

Marriage and Household in Early Modern Northeastern Japan:
Rural-Urban Similarity and Diversity

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Regional variation is an integral part of Japanese historical demography. At least three different patterns of population and family are suggested to have coexisted in three geographic boundaries in early modern Japan: northeast, central, and southeast. However, the evidence for the three patterns are either based on macro level studies or on micro level studies of a few villages in each region. This paper challenges this general categorization and tries to examine "northeastern" pattern of marriage and family using household registers 1716-1870 from diverse economic settings: two rice farming villages, one village enriched by cash crop agriculture, and one booming local post town. We apply the event history analysis model proposed by the Eurasia project for examining marriage responses to economic stress and household context. The results of this study should provide more careful examination of the northeastern pattern and marriage in its relation to household socioeconomic status and context at various stages of local economic and population development.

Studies on nuptiality of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century peasants have shed light on marriage in pre-industrial Japan, particularly on the ways it differed from the western European model of late marriage and celibacy. Japanese peasants married earlier than their European contemporaries but perhaps later than the Asian standard. Regional variation, however, was large: the age at first marriage ranged from 14 to 25 for women and 17 to 28 for men. Northeastern Japan was at the lower end of this distribution. Moreover, both men and women married virtually universally by age 30 as long as they survived (Kurosu, Tsuya and Hamano 1999). However, early and universal marriage did not provide any guarantees of longevity, fecundity, or harmony as marriage often ended with the death of one of the spouse or terminated by divorce (Kurosu 2007). Flexible attitudes and practices of divorce and remarriage were behind this early and universal marriage system.

With the use of multivariate analyses, recent studies have further revealed the importance of roles of household in accelerating and delaying marriage (Tsuya and Kurosu 2000, 2006). Marriage in preindustrial agrarian society was primarily a family and household enterprise, based on a long-term planning and negotiations between the two parties involved. Especially in the context of normative prevalence of stem family system in preindustrial northeastern Japan, power and resources that household socioeconomic status entailed played a crucial role in determining the likelihood of securing a suitable partner for an inheriting child (Tsuya and Kurosu 2006).

However, these studies are all based on the rural villages of the east (pacific) side of

northeastern Japan. The west (Japan Sea) side and more urban areas of northeast Japan are yet to be examined. A couple of studies based on the west side of the northeastern Japan (Oto 1996, Kinoshita 2002) suggest that the patterns might have been different as the west side was much better off than the east side counterpart because of the better climate and the development of cash crop agriculture. Studies on nuptiality and household among urban population are limited but suggestive that marriage and family might vary from rural conditions (e.g. Takahashi 2005, Sasaki 2005). These studies suggest that the age at marriage was later than those of rural peasants and that the celibacy rates were higher particularly among men. Some studies suggest the prevalence of nuclear family households in urban areas while some others emphasize the difference in the nature of household formation and marriage between permanent residents (with tax obligation) and temporary residents (Saito and Tomobe 1988). However, the mechanism at which marriage was postponed among males and females in urban areas is not well examined.

The attempt of our study is to utilize one of the best remaining population registers of both urban and rural areas in the northeast and extend the studies of Shimomoriya and Niita in order to compare patterns and timing of first marriage in different demographic and economic settings. Using the local population registers, we analyze the patterns of and factors associated with first marriage in three different geographic and socioeconomic settings: Two rural villages of Shimomoriya and Niita and one local post town of Koriyama in the east side; and another rural village of Yanbe in the west side of northeastern Japan. The example of these communities provide rare opportunities to contrast urban vs. rural and east vs. west of northeastern Japan. Shimomoriya and Niita were based exclusively on rice farming and suffered from population decline without being able to recover from the damages caused by a series of famines; while Yanbe developed cash crop agriculture and did not suffer as much as the two villages in the east. Koriyama managed its stabilized expansion throughout the observation period.

The data are drawn from the local population registers called 'ninbetsu-aratame-cho' (NAC) in the northeastern villages of Shimomoriya, Niita, Yanbe and local post town of Koriyama. In all four communities, the NAC was enumerated annually at the beginning of the third lunar month. Surviving NAC registers in Shimomoriya cover the 154 years from 1716 to 1869 with only nine years missing (1720, 1729, 1846, 1850, 1858, and 1864-67). In Niita, the surviving NAC registers cover the 151-year period from 1720 to 1870, during which there are only five years missing (1742, 1758, 1796, and 1857-58). NAC registers in Yanbe cover the 110 years from 1760 to 1870 with 4 missing years (1761, 1764, 1765, and 1797). The data of Koriyama consists solely of Koriyama Kami-machi. Koriyama consisted of two areas—Kami-machi and Shimo-machi. They were separate economic and political organizations operated by two different village officers. The population registers of the two areas were also compiled independently. The data of Shimo-machi also exists but there are too many missing years to operate similar types of analysis with Kami-machi. Therefore, we restrict our analysis to Kami-machi in this study. Therefore, Koriyama hereafter refers to Koriyama Kami-machi. The

surviving Koriyama NAC registers cover 142 years from 1729 to 1870 with 20 years missing. Thus, although the proportion of missing years in Koriyama NAC are substantially higher than those in the other three villages, the population registers of all the communities provide vital information spanning the latter half of the Tokugawa era. The format and contents of the NAC registers are almost identical in all four communities.

In addition to the long span of the existing records, the NAC registers in these communities have other advantages as demographic data. First, the registers were compiled using the principle of current domicile; thus, the NAC data are all 'de facto.' Registers compiled this way give far more exact demographic information than those based on the principle of legal residence although the latter 'de jure' principle seems to have been much more prevalent (Cornell and Hayami 1986). Second, the dates (month and year) of births and deaths were annotated as far as these events occurred during the period of observation in the NAC registers of the three villages. The dates of occurrence of these events were not usually given in local population registers in Tokugawa Japan, and this provides another evidence for the high quality of the population registers of these communities. Third, exits from the records due to unknown reasons are rare in the population registers in the three villages. In most cases, we can therefore determine the timing of entrance to the 'universe' of observation (due to birth or immigration) as well as the timing of death and other exits, although the four communities experienced considerable in- and out-migration (Narimatsu 1985: 101-20; 1992: 32-8; Takahashi 2005).

The paper starts with a discussion of approaches concerned with nuptiality, followed by descriptive analysis of first marriages and its outcomes contrasting the four communities. Discrete-time event history analysis is then applied to demonstrate how individual demographic characteristics as well as familial and socioeconomic context influenced the likelihood of first marriage and remarriage. The models are a modification of the series of analyses in the Eurasia Population and Family History Project.

This study is one of the first attempts to systematically compare the nuptiality in rural and urban settings in the Japanese historical demography. Studies using the villages of Shimomoriya and Niita (e.g. Tsuya and Kurosu 2004, 2010; Kurosu 2007, 2010) showed successfully how local economic condition, household socioeconomic status and living arrangement affected demographic events. These studies applied the models of the event history analysis used in the Eurasia project for examining demographic responses to economic stress and household context (Bengtsson, Campbell, Lee et al., 2004; Tsuya, Wang, Alter, Lee, et al. 2010). As this study applies the same model to different ecological and economic contexts, we should be able to directly compare the results of marriage responses to economic and household factors between rural and urban areas, as well as villages of different agricultural characteristics. The results of this study should also show the importance of examining further details of the three regional patterns of demography and family in historical Japan.

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