The death of the partner, remarriage and family continuation in Tokugawa Japan: a village study[1]

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Resumen

Este artículo examina las relaciones entre la muerte de la pareja, el hecho de volverse a casar y la continuación de la familia en la población de un pueblo japonés en la era Tokugawa. El análisis se basa en los registros de población del pueblo de Nishijo en el centro de Japón. Primero, se estiman tablas de vida de segundas y consecutivas nupcias usando un total de 286 casos donde se puede observar el fin de la unión matrimonial. Luego, con el fin de indagar que determinaba la decisión de las viudas de casarse otra vez, se seleccionó una muestra menor de 26 mujeres que habían quedado viudas antes de cumplir los 40 años y por último se las siguió en los registros durante los siguientes 10 años. Según estos datos, existe una correlación negativa entra la edad descendiente que tiene que heredar y la probabilidad de casarse otra vez, y esta relación era más importante que con la edad en la cual estas mujeres perdieron su marido y con el número de descendientes vivos. Los datos sugieren que estas mujeres daban prioridad a la continuación de la familia del marido muerto, lo cuál concordaba con las estrategias de la familia troncal.

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1 This article is a development from two previous papers: Kiyoshi Hamano, Shuma Morimoto and Osamu Saito, «The death of the partner and re-marriage in Tokugawa Japan's socio-demographic system: a village study», paper presented at the Conference on When Dad Died. Family Stress and Household Dynamics in Historical Societies, Venice, May 1998, and a Japanese-language publication, Saito Osamu and Hamano Kiyoshi, «Tokugawa nōson ni okeru saikon to ie no keishō: Mino-no-kuni Nishijō mura, 1773-1869», *Kokumin keizai zasshi*, vol.179, no.3, 1999. The authors thank Kazuyasu Sakamoto for his help in computing work during the process of additional research.

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Palabras clave: familia, matrimonio en segundas y consecutivas nupcias, viudedad, muerte de pareja, Tokugawa, Japón

Abstract

This paper explores the relationships between the death of the partner, remarriage and family continuation for a village population in Tokugawa Japan. The analysis is based on population registers for the village of Nishijo in central Japan. First, remarriage life tables are estimated from 286 cases in which the end of marital union can be observed. Then, in order to examine what determined widows' decision to remarry, a sub-sample of 26 women who became widowed before age 40 is selected and traced for ten years. According to this dataset, the age of the inheriting child was negatively correlated with the probability of remarriage, and was more important than the age at which they lost the husband and the number of existing children. It is suggested that those women placed a high priority on the continuation of the late husband's family, which was consistent with stem-family strategies.

Keywords: family, remarriage, widows, death of partner, Tokugawa, Japan

Résumé

Cet article examine les rapports entre la mort du couple, le remariage et la continuation de la famille chez les habitants d´un village japonais à l´époque Tokugawa. L´analyse se base dans les registres de la population du village de Nishijo au centre du pays. Premièrement, on estime les tableaux des deuxièmes et éventuellement des ultérieures noces, en utilisant un total de 286 cas où l´on peut observer la fin de l´union matrimoniale. Après, avec le but de connaître ce qui détermine la décision des veuves de se remarier, on a choisi un échantillon moindre de 26 femmes qui étaient restées veuves avant d´avoir 40 ans révolus, et qui ont été finalement suivies dans les registres pendant les 10 années suivantes. Selon ces données, il existe une corrélation négative entre l´age du descendant (homme ou femme) qui doit héritier et la probabilité de se remarier à nouveau, cette relation étant plus importante que celle établie avec l´age auquel ces femmes avaient perdu leur époux, ou avec le nombre de descendants en vie. Les données suggèrent que ces femmes donnaient priorité à la continuation de la famille du mari mort, ce qui allait de soi avec les stratégies de la famille souche japonaise.

Mots clés: famille, mariage en secondes noces et mariages successifs, veuves, mort du couple, Tokugawa, Japon.

INTRODUCTION

In a chapter entitled «Did the peasants really starve?» of *The World We Have Lost*, Peter Laslett referred to a number of individual family stories in crisis years of English history. He found in the burial register of Greystoke, Cumberland, 1623, for example, that many «died for want of food and means». 1623 was a famine year in England; over for times the expected number of deaths were recorded in Greystoke. One of the dead was William, child of Lancelot Brown who seems to have left the village to try to find subsistence for his family. Did William also starve to death? Laslett's main concern was to question the stereotyped image of «the starving peasantry», asking whether the parishioners in Cumberland as well as in other parts of historic England really «died for want of food and means». Indeed, as for William Brown, his guess was that «it was the loss of the bread-winner, rather than exhaustion of the food supply, which had been the immediate cause of death» (Laslett, 1983a:130-132). With this and similar pieces of information as well as statistical measures the Cambridge Group worked out, he successfully turned our attention in the study of dearth from the supply of food to other elements in the fabric of society, such as the family's relationship with the system of public support.

