

## Imagined Communities of the Living and the Dead

### *The Spread of the Ancestor-Venerating Stem Family in Tokugawa Japan*

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In 1901 the living presence of dead ancestors could seem as quintessentially Japanese as shrine gates and cherry blossoms. Lafcadio Hearn, that conjurer of old Japan for an Anglophone readership, made it the theme of one of his short stories that year, “The Case of O-Dai”:

O-Dai pushed aside the lamplet and the incense-cup and the water vessel on the Buddha shelf, and opened the little shrine before which they had been placed. Within were the *ihai*, the mortuary tablets of her people . . . [and a] scroll, inscribed with the spirit-names of many ancestors. Before that shrine, from her infancy, O-Dai had been wont to pray. The tablets and the scroll signified more to her faith in former time—very much more—than remembrance of a father’s affection and a mother’s caress; . . . those objects signified the actual viewless presence of the lost. . . . All this O-Dai ought to have known and remembered. Maybe she did; for she wept as she took the tablets and the scroll out of the shrine, and dropped them from a window into the river below.<sup>1</sup>

The young woman discarded the totems of ancestor worship at the instigation of two English missionaries. Up to this moment, her neighbors had humored her new religion. Now Hearn ventriloquized their “universal feelings” as follows:

Human society, in this most eastern East, has been held together from immemorial time by virtue of that cult which exacts the gratitude of the present to the past, the reverence of the living for the dead, the affection of the descendant for the ancestor. . . .

To the spirit of the father who begot her, to the spirit of the mother who bore her, O-Dai has refused the shadow of a roof, and the vapor of food, and the offering of water. Even so to her shall be denied the shelter of a roof, and the gift of food, and the cup of refreshment. And even as she cast out the dead, the living shall cast her out.<sup>2</sup>

Although Hearn added and subtracted some details, he based the outline of O-Dai's story on his understanding of actual events that transpired in Matsue sometime in the 1880s.<sup>3</sup> He may also have been broadly correct that, in the mid-Meiji period, the social consensus expected descendants to care for their ancestors' spirits as a matter of course.<sup>4</sup> Yet Hearn was mistaken in one respect: the household imagined as a community of the living and their dead ancestors was not a timeless feature of Japanese society, nor even a particularly ancient one.

The only household form that is potentially immortal, and can thus grow into a tight-knit transgenerational community of the kind that O-Dai violated, is the stem family. In stem families, the heir marries and remains with his or her parents; all other children move out upon reaching adulthood. As parents retire or die and children take their places, the household never has more than one married couple per generation. No other household form can continue indefinitely.<sup>5</sup> Nuclear families dissolve once the children move out to light hearths of their own. Joint families, in which several married children stay with their parents, eventually grow into lineages, too large to function as households.

Stem families have existed in many times and places.<sup>6</sup> Their ability to replicate themselves continuously made them ideal for protecting material assets and social capital. Presumably for this reason, the stem family was the default for elite samurai by the fourteenth century.<sup>7</sup> For non-elite groups in Japan, the chronology is altogether different. Among Japanese commoners, the stem family became the culturally dominant household form only after 1600. It also took on a highly specific form that one of its foremost students, Ōtō Osamu, has defined as "an institutional mechanism that has its own name (*kamei*), occupation (*kagyō*), and property (*kazai*), oriented toward perpetuating itself indefinitely across generations with ancestor veneration as its spiritual pillar."<sup>8</sup>

The diffusion of the stem family to commoner society must rank among the great transformations of the Tokugawa period. Here, I begin to document the timing and sequence of this transformation, as well as something of its geography. I am unable to narrow all uncertainties. My evidence is extensive for eastern Honshu but very limited in some other regions; even when sources are abundant, they often permit a range of interpretations. We can nonetheless trace the gradual strengthening of the ancestor-venerating stem family in a variety of media: in patterns of co-residence as recorded in the registers of religious surveillance; in the practices of Funerary Buddhism; and in expressions of a wish for continuity, such as names passed from father to son and heirs adopted to lead the family into a new generation.

Despite its limitations, the evidence presented here is consistent with my three main arguments, each of which is fleshed out in its own section. First, in the late seventeenth century, the stem family became the setting in which most commoners in some Japanese regions spent at least a part of their lives (section 1, “The Living”). Second, by the mid-Tokugawa period, the stem family was at once a unit of production and consumption and an imagined community of the living and the dead (section 2, “The Dead”). These two aspects of the stem family may have reinforced each other, but proving causal links lies beyond the purview of this chapter. What can be said with confidence is that stem families were structurally amenable to the services Funerary Buddhism had to offer. In time, the very attraction of those services may have moved increasing numbers of families to form stem lines. Third, the importance of the stem family grew continually in the course of the Tokugawa period (section 3, “The *Ie* Perpetuated and Unified”). The growth was in one sense faster in the late seventeenth century than in the early nineteenth, when many indicators had reached saturation levels. However, as family altars became crowded with dead yet present ancestors, the weight of obligation on the living probably continued to grow in the late Tokugawa period. So did devotion to this precious social organism that promised a kind of immortality to its members. This would at least explain why a variety of indicators for identification with the stem family and a concern for its perpetuation point upward throughout the late Tokugawa period.

## THE LIVING

### *Unknowns of the Sixteenth Century*

From the lost tapestry of commoner family structures in the sixteenth century, only a few motes of lint have come down to us. In these small samples from the Kansai (Tanba, Izumi, and Ōmi) and central Japan (Kai), we observe a transition to using family surnames (*myōji*) instead of lineage names (*ujina*), suggesting a move away from earlier arrangements in which nuclear households formed and dissolved within larger lineage communities.<sup>9</sup> Wives, who had once kept their separate property and original family names, now typically shared both with their husband.<sup>10</sup> There are also indications of a concern with maintaining the household as a goal in itself; for example, when the household of a condemned criminal was held in trust until his heir was old enough to head it. William Wayne Farris concludes from such evidence that “in essence, the general outline of the Tokugawa-period stem household seems to have been in existence among the peasantry by 1500 in the Kinai and perhaps by the mid-1500s in central and western Japan.”<sup>11</sup> The wording is admirably judicious, because the phrase “in existence” makes no commitment as to whether this was the cultural mainstream or the practice of a few exceptional pioneers. The use of surnames and a concern with household

continuity cannot tell us whether people actually lived in stem households, let alone how they might have imagined their dead ancestors. In addition, a few settlements cannot stand in for large swaths of Japan, especially when we consider that the sample may be biased: communities more concerned with household continuity may have been more likely to create and preserve sources that speak to household arrangements of any kind.

Caution must therefore temper any conclusion about the penetration of the stem system before the Tokugawa period. We know that other household models remained common enough to provoke Toyotomi Hideyoshi, in 1594, to forbid farming families with separate incomes to live under the same roof.<sup>12</sup> And we know that terminology is slippery: in the earliest population registers, from the 1600s to the 1630s in Kyushu, the term *ie* sometimes signifies “building” rather than “family.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, our small samples from the Kansai and Kai cannot be assumed to represent the whole archipelago. The regional diversity in household forms during later centuries warns against projecting uniform conditions earlier.

#### *Roofs and Umbrellas: The Household of the Registers*

By the mid-seventeenth century, a new type of source captures something of the patterns of co-residence in commoner society: population registers, variously entitled “register of religious inspection” (*shūmon aratamechō* and similar names) and “register of population inspection” (with titles such as *ninbetsu aratamechō* and *ninzū aratamechō*). Every village was ordered to compile such lists, and even from this early period, they survive in some numbers—usually in the fair copy the headman kept after he submitted the original to the authorities. Such documents group individual villagers into households and usually also state their ages and roles within the household—head, wife, mother, cousin, and so on. As such, they are a fabulous, and abundant, source for reconstructing the residential patterns of the population. Yet the relationship between record and reality is inevitably less straightforward than first meets the eye.

In particular, the registers invite questions as to what the household units recorded there actually represent. A 1670s directive on enforcing population registration specified that commoners should be recorded “building by building,” suggesting that individuals were herded into households according to the house they occupied—and also that other alternatives could be imagined.<sup>14</sup> Although the close linguistic association between house and household in Japanese may reconcile us to this privileging of the roof as the basic unit of society,<sup>15</sup> the organization of resources and social obligations—land rights, labor burdens, tax and service duties, the sharing of food and other goods—did not necessarily respect the walls of individual buildings.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps for this reason, some people gave different answers about how far their household extended, depending on who was asking.

Cadastral surveys, which assigned landholdings and tax obligations, do not always agree with population registers in their reporting of household units.<sup>17</sup> Disagreements also sometimes surface in finer-grained social surveys. In 1808, a village south of Nara tried to make its request for lower taxes more persuasive by adding a detailed record of the income and expenses of each household. The precision is impressive, with notations like “food for three and a half people.” In the economic ties the document describes, the membership of the households often differs from that stated in the population register for the same village.<sup>18</sup> One way to understand this discrepancy is to consider that the population registers were designed to attach individuals to a household legally, not to define who ate where. Law and economics may have coincided in many cases, but not in all.

Population registers were instruments of control, not of nuanced description. As such, they were never designed to render a full account of the many-layered bonds of kinship, interdependence, and solidarity that are among the most meaningful aspects of household life. Nonetheless, even the greatly simplified versions of reality we see in their pages sometimes define households in ways that challenge taxonomists.

Take, for example, a compound in the village of Honma in Shinano, recorded in 1663.<sup>19</sup> It consisted of a main house, a formal tatami residence, a storehouse, and two smaller dwellings. The headman of Honma resided in the big house with his wife and children. In one of the humbler *soeya* (side building, also the term for a dependent), his brother’s widow dwelt with hers. In the second *soeya*, there lived a fifty-five-year-old man and his nuclear family, whose kinship ties with the headman remain unstated. Seven other individuals are listed as servants. That three of them were recorded as belonging to the widowed sister-in-law suggests that she managed her affairs with a degree of independence.<sup>20</sup> The landholdings, meanwhile, were stated for the compound as a whole. All this suggests that the three residential groups did not share all consumption and production, but nonetheless retained a degree of interdependence. Should we then classify them as three nuclear families, one joint family, or—if we exclude the residential group without clear kinship ties to the other two—as one joint and one nuclear family?

Hanging the distinction on the bonds among kin has problems of its own, since population registers do not always record them across subhouseholds. In the same document from Honma, the compound of one Magouemon appears with four separate houses, occupied by four nuclear families. Three of these buildings are designated as *soeya*, subsidiary buildings. From the register alone, one might conclude that the three *soeya* families were all servants of Magouemon. But other documents in the village reveal them to be two cousins and a younger brother.<sup>21</sup> Should we therefore classify the compound as one sprawling joint family?

It seems a better solution to respect the categories of our sources by creating a separate term for compounds with clearly delineated subunits: an umbrella household (see table 3.1). Honma’s register is somewhat unusual in its attention to architectural detail. Far more commonly, a simple layout distinction, such as

TABLE 3.1. The taxonomy of households used in this chapter

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Nuclear family: one and only one married couple or combination of a parent and his or her children. No married lateral kin (brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins).
Stem family: one and only one married couple or parent per generation, with at least two such generations present. No married lateral kin.
Joint family: at least two married couples or parents in the same generation.
Solitary: one-person household.
Other: a residual category, which includes nonkin households (for example, in temples) and <i>frerêches</i> (unmarried siblings sharing a household).
Each of these five household types can either be independent or part of an umbrella household.

