

*Future perspectives within Japanese and Chinese children:
A comparative study about children's expectation and concerns for the future*

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Adopting a comparative methodology, this study attempts to identify similarities and differences in children's expectations and concerns for the future between Japan and China. Fourth-grade elementary-school children were invited to describe three future events that they expected and three future events that they were concerned about. Qualitative analysis was conducted on the response contents. Comparison analysis revealed that, to some extent, responses related to both expectations and concerns about the future were very similar. For example, both them listed most events about the principal developmental task such as future occupation, education and family. Besides the topics about themselves, they both mentioned more concerns about societal or global affairs. For the difference, first Chinese children have more active and motivated attitudes towards their futures than Japanese children. Moreover, Chinese children also have much clearer images about what they want to be in the future than the Japanese children. The study argues that differences in the traditional cultures and the current social environments between two countries may contribute to these results.

Keywords: future perspective, expectation, concern

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1. Introduction

Time Consciousness and Human Development

Lewin(1951) used 'time perspective' as a psychological conception, which is defined as 'the totality of individuals' view of his psychological future and psychological past existing at a given time' (p. 75), to represent how human's considerations about future or past influence our present behavior. In case of represent how people see their future in terms of goals, hopes, expectation, and concerns have been described in terms of future perspective.

Our consciousness of time, which seems originate from experiencing the discrepancy between desire and satisfaction soon after we were born to the world. Repeatedly experience of this discrepancy of time enable infant to construct gradually the consciousness of three time dimensions: past, present and future (Fraisie, 1957). Zazzo(1969) was interested in how children develop self-consciousness based on this three dimensions of time. He did questionnaire investigation and asked children "which period of your life would you prefer to live", had them select one from "the period in infancy" "present" "the period in adulthood", and lastly questioned the reason for the choice. The result indicated that, self-evaluation was developed through three stages. The first one is evaluate him/herself by comparing present him/herself to one lived in the past; then going through a comparison between present him/herself and possible one in future, lastly turn to the stage of self-evaluating by comparing present self with both one when in past and possible one in future. However, the same investigation was carried out later in Japan (Tsukano, 1994), but did not reproduce this conclusion.

Future Perspective Developed in a Societal Cultural Environment

These previous researches indicate that, the consciousness of time is playing an important role in development of human beings. While considering about children, comparing to the past, the development of future time conscious is considerably more important for them. In particular for adolescence, when is conceived as a period of thinking about future in preparation for transition to adulthood, how children think about their future in adolescence has great influence in their later adult life (Nurmi, Poole, & Kalokoski, 1994).

However, it has been also pointed out that children's future orientation occurs within a social, cultural and historical context where it may influence conception of what is possible and desirable in the future (Nurmi, 1993). For instance, Nurmi (1991) indicated that normative social expectations play an important role in casting relevance upon one's particular interests or trajectories. Sundberg, Poole & Tyler (1983) focused on the impact of cultural or difference on the children's development of future perspective, and conducted the comparative study within India, United States, and Australia. The result showed that, they were found showing a shorter time perspective than boys due to a traditional culture where Indian girls have less freedom of choice. In addition, compared to other two countries, living in a society where significant life events like marriage are mostly arranged by others, Indian youngster are relatively more interested in the same events happening to others.

On the other hand, how children see their future or their expectation or concern about future can also indicate social problems which exist in certain social environment. For

instance, Solantaus (1987) conducted the comparative study of 11 to 15-year-olds' hopes and worries about the future within Austria, England and Finland, and found that children from England emphasis much more on work and employment compared to the other two countries, which reflects the higher unemployment rates in their country at that time. Besides, the result also found that children from Finland showed a high level worrying for the nuclear war in the future than the other countries since when Finnish mass media paid much more attention to the war and peace issues in the world.