However, there is one question that Laslett did not address: What happened to the Brown family after the 1623 famine? Did the widow, if survived, have resources to keep the family getting by without the breadwinner? Or did she remarry to keep the family on land? The death of the breadwinner was a devastating blow to any family in the pre-industrial period, particularly to a family whose prime concern was to keep the name on the land. Laslett seems to have assumed that like many other famine victims of Greystoke, the Browns started «wondering» leaving no trace in the parish, which in turn implies that the question of family continuation would never be a significant issue in the history of social structure of pre-industrial England, where virtually no labouring family had material wealth to inherit in the village community. However, in other pre-industrial societies, especially in stem-family societies where the bond between family and land was much stronger, the question of family continuation was a significant issue and remarriage could be a means to achieve that goal when the household head died prematurely. Elsewhere, Laslett put forward a four-region synthesis of the European household and family patterns, based on a catalogue of «procreational and demographic criteria» which does

include remarriage. He postulated that the proportion of widows remarrying was «very low» in Mediterranean and east European populations, «high» in western Europe, and «very high» in north-central or middle areas of Europe. The «middle» region was the region where many historians claim to have found «stem family» forms in historic data (Laslett 1983b).

Tokugawa Japan too was a stem-family society. There, the family-land bond was so central in the fabric of village society that when the partner died of a famine-related cause of death, remarriage could also be an important option for the Japanese widow to keep the family line intact. But was this the only option they could take?

Take one Japanese family story. In the year 1836, amidst of the nation-wide Tempo famine, a 29-year-old married man died in the village of Nishijo, central Japan. His name was Yasuemon who was a poor peasant possessing only a small plot of land assessed to produce less than one *koku* (150 kg) of rice. He must have rented more plots of farm land to support the whole family, but it is unlikely that the area total of his farm exceeded the village average. When he died, there were the widow, her mother-in-law and a three-year-old son left in the household. The widow became the head of the household. Within a year, however, the mother-in-law died and, at about the same time, the widow remarried to a man from a neighbouring village. This did not mean to form a new household but to enable Yasuemon's family to continue. Although the remarriage did not bear children to the couple, it enabled the family to return to the stem-family life cycle. In 1855 the only son from first marriage took a wife at the age of 22. Subsequently four children were born to the young couple. In 1869, when the record ended, the household was a three-generation one with two conjugal family units vertically related.

The above episode suggests that in the Japanese past even poor peasants like Yasuemon's family placed a high priority on keeping the family line continue and often managed to do so. Indeed, Yasuemon's family had been landless until his father's generation, but his father managed to buy up a small piece of land. Together with their tenant rights, therefore, the loss of the breadwinner did not deter the family from trying to keep the family farm going. Also suggestive is that the widows often chose to stay in the husband's family household, for whom there seems to have been several options including adoption and remarriage. Yasuemon's widow combined both.

Such findings should be set against the conventional picture of Tokugawa society. The Tokugawa agrarian society has been depicted as, firstly, a population with universal marriage, secondly, as a Confucian society in which the family household (called *ie* in Japanese), rather than the individual, was the social, legal and administrative unit, and finally, as a stem-family society in which the concept of descent line carried significant weight. All this seems to suggest that the woman's status in the family was a subordinate one, limiting the possibility of divorce and that of re-marriage. However, recent work by early modern historians has revealed that there were a surprisingly large number of divorce cases in the Tokugawa and the early Meiji period. In those cases women did not always appear as passive agents. In fact a substantial proportion of the cases were initiated by the women rather than their husbands, and this was not necessarily confined to the educated but was widely found among the farm women as well. These findings question the stereotyped images of women in traditional rural Japan, suggesting that similar revisions are necessary in relation to remarriage. Unfortunately, however, little has been done to determine, first of all, how often marriage was terminated by either divorce or the death of the partner. Not many have demonstrated how frequently both the man and woman remarried after the marriage ended, and with the exception of Hiroshi Kito and Satomi Kurosu, very few have examined how the probability of remarriage changed according to, say, the duration of marriage and the age at marriage (Kito 1988; Kurosu 1998). These are primarily demographic questions, and can be examined either by having a close look at individual family stories or by taking a «life table» approach if a suitable source material is available.

It is evident that the Christian church register does not allow us to conduct this kind of nuptiality studies. On the other hand, a series of village population registers such as the *shūmon aratame-chō* of Tokugawa Japan enable us to go a significant way along this line of research. Few have worked on this aspect of nuptiality in the Japanese past, however, since working with the village population register in relation to marriage is without problems. A notable exception is Thomas Smith's pioneering study of Nakahara, where an attempt was made to estimate celibacy tables for both men and women of that village (Smith 1977, ch.6), while Kiyoshi Hamano, working on a southwestern village, touched upon a mechanism with which the death of the wife was linked to a shift in the mean age at first marriage through the

husband's re-marriage behaviour (Hamano 1995. See also Hamano, Kurosu and Morimoto 1998). Otherwise no effort has so far been made by Tokugawa historical demographers.

