

Introduction

Mary Elizabeth Berry and Marcia Yonemoto

Over the past two decades, new studies on demography, the status order, law, literacy, and gender have significantly changed our understanding of early modern Japanese society. Yet, oddly, no recent study in English has focused on what is arguably the key social institution of the time—the family.¹ The essays assembled here help to right the balance by exploring a variety of family histories, each of them discrete, from early modern Japan. They range across a large space, from the northeast to the southwest of the archipelago, and over a long stretch of time, from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. They focus variously on the military elite, agrarian villagers, urban merchants, communities of outcastes, and the circles surrounding priests, artists, and scholars. They draw on diverse sources—from population registers and legal documents to personal letters and diaries, from genealogies and household records to temple death registers and memorial tablets, from official compendia of exemplary conduct to popular fiction and drama. And they combine high vantages on collective practices (the adoption of heirs and the veneration of ancestors, for example) with intimate portraits of individual actors (such as a runaway daughter and a murderous wife).²

Together the essays challenge the dominant postwar narratives, epitomized in the social-scientific scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, which tend to see the family in structuralist and nationalist terms as the foundation for Japanese insularity, social and political stability, and economic success.³ This collection, in contrast,

envisions the family less as a fixed institution or ideological construct than a process—one responsive to individual circumstances, subject to contestation, and marked by diversity across time and space. Although our sample of subjects is inevitably limited, the following chapters intimate the variety and disparity of experience among families that—while they certainly share certain key characteristics and were shaped alike by the pressures of a common polity—remain too unlike to authorize much generalization. In short, we disagree with Tolstoy’s artful proposition that “happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Up close, every family looks different. Felicity takes as many forms as suffering; the divide between happiness and unhappiness is rarely stark; shared experiences do not guarantee shared sentiments.

ORIENTATIONS ON THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The circumstances and choices that made one family unlike another were framed, then as now, by the prevailing laws, norms, and controls on resources that shaped all lives. The merit of exploring families in a particular place and time lies in the prospect of understanding the diversity of individual family histories within the structural pressures of a distinctive regime. In the case of early modern Japan, the challenge is bracing. The unique features of the early modern polity generated equally unique patterns of family practice, unknown elsewhere in a similar configuration. For readers unfamiliar with the general contours of early modern Japanese history, we offer here a brief overview.⁴

Japan was governed from 1603 to 1868 by hereditary heads of the Tokugawa family, headquartered in Edo (now Tokyo), who used the title of shogun. The title was bestowed by successive heads of the imperial family, headquartered in Kyoto, who had reigned for over a millennium but had long ceded practical power to surrogates. The Tokugawa proved the strongest and most durable of them. Victors of civil wars that had raged for a century and more, they forged a peace that would last fifteen generations. Their polity was founded on a federal form of alliance that accorded substantial authority over local territorial domains to some two hundred daimyo lords, many of them former rivals. It was secured by remarkable policies of pacification. The Tokugawa regime stripped the landscape of the petty fortifications critical to continuing combat, allowing each daimyo a single major castle, and purged villages and monasteries of weapons. After several decades of relatively open international relations, the regime addressed the menace from abroad by combining long-standing bans against Christian proselytism and conversion with radical curtailment of contact. Foreign traders were limited by nationality and confined to a single port; travel overseas by Japanese was prohibited. And, most ambitiously, the regime enforced the policy, initiated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, that required the relocation of an immense population of samurai warriors from villages (where they had enjoyed a dangerous independence) to the castle

headquarters of their daimyo lords (where they would live as urban consumers on typically modest stipends).

These policies all but eliminated the violence of war (as well as its opportunities) and any routine encounter with the outside world (including licit migration).⁵ Weightier as a factor of daily life was the social stratification effected by an evolving status system. The law and customary practice of the Tokugawa regime accorded great privilege to the samurai—constituting, with their families, about 7 percent of the population—who monopolized public office and presided over the commoner community of primary producers, craftspeople, and merchants. Privilege was complicated by paradox, nonetheless. Lacking much martial purpose as peace took hold, the samurai remained too numerous to employ gainfully, even in the bloated bureaucracies of the shogun and the daimyo. While some fashioned new lives as scholars, physicians, or writers, and others simply dropped off samurai rolls, the unemployed or underemployed majority became a costly burden to the regime—and not a comfortable one. Fixed but inflation-ridden stipends failed to cover the expenses of a presumptive elite often in debt and sometimes reduced to meager livelihoods.

Crucial here was a changing economy. The relocation of samurai from villages to castle towns set in motion a process of urbanization unparalleled in scale and speed elsewhere in the early modern world. By 1700 the once-small population of Japanese city dwellers surpassed 15 percent, distributed across the archipelago. The Tokugawa capital of Edo, then the largest city in the world, numbered over 1 million; the luxury craft center of Kyoto and the wholesale commodity market of Osaka approached 400,000 each; and dozens of castle towns exceeded 30,000.⁶ This transformative growth of cities required the no less transformative development of a nationally integrated market that could supply city people—both the samurai and the ever-larger waves of commoner migrants they attracted—with the materials of daily life. The ensuing penetration of a monetized commercial economy generated new wealth for successful commodity producers, transporters and wholesalers, and a range of enterprising manufacturers and financiers. It also transferred substantial wealth from the martial elite to commoner entrepreneurs.

