The Structure of Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships in Japan

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In this paper, the author attempts to clarify the structure of the grandparent-grandchild relationship in Japan, and its social meaning, through the customs of Toriage-Jii-san (delivering grandfather) and Toriage-bii-san (delivering grandmother) in the farming villages of Aizu, Inkyo Musuko (grandson of the retired) and Inkyo Musume (granddaughter of the retired) in Ibaraki Prefecture, and Natori (naming custom from grandparents name) in the Gotō Islands; and to further examine the structure stem family and retirement-system family in Japan through this relationship. Few social-anthropo-
logical or sociological studies have been made into the structure of the grandparent-
grandchild relationship in Japan. Research in this field lags very much behind.

The ritual relationship between the Toriage Jii-san or Toriage Bii-san, and their
Toriagekko (delivered grandchild) in the farming villages of Aizu is a custom which symbolizes, most clearly, the alternation of generations between grandparents and grand-
children, as can be seen in the custom of ritual grandparents being present at the birth of their ritual grandchild, and, vice versa, the ritual grandchildren playing an important role at the death of the ritual grandparents. Inkyo mago (grandchild of the retired) in the retirement-system family in Ibaraki Prefecture is a custom which shows that the grandparent-grandchild relationship plays a very important role in the familial integra-
tion of the retirement-system family. The Natori custom of the Gotō Islands, Nagasaki Prefecture, is a custom which establishes an intimate relationship between the generation of the grandparents and that of the grandsons, through the succession of the name of the grandparent by the grandchild. Furthermore, the bilateral kinship relationship called Yauchi is securely maintained and smoothly run through this kind of intimate relation-

The analysis of these customs concerning the grandparent-grandchild relationship obviously clarifies a structural difference between the parent-child relationship and the grandparent-grandchild relationship. The parent-child relationship is characteristically a vertical relationship, basically containing a confrontation. In the grandparent-grandchild relationship, the intimate relationship is emphasized more between those of alternae generat-
ions, and plays an important role in the integration of the family. Therefore, it is obvious that the Japanese give different meanings to the parent-child relationship anb the grandparent-grandchild relationship.