<TEAM RESEARCH PROJECT: Historical Sociology of Family and Population>Marriage Patterns and the Demographic System of Late Tokugawa Japan : Based on Two Case Studies of Contemporary Demographic Registers

Historical Sociology of Family and Population

Organizer: Oᴄʜɪᴀɪ **Emiko**

Article 1

Marriage Patterns and the Demographic System of Late Tokugawa Japan: Based on Two Case Studies of Contemporary Demographic Registers

Hᴀᴍᴀɴᴏ Kiyoshi

Kyoto Gakuen University, Kyoto, Japan

Summary

John Hajnal was the first scholar to examine marriage patterns in preindustrial society. He divided marriage patterns into two categories of Western and Eastern European patterns, from which he explored their distributions and origins. There is some debate over to which of these two patterns the marriage pattern of Tokugawa Japan belongs. This paper, while discussing the relationship between marriage and other demographic considerations, attempts to shed light on characteristic features of marriage patterns in the Tokugawa period. The conclusion maintains that a strong argument can be made in favor of the position that the marriage patterns of Tokugawa Japan belong to neither the Western nor Eastern European model.

Key words

MARRIAGE PATTERN, DEMOGRAPHIC SYSTEM, NUPTIALITY, FERTILITY, MORTALITY, INHERITANCE, TOKUGAWA JAPAN

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INTRODUCTION

The difference in the Marriage Pattern among various European countries was first theorized in the now classic article of John Hajnal (1965), in which he found quite different marriage patterns between Western and Eastern Europe. The Western European marriage pattern is defined as a late marriage and a high celibacy rate; on the other hand, the Eastern European marriage pattern is defined as an early marriage and a low celibacy rate. His theory was expanded in his more recent article (Hajnal, 1983): a Western European marriage pattern prevailed over all Northern and Western Europe and an Eastern European marriage pattern prevailed not only in Eastern Europe but was extended to include Asian countries such as China and India, where fertility levels were quite high.

Elsewhere, several scholars have insisted that the Japanese pre-modern marriage pattern was considered to be a variation of the Western European marriage pattern. For instance, in her study of Tokugawa Japan, Suzan Hanley has argued that the age at marriage was relatively high and fluctuated in relation to short-term economic conditions (Hanley et al., 1977: 248). The same conclusion was derived from the comparative study of family systems conducted by Wolf and Hanley (Wolf et al., 1985).

Contrary to their findings, Saitō Osamu insisted that the Japanese pre-modern marriage pattern adhered to neither the Western European marriage pattern nor to the Eastern European marriage pattern. Instead, he pointed out that the Japanese family system was clearly different from the nuclear family system of Western Europe, and that the celibacy rate in the Tokugawa and Meiji periods was much lower than the levels in pre-modern Western Europe. This fact should not be taken to mean, however, that the Japanese case should be included in the Asian marriage pattern, because Japan's age at marriage was clearly high compared to Chinese and Indian levels. Saitō concluded that the traditional family demographic system in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan was clearly different from that of Europe as well as other Asian countries (Saitō, 1992: 371–2).

In what ways does the Japanese pre-modern marriage pattern truly differ from the European or other Asian marriage patterns? If we assume that it was different, in what regard was it indeed different? To answer these questions, we should investigate not only the characteristics of the Japanese marriage pattern, but also the function of the Japanese marriage system in relation to other demographic factors. This paper examines the nature of the Japanese pre-modern marriage pattern, and tries to examine the relationship between marriage and other demographic considerations such as inheritance in Tokugawa Japan.

AGE AT MARRIAGE

Saitō pointed out that the rather late age at marriage in pre-modern Japan was the most obvious difference from other Asian marriage systems. Before we discuss this further, we should confirm this point by referring to empirical data. In the Tokugawa period, the most convenient source for calculating the age at marriage is a series of population registers, *Shūmon-aratame-chō*, compiled at local village offices. From the late 17th century onwards, all the inhabitants were recorded in *Shūmon-aratame-chō* once a year. Studying a series of high quality *Shūmon-aratame-chō*, we can calculate various demographic parameters such as fertility, nuptiality and mortality.[1]