This is undoubtedly a promising area in Tokugawa historical demography and its related fields, promising in much the same spirit as in which Peter Laslett wrote *The World We have Lost*, a book full of questions. In this paper we will look at one village, Nishijo, for the period 1773-1869. Being a village study we will not be able to present statistically robust generalisations. What we would like to do instead is to demonstrate what can be done with Tokugawa village population registers in relation to the relationships between the death of the partner, remarriage and family continuation, In short, this essay is an attempt to repay, at least in part, our debt to Peter Laslett.

1. THE ISSUES

The death of the partner is an event which involves two demographic variables: mortality and nuptiality. The former is obvious while the latter and the latter's relationship with the former merit a little more attention. With the death of the husband, the wife's marital status changes from «married» to «widowed», but at the same time it opens up a possibility of remarriage to her. Whether she will actually remarry or not, and how soon it will take place, depend on the age at death of the partner and the duration of marriage, as well as social norms and legal constraints she faces in the society.

Conceptually there are two areas with which the research is concerned. One is nuptiality studies. So far historical studies of nuptiality have been almost exclusively focussed on age at first marriage and, to a lesser extent, celibacy, while the death of the partner and remarriage have been virtually left out from consideration. This is largely because demographic research the Christian parish register does not allow researchers to conduct full investigation into the dissolution of marriage, its causes and remarriage that might follow. There are, of course, numerous studies of remarriage in the past (for a survey of evidence, see Oris and Ochiai, 2002: 63-77). But since most of them utilised sources other than parish registers, it has been not quite possible to accommodate the issue of remarriage in the discussion of pre-industrial demo-

graphic regimes that has so far been based chiefly on the parish-register demography. However, village population registers such as Tokugawa Japanese ones have no such limitations; it is not difficult to count the number of marriage and take up the remarriage cases. Such findings will undoubtedly enlarge the field of nuptiality studies in a formal demographic sense.

The other area is concerned with what John Hajnal termed pre-industrial household formation systems (Hajnal 1983). Since observed frequencies of marriage disruption and remarriage are not simply a reflection of mortality profiles of those in the childbearing ages, but are determined largely by decisions individual women made in specific situations as well as social and legal rules in relation to marriage and remarriage. The gist of Hajnal's theoretical argument is that most fundamental are the rules governing how the family household is formed. He demonstrated that two contrasting marriage patterns observed between east and west European populations correspond to the joint family and the simple family household formation system, but was reticent about the stem-family system. Laslett hypothesised, as noted above, that remarriage was frequent in such areas but gave no evidence (Laslett 1983b).

Against this historiographical background, Osamu Saito has recently suggested to use, as a yardstick to identify a remarriage pattern, the elasticity of remarriage with respect to mortality change. It is obvious that in any society there existed a potential demand for remarriage when adult mortality was high, but how sensitive remarriage was to a change in mortality rate varies from society to society depending on social norms and structures. The mortality elasticity of remarriage measures this sensitivity, with which I have identified three separate remarriage patterns in the past. In the system Hajnal called north-west European, the elasticity was neither high nor low. In the joint household system, such as Russia and Taiwan, where universal marriage was the rule and most married young, remarriage could become extremely frequent when death rates stayed high, but as soon as mortality fell substantially the remarriage market would diminish swiftly, suggesting that the elasticity was high. In contrast to either of these two, Japan exhibited a distinctive remarriage pattern. The remarriage pattern of this stem-family society was characterized not so much by either a high or low frequency but by a low elasticity (Saito, 2005).

There are, of course, regional variations in Japan. In north-eastern villages Kurosu studied, and in a remote mountain village of the central region Kito worked on, remarriage tended to be frequent, reflecting higher levels of mortality due to a series of famines or to less favourable farming conditions, or both (Kito 1988; Kurosu 1998). Compared with these relatively high-mortality villages, however, Nishijo exhibited the combination of lower levels of mortality and a lower frequency of remarriage (for mortality, see Saito 1997). We shall examine this phenomenon in relation to the workings of the stem-family household system and the position of women in that system.

The demographic factors to be examined are the age at which the woman lost the husband, the number of existing children, and the age of the eldest child. European studies have shown that the first two variables were inversely correlated with the chances of remarriage but no conclusive results for the age of children (Knodel 1988:177-184; Oris and Ochiai 2002: 69-70; Alter et al. 2002). The Nishijo data will show somewhat different results: that the age of the inheriting child was more important a variable determining the probability of remarriage than the other factors. Remarriage was inversely correlated with the age of eldest child, suggesting that stem-family strategies for household continuation were involved in the decision-making process. Before going into such analysis, however, a few remarks about the village and data are required.

