parents need the most when the financial conditions are already good.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ PEI/PILLAI 1999: 199.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. JI/XU 1999: 264; KWONG/ZIMMER 2003: 34; CONG/LI/SILVERSTEIN 2006: 257.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. WANG 2010: 82-83.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. FELDMAN et al. 2010: 67; GEORGE/ZENG 2000.

¹⁵¹ Cf. CHEN/FU 2009: 48; FELDMAN et al. 2010: 67.

¹⁵² Cf. LOWRY 2009: 19.

¹⁵³ FELDMAN et al. 2010: 67.

¹⁵⁴ Questionnaire with a representative from the Family Planning Commission in Shijiazhuang. The questionnaire is attached.

Since China is a country with Confucian tradition and values, intergenerational support and filial piety are expected from the children, especially in traditional rural China. However, intergenerational support in this time of demographic transition is put under serious constraints as a consequence of the 4-2-1 or also 8-4-2 problem. An only child or a couple has to take care of their parents and due to longer life expectancy most likely also their grand-parents. If couples also have to care for their own children, the middle-aged in China face a heavy burden, called the “mid-life squeeze”¹⁵⁵, which was already demonstrated through the rising dependency ratios.

4.4.2 Confucianism and filial piety

Intergenerational support and the implied support for elderly parents are based on the Confucian idea of filial piety (xiao, 孝) and are important for China and to a lesser extent Japan as well. Filial piety is premised on the fact that one’s body exists solely because of his/her parents and therefore individuals should take care of themselves and their parents and not harm either in any way.¹⁵⁶ Even though China underwent a process of industrialisation and modernisation, traditional Confucian values of filial piety still persist. As already described in the social component defining rural areas, adherence to traditional values for old-age care is common. Rural patriarchal clan systems and agricultural history have a significant impact on the strong values of family obligation.¹⁵⁷ This means that as a “primary source of social security for the elderly, Chinese cultural models of filial duty and parental investment entailed a candid recognition that parents must be repaid in time and money as well as love”¹⁵⁸.

The Chinese government still regards the role of filial support for parents as very common and thus relies on family and kinship structures as the main form of social security for the elderly. Scholars expressed this in the term of the “Confucian welfare state”¹⁵⁹. The term implies that the deep-rooted tradition of family and kinship ties is partially responsible for the constrained development of a western-style welfare system provided by the state. Nevertheless, by the 1980s children had become more willing to disobey parents, indicating an “abandonment of absolute

¹⁵⁵ LIN 1994: 433; LIN 1995: 143.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. HWANG 1999: 169.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. FULIGNI/ZHANG 2004: 180.

¹⁵⁸ FONG 2004: 127.

¹⁵⁹ Proposed by JONES 1990.

submission to parental domination in everyday practice”¹⁶⁰. A modern life style which decreases the status of the elderly is becoming popular in China and puts pressure on the traditional caring system.¹⁶¹ A survey undertaken by the Social Survey Center of China Youth Daily “revealed that about 74 per cent of respondents said their pressure in work and life is large, and felt incompetent to take care of their parents. About 68 per cent of respondents said they have to support several elderly people”¹⁶². The Chinese government is becoming more and more aware of this development and is attempting to ensure the support of families to their older members through education and mass media.¹⁶³ The government is also trying to enforce filial piety through legal regulations (see chapter 4.5) and a Family Support Agreement (jiating shanyang xieyi, 家庭赡养协议) which was designed for rural China, but is spreading to urban areas as well. The agreement is supposed to stipulate the care older people should receive by their family members, especially their children. 13 million agreements were signed until 2005 and village committees are requested to supervise the proper implementation.¹⁶⁴

The study conducted by Lowry also demonstrated that many elderly are aware of the changes and modernisation in China and its effect on the filial duty of care. Some stated that they feel neglected by their children, whereas others felt that modernisation and economic rise had positive effects on the elderly care provided by their children. There is a great number of elderly who believe that filial piety is not necessarily vanishing, but changing its form. The elderly understanding filial piety “as (whether partially or entirely) the fulfilment of material obligations pointed out that filialness was actually more possible in contemporary times than in previous eras, to the extent that children had access to modern appliances and opportunities to earn money.”¹⁶⁵

4.4.3 Men as traditional support for the elderly and women as domestic labourers

Another effect of the demographic transition in China is that the role of the younger generation providing care for the elderly is shifting. Even though the traditional value of sons as supporters

¹⁶⁰ WANG 2004: 27.

¹⁶¹ Cf. JI/XU 1999: 260.

¹⁶² CHINA NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AGEING 2010b.

¹⁶³ Cf. CHEN/FU 2009: 48.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA 2006.

¹⁶⁵ LOWRY 2009: 15.

for elderly parents (yang er fang lao, 养儿防老) and women providing domestic labour while men work outside (nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei, 男主外, 女主内) remains strong in rural China, women as sole caregivers are becoming more and more important.¹⁶⁶ In Lowry's study, 76.7 per cent of the elderly respondents expected a son, and only 36.7 per cent expected a daughter to provide financial support.¹⁶⁷ This traditional view of more beneficial support provided by the son is partly responsible for the high share of males in rural areas and the occurrence of female infanticide as described in chapter 3.2.3.¹⁶⁸ Women, mostly daughters-in-law, are supposed to be available for unconditional and free domestic labour, which accounts for the fact that women are the main caregiver in most families.¹⁶⁹ Due to a longer life expectancy, instrumental care is often indispensable for the elderly and currently reinforces the position of women – especially daughters – in rural areas. It means that “daughters, who are preferred for providing forms of daily assistance to elderly parents, would be more highly desired. The ‘gender-equalising’ impact of this system could be further strengthened by offering additional old-age benefits to parents with only daughters”¹⁷⁰. Daughters can frequently provide better instrumental and emotional care to their elderly parents. The Chinese government should acknowledge this shift in provision of care and encourage the strengthened position of women in terms of old-age care.¹⁷¹

4.5 Government alleviation approaches

In order to promote a harmonious society, the Chinese government is working on the issues resulting from an ageing society. To enforce the duty of the family *and* the state to provide support for the elderly, the Chinese government issued several laws and anchored them in the constitution. The obligation of caring for the elderly is stated as follows in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China of 1982 and the 2004 revision, Article 49: “Parents have the duty to raise and educate their children who are minors, and adult children have the duty to support and assist their parents.”¹⁷² The Chinese Constitution as the highest law in China and its statement of mandatory support for the elderly shows that elderly care provided by the children is a fundamental right and can be legally enforced.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. CHI/GUO/SILVERSTEIN 2009: 548.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. LOWRY 2009: 16.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. GEORGE/ZENG 2000.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. FELDMAN et al. 2010: 71.

¹⁷⁰ LIN 1994: 442.

¹⁷¹ Cf. GEORGE/ZENG 2000.

¹⁷² THE CENTRAL PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA 2005.

