

Social Norms versus Individual Desire

Conventions and Unconventionality in the History of Hirata Atsutane's Family

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Sometime between 1863 and 1866, Hirata Nobutane wrote an apologetic letter to his father that blamed his failure to manage his household on a “a desire for children.” He faced several problems—bad relations with a prospective adoptive son and estrangement from his wife. One of his servant-concubines, Fuji, was trying to mediate with the young man. Nobutane turned to his father for help with the wife, perhaps because his wife might have been using her filial duty to her in-laws as an excuse not to live with her husband. Accusing another servant-concubine, the tattletale Teru, for causing the trouble between them, he wanted his wife back: “First of all to take care of my health, also to practice discretion so that doubts [between us] will not arise.” Since his wife refused to give him a straight answer, Nobutane asked his father to tell her to return.¹

The letter speaks to three issues of family dynamics in early modern Japan that concern me here: the imperative to reproduce the house from one generation to the next; the inclusion of temporary residents who complicated its composition; and the emotional relations between members. Although social norms governed what can appear to be highly regulated corporate families, they tell us little about how people actually navigated these issues and made choices in a system flexible enough to accommodate self-interest. A rule-ridden institution, the family was also, in the end, a voluntary association in which some members, at least, could get kicked out or leave.

While Nobutane's letter does not disclose whether his “desire for children” concerns offspring or a child brought in from outside, he had the alternative of adoption. Indeed, anthropologists and historians have long remarked on its remarkable

incidence in early modern Japan compared to other societies in East Asia and across the globe.² Both commoner and elite households routinely adopted male heirs (sometimes children, sometimes adult spouses for daughters) as well as females intended as brides for adoptive sons. And because a host of rules, formal and informal, came to govern the process—its timing, the qualifications of adoptees, and the relations between adoptee and adopter—the house as a corporate unit is often seen as taking precedence over the lives and desires of its members. As Jane Bachnik puts it, “That the organization could continue takes precedence over how it continues.”³ Whether the evidence invariably supports this conclusion bears testing.

For the same reason, we should examine the composition of the household. The stem family (*ie*)—including a retired head or his spouse, or both, the current head plus his wife, and their children—defined an ideal in early modern Japan. Yet Nobutane’s letter mentions the temporary residents Fuji and Teru, who fall into an ambiguous category between family and servants. Within the constraints of social norms and cultural expectations, families sometimes incorporated extraneous members who do not fit the parameters of the stem family as we understand it. The disjunction owed in part to complicated entanglements, particularly involving women who fail to appear in official records. What are we to make of them and how are we to position them?

And how, further, were entanglements within the household handled? How did married people feel about each other and marriage itself? William Lindsay describes a normative separation, expressed ritually, between wives who were accorded respect for skill in household management and prostitutes who were regarded as objects of lust and even affection. The wifely virtues of modesty and decorum found their opposite, or complement, in the courtesan’s attractions of gaiety and wit.⁴ Concubines do not figure in this scheme, which, in any case, assumes a male (and highly generalized) vantage. Getting beyond such simplifications presents a twofold problem for a social historian: evidence concerning conjugal relations is scant and not easily quantified; connections between the quality of conjugal relations and larger social trends are difficult to trace. Microhistory, however, offers a passage for elucidating emotional dynamics. If necessarily narrow in reach, it offers the reward of human interest.

I explore the issues I raise here—the reproduction of the house, its inclusion of temporary residents, and the personal relations among members—through the voluminous archive created by Hirata Atsutane and his descendants, now housed at the National Museum of Japanese History. It contains the manuscripts for Atsutane’s many works on Japan’s history and religion, not to mention medicine, divination, and foreign affairs. It also contains a household diary charting the growth of his school and the milestones in the lives of individual family members. Most numerous are the thousands of letters they received and wrote. This archive effectively documents the path taken by a poor but ambitious scholar of marginal sta-

tus to found a school of Japan studies and, in so doing, perpetuate his legacy by perpetuating his house. There we find Atsutane and his heirs pursuing a conventional goal—to maintain and transmit family assets—but the steps they took were often unconventional.

ADOPTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Adoption figured in the recruitment of heirs to the Hirata family of scholars for several generations. We begin with Atsutane, an adoptee himself who adopted his successor, Kanetane. Kanetane was able to transfer the Hirata headship to his own son, Nobutane, but Nobutane, too, had to look for an adopted heir—one he sought prodigiously but without success. The motivations, circumstances, and outcomes of the cases differed. And their conduct resembled only superficially the norms generally governing adoption practice.

Born the fourth son of a mid-ranking samurai serving the Satake rulers of the northern Akita domain, Atsutane could inherit neither the headship of his natal family nor its privileged position in the ruling class. The only way for him to gain official status as the member of a lord's retainer band was through adoption as heir into another samurai family. Status mattered to him. Although he would gain fame as an intellectual, ideologue, and religious figure, Atsutane wanted membership in the class into which he had been born.⁵ Fortunately for him, adoption had become crucial to household survival in his day and commonplace among all classes. Historian Kamata Hiroshi estimates that by the nineteenth century, up to 40 percent of all successions to samurai houses involved adoption. He infers that, lacking this mechanism, the samurai class would have died out long before the Meiji Restoration.⁶

Arrangements for most adoptions took place between the adoptee's parents and the adopter, but such was not the case for Atsutane. He had absconded from Akita at age nineteen and spent several years doing odd jobs in Edo, where he came to the attention of Hirata Tōbei, an Itakura domain retainer, sixty-nine years of age and in need of a son. Tōbei first brought Atsutane into his house as a dependent, then, having decided that he would do, set about the process of making him the Hirata heir. Yet because Atsutane had cut his family ties in running away, another house had to be found from which he could be received. As historian Itō Hiroshi writes, "It would not do for him to be picked up like a stray kitten off the street."⁷ One of Tōbei's students in military science agreed to stand in as Atsutane's "uncle" thus allowing the adoption to take place. Next, Tōbei had to present a formal petition to the domain requesting permission to adopt Atsutane. Following an audience with the domain lord to obtain the required permission, Atsutane was inducted a week later into a guard unit with a tiny two-person stipend—approximately 1.6 quarts of rice a day, barely enough to feed two people. Aside from the irregularity of a murky family background, the adoption followed conventional procedure.

