Introduction

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> *For me—and for those of us who are older and hence "different"—a shifting self-image is based not only on the changed person I see in the mirror, but also on the behavior of those around me. "Let me help you cross the street." "Why don't you take my seat?" "Would you like to take a nap?" The solicitude is always heartfelt, but it reflects a stereotype.*
>
> *We are characterized on the basis of a number of assumptions: we're fragile, our memory is spotty, our energy is low, we're anxious about the next DMV license exam, we fall more often. And to some extent, all of that is true.*
>
> Herbert L. Abrams, "How It Feels to Get Old," *Stanford Magazine* July/August (2004, 53)

WE AGE AS LONG AS WE LIVE, so issues of aging should be everyone's concern. But despite the large number and the longevity of older people in developed countries such as the United States and Japan, the elderly as individuals are in many ways still invisible. They tend to be perceived as recipients of health care, consumers of social security savings, and the passive targets of scientific research and public policy; their faces and voices seem hidden behind statistics of the elderly population at large. Except for the fortunate who in their early years had intimate contact with old people, younger people may find it difficult to understand or appreciate the experience of the elderly. Even those with such contact may not fully comprehend what it is like to be older since it is not yet their experience. The perceived distance of the lives and concerns of older people from those of younger generations seems also to affect scholarly research, and may

engender stereotyping (Eckert 1984). Young and middle-aged researchers without the direct experience of being elderly, as many of us are, need to be aware of the possible discrepancies between commonly held views about old age and the actual lives of the elderly. We need to be aware that preconceptions about older people may influence the process of selecting among multiple interpretations of what we observe.

Faces of Aging

Defining old age itself is a complex issue. Researchers, including the contributors to this volume, who work with old people in developed countries often refer to individuals over 65 years of age as old, but they are also aware that this chronological characterization is too simplistic. The perception of one's age is not necessarily defined by chronological age (Boden and Bielby 1986) and can be "disjunctive" (Coupland, Coupland, and Giles 1989). Age is also felt in terms of one's physical facilities ("functional age") and the rites of passage one takes ("social age") (see Counts and Counts 1985; Hamilton 1999). The chapters in this volume make a concerted effort to put a human face on aging issues, and consider multiple dimensions of the aging experience.

As with other groups of people, older persons live under diverse economic, regional, and health conditions. Some live in an urban environment and some in rural areas; some are in nursing homes, while others live independently or with families; some are women and some are men. Heterogeneity, in fact, is perhaps more pronounced among the elderly. One person can also have multiple faces—an image of oneself, a face that is given by others, a face or faces one presents to others, and a face one sees as one's own. I have used the word "face" here to refer to the human aspect of the aging experience and to the various dimensions of that experience. The concept of "face" has also been used in the sociology of interaction, notably by Goffman (1967), to mean "the positive social value a person effectively claims to himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (5). The epigraph to this introduction suggests various "faces" of aging in the way I have used the word, but also evokes Goffman's "face" especially in the sense of individuals being "in wrong face," that is, experiencing a mismatch between who they think they are and who they are considered to be. According to Goffman, "a person may be said to *be in wrong face* when information is brought forth in some way about his social worth which cannot be integrated, even with effort, into the line that is being sustained for him" (8). However, the situation of aging is complex. The

image that others have of the elderly is not completely wrong, as the epigraph suggests, but it is not how the elderly see themselves all the time. In other words, there are definite physical and social changes associated with aging, but they do not completely alter the person.

The chapters in this book are written with an awareness of the multilayered conditions associated with the lives of elderly persons. They attempt to reveal the experience of aging with close attention to the point of view of the persons who undergo the process, going beyond the interpretations assigned by the broader society or appropriated by the elderly themselves. Giving more attention to the individual experiences of the aging population should make it possible to shift the perception of aging issues from "their" problems to matters of our own concern, and help us attain a fuller understanding of the complex issues of aging and the well-being of the overall population.

Multidisciplinary Perspective

The volume is designed specifically to present a spectrum of elder-centered issues on aging rather than narrowing to one topic or one discipline. The choice of a multidisciplinary perspective reflects, first of all, the multifaceted nature of aging issues. It is intended to encourage future interdisciplinary investigations, which in turn will form a crucial basis for effective public policies. The importance of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies that diverge from the previous trend of biology-centered research has been repeatedly advocated, particularly in the domain of aging studies (e.g., Johnson 2005; National Research Council 2005; Majeski and Stover 2005). The Gerontological Society of America held its 58th Annual Scientific Meeting in 2005 with the main theme "The Interdisciplinary Mandate," in which gerontologists, including experts in the biological and medical traditions, encouraged their professions to take a step toward cross-fertilization.