Comparison of Children's future perspective between China and Japan

In contemporary Japan, as the economic inequality is rapidly increasing, it has been reported that, people who feel hopeful or not about their future are more depending on their social status (Yamada, 2011). Yamada (2011) also contributed this as a reason to explain a growing number of social problems such as withdrawal and drop-out in Japan, since more and more people in a low social class can only feel their opportunities in the future have been blocked. Investigation conducted by Benesse (2009) revealed that, children in Japan were showing a low motivation not only about their future achievement, but also on making contributions to their country when they grow up. Besides, since the formal educational system has being lost its function neither on "rising One's social hierarchy" nor "guaranteeing an ideal job"(Yamada, 2011), some results indicated that children are gradually losing faith in formal education. For instance, an international comparative study investigating on children's awareness of learning showed that, Japanese elementary school students were less likely to endorse beliefs about everyday educational practice will be helpful in the future (Benesse, 2006).

Compared to Japan, China currently are achieving a rapidly development in economy. However, since a lot of bureaucratic corruption incidents are frequently reported recent years, the bustling societal atmosphere has been pointer out and being criticized. Some investigation even showed that, what children are dreaming about future mostly seemed utilitarian (Feng Jiang, 2012).

On this basis, the aim of this study was to investigate how the sociocultural difference influences children's future-oriented expectations and concerns about future between China and Japan.

2. Method

Samples and Procedures

The questionnaire investigation was first conducted in Japan in 2011, and then in China the following year, which was carried out among 4th grade students of elementary school in two countries. The Japanese sample comprised 445 students from Yamagata to Ibaraki, while the Chinese sample comprised 247 students from Beijing.

The questionnaire consisted of two questions: 1. What kind of things are you expecting for in your future? 2. What kind of things are you concerning about in your future? Students were asked to write down three events for each question.

After gathering all answering statements, three analysis procedures were carried out as follows. First, we adopted the KJ method, which is introduced by a Japanese scholar named Jiro, Kawakita. It is mostly used to deal with a large amount of qualitative data through resorting statements into categories based on their natural relationships. We did this analysis with a group discussion, and finally 11 categories both for expectation and concern in China, and 12 categories for expectation, 11 categories for concerns of Japan were settled down. Each category was then given a name based on statements including in it. Through this procedure, we can get a rough outline of topics listed by children (Table 1).

Next, all the categories were then input as variables to use Hayashi's quantification method-III to continue the analysis. Hayashi's quantification method-III, which is introduced by Chikio Hayashi, is specifically designed to analyze qualitative (categorical) data by assigning numerical values to qualitative data. With the result, we can get a scatter plot, where all variables will be distributed on it and the association between these variables is expressed by the distance between them. Analyses were conducted for four times separately on expectation and concern in both countries. To make the association between these categories more clearly, the score each category in the row and column were used to input in a cluster analysis, which can partition categories into a superordinate cluster. We also assigned each superordinate cluster a name.

Table 1 category of expectation and concern about future

		Japan		China	
		classified categories	Frequency	classified categories	Frequency
e x p e c t a t i o n	1	physical change in body	28	physical change in body	23
	2	self-image in the future	34	self-image in the future	34
	3	job/proceeding to next stage of education, study	89	self-actualization	44
	4	residence/living life	43	employment	69
	5	the changing in relationship(meet new friends, get married, give birth)	64	study/proceeding to next stage of education,studying abroad	75
	6	becoming an adult,vague image of being an adult	60	possession,money	18
	7	feel free to do something	82	realization of goal	36
	8	realization of goal	98	leisure activity	23
	9	leisure activity	67	the changing in relationship(meet new friends, get married, give birth)	41
	10	the development in science and technology, the evolution of tool	84	the development in science and technology, the evolution of tool	53
	11	changing in living environment, Japan, the world and the earth	47	changing in living environment,the development of China, expect for a peaceful world	60
	12	some vague expectations looking forward to it since it's unknown	26		
c o n c e r n	1	illness, death	85	illness, death	27
	2	self-image in the future	44	self-image in the future	35
	3	employment, proceeding to the next stage of education,study	97	employment	100
	4	money,living life	57	study/proceeding to next stage of education	44
	5	the changing in relationship(death of parents, couldn't make new friends)	66	money,economic condition of living life	21
	6	being a victim, injury	64	the changing in relationship(death of parents, couldn't make new friends)	26
	7	can't realize the dream	38	being a victim	18
	8	natural environment,natural catastrophes	93	natural environment,natural catastrophes	76
	9	changing in living environment, science,politic and economy	37	vague concerns, the end of world	29
	10	war,incident,accident	43	workwide war	59
	11	some vague concerns,concerning about it since it's unknown	33	changing in living environment, the development of science	20