2. THE VILLAGE

Nishijo village was located in the middle of a polder area in the Nōbi plain, only several kilometres away from Nakahara, a village studied by Thomas Smith. The Nōbi plain is one of the largest alluvial fans on the Honshū Island, created jointly by the Ibi, Nagara and Kiso Rivers that carry water from the Hida Heights and the Japan Alps down to the Pacific at Ise Bay. Silts carried by those rivers make the soils of paddy fields extremely fertile. Thus, Nishijo was a predominantly wet-rice producing village, protected by dykes from flooding waters. Since much effort of reclamation came from local notables, the distribution of landholdings was skewed. While a large proportion of the village land was in the hands of a few wealthy farmers, two-thirds of the villagers were *de facto* landless. In terms of tax assess-

ment of land measured in *koku* of rice, they possessed land of no more than 2 *koku*, only 300 kg in rice equivalents (Hayami 1992: 201). On the other hand, however, there was no household headed by a day labourer. Virtually all the less-than-two-*koku* villagers were tenant cultivators, tilling small pieces of wet paddies. This was a typical peasant society.

Another characteristic of the village was its proximity to towns. Nishijo was some 10 kilometres south of Ōgaki, a local castle town, and 30 kilometres north-west of metropolitan Nagoya. Even Kyoto was not inaccessible. Akira Hayami's work has revealed that a substantial number of people of this village actually migrated to Kyoto and Nagoya and toŌgaki and other Nōbi towns, as well as to neighbouring villages. Many of those were return migrants. Including such returnees, according to his calculations, roughly one in two who were born in Nishijo experienced out-migration at least once in his or her life time (Hayami 1992, ch.10; 1997, ch.5).

Nishijo was officially a hamlet within Niremata village (*mura*), not an independent *mura*. However, since Nishijo had their own village officials, the village population registers were compiled separately from the parent village of Niremata. The extant registers run for 97 years from 1773 to 1869. The population of Nishijo in 1773 was 366 and the number of households 93; in 1869 there were 381 people with 78 households.

There are a couple of problems we have to face when utilising them as data. Village population registers like the *shūmon aratame-chō* are census-type listings of inhabitants taken on a yearly basis, so that we can trace an inhabitant's changing marital status without much difficulty if he or she continued to live in the village for his or her entire reproductive period. However, such data usually have a censoring problem, which means that many demographic events are not fully observed because of the limitation of period coverage.

In the case of Nishijo, situations are somewhat different from usual cases. The information about when an event begun, be it marriage, adoption or migration, was repeatedly recorded while people were registered in the successive registers. The starting years of most of demographic events are therefore available even when such events occurred before the period covered by the available series of data, i.e. before 1772. On the other hand, it is not possible to know when a particular demo-

graphic event ends if it had not been terminated until 1869. Consequently, demographic events closer to the last record year tend to be excluded from our observation because of right censoring. This should be reminded when we analyze our results in this paper.

Another factor we need to mention here is the difference between the so-called *uchigaki* and *sotogaki* populations. The village population register usually covers only the people affiliated with each household; in the case of Nishijo, such people were included in the section listing the currently domiciled population (*uchigaki*). According to the usual procedure, people were excluded form the population register when they permanently migrated to elsewhere; however, the register of Nishijo did not completely exclude such people, but classified them in a different category, the *sotogaki* (literally outside section). As a result, they always cover all the people that affiliated with each household at one time of their life. This enables us to find people in the «outside» section of the register, who in fact migrated to somewhere long time ago. However, the reliability of «outside» information is considered to be low compared with the one in the «currently domiciled» section. Those people, who were transferred by the village officials to the «outside» section and never returned to the «currently domiciled» section, are categorized in our analysis as «unknown» in terms of their marital status.

There is another data problem, which is inherent in Tokugawa Japan's household registration system. The system was designed to list people living in the village at one point in time, not to register individual demographic events. Additional information on birth, death, marriage and so on were often added on the duplicate of the previous year's register, but rarely indicating the day and the month of the event. This makes it difficult to determine exactly when marriage took place. Even worse is that there were undoubtedly unrecorded marriage and divorce cases. If a couple who had started their marriage life soon after the previous year's compilation dissolved the union before the next compilation date, there is no way to trace their marriage and divorce in the village's register. Such cases may have been numerous, but there is a possibility that the cohabitation had already begun several years earlier. We should, therefore, not underestimate the probability of omission of this kind.

Finally, it should be noted that the concept of marriage (and remarriage) was in sharp contrast with that in Christian Europe. In Europe marriage was, and still is, an event at which a new marital

