

Transnationalising intergenerational relations: redefining and negotiating family obligations, care and support in an international migration context*

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Abstract

This study aims to make sense of family relations, care, and support in a migration context by examining the intergenerational relations of contemporary three-generational Korean families whose adult children's work led to their professional migration. Informed by transnational migration perspective and by recent discussions in family studies of the role and significance of visit and of negotiated features of support and obligation at a distance, which challenges the conventional wisdom that care-giving or support at a distance is an unfeasible task, this study investigates how intergenerational relations are worked out in an international migration context.

This study focuses on the meanings and forms of family care and support between adult children and their elderly parents and between the grandparents and grandchildren of Korean professional migrants.

The findings are presented from my own field study that I conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 110 individuals from 26 three-generational families; interviewing both the migrant couples in Singapore and at least one (up to all four) of the surviving elderly parents of the couples in Korea between April 2006 and September 2007.

I found an active involvement in family care and support between generations. Through case studies, I suggest that the care needs of the elderly were often orchestrated by migrating and non-migrating adult children. In some cases, support from the elderly for migrating adult children's families, particularly, providing care for grandchildren through grandparents' visits or grandchildren's home visits, was observed. Care and support needs and the involvement of both generations often characterised transnationalising intergenerational relations. Based on this finding, I argue that the nature and practice of intergenerational family obligation lies at the heart of becoming a transnational family through their kin maintenance, which combines and satisfies the needs of both grandparents and grandchildren.

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Introduction

How are intergenerational relations between the elderly parents and their adult children and grandparents-grandchildren relations (re-)shaped when adult children and the young children of the elderly embark on temporary migration? Concerning care and support roles across the generations, many researchers have argued that those who are at geographically close distance provide such roles (Rossi and Rossi 1990; Lin and Rogerson, 1995; Joseph and Hallman, 1998 cited in Baldassar et al 2007: 3) so that care and support arrangements and relations at a distance are speculated to be largely unfeasible. Also, it is often speculated that family obligations, particularly family care and support for close kin may hinder the migration of a family or burden in its intergenerational relations. However, in recent years, some pioneer research on transnational care and support has recognised that even in international migration settings, transnational care-giving is observable among the first generation immigrants and their elderly in their countries of origin (Baldassar 2007a; Baldassar 2007b). However, how this is arranged by non-permanent migrants remains still unexplored. The conventional framework on intergenerational relations, as applied to the care and support of elderly dependents, does not seem to pay appropriate attention to this significant minority group of the elderly whose adult children are abroad, and whose numbers are increasing due to the globalisation of workplaces.

This paper will deal with and try to make sense of ideas and practices of filial piety, family obligation and care and support for the elderly, among elderly parents who have at least one adult child migrant family in Singapore. Among issues related to intergenerational relations, it will focus on ideas and practices of co-residence and visit, care and support. In particular, it pays attention to the new meanings and forms of co-residence, visits and ways of organising care and support. I will discuss how migration and family obligations transform or reconfigure these relations and their arrangements with each other and who are more likely to be transnational elderly, and why this is so. There have been rare attempts to make sense of what people think and practice through in-depth analysis linking both the thought and practices of the two generations in a transnational context (Baldassar 2007a; Baldassar 2007b). Through this case study of multi-sited global ethnography, I aim to formulate a grounded understanding of family obligation towards the elderly in contemporary Korean society and also of care and support norms and practices among contemporary Korea professional migrants.

Literature Review

A few recent pioneer works on transnational families' care and intergenerational relation practices (Baldassar 2007a; Baldassar 2007b; Mason 2004; Zontini 2006; Zontini 2007) and new meanings (Finch 2007; Smart and Shipman 2004) are providing some possible foundations of comparison in this underinvestigated field. This work challenges our conventional wisdom that care-giving or support at a distance is either an unfeasible task, as many researchers have argued, and that those at a geographically close distance provide such

roles (Rossi and Rossi 1990; Lin and Rogerson, 1995; Joseph and Hallman, 1998 cited in Baldassar et al 2007: 3). A few deserve specific detailed mention.

Baldassar (2007a: 275) argued in her ethnographic study of long-distance family relations and care between Italians in Australia and their kin in Italy that “transnational lives are shaped by ... culturally constructed notions of ‘ideal’ family relations and obligations, as well as notions of ‘successful’ migration and ‘licence to leave’”. Her research is a “critique of preoccupation and assumption in the gerontology literature that care-giving requires proximity,” rather, providing an example of transnational family literature, in which “transnational care-giving is premised on an ideational concept of family and kin relations”(Baldassar 2007a: 276).

Zontini (2007: 1104) also challenges the conventional assumptions on care norms and practices of the first and the second generation immigrants, namely, that “immigrants ...hold unchangeable values” from the origin country while the second generation children “will reject the norms and values of their parents as a result of living in a new society” . Using a case study of Italian families in the UK, she argued that “change occurring in immigrant families is not necessarily a move from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’ or from ‘ethnic’ to ‘mainstream.’” She reports that, “despite the tensions sometimes occurring between parents and children, reciprocal bonds across generations remain very strong, with children providing care for their ageing parents while at the same time receiving various forms of support from them. ...as a result of their upbringing and their personal choices, second-generation women continue to be involved, as were their parents, in having to manage kin relationship at a distance” (Zontini 2007: 1103).