Table 1. Mean Age at First Marriage in the Tokugawa Villages

Province	Village Name	Year	Male (*sai*)	Female (*sai*)
Mutsu	Shimoyuta	1737–1870	19.6	15.6
	Ohkago	1790–1870	22.4	18.8
	Shimomoriya	1726–1872	17.8	14.3
	Niita	1726–1870	19.6	15.0
Kōzuke	Goryō	1751–1868	24.1	17.1
Musashi	Kabutoyama	1791–1871	25.5	18.3
	Ohmiyagō	1771–1848	25.7	19.6
Echizen	Shimosinjō	1828–1870	26.8	20.4
Mino	Yufunezawa	1701–1796	27.0	20.2
	Asakusanaka	1716–1830	27.1	19.6
Owari	Kandoshinden	1778–1871	26.4	20.5
	Nōbi 43 Villages	1665–1871	26.4	20.5
Nagato	Shibuki	1826–1871	28.5	22.7

[a] Sources except Niita: Hayami and Kitō (1989) Table 6-2., Niita: Narimatsu (1992) Table 3-4.

Table 1 shows the selected age at first marriage data collected from 17th to 19th century village studies. The data is ordered from north to south. One point worth mentioning here is that all age figure calculations are based on the traditional Japanese age-counting system (*Kazoedoshi*). In this system, a child is one (*sai*) at birth, advances to age two at the first subsequent new year, age three at the next new year, and so on. Thus, traditional Japanese ages are equivalent to Western ages plus one.

As we can see from the chart, the age at first marriage varied from 17.8 *sai* to 28.5 *sai* for men and 14.3 *sai* to 22.7 *sai* for women. There appeared to be a tendency for the age at first marriage to be lower in northern Japan and higher in southern Japan.[2] If we exclude the data for the province of Mutsu, whose populace is considered as an outlier, (Narimatsu, 1985: 79–81; Narimatsu, 1992: 71–77) the median age at first marriage was 26.4 *sai* for men and 20.2 *sai* for women, that is to say, 25 to 26 years for men and about 19 years for women in Western ages.

Data for forty-three villages in the Nōbi region are the only figures available from late 17th century (Hayami, 1979: 222). These data (not shown in Table 1) show that the age at first marriage was lowest in 1701–1725, namely between 21 and 22 *sai* for men and between 17 and 18 *sai* for women. After this period, the age at first marriage rose consistently until the end of the 18th century. In the 19th century, the age at first marriage for men was almost stable between 26 and 27 *sai*; on the other hand, the age at first marriage for women rose still and exceeded 21 *sai*. The same trend was observed in several other villages, including the villages in Mutsu province, from the 18th to 19th centuries.[3]

How does this age data compare with cases in Western Europe? Hajnal defined a late marriage to be a first marriage at mean ages of 'over 26 for men and over about 23 for women' (Hajnal, 1983: 69). Indeed the mean age at first marriage in Tokugawa Japan is close to the criteria for late marriage in Western Europe, however, none of the categories except the age at first marriage for men in Shibuki-mura actually met this criteria. In this sense, the age at first marriage in Tokugawa Japan other than Shibuki-mura can hardly be recognized as a late marriage when comparing the data with Western counterparts.

Let us now consider how this age data compares with other Asian countries. In most Asian countries, data for the ages at first marriage was not available until very recent times. One of the few exceptions is found in traditional China. Hajnal calculated the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) of Chinese peasants in early 20th century, to be namely 21.3 for men and 17.5 for women (Hajnal, 1983: 82). If we accept this as the standard for early marriage in Asia, the average of Tokugawa Japan (25–26 for men and about 19 for women) was clearly higher than this level, especially in the case of men.[4]

From these observations, we can conclude that the mean age at first marriage in Tokugawa Japan was late by the Asian standard, yet, not so by the Western standard. Also significant was the upward trend observed from the 18th to 19th century.

AN ECONOMIC-DEMOGRAPHIC MODEL OF
PRE-MODERN JAPANESE SOCIETY

What explanations can be offered to account for the mean age at first marriage in pre-modern Japan being situated somewhere between the Asian standard level and the Western European standard level? To answer this question, we need first to discuss the determinants of the marriage age in pre-modern Japan.