3. Result

3-1. Content Analysis

Statements collected from two countries were first compared by the analyzing result in KJ method. In following, “ 「 」 ” is used to represent category we got in KJ method, “ 【 】 ” is used to represent superordinate category we got in cluster analysis and “[]” is used to represent collected statement.

1) Similarity in content

Comparing these categories within two countries we found that, most topics mentioned by two countries were very similar. First, major topics about future in both countries were 「education」, 「employment」 and 「the changing in relationship」 (e.g., expectation of marrying someone, giving birth; or concerns about the death of parents, can't make new friends and so on). Actually these main topics about future have also been showed in some previous studies (Poole & Cooney, 1986), in which Poole & Cooney pointed out those main topics about future can be similarly across different countries or different year.

A lot of statements about 「realization of goals」 and 「self-actualization」 can also be observed in both countries. In terms of realization of goals, for example, in Japan

we found statements like looking forward to be a soccer player or a baseball player, while in China, much more examples like looking forward to be a doctor can be found. Talking about the ideal self-image in the future, Japanese children would like to be a respectable person; while Chinese children are expecting to be one who can contribute to their society or country.

In addition to these topics about their personal future, a majority of topics about societal future can also be observed in both countries. Most children mentioned expectations about 「the development of science and technology, the evolution of tool」, which including statement like [car may fly in the sky](from expectation in Japan), or [(looking forward to) new inventions in the future] (from expectation in China). Meanwhile, the similar concerns about 「natural environment, natural catastrophes」 can also be observed in both countries. This category comprised topics about pollution, earthquake and so on. On the other hand, some 「vague concerns」, which is consisted of statement such as [(concerning about) if the earth will be broken or not] (from concerns in Japan) or [(concerning about) if it is the end of world] (from concerns in China) existed for a certain amount. With this, the information from Mass media can be considered as the reason since existed statement like, [TV program said human beings will be extinct in the future] (from concerns in Japan).

2) Difference in the content

Some differences can also be observed. First, as introduced, a certain amount of statements both from expectations and concerns about education are exist in two countries, however, in Japan, certain statement such as [which high school I will go (expectation)], focus more on how things will change; while in China, there are more statement like [my final academic background (expectation)] or [achieving 100 points in final examination (expectation)], which seems paying more attention to final achievement or outcome on education. Besides, in China, there are certain amounts of expectations about studying abroad, which almost can seldom be found in Japan. Studying abroad has won much popularity in recent years in China. From these statements, we can find this is even having an impact on elementary school students.

Besides, ideal self-image can be found as another primary topic in expectation or concerns. Ideal self-image in China including, for example [conduct filial piety when grow up to an adult (expectation)] or [be an adult who be capable to contribute to the country (expectation)], which seems like children prefer to grow to be one who is capable to others.

Compared to China, the ideal self-image seems much vaguer in Japan. A certain amount of statements like [(looking forwarding to) how I am like as an adult (expectation)] or [(looking forwarding) to be an adult (expectation)] can be found. It is obvious that they are containing very few details about the ideal adult image.