The scholar Ôtake Hideo divides adoptions into two basic types: those necessary for succession (as in Atsutane's case) and those not. Adopted successors might include outsiders, either as sons or sons-in-law; they might also include younger brothers of incumbent heads or the sons of elder brothers. (Atsutane's grandson, Nobutane, would eventually consider adopting his brother, something Kamata calls a "relay transfer."⁸) Emergency adoptions, when heads were critically ill, occurred on occasion, as did the posthumous adoptions that were officially forbidden but widely practiced. (One occurred in the natal family of Atsutane's adopted son.) And then there was temporary adoption (*kokoroate*), undertaken, for example, when a warrior wanted to ensure the survival of his house were he to die on a journey. Arranged before he departed, it would be dissolved upon his return. Adoption could also be used to establish a branch family, although historians think the practice had disappeared among samurai by the early nineteenth century, if not before. Finally, the wife of a head might adopt the child of a concubine to confer legitimacy, whether the child was in line to succeed, to be married to a successor, or to be married out. (Nobutane's wife would adopt a concubine's child.)⁹

For Tōbei, the adoption of Atsutane assured a successor to the Hirata house; for Atsutane, the adoption accorded the status needed to marry and become a full-fledged adult. A year later, after his adoptive mother died, Atsutane did enter into a marriage, with a samurai woman who became Tōbei's adopted daughter-in-law. Although historians point out that most samurai adoptions took place within a single domainal community, the three principals here had different lords. What brought them together was residence in the city of Edo, but also the relatively small size of each adoption pool there. Akita domain, for example, had 5,761 samurai retainers but only 391 men permanently stationed in Edo with their families (6.8 percent of the total).¹⁰ Assuming that the domains of Tōbei and Atsutane's wife stationed similarly small percentages of their retainer bands in the city, all the principals had lousy odds of adoption or marriage had they been unwilling to go outside their domainal circles.

If adoption allowed Atsutane to claim samurai status, it did not land him in a felicitous situation. According to one story, Tōbei was the eldest son of a family of doctors but so despised the medical profession that he had his younger brother take over the headship, thus freeing himself for adoption by the Hirata, specialists in military science. He appears not to have thrived. When he died in 1809, only six people other than Atsutane and his wife attended the funeral. He was buried in a cheap coffin after a service that cost a pittance. Atsutane, now the house head, would keep the Hirata name throughout his life, even as he later broke off relations with the Itakura domain to seek a more illustrious patron before landing a position with Akita domain at the end of his life.¹¹ Although he and Tōbei had ostensibly pursued the adoption to perpetuate the Hirata house, neither had much allegiance to a lineage each joined for ulterior, essentially selfish motives.

Suspect behavior occurred again when it came time for Atsutane to adopt a son to marry his daughter. Adopting a son-in-law fit samurai practice, of course, but Kanetane, who became Atsutane's heir and the second leader of his school, was an inappropriate choice: an eldest son, he was expected to maintain his own father's house. Kanetane had become Atsutane's disciple around the same time as his younger brother did so. Why was it the older brother who, abdicating his responsibilities to domain and natal family, married Atsutane's daughter, O-Chō?

There are at least two accounts of how the adoption came about. According to a letter written by Atsutane some years after the marriage, "Kanetane disliked [his low stipend of] 5 *to* of rice, so he turned his house over to his younger brother and, as a wandering samurai (*rōnin*), became our child."¹² A retainer of the Niiya domain in Iyo, worth a meager 10,000 *koku*, Kanetane was presumably seeking a bigger stage for his scholarly talents. But according to a manuscript draft of Kanetane's autobiography, it was Atsutane, bemoaning his lack of a successor, who took the lead: "I really must adopt a son, but I have a homely daughter." With the help of a go-between who was another Hirata disciple, Kanetane became Atsutane's adopted son in the first month of 1824, when he was still a Niiya retainer. Given his official duties to the domain, he was able to stay at the Hirata house only five to seven nights a month. Atsutane's daughter went into service during that time and received training in the inner quarters of another daimyo house. Then, after giving the adoption a trial run and leading a double life for almost a year, Kanetane appealed to the domain for permission to retire (with the typical excuse of illness) and surrendered the headship of his natal house to the younger brother. The appeal was approved almost immediately; Kanetane spent more time at the Hirata residence; he married O-Chō on 1825.4.7; and the family subsequently issued a formal announcement that he had moved.¹³

In these two accounts, Atsutane and Kanetane each credit the other for seeking the adoption. Technically, they had to overcome three obstacles: Kanetane was from a different domain, had already been designated heir to his natal house, and had official responsibilities as a Niiya domain retainer. (In fact, it is doubtful that Niiya knew of the adoption before the marriage.) But Atsutane's 1842 letter glosses over all the obstacles, suggesting, at least in this instance, that individual desire took precedence over obligation to family and domain. The suggestion is remarkable on its face. The matter-of-fact quality of the letter nonetheless intimates that acting on desire may not have been uncommon.

A third adoption in the Hirata house offers a striking contrast to the earlier examples, in part because the family was now well established and highly desirable as a marital partner. Kanetane's oldest son, Nobutane, was trained from his birth in 1828 to succeed his father as Hirata head and leader of the family school. But like his grandfather, Atsutane, Nobutane had to resort to adoption to find an heir for himself. Unlike Atsutane (and Tōbei), Nobutane made choosing his heir into a competition.