Hayami Akira has found that the practice of apprenticeship had a significant effect in determining the age at first marriage. In the case of Nishijō-mura, the age at first marriage of women who underwent a labor-related emigration was 25.9 *sai*; on the other hand, the age at first marriage of women who did not experience a labor-related emigration was 21.5 *sai* (Hayami, 1974: 180). However, whether one served as a labor-related emigration or not does little to explain the upward trend of the marriage age in the late Tokugawa period, because the number of apprentices serving as live-in servants decreased at the same time (Saitō, 1985: 292).
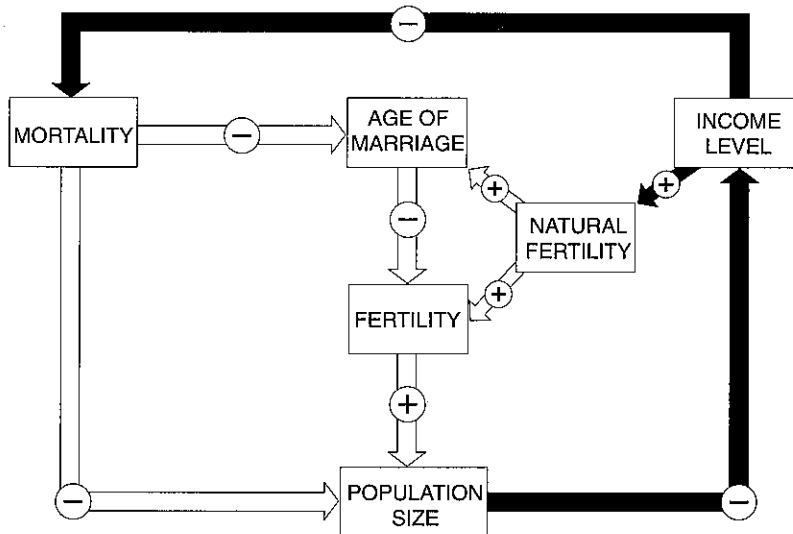

Figure 1. Economic-Demographic Model of Pre-modern Japanese Society: Mosk's model

Source: Saitō (1985: 244)

In the course of studying the diversity of fertility transition, Carl Mosk has compared the pre-modern Japanese demographic mechanism with the European economic-demographic model derived from the European Fertility

Project (Mosk, 1983). His economic-demographic model of pre-modern Japan
is easily understood by looking at the diagram described by Saitō (See Figure
1). In this diagram, the white arrows represent a demographic relationship,
whereas the black arrows show the relationship between the economy and
population.

To understand the mechanism of this diagram, we should consider a particu-
lar economic situation: a rise in the level of peasants' income. Under these cir-
cumstances, the mortality rate (especially the infant mortality rate) declined,
while, natality rose as a result of the natural fertility increase. It follows that the
size of the population increased rapidly while the income level consequently fell.
Were this the only economic-demographic phenomenon in this society, economic
development could undoubtedly not have been achieved. In fact, one could con-
sider this situation as a sort of 'Malthusian trap.'

However, according to Mosk's model, the age at marriage played an impor-
tant role in adjusting the natality rates of Tokugawa Japan. Mosk insisted that
the marriage age rose in response to both the rise of the natural fertility rate and
the decline of the mortality rate; therefore, the level of natality was kept in check.
This argument is apparently similar to Hanley's argument, that is to say, the age
at marriage fluctuated in response to economic conditions just as it did in Western
Europe.

Two questions seem to arise from Mosk's clearly constructed model. First, his
empirical research was based on the census records compiled in 1925 and 1930.
Is it possible to apply these results for 18th and 19th century Japan? Second, as
Saitō mentioned (Saitō, 1985: 245–6), did Tokugawa peasants really want to
postpone their age at marriage in response to the levels of natural fertility and
mortality? To answer these questions, an empirical study of two Tokugawa vil-
lages follows.

FERTILITY, MORTALITY AND NUPTIALITY WITHIN SHIBUKI-MURA

In this section, I will examine the relationships to be found among fertility, mor-
tality and nuptiality, based on recent research conducted on Shibuki-mura [紫福
村], a village located in the northern part of Choshū-han, one of the major do-
mains in the Tokugawa period, situated on the western edge of Honshū Island.[5]
According to the *bōchōfūdo-chūshin'an* [防長風土注進案], the well-known
topography compiled in 1845, Shibuki-mura was an agricultural village and
mainly produced rice, wheat and vegetables.