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an indentation, signals that we are dealing with an umbrella household.<sup>22</sup> At one extreme, such compounds may have functioned as joint families; at the other, as clusters of families that acted as little more than neighbors. In between lie infinite gradations, but all had enough of a separate corporate identity to prompt the headman to try to acknowledge it in the layout of his listing.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Structure versus Process*

With the caveats just spelled out, the registers tell us what the structure of households was at the moment the headman put brush to paper. Useful as this is, they do not tell us how the members understood the rules of that household and what aspirations they nurtured for its future. This is a problem, because the stem *ie* discussed in this chapter is a process and a narrative rather than a thing.<sup>24</sup> It is a son's decision to bring a wife to live with him and his parents, and the younger couple's long-term plan to keep one and only one married child living under their roof. Unfortunately, my data set can capture such decisions only in the form of past events that are implied in present structures.<sup>25</sup> A snapshot of a household operating by stem rules is not always obvious as such: if the head's father died before his son married, the stem family looks like a nuclear family. This nuclear phase is in fact quite common for stem families. Even in a snapshot of a society in which every household followed stem family rules, we would expect to see a sizable fraction of households in a nuclear configuration.

Studying Tokugawa-period households through population registers, then, is like reviewing a color movie through a series of black-and-white stills. As long as we are aware of their limitations and idiosyncrasies, they are an immensely valuable source on the types of households in which the commoner population of Tokugawa Japan lived.

#### *The Rise of Stem Co-residence in Eastern Honshu*

With these qualifications acknowledged, it is high time to turn to the data. This subsection analyzes about 3,300 registers from some 1,000 villages in

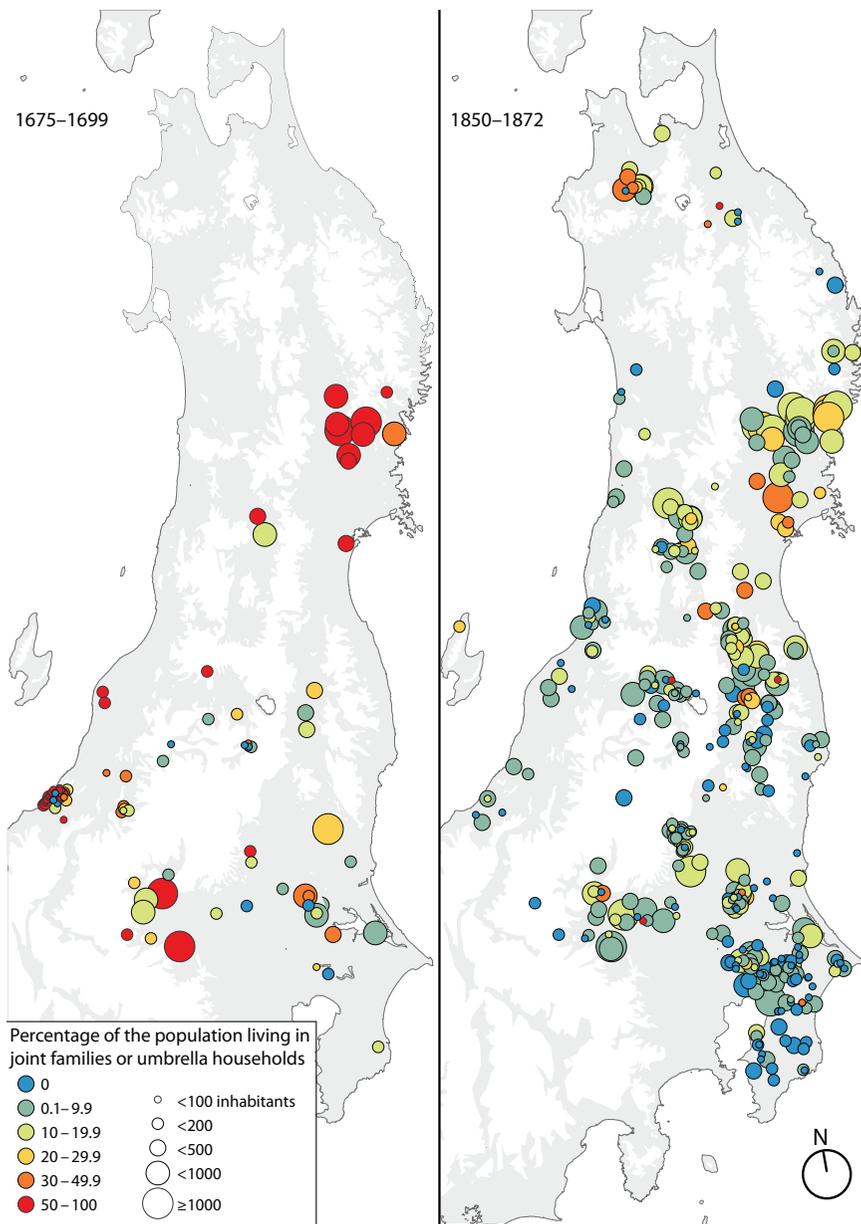


FIGURE 3.1. Joint families and umbrella households in the villages of eastern Honshu, 1675-1699 and 1850-1872

SOURCES AND METHOD: Villages with multiple registers in a quarter century have been averaged and appear only once on each map. For a list of the villages, see Drixler 2013, 261-75.

the eastern third of Honshu. Written between 1650 and 1872, their pages list about 780,000 individuals in about 150,000 households. From this library, two major observations emerge: one, eastern Honshu was diverse in its household culture; and two, within that enduring diversity, joint families and umbrella households receded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as stem families advanced.

I once thought of demographic differences between neighboring villages as statistical noise, to be fused into the emergent melodies of ever-larger samples. But increasingly I have come to see that diversity itself as an important finding. Neighboring villages might disagree about the wisdom and virtue of infanticide;<sup>26</sup> over whether one family could support multiple temples;<sup>27</sup> and over whether retired household heads should move to a separate dwelling.<sup>28</sup> In famine, a few hour's walk could lead from a village in which half the population died to one that showed no anomalous spike in deaths that year.<sup>29</sup> So, too, with joint families and umbrella households (figure 3.1). To be sure, a trend toward greater homogeneity within and between regions unfolded from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. But it bears further thought that even in the last years of the shogunate, close to half the people of some villages still lived in joint families while in others, a short walk away, not one such family existed.

Figure 3.1 tells a second story: that joint families and umbrella households became much rarer over time. To visualize this trend in the context of all household types, it is useful to narrow the dataset to one region at a time. Figure 3.2 plots the changing proportions of different household types in Sendai. In this most populous domain of eastern Honshu, both joint families and umbrella households were particularly numerous in the seventeenth century and held out longer than elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

When we conduct the analysis at the level of regions (figure 3.3), a spatial and temporal narrative emerges that is not as easily visible in the village-level maps. The retreat of joint families and umbrella households occurred throughout eastern Honshu, but was staggered across space.<sup>31</sup> At the southern end of the area—in Hitachi and the Bōsō provinces—less than a quarter of the population lived in such contexts even in the earliest registers, while in Sendai and Echigo, that proportion exceeded four-fifths. The staggered retreat meant that eastern Honshu had a pronounced gradient from the southeast to the north and west in the seventeenth century, before it converged on a much narrower range in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

As joint families and umbrella households retreated, stem families advanced in an approximate mirror image (figure 3.4). It was only in the early nineteenth century that the majority of people in all parts of eastern Honshu lived in stem families at any given moment (apart from the far north, perhaps, for which my sample is too small to permit confident conclusions). Since the snapshots classify some fraction of families operating by stem rules as nuclear, the point at which

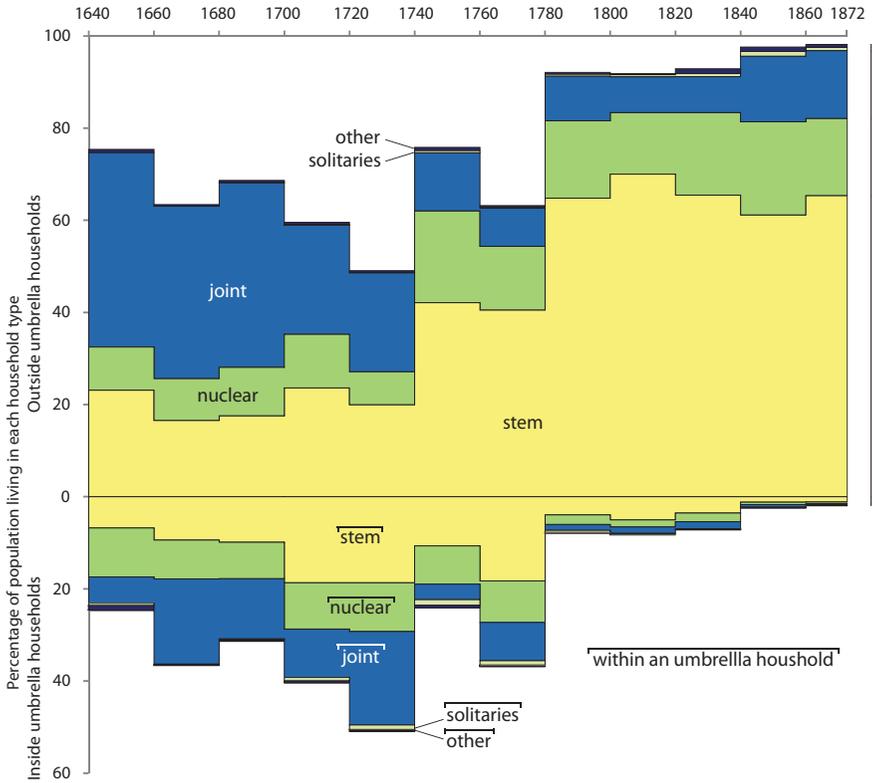


FIGURE 3.2. The changing balance of household types in Sendai domain, based on their structure in the year of observation  
 SOURCES AND METHOD: A sample of population registers from 118 villages containing c. 123,000 observations of individuals. Villages with multiple registers in a twenty-year period have been averaged and counted only once in that timespan. Sendai’s branch domain of Ichinoseki is included in this data. For a list of the villages, see Drixler 2013, 262–64.

every region of eastern Honshu had a stem majority may have been reached a few decades earlier.<sup>32</sup> Considering that scholars routinely treat stem families as the very definition of the Tokugawa-period Japanese *ie*, this is a surprising finding, which forces us to see the Tokugawa centuries as an age not of cultural stability in household patterns, but of continual evolution. As we shall see at the end of this chapter, this cannot easily be dismissed as the peculiarity of a backward eastern periphery; in 1880, the year of the first comprehensive statistics, it was eastern Honshu where stem families were more numerous than in any other Japanese macroregion of the same size. (See Figure 3.12, below.)

