Comparison of Living Arrangements and Family Support for the Urban Elderly in Incheon-Gyeonggi, Korea and Shandong, China

Abstract

Ik Ki Kim (Dongguk University)
ikki@dongguk.edu

Korea and China have shared many common social features such as: Confucianism, Buddhism, patriarchal stem family, tradition of ancestor worship, predominance of men over women and strong filial piety, etc. In addition to these features, both countries have experienced very rapid processes of economic development and demographic transition in a short period of time. Economic development in Korea started since the employment of the first 5-year economic development plan in 1962 and that in China started since the employment of reformation and open policy in 1978. Korean government adopted the national family planning programs in 1962 and Chinese government adopted ‘one-child policy’ in 1978.

These changes in the economy and population policy have brought about rapid processes of low fertility and increase of life expectancy in both Korea and China. In 1960, TFR in Korea was 6.0 and that in China was 6.2. As of 2010, however, TFRs in Korea and China decreased to 1.2 and 1.7, respectively. Accordingly, Korea and China have experienced rapid processes of population aging. The proportions of the elderly aged 65 and over have continuously increased both in Korea and China, reaching to 11.0 percent and 8.0 percent in 2010.

Strong tradition of the Confucianism has shown similar pattern of living arrangements of the elderly in both Korea and China for a long period of time. During the processes of the population changes, however, living arrangements of the elderly has shown somewhat different patterns between Korea and China. The living arrangements of the elderly may provide some insight into the family relations of the elderly. Thus, this study tries to compare the differences of the living arrangements of the elderly and thus show the different patterns of the family support for the elderly in Korea and China.

China has a huge population with diverse characteristics, while Korea is a small country with homogeneity. Comparing the living arrangements of the elderly for the whole population may not be appropriate. For a more sophisticated analysis, this study selects the urban elderly of Incheon-Gyeonggi Province in Korea and Shandong Province in China. In China, Shandong Province is the most closely located from Incheon-Gyeonggi in Korea. In addition to the geographical proximity, Shandong province is the origin of the Confucianism, which has affected a great influence on the behavior of Korean people including family support.

This study is based on the analysis of the data from the same questionnaire for the elderly...
in Chinese and Korean cities. Korean data (2,010) for the Incheon-Gyeonggi Province were collected in Incheon Special city and 17 cities in Gyeonggi Province. The sample size of the Korean elderly aged 65 years and over is 1,014. The Chinese data (2,009) were collected in Jinan (Capital city of Shandong province) and three coastal cities (Qingdao, Yantai, Weihai) in Shandong Province. The sample size of the Chinese elderly aged 60 years and over is 890. For the comparison, this study uses the data of the elderly aged 65 years and over. The final sample size of the Chinese data for this analysis turns out to be 738.

This study employs frequency distribution, cross-tabulation and logistic regression analysis for the statistical analysis. Sampling procedures for the two populations are somewhat different. General characteristics of the sampled populations are as follows: First of all, average age of the Korean elderly turned out to be a little older than that of the Chinese elderly. Proportion of the Korean male elderly is greater than that of the Chinese elderly by 6.2 percent.

The proportion of the currently married among the Korean elderly is lower than that of the Chinese elderly by 21.6 percent. Considering that the Korean elderly are a little older than the Chinese elderly, health status of the Korean elderly shows somewhat worse than that of the Chinese elderly. Educational level of the sampled population for both Korean and Chinese elderly is about the same. Proportion of owning the house by the elderly among the Korean elderly is much lower than that of the Chinese elderly by 41.5 percent.

The living arrangements of the elderly for both Korean and Chinese elderly turned out to be as follows: Proportion of the urban elderly living alone in Incheon-Gyeonggi is 25.1 percent, while that in Shandong Province is 14.3 percent. Proportion of the elderly living with spouse only in Incheon-Gyeonggi is 36.7 percent, whereas that in Shandong Province is 58.1 percent. The proportion of the elderly living alone is a little greater among the Korean urban elderly. On the other hand, the proportion of the elderly living with spouse is much less among the Korean urban elderly. Proportion of the elderly living with unmarried children in Incheon-Gyeonggi is 14.0 percent, while that in Shandong Province is only 3.5 percent. Proportion of the elderly living with married children seems to be very similar for both Korean elderly (24.3%) and Chinese elderly (24.2%).

In addition to the analysis of both data from the same questionnaire, this study shows the trends of the living arrangements of the elderly in both countries to explain the different patterns of the living arrangements of the elderly. The national data in 2,000 indicates that the proportion of the elderly living alone in Korea was 16.8 percent, whereas that in China was 7.1 percent. The proportion of the elderly living with spouse only was 29.2 percent in Korea, while that in China was 28.0 percent. Although the sample for the national data in 2,000 is different from that of the data set for this study, this trend roughly indicates that living arrangements of the elderly in both Korea and China have shown drastic changes for the past 10 years.

This study also illustrates the results of the cross-tabulation analysis of the selected variables with the living arrangements of the elderly. In addition to the cross-tabulation analysis, this study employs the logistic regression analysis on living separately from children. The results of the logistic regression analysis show different patterns between Korean elderly and Chinese elderly. Significant variables in the logistic regression on living separately from children in Incheon-Geonggi are ‘age’, ‘monthly income’, ‘being married’ and ‘owning house
by the elderly’. On the other hand, significant variables in Shandong Province are only ‘being female’ and ‘being healthy’.

The changing pattern of the living arrangements of the elderly brings about the different pattern of the family support for the elderly. In terms of the support for the elderly, living arrangement is a very important mechanism to the elderly because it is closely related to the support for them. Co-residence with family members seems to be the best way of supporting the elderly because most types of support (financial support, emotional support, assistance in activities, etc.) are possible with co-residence. Of course, living alone does not necessarily mean a lack of support from family members. However, the elderly living alone or with their spouse only normally have a limited access to these types of support. Analyzing the living arrangements, this study would lead to the implications for the family support.