3-2. the graphical display

Figure 1~4 represent the analysis result of Hayashi's quantification method type 3. As Figure 1 and Figure 2 show, in case of expectation in Japan, 5 clusters were decided and each of them were named as 【vague adult image】 【vague expectations】 【self-image and living life in the future】 【the realization of goals】 【the outside world】. Whereas with terms of concern, we named 4 cluster as 【vague concerns】

【the realization of goals】 【self-image and living life in the future】 【the outside world】 .

With terms of expectation in China, 4 clusters were named as 【self-actualization and possession】 【self-image and living life in the future】 【the realization of goals】

【the outside world】 ; whereas with terms of concern, we named 4 cluster as 【vague concerns】 【self-image and economic capacity】 【living life in the future】 【the outside world】.

1) Dimension 1 and 2 –Japan

As figure 1 showed, the left hand pole of horizontal axis appears to contain expectations concerning more about personal world. For example, the cluster of [self-image and living life image] which located at most left-hand pole, refers to children's statement of expecting for physical body changing and education, job, relationship; whereas variables located at the right-hand of horizontal axis seem to be opposite in the character to these on the left. Compared with clusters located at left hand pole, the cluster of [outside world], that located at most right hand, contains expectations about science, society, living environment and earth. Thus, the left-hand pole of horizontal axis can be interpreted as a [personal-societal] dimension, with a continuum ranging from expectations focus on private world at left-hand pole to expectations focus on outside world at right-hand pole.

Turning to vertical axis, the top pole contains variables in which statements were not described in a specific way. For example, [vague adult image] located at most top of raw axis, contains statements such as [(looking forward to) be an adult], which seems providing a vague adult image; whereas at the lower pole of raw, contains statements such as [(looking forward to) the camp next week], which obviously is containing a specific image about expectation. Thus raw axis can be interpreted as [vague-specific] dimension comprised of a continuum changing from some vague expectation at the top pole, to specific image of expectation at lower pole.

Meanwhile, as Figure 2 displayed, we can apply the same explanation of axis in expectation to concern. The horizontal axis appeared to make a continuum of concerns, ranging from [personal] dimension at left-hand pole, to [societal] dimension at right-hand; whereas the vertical axis appear to make a continuum of concerns, ranging from [vague image] at the upper pole, to [specific image] at lower pole.