The most important law regarding elderly care is the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (zhonghua renmin gongheguo laonianren quanyi baozhangfa, 中华人民共和国老年人权益保障法) which was implemented in 1996. Article 1 expresses its purpose: "This law is enacted to protect the lawful rights and interests of the elderly according to the constitution, develop the undertakings related to the elderly and promote the Chinese people's virtues of respecting and providing for the elderly."¹⁷³ The law makes it mandatory for children to support their elderly parents, including paying medical expenses, providing nursing care, arranging proper housing, taking care of farm and livestock owned by the elderly and catering for their special needs. According to this law the state is also legally responsible to fulfil its duties. Among the state's obligations toward the elderly are: establishing an old-age and medical insurance system, increasing pensions when possible, training geriatricians, providing education for the elderly, building nursing facilities and developing community services.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, the requirement of caring for elderly parents is stated in other laws, including the Criminal Law of 1979, the Marriage Law of 1980 and the Women's Protection Law from 1992.¹⁷⁵ Between 2001 and 2005 40,000 legal aid cases of elderly demanding their right for care by their children were reported and further 400,000 cases were dealt with through dispute mediation.¹⁷⁶ There is however a high cultural barrier of filing lawsuits against "unfilial" children in court, since this is regarded as parental failure and bringing shame on the family.¹⁷⁷ The fear of completely ruining the relationship with their undutiful children restrains many elderly from reporting their case. Therefore the estimated number of unreported cases is much higher and the figures above can only present a limited picture of the actual situation of abandoned elderly who do not receive care by their children.

Another pillar of the governmental approach is the focus on elderly and social security as inscribed in China's Five-Year Plans. In China's 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010) the New Cooperative Medical Scheme aimed to cover 80 per cent of the rural population – which was successfully achieved. According to China's 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) pension schemes shall soon cover all rural citizens and in this way enhance domestic consumption in the future. Furthermore, the general public service ought to be improved in both rural and urban China as

¹⁷³ THE CENTRAL PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA 1996.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. THE CENTRAL PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA 1996.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. FONG 2004: 129.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA 2006.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. JOSEPH/PHILLIPS 1999: 160; CHOU 2010: 8.

described in chapter 4.2.¹⁷⁸ Besides these conventional governmental approaches, the population in rural China has not been active in improving their own situation – in marked contrast to ageing Japanese communities as examined in the following chapter.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL WEB PORTAL 2006a.

5 Lessons in local empowerment from Japan

Japan vigorously started combating the problems caused by an ageing society and can serve China as a model in dealing with the consequences of the demographic transition in many ways. Not only has Japan established functioning social security and pension systems, but it also builds an increasing number of nursing homes to provide for the rising number of elderly. Local municipalities in Japan also promote the setting-up of new business by elderly citizens, especially in farming, when they retired from working in urban industries.¹⁷⁹ And actively pushing inward migration of new citizens (*teiju seisaku*) from Japanese cities or abroad is desired and viewed as one of the options to save ageing communities from vanishing.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, by pushing forward ideologies of active senior citizens, the local population in rural areas is enticed to improve their own situation. China, on the other hand, lags behind in terms of measures and approaches towards its ageing problem, especially concerning the social security and state level care. The learning curve can even be steeper when looking at local initiatives as well as grass-root-level participation. Japanese elderly started fighting their village's deterioration and decline with their own initiatives, such as ecotourism, opening of small businesses and selling local products. Chinese rural communities lack this kind of local empowerment and initiatives from the local population are scarce.

In order to demonstrate that not only the demographic transition in general, but also the circumstances in rural China and Japan are similar and comparable, the situation of the rural elderly in Japan is examined first. Then the two case studies of local empowerment in Japan, namely engaging in ecotourism and selling local products, are presented and analysed if they are applicable to China's countryside.

5.1 Japan's rural elderly population

The effects of the demographic transition in rural Japan are similar to the situation in the Chinese countryside. The working age population continues to leave the countryside for job opportunities in the cities and the elderly remain behind.¹⁸¹ The left-behind face the same set of challenges as

¹⁷⁹ Cf. OGAWA 2009: 159.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. GODZIK 2008: 129.

¹⁸¹ Cf. ISHIKAWA/MAEDA 2002: 120.

their Chinese counterparts: a lack of care through official or familial structures, insecurity and abandonment, mounting impoverishment and the decline of their village. Furthermore, the local retailing, agriculture, forestry and fishery industries have declined.¹⁸² Today only 8.9 per cent of the total Japanese population still engages in farming. Out-migration and ageing further contribute to the decline of Japanese agriculture with problematic results for the whole economy.¹⁸³

As in China, Japanese public transportation to secluded villages is underdeveloped and the elderly have trouble getting to the doctor or the market. Another pressing issue of rural-urban migration is the case of the so-called “limited villages” (genkai shuraku), which are at serious risk of completely disappearing due to the fact that more than 50 per cent of the inhabitants are older than 65 years. 200 villages in Japan have already vanished and almost 3,000 are close to extinction.¹⁸⁴

Although the state level assistance in terms of financial support is comparatively high in Japan, daily assistance and instrumental care needs can often not be satisfied. Even governmental financial help through social security is not always sufficient. A great number of elderly qualify for support, but cannot solely live on this allowance and working past retirement age is therefore common.¹⁸⁵ The share of the GDP spent on health care is in fact less than that of the US.¹⁸⁶ The example of the Health Insurance for Later Period of Old demonstrates that there are still difficulties in terms of social security. This separate insurance plan for the oldest of the elderly, seniors aged 75 years and over, was introduced in 2008 and aimed at securing low income elderly. It however left out senior citizens living at the poverty threshold and made them contribute, which they were not able to. The name of the insurance was also criticised, because “later period of old” sounds as the next stage would be death. It has hence ironically been called the “‘hurry-up-and-die’-insurance”¹⁸⁷. Poverty and inequality is a common problem among the elderly – especially when living alone and not being able to rely on children. The share of multi-generation households has declined all over Japan. Of all households 57.9 per cent are nuclear-family households and 29.5 per cent are one-person households. The average size of a household

¹⁸² Cf. ELIS/LÜTZELER 2008: 23.

¹⁸³ OECD 2008: 4.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. BERLIN INSTITUTE FOR POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT 2007.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. ISHIKAWA/MAEDA 2002: 115.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. EGGLESTON/TULJAPURKAR 2010: 11.