An additional motivation for compiling a volume with chapters representing multiple disciplines is to respond to a challenge noted in gerontological studies, namely, a "lack of broad training" (National Research Council 2005, 89). Ryan and Norris (2001) lament that, although "gerontology is a multidisciplinary field, . . . as knowledge about aging grows in depth and complexity . . . the crossover of even related subspecialities has become less likely" (286). They draw attention to the trend of journals becoming so specialized that a specialist in one field has no chance of accidentally "tripping over" an article in another and they observe that "given this rigid and powerful disciplinarity, it is little

wonder that older adults and their families feel challenged and frustrated by their interactions with health care professionals" (ibid.). While it is undoubtedly challenging to pursue successful interdisciplinary studies, exposure to a variety of research agendas and disciplines will help individual researchers gain a fuller background and understanding of the nature of the research topics, and enable them to produce more textured observations. A commonly shared view may emerge from different disciplines and topics of investigation, which in turn can help to form a basis for effective public policies. This book offers an opportunity for the interested eye to "trip over" studies in specializations of others.

By providing access to different aspects of studies on aging, the chapters in this book are also designed to offer qualitative studies of aging for researchers in any discipline or for anyone who has personal or professional interests in issues of aging. As we age, or as we have increasing contact with older people, all of us, including those who are not gerontologists, may become interested in issues of aging. Considering the significant impact that the increasing number of old people has made and will be making in many countries, the more investigation in a wide range of disciplines is mobilized, the better our understanding will be. It is not easy, however, to find scholarly introductory literature that provides a broad background on aging issues. Available publications are almost entirely discipline specific and are frequently written to support a particular agenda. The chapters of this book showcase qualitative studies by specialists of various disciplines—medicine, nursing, gerontology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, film studies, gender studies, communication, and linguistics—in an attempt to keep a balance of depth and breadth of investigation, and to encourage contributions from a variety of fields.

Lives of the Elderly in Japan

While this book covers topics of aging from multiple disciplinary perspectives, all the chapters approach their questions with the Japanese situation in mind. Japan leads other developed countries in its proportion of elderly members of the population. People over 65 years of age amounted to 20 percent of the nation's population in 2005, a figure that is expected to reach 30 percent by 2025 (Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2006). With average life expectancy at birth in 2007 reaching 85.99 years for women and 79.19 years for men (Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare 2008), the population of elderly in Japan is likely to continue to grow for some time, while the birth rate has declined in 2006 to the rate of 1.25 children born to a

woman. It is predicted that in the year 2050 the median age of Japanese will be 53.4 years and that the population pyramid will be top-heavy, resembling the shape of an ice cream cone or an urn (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2002).

Detailed statistics of Japan's demography are found in reports by government agencies such as the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare and the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. In general, Japanese elderly "reap the fruits of a busy life, enjoying relatively carefree years of retirement in good health and without economic worries" (Coulmas 2007, 2). Because of the trend of the population structure, establishment of a better pension system, and other factors, Japanese people's attitude toward old age has been changing. In a 2001 survey by the Cabinet Office the percentage of the elderly who desire to live always with their children and grandchildren was 43.5 percent and dropped by 10.7 percent compared to 1986 (Coulmas 2007, 28). The largest portion of people (33 percent) in 2003 responded that they wished to spend their old age "leisurely to suit their tastes and hobbies" in contrast to only 24 percent who wanted to live "peacefully with their children and grandchildren," while the ratio was opposite in 1973 (Coulmas 2007, 28–29).

The Japanese situation offers a wealth of resources for research—not only a large number of older people, but also a culturally and socially interesting setting for considering the implications of aging in the modern world. There are commonly held views, of varying relations with reality, including the notions that Japan is a society where the elderly are respected, families have close ties, harmony is prized, and women are subservient. A number of chapters of this volume discuss how these understandings compare with the current lives of older people in Japan, and consider the implications of such findings for general issues of aging.