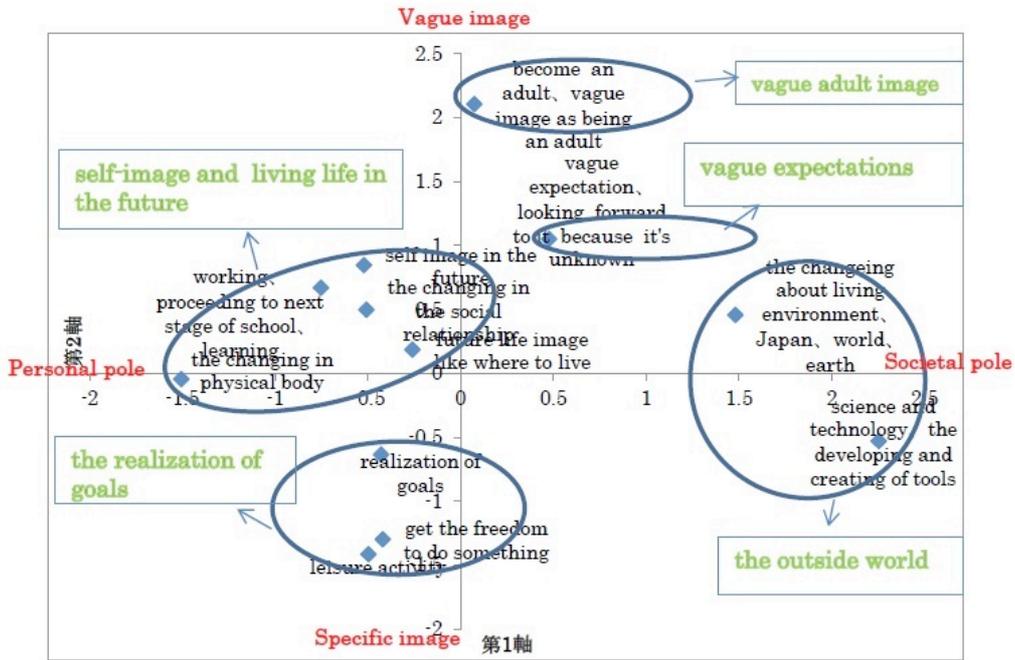


Figure 1 the graphical display of expectations in Japan

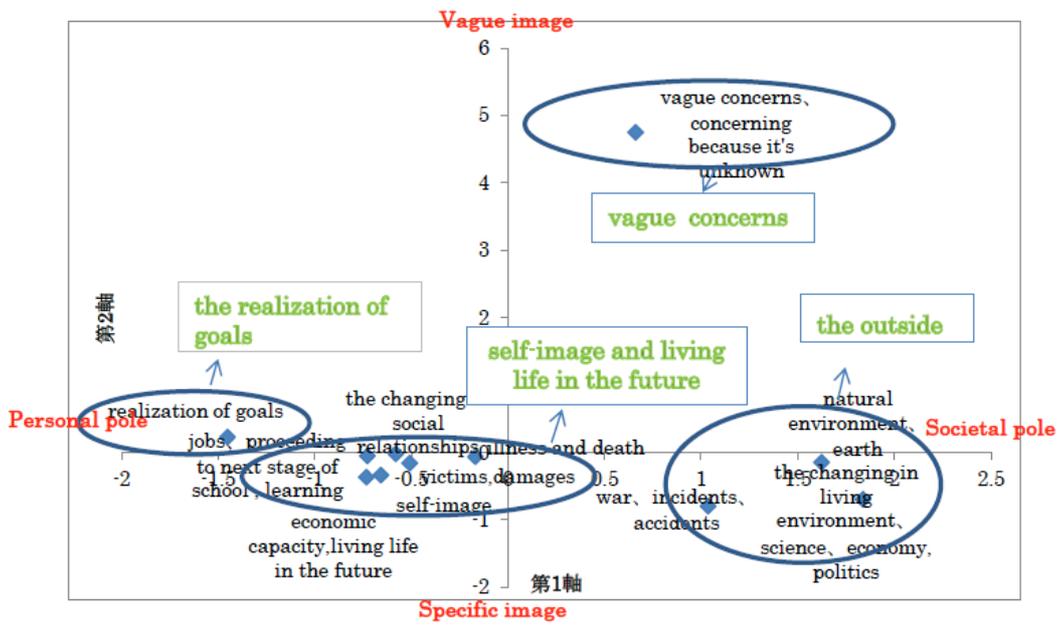


Figure 2 the graphical display of concerns in Japan

2) Dimension 1 and 2 –China

We now turn to a discussion about the result in China. Expectation is presented in Figure 3 and concern is presented in Figure 4.

With terms of expectation, the distribution of categories around horizontal axis appears to have same character with Japan, which means the left-hand pole of horizontal axis can be interpreted as a [personal-societal] dimension, with a continuum ranging from expectations focus on private world at left-hand pole to expectations focus on outside world at right-hand pole.

Turning to vertical axis, the cluster of [realization of goals] located at most upper pole, refers to expectations of realizing dreams, and also contains expectation for leisure activity such as [(looking forward to)go abroad for a tourism]; whereas variables located at most lower pole were about concerns of death, illness. As moving to upper pole, categories were about employment, for example concerning if he can get a job, then came to categories represent changing in relationship, such as death of parents or family, and then were categories about proceeding to next stage of education. If all these concerns can be understood as some changes may occur in the future, it is obvious that clusters located at upper pole contain some changes one have to actively pursue, while clusters located at lower pole contain much more changes will happen in a more naturally way with time. Contrasting with [active] pole, we considered lower pole as a dimension representing some naturally happening changes, which named [passive] changing. Thus, the vertical axis can be interpreted as a dimension of [active-passive] changing, with a continuum ranging from some changes can only happen if one actively pursue at upper pole, to some changes will occur in a natural, passive way at lower pole.