It is not clear how many men and boys Nobutane went through in his search. By 1870 he had buried one boy listed as his natural son, along with two others whose status is ambiguous. A young man known as Masaji may have been brought into the household early on for a trial, though he disappears from the record. Another, named Shin'ichirō, had entered the Hirata household by 1869. We know nothing of his family background. On 1870.1.13, one of Nobutane's associates, a national government official and Hirata disciple, sent his younger son, Aoyama Sukematsu, to Kanetane for training and possible consideration as heir. Also in the mix was Nobutane's youngest brother, then called Kumanosuke.¹⁴ The three on record (Shin'ichirō, Sukematsu, and Kumanosuke) spent some time being educated by Nobutane's father, Kanetane, who had moved to Kyoto following the Meiji Restoration. Nobutane himself was fighting his way through the bureaucratic turmoil of early Meiji state-building in the former Edo, now renamed Tokyo. In a letter to his parents, he wrote:

Although I would like to decide to adopt my brother Kumanosuke right now, there is the matter of Shin'ichirō and the other, so first of all I want to wait and see [who should become] the legitimate heir or a common law child. The reason is that if I decide such a matter now, as a matter of course they will neglect their studies. If I establish the strict rule that someone who cannot do scholarship cannot succeed to the house, this will lead to competition, or at least that is my humble opinion. There is no way that someone who cannot perform as an adult can maintain the house.¹⁵

This passage shows a complicated understanding of who might belong in his family, for some members clearly held no more than provisional positions. Only at a later date would Nobutane decide who was to become the permanent heir. In the meantime, the three boys had to please a man who turned out to be a strict judge indeed.

In each of his letters to his parents, Nobutane commented on the boys' progress, based on the letters they sent him and the work they completed under assignment from himself or Kanetane. On 1870.4.19, he wrote: "I have received the letters from Shōkichirō [Kanetane's third son] and Kumanosuke. Although Shōkichirō's shows that he put considerable thought into it, Kumanosuke's is so wretched that I don't know what to do. . . . Please order him to practice his penmanship and study grammar."¹⁶ Nothing Kumanosuke did pleased Nobutane. In a letter from 1870.6.14, Nobutane wrote, "[I]f he is going to become an embarrassment to the house, wouldn't it be better for him to be shut up inside? I am really worried about this."¹⁷ Although Nobutane had planned for Kumanosuke to come to Tokyo with his wife, Kumanosuke's ill health forced him to stay in Kyoto and took him out of the running for the family headship, at least during Nobutane's lifetime.

Nobutane tried harder to turn Shin'ichirō into a suitable successor. In letters to his parents, he stated repeatedly that because Shin'ichirō was to be his son, he wanted to be the one to raise him. He told his younger sister, "If I don't get him

under my roof, I don't think I will be able to think of him as my son."¹⁸ But if Shin'ichirō was intelligent and clever, he did not study as hard as Nobutane thought he should. On the road to Tokyo, he was "full of mischief."¹⁹

Once Shin'ichirō was established in Nobutane's house in Tokyo, he proved to be nothing but trouble. He bit one of the attendants and threw stones at another; one day he took money from the accounts box and went to buy sweets without wearing his sword. Nobutane tried turning the boy over to his attendants, but when their backs were turned, Shin'ichirō removed his *hakama* (the divided skirt indicative of samurai status) and sword and ran out to go shopping.²⁰ The attendants could do nothing: "He is really more than O-Chō can handle and I don't know what to do about the situation either," wrote Nobutane.²¹ On the second day of 1871, Shin'ichirō sent a New Year's greeting to his honorable grandparents. Written in carefully drawn block characters, the letter indicates that he saw himself as Nobutane's adopted son.²² Within the next five months, he was gone.

In the competition to become the heir to the Hirata house, one boy remained, the eleven-year-old Aoyama Sukematsu (1859–1917).²³ Judging from Nobutane's remarks, Kanetane must have sent glowing reports: "Nothing pleases me more than the news that Sukematsu-sama-ko is doing well" (1870.2.3; 1870.2.14).²⁴ He arrived in Tokyo on 1871.5.22, according to a statement to the police made by Nobutane, who called Sukematsu his son (*segare*).²⁵ On 1871.5.29, in a report on the residents in his house sent to the Imperial Household Ministry, Nobutane called Sukematsu his adopted son (*yōshi*).²⁶ In yet another report, describing his family's circumstances, submitted in 1871.10, Nobutane called Sukematsu his *shoshi*. In modern Japan, this term means an illegitimate child or a child born of a concubine and not adopted by the wife. According to the authoritative dictionary *The Great Dictionary of the Japanese Language*, or *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, however, it once had additional meanings, ranging from sons not yet heirs to young children or youths.²⁷ What did the semantic differences between the terms mean for Nobutane's relationship with Sukematsu? Sukematsu was indeed young, Nobutane did adopt him, and Nobutane tried to treat him as though he were his own son.

Alas, the relationship between Nobutane and Sukematsu did not last long. Nobutane fell so seriously ill in the tenth month of 1871 that O-Chō wrote an urgent letter summoning his parents to Tokyo. They arrived just a couple of months before he died, on 1872.1.24. Following the death, Sukematsu decided to break off the adoption, ostensibly because it had become a relationship in name only. But in fact, Sukematsu's older brothers had established branch houses, his father needed an heir,²⁸ and he wanted to pursue Western studies, not the Hirata house specialty of ancient studies.²⁹ Taneo (called Kumanosuke as a child) became the Hirata family's household head for official business; finding a new head who could carry on the family's legacy of scholarship had to wait until a son-in-law, Tozawa Morisada, was adopted in order to marry Nobutane's daughter, in 1886. Sukematsu took a new name, one that combined the characters of his adoptive

father and his natal father, becoming Aoyama Tanemichi, later a famous professor and medical researcher whose bust still stands at the University of Tokyo.

Tanemichi's decision to leave the Hirata house and pursue a career more to his liking suggests a relaxation in the norms that had heretofore restricted the options available to young men. After all, many sons in early modern Japan were adopted by fathers they had never met, so a lack of emotional attachment to Nobutane cannot have been the reason for Tanemichi's refusal of heirship to the Hirata house.³⁰ Likely it was a combination of other factors, such as the transformation of samurai into *shizoku* (former samurai) in 1869, the abolition of domains and establishment of prefectures in 1871, and the creation of a new educational system in 1872, which eroded the foundations of the Hirata house in its samurai identity, the Akita domain retainer band, and the Hirata School.

The need for a male to head the household, and for a male to have a household to head, meant that families looked first to adopt males. While the procedures followed in the Hirata family may have nominally conformed to the rules governing adoption in samurai households, they concealed considerable divergence from the norm in terms of eligibility, as we have seen. Males came into the Hirata family for a variety of reasons that reflected both their preferences and those of the family. In all cases, both sides took the time to get to know one another before finalizing the relationship. In contrast to men, women usually moved from one household to another through marriage. For this reason, adoption meant something different for them.