Though few *Shūmon-aratame-chō* have been found in the Choshū-han region
thus far, another type of population record, *tojaku* [戸籍], was available in many
villages. In the case of Shibuki-mura, the *tojaku* covered over one thousand in-

habitants and included all the demographic events such as birth, death and marriage from 1826 to 1871.[6] Unlike *Shūmon-aratame-chō*, all the demographic events are recorded in one volume of the *tojaku*; therefore, we are not faced with the problem of missing records. For this reason the *tojaku* can even be considered as a better source than *Shūmon-aratame-chō* for the study of short-term demographic change in fertility, mortality and nuptiality.

Table 2 shows the relationships among several different demographic indices by five-year periods. Demographic indices regressed here were the crude birth rate, the crude death rate, the crude marriage rate, the age at first marriage for women, and the marital fertility rate, which is considered an index of natural fertility. There existed a clear and positive relationship between the marital fer-

Table 2. Regression Matrix of Demographic Indices: Shibuki-mura, 1826–71

	(1) CBR	(2)CDR	(3)CMR	(4)AFM	(5)MFR
(1) CBR	–				
(2) CDR	.084	–			
(3) CMR	.537	.653*	–		
(4) AFM	.188	.459	.647*	–	
(5) MFR	.894**	.138	.591	.341	–

(1) Crude Birth Rate, (2) Crude Death Rate, (3) Crude Marriage Rate, (4) Age at first Marriage for Women, (5) Marital Fertility Rate

** statistically significant at 1% level

 * statistically significant at 5% level

tility rate and the crude birth rate, as was stated in Mosk's model discussed in the previous section (see Figure 1). On the other hand, contrary to Mosk's model, no significant relationship between the marital fertility rate and the age at first marriage for women was established. Likewise, neither were the crude death rate nor the crude birth rate and the age at first marriage for women. It is notable, however, that a statistically significant positive relationship existed between the crude death rate and the crude marriage rate.

Since we dealt with indices by five-year periods, one must acknowledge the possibility that some demographic changes may have been canceled out within the five-year period. Therefore, for further confirmation, the relationship of the three demographic indices was taken into account, which provided data for consecutive single-year periods. Table 3 shows the effects of the crude death rate on the crude marriage rate, the effects of the crude marriage rate on the crude birth rate, and the effects of the crude death rate on the crude marriage rate, with no lag and a lag of one year.

Table 3. Internal Relationships among Short-term Demographic Indices: Shibuki-mura,
           1826–71

(1) effects of CDR on CMR

| | | deviation of CMR | | | |
| | | no lag | | one year lag | |
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)
deviation	+5/1000	8	4	8	4
of CDR	-5/1000	6	8	2	12
	chi-square	0.67		5.44*	

(2) effects of CMR on CBR

| | | deviation of CBR | | | |
| | | no lag | | one year lag | |
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)
deviation	+3/1000	6	4	6	4
of CMR	-3/1000	6	7	6	7
	chi-square	0.06		0.06	

(3) effects of CDR on CBR

| | | deviation of CBR | | | |
| | | no lag | | one year lag | |
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)
deviation	+5/1000	8	4	7	5
of CDR	-5/1000	6	8	4	10
	chi-square	0.67		1.28	

*   statistically significant at 5% level

To remove the long-term trend factors, these three crude rates are regressed
with the year. The distance from the regression line was considered to be a devi-
ation. If the deviation of the dependent variable exceeded a certain level (plus or
minus 5 percent for CDR, and plus or minus 3 percent for CMR), the plus/minus
of the independent variable was checked. Therefore, based on the combination
of the sign of two variables, contingency tables were constructed and a chi-square
test was carried out, as in Table 3.[7]

Among six different combinations, only the effect between the crude death
rate and the crude marriage rate with a one year lag was statistically significant.
This outcome is consistent with the findings we observed in the regression analy-
sis for five-year periods: the mortality rate was closely related with that of nup-
tiality; however, nuptiality is not connected with fertility.