Contradictions in values followed, for while the polity was founded on social hierarchy, samurai privilege, and the primacy of honor, the economy thrived on expanding competition, improving performance, and the primacy of profit. The regime chose to live with the contradictions. Without either demobilizing the samurai or attempting a thorough reform of their roles, the shogun and daimyo combined wavering forms of fiscal amelioration (from low-interest loans and supplementary job stipends to price-fixing and currency manipulation) with unwavering affirmations of a samurai-first morality: they were cast as public men whose virtue underpinned a functionally differentiated but interdependent society of benevolent superiors and deferential inferiors. At the same time, the shogun and daimyo maintained an arresting flexibility in their relations with commoners.

They left all economic activity—including mining, minting, finance, and international trade—in merchant hands. They entrusted most local rule—including tax collection and policing—to self-governing associations in rural villages and urban neighborhoods. And, despite chronic fiscal distress, they relied on loans and deficit financing instead of aggressively raising agrarian taxes or instituting much more than token levies on commerce. In effect, they paid the price of sustaining an anachronistic status system by relinquishing economic power.

What impact did these political and social structures have on the formation of families? At a very general level, the division of society into function-based status groups inspired the principle that families would pass down hereditary occupations to fulfill social and political as well as filial obligations. Stratification by status inspired the further principle that marriages would unite social peers to preserve hierarchical boundaries. Mobility in employment certainly occurred, particularly among noninheriting sons. Inter-marriage among commoners of different callings became unremarkable; unions between commoners and low-ranking samurai were not unknown. Still, continuity in family calling and (general) status parity among spouses remained pronounced in early modern Japan. Insularity and prolonged peace abetted this stability, to be sure, since neither foreign encounter nor deracinating violence disturbed customary practice with the shock of external example or internal breakdown.

Family history in the Tokugawa period was most profoundly defined, however, by the widespread adoption of the *ie* or stem model of succession. It is the *ie* or stem family that is the subject of almost all essays in this volume, together with those practices (notably, the routine adoption of heirs) helping to ensure its survival. We should emphasize, however, that stem family formation became a majority, though by no means universal, practice in early modern Japan. A fully representative collection would engage the alternative formations (nuclear and compound, with any variety of permutations) elected by many houses.⁷ While awaiting the research that will enable greater representation, we focus on the stem family not only because it spread across social sectors but also because it remains remarkable as a dominant choice in the early modern world. The choice clearly addressed the political and social exigencies of the time, if in multifarious ways that we must reckon with.

THE *IE*: DEFINITIONS AND MARTIAL ORIGINS

A protean term, *ie* referred, most simply, to both a physical domestic space (the home) and the kin residing there (the family).⁸ It extended in meaning to include any nonkin who shared the residence, whether through contractual understanding or informal consent (the household), as well as participants in the family enterprise, whether lodged together or not (the staff). Thus, for example, the *ie* of a substantial merchant included his apprentices and clerks; the *ie* of a large-scale

farmer included his laborers. In its most circumscribed form, moreover, the term described a descent group that linked current members to generations of both deceased ancestors and unborn descendants to come (the lineage). And this linkage was secured, optimally across the ages, by the practice of succession to a unitary inheritance.

The characteristics of the *ie* are, for the most part, congruent with those of the stem family; in this volume we acknowledge but set aside ongoing debates over strict definitions and nomenclature to use the terms *stem family* and *ie* more or less interchangeably.⁹ In its ideal form, the model *ie* had two defining features. First, the headship and major assets of a house passed to a single heir, which occurred with increasing frequency upon the retirement rather than the death of the incumbent (to ensure a smooth transition). Although a family with means might provide dowries for daughters and start-up resources for noninheriting sons, the bulk of the estate—beginning with the primary residence and any hereditary titles—devolved on the new head. So, too, the responsibilities for sustaining the *ie*—from honoring the ancestors and providing an heir to protecting resources and perpetuating the enterprise—devolved on that head as well. Second, the adult siblings of the heir departed the family, typically upon the heir's marriage. Daughters moved in with their husbands (unless circumstances required or favored the adoption as heir of a son-in-law, who joined the household and assumed his wife's family name). Noninheriting sons were variously set up as heads of branch lines, dispatched to paid labor, or adopted into families in need of heirs. Any siblings who continued to reside in the household remained single. The model *ie* thus consisted, in mature form, of three co-resident generations: the retired head and his wife, the incumbent successor and his wife, and the heir-in-waiting. It continued with the marriage of the heir-in-waiting (accompanied by the departure of siblings) and the transfer of headship from the now-retiring incumbent to the now-succeeding heir (once a new heir-in-waiting was established).