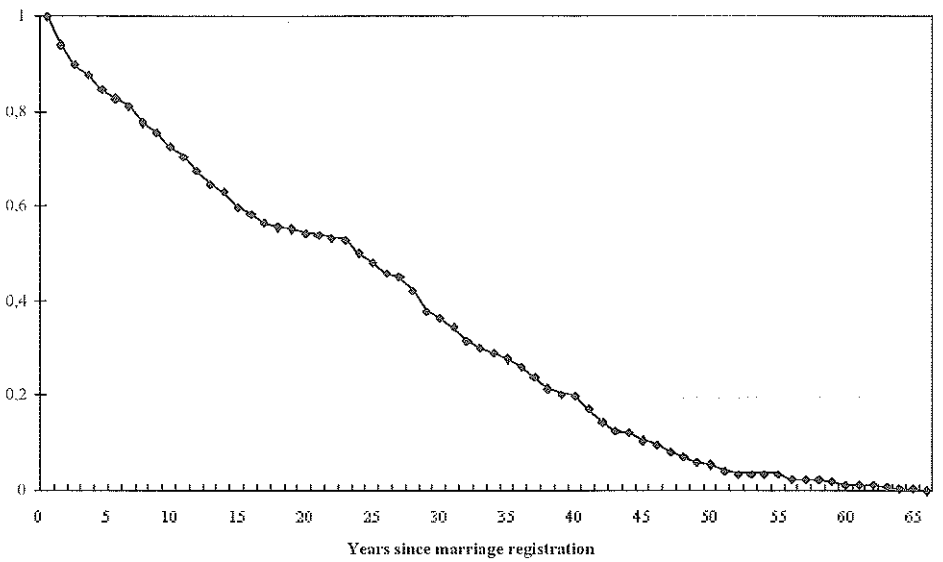
union was formed, whereas in Tokugawa Japan marriage was a process of several events through which the formation of a new couple was completed. It is difficult to say exactly when the process began, but what is certain is that cohabitation came before any kind of «registration» of the marriage. According to a survey of Tokyo taken as late as 1938, the average interval between wedding and registration was 9.9 months while that for unskilled labourers tended to exceed 12 months (Okazaki 1950:182-185). It implies that the interval between cohabitation and registration must have been even longer, and it is often suggested that in many rural areas marriages were formally recognised only after the birth of a child. Indeed, Nishijo may well have been such a case since Nishijo's completed families include no couple who ended childless. It is, therefore, not unlikely that «marriages» in the village's registers did not include such trial marriages. This possibility should be born in mind when looking at divorce cases in this village, although we are interested more in cases where the husband died.

3. MARITAL DISSOLUTION

In order to investigate the pattern of remarriage in Nishijo, we first select the cases in which the end of marital union can be observed. There are 286 cases to meet this condition. There are basically three reasons for marriages ended: divorce, death of the husband and death of the wife. Deaths of the husband are the largest category (59%) followed by the deaths of the wife (28%). Divorce accounts for 11%. There are five cases in which both the husband and wife died in the same year. There are also two cases in which a disappearance (*kakeochi*) of the husband was the reason that marriage was terminated.

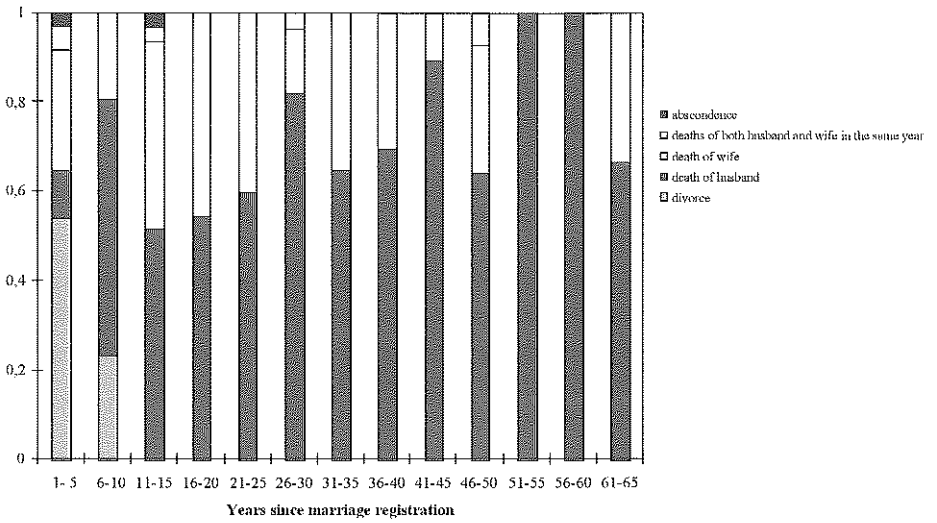
These cases may be summarized by treating them as life table functions. Figure 1 illustrates the pattern of marital dissolution after the year of marriage registration by using a life table analysis. More than one third of the couples were divorced or widowed within ten years after marriage. About a half of the marriages ended after twenty years.