Eagle-eyed readers may already have noticed a complication to this otherwise neat narrative. In the last decades of the Tokugawa period, joint families (though

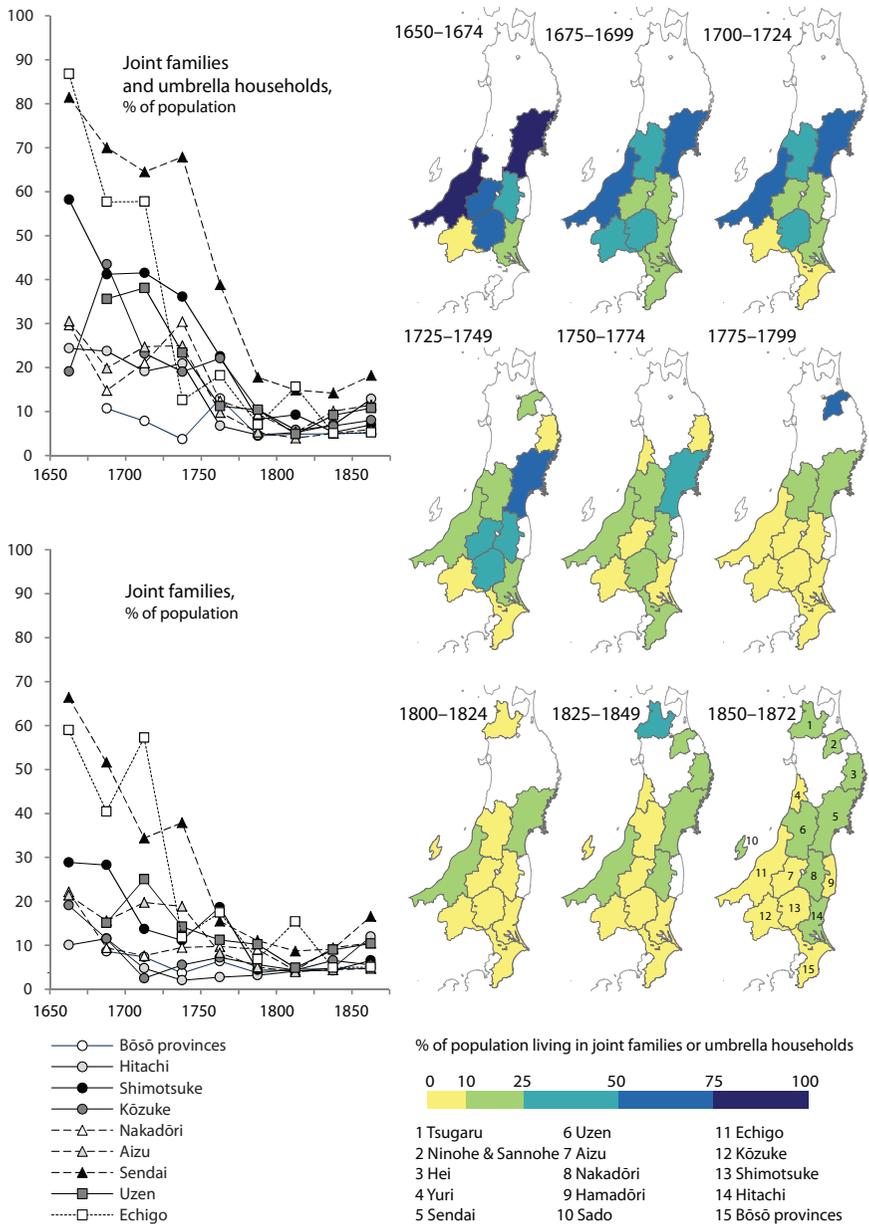


FIGURE 3.3. The decline of joint families and umbrella households in eastern Honshu  
 SOURCES AND METHOD: A sample of population registers from 1,040 villages. Villages with multiple registers in a quarter century have been averaged and counted only once. For a list of the villages, see Drixler 2013, 261–75.

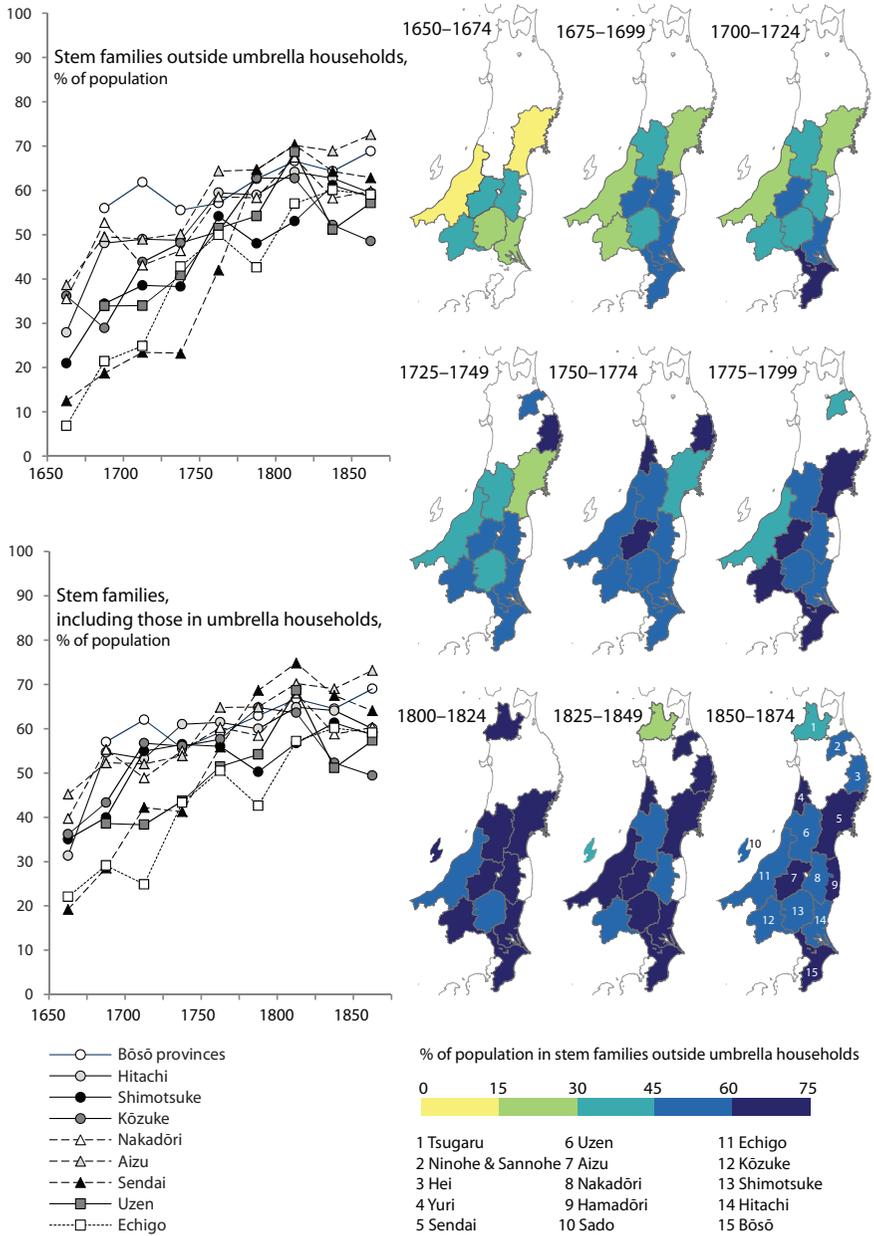


FIGURE 3.4. The rise of the stem family in eastern Honshu

SOURCES AND METHOD: A sample of population registers from 1,040 villages. Villages with multiple registers in a quarter century have been averaged and counted only once for each such period. For a list of the villages, see Drixler 2013, 261-75.

not umbrella households) experienced a small renaissance at the expense of stem families in some eastern regions. This was in part the result of parents raising more children than before. Since for households with a single surviving adult son or daughter, the temptation to form joint families would have been small, the larger sibset sizes created more situations in which joint families were a serious option. Yet this may not be the whole story. As I have argued elsewhere, new discourses and policies emerged around 1800 in the Kantō and the Northeast that envisioned the household as an entity that could grow branches.<sup>33</sup> The ideal of this vision was not necessarily a joint family, but rather that noninheriting children should found their own branch households. Still, it is possible that this ideal created the conditions in which joint families became waiting rooms for branch households, where nonheirs and their spouses bided their time while saving up the necessary funds to strike out on their own.<sup>34</sup>

While we therefore cannot read the small rebound in joint family residence as a sign that more people hoped to ultimately live in this arrangement, we also cannot assume that the stem family ever became the universal ambition of rural commoners in eastern Honshu. It is not clear whether in local societies dominated by stem families, the minority who lived in joint families did so by preference or by necessity. It is possible that such families held different values and resisted what was now a dominant culture of stem households. However, such low levels are also consistent with a society that considered the stem family as normative but at times allowed other concerns—helping a married sibling or obtaining labor of the right age and gender for the household—to override that preference.

What can be said with certainty is that even in the 1850s, there were some local societies in which the joint family was more than a compromise solution for specific circumstances. The village of Mizuki stood on the Tsugaru Plain, at the time Japan's northernmost expanse of rice paddies and an area where, as we have just seen, joint families remained numerous till the end of the Tokugawa period. In 1850, Mizuki had 484 inhabitants, including a tofu maker, a carpenter, a cooper, a thatcher, an acupuncturist, and shops for saké, salted fish, sundries, and fish oil.<sup>35</sup> Some other villagers worked as servants as far afield as Matsumae and Akita. With more than 2 *koku* of arable land per capita, Mizuki appears to have been a well-off place, though any sense of prosperity may have been tempered by the memories of deadly famines that had swept Tsugaru as recently as the 1830s and left the landscape dotted with stone memorials to the victims. The famines may also have been a reason that twenty-one houses stood empty in Mizuki.

The fish oil seller Heisaku owned nearly 40 *koku* of land, more than the largest landholders in most Tokugawa villages. If there were material constraints on the formation of his household, they would have been other than the threat of abject poverty. At thirty-nine, Heisaku oversaw a family of thirteen, who all lived under the same roof: his wife, two daughters, a son-in-law, and two sisters, one of whom had brought a husband into the household and given birth to no fewer than

five boys. Perhaps the brother-in-law took care of the rice paddies while Heisaku devoted himself to the fish oil business? The owner of the sundries store, Jūjirō, had even more land, nearly 56 *koku*. At age forty, he gathered under his roof a mother, a wife, a daughter, two sons, a sister with husband and children, and a brother with wife and children. When the headman updated the population register six years later, four children had been born, Jūjirō's younger sister had married, and a nephew had taken a bride. Instead of founding households of their own, both new couples remained with Jūjirō. Such sprawling joint families were not the preserve of shop owners with big farms. Even in the household of the headman, we see a logic at work that allowed any member of the family to stay on after marriage. The household head's two sons, an adopted daughter, and two granddaughters had all brought spouses into the family. In Mizuki at least, the joint family was holding its own even during the last generation of the Tokugawa period.

Examples like those from Mizuki notwithstanding, a great quantity of evidence suggests that while we must acknowledge the continued importance of other living arrangements, the stem family was the culturally privileged household form of Japan by the end of the Edo period. This status was not just a matter of the economic advantages of several generations pooling their labor and resources under the same roof: as the following section shows, the living had come to imagine the stem family as a condominium with their dead.

## THE DEAD

### *An Age of Dread and Distance*

In medieval Japan, fear of the dead generally prevented the living from including them in any sense of synchronous community. I know of no evidence that their spirits were regarded as a benign presence among the living. There is, on the other hand, ample evidence that the living looked upon the bodies of the dead with horror and only very gradually came to erect grave markers that suggest a desire for communion with their souls.