¹⁸⁷ EGGLESTON/TULJAPURKAR 2010: 11.

in 2010 is 2.67 persons.¹⁸⁸ The rise of single households is particularly common in rural Japan, where widowed elderly continue to live without children nearby. As in China, women are affected the most and 1 in every 5.6 women in Japan aged 65 and older lives alone.¹⁸⁹

The decline of traditional care provided by children according to the Confucian tradition is also experienced in Japan, especially in depopulated rural areas. “In parallel with the ageing of the population and the accompanying socioeconomic changes, it is predicted that the Japanese tradition of family care for aged parents cannot avoid considerable weakening or, indeed, total loss.”¹⁹⁰ Even though Confucianism is not as deeply rooted in the Japanese society as in China, the tradition of caring for elderly parents is still common. This belief is enshrined in the concept of *inkyō*, meaning that the senior head of the family steps down from his active life and retires from his ruling position of the family. The son is supposed to take over as head of the family and support his parents.¹⁹¹ This means that living separately from one’s own children in old age is considered bringing shame on the family.¹⁹² Out-migration of rural villages has caused not only the abandonment of elderly, but has also forced senior citizens to engage in maintaining their family property and take care of themselves. The role of social support and networks is therefore important and support is often provided by the neighbourhood. This improves the health status and general well-being of the elderly.¹⁹³

As part of the government’s campaign “the age of fruition” (*jitsunen*) the elderly are encouraged to stay active after retirement.¹⁹⁴ The promotion of creating productivity instead of being dependent is one of the main features of elderly Japanese today: they do not wait for state level assistance, but help themselves. The New Elder Citizens’ Movement, created by senior doctor Hinohara Shigeaki, promotes the activeness of the elderly aged 75 years and over in order to contribute to society.¹⁹⁵ Japanese communities have produced different approaches and grass-root-level initiatives for improving their situation. These are examined closer in the following chapters.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS/STATISTICS BUREAU JAPAN 2010.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS/STATISTICS BUREAU JAPAN 2010.

¹⁹⁰ ISHIKAWA/MAEDA 2002: 119.

¹⁹¹ Cf. OGAWA 2009: 146-147.

¹⁹² Cf. ISHIKAWA/MAEDA 2002: 119-121.

¹⁹³ Cf. KANAGAWA/SAGAWA/SAITO 2005: 34.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. OGAWA 2009: 153.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. OGAWA 2009: 160.

5.2 Examples of reviving rural communities through local initiatives

Japan possesses numerous examples of local empowerment and initiatives to revive rural communities: volunteering programs for youth participation to support elderly in rural communities (removing snow, help shopping), rural-urban family exchange programs, traditional art and cultural exhibits¹⁹⁶, renting agricultural land and setting up low-carbon lifestyle villages as new holiday village model projects.¹⁹⁷ Retirement migration is another way to prevent ageing communities from further shrinking. Young elderly are enticed to spend their retirement life in a rural environment created especially for them, including nursing homes, daily activities and social companionship.¹⁹⁸ Former migrated elderly often tend to move back to the village they originate from. The advantage of feeling at home and familiar is used by many villages to attract returnees, even when they are retirees. But the most promising and sustainable projects for village revitalisation are the ones generating income. As two model projects, the establishment of ecotourism as a new income and job source as well as the opening of small businesses by selling and commercialising local goods and brands are chosen here. These two main approaches to revive rural communities in Japan will be examined through case studies and then demonstrated to be applicable to Chinese communities. Some Chinese communities have started similar projects, but the local participation and empowerment is low and needs to be further developed.

5.2.1 Ecotourism

Ecotourism¹⁹⁹, a term coined in the 1980s, refers to “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”²⁰⁰. According to The International Ecotourism Society, the principles of ecotourism comprise minimising negative

¹⁹⁶ See: KLIEN, Susanne (2010): *Contemporary art and regional revitalization: selected artworks in the Echigo-Tsunami Art Triennial 2000-6*. In: Japan Forum, Vol. 3, pp. 513-543.

¹⁹⁷ See: MCGREEVY, Steven/SHIBATA, Akira (2010): *A Rural Revitalization Scheme in Japan Utilizing Biochar and Eco-Branding: The Carbon Minus Project, Kameoka City*. In: Annals of Environmental Science, Vol. 4, pp. 11-22.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. GODZIK 2008: 129.

¹⁹⁹ Ecotourism has a variety of definitions and is an elusive concept. Other similar concepts such as Agritourism, Green Tourism, Farm Tourism and Rural Tourism are incorporated in this ecotourism approach. See JIANG 2008 as well as: BJÖRK, Peter (2000): *Ecotourism from a Conceptual Perspective, an Extended Definition of a Unique Tourism Form*. In: International Journal of Tourism Research, Vol. 2, pp. 189-202. Chinese definitions vary from western approaches. Ecotourism and rural tourism in China are indistinguishable and the different names are used interchangeably in the literature. Also see: DONOHOE, Holly M./LU, Xiaoli (2009): *Universal Tenets or Diametrical Differences? An Analysis of Ecotourism Definitions from China and Abroad*. In: International Journal of Tourism Research, Vol. 11, pp. 357-372.

²⁰⁰ THE INTERNATIONAL ECOTOURISM SOCIETY 2011.

travelling impacts, creating environmental and cultural awareness, generating financial aid for preservation as well as empowering local people. This is realised through a variety of measures, including the visiting of nature parks and their conservation, rural farm stays, hands-on agricultural activities for children and adults and experiencing the traditional lifestyle. The stress of urban areas, the crowdedness and the pollution can be left behind and convalescence as well as relaxation are attractions for city dwellers.²⁰¹ The concept of ecotourism is basically applicable in every rural community, but even more to those that have a distinct natural or cultural environment worth preserving.

Regular tourism can also be seen as a way to revive local communities, but it usually does not include the local population and is rarely sustainable. Yubari, a depopulated Japanese community in central Hokkaido, is an example. Trying to attract tourists, the local municipality built large theme parks and resorts, organised expensive shows and set up museums in old industrial facilities.²⁰² As this was not a specialty of the town and not providing a sense of rural lifestyle it did not attract city dwellers as visitors. The project funding was quickly used up and there were no sustainable results besides large concrete ruins and further deterioration. Therefore using the natural agricultural and rural environment is more beneficial and viable.

“Rural tourism implies the reevaluation of the countryside as a place for health recovery, and as a comfortable place where people can relax and get back a sense of calm and peace of mind. This is completely different from the idea of big companies investing vast amounts of capital to develop sprawling resorts in rural areas, which is in fact the antithesis of rural tourism because it displaces rural communities rather than invigorates them.”²⁰³

5.2.1.1 Case study Japan: Ajimu

The idea of ecotourism in Japan is not new. Analogous to the international wave of ecotourism, the Japanese version began in the late 1980s, when the Environment Agency, Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries drew attention on depopulation and economic decline of many rural communities in Japan. They found that it is “the policy of

²⁰¹ Cf. JIANG 2008: 55.

²⁰² Cf. FLÜCHTER 2008: 78-79.