Comparing these results with Mosk's results based on the statistical evidence of 1925 and 1930, the following observations can be made in the case of Shibuki-mura. First, the marital fertility rate did not correlate with either the age at first marriage or the marriage rate. Second, although mortality correlated with the marriage rate, it did not correlate with the age at first marriage. Third, neither the age at first marriage nor the marriage rate played a key role in determining fertility levels. Based on the above evidence, it is clear that nuptiality did not play a role in adjusting fertility in Shibuki-mura.

INHERITANCE SYSTEM AND MARRIAGE IN SHINMACHI-MURA

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect in the previous section is that the rise of the marriage rate was not accompanied by a fall of the age at first marriage. In pre-modern Western European trends, both the rise of the marriage rate and the fall of the age at first marriage occurred simultaneously. This pattern is easily understood by looking at the inheritance system of pre-modern Western society. In a society where the nuclear family system was the norm, acquisition of agricultural land was a necessary condition for forming a new family. Therefore, the marriage of the male successor was often postponed until his father died. If mortality rose, the successor got an earlier chance to marry because of the death of his father.[8] On the other hand, in a society where a stem family system was the norm, the successor did not have to wait to marry until he inherited the agricultural land. Pre-modern Japan is considered to be the latter case, however, no empirical research has as yet been conducted for the Tokugawa period.

In this section, I will show the relationship between the death or retirement of the household head and the marriage of the successor in the case of Shinmachi-mura [新町村] in Musashi province.[9] Musashi province was situated in the center of Japan and included the capital city of Edo. Shinmachi-mura was located in the western section of Musashi province, along the Ōme Road and had about three to four hundred inhabitants in the late Tokugawa period. Most of the inhabitants were peasants who produced wheat or vegetables. The weaving industry became an important income source after the Tempo period (Hamano, 1986: 58-9).

In examining the relationship between inheritance and the age at marriage, only those marriage cases in which bridegrooms were born in Shinmachi-mura were selected, as it was necessary to determine the age at first marriage for those men. These cases can be categorized into three groups: (1) the bridegroom had already become a household head because of the death or retirement of the previous household head; (2) when the marriage took place, the bridegroom had

not yet become a household head, and (3) the bridegroom was a younger brother of the household head.

Most cases were included either in the first or second group, because only the eldest son usually married in each household. The second or younger sons tended to leave the household before they married, therefore rendering the third group as an exceptional case. Though the bridegrooms of the third group lived with their elder brothers, they usually stayed for only a short period after their marriage. Most of them eventually established a branch household in the same village. It should be also noted that the age at first marriage of this third group was fairly late.

To illustrate the relationship of the inheritance and the age at marriage, a comparison of the first group and the second group is in order (See Table 4). The mean age at first marriage for the first group was 25.3 *sai*; on the other hand, the mean age at first marriage for the second group was 24.9 *sai*, insignificant difference of marriage age between them. This would seem to indicate that inheritance did not significantly affect the age at first marriage for men. If these households are divided into two economic classes by ownership of land, however, a clear difference arises: three *koku*, the average size of land property in this village, was used as the dividing line.

Table 4. Age of Marriage by Family Relationship and by Class: Shinmachi-mura, 1777–1872

Family Relationship of Groom to Head	Class	Marriage Age [b]		
		Male Mean(SD)	Female Mean(SD)	N
(1) Household head [a]	< 3 *koku*	26.2 (4.1)*	21.3 (3.2)	18
	> = 3 *koku*	23.6 (4.0)*	19.9 (3.4)	12
	Subtotal	25.3 (5.0)	20.9 (3.2)	40
(2) Son/Grandson/ Son-in-law	< 3 *koku*	25.6 (4.5)	22.6 (5.5)	30
	> = 3 *koku*	24.6 (4.5)	21.5 (3.1)	54
	Subtotal	24.9 (3.9)	21.9 (4.1)	84
(3) Younger Brother	< *koku*	27.3 (3.9)	21.8 (3.5)	4
	> = *koku*	28.6 (7.7)	21.1 (4.0)	7
	Subtotal	28.1 (6.4)	21.4 (3.7)	11

a   only cases in which type of successions are confirmed.

b   marriage ages for males are only for first marriage, whereas marriage ages for females include re-marriage.