A case in point is Atsutane's third wife. One of his rural patrons, Yamazaki Chōemon, a town official and oil seller, arranged this marriage for Atsutane. Sixteen years younger than her husband, the woman could read and write and was particularly good at keeping accounts, but she was the daughter of a mere tofu maker. To conceal this humble background, Chōemon adopted her himself. An account by a student who boarded with the Hirata family for a month reports that, once Atsutane married her, "the household expenses were covered by her family, and he no longer had to worry about where his next meal was coming from."³¹

For this marriage, Atsutane took advantage of a widely practiced procedure of doubtful legality. The Tokugawa regime frowned on the sort of temporary adoption that, as in the case of Atsutane's new wife, occurred solely to raise the status of the adoptee. Discouraged for men, the situation for women was more ambiguous. After all, Tenshōin, the wife of the thirteenth Tokugawa shogun, had her Satsuma background laundered through the Kyoto aristocracy in order to achieve a sufficiently exalted status. And, in fact, with few exceptions, this form of adoption (called *koshikake yōshi*—adoption for the purpose of being adopted again) came to be permitted for women only. Another means for achieving the same goal was to rely on a "temporary parent" (*kari oya*). According to the historian Kamata, low-ranking members of the warrior class were particularly prone to use such expedients to adjust differences in status.³² Even a doctor attached to the shogunate concealed his second wife's rural origins by this means.³³

As Luke Roberts points out, rules were made to be broken during the Tokugawa period, so long as all sides made a pretense of obeying them.³⁴ Like the deathbed adoptions that might take place months after the adopter's death, adoptions for the purpose of equalizing the status of adopter and adoptee or husband and wife were officially forbidden because they blurred status distinctions, but they nonetheless happened. Along the same lines, the history of the Hirata house suggests that the ostensible reason for adoption—maintaining household continuity—could mask other factors, including personal preference and personal ambition. Incorporating women into the study of adoption forces us to consider other factors. Because they, too, were necessary for the house to continue, their adoptions fit the conventions of household succession. Still, unlike the men adopted or considered for adoption into the Hirata family, Atsutane's third wife went through a temporary adoption and subsequent marriage without the option of a trial run before the arrangement was finalized.

TEMPORARY RESIDENTS

In most cases, adoption functioned to maintain the stem family from one generation to the next, but members of the Hirata house used this mechanism for other purposes as well. We have already seen how Nobutane bent the rules in considering three young men simultaneously as potential sons; his grandfather, too, used adoption in a fashion uncommon at the time. These instances speak more generally to the Hirata family's porous boundaries, for a great many people flowed in and out of the household, some as student-boarders or servant-students, some as wet nurses and maids. These individuals would not have been considered members of the family. Others, such as maid-concubines, had more ambiguous roles.

Just three years after Kanetane's adoption and shortly after Nobutane's birth, Atsutane adopted another man, one who came with a wife and son. This was Ikuta Yorozu, of impetuous personality and enormous talent. He joined the school in the same year that Atsutane adopted Kanetane, although he did not meet Atsutane in person until a short visit to Edo just a week before Kanetane's marriage. Thereafter, he corresponded regularly with Atsutane, borrowed his works, entertained Kanetane when the latter paid a visit to his domain, and wrote texts for which he solicited prefaces from Atsutane. When his criticisms of his domain's policy led to his exile, he arrived with his family on Atsutane's doorstep on 1828.10.7. A few days later Ikuta changed his name to Ōwada Toshō Taira no ason Atsumichi.³⁵ Atsutane then adopted Ikuta as Kanetane's younger brother, though without making the adoption public by reporting it to the authorities. Instead, Ikuta became chief of studies for the Hirata School.³⁶

The co-residence lasted only five months. For much of that time, Ikuta was traveling while his wife and son stayed at the Hirata house. Early in 1829, Atsutane's granddaughter died two days after coming down with smallpox. Ikuta's

son caught the same disease and he, too, died. In the third month, some sort of trouble seems to have arisen between the Ikuta and the Hirata, because he and his wife moved out. Yorozu continued to attend Atsutane's lectures; he sometimes stayed the night or several nights. He wrote texts on themes selected by Atsutane, lectured on divination at Atsutane's urging, and, when he traveled, corresponded with Atsutane and Kanetane. The Hirata family archive contains copies of his works both in manuscript and published versions, many made and distributed decades after his death.³⁷

Atsutane's adoption of Yorozu inadvertently exposed the family to danger. In late 1836 Yorozu moved to Kashiwazaki in Echigo, where he established a school to propagate Atsutane's teachings. Like much of the country, Echigo was then suffering the effects of a famine exacerbated by hoarding on the part of merchants and a decision by domain officials to export rice out of the region. While Yorozu repeatedly appealed to domain authorities for relief, to no avail, reports of Ōshio Heihachirō's rebellion in Osaka in 1837.2 provided a model for direct action. Supported by some thirty followers, Yorozu attacked the local deputy's office on 6.1. Government troops quickly dispersed the rebels and shot Yorozu (some reports say he committed suicide). The Hirata family soon learned that Yorozu's wife and two children had hanged themselves in prison (other reports say that she strangled the children and then bit off her tongue). Three months later, the magistrate in charge of temples and shrines sent a summons to Kanetane telling him to appear at once. When he did, he was questioned as to whether Ikuta Yorozu was listed on the Hirata family registry or not. Two days later Kanetane returned to the magistrate's office with a written statement to the effect that Yorozu was not so listed.³⁸

Because of Yorozu's connection with the Hirata School and the Hirata family, a number of disciples either visited the school to seek clarification of the relationship or made inquiries through the mail. Kanetane wrote to an important disciple in Mikawa:

I'm sure you've heard about Yorozu's violent death. Some disciples have worried that this has caused trouble for my house owing to the preface Yorozu wrote for *Thoughts on the Great Land of the Gods* [*Daifusō kokukō*, a text by Atsutane published the previous year].³⁹ Since I have received letters from the most unexpected places asking about us, I thought I should tell you about it. Really this has not caused any trouble for me at all, so please don't worry. But this is truly regrettable, a development with which I cannot agree, and all I can do is sigh.⁴⁰