Since the Japanese situation offers a convenient point of cross-cultural comparison, there have been several notable works on aging in Japan as well as elsewhere in East Asia that investigate specific social and anthropological questions. Topics investigated include the social conditions of caregiving in Japan (Long 2000; Wu 2004), the implications of the Confucian concept of filial piety in the modern world (Ikels 2004), social and family support of the elderly (Kendig, Hashimoto, and Coppard 1992; Hashimoto 1996), end of life (Long 2005), aging interpreted as psychological maturity (Plath 1980), and aging in a rural environment (Traphagan 2000; 2004). As we will see more clearly in the following sections, this volume also includes topics that have not been discussed in existing

books, such as verbal interactions, sexuality represented in film, lifestyle, and the psychology of communication. In offering such a diverse view of the lives of the elderly beyond statistics, it is hoped that this volume will complement the existing literature and extend our understanding of elders' lives.

Background of the Volume

The majority of contributors to the volume were also speakers at a three-day conference, "Faces and Masks of Aging: Implications from the Lives of Japanese Elderly," held at Stanford University in May 2005. The conference was open to the public, and had the participation of people from both Stanford and outside communities. The conference focused on qualitative investigations of the lives of old people from a cross-cultural perspective, drawing examples from various scholarly research projects and from an artistic depiction of the lives of Japanese and American elderly. The conference was intended to promote conversation and collaboration on qualitative aspects of the lives of the elderly among researchers in Japan and the United States who work in various academic fields. It was also intended to create and sustain a dialogue on aging issues in Japan and the United States, and to encourage greater attention to the latter part of the life span by illuminating the richness of the language and lives of the elderly and offering evidence against the simple decrement-based "ageist" view. Fourteen specialists from Japan and the United States in the fields of psychology, medicine, nursing, gerontological health care, sociology, anthropology, communication, film, and linguistics presented their research. Laura Carstensen, director of the Stanford Center on Longevity, delivered a keynote speech, and the award-winning film *Yurisai* (Lily Festival) was screened, followed by a public discussion with the director, Sachi Hamano. This volume is an outgrowth of those presentations and the conversations that continued after the conference. The chapters represent contributions that were particularly pertinent to exposing multiple aspects, or faces, of the lives of old people, with particular attention to the situation in Japan. After the conference, additional contributions were solicited for the purpose of this publication.

Varied Experiences and Varied Representations: Preview of the Chapters

The ten chapters, excluding the Introduction and the Afterword, are organized in two parts. The chapters in Part 1 present varied life experiences of old people depending on their personal and social backgrounds. They lead us to the clear

awareness that lumping together people who have varied health and living conditions in a single category of the "elderly," and assuming that their lives and needs are similar because of their advanced age, is utterly meaningless. For example, an important factor for successful aging in one group, such as being in close contact with younger family members (Doba et al., this volume), may work against successful aging in another context, in rural Japan (Traphagan, this volume). Contrasts such as this are perhaps more apparent in the context of chapters juxtaposing different lives. A further benefit of such juxtaposition is that we are also presented with various possibilities and resources that may be available to old individuals. Issues of gender and sexuality, which may often be avoided if considered taboo, are also discussed in Part 1.

The chapters in Part 2 focus on verbal communication involving old people, and on considering how old individuals verbally represent themselves, how they may be interpreted by others, and what we learn from such interactions. While there have been notable studies in communication and aging, especially in North America and Great Britain (e.g., Nussbaum and Coupland 2004), this is an area of study that has not been well represented in the field of gerontology on either side of the Pacific Ocean. For instance, no independent chapter on communication or linguistics is included in the 744-page handbook on age and aging (Johnson 2005), despite the apparent and unarguable importance of verbal communication to human life. Linguistic studies of discourse by Japanese elderly have appeared only recently (e.g., Hamaguchi 2001; Matsumoto 2005; 2007; Backhaus 2009). The chapters in this section discuss verbal communication of the elderly from the point of view of human interaction rather than from the viewpoint of decreased biomedical ability, and reveal a complexity of self-expression in verbal interactions with and among older people. Aging from the perspective of communication is further discussed in the Afterword by Jon F. Nussbaum and Carla L. Fisher.

