

BOTH BORROWERS AND LENDERS: TIME BANKS AND THE AGED IN JAPAN

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of the
Australian National University

June 2008

Certificate of Authorship

I, Elizabeth Jill Miller, hereby declare that, except where acknowledged, this work is my own and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

Elizabeth Jill Miller

Acknowledgements

At the outset I must acknowledge my debt to the many Japanese who have helped me in the course of my study of Japan and its culture. I particularly want to thank two Japanese women friends, both members of the baby boomer generation, who I first encountered in a two-year women's history course in Osaka in 1982 and from whom I have learnt much over the intervening years. The enthusiasm of NALC member Shoko Ikeda for the potential of time banking inspired me to start the research for this thesis. Miyako Hayashi kindly let me stay with her family for the two months of my fieldwork in Osaka.

I owe much to the Japanese time bank members I met while in Japan in 2005. They talked to me about their organizations and let me see them in action. Such understanding that I do possess of Japanese group membership also stems from having been a member of a number of organizations during the 10 years I lived in Japan.

I must also thank my supervisory panel. Don Rowland, my principal supervisor, helped keep me focused on the main threads of my thesis when I might have strayed off the track. Tessa Morris-Suzuki provided helpful advice from her background in Japanese studies. Peter Camilleri, who was also the supervisor for my MPhil thesis, encouraged me to go on and do a PhD.

I wish to acknowledge the support I have received through being a student member of the Australian Association of Gerontology, with particular thanks to Natalie Chan, Audrey Guy and Virginia Simpson-Young. I have received valuable feedback from conferences at which I have presented material from this thesis, including the 2007 APRU Doctoral Students Conference at Keio University in Tokyo and the 2007 Asia Pacific regional conference of the

International Association of Geriatrics and Gerontology in Beijing as well as Asian studies and gerontology conferences in Australia.

A two-week stay in Beijing provided by Peking University enabled me to gather more material for my China section. My Australian National University co-funded scholarship allowed me the luxury of doing full-time research.

I thank my friends who encouraged me to keep going at times when I felt I was not doing due service to my topic. I aspire to apply the models for positive ageing and use of time that I have learnt from researching this thesis and hope that they could prove to be of benefit to others. Translations from Japanese and of Japanese and Chinese publication titles in this thesis were all my own work.

Abstract

The rapid ageing of Japan's population is occurring in the midst of accelerating social change, causing a rethinking about what it means to grow old. Some older Japanese are pioneering new models for ageing through their involvement in groups known as time banks. These are non-profit organizations which trade time, a universal possession, rather than conventional currency for services. Time given in volunteering is banked for future redemption as assistance for the giver, with points paid per hour. This first study of the impact of time banks on the lives of older Japanese members aims to chart how such groups can help both their senior members and society as a whole.

Time banks now exist across the globe but the world's first time bank was established in 1973 by a Japanese woman. She aspired to create a new form of currency that could give people greater control of their lives and foster warmer community links. The benefits that older time bank members derive include formation of new friendship networks to replace those lost by retirement and the chance to use old skills and learn new ones. Time banks can generate a new form of social capital that fosters traditional Japanese reciprocity and has *ikigai* or 'sense of meaning in life' as one of its main pillars.

This research is based on both three-months of fieldwork in Japan and an extensive literature review in Japanese, English and Chinese. It has been aided by accessibility to the thoughts of the founders of four major time banks through their books and also by their group web sites. My study follows on from an MPhil thesis that compared ageing in China and Japan and draws on my experience living in Japan for 10 years between 1979 and 1991 in both Kansai and Kanto.

The literature indicates that social participation is a crucial component for maintaining both psychological and physical health in the later years. While this is a qualitative study and there is yet to be a qualitative review of the effects of time banks in Japan, feedback I received from older members of the first time bank shows that time banks can foster a meaningful later life.

The 21st century has been dubbed that of the aged as greater mass longevity boosts their numbers to unprecedented levels. This thesis questions whether organizations such as time banks can make a significant difference to the quality of life that older people enjoy in this new era. The theoretical framework examines whether the social exchange that these groups nurture can enhance the social capital of their communities, creating a positive image for ageing.

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