

# Gift-Giving Among Baby-Boomers

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# Age Cohorts

- Share historical and cultural events
- Share memories and social values as a result
- Among their shared understandings:
  - The meanings of consumption
  - The meanings of gift-giving
- In a consumer society, we construct self narratives from what is commercially available

# Baby Boomers in Japan

- *Dankai no Sedai* (nodule generation)
- Born 1947-1949
- Grew up during the post-war economic miracle
- Self expressive and individualistic
- No serious shortages like their parents
- Embraced U.S. consumer culture—jeans, rock 'n roll, holidays like Christmas, Valentine's Day



# Prior Consumer Gift-Giving Work

- Mostly in North America
- In Japan
  - Befu 1968; Lebra 1976 (*giri*)
  - Graburn 1987; Witkowski and Yamamoto 1991 (*omiyage*)
  - Green and Alden 1988 (comparative to US gift-giving)
  - Hendry 1995 (gift wrapping)
  - Ito and Kurita 1984 (rural gift-giving)
  - Kimura and Belk 2005 (Christmas)
  - Minami 1998 (bridal gifts)
  - Minowa and Gould 1999 (gender differences in gifts)
  - Minowa, Khomenko, and Belk 2009 (Valentine's Day, White Day gifts)
  - Hashimoto 1996 (younger consumers' gifts)
  - Rupp 2003; Daniels 2009 (various & used gifts)



# Method



- Depth interviews on romantic gift-giving
- This portion based on first 12 informants (6m, 6f, 60-65, 2010-2011)
- Retired former office worker to a taxi driver, a business owner, a college student, and housewives
- “Magic” gifts given/received
- Gifts seen as communication and symbolic exchange that affect and reflect relationships

# Gift Disposition of Baby Boomers in Japan

## Genealogy of Gender Domination

### Matrilineal/Matriarchal

### Patrilineal/Patriarchal

Nature of Gift Experience

Euphoric

Traumatic

<p><i>Reality Adapter</i> i4 [F64], i5[M61], i9[M61] “My daughter is dry and practical... no gift exchange, but it’s her generation.” Commensal experience important. Reflection of gender role in gift giving.</p>	<p><i>Nostalgia Indulger</i> i10 [M63], i11[M61], i12[M64] “I would like to have a magic gift... go back to my teens ... express my appreciation to the girl who gave me the scarf.”</p>
<p><i>Fantasy Seeker</i> i7[F60] “He remembers everything I say...and makes things into reality [by giving her as gifts].” Giving away gifts is like <i>matsuri</i>. Materialism emphasized.</p>	<p><i>Fantasy Avoider</i> i4 [F64], i8[F63] “I would hate a magic gift.” “My father told me not to be obligated to men by not giving them a return gift.” Gives social gifts to multiple men.</p>

Modest

Vulgar

Manifested Gift Practice

# Additional Insights

**EUPHORIC GIFTS IN YOUTH:** When I was young, I had a friend who married early, and she had a child. A girl. I was single then, and I went over to her place, ... and she showed me socks she had bought for the baby. I saw one that had lace and all these details on it. So I said to her, "Socks are socks. Who cares what kind of socks? As long as they keep you warm." And my friend said, "But I *wanted* to buy it for her." And I thought to myself, "I lose." For me, I had no such feeling like: I *want* to buy something for somebody... I thought, "I see, I lose. I was not thinking in terms of a mother's feeling." The friend had a strong feeling that she *wants* to do something for somebody she feels strongly about...I think this leads to giving presents (Yasuko F64).

**CHANGING GIFT MEANINGS:** When I was younger, I think I gave her gifts as my obligation...for instance, I thought I had to give her gifts for our wedding anniversary, etc.. But as we get older... I can think of an appreciation to her. Thank her for washing my clothes, making meals, and raising children...I think that gifts are showing my appreciation (Taro M61).

# Effects of Childhood Experiences (1)

My mother was going in and out of hospital since I was about three years old and I have no other siblings...From about age three to ten, no one ever celebrated my birthday or Christmas with me...so there may be some strong trauma from that so I really have this need to have some celebration of these events with me, especially my birthday (Sachicko F60).



## Effects of Childhood Experiences (2)

It surprised me a lot, but I remember receiving it with an attitude that nothing surprised me.... I now feel bad about my bad attitude in receiving this gift. It's like when you walk by someone on the street and you didn't mean to give a cold shoulder, but the person felt that you did... My encounter with this girl didn't last at all... I wish I were more like a *nanpa* player [a smooth-talking young man], but I wasn't. I was more like *kōha* [man's man]. I regret about how I behaved at that time. I pretended as if I wasn't happy receiving the gift or as if I didn't see her when she walked by me... I was more surprised than being happy. Then I ran away... I wasn't even thinking about being manly at that time. I never wore [the scarf]. I was too embarrassed to wear it... it was a secret. It would be nice to go back in my teens... I probably would be able to express my appreciation more if I could take my life experience with me in going back to my teens, especially to the girl who gave me a scarf (Shiro M61).

# “Catching a sea bream with shrimp” [Ebi de tai wo tsutu]

I give something to him because I want something in reciprocity <LAUGHTER> ... I enjoy giving him gifts, and at the same time I enjoy receiving gifts... [I agree that] through some objects, nothing too cheap... one can feel love... This may be an awkward way of saying, but I would like to confirm...this may be a harsh way of stating but how much can you spend for (a gift) for me? I really don't mean to sound so harsh, but.... (Sachicko F60)

# With age comes...realism?

When I was young, there was a man who would bring a bouquet every week...it wasn't about masculinity or femininity...how can I say this? Imaginary world, or the world of film, I think he had an unrealistic worldview... there was a man who did that sort of thing. In that time and age...I think he was able to do that because he was so young and unrealistic. ...Old people become more and more realistic. We have no sense of adventure... When you become old, you want to live grounded within the range you have experienced in the past, within the range you can comprehend. So we don't like it when we are approached with a dreamlike scenario... When you reach our age, we hate magic. That type of thing where we can't get a real sense [of things], we dislike it...makes us really anxious... We fear new things. We want to only hold onto things we have accumulated, things we can be certain of (Yasuko F64).

# Conclusions

- Romantic gift giving is a culturally constructed consumer practice
- Gift giving orientations were influenced by the genealogy of gender domination – whether they are from patriarchal or matriarchal families – and whether they had euphoric or traumatic gift-giving experience and gender socialization in their youth
- Gender roles have liberalized and the economy has worsened, but lessons of adolescence remain
- For some, age promotes conservative practicality, while others remain romantics