Between the seventh and the seventeenth century, elaborate funerary rituals of any kind were rare in Japan. Huge ancient tomb mounds still loomed in the landscape, but no one now emulated such monuments. In the Heian period, non-elites commonly disposed of their dead without burial at all.<sup>36</sup> Such "wind funerals" (*fūsō*) minimized contact with the corpse and protected the living from the pollution emanating from death; by supplying more disturbing sights and smells than cremation or interment, they may also have perpetuated fear and revulsion of the dead. Even among court nobles and warriors, funerals were often furtive affairs, conducted at night and often without the presence of the bereaved;<sup>37</sup> even the location of graves was often quickly forgotten.<sup>38</sup> Communal non-elite cemeteries appeared from around 1150, but even within their precincts, dead bodies were often left to decompose on the surface.<sup>39</sup> When a body was interred, it was usually placed in a communal grave or a shallow pit, to be reused in rapid succession.<sup>40</sup>

Over a large swath of Japan, the death pollution taboo remained so strong that those who raised memorial stones typically used them as cenotaphs separate from the actual places of burial.<sup>41</sup>

While grave markers and cenotaphs were rare before the sixteenth century, their morphology indicates a changing balance between a fear of dead souls and a concern for their well-being.<sup>42</sup> The imperial court, adapting a continental Buddhist practice, began building stupas as a means of acquiring merit in the tenth century.<sup>43</sup> By 972, the head of the Tendai sect advised monks to prepare stupas for their own burials and enshrine mantras within them. By the twelfth century, laymen had sufficiently embraced the custom to make stupas common sights in cemeteries around Kyoto.<sup>44</sup> Yet even as these structures channeled merit to the deceased, most were inscribed with dharani spells, intended to protect the living from the spirits of the dead.<sup>45</sup>

The balance between fear and loving concern continued to shift with the growing popularity of Pure Land Buddhism, which promised that the salvific power of buddhas and bodhisattvas, rather than individual merit, could transport departed souls to a paradise that effectively removed them from the cycle of reincarnation.<sup>46</sup> By the fourteenth century, the majority of tombstones adopted designs that connected the dead with the intercession of Amida or Dainichi Nyorai. In the sixteenth century, wealthy commoners in the Kinai appropriated such elite customs and began to erect funerary stupas and stelae in large numbers. Indeed, the Pure Land sect came to treat the management of the dead as the critical link between Buddhist clergy and the faithful. Tamamuro Fumio argues that Pure Land initiatives inspired sect after sect to treat funerary rites as the key to increasing the number of adherents and to securing stable revenues.<sup>47</sup> For Sōtō Zen, death rituals became, in the words of Duncan Ryūken Williams, “the central practice” for parish priests.<sup>48</sup> By the time the Tokugawa shogunate resolved to uproot Christianity through religious registration in the 1630s, the basic culture and institutions of what Tamamuro calls Funerary Buddhism had taken shape.

#### *How Funerary Buddhism Bridged the Chasm of Death*

Foundations in place, Funerary Buddhism gradually reconfigured the relationship of the living with the dead. It did so through a ritual technology that promised to transform potentially threatening dead spirits (*shiryō*) into ancestral deities (*sorei*), released into a serene existence beyond the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Crucially, however, a soul otherwise destined for judgment, atonement, and reincarnation could become an ancestral deity only through the correct rites, arranged by its descendants with the aid of Buddhist priests. During the forty-nine-day period following death, seven precisely timed rituals would help the spirit on its journey through the courts of hell. In a second stage, six more required rituals would complete the transformation on the thirty-third anniversary of death.<sup>49</sup>

In effect, Funerary Buddhism introduced a new theme into the relationship of the living with the dead: the possibility of an alliance promising priceless benefits to ancestors and descendants alike. In exchange for ritual observance, the living

could enjoy the protection of their deified antecedents. And when death came, each individual would in turn join the collectivity of his or her dead ancestors, as long as the next generation continued to do its duty.

An example of ancestor veneration in this mode can already be found in the records of a late-fourteenth-century Kyoto courtier.<sup>50</sup> Some necrologies, lists of death dates used for scheduling the requisite rites, stretch back deep into the Middle Ages.<sup>51</sup> However, the great flowering of Funerary Buddhism occurred only after the 1630s, when the Tokugawa shogunate ordered all subjects to register with a Buddhist temple and thereby demonstrate their rejection of Christianity, even in regions where the Catholic missionaries had made no inroads. Many people now entered a formal and exclusive relationship with a temple for the first time. Some Buddhist priests may have felt pressured to make themselves useful to the swollen ranks of their parishioners. For all its attractions, however, the promise of ancestral deification does not seem to have captivated all laypeople overnight. Even in 1655, veneration of stem family ancestors was sufficiently unfamiliar to commoners to motivate didactic writings on its benefits. That year, Suzuki Shōsan, a Zen priest and one of the more influential advisors to Tokugawa Ieyasu, authored *Inga monogatari*, a collection of tales about the karmic law of cause and effect. In several tales, the vengeful spirits of neglected ancestors are at length pacified when their descendants assume their ritual obligations.<sup>52</sup> As we shall see in a moment, that was still very much a minority practice in 1655.

Funerary Buddhism brought with it a distinctive material culture: necrologies (*kakochō*) for scheduling memorial services, ledgers of funerary donations (*ekōchō*), ancestral tablets (*ihai*), and tombstones. These objects survive in vast numbers today, the losses kept small by their great ritual importance. For social historians, necrologies and tombstones in particular are a gift. Relatively easy to count at scale, they enable us to track the spread of a new way of understanding the afterlife. In preparing this chapter, I analyzed a collection of *kakochō* necrologies from 961 parishes with a total of 1.9 million deaths in the Tokugawa period. I omit the chart, sources, and methodological explanations here because of space constraints. What can be said in summary is that in necrologies that go back to the early seventeenth century, deaths at first typically appear at intervals of several months or even years. From about 1630, the numbers increase, generally well in excess of population growth but also sufficiently slowly to continue their upward trend throughout the Tokugawa period.<sup>53</sup> One likely explanation for such growth across several centuries is that the adoption of *kakochō* expanded gradually to new sects, new temples, new families, and, within families, new categories of the recently deceased. In the earliest entries, former heads of elite households may have been greatly overrepresented. At the other end of the intrafamily status hierarchy, stillborn children were rarely memorialized in a necrology before the nineteenth century. In between those two extremes, it remains a question for future research by what decade core members of stable households could generally expect to be inscribed into a necrology upon their death. In the Northeast at

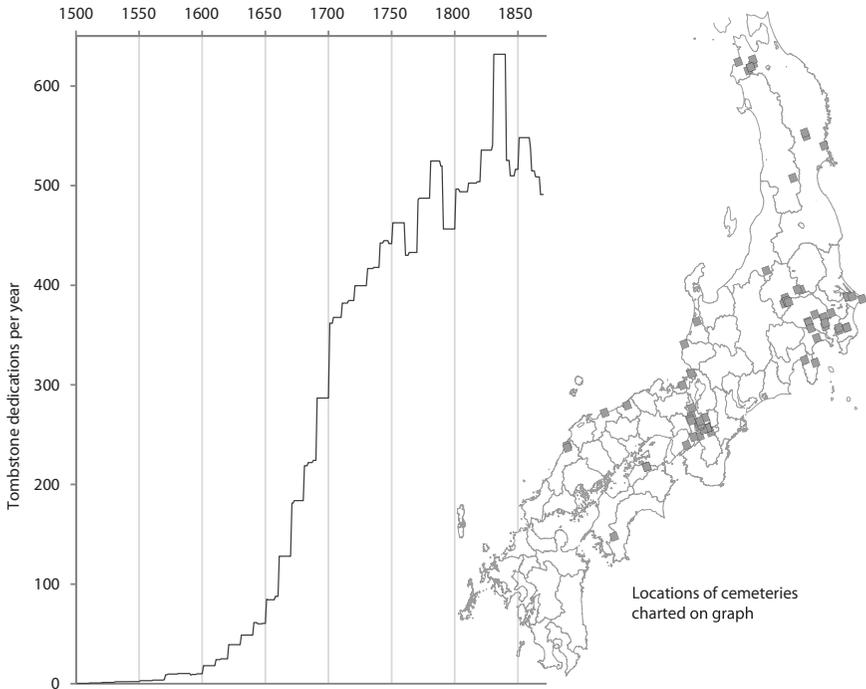


FIGURE 3.5. Japan-wide trends in tombstone dedications for commoners, 1500–1869

SOURCES AND METHOD: This chart presents a synthesis of 92,400 tombstone dedications in about 540 cemeteries from the following published studies: Akiike 1989, 60–65; Fussa shishi jōkan, 772, 777; Hattori 2003, 80–81; Hattori 2006, 60; Hattori 2010, 54, 60, 80–81; Hirose 2008, 102; Ichikawa 2002, 7; Ikegami 2003, 42; Itō Shishi Hensan linkai 2005, 238; Jishōin Iseki Chōsadan 1987, 160; Kutsuki 2003, 3; Kutsuki 2004, 80–81; Masaoka 1999, 394; Matsuda 2001, 123; Miyoshi 1986, 31–40; Nagasawa 1978, 64–67; Nishimoto 2015, 171; Saitō 1981; Nakayama Hokekyōji-shi Hensan linkai 1981, 338; Sekiguchi 2000, 61; Sekiguchi 2004, 482; Sekine 2018, 82, 118, 124, 130; Sekine and Shibuya 2007, 33–34; Shintani 1991, 139; Shiroishi, Kutsuki, and Senda 2004, 16, 24, 29, 33; Shiroishi, Kutsuki, Muraki et al. 2004, 57, 102–3; Tanigawa 1989, 5, 9; Yoshizawa 2004, 177. Cemeteries known to contain numerous samurai graves are excluded from the sample.

The studies typically report the number of tombstones by either reign period or decade. Within each time series, I have distributed them evenly across years and then added them up. The result is that mortality crises are less visible (but note the peaks in the 1780s and 1830s) and that the overall curve has uneven steps. These are simply artifacts of the information loss during the publication process of the studies that underlie this chart. The chart counts tombstones, not names inscribed on them. In many locations, the curves for the two are very similar before the widespread adoption of family tombs in the modern period, but already in the Tokugawa period, the two measures diverge widely in some cemeteries. See, for example, Sekine 2018, 198–99.

least, this point had likely been reached by 1750; by this time, dead children appear in the *kakochō* in numbers that are consistent with other sources, as do famine victims—often including those who died far from home or without descendants.

In the same decades that priests began to routinely record their parishioners' posthumous names, more and more tombstones were rising in the cemeteries of Japan—each of them a mineral metaphor of the new vertical bond between the living and the dead.<sup>54</sup> Figure 3.5 combines the published efforts of several dozen Japanese scholars who have studied hundreds of graveyards. In this Japan-wide

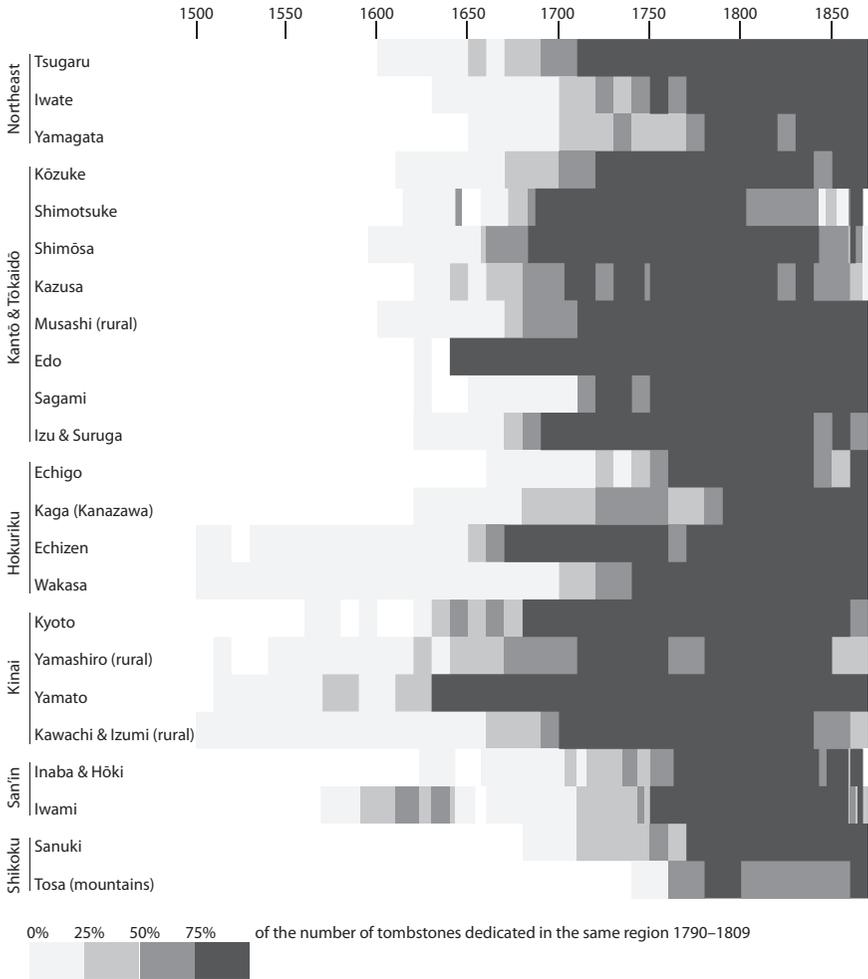


FIGURE 3.6. Regional trends in tombstone dedications, 1500–1869

SOURCES AND METHOD: This chart groups the 540 or so cemeteries of figure 3.5 into twenty-three different regions. These are listed in their approximate sequence from northeast to southwest. To keep the focus on commoner practice, cemeteries known to contain numerous samurai graves are excluded. For every year, the chart compares the number of new tombstones to the average for 1790–1809, by which time the diffusion process was complete in many areas. For the precise location of the cemeteries in each region, see figure 3.5.

