

Adoption Practices in Northeastern Japan, 1708-1870

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Adoption mediates demographic constraints and family continuity. In early modern Japan where strong patriarchy and primogeniture prevailed, the adoption of adults and even sons-in-law were common to secure heirs among sonless couples. This study attempts to understand better the rationale of both the demand and supply sides, i.e. families who adopted in/out sons and daughters, as well as the characteristics of those individuals who were adopted in/out. We take advantage of a unique large-scale individual-level panel dataset, transcribed from well-preserved population registers from northeastern Japanese villages and towns in 1708-1870. We first investigate the types and age/sex patterns of adoption followed by the adoption market for adopted sons and daughters. We pay special attention to the contrast among three agricultural villages and a local town. We then conduct an exploratory analysis to examine the factors related to adoption, considering the influence of time-variant household composition, landholdings, and heads' characteristics. This is one of the first studies to systematically compare adoption practices between rural and urban areas.

Source and Setting: This study draws its data from the local population registers called *ninbetsu-aratame-cho* (NAC) in three farming villages (Shimomoriya, Niita, Hidenoyama) and a local town (Koriyama) in the present Fukushima prefecture in northeastern Japan. These NAC records extend over a period of about 150 years, 1708-1870 with some number of intermittent years missing. The registers were compiled annually based on the principle of *de facto*. The detailed records of events allow this study to examine timing and types of adoption. The contrasts among these communities make the study of adoption particularly interesting as they provide different patterns of population trends during the observation period: Two rural villages of Shimomoriya and Niita suffered from population decline without being able to recover from the damages caused by a series of famines; while the local post town of Koriyama and the neighboring village of Hidenoyama managed their stabilized expansion throughout the observation period.

Adoption: In this study, the timing of adoption is measured solely in terms of records in the NAC registers. In the population register, adoption is determined by the annotation of an exit or entry of an individual from/to a household. Adoption is annotated as son/daughter being “adopted in” or “adopted out” (養子・養女); men being “adopted in/out as a son-in-law” (婿養子). Combination of these

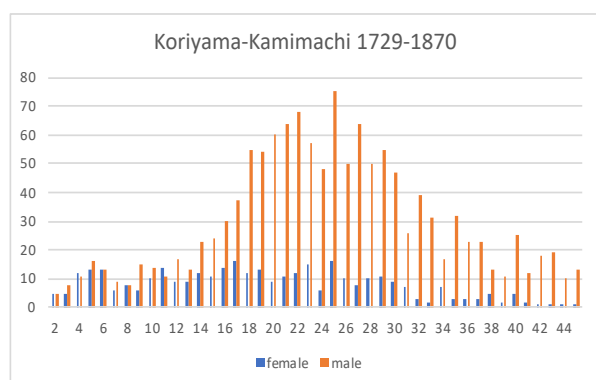
annotations, marriage information, as well as relationship to the head allow us to distinguish at least three types of adoption---adoption of sons-in-laws, sons, daughters, and married couples.

Analysis: Altogether, we found adoption of 2,546 males and 645 females into households during the observation period of the study (Table 1). More than half of adoption cases were son-in-law adoptions followed by adopted sons. Nevertheless, quite a number of adoption of daughters were found, particularly in Koriyama. As for the age distribution, the patterns of male and female adoption were different (Figure 1): while male adoptions concentrate during 20-28, those of females were scattered during age 2-30 in Koriyama. Although exploratory, our event history analysis suggests that factors associated with adoption varied depending on the type of adoption. Household SES was more important for adoption of sons-in-law and sons but not daughters; Female head was associated only with the chance of sons-in-law adoption; and proportion of elderly co-residents increased the chance of adopting daughters. Demands as well as market for adoption varied in terms of the necessity of households.

Table 1. Adopted sons and daughters by type of adoption

MALE	Niita	Shimomoriya	Hidenoyama	Koriyama-kami	ALL
sons-in-law (婿養子)	273	250	143	986	1652
sons (養子)	113	64	39	456	672
couples (夫婦養子)	36	23	25	130	214
unknown	3	2	1	2	8
all	425	339	208	1574	2546
FEMALE					
daughters (養女)	60	33	25	317	435
couples (夫婦養子)	36	21	25	126	208
unknown	1	0	0	1	2
all	97	54	50	444	645
Both Males&Females	522	393	258	2018	3191

Figure 1. Age distribution of adopted sons and daughters: Koriyama 1729-1870



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