FIGURE 1
Cumulative proportions of marital dissolution



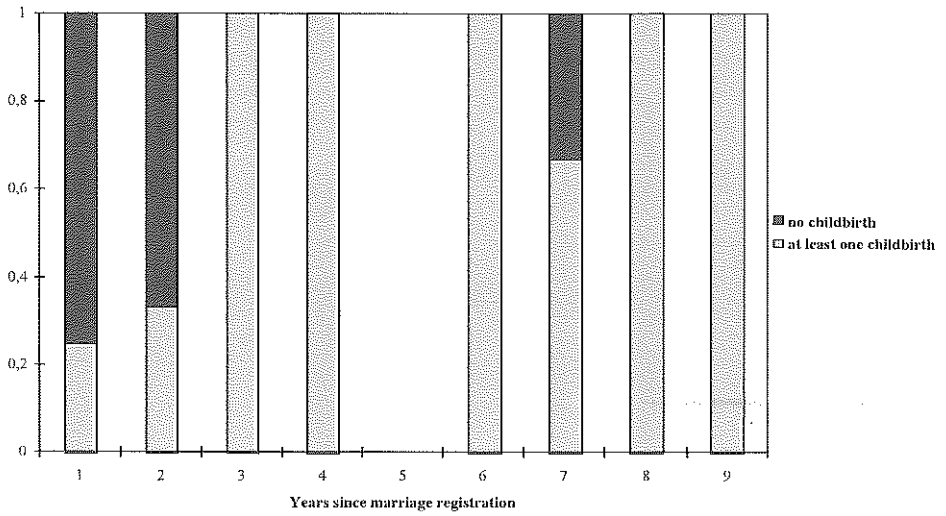
A Cause of marital dissolution may vary with the duration of marriage. Figure 2 shows this relationship. Divorces are the primary reason within five years after the registration of marriage. On the other hand, no divorce occurs 10 years after the registration. Deaths of the husband are always the primary reason after six years. This tendency increases as the duration becomes longer, because a husband is usually older than his wife.

FIGURE 2
Causes of marital dissolution



Why are divorces concentrated in an early stage of marriage? Childlessness can be one of the reasons why. Many children were registered in the *shūmon aratame-chō* before marriage was registered. It is expected therefore that the registration of marriage was frequently postponed until a baby was born. If a marriage was registered before the baby was born and if pregnancy did not occur after several years, the couple may have been forced to divorce. Figure 3 suggests that this type of divorce only occurred in a very early stage of marriage in Nishijo. Couples who got divorced without children mostly appear within two years after the marriage registration. After this very early stage, most divorcees had at least one child. Childlessness, in other words, was not the primary reason why they divorced except in a very early stage of marriage life. Many couples may have chosen divorce even though they had children.

FIGURE 3
Female experience of childbearing at the time of divorce



The existence of remarriage was another reason why they chose divorce in the very early stage of marriage. The mean age at first marriage for males and females were slightly over 25 and 20 respectively in Nishijo. If remarriage did not occur after they reached a certain level of age, perhaps 35 for males and 30 for females, it may account for why they did not divorce after ten years from marriage. Whether this is the case or not in Nishijo will be examined in the next section.

4. REMARRIAGE

A remarriage rate can be calculated in various ways. The simplest method of all is to calculate the ratio of remarriages to the total number of marriage cases (as Hayami did in Hayami 1992: 238). To examine the pattern of remarriage in a more effective manner, the life table approach is taken again. Since the age at marriage is probably the most important determinant of remarriage, we should divide widows and widowers into different groups by their age at divorce or widowhood.

Table 1 sets out a remarriage life table for Nishijo males. «Age -30» means those people divorced or widowed before age 30. Since there were no men who remarried in their 50s or over, only three categories are shown. It is clear that the majority of men remarried if they were widowed either in their 20s or 30s. On the other hand, the chance of remarrying was quite low if they were over 40 years old. The table also shows the relationship between the remarriage rate and the duration since marital dissolution, which is graphed in Figure 4.

TABLE 1
Men's remarriage rate

Duration in years since marital dissolution	*Age at marital dissolution*		
	–30	31-40	41+
5	0.469	0.685	0.091
10	0.682	0.685	0.091
15	0.841	0.748	0.091
N	15	30	13