²⁰³ ARAHI 1998: 2.

the national and regional governments as well as the business to hold the line on population loss by replacing the declining industries – forestry, farming and fishing – with rural tourism.”²⁰⁴ Ecotourism Japan, a non-profit organisation, set out to “establish a nationwide network of tour operators, researchers, and professionals, with the aim of revitalizing local communities through ecotourism”²⁰⁵. The local people are the foundation of ecotourism projects. They act not only as guardians of natural and cultural resources or designers of the programs, they also engage as hosts and guides of the visitors due to their indigenous knowledge and experience. Ecotourism through farm stays is becoming increasingly popular in Japan with 8 million guests staying in ecotourism related facilities in 2008.²⁰⁶ The simple life of rural areas is a rising holiday option for stressed city dwellers. When questioned about their motives they stated that they “feel that rural tourism is a means for rural communities to lead the rest of us to some kind of spiritual activation, while simultaneously taking action to stimulate their own prosperity”²⁰⁷. The farming experiences that urban residents demand are manifold: 39.5 per cent like to participate in farming experience programs run by a farmer, 29.7 per cent wish to experience rice planting and reaping and 25.4 per cent would even consider working as agricultural volunteers to help farmers in need.²⁰⁸

Many communities in Japan realised the positive effects of ecotourism and started projects in order to revive their village. One of the earliest towns to utilise ecotourism is Ajimu in Oita Prefecture at the northern part of the Kyushu Island. Due to its agricultural base and mountainous remoteness the majority of the younger generation migrated to the cities. Ajimu reported a rapid fall in its population and was merged with the town of Innai to the city of Usa in 2005. Ajimu has about 8,000 inhabitants, mostly farmers, and 35 per cent are over 65 years old.²⁰⁹ Already in 1996 the Ajimu Green Tourism Study Group was formed in order to promote an ecotourism-based community in which local farmers can provide farm stays for urban dwellers. The participation of the local population is the main backbone of the project. Local empowerment is realised not by following an overarching centralised tourism plan provided by the government, but by letting the farmers design their own activities. “The underlying concept of Ajimu Green Tourism is that the leading players are the people who live in the rural community. The real life of the rural

²⁰⁴ GRABRUN 1995: 57.

²⁰⁵ ECOTOURISM JAPAN 2011.

²⁰⁶ Cf. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES JAPAN 2010.

²⁰⁷ ARAHI 1998: 2.

²⁰⁸ Cf. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES JAPAN 2010.

²⁰⁹ Cf. KIM/MITSUHASHI 2005: 2.

community is the main interest (...) [and] the utilization of the existing local resources is the key asset.²¹⁰ This decentralised approach led to the farmers' capacity building and the voluntary involvement leaves room for creative ideas. Some farmers have vineyards or poultry farms, others grow vegetables, grapes or herbs and each family can choose for themselves if and how they would like to participate.²¹¹ Each year 10,000 visitors take part in day-to-day activities involved in running a farm such as planting, harvesting or fishing.²¹² By doing so, the community raises awareness of the natural beauty in rural areas and promotes local cultural traditions. The historic buildings of the farmers, the simple meal preparation and the contact with animals contribute to the feeling of traditional lifestyle. Feeding animals and harvesting has an additional educational effect for children: they learn where the food comes from and what kind of work is required to produce it. Most visitors do not have lengthy holidays so day trips are possible and occur mostly during the festivals the citizens of Ajimu celebrate, such as the stacking straw event. The activities performed by the locals "along with green-tourism have an effectiveness to revitalize a rural mountainous area by generating immigrants and entrepreneurs from urban areas despite of depopulation and aging."²¹³ The fact that most of the farmers are aged 60 years and over proves not to be problematic. Many tourists feel that the acquisition of knowledge from the elderly is a new experience and produces a feeling of homeliness and simpler times, actively reducing the everyday stress of cities.²¹⁴

The example of Ajimu shows that low-impact tourism, organised by the local community proves to be successful in terms of generating income and jobs in their village. In a general survey from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the respondents saw several positive effects for rural areas brought about by non-rural people moving in or visiting: 63.8 per cent believed that the decline of rural population can be reversed, 55.1 per cent acknowledged the industrial and economic revitalisation and 54.3 per cent found the community in revitalisation process.²¹⁵ Even though the general ageing process cannot be reversed, the negative impact it has on rural areas can be reduced and the new job opportunities exert a pull on migrants. This in turn means that the elderly contribute to the improvement of their own situation instead of completely relying on the state or their family.

²¹⁰ KUSWIDIATI 2008: 127-128.

²¹¹ Cf. KUSWIDIATI 2008: 127.

²¹² Cf. KIM/MITSUHASHI 2005: 12.

²¹³ KIM/MITSUHASHI 2005: 14.

²¹⁴ Cf. ARAHI 1998: 4.

²¹⁵ Cf. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES JAPAN 2010.

5.2.1.2 Applicability in China: Happy Farmers' House and ecotourism

Tourism is a growing industry in China with 1,712 million domestic tourists in 2008 and a share of 3.9 per cent of China's GDP.²¹⁶ It is seen by the Chinese government as an important tool for poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas. Shao Qiwei, director of the China National Tourism Administration, stressed this aim at the first International Forum on Rural Tourism in Guiyang in 2006: "Rural tourism development has become a new economic growth sector in China, and has the capacity to help poor regions shake off poverty."²¹⁷ This approach can and needs to be further developed into a measure against migration and abandonment of the elderly. The incorporated concepts of ecotourism (shengtai lüyou, 生态旅游) and Happy Farmers' House²¹⁸ (nongjiale, 农家乐) already exist in China and can be used as a device for the creation of jobs, the generation of income and as an incentive for migration to rural areas. But Chinese ecotourism is still under-developed and is operated almost without any local empowerment and community participation.

The Chinese government needs to strengthen the incentives for local empowerment and allow a certain degree of economic decentralisation in order to promote viable participation as in Japan. Communities need to initiate ideas, control and execute them, rather than passively accept them. The case of Ajimu can serve here as a model: Farmers need to discuss their requirements, engage in the decision-making and have at least partial control over the design and layout of the project. Participating locals need special training in order to be able to manage rural tourism products, such as running a farm stay, marketing local goods or work as guides.

Another problem is the immense pollution Chinese ecotourism produces. Instead of being low-impact, big resorts and parks are often built; hotels, restaurants and shops litter the environment and repeatedly result in out-migration of the villagers. Instead of protecting the local community, their agricultural land is taken away or their farm destroyed to make room for large construction projects. In order for ecotourism to be useful for declining communities, they first and foremost have to be preserved naturally. As has been argued previously, the local resources are the advantage. The Japanese approach actively promotes the involvement of the local people

²¹⁶ Cf. GERILETU et al. 2011: 307.

²¹⁷ CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL WEB PORTAL 2006b.

