Granovetter began his classic article noting: “A fundamental weakness of current sociological theory is that it does not relate micro-level interactions to macro-level patterns in any convincing way.... how interaction in small groups aggregates to form large-scale patterns eludes us in most cases (1973:1360).” Despite the passage of almost 40 years, this description is still apt for family demography. We know enormous changes have occurred, but the processes whereby such changes begin, spread, and become accepted are still largely unknown. That structural changes, such as industrialization and increases in education, play a role in family institutional change seems self evident. And in response, some people adapted behaviors, such as postponing marriage or using child care arrangements, to ease the pressure that the macro education and work changes put on family roles. What is less evident is the extent to which people know the early adaptors of new family behaviors and how knowing early adaptors might be related to their attitudes towards these behaviors. To the extent that attitudes change, this then feeds back to societal values and the broader family institution.

We examine for Japan the extent to which people know family innovators and the extent to which knowing family innovators is related to their attitudes toward such behavior. Note that this is not the standard diffusion question whereby something new, e.g. a new drug (Coleman et al. 1966), is introduced. Rather, the issue is the mechanisms whereby macro-level change produces conditions ripe for micro-level changes, which, in turn, occur and are observed, leading to micro-level behavioral and attitudinal change, ultimately producing macro-level institutional change (Rindfuss et al. 2004).

Substantial changes in economic, educational and political institutions have occurred in numerous countries that would have been considered “developed” in 1960 (e.g. Caldwell 2004; Pampel 2001; Retherford, Ogawa, and Sakamoto 1996). At the risk of oversimplification, such economic and educational changes include: a) the rise of the service economy, b) lowered levels of employment discrimination against women and various minorities, c) a continuation of the shift away from employment in agriculture and related rural to urban movement, d) demand for better educated workers, e) a shift to work settings not conducive to caring for a child, and f) out-sourcing jobs to low wage countries. These changes delayed labor force entry into late teens and 20s, facilitated women’s financial autonomy, provided more anonymous settings in urban areas, and provided stimulation to create and expand such facilities as colleges and universities. These institutional changes have stressed the traditional family institution in numerous countries, creating conditions favorable for family change in the same manner as a seismologist might say that the changing tension between tectonic plates has made conditions favorable for an earthquake. We take the educational, and economic institutional changes as given and ask: what are the mechanisms that might sustain a change in the family institution?
Setting: Japan

Japan has experienced most of the structural changes found in Western societies related to the second demographic transition, including increased education levels especially among women, rise of the service economy, urbanization, shift to work settings not conducive to caring for young children, and out-sourcing of jobs to low-wage countries. Yet Japan, unlike most Western countries, has experienced limited movement in several components of the second demographic transition, including non-marital fertility, widespread use of child care centers, and, somewhat less so, cohabitation. Divorce has increased and the most dramatic change has been increased age at marriage. With respect to the latter, the proportion of all women aged 30-34 never married has increased from 7% in 1970 to 35% in 2010, and the proportion of men aged 35-39 never married increased from 5% in 1970 to 36% in 2010.

Japan's historical, cultural, and religious heritage differs markedly from that of Western post-industrial societies. It has a history of a strong Confucian influence on the family system, with an emphasis on filial piety and the importance of the patrilineal line (Aruga 1943; Otake 1982; Tsuya and Bumpass 2004). Japan is a homogenous society in terms of ethnicity and language, as well as relatively homogeneous and where Buddhism and Shintoism have long been part of society, permeating every fiber of Japanese lives, and Japan does not experience the competition between religious perspectives common in many Western societies: e.g., it is not problematic for one to have a Shintoist wedding and a Buddhist funeral. Such homogeneity in ethnicity, language, and religion is a context in which new family attitudes and values may be adopted very rapidly. Japan contrasts sharply with most Western societies in that unmarried childbearing is almost non-existent at approximately 2 percent of all births (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2006: 38).

While unemployment is still moderately low, the nature of the Japanese economy and the types of jobs available to young people have been changing. In an attempt to increase their competitiveness and profitability, employers have been moving away from the lifetime employment model, a long prevalent and distinguishing feature of the Japanese labor market (e.g. Roberts 2007; Yuji 2005). This resulted in the rise of employees working in temporary positions such as keiyaku (those hired under a fixed-term contract with limited provisions of social insurance and other fringe benefits) and haken (contract work whereby an agency sends workers to a corporation for a specified period) (Statistics Bureau 2001). These non-regular workers tend to be young: 61% employed as keiyaku or haken in 2005 were aged 15-34 (Statistics Bureau 2005).