The Study

As the final result of the whole fieldwork, I conducted 110 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 26 primary migrant (PM) couples’ families. This group satisfied the basic requirement of having at least one child and one surviving elderly parent and that both the PM couples and at least one of the surviving elderly parents were interviewed. As a result, 52 primary migrants, 26 males and females each, and their 58 elderly parents, 26 males and 32 females respectively, were interviewed. The interview lasted between one and four hours. A typical interview with a PM would last about one hour if the interview was conducted at their office, one and half or two hours at home or at a café near their house or office. All but two of the interviews with the elderly parents were conducted at their residences. All of the interviews were digitally tape-recorded. A typical interview started with the introduction and consent of the interviewees, filling up basic demographic forms and consent forms, which took between fifteen and twenty minutes, and the semi-structured interviews were then recorded.

Primary migrant couples: the middle class middle generation couples

Reflecting the age patterns when professional expatriates from Korean companies are being sent abroad and my deliberate attempt to recruit a diverse age group but including

couples who have both children of school age and at least one surviving elderly parent(in-law), the age profile of the PM sample shows that the majority were mostly in their 30s and 40s (See Appendix Table 1). On the whole, they were **middle class middle generation couples**.

The majority of the sampled PMs were aged between 36 and 45 (median age, male 43, female 41). The PMs were married for an average of 14.7 years of marriage (a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 24 years). Among the 26 couples, 14 of the husbands were the eldest sons. Among the wives, 12 were the firstborn daughters. Therefore, both firstborn and non-firstborn children were represented, which may enable us to see whether there is any difference in their intergenerational relations with their parents, as firstborn son couples were traditionally expected to show more commitment to their elderly parents.

Almost all the PMs had received university or higher education. Exceptions were for two high school graduates and one polytechnic graduate, among 52 PMs.

The PM couples' household monthly income was in average 11,240 Singapore Dollars (SGD), which is significantly higher than both the mean household income in Korea and in Singapore¹. Among the total of 26 families, 5 families had a monthly income of less than 6,000 SGD, where as 5 families had an income of more than 15,000 SGD. Others were located in-between.

My sampled families had stayed in Singapore for different length of time as well. The average length of time they had spent living in Singapore was 7 years, and the average length of time they spent living outside Korea was 8.6 years. Some professional families had overseas experience other than in Singapore.

Elderly parents of PMs: working class versus middle class elderly parents

Even though the adult children were mostly middle class white collar workers, the elderly parents who were interviewed included both those from a middle-class and from a working-class background. This reflects the dramatic economic development of Korea and the dynamic mobility that has occurred in recent decades which has been achieved in one generation's time. About half of the elderly respondents had held working-class occupations as their life-time jobs. Among 26 male elderly people, 10 had been factory or service workers and two had been farmers. 11 had held professional or managerial jobs. Among 32 female elderly respondents, 14 had held working class jobs. Some of the elderly people who were sampled still worked either full-time or part-time. There were 15 elderly people working at least part-time. Among them, 8 were currently working as farmers, labourers or professional workers in a slightly more flexible schedule than they had previously worked.

Care and support for the elderly

¹ Its range was 0 to 30,000 SGD. One couple was temporarily out of work, therefore had no current income but spent about 4,000 SGD for a month's expense.

How are the elderly cared and supported? My interview data suggests, Firstly, that providing occasional and regular financial support towards the elderly was significant component in the meanings of migration (for adult children) and of intergenerational relations for both adult children and elderly parents. What they differ from the similar financial support of other labour migrants (“remittance”) was that, among the sampled families, this assistance was primarily viewed what Finch (2007) called as “displaying”, showing the tokens of their obligations. It was so even for those cases that financial assistance took up significant portion of livelihoods of the elderly.

Secondly, then, why is it somewhat downplayed by both parties involved? To understand that, we need to look at the level of ideas shared often by this migrant group and their parental generations. When asked about their thought and practices of intergenerational relations, ‘providing’ or ‘displaying’ of emotional and material tokens of family bonds were often understood as being practices of filial piety and family obligations in ordinary situations, whereas they took the form of providing significantly more support when special needs arose or would arise in the future. As a result, I found substantial support exchange and care-giving across the generations, even though tensions existed about doing so. Lowered expectations on the part of the elderly and explicit and implicit negotiations of responsibilities by migrant adult children and their siblings with their parents co-existed. I also found somewhat different kinds of negotiation between the two generations depending on the class of the elderly, but not necessarily that of the migrant adult children, who in this case study were largely middle class professionals.

The following four case studies of elderly parents will be presented to provide a glimpse of ideas and practices of filial piety and family obligations and how support and care for the elderly are organised in their ordinary days that I just summarised above. I will describe two cases each from working-class and middle class elderly parents, whose health status also differed. They also seemed to have different ways of getting (or giving) care and support. After the presentation of these vignettes, I will briefly explain how I will discuss the lives of the elderly parents further at the end of this section.