Part 1: Varied Lives and Experiences of the Elderly

The first chapter presents a case study on successful aging through participation in the activity of photography. Through their interviews with elderly people who took up photography as a post-retirement hobby and joined photography clubs, Keiko Takahashi, Makiko Toroko, and Giyoo Hatano find that enhancing social relationships with others and having flexible and accepting attitudes toward aging are significant factors in remaining engaged and leading a meaningful life.

The findings of the first chapter are echoed in the second chapter, which introduces the "New Elder Citizen Movement," a rapidly growing movement that promotes the enriched physical and mental quality of later life. The movement has been led by Shigeaki Hinohara (who will be a centenarian in 2011), the honorary president of a teaching hospital in Tokyo, and a co-author of this chapter with Nobutaka Doba. The lifestyle variations of the members, who are predominantly over seventy-five years of age, are examined in detail to provide a general picture of how they live. Through investigation of a relatively large number of elders, this study focuses on quality of life issues and initiatives taken by the elderly themselves.

The first two chapters present the elderly as resilient and self-reliant. This picture runs counter to the stereotypical image of the elderly as defeated and discouraged. While some elderly defy stereotypes by leading active and engaged lives, others also defy stereotypes in very different ways, as other chapters in this part illustrate. In Chapter 3, Susan Orpett Long discusses the strained relations between older spouses when one must care for the other. Long points out how caregiving relationships have changed, noting that adult children, who traditionally provided care for their parents, no longer live at home and so the responsibility falls to one's spouse. Taking a case in which the husband cares for his ill wife, Long discusses tension, dependency, and sacrifice as experienced by the elderly couple and the reality of the caregiving situation. In interviews, the multiple public and private faces of the old couple, or *soto-zura* (public mask) and *uchi-zura* (inward-facing representation), are revealed, adding texture to the image of the husband as a good family caregiver.

Tension among family members is also clearly felt in the rural families discussed by John W. Traphagan in Chapter 4. Unlike in urban environments, elders in rural areas can be more isolated from other elders and have to depend on their younger family members, whose life experiences are far different from their own. Traphagan focuses on such rural elders' experiences and voices, which he relates to the increased number of suicides among the elderly in rural Japan. The chapter makes us realize that close contact with young family members, which can be beneficial in certain situations (Doba and Hinohara, this volume), does not necessarily ensure happiness in either generation, and in fact, could cause more tension. It also makes us wonder about reasons for the difference between the experiences of the elderly in a photography club in the midsize city of Ueda in mountainous Nagano Prefecture (which is far less urban than Tokyo) and experiences of the elderly in rural Iwate Prefecture.

If those in Traphagan's study had an independent means of transportation to gather with others of their age, could they also become like the "shutter bugs" studied by Takahashi et al.? Doba and Hinohara's study also shows that older individuals wish to remain useful and relevant in the world. Is there a way for the elderly in rural Iwate to feel useful to others? Many questions arise when contrasting their conditions and experiences with those of elders in other situations.

Calling our attention to a topic rarely discussed in the arena of aging and the aged, Chapter 5 concerns an area in which a gap exists between widespread social expectations and the elderly's subjective experience, namely, sexuality. Hikari Hori discusses aging, failed virility, alliances between a "good wife" and a "fallen woman," and lesbianism, all of which are depicted in the award-winning romantic comedy *Yurisai* (Lily Festival). Hori argues against the common stereotypes of the elderly, especially of elderly women, by analyzing the film and addressing women's participation in the production of films regarding aging.

Part Two: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Verbal Behavior of the Elderly

In Chapter 6, Anne R. Bower, a sociolinguist and gerontologist who has been observing American nursing homes, cautions against importing cultural and generational bias into the study of elders' speech practices. The emphasis on capability of verbal communication may be culturally or generationally motivated and may not be shared by other cultures or by the elderly themselves. More specifically, as taciturnity is known not to be regarded as a sign of poor communicative ability in Japan, we should recognize that a similar view may be held by the elderly even in America, where talk is highly valued. Bower's chapter offers the alternative perspective of a culturally sensitive model that can be used to understand elders' speech practices in both countries.

In a similar vein, Chapter 7, by Natsumi Morita, a scholar of nursing, questions the assumptions of healthcare professionals and advocates the use by doctors and nurses of lay terminology that patients themselves use to describe their varied inner experiences. This suggestion opposes the use of objective technical terms from medicine in communicating with dialysis patients, the majority of whom are elderly. The chapter supports the elderly centered perspective even, or especially, in the medical environment, and promotes a closer understanding of the experiences of the people whom healthcare professionals encounter.