*   statistically significant difference by class at 5% level

If the previous household head died or retired before the successor's marriage, the age at first marriage fell only in the case of the upper class: the age at first marriage for men in the lower class was 26.2 *sai* and the age in the upper class is 23.6 *sai*. This difference is statistically significant at a 5 percent level. By contrast, if the successor had not yet become a household head, there was no significant difference of the marriage age between the lower class and the upper class.

These results suggest that the combination of the amount of land property and the timing of inheritance affected the age at marriage for men. If the household head died or retired earlier in the upper class household, the successor tended to marry earlier, as was the case in Western Europe. This is probably because the acquisition of a bride into a household compensated for the loss of labor from the death or retirement of the previous household head.[10] Table 4 shows that the younger age at marriage found in cases of inheriting grooms with over three *koku* of land was rare. Out of the 135 marriage cases examined here, only 12 such cases belonged to this category. Please also note that this statistically significant difference was only observed among men, and not among women. It follows that the inheritance system certainly affected the age at first marriage, however, the effect was extremely weak compared with the case of Western Europe.[11] This is explains why the rise of the marriage rate was not accompanied by a fall of the age at first marriage.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the age at first marriage in Tokugawa Japan was higher than the level in traditional China, however, the Japanese level remained lower than the level of pre-modern Western Europe. Likewise, the role of nuptiality in Tokugawa Japan was also different from the Western European pattern, because it did not play a key role in determining fertility levels. From these observations, we can conclude that the Japanese marriage pattern was clearly different from the Western European marriage pattern.

On the other hand, nuptiality did play an important role in adjusting the size of the labor force in upper class households. This is because a successor tended to marry earlier if the household head died or retired earlier than expected and a relatively large field was left.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The nature of *Shūmon-aratame-chō* was discussed in Cornell and Hayami (1986).

2. The same tendency was observed in the SMAM calculated from the early Meiji statistical data. See Hayami (1986).

3. The mean age at first marriage for both men and women in Shimomoriya-mura rose from 18th to 19th century (Narimatsu, 1985: 83–84). On the other hand, the mean age at first marriage rose only in the case of women in Niita-mura during the same period (Narimatsu, 1992: 72–74).

4. Peter Smith (Xenos) calculated the SMAM in the latter half of 20th century for a number of Asian nations. See Peter Smith (1980).

5. This section is based on my earlier research published in Japanese. See Hamano (1994/5).

6. *Tojaku* were compiled at each sub-village in Shibuki-mura. The quality of these *tojaku* differs from one sub-village to another. I decided to use only 6 volumes of the *tojaku*, namely the volume of Dogaichi, Nagao, Tonokawa, Ichi, Kyoubutsu and Doinouchi, respectively, which I considered to be complete and therefore in satisfactory condition. These data covered about 40 percent of the total Shibuki-mura population.

7. The method used here is based on the technique developed by Wrigley and Schofield (1981: chap. 8, 285–355).

8. The inheritance model was discussed in Saitō (1985: 103–107).

9. This section is based on my presentation at the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the Population Association of Japan. (Hamano, 1995).

10. The relationship between the timing of marriage and the family labor force has been discussed by Thomas C. Smith in his study of 'Nakahara-mura.' He concluded that 'marriage in Nakahara showed a tendency for peasant families to adjust their size and composition to the requirements of farming' (Smith, 1977: 145).

11. Wang Feng suggested that this might also explain why the age at marriage in Tokugawa Japan was higher than the level in traditional China or other Asian countries.

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要 約

徳川期日本の結婚パターンと人口システム

浜 野 潔

前工業化社会における結婚パターンについて、最初に理論的な考察を行ったの

はヘイナルである。彼は結婚パターンを西ヨーロッパ型・東ヨーロッパ型（ア
ジアを含む）に分け、その分布や起源を追求した。徳川期日本の結婚パターン
がどちらのパターンに属するか、という点に関してこれまで、一致した結論は
得られていない。本論文では、結婚と他の人口指標がどのような関係にあった
かという観点から、徳川期の結婚パターンの特徴を明らかにしようとした。そ
の結果、徳川期日本の結婚パターンは西ヨーロッパ型でも東ヨーロッパ型でも
ないと結論づけた。