With terms of concern, it appears that explanation of axis in expectation can also be applicable to concern. The horizontal axis appears to be a continuum of concerns ranging from [private] dimension at right-hand pole, to [societal] dimension at left-hand; whereas the upper pole of the vertical axis contains changes one have to actively pursue, while at lower pole located changes will occur naturally with time. We chartered it as a [passive] changing dimension.

It is worth noting that, in graphic display of expectation in China(Figure 3), [self-actualization] and [possession], meanwhile in graphic display of concern, [self-image in the future] and [money, economic status] were partitioned as one cluster, which means one who mentioned self-actualization or self-image, mostly also mentioned money, possession or economic status in the future. Hence, we can see this may be a result indicating that Chinese children are evaluating what degree they actualize themselves based on a criterion of material possession.

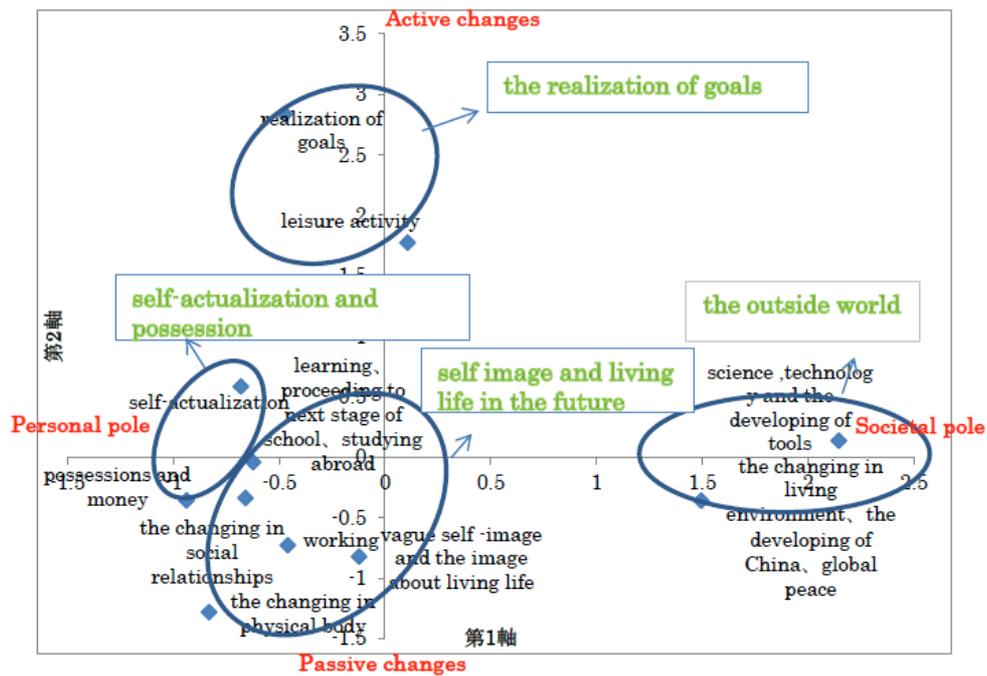


Figure 3 the graphical display of expectations in China

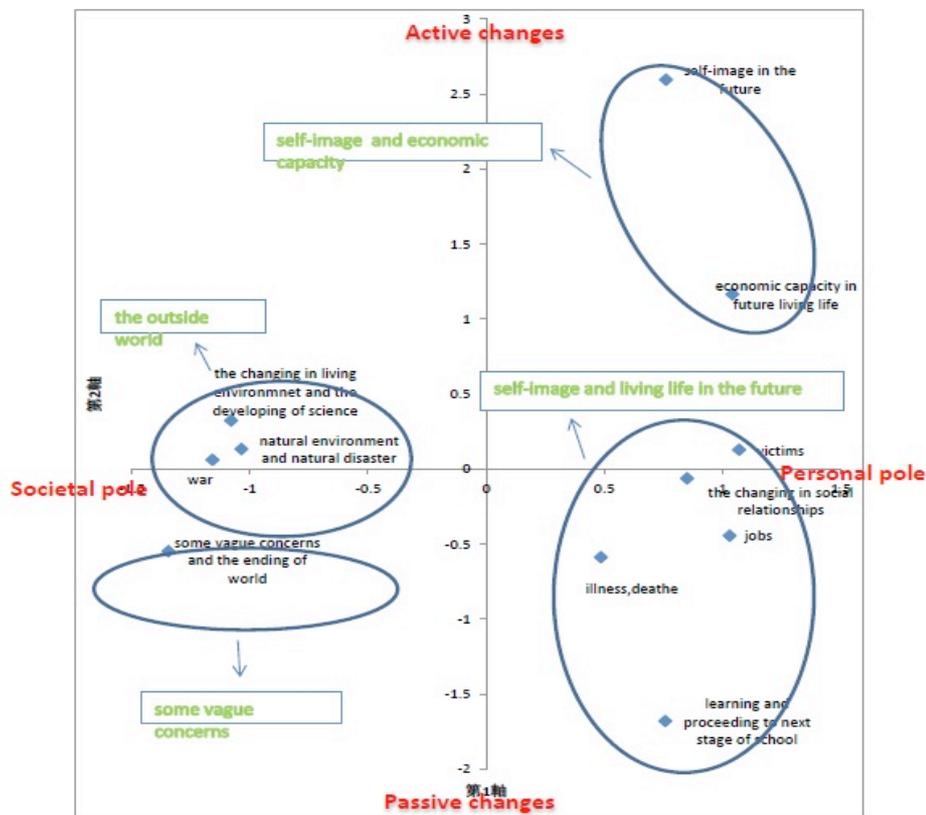


Figure 4 the graphical display of concerns in China

4. Summary

This research focused on how social-cultural environment influences the development of children's future perspective through investigating and comparing the children's expectations and concerns within Japan and China.

Three analysis methods were carried out on data. With the first step, KJ method was adopted and all statements were classified into categories and each was named based on the content. Through this procedure, we got an outline of the topics about future and found that, most of topics in two countries were similar. For example, they both mentioned a lot about education, employment, marriage, and giving birth, which all these are mainly significant life events in a life trajectory.