In Chapter 8, Yoshiko Matsumoto turns the focus of attention from institutional settings to discourse practices in informal peer settings. A linguistic examination of naturally occurring conversations among elderly Japanese women—a type of data that has rarely been studied—reveals that, in contrast to the often negative assessments based on younger speakers' (or analysts') perspectives, peer conversations were lively and often humorous, even on topics of distressing life experiences such as a husband's death or a speaker's own illnesses. The conversations also refute other commonly held perceptions about elderly women and their verbal behavior, such as the images of being submissive and unconcerned about physical attractiveness, as discussed in greater detail in Hori's chapter. The peer conversations studied in this chapter thus offer alternatives to the common view of the discourse practices of the elderly as negative, self-pitying, and dependent, and suggest attention to multiple dimensions of a seemingly simple phenomenon.

Natural conversations are also the topic of investigation by another linguist, Toshiko Hamaguchi, in Chapter 9. Based on a longitudinal study of intergenerational family conversations among the author, her grandmother, and her mother, Hamaguchi argues that solidarity among family members is enhanced through co-construction of narratives and that elderly people's apparent overuse of pronouns whose reference is not immediately clear within family conversations should not be interpreted as a sign of decreased linguistic and cognitive ability, but as an expression of intimacy. Family members, or those who have an intimate relationship with one another, are privileged to be able to fill in each other's thoughts and references, and can rely on and be assured of such close ties. This chapter, like the one by Matsumoto, reveals an alternative understanding of a phenomenon that has often been subject to negative interpretations.

The importance of enhancing opportunities for the elderly in Japan for communication within and across generations is also advocated in Chapter 10 by communication specialists Hiroshi Ota and Howard Giles in their study of inter- and intragenerational verbal communication. While there is a "good story," i.e., the stereotypical view of the young respecting the old, as Traphagan also shows in his chapter, the elderly in Japan are also perceived negatively by their own and younger generations, a fact that hinders close communicative relationships between them. Ota and Giles advocate balanced and "mindful" accommodation in society, and suggest that mindful communication may help honor the identities desired by the other party in the interaction and allow older adults to pay greater attention to the positive aspects of aging.

Concluding Remarks

This volume presents a multidimensional picture of aging with a focus on Japan. It also attempts to provide an opportunity for researchers to become aware of a broader research agenda and to think in interdisciplinary directions, while furthering knowledge in each discipline represented. Shared insights may emerge from the variety of studies presented in the volume. For instance, it seems clear that the "standard view" based on stereotypes of the elderly in Japan or elsewhere should not obscure the complexity of real aging experiences, which vary depending on living conditions and the perspectives from which individuals view their lives and interactions. Several chapters suggest that opportunities to interact verbally or nonverbally with people with whom one can sustain a positive relationship are indispensable for the well-being of the elderly. The danger of isolation, while not confined to the elderly, is a critical issue. As is true for other generations as well, an old adult can be completely isolated even when surrounded by family members, as illustrated by cases of elder suicide in rural Japan and tension in spousal care. In contrast, interactions with younger people outside the family or with friends and peers close in age who may share interests and similar experiences can contribute to positive relationships and encounters. While the life of the elderly is enhanced by fruitful *inter*generational relationships at home and beyond, many chapters also suggest an additional, rewarding direction, namely *intra*generational interaction. Among peers and friends, older adults engage in verbal and nonverbal activities that may not fit with the images and standards held by younger people. The elderly may feel free to keep their "old" values or talk about topics that younger people may not consider appropriate. Especially in Japan, where the elderly are expected to outnumber younger people in the future, when creating public policy it is worth considering a variety of possibilities available to the older generations that can facilitate social networking outside of families, and accommodate a system where old people help each other. Numerous studies have demonstrated that forcing one group's norms and expectations onto another does not yield positive outcomes. Pressing the norms and expectations of middle-aged or younger adults on the elderly would not be productive. In this sense, the issues addressed by an inquiry on aging are simultaneously universal and specific. I have no doubt that there are many more insights that readers can draw from the chapters presented here. Ideally, this volume will encourage greater attention to the latter part of the life span by illuminating the richness of the lives and interactions of the elderly and offering convincing evidence against the simple decrement-based "ageist" view.

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