Data

We use two replicated cross-sectional surveys: the 2000 and 2009 National Surveys on Family and Economic Conditions (NSFEC). The 2000 NSFEC is a national probability sample of 4,482 Japanese men and women aged 20–49 (see Rindfuss et al. 2004). There were 3,112 respondents to the 2009 NSFEC new cross-section. In addition, we also use a 2009 follow-up survey of the 2000 respondents. The same questionnaire was used in the two 2009 surveys, and was similar to the 2000 questionnaire.
The 2000 and 2009 surveys had a social-network-type set of questions on knowing people who had engaged in various innovative family behaviors by four social relationship domains. Respondents were asked if they knew anyone who had experienced the following behaviors: a) had a baby in a childcare facility while the mother was working; b) lived with a person of the opposite sex while single; c) had a birth while unmarried; d) had said that he/she does not want to marry ever; e) age 35+ and never married. These are the “know” questions. The 2009 surveys added a question on divorce. Each of these family behaviors is phrased such that the behavior would violate traditional expectations and hence be “innovative.” These family behaviors differ in the extent to which they are common in Japan, but none would have been condoned under the Japanese family system that was preeminent in the post-World War II period. For each of these five family behaviors, respondents were asked if they knew anyone who had engaged in the behavior for each of the following relationship domains: a) brothers and sisters, b) other relatives, c) friends, and d) coworkers. We examine multiple social relationships to be sure to capture both strong and weak ties.

**Preliminary results**

The analyses for this paper are well underway. Work files have been prepared and preliminary analyses begun. In terms of trends across the two cross-sections in the proportion knowing someone who had used child care, cohabited, had a non-marital birth, said did not want to marry or was 35+ and unmarried, by the four relationship domains (5 * 4 or 20 cells), with few exceptions, more know someone who had engaged in one of the behaviors in 2009 that 2000. The largest increase is 35+ and not married for respondent’s coworkers (38% in 2000 and 54% in 2009), and this undoubtedly reflect the actual increase in age at marriage in Japan. The increases in knowing someone 35+ and not married were also relatively large in the siblings, other relatives and friends relationship domains. In contrast, the increases in knowing someone who had had a non-marital birth were quite modest, as would be expected given the lack of any appreciable increase in non-marital births in Japan. Similar patterns are found comparing the 2000 and 2009 responses for the panel members.

For the panel members asked the know questions in 2000 and 2009, it is possible that someone they knew had engaged in one of these family behaviors during the ensuing 9 years or that their circle of other relatives (e.g. in-laws), friends or co-workers changed such that they now knew someone who had engaged in the family behavior. The largest increases were for the child care and marriage items, and among the relationship types, friends were the most dynamic. With the panel data it is also possible to become an “unknown,” that is, to report that they knew someone who had engaged in a particular behavior in a given relationship domain in 2000 but not in 2009. In addition to the possibility that there is some random noise in the data, there are a number of substantive reasons why someone might become an “unknower.” For example one’s group of friends might have changed such that one no longer had a friend who had had a non-marital birth. Or one might have changed jobs, with a new set of co-workers and none of them had cohabited (at least the respondent was unaware of any of them having cohabited). “Unknowers” are most likely to be found in the friendship relationship domain and least likely to be found in the sibling domain. This pattern is to be expected with the
dynamism likely in the friend domain and a lack thereof in the sibling domain. And unknowers are most common for the child care item. This is not surprising. Over the course of nine years one might forget whose children had been in child care.

Analyses still to come include examining the patterning of becoming a knower or unknower, using the panel data and such demographic variables as variables as birth cohort, sex, education, occupation, and family status in 2000, as well as changes in work and family status between 2000 and 2009. The emphasis will be on patterns of association rather than causal relationships. Similarly, we will examine the extent to which the patterning by demographic variables has changed between the 2000 and 2009 cross-sectional surveys. Finally, as in our 2004 paper, we will examine the relationship between the know variables and attitudes held towards such family behaviors, and whether this relationship has changed within the panel and between the two cross-sections.

References