FIGURE 4
Remarriage life table for men

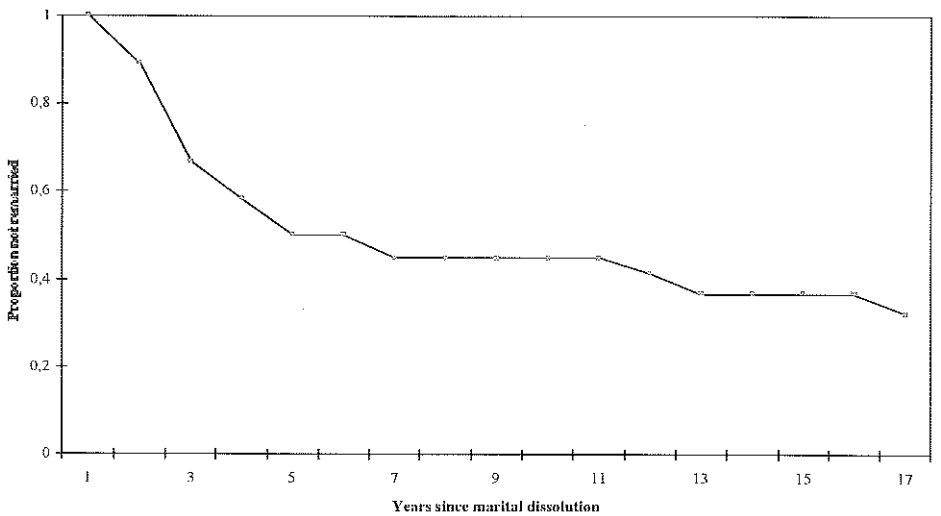
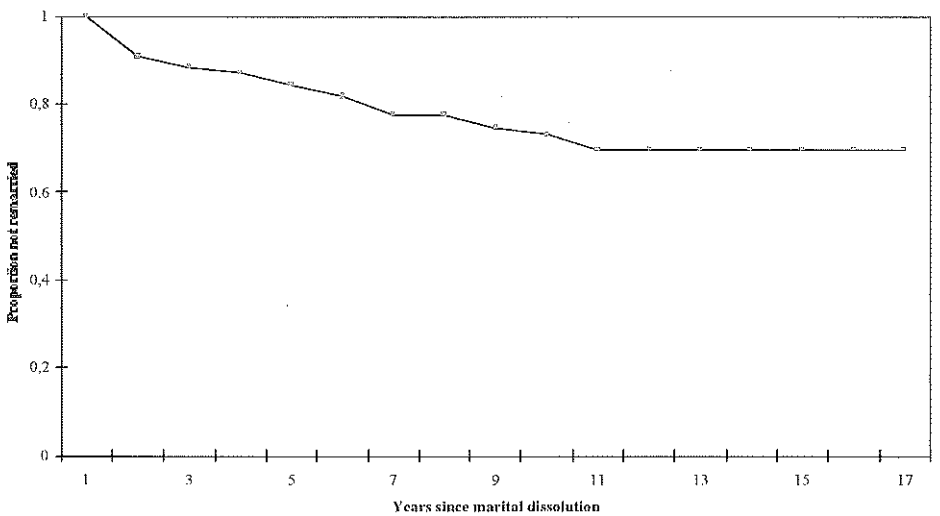


Table 2 and Figure 5 show the same calculations for females. As a whole, the chance of remarrying was lower for females. In the case of men, a turning point came between the 30s and the 40s. On the other hand, it was different for women. No women remarried if they were divorced or widowed in their 40s or over. It is very interesting that that age level is approximately the same with the upper limit of divorce age in Nishijo. It can be argued that Tokugawa villagers performed divorces if they were still young to find a remarriage partner.

TABLE 2
Women's remarriage rate

Duration in years since marital dissolution	*Age at marital dissolution*		
	–30	31-40	41+
5	0.367	0.171	0.000
10	0.662	0.220	0.000
15	0.662	0.220	0.000
N	40	25	34

FIGURE 5
Remarriage life table for women



The interval from the end of the first union to remarriage is also different between men and women. If Figure 4 is compared with Figure 5, we notice that the curved lines for male are steeper than the ones for females. The average interval between marriage and remarriage is 3.6 years for men and 4.0 years for women.

5. HEADSHIP SUCCESSION

In Nishijo all the men either divorced or widowed in their 20s remarried, whereas widows appeared less successful in the remarriage market. If wives became widowed in their 20s, the chance of remarrying was about 70%. If they were in their 30s, the chance was only 20%. This fact, on the face of it, suggests that female remarriage was less to do with the continuation of the household. However, remarriage was not the only means for the household to continue, nor was it for widows to survive the hardship. Both may have been interrelated. Their decision to remarry or not to remarry may be placed in the context of the headship succession question. In this section, we will focus on the issue of who succeeded to the headship of the household after the death of the breadwinner. Was it the mother or her child who succeeded him? If it was the mother, how was her decision making related to the succession question?

For this analysis, those women who became divorced or widowed before they reached 40 years of age are selected, then traced for ten years in order to check whether they remarried or not. How they fared after the event is summarized in Table 3.

Most divorce cases occurred during an early stage of marriage. Accordingly, the mean age at marital dissolution by divorce is low (23 years old), so that more than half of the women remarried after their divorce. Those divorced women who did not remarry were five years older than the women who did remarry.

TABLE 3

Women's remarriage profiles: the age at marital dissolution, surviving children and landholding class

	Mean age at marital dissolution	*Surviving children*		*Landholding class (koku)*		
		At least one	*none*	*Less than 5*	*5 or more*	*N*
A. Divorcees						
Remarried within 10 years	21.5	4	2	3	3	6
Not remarried within 10 years	26.0	3	0	2	1	3
B. Widows						
Remarried within 10 years	28.9	7	0	3	4	7
Not remarried within 10 years	33.2	19	0	15	4	19
Returned to parental home	31.0	2	1	1	2	3
C. Divorcees & widows combined						
Remarried within 10 years	25.5	11	2	6	7	13
Not remarried within 10 years	32.2	21	1	17	5	22
Returned to parental home	31.0	2	1	1	2	3

Among the 38 women widowed before 40 years of age, 13 (23%) remarried and three (10%) returned to their parental home, but the majority, 22 (61%), remained widowed. Those who did remarry were seven years younger than those who did not, which is a significant difference. Economic status of the couple's household is another possible factor determining the chance of remarrying, for which landholding class can be a measure in the case of Tokugawa Japan. The effect of landholding was felt for those who owned less than 5 *koku* more than those who owned more: the number of non- remarrying widows was five times greater than that of remarrying widows, while the ratio of women who remarried to those who did not was one-to-one among the large holders. On the face of it, therefore, Table 3 suggests that even when the husband died, his wife was able to remarry if she was young enough, and if the household was endowed with a reasonable amount of land resources.