Elderly A couple: Not healthy working class elderly

Elderly A (female, 76, F36HF/M) has suffered from dementia, Parkinson’s disease and other complications for the last several years. “There is nothing she can do by herself” said her husband, aged 76. “She cannot even bend her neck to make comfortable to sleep by herself. If her head falls down, I recognise she wants to sleep. Then, I lay her down to sleep.” Her husband needs to do everything from preparing and feeding her food to taking her to toilet. Three years ago her condition deteriorated and she can no longer do anything alone. As a primary care-giver, Mr. A can hardly go outside his house for more than 30 minutes as he does not feel comfortable being outside without her. He talks about her deteriorating condition when he receives calls from his *Jangnam* (firstborn son) in Singapore. His son hurriedly visited his parents’ three times this year already. Mr. A senior, despite the fact that his wife now is entitled to have a government-sponsored welfare care-taker twice a week, told me that he should not use the free service, which is recently introduced in Korea. “I do

not mean that I do not appreciate it, but I said ‘I do not want it.’” He feels that he, as a husband who has lived with her for a life time, should be the care-giver, as long as he is healthy and has enough energy to “cook meals”, which he learned whilst his wife was hospitalised six years ago. If somebody from the welfare service visits his house and does what he is doing, “I, who do not go out to work, cannot sleep or do something else in the mean time while the care-taker is doing the ordinary care work I do for my wife... It would be ridiculous.” “If one of the children come to do the job for her, I do not mind... but I do not want to use the government welfare service when there is somebody, me, available in the family”, he said, “Doing so is leaving [the one with whom I lived for lifetime] to others. ... is cutting off human relationship, it is deserting, [contemporary] *Koryo-jang*² which is not preferable, and a pity as a human being.” Passing sick and old elderly to contemporary social welfare service, to the government or leaving [sick and old] to the nursing home is “contemporary form of *Koryo-jang*” as “there is something beyond the affection [*Jung*] between parents and children.” There must be somebody who needs to use these services; otherwise, their later life is so lonely. However, “it is wrong to think that I should also use the service [just because it is available].” “For those who have lost self-consciousness, their days are being counted, then children or the welfare service can manage them”, who could be “viewed as objects.” But it is not desirable “now to think about it, I do not even need to think about it.” “If my wife passes away, then I may think further about being supported by my children and about the living arrangement.” “None of my children are such people” who will desert me. “It belongs to basic obligation as a human being.” Mr A was a farmer until he was in his early 40s, and he then migrated to the Metropolitan Seoul area, working as a labourer in chemical factories and car parts factory until four years’ ago when he was told to quit the job by the company. His wife worked in a garment factory until she got sick around 1996. His daughters and last son, who live in the same or nearby cities, visit their parents, bringing cooked food and other foodstuffs and put them in the refrigerator, by turn but without mutual arrangements, about once a week or biweekly. They give *Yongdon* (pocket money) from time to time, which is “enough for expenses” together with the rental income from Mr A’s multi-household house.

Elderly couple B: Healthy middle class background elderly couple

Elderly B (male, 72; F21WF/M) spends most of his time with his wife, aged 67. He retired from a school as a senior manager in 1994, and then he has maintained a small farm located about 30 minutes’ drive away from his spacious Seoul apartment. At the farm, he built a small house so that they can spend nights there, too. During the busy farming season, they spend most of their time there, attending to what they grow and reading books. What they grow in the farm is not for sale but for them and their children’s families to eat “organically grown” vegetables. Even though he had done only white-collar jobs for his all of his life, he grew up in a rural area until he attended a university in Seoul, so he knows about farming. He

² *Koryo-jang* is an ancient practice of deserting sick and old elderly to the remote mountainous area, grave site, dated from the *Koryo* dynasty (918-1392). Literal meaning of *Koryo-jang* is *Koryo* [dynasty] funeral practice.

keeps a diary on what he did on the farm for the last few years, which now makes it easier to maintain farming. He has thought about it for a long time, spending his later life independently from his children would be ideal in this “changed era”. However, since he turned 70, he feels that he is getting frail, and sometimes is “heartedly dying to see grandchildren.” Unlike living in the same country, which will allow him to visit daughters’ by driving a car for a day, living apart abroad is “not good in this sense.” “As a parent, I sometimes feel sad. Should we live like this? What if at the point of dying we cannot share the feelings between parents and children? If I imagine this, it is so sad.” During winters, they visit their eldest daughter in Singapore or the second daughter in the United States for about 40 to 50 days by turn every year. His only son, who is lastborn, married a few years ago and co-resided for one year and then left for independent living. He and his wife visit Elderly B couple quite regularly on weekends, even though they live more than one hour’s drive away. Whilst his PM daughter and her family lived in Korea, they intentionally moved into the same apartment complex to receive grandparental care for their infant and young granddaughters as both worked. Elderly B gets about 25 pounds a month from each of his children as “fuel expense” for his car, as a token of “kin bond”.

Elderly C: Healthy working class background elderly widow

Elderly C (female, aged 80; F25HM) became a widow 11 years ago as her husband passed away. Whilst younger, she did “everything” from a factory job to being a restaurant worker until her early 60s when her husband got paralysis, *jungpung*, and later on dementia and was ill and lying on the bed for three years. He did not get hospitalised care but she was the primary care-giver at home. She lives alone in a rented flat of a multiple-household house in Seoul’s working class district. She has three sons, the second living in Singapore. She spends most of her time during the day in another flat, which about 10 elderly women in their similar age between 75 and 87 in the neighbourhood collectively rented. “We go there in the morning, cook and have deals together and play ‘*whato*’ [Korean playing card] until early evening every day. It is much more fun.” Her third daughter-in-law, together with two grandchildren, visited to spend a day at her flat on the day I visited for interview. Her third son’s family visits her once a week or biweekly. Her eldest son, who is a real estate agent, comes less frequently as he is busier on weekends and his children attend the secondary school, and are busy with their studies. She lives on about 200 pounds a month, which she says is “enough for everything,” which is contributed by her three sons. The contribution of the second son in Singapore is the largest.

