

COMPLETION REPORT

A comparative study on the perception and experience of growing old between Malaysian Chinese women and Japanese women aged 65 and above

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Aging gracefully: A comparative study of Japanese and Malaysian women aged 65 and above

Longer lives and extended retirement have created a 'young old age' stage of life. How people spend their "young old age" has become increasingly important. This research aims to investigate the different ageing experiences of Japanese and Malaysian women and the activities they engaged in their "young old age". In-depth interviews were conducted to collect data and an adapted grounded theory approach was used for data analysis. Findings reveal many common characteristics for both groups of research participants. Their similarities include similar nurturing characteristics, experienced losses and gains and they were proactive to employ different strategies to cope with the losses and challenges faced by ageing. The emerging themes show that Japanese and Malaysian Chinese have different life missions evident in their daily activities, one passing on culture and the other passing on family values and life experience. They also differ in (1) Choice of living arrangement (independent versus dependent/interdependent): Japanese women were found to be more independent to live alone while Malaysian Chinese women prefer to stay with their children to care for their grown up children or young grandchildren or simply to be cared by their adult children. (2) They were different in the choice of activities in which to engage: Aesthetic pursuits versus family oriented activities. Japanese women engaged in patch work, tea ceremony, pottery arts, cultural dance such as Yosakoi. They engaged in conducting prevention or training for crisis management, computer classes and other community activity work. While the lives of their counter parts Malaysian Chinese women surrounded by the activities of their children and grand-children. (3) The attitudes to life for the two groups of women were different: Malaysian women demonstrated acceptance of all, good and bad, that life had given them, while Japanese women demonstrated stronger fighting spirits to overcome difficulties in life and to pass on some important cultural values.

The external environmental (socio-economic status) and socio-cultural (socio-religious) situation have contributed to the different ageing experience found in this study. Japanese as a developed country, the macrostructure in place that involve the muscle building facilities, community-based activities, pension, public care and community service system. Therefore it allows Japanese women to pursue aesthetic activities and even start learning art crafts at old age. Malaysia women were more conservative and family oriented to hold on to traditional Confucius concept of filial piety which is a kind of reciprocal expectation to have family and informal long-term care giving. Their religious background also contributed to their non fighting stance to accept ageing as it is.

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