²¹⁸ Translations vary; Happy Farmers' House is the Chinese version of rural farm stays.

throughout the entire process. The central and local government in China need to realise that ecotourism is not only a way to sustainably employ regional resources or generate fiscal income, but it is also helpful for ageing and declining communities. It can strengthen local industries in many ways: visitors require accommodation which results in the creation of farm stays, stores for the food supply of guests are needed as well as laundry service, souvenir stores, and restaurants and so on. Morning markets, street markets or farmer markets for tourists are other possible engagement activities for older locals. Only if these services are provided by the community the positive effect on the local economy can spread throughout the area and therefore boost local businesses.

There are several examples of ecotourism approaches in China, mostly natural sights combined with rural experiences. This is due to the fact that Chinese tourists prefer not only scenic and cultural views, but are more and more interested in experiencing traditional lifestyles.²¹⁹ There are about 500 million rural tourists who generate RMB 300 billion every year and roughly 20,000 to 30,000 farm stays are available in every province.²²⁰ These figures show that the market exists, it just needs to be utilised properly. The Wenhai Ecolodge (Wenhai shengtai lüguan, 文海生态旅馆) in Yunnan, for example, is a community-operated lodge which aims at generating income for the locals by educating tourists on the local culture and natural beauty of the environment.²²¹ Daxi (大溪), a small village in Zhejiang, has developed many activities in order to attract tourists: Walks through bamboo forests, a bamboo museum, visits of the surrounding nature such as the World Silver Pit (tianxia yinkeng, 天下银坑) and several opportunities for farm stays. In 2007 24 per cent of the local population worked in the tourism industry, thereby improving the living standard of their families. But the nearly 6 million annual tourists also damage the environment through water and garbage pollution.²²² These environmental problems need to be solved in order to create sustainable ecotourism, which in turn creates viable results. Another well-documented case study is Tengtou (藤头), a small village in Zhejiang without special historic or natural sights nearby. The village started ecotourism in the late 1990s by using its agricultural and traditional rural background. Its closeness to Ningbo city is an advantage since the village can also attract numerous day visitors. The activities in Tengtou include agricultural and cultural education for

²¹⁹ Cf. GERILETU et al. 2011: 316.

²²⁰ Cf. GAO/HUANG/HUANG. 2009: 442-443.

²²¹ Cf. KEOUGH 2010: 65.

²²² Cf. GERILETU et al. 2011: 312.

children and adults while participating in farming activities such as the ‘farmer’s paradise’: Tourists have the opportunity to use traditional farm tools and field equipment in the field and experience the daily life of a farmer. Especially families come to educate their children about the origin of food. Picking fruit and vegetables or flowers is another activity which aims at educating city dwellers about agriculture and farming.²²³ Other benefits include lessons about environmental protection and conservation, for instance through not littering. City dwellers can enjoy the fresh air and natural environment and appreciate the calmness of the rural lifestyle. Farm stays and farm exhibits are a special feature provided by the local elderly, who rent out rooms of their farm. They enjoy chatting with different people and thereby avoid being alone. Renting rooms is a great opportunity for the elderly to earn some extra money without exhausting physical labour. Other income opportunities for the elderly are selling food or fresh locally produced goods. They are able to sell their products to tourists directly and at rather high prices, because “tourists are looking for more natural or green food produced by the local people”²²⁴.

The existing activities for the tourists are sufficient and ensure a comparable wealth of the village. It is important that new entertainment facilities remain in the theme of ecotourism and do not spiral into uncontrolled construction as the Japanese example of Yubari showed. The involvement and experience of the local people remains the most important feature of the Tengtou experience. “The first key characteristic of ecotourism in Tengtou village is that it is a locally initiated, owned and operated, small-scale venture.”²²⁵ By excluding outside businesses and only allowing controlled investment, the benefits and income do not leak out of the village and ensure an improved lifestyle of the villagers. This local empowerment of Tengtou village is so far rather rare in China, but can serve as a model for other Chinese villages facing deterioration and population loss. Regarding the elderly, the example of Tangkou (汤口) in Anhui can be seen as another model for the meaningful usage of ecotourism. The village has created an average household income level of RMB 30,000 per year by hosting tourists in their farms. With this profit the elderly are provided with free old-age care, such as health care, and therefore profit from the new development. Another important goal which was reached through the implementation of ecotourism in Tangkou was the employment of rural labourers. Instead of relocation to the cities, they found work in their village and were thus able to further support their

²²³ Cf. JIANG 2008: 101-105.

²²⁴ JIANG 2008: 121.

²²⁵ JIANG 2008: 135.

elderly parents.²²⁶ The villages' revitalisation was beneficial for the elderly as well as the working aged population and shows that self-made local improvement is within in the realms of possibility.

Ecotourism and the opportunities of farm stays provide good opportunities for many deteriorating and ageing Chinese villages. Already 20,000 Chinese villages have developed mainly through ecotourism and more than 6 million locals benefitted from this development.²²⁷ Happy Farmers' House tourism is small in scale and impact, but also requires only a small investment. They can be easily operated by elderly and generate extra income for farmers. The creation of jobs is the main benefit produced by the development of ecotourism. So far more than 4 million permanent jobs were created by ecotourism and 11 million seasonal jobs.²²⁸ The contribution of ecotourism is diverse and cannot be expressed only in financial terms, but also in terms of environmental conservation, local empowerment and most importantly the restoration of the vitality of rural areas. The Chinese government still needs to acknowledge this development and support local initiatives as well as entice more local participation.

5.2.2 Local products and small businesses

A second measure to ward off out-migration and population loss through economic development and local empowerment is the spread of small businesses by selling local products. Communities can specialise on a certain product which is typical for their region. These products can be agricultural products or processed food, but also cultural commodities. For many farming villages this might be a more viable option than tourism, since the production of food or other products does not involve restructuring the main industry from the primary to the tertiary sector. The benefits are significant: regeneration of farming activities and the creation of new jobs help the revitalisation of villages. In order to promote local products the villages need branding and marketing in cities or even globally. Branding is "the process through which local products are tied to the region from which they originate"²²⁹. The Japanese government emphasises this place-branding through the Japan Brand Development Assistance Program (Japan burando ikusei shien

²²⁶ Cf. GAO/HUANG/HUANG, 2009: 445.

²²⁷ Cf. GAO/HUANG/HUANG, 2009: 442-443.

²²⁸ Cf. GAO/HUANG/HUANG, 2009: 445.