sample, the number of tombstones followed a logistic growth curve, characteristic of diffusion processes. The second half of the seventeenth century coincided rather neatly with the period of fastest diffusion, with growth continuing at a gentler pace into the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup>

Tombstones appeared particularly early in the Kinai and adjacent areas on the Japan Sea coast; by the late sixteenth century, stones also began to mark graves in

a few other locations. However, in most of Japan, the early adopters embraced this new custom only in the first half of the seventeenth century, to be followed in the second half by a rapidly growing and ultimately universal share of their neighbors. In the areas that lagged behind this trend—in this sample, cemeteries in Shikoku and on the Japan Sea side between Yamagata and Shimane—apparent saturation levels were nonetheless reached in the late eighteenth century (figure 3.6). Even after that point, however, Tokugawa Japan may never have had a fully unified funerary culture. True Pure Land Buddhism, one of Japan's most powerful denominations, long had doctrinal reservations against erecting grave markers,<sup>56</sup> and modern students of folklore found that in some specific locales they examined in the twentieth century, people threw away the ashes of their dead without fashioning a proper gravesite.<sup>57</sup> Such counterexamples notwithstanding, there can be little doubt that by the late eighteenth century, most Japanese who could afford to do so buried their dead under a carefully worked stone.

Beyond the raw count, the morphology of tombstones has long been recognized as a rich source for the mentalité of those who raised them. Throughout the seventeenth century, the medieval forms like stupas and prow-shaped stones with Buddhist carvings remained in style. But from about 1700, simple rectangular poles that could be inscribed with posthumous names and family crests began to dominate cemeteries. By the late eighteenth century, some of these came to mark household rather than individual graves, as if to suggest that the individual would dissolve into the transgenerational community of his or her household. These *senzo daidai no haka* remained exceptional in the Tokugawa period and became a mainstay of Japanese funerary practice only in the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> In this, they anticipate the theme of this chapter's final section (albeit for a century not explored further here): that even after the immortal stem family was fully established, it continued to strengthen its hold on the imagination of its living members over time.

#### THE *IE* PERPETUATED AND UNIFIED

The ascendancy of the stem family did not end with its spread as a residential arrangement and as an imagined community of the living and the dead. The indicators discussed in this final section suggest that people's commitment to the perpetuation and unity of the *ie* intensified throughout the Tokugawa period.

##### *The Unification of Temple Affiliations*

When, in the 1630s, commoners were first ordered to register with temples to prove that they were not Christians, they did so on an individual rather than a household basis. In some areas, this practice led to the phenomenon of *handanka*, or multiple temple affiliations within a single household.<sup>59</sup> Initially, moreover, temple affiliations were portable. When women and men married into new

households, they took their established relationships with them. While this custom of personal portable affiliations (*mochikomi handanka*) became rare after 1700, split affiliations did not disappear. Hereditary household-based relationships with several temples (*ietsuki handanka*) took their place and remained common throughout the eighteenth century. In this system, new members, whether they entered by birth or adoption or marriage, were assigned one of these affiliations to secure a personal tie to each temple ministering to the soul of a deceased household member.<sup>60</sup>

Families that practiced hereditary *handanka* used three different modes to determine the parish affiliations of brides, adoptees, and children: balancing numbers, assignation by sex, and generational alternation.<sup>61</sup> Each mode implies that the individual bonds of brides and adoptees to blood relatives were now subordinated to the interests and identity of their new household. Instead of venerating blood ancestors by maintaining their original temple affiliations, brides and grooms were to serve the marital and adoptive ancestors whom they would join when their own lives had run their course.<sup>62</sup>

Or so a pleasingly straightforward interpretation of the evidence would suggest. There are complications. In his monograph on *handanka*, Morimoto Kazuhiko counsels caution in reading religious ideas and social attitudes into patterns of registration. Citing rapid oscillations between 1638 and 1669 in the village of Niremata in Mino, Morimoto argues that any ordering of temple affiliation by sex in early registers reflects government policy rather than individual choice.<sup>63</sup>

It is also possible, however, to read early oscillations between affiliation patterns as evidence of a society new to temple registration and not yet much concerned with ancestor veneration. The system of religious affiliation was, after all, an imposition by the authorities, and people may have taken time to internalize it as a meaningful part of their spiritual lives. Even decades later, the registers were no straightforward reflection of individual ideas about the household, but a negotiated outcome between rulers, temples, and the populace. It is nonetheless telling that multiple affiliations did decline as households gradually unified their temple memberships over the course of the eighteenth century. In Morimoto's impressively large Japan-wide dataset, 41 percent of population registers before 1700 include households with multiple temple affiliations. The figure falls steadily to 14 percent in the early nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Although official policy played some role, the decline was gradual enough, even within villages, to suggest that individual parishioners had at least as much say in the matter as rulers and priests (figure 3.7).<sup>65</sup>

We may surmise that families that maintained split temple affiliations saw their ancestors as individuals, while those that unified their affiliations emphasized the collectivity of the ancestral spirits, residing in the same altar, cared for by the same temple, and gradually dissolving their individuality. Split affili-

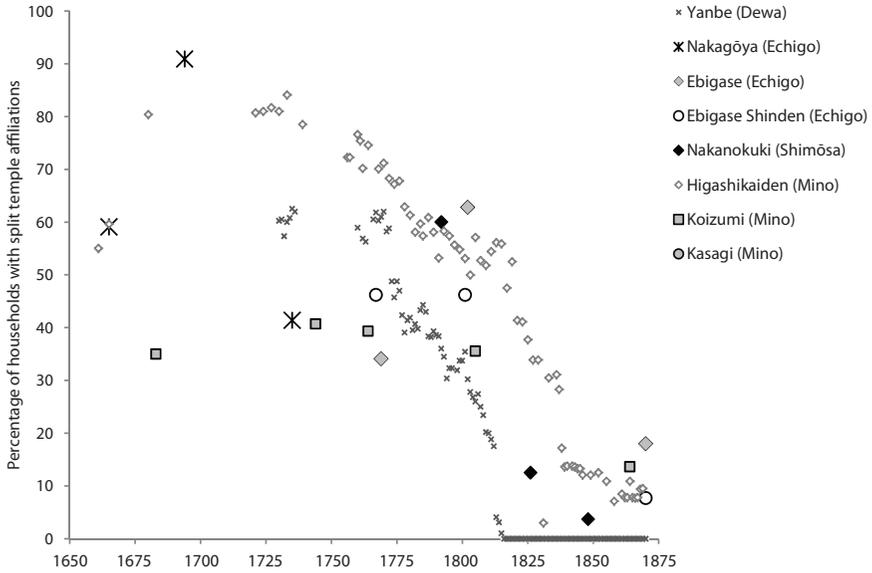


FIGURE 3.7. The decline of split temple affiliations in eight villages in which they were especially common

SOURCES AND METHOD: Adapted from graphs, tables, and discussions in Morimoto 2006, 96–97, 166–70, 196–97, and his appendix, 11–23. To create a legible chart from the hundreds of villages in Morimoto’s study, I selected villages that met the following conditions: information on at least three separate years, at least one of which had to precede 1800; and more than 40 percent *handanka* in at least one year.

ations may have been abandoned for a number of reasons, including prosaic administrative concerns. Yet the process also suggests the ascendancy of a vision of the family as a single, unified, and aspirationally immortal home for its permanent members.

#### *Name Inheritance*

The same subsumption of individual lives into the family is evident in the custom of name inheritance (*shūmei*). Elite warriors had long emphasized lineal continuity by reusing one character in their personal names (*imina*) across generations. Thus, for example, all but three of the sixteen Hōjō regents of the Kamakura shogunate used the character *toki*, and even the three exceptions repeated other characters from their predecessors’ names. Tokugawa-period commoners took the practice one step further. By the late seventeenth century, some household heads bequeathed their whole names to successors.<sup>66</sup> When the head of the Raku workshop of potters retired in 1691, he handed the name Kichizaemon to his adopted son.<sup>67</sup> Other transgenerational brands were born in 1704 and 1709, when Ichikawa Danjūrō II and Sakata Tōjūrō II succeeded the famed kabuki actors who had borne those names before them.<sup>68</sup> Around the same time, name inheritance was being

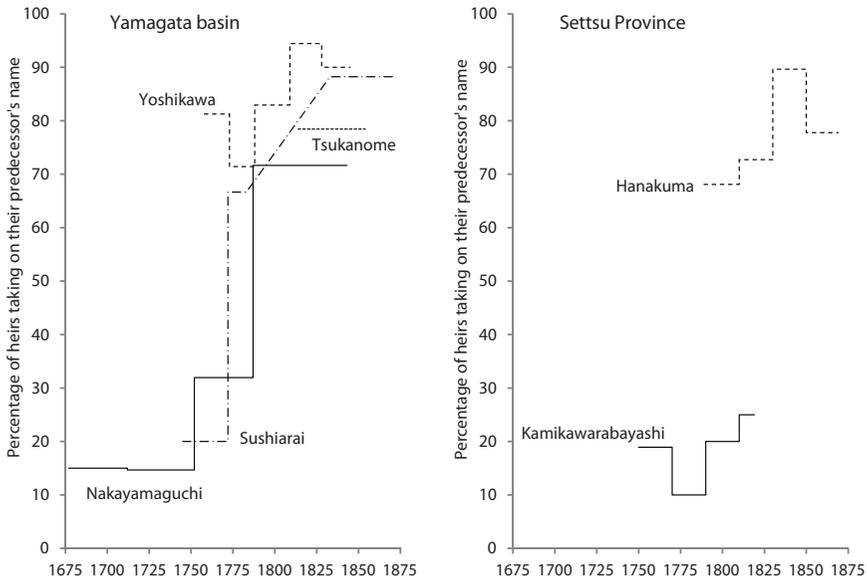


FIGURE 3.8. Name inheritance in four villages in the Yamagata basin (Northeastern Japan) and two in Settsu Province (Kansai)

SOURCES AND METHOD: Yamagata basin: Ôtô 1996, 217–20. Settsu Province: my own calculations from Kawaguchi Hiroshi's DANJURO Database. Reflecting the different age of available population registers, Ôtô uses different periodizations for the four villages. There is also a difference in method. For the villages of Yoshikawa, Sushiarai, and Tsukanome, the figure shows the percentage of successions in each time period that involved the heir taking on his predecessor's name. For Nakayamaguchi, Ôtô compared households at the beginning and the end of each period and counted which of them had a head with a new age but the same name as his predecessor. For Kamikawarabayashi, I defined name inheritance as the male heir taking on his male predecessor's name up to two years before or after assuming the headship of the household. In Hanakuma, all cases of name inheritance occurred in the same year as the actual succession.

practiced by about one-sixth of the commoners in Nakayamaguchi, a village in the Yamagata basin analyzed by Ôtô Osamu.<sup>69</sup>

For the eighteenth century, Ôtô was able to expand his study to a total of four villages (figure 3.8). Within each, the frequency of name inheritance rose rapidly enough in the second half of the eighteenth century that, by the early nineteenth, household heads who did not take their father's name were the exception.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in her study of a village in the Northeastern domain of Nihonmatsu, Mary Louise Nagata concludes that lineal continuity in names was unimportant before 1760 but common after 1800.<sup>71</sup> In faraway Settsu Province, just north of Osaka, the evidence from two villages either highlights local diversity or points to a longer transition period. In one settlement, name inheritance occurred in only a quarter of succession cases even in the 1810s, when its run of population registers ends. In the other, more than two-thirds of male heirs took on their male predecessor's name already in the late eighteenth century (figure 3.8).