Stem family formation was new to the Tokugawa period as a dominant practice cutting across status groups; by the end of the seventeenth century most Japanese would spend at least part of their lives in a stem family.¹⁰ Among the samurai elite, however, the roots of the *ie* were old and deep. They lay in the early medieval period, when warrior houses sought to concentrate their resources, and protect them for the future, amid rising military competition.¹¹ Daughters felt the pain of the change first. Over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, they gradually but decisively lost entitlements to land rights and other wealth, growing steadily more dependent on kinsmen or husbands for economic support and social standing. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, surplus sons were excluded as well, as unitary inheritance became the norm in substantial warrior families: the headship and assets of the *ie* passed to a single male successor, not necessarily a first-born or even a biological son.¹² The need for superior leadership, if found in a younger child or adoptee, surpassed the

privilege of primogeniture. Surplus sons might head branch families, though in inferior positions of wealth and authority; increasingly, they were sent out through adoption to head other households.

Yet this streamlining of inheritance and succession did not signal a contraction or degradation of the *ie*. In another seminal development, martial houses expanded their capacity by embracing mounting numbers of nonkin as *ie* members. Particularly during the era of Warring States (c. 1467–1590), the great contenders for power sought loyalty and selfless service by casting their soldiers as filial near kin who shared not just the victories but the reputation, the ethos, and the future of a collectively imagined house. The notion of the *ie* as enterprise—as a union of the stem lineage and those enabling it to prosper—was catalyzed in wartime, when group purpose, fortified by an ideology of mutual reliance, became a daily urgency.

Despite the changed circumstances of peacetime, the *ie* gained even greater traction among martial houses during the Tokugawa period. On the one hand, the ruling community of shogun, daimyo, and their chief officers cultivated an ever more elaborate cult of hereditary honor to replace the lost legitimacy of performance on the battlefield. Resourceful constructions of *ie* genealogies and histories, escalating rites of passage and commemoration—these were the devices that ennobled contemporary authority with the weight of the past. Even as they justified their ascendancy with claims to just and benevolent custody of the public good, these rulers continued to invoke the integrity of the lineage as the foundation of rightful rule. On the other hand, the samurai in service to the shogun and daimyo, from major deputies to the humblest retainers, founded their own *ie* as an essential form of security. Once mobile fighters with landed bases in villages and voluntary bonds to lords, they became, under Tokugawa rule, castle town consumers who depended on the highly variable stipends (from princely to paltry) that corresponded with their highly stratified ranks. Their capital, now a matter of rank and stipend, was heritable—but only by a single male successor. Effectively enforced, then, was the penetration of the stem family from the highest to the lowest reaches of the samurai population. Although still identified with the collectively imagined *ie* of his lord, the individual samurai needed his own clear line of succession to transmit the rank and stipend signifying elite status. Hence, like his lord, that samurai transferred the headship and the critical assets of his family to a designated heir, sending daughters and surplus sons elsewhere. Also like his lord, that samurai turned to adoption when biology failed or disappointed.

Indeed, the adoption of heirs, a practice of great martial families from the medieval period onward, occurred with such startling frequency in the early modern period as to become a near-defining feature of the *ie* system. Between 25 and 40 percent of the successors to samurai houses in mid- to late Tokugawa Japan were adoptees.¹³ Insofar as roughly half of them were sons-in-law wedded to natal daughters, continuity in the bloodlines of adopting houses was often maintained.

Even so, the high incidence of nonkin successors—who sometimes replaced natal sons—indicates that the persistence of the *ie*, rather than the integrity of a biological line of descent, came first. Why this commitment to persistence above or beyond the claims of blood? The motives for adoption, when they are at all clear in individual cases, were diverse. An adoptee could bring talent to a house in decline, useful or prestigious connections to a house on the ascendant, or escape from discord in a house divided. An adoptee could also perpetuate the name and honor, and venerate the ancestors, of a house lacking heirs. Other purposes and other notions of security, compounded over time by the inertia of social expectation, drove a practice that put not just the *ie* but the persistence of the *ie* at the core of martial family values.

THE SPREAD OF THE *IE*

Stem family formation gradually extended from the samurai to all other status groups in Tokugawa Japan, becoming a majority practice around the turn of the eighteenth century. Some groups, such as outcaste beggars, came to stem succession in the same fashion as the lower echelons of the samurai: they were vested by shogunal or daimyo officials with assets (such as exclusive begging turfs) that could be passed to a single heir alone.¹⁴ For most rural and urban commoners, however, *ie* formation was a more elective process pursued without strict official controls on resources.

The regime did, to be sure, make the family—as an elemental group of co-resident kin and nonkin dependents—foundational to political order. It was the basic unit of taxation and of surveillance as well: neighboring families, in villages and cities alike, were charged in groups of five to police one another and enforce corporate responsibility for conduct. Notably, moreover, shogunal policy made the family the unit of registration in surveys of land and population and, in doing so, effectively reinforced its primacy as a sociopolitical actor.¹⁵ Among the most important records premised on the family unit were those of sectarian affiliation (*shūmon aratame-chō*), which documented on an annual basis the affiliations of commoners with Buddhist temples of their choice. Presumptive proof that registrants were non-Christian, this mandatory documentation generated the demographic data that, remarkable for its quantity and quality in the early modern world, allow historians to trace the spread of stem family formation throughout the commoner population.¹⁶

The movement toward the *ie* is clear in the data. The majority of commoner households chose, by around 1700, the practices characteristic of martial households: the transmission of the headship and most assets to a single successor; the adoption of heirs when necessary or desirable; and the inclusion of nonkin in service to the family as household members. Many embraced the perpetuation of the *ie* as the core value and affirmed its gravity by transferring personal names across

generations, composing edifying genealogies and family histories, and maintaining reverent witness to the dead. But if this movement among commoners toward *ie* formation is clear, the reasons are not.