Elderly D couple: Not healthy elderly couple without any other child but co-residing abroad with only son’s family

Elderly couple D (male aged 78 and female aged 74; F4HF/M) have lived with their only son’s family since his marriage in 1995. Elderly Mr D worked as a labourer in a printing shop until he was around 60, whereas Mrs D was housewife and helped with housework and to care for their then infant grandchildren together with a baby-sitter as their daughter-in-law was a professional worker in Korea. They are one of a few elderly cases who currently co-

reside with their adult children in Singapore. “I have never thought of living apart from my son,” said Mrs D. They have lived abroad for the last seven years. They came to Singapore first in 1999, spending three years, then went to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for two years, and then came to Singapore again in 2004, following their son’s overseas assignment. Their son is currently overseeing the marketing activities of a Korean Electronics MNC in Southeast Asia. Just before they came first to Singapore, their daughter-in-law asked her parents-in-law “which one would you like to choose, loneliness [i.e. living without son’s family] or uneasiness [i.e. of living abroad particularly from language difficulty]?” They live in a luxurious and spacious condominium in Singapore. Mr D had lain on the bed for seven months when I interviewed him, as he cannot take a walk out easily now. “It is tragedy that I have only one child and that I have followed my son and daughter-in-law to live abroad. ... they cannot even go to the catholic church for Sunday service because of me for the last three months... [Elderly] should have at least one daughter ... so that [we can rely on her] in the emergency [or situation like this]”. He said he lost “his will to live” because of severe back and heart pains, which have been treated in all the possible ways in Singapore’s best hospital. Doctors here said there is “anything wrong” except the known complications, which they cannot do anything further. However, Mr D, when his son had a business trip to Korea, said “pack the inner wear, I want to have a medical check-up in Korea, and after that, I will do whatever, jumping into the river” as he feels such pains, told Mrs D. Ever since his monologue of “I want to jump from the window” was heard, at least one of family members is watching him. Mr. D, after getting frail and ill a few years ago, now “just wants to go to Korea.” Mrs D also said “whilst the first stay in Singapore and in Malaysia, there were a number of Korean elderly of similar age so that we could chat with one another, but now there is not any other to chat and play with.” They like the afternoons when their grandchildren come back home from school. They kiss their grandparents and chat with them for a while. Both Elderly D are anticipating the day they to go back to Korea soon, but Mrs D knows that her son may be reassigned overseas again in a few years’ time. “I will follow son. ...How can two of us live alone [in Korea]? ... I don’t think we can live alone... I will follow them abroad.”

As I have shown in the above case studies, the ideas, practices and needs of care and support, as well as their residential arrangements, differed significantly amongst the elderly people. Elderly Couple D had co-resided with their only son and his wife since his marriage and had even followed his overseas deployment. Elderly couple A or Elderly C, whose eldest sons lived in Korea or Singapore, had not co-resided with any of their children. Elderly couple B, in contrast, whose son live in Korea, once lived together with their son for a year or so and once lived in the same neighbourhood as one of their daughters, when their grandchildren were infants but they currently maintained an independent living arrangement. However, their current independent living arrangement was complemented by annual, seasonal and transnational co-residence with their two daughters who lived in Singapore and the USA. Though all these four cases of elderly people had different living arrangements, they shared in common that they received some regular financial support from their children.

In some cases to the children's support was at level that was significant for the livelihood of the elderly, and in others, it was gratefully regarded as a token; the regularity of the support also differed amongst the different cases.

They also suggest that expectations and arrangements differ amongst the elderly, particularly depending on their socioeconomic background (including their financial independence), their family background (available child or spouse in Korea) and their health status. Readers should also note that even though most PMs can be regarded as middle class, considering their occupation, education and income levels, often their parents are not. Roughly half the elderly parents could be regarded as middle class or more affluent, whereas the others were of working class or lower middle class, as is evident in the characteristics of the interviewed elderly. This reflects the rapid economic development in Korea which has been achieved over one generation, providing windows of upward mobility for generations of PMs. The case studies above, therefore, suggest that we should pay appropriate attention not only to what is being done with regard to the key elements of family obligations, such as care and support, but also to the family's background and situational circumstances if we want to make sense of their ideas and practices of filial piety and family obligations in a transnational context.

I would like to make some general observation on the interviews with the elderly parents. When I asked questions during the interviews about the practices of filial piety or family obligations towards the elderly, the respondents began either by saying "nothing much" or confining their response to matters of financial support, whether they were elderly parents or PMs. At least on the surface, most of the elderly did not forget to say that they did not want anything or did not want much. They often started their response by noting that times are changing. During the interview, they raised such examples from newspaper reports as the cases of 'deserting elderly by adult children' or popular soap dramas on television dealing with contemporary elderly and adult children relations, which are depicted in rather dramatic and sensational ways. However, if I further asked what **their own thoughts** were rather than what **others** were saying, and what was being done regularly or irregularly or what had been exchanged, and asked follow-up specific questions, including on non-financial, emotional, "small or trivial" things, I often found that much more had been given or exchanged. This seemed to suggest that people often took many exchanged things between the generations for granted, in partly because they thought such issues were not worthy of mention because they were "natural" or "basic obligatory" things. This requires that we go deeper than we already have discussed earlier (i.e. what they think is important) and look at what is actually being done; this will be discussed in this section. Also, importantly, many respondents often told me who, for example, among his/her siblings, does what, and if they do not do "much" then why that was the case. This suggests that the broad situations and circumstances of the elderly and of other potential care-givers or supporters in the family were often well understood among the extended family members; that is, both '**who does what**' and '**who can do what**' for ordinary or special situations.