By itself, name inheritance does not tell us whether the custom was a matter of outward identity or deeply felt bonds with ancestors and future descendants.<sup>72</sup> At times, other materials help us narrow the possibilities. For example, in his study of the Raku workshop, Morgan Pitelka highlights that the first case of name inheritance occurred just three years after the family created a new genealogy for internal consumption.<sup>73</sup> Even where no other documentation aids our interpretation of the role of transgenerational identities in prompting name inheritance, we may reflect on the effects that name inheritance, irrespective of its original motivation, had on individual identity. As every lifelong male member of the stem household could anticipate a period in which he would assume the name that his ancestors had borne before him, and that his descendants would bear after him, name inheritance may have done its part to reinforce the sense that the living and their dead ancestors formed one insoluble community.

### *Adoption*

As that community became more intensely felt, efforts for its future preservation grew in urgency. Adoption—typically of a man between his late teens and early thirties—could serve that end when no suitable male blood descendant could lead the family into a new generation. Adopting a capable young man was a means of securing the future of the family and of inviting a worthy new member to ultimately join the collectivity of the ancestors. Frequently, he was married to a daughter of the house, blurring the line between adoption and uxori-local marriage.<sup>74</sup>

In my sample of village population registers from what I like to call Japan's Deep East (the area between Edo and the northern borders of Sendai domain), adoptions became more and more frequent over the decades, as we might expect if there was indeed a growing concern with household continuity. The following figures consider only households with married heirs, and therefore exclude nuclear families by definition. For the 1660s, we find about one married adopted son (including sons-in-law) for every nine married sons. Thereafter, the proportion of adoptees rose gently for a few decades and then surged between the 1710s and the 1820s (figure 3.9).<sup>75</sup> By then, nearly 27 percent of married men whose father or father-in-law served as household head were not the head's biological son. Since the language of some registers fails to distinguish between blood relations and adoptions, the actual rates must have been somewhat higher still.

If we conduct the same calculations for Echigo (figure 3.9), Tokugawa Japan's irrepressible regional diversity once again rears its head. In Echigo—an area in which fewer people resided in stem families and the adoption of Funerary Buddhism lagged behind the Deep East—the smaller sample of registers shows no trend sustained across more than a century.

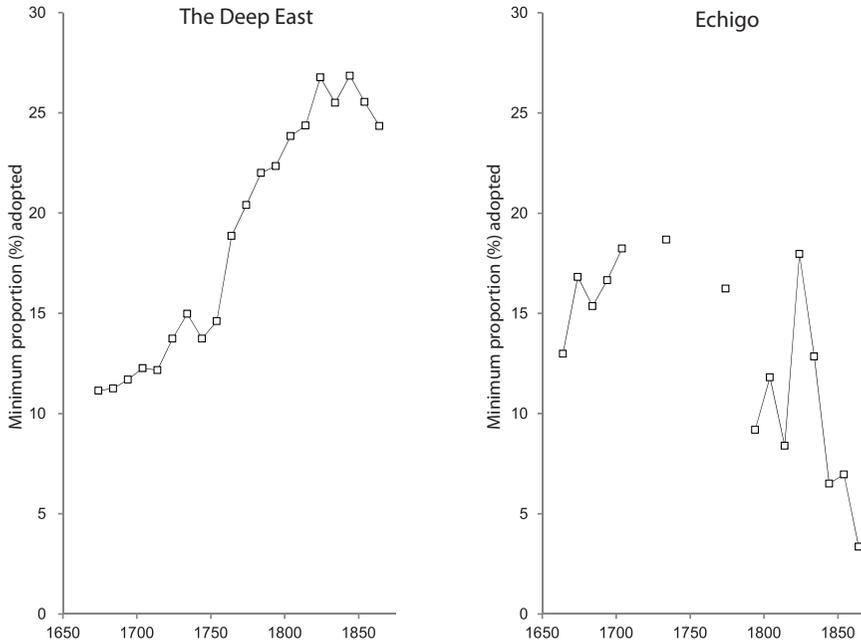


FIGURE 3.9. Married adopted sons in two parts of eastern Honshu, 1660–1869, as a proportion of all married men recorded as a son or adopted son of the household head

SOURCES AND METHOD: For the purposes of this chart, adopted sons include uxori-local sons-in-law (*muko*). The population sample consists of 783 villages in Japan's Deep East (that is, the north and east Kantō and the southern two-thirds of the Northeast) and 169 in Echigo. For the names of the villages, see Drixler 2013, 261–75. Villages with multiple population registers in a decade are averaged and counted only once per decade. Only decades with at least 150 married sons (adopted or biological) are shown.

### *Sacrificed Babies*

In a particularly stark expression of the concern with household continuity, a discourse in some regions treated excessive numbers of children as a threat. Its early signs include the appearance of *mabiki*, originally an agricultural term for thinning out young plants or pruning trees, as a metaphor for infanticide in the 1690s.<sup>76</sup> The term *mabiki* worked at multiple levels, but in a society that often used plant metaphors to describe the nature of the household, it implied that killing children could serve the health and longevity of the stem line.<sup>77</sup> In their analyses of the motives of infanticide, observers noted that people feared “the lush growth of the branches and leaves of their descendants” or “weakening the root house (*honke*) by pouring their resources into the tips of the twigs (*suezue*).”<sup>78</sup> Moral suasion against infanticide sometimes used an inversion of the same metaphor, warning for example that “if a great tree sheds its leaves and twigs, even the stem withers.”<sup>79</sup> This sentence could do its didactic work only if the intended audience felt invested in the vigor of that trunk. The same pamphlet also explicitly describes this mindset; it cites an inscription at a temple which warned that “to kill a child



FIGURE 3.10. Household continuity in the village of Niita in Nihonmatsu, 1720–1870  
SOURCE: Hirai 2008, 67–69.

*thinking that this will make one's family flourish* is similar to eating the flesh of one's child and chewing on its bones."<sup>80</sup>

Beginning in the 1790s, *shison hanjō*, or “the prosperity of descendants,” became one of the most prominent phrases in exhortatory writings against infanticide. This suggests that their authors believed that the future well-being of the household was already an important goal for infanticidal parents. As implicitly defined by the men who crafted such texts, the task was not to persuade the audience to change its aspirations, which placed the interests of the household collective over that of small souls attempting to join it, but to abandon the apparently common opinion that killing some children was an effective and legitimate means to perpetuate a family line.<sup>81</sup>

#### *Successful Successions*

It may be that the apparently growing concern with continuing the stem family translated into greater success at actually doing so. To date, the most detailed study of this issue has been conducted by Hirai Shōko in the village of Niita in the Northeastern domain of Nihonmatsu. There, only 11 percent of households survived throughout the 151 years for which we have evidence.<sup>82</sup> Over time, however, the Niita households became better at perpetuating themselves. In the 1770s, only 53 percent of households had continued for fifty years or more. That proportion increased steadily, even during the Tenmei famine of the 1780s, until, by the 1860s, 84 percent of households in Niita could look back on fifty or more years of endurance (figure 3.10).<sup>83</sup> In this village with a long-declining population, the extinction

rate was stable at around 14 percent between 1721 and 1810 but then plunged to under 2 percent in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup>

Another study, conducted by Yamamoto Jun on the village of Kazeya in Yamato Province, focuses on the fraction of retirements or deaths of household heads that were followed by succession as opposed to the extinction of the household. Between 1738 and 1785, 82 percent of such transitions were successful. Between 1786 and 1858, fully 98 percent were. One other statistic may suggest a growing concern with household continuity: between the two periods, the proportion of successions occasioned by the death of the head declined from 69 percent to 33 percent, while the average age of the successor decreased slightly. Perhaps new attitudes toward the joys of retirement played a role. It is also possible that the villagers of Kazeya believed that managed transitions increased the odds of household continuation, a goal that became invested with ever-greater meaning as the generations passed.<sup>85</sup>

Two village studies barely suffice to establish a hypothesis. It is plausible that a growing concern for household continuity increasingly produced the desired outcome. However, it is too early to tell whether this was in fact the case throughout late Tokugawa Japan.

## CONCLUSION

For all their uncertainties and limitations, the different strands of evidence reviewed here show that across more than two centuries, the influence of a stem family ideal on the way Japanese villagers lived and died strengthened gradually (figure 3.11). Some measures—residence in stem families, commemoration with tombstones, and locally also the use of necrologies—reached saturation levels by the mid-eighteenth century. But other indicators suggest that the commitment to enduring households continued to grow thereafter. In our small sample, name inheritance expanded rapidly in the late eighteenth century. The curves for the unification of temple affiliations within households, adoption rates, and (in two out of two villages) actual success at perpetuating the household all point upward even during the nineteenth century.<sup>86</sup>

The penetration of the stem family system did not occur in the absence of government policy. As we have seen, already Toyotomi Hideyoshi issued laws that effectively favored stem households over other living arrangements. In the 1680s and 1690s, moreover, authorities throughout Japan banned partible inheritance and constrained the marriages of younger sons.<sup>87</sup> While primarily a response to fears of excessive population growth and the fragmentation of farms, the combination of laws consolidating inheritance and curtailing marriage meant, if they were followed, that all families would become stem households.

In a pattern familiar to Tokugawa Japan, such rules were often honored in the breach.<sup>88</sup> That said, at least in the early eighteenth century, when overpopulation fears still ran high, we find attempts at enforcement. In 1713, for example,

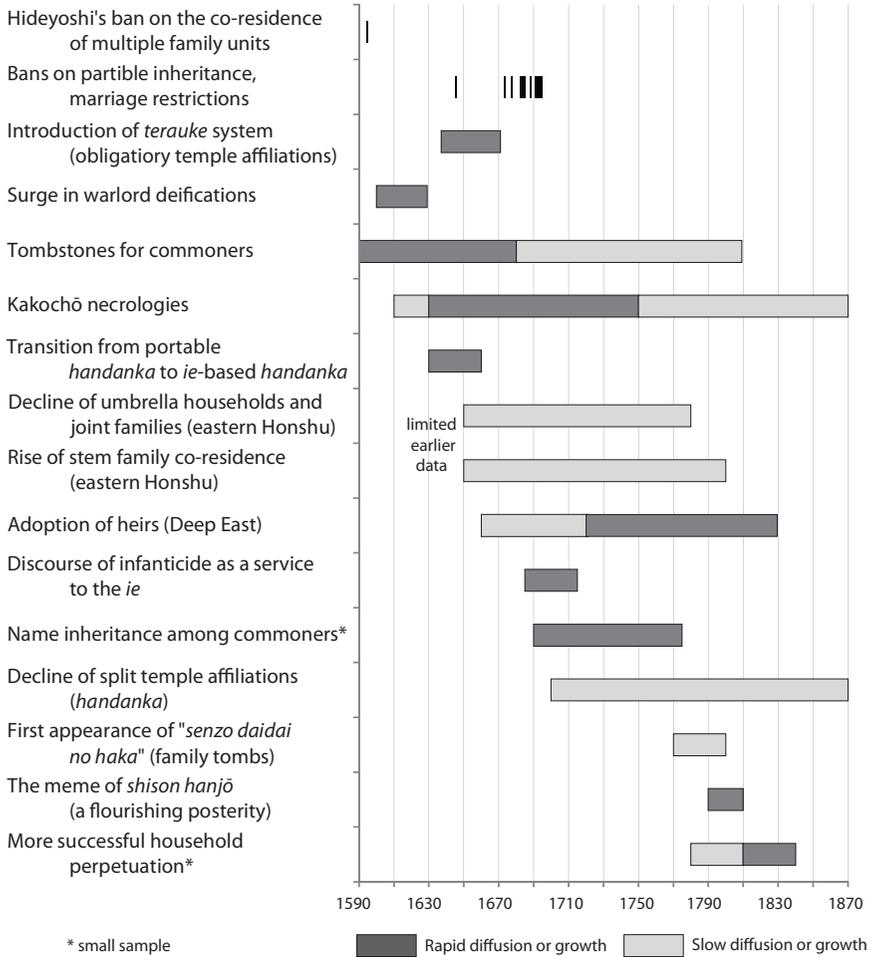


FIGURE 3.11. Timeline of the diffusion of various indicators of devotion to the stem household

the shogunate rebuked “lazy officials” who condoned the illegal establishment of branch households: their negligence caused the “number of people and houses to increase to a level unsuitable for the village.”<sup>89</sup> Still, the temporal congruence between official advocacy and demonstrable adoption of the stem household model remains very loose. Similar decrees affected most regions of Japan at roughly the same time. But commoners adopted the full suite of stem family practices only gradually, in disparate regional and chronological waves.