Although Kanetane tried to make light of the incident, it had consequences for the Hirata School in Echigo, where the disciples he had so carefully recruited dropped away and no new ones joined until 1858. According to Yoshida Asako, this revolt by a close disciple might well have threatened the continued existence of the Hirata School, had the previous adoption come to light.⁴¹

My interest in Ikuta's adoption by Atsutane lies not in its political ramifications but in its meaning for the structure of the Hirata house. Having already adopted Kanetane as his heir, on what grounds and for what purpose did Atsutane adopt Yorozu, and how does this act fit within the parameters of adoption practice? Was it perhaps an honor adoption—a way to give Yorozu status, once he had been exiled from his domain and turned into a stateless person? Or, given Atsutane's respect for Yorozu's scholarship, was it more likely an adoption made in order to set up a branch house (even though Japanese historians believe this type of adoption had already died out in the warrior class)? We usually think of establishing a branch house as requiring a division of real property. In this case, however, what Yorozu acquired was part ownership in the school's intellectual capital, to which he had made and continued to make contributions. One further point: although the Hirata diary states the date when Atsutane and Yorozu signed the adoption contract, there is no indication of whether it was ever abrogated. After 1830.4.2, when Yorozu returned from a trip to Izu, the Hirata diary stops referring to him as Ōwada Toshō, suggesting that the adoption may in some informal way have been dissolved. Warriors were held to stricter standards of reporting changes in family composition than commoners, but, even so, given that families were still to a large extent responsible for defining their composition themselves, a degree of ambiguity might persist.

Ambiguity in defining the status of family members, their relationships to one another, and their functions appears with particular clarity in the documentation left by Nobutane. We have already seen how he complicated the usual procedures for procuring an adopted son. He also brought several women into the family in hopes of fathering an heir. He always called them servants, never concubines, although that is what they were.

Aside from his wife, the woman who remained longest in Nobutane's household was a servant named Fuji. Hired on 1863.11.1, more than nine years after his marriage, Fuji was nineteen by Japanese count, or between seventeen and eighteen years old.⁴² Nobutane was thirty-five. Although both Kanetane and Nobutane were living in the Edo barracks for Akita retainers at the time, Nobutane, as a domain bureaucrat, may have received quarters separate from those of his parents. The letter quoted at the beginning of this essay suggests that his wife was then performing her filial duty to her in-laws, or perhaps that was the excuse she gave to live apart from her husband. In any case, she had not borne any children. Since Nobutane was still a relatively young man, he may have decided to try a different vessel for his sperm rather than adopt an heir.

Fuji was the only one of Nobutane's servant-concubines to bear him a child. The first time she is mentioned in the family diary is on 1866.7.28, when she put on a maternity belt: "We just celebrated among ourselves by setting out red bean rice."⁴³ When Nobutane's wife O-Chō did the same two weeks later, members of Nobutane's sisters' families came for the celebration. O-Chō must have suffered a miscarriage,

whereas Fuji gave birth to a girl, named O-Ishi, on 1867.1.4. When O-Ishi went to a doctor in the sixth month, O-Chō took her, suggesting that, as Nobutane's wife, she was responsible for his offspring. Hirata genealogies either list Fuji as Nobutane's second wife or let her disappear; O-Ishi becomes O-Chō's daughter.⁴⁴

Fuji continued to live with the Hirata family for five years after the birth of her daughter. Following the announcement of the restoration of imperial rule at the end of 1867, Nobutane quickly got Akita domain to dispatch him to Kyoto. Except for Kanetane, the rest of the family remained in Edo until Nobutane summoned them to join him. Arriving there on 3.29 were "O-Chō first of all, O-Naka [a daughter Nobutane had briefly adopted from his uncle's house], O-Ishi, and others." Six days later, Nobutane's mother arrived accompanied by one of his sisters. As an afterthought, he wrote, "Fuji comes as well."⁴⁵ When the emperor moved to Tokyo, Nobutane went with him, while Kanetane and the rest of the Hirata family remained in what they hoped would someday again be the imperial capital. Two years later, after Nobutane had found a place for his residence and the Hirata School in a former daimyo compound in Tokyo, he sent for his family. O-Chō was to ride in a palanquin with sliding doors (presumably with O-Ishi); two of the boys in the running to become his heir were to ride in palanquins with hanging flaps. Listed as an attendant, along with three men including a relative, Fuji was to ride in an open palanquin as yet another marker of her inferior status.⁴⁶

In addition to Fuji, Nobutane employed two other maid-concubines. When, for a time, he left his family behind in Kyoto to take up a career in the new central government in Tokyo, his disciples, deciding that he needed a woman to warm his bed, found Hisae for him. She also ran his household, though not to his liking, because she lacked decorum and flirted with his students. He once thanked his sister for sending Hisae clothing and on another occasion informed his mother that Hisae was not yet pregnant, indications that the family accepted and understood Hisae's position. During discussions concerning when to bring O-Chō to Tokyo, the matter of what to do about Fuji and Hisae came up. Fuji proved the more amenable. As O-Chō set about regularizing the household following her arrival in Tokyo, Fuji stayed, but Hisae did not.⁴⁷ In addition, Nobutane hired wet nurses for O-Ishi and the sons who would later die young. The nurses stayed with the family for brief periods on the borderline between family and servants.⁴⁸

Nobutane's letters suggest that, when it came to women, the line dividing family from servants was porous. Although never dignified with the honorific *O*, so long as Nobutane was alive, Fuji maintained her position as O-Ishi's birth mother and, possibly, Nobutane's preferred concubine. Hisae was marginal and easily jettisoned when her services were no longer needed. We know that daimyo and the Kyoto nobility incorporated concubines into their families as a matter of course; to the end of his life in 1913, the last shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, preferred to sleep between his two favorite concubines even though he had a wife.⁴⁹ Regardless

of Nobutane's sleeping arrangements, it is remarkable that in the close quarters of samurai barracks he managed to get both his wife and his concubine pregnant at almost the same time. In terms of family structure, they held different positions; in terms of emotional response, the family respected O-Chō and felt a certain measure of affection for Fuji.

