

2026 Doctoral Dissertation (Abstract)

Structure and Characteristics of the Concept of 'jiritsu' in Long-term Care in
China: A Comparative Analysis of Conceptual Differences between Japan and
China and Practical Consciousness in the Chinese Caregiving Context

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I . Research Background and Purpose

As both Japan and China face the challenges of a rapidly aging society, supporting the ‘jiritsu’ (independence, autonomy, and self-determination) of the elderly to maintain their quality of life has become a critical social issue. However, Japanese long-term care providers entering the Chinese market often struggle, partly because the Japanese principle of ‘jiritsu shien’ (independence support) is not always well-understood or accepted in the Chinese context. This suggests that while both cultures use the same Chinese characters for ‘jiritsu’, the underlying conceptual structures and meanings may differ. The purpose of this study is to clarify the structural differences in the concept of ‘jiritsu’ between Japan and China and to explore how these differences are shaped within the practical context of caregiving in China. The ultimate goal is to identify why Japanese-style independence support faces resistance in China and to propose a contextually appropriate support model.

II . Theoretical Framework

Through a literature review of Japanese, Chinese, and Western perspectives, this study identified five theoretical dimensions of ‘jiritsu’ in long-term care: (1) performing tasks independently, (2) maximizing one’s abilities, (3) fulfilling social roles, (4) receiving necessary support, and (5) making autonomous choices and decisions.

III. Study 1: Quantitative Analysis of Conceptual Structures

Method: A survey was conducted among caregiving educators in Japan (n=120) and China (n=94) using a 22-item scale based on the five theoretical dimensions. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to compare the conceptual structures.

Results: In Japan, a five-factor structure emerged: (1) Self-determination, (2) Physical Performance, (3) Social Participation, (4) Economic Foundation, and (5) Utilization of

Support. These elements were found to be relatively autonomous and distinct. In China, a three-factor structure emerged: (1) Self-determination (including environmental and support factors), (2) Socio-economic (merging economic power and social participation), and (3) Psychosomatic Foundation (merging physical performance with psychological acceptance). Notably, “Utilization of Support” did not emerge as an independent factor in the Chinese data.

IV. Study 2: Qualitative Exploration of Practical Context

Method: To explore the underlying reasons for these structural differences, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight management-level practitioners from both institutional and home-care services in China. The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis.

Results: Five major themes were identified:

Theme 1: Interconnection of Mind and Body: Mental stability is seen as a prerequisite for physical maintenance.

Theme 2: Inseparability of Economic Ability and Social Participation: Economic resources shape access to care services as well as opportunities for social participation and social status.

Theme 3: Environment-Dependent Self-determination: Decisions are made through a consensus involving family, professionals, and environmental constraints.

Theme 4: Non-recognition of the Link Between “Support” and ‘jiritsu’: Assistance is often viewed as a means for safety or economic rationality rather than a component of being independent.

Theme 5: Independence within Family Relationships (“Family Co-existence”): Unlike the Japanese model of the “socialization of care,” Chinese independence is embedded within mutual interdependence with the family.

V. Comprehensive Discussion and Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that ‘jiritsu’ in Chinese long-term care is highly context-dependent and relational, contrasting with the more differentiated and institutionalized Japanese model. The study makes a significant theoretical contribution by introducing the concept of “family co-existence,” which shows that, in the Chinese context, family relationships are not merely external support for independence but form part of the state of ‘jiritsu’ itself. Practical Implications: The study suggests that exporting care models requires cultural adaptation. Specifically, for the Chinese context, supporting ‘jiritsu’ should involve: Building support models based on the mind-body connection and economic foundations. Developing decision-making processes based on family consensus and the concept of “family co-existence”. Establishing systems that help users perceive “receiving support” as a way to maintain independence, moving beyond the logic of mere safety or economic rationality. Limitations and Future Research: Future studies should expand the scope to include the perspectives of the elderly themselves, their families, and frontline caregivers, while also conducting cross-cultural intervention studies to test adapted support programs. Overall, this research provides a comparative perspective on the concept of ‘jiritsu’ in long-term care and offers insights for developing culturally responsive care models in aging societies.