Before we explore the motives for the widespread adoption of the *ie*, three points deserve emphasis. First, *the institutions of state in early modern Japan were engaged selectively and remotely in family formation*. Both shogun and daimyo did issue regulations concerning adoption practices in samurai houses and retained the right to approve the selection of samurai spouses. Adultery became a focus of criminal law for all classes.¹⁷ And prohibitions against the taking of life, notably associated with the shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi in the late seventeenth century, came to include widespread denunciations of infanticide in the late eighteenth century.¹⁸ Moreover, as Fabian Drixler points out, official anxiety over the population explosion around 1680 provoked both scattered regulations concerning commoner marriage (pertaining to the ages, residential origins, and property qualifications of spouses) and more pervasive regulations forbidding partible inheritance.¹⁹ Still, such regulations, never universal in the first place, were neither clearly enforced nor systematically sustained, especially as population growth slowed. While acknowledging their importance, we note that any formal registration of critical family decisions—including marriage, divorce, remarriage, adoption, succession, and the transfer of resources—occurred at the village or neighborhood level. And if disputes over family relations were hardly uncommon, adjudication was typically undertaken by the commoner elders who governed village and neighborhood associations.²⁰

Second, and unlike the church in western Europe, for example, *religious establishments were removed from the active supervision of family formation in early modern Japan*. The temples enlisted to confirm the Buddhist (and, hence, non-Christian) affiliation of commoners did seize opportunity by exacting donations from their expanding congregations and normalizing the funerary rituals that were vital to a spreading cult of ancestor worship.²¹ A likely source of solace for mourners and a sure source of solvency for clergy, the rituals fully implicated temples in the passage of death. Other passages—marriage and remarriage, childbearing and birth, childhood initiations, divorce—went largely unregulated by Buddhist law and unmarked by Buddhist services.

The priests and priestesses of Shinto shrines may have blessed the newborns and young children of the military elite during the Tokugawa period, though popular ceremonies of initiation emerged only in the late nineteenth century. As a general matter, the various Shinto cults of the time projected a family-centered ethos, given their association with fertility rituals and, in the case of the Ise cult, the rites of imperial succession. But it was the Confucian tradition alone that offered formal principles for ordering family conduct. At the loftiest levels, the study of disparate streams of Confucian philosophy took place in academies and coterie across Japan, many of them patronized by the shogun and daimyo, who

undergirded their authority with Confucian ideas and encouraged their samurai to cultivate Confucian learning. For most of the population, a simple catechism of Confucian virtue was conveyed in the didactically rich edicts issued by the regime, the basic Chinese texts used for elementary schooling, and the immense advice literature generated by commercial publishers.²² Filial piety toward family elders came first in all cases. Loyalty and obedience to superiors, fidelity to duty, and respect for ancestors were complementary seconds. This catechism, resonant throughout the sources of the period, undoubtedly helped sustain the *ie*. Consider, though, that it prescribed no ideal family structure. Nor was it backed by anything like a Confucian establishment that made family law or authorized family decisions.

Third, and as a consequence of limited oversight by state or religious institutions, *commoners formed their families with a fair latitude for choice*. Their turn to the *ie* could not have been strictly voluntary, of course, for no social practice is free of the force of communal, no less than individual, interests. It is precisely here that we find the lure of family history in early modern Japan. Because institutional dictates alone cannot explain the spread of the *ie* across status boundaries, we must look to those communal and individual interests as critical drivers of change. The relationship between family form and changing social pressures is often oblique when state and church decree the norms, more direct when norms are shaped substantially by the actors. The challenge for historians lies in connecting the newly ascendant form of the stem family or *ie* to the specific social and political pressures that encouraged the shift.

WHY THE *IE*?

At the heart of the challenge is the recalcitrance of our sources about motivation: they are as emphatic about the importance of the *ie* as they are elusive about the reasons for forming and maintaining it. In a kind of tautology, the sources invoke the perpetuation of the family as the prime value of a stem succession system designed to achieve exactly that. We doubt that residents of early modern Japan ever announced themselves as members of ancestor-venerating stem families or bothered to explain why they were; *ie* membership came to be simply understood as normal and right. But for us, just why perpetuation of the stem family became more necessary or desirable than alternative values looms as a key question. After all, the costs of *ie* formation were not minor: the choice entailed the disinheritance and separation from the household of offspring other than the succeeding head, and it yoked that head to punishing responsibilities for the lineage's prosperity, reputation, survival, and ancestral devotions. The imposition on his wife of corresponding responsibilities, the abrasion of sibling and parental sentiment, the subordination of the self to the collective—many such concerns unfolded from the stem choice. Insofar as the goal of persistence prevailed over the claims of

blood, moreover, natal kin stood to be replaced—in commoner as well as samurai houses—by adoptees favored to ensure it. Yet whatever the costs, the texts of the time take the *ie* as so self-evident a good, so essential a frame for human association, that justification appears superfluous. Thus, for example, the copious regulations of the Mitsui financial house exhort obedience based solely on the authority of the founder and the need to sustain his *ie* “eternally, throughout the generations of children and grandchildren.”²³