When considering and examining what is being done for the elderly and what are the roles played by the PMs and their non-migrant siblings, it seems that categorising among the

'needy' versus the 'not-yet needy' elderly parents useful. Though dividing the elderly into 'the needy' and the 'not-needy' is arbitrary, I think it may be more useful to do so than to subdivide them according to health, age, class and many other categories in order to discuss them. This may also be useful because people (not only the elderly themselves but also their adult children) seem to consider these factors in their own evaluation of the situation, i.e. whether they need something from others or not. Further inquiry involves two situations: daily/regular routines of care/support in both 'ordinary' situation and special situations (the latter including emergency situations such as hospitalisation or relatively demanding care/support).

On special occasions including emergencies or situations requiring heavy involvement in the family role care for the elderly, often, the level of urgency and the distance between family members were cited to determine who should provide physical care as a first line of support. However, adult children abroad provided a second (in terms of time) line of support but they also often provided a primary line of support when the need arose. In this context, Elderly A's son in Singapore was a primary supporter for his ailing parents, whose role was complemented by his sisters in Korea whose financial role was secondary but whose daily care role was primary.

Also, importantly, the above case studies showed that the transnational reshaping of intergenerational family relations occurred in some cases. I found that this was more often the case for families like Elderly D, whose only adult child was abroad. The elderly couple followed their child's family. In other cases in my sample, such reshaping occurred to a limited extent, if we confine our discussion to the physical/daily aspect of care/support and co-residence.

Transnationalising intergenerational relations: redefining visit, co-residence, support

Then, how does migration reshape intergenerational relations in a subtler or (broader) sense (in contrast to the physical, daily and strict sense)? I will look at the new meanings and forms of co-residence and visiting in this section; how they are recognised in an international migration context. I will show that, firstly, even though the wealthier (and healthier) elderly with a traditional orientation towards familial relations tended to be more likely to become 'transnational' elderly people, on their own initiative, and their counterparts tended to become 'local', it is more than a class and health matter. Kin maintenance, particularly between grandparents and grandchildren through visits, is recognised as an important site for investigation. Secondly, people developed innovative ways forms co-residential arrangements, as was observed among the case families. Thirdly, the circumstances of parents, PMs and other adult children (and grandchildren) are ones that the support givers are keenly aware of, even though they live apart.

In general, two points can be made. Firstly, migrant children and their elderly parents creatively modified old ways or invented new ways of practising family obligations and providing support. In particular, it was not only by providing financial support or moral contact but also through modified co-residence and new meanings attached to visits of

grandparents and grandchildren that led their intergenerational relations becoming transnationalised. These new forms were more often found amongst those of the elderly who were healthier, more kin-committed, and from a middle class background than amongst the others.

Secondly, in the quality and nature of grandparental-grandchildren relations, among my sampled families, visits of grandparents to grandchildren or vice versa had somewhat different meanings and reasons of commitment to do so, besides common emotional ties felt across the generations. Young or school age grandchildren's visit to grandparents organised by adult children was often viewed "bringing/giving grandchildren back for a while" to adult children's parents. On the other hand, for grandparents, having grandparents at adult children's overseas residence or grandparents' residence during the visits, were viewed often as "intensive" short grandparental sessions for most healthy and able grandparents. For those whose health conditions were not so good, motivations were often "giving the opportunities" not too late as often as possible. I will discuss these points in detail in the following.

New meanings of visits: kin maintenance between grandparents and grandchildren

The recent literature on the intergenerational relations of migrants or transnational care and support among immigrants has reported new meanings of visits made by migrants (Baldassar 2007a; Baldassar 2007b; Mason 2004). I will consider visits made by both elderly and PM families, and will show the meanings of these visits. For many people prolonged visits make up an important component of transnational intergenerational kin relations and transnational linkages and practices, which make them transnational migrants rather than immigrants.

How, then, does this differ from the overseas visits of non-migrants or visits made by both generations who live in Korea? Overseas trips made by the elderly are sometimes referred to *Hyodo* travel (literally, filial piety travel [for the elderly]). Some elderly people referred to their [earliest] visit to their children's in Singapore as *Hyodo* travel, but most of the others looked it somewhat differently, partly as overseas travel, for many elderly people is no longer something they do only once or a few times in their lifetime. Their visits, however, cannot be as frequent as those made in Korea, apparently because of the cost involved. Filial piety-driven visits of the elderly to Singapore were mostly paid by PMs, except for a few very rich elderly people, who paid the airfare for some occasions.