Yorozu, Fuji, and Hisae had positions in recognizable if unusual household categories—one as an unofficially adopted son, the others as servant-concubines. In addition to them, the Hirata family at one time encompassed two other people who fit less comfortably into any recognizable categories. Like Yorozu, both lived with the Hirata when Atsutane resided in a house rented from a shogunal deputy (the family moved into Akita domain barracks only shortly before he died, after he received domainal affiliation). The relative lack of supervision may have eased the incorporation of anomalous members.

One of these temporary additions to Atsutane's household, even more poorly documented than the servant-concubines, was a woman known only as "O-Fukuro" (mom) when Atsutane wrote the Hirata family diary and "Obaasama" (grandmother) when it was kept by Kanetane. According to one family history, she was "the mother who had been living in Osaka-chō and moved into Atsutane's house in 1818," soon after his third and last marriage.⁵⁰ Whose mother she was is not clear. From the family diary it appears that she must have led a carefree existence, visiting relatives and making pilgrimages to temples.⁵¹ She stayed with the family until news came of Atsutane's death in 1843. What little is known about her suggests that she had a fictive kin relationship to Atsutane, one sufficiently strong to merit her upkeep for twenty-five years.

Another temporary resident in Atsutane's household was Torakichi, famous for having traveled with the *sanjin*, or "men of the mountains," more than immortals but not quite deities.⁵² Atsutane first heard about him in 1820, when Torakichi showed up at the house of an acquaintance. After an interview, Atsutane, his wife, and two disciples invited the boy to the Hirata home. Torakichi visited several times and eventually spent the night. To keep him amused, the family played hide-and-seek. The boy attracted crowds of visitors, so much so that Atsutane had to inform the authorities of his residence. Wanting protection against the Buddhist priests and mountain shaman experts who tried to interrogate him, Torakichi had his elder brother ask Atsutane to take Torakichi on as an apprentice disciple. The family agreed and dressed him as a little samurai, to his great delight. Although mention of Torakichi tapers off after the first flurry of appearances in the family diary, he appears to have continued to live in the household as an all-purpose attendant and marginal family member. In 1825, his name was changed to Katsuma Daidōji, an appellation chosen by Atsutane's wife. He ran off several times but Atsutane always forgave him. Finally, on 1828.7.16, Daidōji decided to shave his head and become a Buddhist priest. He last appears in the diary when he came to pay his respects a month later.⁵³

Obaasama and Torakichi held the most anomalous positions in the Hirata household. They were more than servants and stayed longer than students, and their long-term functions remain obscure. Obaasama appears to have joined the household because she found it more congenial than her previous lodgings. Torakichi at first provided information on the unseen world that Atsutane incorporated into a major work, but he remained with the family for years after it was completed.⁵⁴ Why did these people continue to belong to the Hirata family? In the end, when structure cannot account for their presence, we are left with sentiment. They stayed because all parties wanted it.

CONJUGAL RELATIONS

Atsutane, Kanetane, and Nobutane married, but the way they acquired their brides and their subsequent relationships differed. These experiences offer a useful survey of how men and women formed the partnerships that kept families going while suggesting sufficient flexibility in marital practice to allow some individuals to bring norms and desires into accord. Comparing marital life in Hirata history also points to a change: from a relative lack of societal constraint during the time of Atsutane, whose women enjoyed a fair degree of agency, to greater adherence to confining convention in Nobutane's day. The change corresponds to the increasing elevation of the Hirata men in the status order, from impecunious scholar on the margins of society to officials residing in the Akita domain's barracks.

When Atsutane sought adoption for himself, he had motives beyond recognition as a samurai. Before coming to the attention of Hirata Tōbei, Atsutane worked for a shogunal retainer who also employed a samurai woman named Ishibashi Orise. She worked as a maid in the interior of the retainer's home, standard practice for a woman seeking to improve her social skills before marriage. Atsutane and Orise fell in love and, as Atsutane wrote, "without her parents' permission, she pledged herself to me."⁵⁵ As we know from kabuki dramas, men and women employed in military households were forbidden to develop relationships not condoned by their superiors. Atsutane apparently concealed his love affair when he first ingratiated himself with Tōbei. Once he had status as an adopted son, he had to convince Tōbei that Orise would make a suitable adopted daughter before applying to the Ishibashi house for permission to marry her. The fact that the couple had made a secret pledge to marry would not normally have pleased either of these honest and upright samurai houses. According to Atsutane, "we had passionate discussions with our parents and others before she became my bride."⁵⁶ As Miyachi Masako has pointed out, "It was rare for a woman of Orise's time to have the joy of choosing her mate as she did."⁵⁷

Atsutane and Orise thus made a love match without benefit of go-betweens or parental supervision. They had three children, two boys and a girl, but only the girl survived to adulthood. Orise herself died at the age of thirty, after eleven

years of marriage. For the first forty-nine days after her death, Atsutane fell into a deep depression and did nothing but cry. He was just finishing one of his most important works, *The Sacred Pillar of the Soul* (*Tama no mihashira*), and in one of his early drafts wrote about Orise: “She served me faithfully while taking delight in the progress I made in my studies. She helped me to achieve success by working herself to the bone.” He also wrote a number of poems expressing his grief at losing this beloved wife, lamenting the fate of his motherless children, praying for Orise’s happiness in the afterlife, and remembering the eleven years of their marriage: “I was really difficult in those days, perverse, and out of sorts. Even though I knew I should not get angry, I would rail at things that could not be helped and scold her. She never lost her composure, but remained faithful to me.” Recalling how the words had poured out of him while he was writing *The Sacred Pillar of the Soul*, he wrote: “It seemed to me that I achieved such extraordinary results because the miraculous spirit of my lover was helping me out.”⁵⁸

If Atsutane had not cut himself off from family and domain by absconding to Edo to make a name for himself as a scholar, he would have been bound by the samurai code of conduct that required parental consent for marriage. This same code bound Orise. It is extraordinary that a woman schooled in the samurai feminine virtues of modesty and decorum would risk damaging her family’s reputation by falling in love. But she did, suggesting that under the right circumstances it was possible for women to have a say in whom they would marry.