To be sure, any practice that gains wide acceptance must inspire conformity for many reasons, some of them complementary, others not. And, indeed, when we press our sources for the recurrent concerns that inform us about the goals of stem family formation, the disclosures lead in disparate directions, some of them parallel, others not. One concern found in the documents of commoner notables, urban and rural alike, centers on reputation, a notion that combines the honor of a name with its successful transmission from one bearer to the next.²⁴ The samurai model of prestige was certainly influential here, perhaps especially for wealthy merchants and craftspeople who had close ancestors, or close patrons, in the military ranks. But commoners could also look to pre-Tokugawa houses in the arts, for example, and, increasingly, to one another. Formerly elite practices of lineal promotion spread among social climbers who projected the past sources of contemporary dignity in genealogies and household histories. They commissioned portraits of founders and mortuary monuments for successive heads; they insisted on fastidious maintenance of their legacies in codes of conduct for descendants. Even across the humbler spectrum, commoners embraced the simple customs that marked generational continuity. They began to transfer to heirs both personal names and the equivalent of surnames; they fashioned ceremonies to welcome brides and mourn the dead. Alive in all such practices was a conflation of reputable standing with continuity over time.

Diverse texts and artifacts—temple death registers, ledgers of memorial donations, ancestral tablets, tombstones—attest to another, specifically religious concern motivating stem family formation. Distributed in different regions across Japan, the evidence suggests the penetration, from the late seventeenth century, of the rites of ancestral veneration associated with funerary Buddhism. The development depended in part on mercenary marketing by temples, which registered commoners as (non-Christian) adherents in exchange for the donations that came to feature services for the dead. It depended, too, on a promise: that those services would convert the threatening spirit of a deceased antecedent into an ancestral deity.²⁵ The conditions? The rites had to be sponsored by the descendants of the deceased, under the supervision of Buddhist priests, for as long as thirty-three years. While binding the living to the dead, belief in such ritual efficacy also bound the living to unborn successors (who would execute the rites on their own behalf). Belief all but demanded, in consequence, the formation of stem families that, unlike nuclear or compound families, might enforce the transgenerational

discipline required for effectively limitless ritual regimes.²⁶ Once great-grandparents and then grandparents achieved transcendence, parents (and then their successors) would await devotions. The motive here for stem formation extended, when biology disappointed, to ready reliance on adoption as well. If imperiled by either infertility or lack of confidence in offspring, the ritual fidelity owed first to the distant dead and, ultimately, to the incumbent head required the selection of a competent adoptee. Insofar as ancestral veneration loomed large for the *ie*, the purity of the bloodline mattered less than reliable religious service by the heir.

If samurai and commoner alike saw opportunities in stem succession to consolidate spiritual and symbolic assets, the consolidation of material capital was fundamental. Germane here is the coincidence between majority conversion to the *ie* model and increasing economic challenge. On the agrarian front, the aggressive expansion of farmland during the seventeenth century slowed significantly in many areas during the eighteenth, as Japan approached a ceiling on the reclamation possible without modern technology. Ever more intensive agriculture, focused on small households, replaced the once-extensive growth in arable that could support multiple offspring. Demographic adjustment followed: Japan's population had grown by a third or more during the seventeenth century but leveled off in the eighteenth as agrarian households variously matched size to resources and privileged well-being over numbers.²⁷ The concentration of family assets in a single heir through stem succession appears to have been a coordinated response to the threat of asset depletion—one perhaps influenced by the laws against partible inheritance issued by officials alarmed by the population swell but more convincingly mandated by the empirical reality of limited arable land.²⁸

On the urban front, the competition for labor in a time of demographic leveling was compounded by the unpredictability of the regime. A fiscally troubled shogunate rattled the market by turning to forced and then canceled loans, price-fixing, currency devaluations and revaluations, fees imposed on expanding numbers of trade associations, and the multiplying sumptuary laws battering high-end businesses. Major traders reacted to this volatility with household precepts that insist, in general, on a bunker mentality and, in particular, on the fortification of the *ie* as the surest guardian of wealth. Their documents address, zealously, the need to conserve capital, avoid risk, hew to proven paths, enforce frugality, educate heirs, improve management, defer to authorities, and, always and everywhere, avoid distractions. Although the voices of lesser traders are harder to detect, their conduct conforms to a pattern of consolidation in a time of financial trial.

Another matter germane to the financial motives for stem family formation concerns the absence of legal guarantees in early modern Japan for property, contracts, credit, and judicial access.²⁹ Even as the commercial economy moved substantial assets to commoner entrepreneurs in villages as well as cities, neither the shogun nor the daimyo ensured protection of those assets or the complex transactions a viable market requires. In this vacuum of legal security, commoners

devised among themselves an arsenal of self-defense. Written agreements accompanied most business operations—including employment, indenture, property sales and rentals, credit, loans, and partnerships. And those agreements concluded with the ever more elaborate verification conveyed by oaths, seals, witnesses, and guarantors. Still, the best-attested agreement is perilous without judicial recourse for injury, which no commoner was assured. A critical form of insurance under such circumstances was the backing, and the stability, of the *ie*. Insofar as the ascendants and descendants of a continuing lineage were implicit cosignatories when an incumbent head put the family seal on a document, the house became the instrument of commercial trust. This development reminds us with particular clarity that the *ie* was an enterprise.