Firstly, what makes such visits different, so that they may be better understood as a transnational organisation of intergenerational relations, is that such visits are organised in terms of some new meanings and forms. First of all, the duration of these visits differed and they were often done regularly. For most elderly people, when they visited their PM children's homes in Singapore, one month was the norm. In the case of the elderly who visited their daughters, the visit might often be extended for up to two or three months. Sometimes they lasted far longer than that. Also, their visits were regular for some elderly people, particularly if they were healthy enough to pay a visit and, in the case of elderly mothers if they were willing to take some care role for their children whilst staying in

Singapore. In this regard, we may call it either a “prolonged visit” or “a virtual/seasonal co-residence” if prolonged regular visits are made annually by the elderly, as they co-reside with their children for several months a year. The following case study of Elderly E is a typical one among the middle class younger elderly who have been willing to provide grandchild care for their daughters in Singapore, as I showed in Elderly B couple earlier.

Elderly couple E’s seasonal virtual co-residence

When I finally met Mrs Elderly E (F8WM, 60) in her newly built house in one of the industrial cities in a South-east province in Korea, she had spent almost five months with her only daughter in Singapore. This visit was unusually extended, although she and her husband usually spent about two months at least a year there since their daughter moved there in 2000. She and her husband went there just after *Chusok* (Korean thanksgiving day) and came back just before Korean New Year’s Day, as her husband had to do ancestor worship ceremonies as a *Jongson* (the first son of the direct lineage of the big family). There were nine occasions of *Jaesa* (ancestral worship service) in a year when she needed to prepare the food for the ceremony. Before moving into her current house last year, as the first daughter-in-law herself, she lived in a house adjacent to her parents-in-law and, later, she co-resided with her parents-in-law for the last 17 years until their death (their mother-in-law passed away at the age of 89 four years ago, and their father-in-law at the age of 90 three years ago). Her husband, the eldest son, ran a big factory until the business went bankrupt in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian Crisis. However, they could have managed to live without any problems. She spends most of her time working out or talking with her brother-in-law’s family who live next door. She has learned many different sports, from badminton to golf. Whilst living in Singapore, she liked to walk through the parks near her daughter’s house. Her husband, meanwhile, swam almost every day in the swimming pool – almost all private apartment complexes have a pool in Singapore - and sometimes went fishing. She has worked out regularly and intensively since she got diabetes three years ago. According to her PM daughter, she works out hard and she pays much attention to her health. She once told her daughter “I shouldn’t collapse [read: get ill]. If I do, I will become a burden to my daughter.” When I asked her whether she would want to co-reside with her daughter, she told me that “I do not have any such intention. She has got married and she lives raising her kids. We should live like this, but if we got ill, then, can we go abroad to co-reside? She asked me all the time to live with them together when things get difficult in Korea, but we do not have any such intention yet.” When I talked with her PM daughter before, she told me that “When I try to persuade my husband to live together with my parents, as my brother-in-law can take care of my parents-in-law, he almost gets persuaded.” Mrs Elderly is good at cooking and when she is in Singapore she cooks it for the family. Whilst in Korea, she gets a call from her daughter almost every day and talks about tiny things, such as how to cook a certain dish, which often lasts over an hour. Whilst she was in Singapore, she took care of her grandchildren. She said, “That’s what I volunteer to do, it’s not something that I am asked to do. I love doing it and it is really fun.” When I asked what led her to go to Singapore so often and long, she said, “When we talk over the phone, saying we miss you, then, we end up going there. While we

are there, something happens to make me stay longer. In Singapore, I am not bored. Other elderly mothers told me they were bored, but I am not. I am busy over there. I woke up early, as the kids in Singapore go to school early. After attending them when they go to go school, I walk to the wet market as an exercise. Later on, when the kids are back, I prepare things for them, and then I go for a walk outside. I am busy doing things every day.

Elderly Couple F

The Elderly Couple F(F34W) took care of her firstborn PM daughter's children until recently. Before the PM couple went to Singapore, the two couples lived in the same apartment complex. In fact, the daughter couple "followed" the move whenever the Elderly Couple moved to a new place, as they had taken care of the grandchildren, who were a 10 year old boy and an 8 year old girl. Mrs Elderly (59) said, "I almost raised the kids. It was like "two families under one roof" (note: this was similar to the title of a famous Korean soap opera). When my mother-in-law was alive, she could set the table for my husband. I moved back and forth between the two houses all day." She even had her own room in her daughter's apartment, even though it was in the next bloc to the apartment. When the PM daughter went to Singapore, volunteering to be assigned to the office in Singapore from the Seoul office of an International MNC - one of world's largest mineral developers and exporter firms - the Elderly Couple decided to follow her to continue to look after their grandchildren. It was, in fact, the PM son-in-law who could only go to Singapore to start his company-sponsored MBA program in Singapore's University for a six month's interval with his wife. Filling the temporary absence of their son-in-law, the Elderly Couple were prepared to live abroad. According to Mrs Elderly "I didn't even have any reservations about it. I just felt I ought to go there to take care of the grandchildren." However, unexpected thing happened. Mr Elderly F (66) suffered from depression due to starting to worry about all sorts of tiny things. For example, he worried about whether his grandson, who barely spoke any English, would not be able to understand the direction as to which school bus to take, and he worried that his grandson might get lost in a foreign land. Worrying about that, he went to the school, to make sure he caught the right bus home. According to his wife and the PM couple, he seemed to "have lost his radar". When in Korea, it was he who drove the car to take his wife and others wherever they needed to go. But suddenly he lost his "sense of direction, and started worrying about everything and couldn't sleep well for three months" Facing this, they decided to send Mr Elderly back to Korea, but his condition did not improve until his wife came back after receiving a call from her sister, who lives in the same apartment complex, saying "the condition of Mr Elderly is deteriorating." When I asked him about his experience, he said, "I do not know. As I was at home all the time and worrying about the kids in Singapore, depression came. ...I couldn't eat the local food. ...When I came back alone, I just didn't want to talk to anyone. I didn't want to meet anyone. I went to see a doctor....Now I've heard that they speak English well, I do not worry." While they maintained the nearby residence, Mrs Elderly even maintained the household economy of her daughter couple's. When I asked her whether she wanted to co-reside with one of her children, she said, "Although I do not live in the same place, I want to live nearby. ... Also, for a few more