Atsutane’s second wife also made up her own mind about marriage, though to a different end. In the fourth month of 1818, a go-between brought word of a woman, age thirty-four and named O-Iwa, who was working as the chief attendant in the Edo inner quarters of the lord of the tiny Hinode domain in Kyushu. According to the Hirata family diary, she first came to Atsutane for a trial visit. The real move came on the thirteenth day of the sixth month. Two months later, on the nineteenth day of the eighth month, a note in the diary states that the marriage connection with the new bride had been severed. No explanation is given for this divorce but, according to Watanabe Kinzō, who made a thorough study of Atsutane’s papers before the war, O-Iwa probably did not want to put up with Atsutane’s poverty.⁵⁹

This marriage does not feature prominently in biographies of Atsutane. It lasted a bare two months, making O-Iwa at most a temporary resident in his household. Although Itō Hiroshi surmises that her personality did not suit Atsutane,⁶⁰ it is at least as plausible that she preferred her career as a chief attendant. Regardless of who made the decision that she leave, O-Iwa merely skirted the margins of family life, leaving before she became so deeply embedded that rejection or escape would have been impossible.

As mentioned, a rural patron chose Atsutane’s third wife and adopted her before sending her to Atsutane. When she arrived, Atsutane decreed that henceforth her name, too, would be Orise (with different characters than those used

in the name of his first wife). This second Orise went with Atsutane when the shogunate exiled him to Akita in 1841 for reasons unexplained, but probably having to do with something he had published. The letters that both wrote back to the family in Edo document Orise's depth of affection for her step-daughter, then called O-Chō, as well as Atsutane's grandchildren. She frequently discussed with Atsutane the possibility of bringing one of the grandchildren to relieve their loneliness. Atsutane wrote to Kanetane: "Mother keeps talking about the seven of you and crying, and she wrote the letter enclosed with this one while she was crying. It was really too pitiful to bear."⁶¹

The letters Orise wrote to the family back in Edo indicate a deep and abiding concern for Atsutane's welfare and respect for him as a scholar. While they do not address directly the issue of conjugal affection, they suggest that the couple cared for each other, an impression buttressed by Atsutane's reports of his wife's feelings. A common metaphor for conjugal harmony was "working together like the two wheels on a cart."⁶² Husband and wife had been brought together for the purpose of promoting Atsutane's scholarly reputation, a goal hardly precluding lasting intimacy.

By the time Atsutane chose Kanetane to marry his daughter, he had written and disseminated some of his most important work and gained renown as a scholar. As far as the two men were concerned, that daughter, O-Chō, was merely a means to solidify their relationship. We have no indication that her feelings were consulted at all. Said to have been so intelligent that, had she been a boy, she would have made a fine heir to the Hirata house, O-Chō, like her husband, dedicated herself to the house and its reputation. She read and memorized her father's books and, as her father's secretary, learned to write poem cards in his hand.⁶³ She had seven children, only one of whom died. The last child and fourth son, Taneo, was born in 1843, when she was thirty-eight, an unusually late age for a woman of that time to get pregnant, and a hint, perhaps, that the couple enjoyed a robust sex life.

Atsutane died before Nobutane was old enough to marry, but the grandfather had already enabled the Hirata family to become full-fledged samurai as members of the Akita retainer band. At the same time as they held down official positions, Kanetane and Nobutane ran the Hirata school, publishing Atsutane's works, enrolling posthumous disciples, and propagating Atsutane's ideas through lectures and letters. In his study of the "structure of difference" within warrior society, Isoda Michifumi has posited that, in some regions and primarily for those of high status, early modern samurai retained some autonomy because, in addition to being bureaucrats subordinate to their lords, they were also lords (*ryōshu*) in their own right.⁶⁴ For Isoda, autonomy came from direct landholding. I think the principle can be extended to operating a school. In other words, following Atsutane's death in 1843, Kanetane and Nobutane were subordinate to the daimyo of Akita as salaried bureaucrats while they maintained a measure of autonomy rooted in their scholarly domain.

Given Nobutane's dual roles, each with a strongly public character, it was to be expected that the choice of a bride would not be his alone. The role carried responsibilities, and the qualifications were strict: in addition to getting along with Nobutane and his parents, the bride had to be competent at running a household and interacting with outsiders. She also had to be well educated. Nobutane married for the first time in 1853, following negotiations with the bride's family, an exchange of betrothal gifts, a petition to the domain for approval of the marriage, and the delivery of the bride's trousseau. This first bride departed the family with so little formality that the family diary does not record it. Negotiations for Nobutane's second marriage, to the sister of shogunal doctor and Japan studies scholar Kubo Sueshige, began in the seventh month of 1854 and followed the same set of procedures as the first had, concluding with a union in the ninth month of the same year. Since Nobutane's mother had already changed her name to Orise following the death of her stepmother, Nobutane's bride took the name O-Chō. Even though none of her pregnancies ended in a living child, she suited Nobutane and his parents in all other ways and retained the family name even after she returned to her brother's house following Nobutane's death.

Scholars have long argued that, in early modern Japan, a wife's competence in household management outweighed her ability to bear children. O-Chō exemplifies this principle. The letter quoted at the beginning of this essay provides the only evidence that she was ever anything but the perfect wife or that she had feelings of her own. She appears in the family diary as a dutiful daughter-in-law who took care of her in-laws while Nobutane traveled and came to her husband's side only when he summoned her. Her few remaining letters merely relate news of current events except for the one that announces Nobutane's imminent demise. Her position as wife was unassailable; no matter how fond Nobutane became of his concubines, in his correspondence with his parents, at least, he always spoke of her with respect, praised her managerial abilities, and made sure the status difference between her and the concubines was maintained.

CONCLUSION

John W. Hall once described early modern Japan as a container society, insofar as the status system specified a place for each male individual—whether the ward for urban commoners, the village for farmers, or the domain for samurai. The family might also be seen as container, at least for the household head and his wife plus the heir and his wife. This study of the Hirata family shows one way in which these containers were constructed piecemeal over time and remained porous. Women could move from one status container to another, as did the second Orise when she went from tofu maker's daughter to wife of a warrior intellectual. "Temporary" residents of houses, such as Obaasama and Torakichi, as well as servant-concubines, such as Fuji and Hisae, could also slide between containers. Compared

to men, greater fluidity characterized possible life courses for women, as did the potential for greater marginality.