²²⁹ RAUSCH 2008: 223.

jigyo) which was launched in 2004.²³⁰ Local products are becoming more and more popular and according to a study by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries 85.3 per cent of city residents in Japan are willing to support agriculture and rural areas by actively purchasing local agricultural products.²³¹ Another reason for choosing local products is that they are seen as organic and healthy products compared to imported ones. The elderly can play an important role here by setting up small businesses and selling local products. 44.5 per cent of Japanese farmers wished that elderly citizens of their village would sell locally produced agricultural products directly through their own shops. The farmers produce the product, the elderly sell it. In this way the income remains in the village, helps the people directly and contributes to the local economic development. It is seen as an opportunity for elderly people to assist in the revitalisation of their region.²³²

5.2.2.1 Case study Japan: Kamikatsu

Japan is very advanced in the field of local empowerment. This is obvious not only through the efforts in the promotion of ecotourism, but also through its innovation in selling local products. The movement “One village One Product”²³³ (Isson Ippin Undo) was introduced in 1979 by Morihiro Hiramatsu, the former governor of Oita Prefecture, as a regional development program. It was proposed to “(1) prevent depopulation and loss of energy in Oita Prefecture, (2) to find and nurture products/industries that could best reflect and benefit each region, (3) to eradicate heavy dependency upon government, and to promote autonomy and willingness amongst regional people”²³⁴. The principles of OVOP stress that the goods have to be produced locally and that the production needs to empower local citizens by working self-reliant and independent.²³⁵ The goal is economic growth by developing a local small-scale industry which benefits the entire village. The movement spread to many other Asian countries facing deteriorating rural areas. China was the first country to copy the model of OVOP (yi cun yi pin, 一村一品) in Shanghai, Jiangsu, Hubei, Gansu, Shanxi, Jiangxi, Yunnan and several other provinces.²³⁶ For his accomplishments in rural development in China, Hiramatsu received the Friendship Award from the Chinese

²³⁰ Cf. RAUSCH 2008: 229.

²³¹ Cf. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES JAPAN 2010.

²³² Cf. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES JAPAN 2010.

²³³ Hereafter referred to as “OVOP”.

²³⁴ OITA OVOP INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROMOTION COMMITTEE 2011.

²³⁵ Cf. OITA OVOP INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROMOTION COMMITTEE 2011.

²³⁶ Cf. IGUSA 2006: 36.

government in 2002. This shows that the OVOP idea is respected in China and recognised as a tool for local economic development.

One of the many successful examples of implementing OVOP is Kamikatsu, a rural and mountainous town at the eastern end of Shikoku Island. It is far away from urban centres and due to its remoteness, the population dropped from 6,356 in 1950 to 1,955 in 2005. Population ageing in Kamikatsu is severe with 50 per cent of the residents being 65 years and older.²³⁷ The timber and fruit industries collapsed after the timber prices fell and an extremely cold winter demolished the fruit plantations. Out-migration continued and further depopulation as well as increased ageing of the village was imminent. An innovative local initiative was to sell tree leaves²³⁸ for decoration to restaurants in the bigger cities. The elderly were not able to handle the field work any longer, but picking leaves could be done in their garden and was not exhausting manual labour. The local farmers also know how, where and when to plant the trees and pick the leaves. The initiative was launched back in 1986 but has started to really make progress in recent years. 195 former farmers, with an average age of 68, are organized in the Irodori Co. The village's annual revenue of 226 million Yen²³⁹ attracted many visitors and pushed the local economy.²⁴⁰ "Elderly people can actively be involved in 'Irodori (coloring) Agriculture', which helps them earn income and makes them feel fulfilled in life. As a result, the town realizes welfare through promoting industry (industrial welfare)."²⁴¹ To process the orders, the elderly farmers received older generation customised computers from the head of the organisation. Even though they are all organised through Irodori Co., they can still individually process their orders at home and bring the leaves to the local shipping station themselves. The new business model is developed for the elderly, but many younger migrants settled in Kamikatsu and now participate in the leave business as well, so the town wins new residents every year. 4,000 guests from Japan and Asia visit the town every year to learn about the business model and how to create additional revenue in ageing communities.²⁴² The rejuvenation through new settlers and the social role given to the elderly additionally strengthens the sense of community. The example of OVOP in Kamikatsu demonstrates that local empowerment without government interference and making use of local resources is a successful method for fighting depopulation and reviving rural villages.

²³⁷ Cf. MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT JAPAN 2011.

²³⁸ The garnish leaves (tsumamono) include camellia, plum, cherry, peach and persimmon leaves.

²³⁹ At the time of writing JPY 1 (Yen) was equivalent to USD 0,0127.

²⁴⁰ Cf. GLOBAL LINKS INITIATIVE 2009.

²⁴¹ MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT JAPAN 2011.

²⁴² Cf. GLOBAL LINKS INITIATIVE 2009.

5.2.2.2 Applicability in China: One Village One Product

China was the first country to adopt the OVOP movement from Japan and has now implemented it in several provinces. But it has mostly been used for industrial cluster building in many areas instead of focusing on local empowerment in small towns. It was mainly seen as a tool for the construction of the new socialist countryside by the government. The first city to implement it was Shanghai. By trying to establish certain industrial clusters in the outskirts, the government of Shanghai tried to reduce migration from the surrounding villages. Even though there are many examples of OVOP in China, it has not been very effective in small villages. One of the few well documented villages is Yangshe (洋畲村), an 88 family village in the remote mountainous region of southern Fujian province. The town mainly relies on the cultivation of oranges, which are promoted as the town's specialty. Until the late 1980s, the town was poor and the income of the farmers low. After the introduction of OVOP with oranges in the beginning of the 1990s, the town flourished and quickly developed its economy with the farmers' income increasing by 70 per cent through the sale of oranges. Nowadays it is known as Professional Orange-Planting Town (ganju zhuanye cun, 柑橘专业村). In addition to specialising on a single product, the farmers started using bio-organic fertilizer and biological pesticides, thereby improving the food quality and increasing their competitiveness at the organic food market. The success of Yangshe is also due to the good management and the participation of the local people. Every first Sunday of the month is a training day for the farmers. They are educated about cultivation and agriculture methods, pollution free farming technologies as well as management practices from designated experts. Through their organisation in the local Fruit Industry Association, they organise promotion and tasting events, coordinate their distribution and meet new traders.²⁴³ The economic benefits for the village are enormous since the OVOP approach "improves the efficiency of agricultural production, increases the farmers' income, implements agricultural industrialisation, promotes the enrichment and flourishing of the villages and helps the on-going widespread construction of the new rural countryside"²⁴⁴. The OVOP development in Yunnan province in southern-western China is another example of the overall success of the OVOP approach. Over 460 villages participate in various forms of the movement with a wide range of products from high-quality tea, coffee, flowers, mushrooms, sugar cane, tobacco and other agricultural products. These remote mountainous villages and their ageing populations already

²⁴³ Cf. HUANG/LI/LI 2007: 20-21.