Why did a family consciousness centered on the stem line arise jaggedly over decades and across the country? Why do the diverse indicators for devotion to the

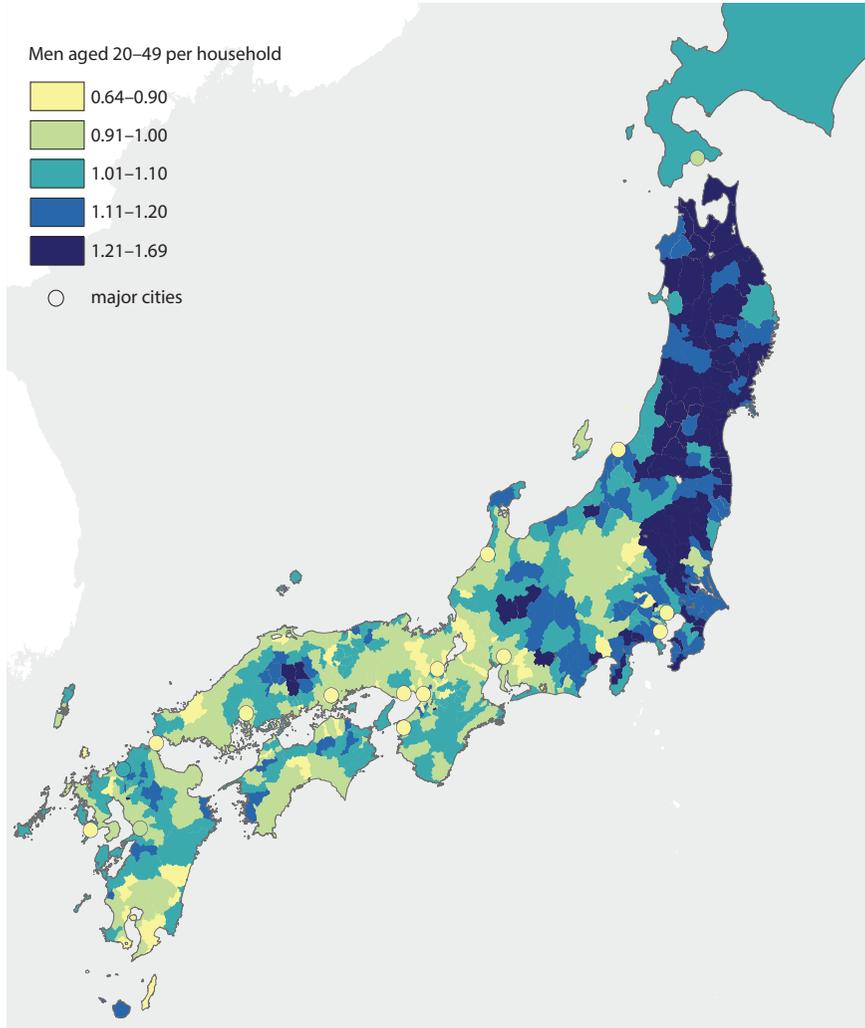


FIGURE 3.12. Men aged 20–49 per household in 1880, by district and city

SOURCE AND METHOD: Naimushō Sōmukyoku Kosekika 1881. No age brackets are reported for the Izu Islands, which therefore remain blank on the map. Since Hokkaido was thinly settled in 1880, I have aggregated the numbers for this northern territory rather than displaying them by district. This district-level map is inspired by a prefecture-level analysis of married couples per household in Hayami and Ochiai 2001, 410.

stem household fail to reach mature intensity at roughly the same time? A partial answer may be that momentum mattered. When Funerary Buddhism was young, the living venerated a few dead ancestors of whom they likely had personal memories. Over time, as commemorative tablets accumulated on family altars, those who knelt before them no longer knew the faces or voices once attached to the

names inscribed there. At that point, visions of a collectivity subsuming individual members may have begun to make intuitive sense. At the same time, with each passing generation, the responsibility resting on the shoulders of the living became heavier. It was one thing to fritter away a legacy in 1640. By 1850, another ten generations of spirits sat in judgment. The sheer venerability of the more durable households made them irreplaceably precious. And as more and more ancestors relied on the living to preserve the line intact, the investment in continuity justified ever-greater personal sacrifices.

Even as we acknowledge the hold the stem family had on many imaginations, we must also remember that there were always sizable numbers of Japanese for whom it held at best a diminished meaning. Noninheriting children had to leave the welfare of their ancestors in the care of a sibling. Many became permanent members of other long-established households through marriage or adoption. But for the rest, life would have been shaped by a different narrative. Some may have aspired to becoming venerated ancestors themselves, but others must have realized that for people in their position, an unbroken line of heirs was not a particularly likely outcome. In the commoner sections of the major cities, such people with neither the security nor the burdens of immortal households were likely in the majority.

Surprisingly, the same may have been true for some areas of the countryside. Statistics from the early Meiji period create the impression that in many parts of western Japan, the nuclear family remained a viable alternative to the stem household; in many rural districts between Aichi and Kagoshima, as well as in most of the major cities, the average number of adult men per household is too low for a society dominated by stem families (figure 3.12).

About what the stem family meant for heirs and their spouses, too, this chapter raises more questions than it answers. Did a man who assumed his father's name become, in some sense, his father? Were people who lived their lives in stem households less afraid of death than contemporaries who had to make do with less stable arrangements? How did they cope with the enormous expectations weighing on them? Did those expectations in turn give meaning and direction to their lives? Lafcadio Hearn elided history when, in 1901, he spoke of the obligations of the living to the dead as a timeless institution. But when he described the devotion of the descendant to her ancestors as the very substance of human society in Japan, he may have only moderately exaggerated a mindset that the late Tokugawa period bequeathed to the next generation.

## NOTES

1. Hearn 1901, 243–45.
2. Hearn 1901, 247–49.
3. Letter from Hearn to Basil Hall Chamberlain, February 4, 1893, in Hearn 1922, 368–70. The letter makes no mention of mortuary tablets, however, and explains the young woman's

ostracism with her work as a preacher. Hearn already gave the “beautiful and touching worship of ancestors” a prominent place in the preface to his first book on Japan, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894).

4. While the model for O-Dai came from a former samurai family, and presumably lived in a former samurai neighborhood of Matsue, Hearn’s phrase “human society, in this most eastern East” implies that this expectation prevailed irrespective of the household’s position in the recently abolished status order.

5. This has led some scholars to define the stem family not (or not merely) by its “residential rule that only one married child remains with the parents” (as I do here) but as “a domestic unit of production and reproduction that persists over generations, handing down the patrimony through non-egalitarian inheritance.” Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai 2009, 3.

6. See, for example, Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai 2009.

7. See David Spafford’s contribution in this volume; note, however, that Spafford uses the term *ie* rather than *stem family*.

8. Ōtō 1989, 177.

9. Farris 2006, 87, citing Sakata Satoshi’s studies of the early fourteenth century in two communities in Tanba and Ōmi.

10. Sakata 1989, cited in Glassman 2007, 381.

11. Farris 2006, 154, 248–49, 251–52, 254. This view is broadly in line with that of other medievalists; however, as Sakata Satoshi (2016) points out, students of medieval and early modern Japan use different definitions of the *ie* and thus date its origins and spread to different centuries.

12. Furushima 1991, 482.

13. That *ie* could mean “building” is clear from the ratio of *ie* to people in these early population reports, implying that the *ie* count included stables and granaries and the huts of unmarried servants. For example, the 1622 *Kokura-han Genna jinchiku aratamechō* apportioned the 38,818 rural inhabitants of four districts in Buzen to no fewer than 17,057 *ie*.

14. “Shūmon aratame no gi ni tsuki on-daikan e tatsu,” *Tokugawa kinrei-kō*, decree number 1614 of Kanbun 10.10.30 (1670), cited in Ōishi 1976, 319. It is unclear whether, in relation to enumerating people house by house, the 1670 order restated an earlier practice or attempted a national unification of different recording principles.

15. Already in the Edo period, *ie* could mean both “house” and “household,” and may derive from a term for “hearth.” See Hur 2007, 199.

16. Nor did those assembled under one roof necessarily act as one household. A 1650 register from Shinano reports a house that was subdivided into two sections (*aiya*), one occupied by a man of thirty-seven and his wife, two sons, and mother, the other inhabited by a younger brother and his wife and daughter. The register listed the horse ahead of the younger brother, implying that it was the exclusive property of the elder sibling. Another house in the village contained two nuclear families with no stated kinship tie. If the house was separated into two sections, the register makes no mention of it, and instead reports that the two families divided a parcel of landholdings between them (*aiji*). A bovine is listed at the end of the first nuclear family, a horse at the end of the second. *Nagano kenshi Kinsei shiryōhen* 5, 341.

17. Nakamura 1959. The disagreement between the two types of documents may also reflect the incentives for misrepresenting land use and ownership in cadastral surveys, with

their connection to taxes and laws regulating maximum individual holdings. In this sense, the population registers may be a better guide. On the negotiated process of land surveying, see Brown 1993.