years, I feel I should ‘manage’ my grandchildren” as they requires caring hands. To the same question, Mr Elderly expressed his uneasiness about the eyes of others, viewing co-residence with his daughter’s family negatively, even though he likes his grandchildren and his son-in-law.

As the above case studies show, the distinction between visiting and co-residence has become blurred. In their daily living, intimate discussion happens last regularly as part of their everyday experience. The cheap cost of international calls, particularly through internet-based service that are often cheaper than a domestic mobile phone call, has provided a foundation for them to maintain transnational intergenerational relations. However, the cheap availability of such technological instruments does not in itself make migrants’ intergenerational relations transnational. As the last part of the case study of Elderly E shows, she has been able, active and willing to provide a caring role for her grandchildren. The same was true for Elderly F who even followed their daughter’s overseas assignment. An elderly parent whose son was staying in Singapore once remarked: “Look around you, all the elderly people are their daughters’ parents, not their sons’.” This was commonly observable. This change is not occurring just because of the adult children’s presence in Singapore. A major reason why adult sons’ parents normally stay for about one month, whereas adult daughters’ parents stay for longer lies in their providing this role. Even though traditional expectations are waning, daughters-in-law still feel a tension with their parents-in-law, and vice versa. Even if mothers-in-law may help with the housework for their sons’ families, as domestic work is the realm of their daughters-in-law, their exchange of help is weighed in a different way from the same matter between mothers and married daughters. The Elderly E case study shows this vividly. This kind of transnationalised seasonal co-residence seems to be a variant of the newly emerging forms of co-residence that are spreading in Korea, variants of co-residential and independent residential arrangements, providing both a sense of emotional closeness and physical independence, both of which were cited as important and were preferred by both generations as a “modern” and “convenient” way of meeting the traditional obligations.

Secondly, from the viewpoint of the PMs, their visits to Korea also took on some new meanings other than the usual visits. Although they took an annual (or biannual) visit of all the PM family members together, sometimes they sent their relatively grown up children – in the upper grades of primary or secondary schools - alone for a lengthier period during the school vacation. Sending the PM’s children to Korea during school vacations often had many purposes. From the point of view of the PM, sending their children (whether they accompanied their children or sent them themselves) had about three purposes. The first purpose was to catch up with their school subjects (particularly maths or social studies), which are taught in the Korean curriculum or in the Korean language. This was particularly the case if the PMs’ children were in the upper grades (Grades 4 to 6) of primary school or secondary school and/or if they had clear plan to go back to Korea in a few years’ time. The second common purpose, which was particularly popular amongst the lower grades of

primary school pupils, was to let their children have “Korean cultural experiences” and “keep up with their kin,” that they did not have the usual occasions to interact with whilst they were living away. Thirdly, another common reason of visit which was mentioned across the ages of the children and regardless of the PM’s intention of staying further in Singapore was related to filial piety. The visits were to provide a chance for the elderly parents “to have their grandchildren” around them so as to have “intensive” time for the two generations to get closer. Having a chance of strengthening the kinship bond between grandparents and grandchildren had a special meaning. Unlike immigrant settings, where the chain migration of close family or kin members are common so that immigrant families may have some kin members around, most PMs in Singapore do not have such kin members, even though some of the migrants do. From the viewpoint of the PMs, this meant a form of ‘cultural education’ which could not be taught or learned from textbooks. This need arose if the stays of the PMs were extended for more than three years. For those whose stays were not that long, the PMs sometimes felt the need to meet the expectations of the elderly, who were often eager to see their grandchildren. Sometimes, the PMs said they thought that their grandchildren rather than they themselves would be a better “gift” for the elderly parents.

New types of co-residence: seasonal co-residence and independent virtual co-residence

New types of co-residence of the elderly with their adult children could be identified. Concerning the co-residential arrangements of the elderly, I will suggest two main points. First, from viewpoint of the elderly, there are noticeable patterns that earlier studies have not identified. These are, firstly, what I will call ‘seasonal virtual co-residence’ and what I called earlier ‘arranged nearby residence’, both of which accommodate the frequently preferred option of independent living by the healthy elderly (which is similarly preferred by the younger generation) with ‘intimate and close’ relationships at a close distance, which complement the independent residence of both of the generations. If I elaborate further what I mean by seasonal virtual co-residence by drawing some examples from my interviewees’ residential arrangements. Elderly couple B, and another elderly couple (F10W that I didn’t presented earlier) both do this by alternating extended visits of their two daughters for about two months every year. This form of co-residence is often taken by wealthier (middle class background) elderly people and PM daughters’ parents, the latter of whom, according to traditional norms and practices, do not normally co-reside with them after their marriage.