In addition, the realization of goals or how they will be like as an adult were also a primary topic in both countries. Not only these topics of personal world, they also showed a strong interest in outside world, which means society, world, earth or the development in economy, technology. This "personal-societal" character of topics was also be confirmed by following analysis of Hayashi's quantification method-III, where both statement in Japan and China were constructed based on a personal-societal dimension.

In content analysis, we found Chinese children were caring more about the outcome or achievement when mentioning education, whereas Japanese children seemed just showing the expectation or concern for how it will change. In addition, Chinese children are more likely to be an adult, who is capable to help others; whereas Japanese children seemed vaguer about what kind of adult they would like to be.

This character that Japanese children's future image seems much vaguer is also showed in the following analysis. Through the explanation of axis, we found that both expectation and concern in China were constructed based on a dimension representing active-passive changing; whereas in Japan, the statement were constructed based on a dimension representing vague-specific image.

In general, the future perspective in Chinese children seems much clearer, more active and ambitious; whereas, Japanese children showed a vague image about their future, which may contribute a much more conservative culture in Japan as a reason to it. On the other hand, Chinese children who expect for self-actualization, at the same time have a desire for economic achievement in the future, which can be considered as a result that, the social environment in China which has been criticized for a bustle and dynamic atmosphere are giving a significant impact on children's moral value.

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