18. Kinoshita 2017, 73–74.
19. “Shinano-no-kuni Saku-gun Honma-mura ninbetsuchō” (1663), in Hasegawa et al. 1991, 68–72.
20. I am here restating the analysis of Hasegawa et al. 1991, 72.
21. “Shinano-no-kuni Saku-gun Honma-mura ninbetsuchō,” (1663), in Hasegawa et al. 1991, 69–70.
22. I have also designated servants with families as subunits.
23. For a classic discussion of the evolving relationship of hereditary servants, dependent subhouseholds, and their masters in seventeenth century Japan, see Smith 1959, 13–49, 124–56.
24. Already in 1959, Koyama Takashi called for a move away from a household typology based on structure in a single moment and to replace it with a focus on the life cycle of households (Koyama 1959, 69). See also Lee and Gjerde 1986.
25. With longitudinal data it would be possible to classify a family through the decisions it made regarding its membership. For example, the arrival of a second daughter-in-law would prove that at that moment, the household was operating under joint family rules. To my knowledge, this type of analysis has not been fully implemented, though Takahashi Miyuki’s exemplary study of Kōriyama Kamimachi takes an important step in that direction by tabulating the transitions between different household types (2005, 284–95). Even studies of longitudinally linked population registers—long the mainstream of Japanese historical demography—have generally calculated changing fractions in a structural taxonomy (see, e.g., Takahashi 2005, 296–98; Kinoshita 2015, 73–82; and Hirai 2016, 103). Perhaps this is the better part of wisdom, because a classification of household types by event would largely consist of probabilistic ranges. In a typical year, a household would be suspended between two states, like Schrödinger’s cat in its box. For example, a household with a husband, a wife, and an eighteen-year-old son would at once be possibly nuclear and possibly stem, until the arrival of a daughter-in-law or the departure of the son settle the question.
26. Drixler 2013, 37–38, 60, 183–85.
27. Morimoto 2006, esp. 90.
28. Nagashima and Tomoeda 1984, 180.
29. Unpublished work for my book project on Tokugawa Japan’s volcanic winters.
30. In reviewing this figure, it is important to note that each twenty-year period contains a different set of villages. We may hope that the sample is nonetheless large enough to be representative of the overall trends among Sendai’s rural commoners, but this is more likely to be true for the broad outlines of the trend than the precise fractions in every twenty-year period.
31. Joint families and umbrella households also retreated in other parts of Japan. See Smith 1959, 124–56.
32. The snapshot approach also classifies some families operating by joint rules as stem. However, this is unlikely to cancel the stem-as-nuclear shift. For one, the share of joint-as-stem in the population was smaller. For another, while any stem family is at risk for passing through a nuclear phase—all it takes is the late marriage of the heir combined with

an untimely death in the older generation—many joint families contained more than two married couples per generation, requiring extraordinary circumstances in the cycle of arrivals and departures to induce a stem phase.

33. Drixler 2013, 130–37.
34. Whether this was indeed the case lies beyond the scope of this chapter and is best examined in well-documented and longitudinal case studies.
35. “Masudate-gumi Mizuki-mura tō kosū ninbetsu zōgen aiaratamechō” (1850), in *To-kiwa sonshi shiryōhen 2*, 133–201.
36. Katsuda 2003, 40–46, 252–64.
37. Tanaka 1978, 183–204; Gerhart 2009, 41.
38. Glassman 2007, 389–90; Gerhart 2009, 107.
39. One such burial ground is depicted in a late-twelfth-century illustrated scroll, the *Gaki sōshi*. The *Gaki sōshi* shows hungry ghosts in various settings; since it may have been designed to titillate and shock, it has to be treated with due caution as a descriptive source. Yet its image of a cemetery littered with bones and decaying bodies in open coffins has been confirmed by archaeological finds of coffin nails on the perimeter of medieval burial mounds in Ichinotani (Shizuoka). Yamamura 1997, 320; Shintani and Sekizawa 2005, 170.
40. Tanaka 1978; Bitō 1991, 384; Katsuda 2003; Hur 2007, 21–22.
41. Shintani 1991.
42. Shintani 1991, 216–24.
43. Tanaka 1978, 123–43; Shintani 1991, 216.
44. Cemeteries with stupas appear in the *Gaki sōshi* (late twelfth century) and *Ippen shōnin eden* (1299, scroll 5), in which the holy man visits his grandfather’s grave—a simple, if stately, mound overgrown with grass. See Iwata 2006, 131–33.
45. Shintani 1991, 219.
46. Shintani 1991, 224.
47. Tamamuro 1964. See also Matsuo 2011.
48. Williams 2005, 38.
49. For a much subtler and fuller discussion of this process than is possible here, as well as of the connections between Funerary Buddhism and *ie* society, see Hur 2007, 141–215, and Williams 2005, 45–50. Different temples differed in the timing of their rituals.
50. Shintani 1991, 222–24; Gerhart 2009, 18–49.
51. Farris 2006, 187–88.
52. Williams 2005, 25.
53. These statements apply to regional summaries of the Northeast, the Kantō and Tōkaidō regions, and the snowy areas on the Japan Sea coast between Iwami and Echigo, including the inland province of Hida. In other areas, my collection contains too few *kakochō* to permit even these cautious generalizations.
54. In the first half of the Tokugawa period, tombstones and necrologies did not always come as a package. Depending on the locale, stone could precede paper, or vice versa. For the case study of one family, see Sekiguchi 2004, esp. 479–80.
55. In assessing the extent to which the number of tombstones is a telling gauge of people’s views of death and household continuity, the effects of mundane material factors must be considered—the number, skill, and wages of stonecutters, the availability of suitable stone, and the economic means of potential patrons. Kutsuki uses case studies of three

localities of the Kinai to examine these issues (2004, 70–138). It is also possible that the body of published studies as a whole suffers from selection bias; if researchers were drawn to cemeteries with older tombstones, figure 3.11 overestimates the speed of diffusion.

56. Hur 2007, 417, n. 216.

57. Gamaike 1993, 226–31.

58. Ichikawa 2002; Sekine 2018, 128–34. For an elegant English summary of the changing shapes of gravestones, see Hur 2007, 198–99.

59. The densest clusters that have so far been identified are in Yamagata, Niigata, Chiba, and Gifu prefectures. For a map and a discussion of methodological issues, see Morimoto 2006, 88–104.

60. Morimoto 2006, esp. 261–65, 276.

61. Morimoto 2006, 71–76.

62. Morimoto 2006, 286.

63. Morimoto 2006, esp. 274–86. By emphasizing the haphazard nature of early registration, Morimoto contradicts Fukuta Ajiō's 2004 thesis that sex-specific succession expressed the supposed bilinearity of kinship in Japan; Morimoto is similarly skeptical of Ōkuwa Hitoshi's 1979 interpretation of mixed registration as a transitional phenomenon specific to the period between the dissolution of the medieval patriarchal joint family and the rise of the early modern stem family.

64. Morimoto 2006, 91. In Morimoto's Japan-wide sample of population registers, the percentage that contains *handanka* households declines from 40.7 pre-1700, to 37.3 in 1701–50, 32.8 in 1751–1800, and 13.8 in 1801–50.

65. With this view, I depart from Morimoto Kazuhiko, who cites the official decrees on the unification of *danka* affiliations to question whether the decline of *handanka* is really evidence for the absorption of the stem family ideal. Morimoto 2006, 275, drawing on the arguments of Hōzawa 2001.

66. Takagi 1981.

67. Pitelka 2005, 81–82.

68. Name inheritance among actors may have been more than a matter of personal identity or outward branding. Satoko Shimazaki argues that it made their bodies “archives of popular memory that could be passed down from one generation to the next” (2016, 82–84). Yet her account of Ichikawa Danjūrō II also suggests that memorializing his father (after he was murdered on stage) was a key motivation. That audiences embraced this move may be significant in understanding popular attitudes toward name inheritance and the worldviews that underpinned it.

69. Ōtō 1996, 218. Household lineality also found expression in the repetition of characters in posthumous Buddhist names.

70. Ōtō 1996, 217–20. In Nakayamaguchi, landowners led the trend by several decades, but their landless neighbors eventually reached similar levels. In the other three villages, there is no statistically significant difference in the rate of name inheritance between the two groups.

71. Nagata 2009, 361–77, esp. 371–75.

72. On the view that *shūmei* expressed a subjective consciousness as a member of an *ie* as a transgenerational perpetual unit, see Ōtake (1962) 1982, 187. In an analysis of three villages Mary Louise Nagata argues that heirs used name inheritance to strengthen relatively weak claims to their position (2006, 329, 334).

73. Pitelka 2005, 70–82.

74. On the logic and practice of adoption in Tokugawa Japan, among both samurai and commoners, see Marcia Yonemoto's chapter in this volume. My argument in this section, which takes adoption rates as an indicator for a family's commitment to its continuity, is complicated by Nanami Toishi's observation that adoption rates could also be driven by the concerns of the village community, as is suggested by the fact that some adoptions were in fact resurrections of extinct or abandoned household lines (Toishi 2017).

75. The samurai of four domains reviewed by Marcia Yonemoto similarly all showed an upward trend in the proportion of adopted heirs between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century (2016, 171–75). Among daimyo houses, too, adoptions became more frequent in the course of the Tokugawa period, nearly quadrupling between the early seventeenth and the late eighteenth century, with further increases in the nineteenth (see Marcia Yonemoto's chapter in this volume, p. 61, n. 3 citing figures compiled by Takeuchi Toshimi).

76. The first appearances of *mabiki* as a term for infanticide are in a poem, a medical almanac, and a manual of magic, all in the 1690s. See Drixler 2013, 307, n. 31.

77. While botanical metaphors for the family evidently came easy to the people of Tokugawa Japan, no close analogue of the modern English term *stem family* existed, unless one wants to render *honke* as such (whose first character is a tree with its roots or trunk emphasized).

78. Tani (1719) 1997; Nagakubo (1773) 1971, 521. Stem or root house—*honke*—is also the typical term for the main household of a descent group as opposed to the branch household, or *bunke* (literally, “split household”); the “tips of the twigs” is here a literal rendition of *suezue*, which can also mean “descendants,” “kin,” or “siblings.”

79. Nakahachi (n.d. [probably early nineteenth century]) 1978.

80. Nakahachi (n.d.) 1978.

81. For more on this, and in particular the related role of filial piety in motivating infanticide, see Drixler 2013, 61–68, 130–37; and Drixler 2016, 161–62.

82. 1720–1870. Hirai 2008, 65.

83. Hirai 2008, 67.

84. Hirai 2008, 69. The case is complicated by the fact that Hirai's study village of Niita participated in Eastern Japan's culture of infanticide—and depopulation—in the eighteenth century, and that the number of children whom couples in Niita raised increased during the nineteenth century.

85. Yamamoto 1999, 213. As Yamamoto notes, Kazeya was an unusual village in that its farmers owed no rice tribute and that after 1786 they were all raised to the status of *gōshi* (rural samurai). However, the rise in succession by retirement also occurred elsewhere. In Yachi in Kōzuke, such handovers increased from 11 percent between 1764 and 1802 to 54 percent between 1802 and 1857 (Furusawa 1999, 131, 136–37). In Shimoyuda in Sendai domain, the same proportion rose from 27 percent circa 1750 to 81 percent circa 1790 (Ritsumeikan Daigaku Takagi Zemi 1985, 161).

86. The figure includes two phenomena analyzed in a longer draft of this essay but omitted here for the sake of keeping this chapter at a readable length. The sources for the necrologies are too numerous to list here. Warrior deifications are based on Takano 2003 and 2005.

87. Restrictions on partible inheritance were introduced by Wakayama (1645), Okayama (1656), the shogunate (1673), Sendai (1677), Akita (proposed in 1682), Tsu (1683), Amagasaki (1684), Utsunomiya (by 1689), Tosa (1691), Kaga (1693), and Aizu (by 1695). Other domains that mentioned such restrictions in the prefaces of their *goningumichō* include Ashikaga, Hitotsubashi, Kasama, Sakura, and Takaoka in the Kantō; Shōnai, Fukushima, and Tanagura in the Northeast; Nagaoka and Itoigawa in Echigo; Ueda, Koromo, Takatō, and Nishio in central Japan; and Tsuyama in western Japan. This list derives from information in Harafuji 1957, 32; Kodama 1953, 374; Mori 1952; Ōtake (1962) 1982, 153–58; a document in *Nangō sonshi* 2, 618–22; and the 1689 population register of Wakatabi, in *Tochigi kenshi shiryōhen Kinsei* 3, 241.

88. On the continuing practice of partible inheritance and the establishment of branch households in various village studies, see Smith 1977, 134; Hayami 1983; Ritsumeikan Daigaku Takagi Zemi 1985, 168–76; Narimatsu 1992, 170–88; Furusawa 1999, 137–43; Narimatsu 2004, 190; Takahashi 2005, 286; Okada 2006, 213–32.

89. Ōtake (1962) 1982, 156.

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