The centrality of enterprise to the spread of the *ie* is especially stark in houses whose members assumed custody—variously as performers, craftspeople, and teachers—over numerous artistic disciplines (broadly defined). Represented in this volume by the Hirata family of scholars, the Raku family of potters, and the Sen family of tea masters,³⁰ these houses figured in the thousands at elite levels (and in geometrically larger numbers at lower levels) in fields as diverse as fencing, football, painting, poetry, music, carpentry, gardening, printing, stone carving, and cookery. Their staffs were rarely large. But their income from clients and students depended on both the expertise and the consistency in transmission promised by the name of a reputable *ie* and embodied in the incumbent head. Some of these houses had old roots. All drew on the association between superior knowledge and esoteric initiation long ascendant in domains such as poetry, drama, and calligraphy. They arose in remarkable numbers, however, to exploit the consumer marketplace of Tokugawa cities. Such *ie* pushed fidelity in practice and replication of product as the guarantors of value. Here, again, the *ie* became an instrument of commercial trust. But here, too, the *ie* remained so fused with enterprise that its institutional character—and the primacy of capable leadership—had to prevail over the immediate interests, and succession, of kin.³¹

In agrarian villages, too, the family as enterprise figured significantly in social definition and management. The basic unit of taxation throughout village society, it was also the unit of communal membership, administration, and ceremonial participation. So tightly was it knitted into activities ranging from water control to harvest festivals that village elders urgently sought successors to the headship of declining houses rather than accept extinction as a matter of course. Indeed, they kept failed *ie* on their books in the hope of filling vacant headships with volunteers from inside or outside the community. The personal considerations here were peripheral. The *ie* was the instrument of village rule.

Finally, we must take account of what we might call the *ie* consciousness (as distinct from *ie* practice) that spread through print culture. One conduit was an immense body of didactic literature, from primers to household encyclopedias, that warned readers against the many hazards to family well-being even as

it depicted the successful *ie* as the essential source of felicity (*saiwai*, *shiwase*, *kokoro yasuku*).³² Another conduit was contemporary drama and fiction, which typically centered on those hazards to identify the family as the locus of pain and conflict. Happy endings occurred on occasion. We also find comedic riffs on personal failing (avarice, vanity, fecklessness) that cheerfully blame the pain on protagonists who deserve it. Nonetheless, the unhappiness featured in popular scripts and stories belonged not to some natural order but to a world gone wrong, usually an *ie* gone wrong. Dramatists, for example, based some of their most sensational plays on the quarrels over succession that violently splintered daimyo houses. They based some of their most wrenching plays on the murder-suicides of lovers unable to reconcile desire with family obligations. For insatiable consumers of prose fiction, writers produced equally melodramatic tales about houses ruined by dissolute heads, wayward heirs, estranged couples, and the angry ghosts of wronged spouses. The point was that the *ie* was imperiled on many fronts. Yet the moral was that peril needed to be faced and wrong needed to be righted. Failure ensured tragedy. Resourceful intercession promised the contentment achievable through familial integrity. Intercession sometimes involved the shocking sacrifice of elders and parents and children who, bound as much by affection as virtue, risked (and lost) their lives to save relatives in times of hardship (poverty, debt, illness, famine, disaster, crime, and the like). The limit cases appeared in stories of revenge, which dominated the fiction market for a time, as rival authors portrayed children avenging murdered parents (in ever more fantastic circumstances) to recover the honor and security of the house. All in all, commercial drama and fiction insisted, family life was hard life. But like the pedagogical literature, contemporary drama and fiction enforced a common message: the *ie* deserved sacrifice because fulfillment was unachievable outside it.³³

OUR ESSAYS

The foregoing discussion of what the early modern Japanese *ie* was, why it was formed, and how it spread situates the essays that follow. We divide the chapters into two parts, mindful that distinctions are imperfect and readers will navigate the collection independently. The essays in part 1, “Norms: Stem Structures and Practices,” plot—from generally high vantages—the paths taken by early modern families to constitute and perpetuate themselves as *ie*. David Spafford explores the medieval origins of stem succession in warrior houses, emphasizing not just the emergence of unigeniture but the fusion in the *ie* of kin with nonkin, membership with service, kindred filiality with nonkindred loyalty, and conjugal with natal ties of belonging. Marcia Yonemoto looks at succession practices within an early modern warrior elite that, much more so than its ruling-class counterparts in East Asia, used various forms of adoption to perpetuate and extend family-based control over resources and power.³⁴ Fabian Drixler charts the emergence of the stem

family as the dominant form of social organization among commoners in the late seventeenth century and posits the rise of ancestor veneration as the main impetus for stem family perpetuation. Morgan Pitelka shows how leading martial houses, as well as elite merchant and artisanal houses such as the Sen and the Raku, used the collection of valuable material objects to maintain and expand family legacies. And Maren Ehlers focuses on how outcaste groups (*hinin*) in urban and rural areas organized themselves into *ie* to transmit hereditary rights to begging turfs and other official duties and privileges, even while such self-identification made them targets for exclusion and discrimination. It bears emphasis that these essays do not propose a typology or ideal structure for the *ie*; rather, they offer different visions of the choices families made in different contexts to consolidate capital and influence.