²⁴⁴ Author's translation; HUANG/LI/LI 2007: 21.

benefit from the economic development of the OVOP approach and it is applicable to many more villages in China.²⁴⁵

The advantages of the OVOP movement are clear, but its success has been limited in China when compared to Japan. Guo, Qin and Zhang (2007) found several reasons why it has not worked properly in Chinese villages so far. The Chinese government is overly involved in terms of financial aid and control of the production, grass-root farmer organisations have not been set up, the farmers lack training in agricultural specification, the encouragement to participate is not sufficient and the link between the rural culture and the product is often not clear. Japanese experiences have not been incorporated and need to be examined further.²⁴⁶ The authors especially criticise the approach of the Chinese central government because they invest money and try to control the projects, instead of setting up incentives for the farmers to participate. In Japan the farmers decide themselves which product to sell and how to merchandise it, they receive training in these areas and are provided with technical guidance and information services, if needed. The Japanese government avoids direct funding and only offers indirect investment such as advertisement in order to keep up the local empowerment.²⁴⁷ If applied correctly the OVOP movement can contribute to the economic revival of the ageing countryside and help villages attract new settlers due to job creation. The Chinese government can contribute to “improve the elderly’s economic independence by sponsoring small-scale sideline industries suitable for these older workers”²⁴⁸. The central government should therefore promote the movement, but without controlling the project itself and look to Japan for examples in local empowerment.

²⁴⁵ Cf. DU/QIAN 2011: 6.

²⁴⁶ Cf. GUO/QIN/ZHANG 2007: 13-14.

²⁴⁷ Cf. GUO/QIN/ZHANG 2007: 13.

²⁴⁸ FELDMAN et al. 2010: 73.

6 Discussion and conclusion

The demographic transition has affected both China and Japan in a similar way, especially regarding the elderly population in rural areas. Both countries are subject to a low fertility rate, a rising life expectancy and growing urbanisation. Although China's demographic transition lags 30 years behind compared to Japan, it progresses much faster. China will soon close up to Japan in terms of an ageing society and the Chinese government needs to prepare for the rising number of elderly. Moreover, the social security system – particularly in rural China – is being challenged due to the low fertility rate and governmental measures are still in the early stages of development. Albeit governmental approaches exist in China, they fail to respond to the problems the rural elderly face today. Bad infrastructure, a lack of social security and pensions, the risk of impoverishment and the disappearance of intergenerational support puts great pressure on the Chinese state to help left-behind elderly in rural areas. Japanese elderly also face abandonment by their children, live in secluded areas with insufficient infrastructure and need instrumental care which cannot be provided by the government. But while many Japanese communities themselves have implemented a series of measures to ward off the negative effects caused by economic decline and out-migration, Chinese villages still lack this kind of local empowerment. In addition, the Chinese state overestimates the traditional caring structures in the countryside. Even though the traditional caring system still functions through kinship structures, the intergenerational support is vanishing due to an increasing number of only children and changing values of younger generations. The villages need to act themselves in order to improve their situation. The discussed methods of ecotourism and sale of local products could be applied to help many villages in China. They serve as two examples of how abandoned and ageing villages in rural areas can fight the results of the demographic transition. Local initiatives already exist in China, such as the OVOP movement or ecotourism projects, but the participation of the local population is low. Both Japanese examples of local empowerment could be applied by most ageing communities in rural China. This could not only help shaking off poverty as desired by the government, but also prevent out-migration and create jobs, thereby revitalising ageing villages. To put the benefits of local empowerment into a greater picture, the theory of local empowerment needs to be considered here. According to Beer, a community-centred economic development can create better results against the economic decline of communities than governmental approaches. Citizens have a better idea of what is needed in their specific villages and can create business

opportunities customised to their local circumstances and requirements.²⁴⁹ Standardised governmental measures aiming to combat depopulation and economic deterioration have failed in the past. The local empowerment approach is as simple as beneficial: creating job opportunities and generating income is the main goal. Through new jobs the economic recession of rural villages is warded off and thus exerts a pulling mechanism on migrants which in turn guarantees enough young people to care for the elderly. This is especially true when former migrant children return to the villages and take care of their parents, who were previously left behind. Besides, controlled outside and state investments and innovative projects can promote new business start-ups in various fields. Important in the theory of local empowerment is the participation of the local population in the regional economic planning and the active contribution to the projects. If the community works together on a common goal, the social cohesion and a culture of mutual support are strengthened, thus building an improved environment for living – especially in old age. This was particularly evident in the case study of Kamikatsu, where the revitalisation through return migrants and the respected social position given to the elderly reinforced the sense of community. China can and should learn from Japan in this regard. Former Japanese Premier Koizumi (2001-2006) promoted competitive federalism and decentralisation in order to entice communities to take action against their economic and fiscal decline.²⁵⁰ Premier Hatoyama (2009-2010) similarly supported self-reliance in rural Japanese communities as an alternative to central approaches:

“Regional communities, bound by the bonds of the land and of the blood through which ‘everyone knows everyone else’ are on the verge of disappearing. Our next aim, therefore, should not be simply to revive communities of the past but should be to seek out a new type of community. (...) In order to bring about ‘an economy for the people’, I will boldly implement reforms to establish ‘regional sovereignty’ so as to create vibrant local communities where decisions on regional matters are taken by the local residents.”²⁵¹

A similar approach should be applied to China. Due to their household registration restrictions, Chinese rural elderly cannot freely move to the cities, where their migrant children live. This means they need to be taken care of in their villages. Engaging in economic activities through local empowerment can be seen as a new strategy to integrate the elderly and not leave them abandoned with their problems. Most senior citizens would benefit from a small income to improve their living situation. With a rising life expectancy senior citizens are also more active in

²⁴⁹ Cf. BEER/GRAHAM/MAUDE 2003: 2.

²⁵⁰ Cf. ELIS/LÜTZELER 2008: 23.

²⁵¹ PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN AND HIS CABINET 2009.

older age and studies indicated that “most elderly persons were active and sufficiently healthy to engage in earnings related activities. From productive aging perspectives, home-based production projects such as folk arts or small businesses may help many rural elderly generate more earnings and become self-reliant.”²⁵²

Naturally, in theory this is much simpler than in Chinese reality. The Chinese state is highly centralised and local empowerment is lower than in most democratic countries. The general participation problems are mostly due to Chinese history and need to be resolved by the government.

“Participation is still equated in the minds of many peasant farmers with involvement in the mass mobilization campaigns of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution periods where they were mobilized for political participation to the benefit of others – Party cadres, government officials and local leaders. (...) Hence, many peasant households are wary of participation that involves a mobilization of their communities for the achievement of aims that do not bring them tangible economic or social benefits.”²⁵³

This shows that local participation has a negative connotation and the population is not used to planning and controlling their own projects. The general role of the state is also ambiguous: On the one hand the state should not interfere with local initiatives and let the population control small-scale projects, but on the other hand the state needs to set up incentives for the people to come up with own ideas for fighting the negative effects of the demographic transition. Local empowerment should not be actively “pushed” by the state, but participation needs to be enticed. Also, local empowerment should only serve as a complement, not as a substitute for the state’s responsibility to protect its own citizens with social security and pensions. Nonetheless, in the near future the Chinese state cannot shift the whole caring system onto state level. This means that the added value of local initiatives is the direct benefit for the population, whereas bureaucratic states have only limited knowledge of what the citizens in a particular village need and it takes much more time for them to react. This needs to be acknowledged by the government and villages need to realise that they can actively benefit from participating. Japan’s approach on decentralisation applies to a certain extent to China as well. Even though China has a strong central authority, local governments have an increasing power over economic development in their region. Especially the village committee and the township people’s congress, which are

²⁵² LI/TRACY 1999: 369.