When these new forms of residential arrangements for the elderly (arranged nearby co-residence, independent virtual co-residence and seasonal co-residence), together with the original form of co-residence with one of the sons, are considered, in many cases, supporting and caring for the elderly requires adjustment and innovative ways of living in order to fulfil both the needs of the elderly and their children’s obligations towards them. This suggests that the conventional categorisation of co-residence with adult children and the analysis of intergenerational relations based on it require further refinement and a new and broader perspective in order to capture and understand the intergenerational relations within contemporary families.

Apart from the role provided by adult children towards their elderly parents, I often found care and support roles of the elderly towards their (grand-)children. Along with occasional (financial and moral) support, the most noticeable of these roles was grandchild care and support by the elderly. I suggest that this constitute one of the important links in the transnationalisation of intergenerational relation among the three generations; who were more likely to become 'transnational' elderly than others were. I suggested earlier that middle class elderly parents and/or those elderly parents whose only child (not only their son but also their daughter) migrate were more likely to embark on a transnational journey together with their adult children. Those elderly parents who were willing and able to provide grandchild care for their migrating children were also more likely to do so.

Also noticeable was that, concerning grandchild care, somewhat different views existed among the elderly. Some middle class elderly tend to differentiate their affection to grandchildren and their provision of grandchild care, possibly viewing it as replaceable labour. Some middle class elderly supported the cost of child care financially for their adult children rather than gave care by themselves. This was the case for F18H who provided money for their sons when their grandchildren were born or when they infants. In the case of another middle class elderly couple F7W, who had four daughters, they did not provide any child care help for their middle class children. Their adult children were able to hire their own babysitters when they worked and later on they quit their jobs to take care of their own children. In contrast, some of the other middle class and most of the working class elderly parents viewed it more as an emotional and kin responsibility if they were able and healthily available. For example, the above case F32W who had provided a carer role for the last ten years said her reason for doing so was "affection." Similarly, the elderly couple F34W even followed their firstborn daughter's family to Singapore, and expressed a similar view, even though F34WM's sudden psychological condition forced them to go back.

Conclusion: transnationalising and negotiating arrangements of intergenerational relations

I have shown that the filial piety, when understood in the eyes of contemporary Koreans, is a concept adaptable and malleable to personal and familial circumstances, rather than fixed. I have shown through my case study that the contemporary understanding and most frequent means of application was in the form of "tokens" or "displaying" (Finch 2007) of filial piety and familial bond by the elderly, which involves certain but not all elements of the original concept. Many informants emphasised non-financial aspects ("making parents' minds ease" and "live their life well") of filial piety rather than everyday financial ones as the basis of intergenerational relations. This is congruent with other recent studies conducted in Korea on intergenerational relations in a domestic context.

Practices of intergenerational obligations in transnational context suggest that most families' intergenerational relations were not dawn back but the arena of practices were

extended. While looking into this, I have noticed that healthier, younger and financially more capable elderly who are committed to their own grandchildren seemed more likely to become transnational elderly, whose live space has been extended to the country of their children's residence. As temporary labour migration literature suggests, migration requires some resources at their own disposal either at their own human capital level or their social network, particularly in their family or kin members. It seems that elderly's health, age and financial resources have been transformed into such resources enabling elderly parents to remain more close connection with their adult children and grandchildren through innovative practices of virtual independent co-residence at the local level and seasonal transnational co-residence at the transnational level.

Also, in general, adult children's migration was generally well accepted by the elderly as good enough even though it might lead to the absence of physical day-to-day care and support from migrant children towards their elderly parents. When combined with changing contemporary understanding and ideals of filial piety and family obligations which were highly congruent and have provided moral background, supporting their adult children and grandchildren's migration "as a family mobilisation project." It also provided doable and feasible avenue for migrant adult children without being 'blamed' or 'stigmatised' at their family level. A few reasons could be inferred. Firstly, professional migration through Korean multinational companies has been understood as an important advancement for career. Secondly, professional migration through which grandchildren can have overseas education, is seen as doubly good one. Thirdly, in most cases (except a few rich enough elderly cases – but including some rich elderly cases), migrant children actively participated in organising financial support for their elderly even abroad.

People give new meanings to and develop new ways of expressing their filial piety and their family obligations, particularly those relating to co-residential and care support, under the contemporary understanding of these concepts. As a whole, filial piety was reinterpreted not only by the elderly but also by the adult children. Its practice was also accommodative to the circumstances, and was understood by both generations. In addition, many PMs creatively invented or accommodated themselves to new ways of practising filial piety, which were often appreciated as 'modern' ways, as I showed in the new arrangements such as seasonal co-residence.

In sum, I found an active involvement in family care and support between generations. Through case studies, I suggest that the care needs of the elderly were often orchestrated by migrating and non-migrating adult children. In some cases, support from the elderly for migrating adult children's families, particularly, providing care for grandchildren through grandparents' visits or grandchildren's home visits, was observed. Care and support needs and the involvement of both generations often characterised transnationalising intergenerational relations. Based on this finding, I argue that the nature and practice of intergenerational family obligation lies at the heart of becoming a transnational family through their kin maintenance, which combines and satisfies the needs of both grandparents and grandchildren.

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