If the essays in part 1 tell stories of integration and consolidation—offering broad-based examples of opting *into* the *ie*—the essays in part 2, “Case Studies: Stem Adaptations and Threats,” narrow the focus to closer studies of individual family histories. Each involves trouble; each also involves resourceful coping with trouble to sustain the *ie*.³⁵ Three of the chapters focus on the internal dynamics of domestic life disclosed vividly (if always through the lens of self-interest) in intensely personal documents. Luke Roberts investigates the ambiguous circumstances surrounding the murder of the lover of a samurai wife. Amy Stanley focuses on the escape of a rebellious temple daughter to a new life in Edo. And Anne Walthall examines the unconventional family of the esteemed nativist scholar Hirata Atsutane. All of these *ie* are complex: each maintained its integrity by accommodating human commotion and unpredictable circumstances. Intense feeling runs rife throughout the cases as impulsive individuals, acting on desire, sow confusion in their households. Some misbehavior is as lurid as anything on the stage; most belongs to quieter rebellion and self-indulgence. It occasions, nonetheless, the jealousy, divided loyalties, shame, and alienation that compound the routine trials of guaranteeing succession and protecting resources. Stress bends all families into varied shapes, of course. The *ie* was no exception. What we find in these three instances is bending in the service of the *ie*’s reputation, survival, and internal coherence. Dissolution was not an option. The preservation of familial integrity consumed the prime players in each case.³⁶

The final essays by Mary Elizabeth Berry and David Atherton integrate fictional portrayals of the family (in Berry’s case a popular stage play; in Atherton’s, mass-market novels) with contemporaneous documentation of particular family experiences. Berry relates the stage play to the archive of the megamerchant house of Mitsui; Atherton connects the popular novels to a shogunal compilation of exemplary biographies of family-saving heroes. Again, trouble dominates both the documentary and the fictional sources. The former direct successors to paths of prevention and escape accessed by familial vigilance and virtue; the latter depict the family’s disintegration in excruciating extremity, and its reconstitution as the restoration of a natural order.

By way of conclusion, we alert readers to several key themes in the essays that follow.

(1) The families we survey were resilient and flexible: they display a striking tolerance for trouble, belying both the moralism of the pedagogues and the melodrama of the storytellers. Their households managed to provide for runaway daughters, absorb concubines and other outsiders, and survive scandal. And in such persistence they remind us that families are, finally, voluntary and variable alliances of people who, even within rule-ridden systems, accord some freedom to one another.

(2) But these families also required systemic safety nets. Uniquely under threat because of the imperative of survival and the challenge of succession, the *ie* was protected most obviously by the widespread acceptance of (and reliance on) adoption. The evidence for licensed prostitution and concubinage in early modern Japan suggests, too, an acceptance of extramarital pleasure for men in a social order of arranged marriage focused on the family enterprise and reputation.³⁷ The ease of divorce and remarriage, however, amplifies the picture to suggest some latitude for women as well. Accord in marital unions (routinely emphasized in family codes) was too important to preclude escape and new choices when accord dissolved. The expectation of satisfaction for couples who led their *ie*—and the possibility of pleasure in each other—appears indispensable to the logic of divorce.

(3) A corollary, emphasized in many of our essays, is that women mattered, in and outside the family: they exercised considerable influence as daughters, wives, and mothers but also as workers, record keepers, mediators, and temporary or *de facto* heads of household. Focusing on the family as a primary unit of social organization reveals how gender roles that have often been seen as prescribed or static could also be dynamic and self-fashioned.³⁸

(4) Families and households varied across space, time, and social status. In the spatial register, some of our essays focus on urban centers (Berry, Pitelka); most bridge the distance between province and city (Atherton, Ehlers, Spafford, Stanley, Walthall, Yonemoto); several focus on localities far afield from urban centers (Drixler, Roberts).

In the temporal register, some essays engage the *longue durée* (Drixler, Ehlers, Yonemoto); most engage narrower periods (for Spafford the late medieval period, for Pitelka the seventeenth century, for Berry the turn of the eighteenth century, for Atherton the turn of the nineteenth century, for Walthall, Roberts, and Stanley the nineteenth century).

In the status register, some essays deal mainly with the martial elite (Roberts, Spafford, Yonemoto); one essay deals with outcastes (Ehlers); another with the agrarian population (Drixler); another with merchants (Berry); another with the household of a Buddhist priest (Stanley); and another with a scholarly house of samurai status (Walthall). Pitelka addresses both the martial elite and prestigious urban traders in goods and services. Atherton addresses humble players across the status spectrum.

Such juxtapositions across spatial, temporal, and status frames of analysis reveal variations in family structure even as they expose those processes of *ie*

maintenance—notably concerning succession—that became common, if not uniform, among households otherwise quite disparate.