²⁵³ PLUMMER/TAYLOR 2004: 40.

elected directly by the citizens, have direct contact to the people and can create an environment for grass-root participation on local projects. Even though there are also other general differences between the two countries which make a one-to-one transfer of experiences difficult, the Japanese example still offers interesting perspectives for China to look into and potentially transfer them to its own rural communities. In China the sheer number of ageing communities is enormous, the general number of deprived elderly is much bigger and the state systems are different when it comes to social security. Nevertheless, the main problems for the rural areas remain the same. Numerous Chinese villages can improve the living standard of the elderly and achieve economic growth through taking lessons from Japanese communities. The Chinese government needs to encourage and set the right incentives for local empowerment in order to promote economic development in ageing communities. Decentralisation, if executed in moderation, can endorse grass-root level initiatives which can be valuable for the whole community. Communities can engage in ecotourism or the sale of local products, thereby creating job opportunities, generating wealth, attracting young settlers and revitalising the village. Both approaches do not require great investment and can be small in scale, but the direct improvements brought to the locals can make a difference in their life. Japan is 30 years ahead in demographic terms and the Chinese government should acknowledge that there are many lessons to be learned from Japanese experiences.

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Note: All online sources were last accessed on October 30th, 2011.

Attachment

The author's email questionnaire with a representative from the Family Planning Commission in Shijiazhuang:

1. 独生子女政策对农村的人口发展有怎样的影响？

随着中国计划生育政策的全面推行，生育率迅速下降，出现了越来越多的独生子女。独生子女比例逐渐增加。农村独生子女所占比例较低，至今还不到每年出生人数的 10%。但由于农村人口基数大，其独生子女的绝对数量可观，而且其比例还正在逐年增长。由于生产力发展水平还比较低，社会保障制度还不健全，子女在家庭生产、养老保障、医疗护理等方面仍具有不可替代的作用，相当多的群众生育观念并没有发生根本转变，“儿女双全”、“生男孩”的愿望仍很强烈，对子女数量的要求与生育政策的规定还有一定距离。只要政策允许，绝大多数人还想再生。部分地区独生子女生育二孩是现行政策的规定，并不是政策的调整和改变，只不过现在到了兑现期而已。但是，这种政策兑现可能给人以政策松动的误解，而导致超生增加，导致生育水平反弹。其次，不同地区发展不平衡。虽然多数地区生育率较低，但是，西部地区和农村地区妇女的生育水平还比较高，还有一些地区（主要是中西部地区）计划生育工作仍处在艰苦的爬坡阶段，降低生育水平的难度很大，尤其是一些少数民族地区和贫困地区，还难以摆脱“越穷越生、越生越穷”的局面。

2. 农村的老年人在生活不能自理的情况下会主动寻求帮助吗？没有家庭的老年人是如何生存的？政府会给他们提供帮助吗？

农村的老年人在生活不能自理的情况下大多数会主动寻求帮助，但也有个例除外。在农村每个乡镇都建有敬老院，由政府出资，没有家人的老年人集中在那里集体养老。城市建有托老中心，生活能够自理的，可选择社区养老，政府提供最低生活保障。

3. 农村老年人的生活特别依赖他们的子女吗？子女除了给年迈的父母提供资金帮助之外，会亲自照顾他们吗（比如生病时照顾他们，帮他们作饭等等）？在城里工作的子女是如何照顾留在农村的父母的？

农村老年人的生活对子女的依赖度已比以前降低了很多。现在子女对父母的赡养义务已不仅仅是提供物质和资金帮助，情感赡养（如生病时照顾他们，经常探望父母，陪父母聊天谈心等等）也是非常重要的，这一点可能不久就要上升到立法层面上。在城里工作的子女无法做到经常陪在农村的父母身边，除了提供物质和资金帮助外，更重要的是常打电话问候，有条件的话常回家看看父母，帮他们作顿饭，多跟父母谈心，做情感交流，这是在当前物质条件已有很大改观的状况下父母最需要的。

Translation:

1. What effect did the one-child policy have on the development of the rural population?

With the full implementation of China's family planning policy and a rapid drop of the fertility rate, there have been more and more only children. The one-child ratio gradually increased. The proportion of the rural only children is comparatively low and until now it has not yet reached 10 per cent of the births per year. However, due to the high number of the rural population, the absolute number of only children is significant, and its proportion is still increasing year by year. With the development level of the productive forces still being relatively low and the social security system not yet fully existing, the children still have an irreplaceable role in working at home, providing old-age security, health care and so forth; for a great number of the population the concept of birthing did not undergo a fundamental change as the desire for "having both a son and a daughter" and "having a boy" is still strong; the number of births is still far away from the requirements of the policy. If the policy would allow it, the vast majority of people would want to have more children. In some regions there are exceptions to the one-child policy when having a second child is permitted, but this is not a policy adjustment or change, it rather means that it is permitted now. However, this may lead to a misunderstanding that the policy is more flexible, which would in turn increase the birth rate, thus leading to an increased fertility level. Furthermore, there is an uneven development in different regions. Although there are low fertility rates in most areas, the fertility level in western provinces and rural areas is still relatively high; there are several regions (mainly in central and western China) where the work of family planning is still in the stage of implementation and reducing the fertility level proves to be very difficult, especially in some ethnic minority areas and poorer areas; but it is also challenging to discard the situation of "the poorer you are, the more children you have, the more children you have, the poorer you are".

2. Are there many rural elderly who seek help because they cannot take care of themselves anymore? How do the elderly without family provide for themselves? Will they be supported by government?

If the rural elderly cannot take care of themselves, they will in most cases take the initiative and seek help, but there are also exceptional cases. In every rural town nursing home funded by the government exist. Elderly without family live there and they will be taken care of. In the cities there are senior citizen centres where elderly can take care of themselves, they can choose retirement communities and the government provides them with a minimum living allowance.

3. How strong is the support for the elderly through their children? Is there only financial help or also personal help (such as taking care of them in case of health issues, cooking for them, etc.)? How do the children living in the city take care of their parents left behind in rural areas?

The dependence of the rural elderly on their children has decreased significantly. Now it is an obligation for children to not just provide material support and financial assistance for their parents, but also offering emotional support is very important (for example take care of them in case of sickness, visit them often, talk with their parents, etc.); this may soon be taken up to the legislative level. Children working in the cities often cannot accompany their parents in rural areas and in addition to providing material and financial help, it is more important to call often, if possible go home more often, cook for them, talk more with their parents, offer emotional communication. This is what the parents need the most when the financial conditions are already good.