What we see in the Hirata family records is a house coming into being and what that process meant for its members, especially regarding the relationships forged between house heads and everyone else. Although Atsutane got himself adopted into an unremarkable samurai family, his intellectual ambitions propelled the family onto an unconventional path. As long as he lived, a household of still-nascent distinction remained more fluid in incorporating women and temporary members than better-established families. Under Kanetane's headship, the family strove toward conventional prestige. By Nobutane's time, marriage practice followed the standard procedure of bringing in a bride. Nobutane attained such an illustrious position, first as domain bureaucrat and later as a central-government official, that he could command the services of multiple women and even have his choice of heir.

This vexed business of adoption and succession continued to allow flexibility. Atsutane manipulated adoption strategies in order to marry the woman he wanted (although, unlike commoners, samurai like Tōbei did not normally adopt couples) and to make Ikuta Yorozu his son (despite prohibitions against establishing branch houses). Kanetane jettisoned his position as head of his natal house to become Atsutane's adopted son. Nobutane compelled candidates for adoption to compete against one other. Throughout these machinations, the Hirata house pushed the boundaries of accepted procedures for samurai.⁶⁵ Ray Moore, in assessing the extent to which adoption enabled social mobility in the warrior class, concluded that it had little effect in quantitative terms, a conclusion shared by Japanese historians.⁶⁶ The collective consequences of adoption nonetheless conceal individual aspirations and fates. If the Hirata family used adoption for often-conventional reasons—above all to preserve and continue the house—the actions of successive heads suggest that achieving their goals required taking advantage of catch-as-catch-can opportunities beyond the normative strategies open to public scrutiny and approbation. The Hirata family was surely not the only one of whom this can be said. Their records, however, provide a particularly intimate view of the process and demonstrate the role that microhistory can play in shedding light on how individuals and families employed everyday tactics in what Michel de Certeau has called “the ancient art of making do.”⁶⁷

NOTES

1. Shokan 13–1–5.
2. On the frequency of adoption among the ruling classes in Japan as compared to China and Korea, see Marcia Yonemoto's chapter in this volume.
3. Bachnik 1983, 167.
4. Lindsay 2007.

5. For accounts of Atsutane's intellectual career, see Harootunian 1988 and McNally 2005.
6. Kamata 1988, 63.
7. Itō 1973, 44.
8. Kamata 1988, 69.
9. Ōtake 1988, 100.
10. Handa 2006, 125.
11. In a letter to Ban Nobutomo, Atsutane complained that the Itakura domain had repeatedly reduced his stipend, yet it expected him to continue to work full-time. Itō 1973, 107.
12. Watanabe 1942, 27.
13. Itō 1973, 180–83; Shokan 21–2.
14. Kumanosuke had been adopted by the Matsui house to marry its daughter in 1855 when he was just twelve years old; when she died two years later, he returned to the Hirata family. His formal name was Taneo.
15. Miyachi 2006a, 424.
16. Miyachi 2006a, 428–29.
17. Miyachi 2006a, 445.
18. Shokan 15–38–12–1.
19. Miyachi 2006a, 483.
20. According to Isoda Michifumi, among the signs for making sure that samurai did not mistake the rank of a person they might have to greet were the wearing of *hakama* and the carrying of a sword; samurai of *kachi* rank and above were never supposed to leave their gates without them. Isoda (2003) 2013, 78–79.
21. Miyachi 2006a, 491.
22. Hako 1–10–11.
23. Sukematsu's father, Kagemichi, had taken the boy and his aunt with him to Kyoto in 1868, when he moved there to work in the Bureau of Divinity along with Nobutane.
24. Miyachi 2005, 96, 98.
25. Sasshi 54.
26. Sasshi 55.
27. These are meanings derived from the thirteenth-century *Goseibai shikimoku*.
28. Uzaki (1930) 1998, 23.
29. Watanabe, document 6798.
30. Miyachi 2006b, 65.
31. Watanabe 1942, 24.
32. Kamata 1988, 75, 79.
33. Walthall (1999) 2005.
34. Roberts 2012.
35. *Ōwada* was the name of Atsutane's natal house; *Tosho* was a title given to house elders in Tatebayashi, Ikuta's original domain; *Taira no ason* indicated that he claimed descent from the emperor Kanmu through the Taira line, as did Atsutane.
36. Miyachi 2005, 39–40; Watanabe 1942, 154–55.
37. Miyachi 2007, 342, 357, 362, 374, 378, 379, 411, 413, 426, 429 437, 446, 455, 510.
38. Miyachi 2006a, 110–21.
39. *Daifusō kokukō* states that ancient Chinese texts mention a land to the east across a great waste called Fusōkoku, a sacred and pure land of the gods, the origin of rulers and

teachers. The first rulers of China, the so-called three sages and five emperors, all came from Fusōkoku. Thus these earliest rulers come from where the Japanese imperial gods reside. *Fusō* means “the cherry tree,” and when this cherry tree withered, it changed into Mt. Fuji. Itō 1973, 189.

40. Yoshida 2012, 102.
41. Yoshida 2012, 103.
42. Sasshi 54.
43. Miyachi 2006a, 348.
44. According to the family diary, Nobutane also had a son named Heitarō, born 1868.6.1, who died that same year on 9.4. No mention is made of the mother. Miyachi 2006a, 375.
45. Miyachi 2006a, 374.
46. Miyachi 2006a, 384, 469.
47. Miyachi 2006a, 403, 408–10, 489–90.
48. There are no records of what became of Hisae, or of Teru, the servant-concubine mentioned in this chapter’s opening quotation.
49. Endō 1985.
50. Bessatsu *Taiyō* 2004.
51. Miyachi 2005.
52. For a meretricious account of Torakichi, see Hansen 2008.
53. Watanabe 1942, 180–99.
54. The major work was *Senkyō ibun*.
55. Itō 1973, 48.
56. Itō 1973, 53.
57. Miyachi 2006b, 56.
58. Itō 1973, 96–99.
59. Watanabe 1942, 24.
60. Itō 1973, 118.
61. Miyachi 2006b, 62.
62. Walthall 2009, 13.
63. Miyachi 2006b, 63.
64. Isoda (2003) 2013, 16–19.
65. For an overview of the norms and regulations governing warrior adoptions, see Kamata 1988, especially 75, 89.
66. Moore 1970, 617–32.
67. De Certeau 1984, 30.

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