Our deeply different stories are linked by the structural constraints that, always modulated by human and systemic allowances for deviation, make the early modern *ie* in Japan a site for collective inquiry.

NOTES

1. In the interests of readability, the endnotes for this introduction cite only selectively the voluminous literature in English and Japanese that, line by line, guides our thinking. To facilitate further bibliographic exploration, see the appendix, which contains suggestions for further reading.

2. As the endnotes to the following chapters attest, each author's research relies on the exceptional record keeping of both the governing regime and the many individual households that prodigiously cached everything from letters to ledgers to testaments in family storehouses.

3. The essays in this collection focus on the Japanese stem family or *ie*. We discuss the debates over terminology, structure, and development of the stem family or *ie* later in this introduction.

4. Those well acquainted with the historical narrative may choose to skip ahead to the next section.

5. Revisionist views of Tokugawa foreign relations, emphasizing regulation of foreign relations over isolation, have dominated the historiography since the 1970s. For overviews in English, see Tashiro and Videen 1982, Toby 1984, and Hellyer 2010; on Tokugawa–Chosŏn Korea relations, see Kang 1997 and J. Lewis 2003; on Tokugawa–Dutch relations, see Clulow 2013; on Tokugawa expansion into northeastern (Ezo) and southwestern (Ryūkyū) borderlands, see, respectively, Walker 2006 and Smits 1999.

6. See McClain, Merriman, and Ugawa 1994; McClain and Wakita, 1999; Fiévé and Waley, 2003.

7. A number of the essays in this volume, particularly those by Amy Stanley and Anne Walthall, introduce a variety of actors (servants and temporary household residents, for example) who do not fit into the *ie* model. And few of the subjects of David Atherton's essay are identified specifically as members of stem households.

8. For further reading on the definition and structure of the *ie*, see the appendix.

9. For further reading on the stem family and the *ie*, and on comparative frameworks for understanding stem families versus *ie*, see the appendix.

10. See the essay by Fabian Drixler in this volume.

11. See the essay by David Spafford in this volume.

12. Mass 1989; Tonomura 1990.

13. Percentages of adoptees varied significantly by time period, region, and status; see the essays by Marcia Yonemoto and Anne Walthall in this volume.

14. See the essay by Maren Ehlers in this volume.

15. Herman Ooms (1996) sees the penetration of shogunal rule at the local level in starker terms, as a "colonial" regime focused on conquest, and emphasizes the conflict inherent in the "juridical sphere" of the Tokugawa village.

16. See Cornell and Hayami 1986.

17. Extramarital liaisons by wives threatened lineal continuity and thus were policed strictly by community members and officials alike. See the essay by Luke Roberts in this volume.

18. See Bodart-Bailey 1985 and 2006; Drixler 2013 and 2015.

19. See Drixler 2013, pp. 61–62, 305n5, 305n7.

20. Never a universal polity with direct relationships to the governed, the regime of shogun and daimyo depended on "nested containers" of subordinates who were administered by immediate

(typically local) superiors; for a more fully developed spatiotemporal analysis of the household as one such “container,” albeit in the quite different context of early China, see M. Lewis 2006.

21. See the essay by Fabian Drixler in this volume; see also Hur 2007.
 22. On this literature, see Berry 2006; Kornicki 2000; and Rubinger 2007.
 23. See the essay by Mary Elizabeth Berry in this volume.
 24. See essays by Morgan Pitelka, David Spafford, Amy Stanley, and Anne Walthall in this volume.
- For a recent study of the influence of Confucian thought in Japan, see Paramore 2016.
25. See Hur 2007.
 26. See the essay by Fabian Drixler in this volume.
 27. The locus classicus for the preceding arguments, in English, may be found in Smith 1959 and 1977.
 28. Fabian Drixler argues that increased opportunity for wage work without long periods of indenture was a major factor in falling fertility (and resulting population stability) around 1700; see Drixler 2013, pp. 83–84. On declining indentures, see also Ramseyer 1995.
 29. See the essay by Berry in this volume for discussion of these matters in the merchant context. For surveys of Tokugawa law, see Hiramatsu 1981 and Hirai 1992.
 30. See the essays by Morgan Pitelka and Anne Walthall in this volume.
 31. We find another example of *ie* penetration in the leadership of Buddhist temples, which administered large, often wealthy establishments from generation to generation. See the essay by Amy Stanley in this volume.
 32. Although largely bypassed in the scholarship, what we might call happiness figured throughout the illustrations, sample letters, and vocabulary lists of published instructional texts, especially for women.
 33. See the essay by David Atherton in this volume.
 34. Also note, in the essay by Anne Walthall, the important role of temporary adoption.
 35. Our emphasis on the precarity of stem families echoes an important theme in Pratt 1999.
 36. Two studies in English that also discuss inclusion and exclusion from early modern families are Gary Leupp’s study of urban lower-class tenement dwellers (Leupp 1992) and Joyce Lebra’s article on the contested familial legacy of a woman head of a saké-brewing concern (Lebra 1991).
 37. See Lindsey 2007 and Stanley 2012.
 38. On women’s roles as discursive ideals as well as lived experiences, see Yonemoto 2016.

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