However, there is another factor affecting the probability of remarriage for widowed women. The existence of surviving children is one of such important factors. In his analysis of Nakahara, for example, Thomas Smith already noted that remarriage depended largely on

whether there were children. By comparing childless widows with those with children, he concluded that «the operative cultural rule in Nakahara was that childless widows could remarry; but widows with children could not», then suggested that an important reason was that a widow with children was a «full member» of the husband's family, hence that «she herself had a generally recognized responsibility to stay in the family and work for its survival; and as a mother she could best secure her children's future in this way» (Smith 1977:101-102). We cannot examine the childless cases for Nishijo since, as noted earlier, no such couples are found in our sample. However, we too will argue that much similar considerations must have been working among Nishijo widows. Yet we do not think that the substantial proportion of widows did not remarry because they *could not*. As we will see, whether they would remarry or not must have depended also on the survival of children and the age of the eldest. We would like to suggest that it was a result of their decision: remarriage was a kind of *strategy* for the survival of the family as well as for the interest of her child who was supposed to succeed to its headship. Thus, we tabulate our cases according to, first, the number of surviving children and, second, the age of the eldest child. Table 4 shows the cross-tabulation. Since two women who returned home are excluded from the table, it should be noted that all the women included are those who remained in the husband's family even after the dissolution of marriage.

TABLE 4
Women's remarriage profiles: the number of children and age of the eldest

	Mean number existing children		*Mean age of eldest child*		
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*
A. Divorcees					
Remarried within 10 years	1.0	1.1	3.3	3.4	6
Not remarried within 10 years	1.3	0.6	5.7	3.8	3
B. Widows					
Remarried within 10 years	1.9	1.1	7.3	2.7	7
Not remarried within 10 years	2.7	1.0	9.9	2.9	19
C. Divorcees & widows combined					
Remarried within 10 years	1.5	1.1	5.8	3.5	13
Not remarried within 10 years	2.5	1.1	9.3	3.3	22

According to this table, the typical divorcee had just one child whose age was three, reflecting the fact that most of the sampled women were young. Between the groups of remarrying and non-remarrying divorcees, there is no discernible difference in the number of children but the age of the child of the non-remarrying group was higher than that for the remarrying group.

These variables did differ between the two groups in the case of widows. The women who chose to remarry had on average two children with the eldest being seven, while those who remained widowed had more children, nearly three, with the eldest being, on average, ten years old. Since the number of observations is small these differences are statistically significant only at the 10 per cent level, but the observed differences merit attention.

The results suggest that women's decision not to remarry was influenced, not so much by the existence of many children by her first marriage, of especially small children, but by the possibility of the future heir being about to start working and eventually to succeed the mother as the head of the household. The women did probably choose not to remarry as a strategy to keep the family line—first by taking up the headship to wait for the son becoming old enough to start earning, then by handing the headship to the grown-up heir. Even if the eldest were a girl, the family would be able to take in an adopted son for the inheriting daughter. Such was a strategy which would not be inconsistent with the logic of a stem-family system.

In order to examine the significance of these findings, we conduct a survival analysis by focussing on the 26 widows only. Three groups of explanatory factors are considered. The first is the age of widow at the time of the husband's death, representing the attractiveness in the remarriage market. The second group of variables is concerned with her children, i.e. the numbers of sons and daughters and the age of the eldest. The third is the household's landholding class, expressed in a rice equivalent (*koku* of rice). We do not include the age of widow in year t since it is closely correlated with the age of the eldest child (the correlation coefficient is 0.846), but include an interaction term of the age of the eldest and landholding to see if these two variables were not independent with each other. Table 5 shows the results obtained by applying the Cox proportional hazard model to all the observations derived from the 26 cases.

TABLE 5
The determinants of women's remarriage: results of survival analysis

	Widows only		
	Sign of coefficient	*Hazard ratio*	*p-value*
Age of woman			
DEL at husband's death	+	1.02	0.217
Age of eldest child	–	0.52	0.070
No. of sons	+	1.05	0.949
No. of daughters	+	1.80	0.430
Landholding	–	0.87	0.106
Interaction: Eldest child×landholding	+	1.01	0.244
No. of subjects	26		
No. of observations	280		
Log pseudo-likelihood	–14.73		
Chi-squared	8.46		

Because of a small sample problem the overall performance is not very good. The coefficients of the woman's age at the husband's death and the number of sons and daughters have unexpected signs but they are statistically not significant after all. Interestingly, however, the table suggests that both the age of the eldest and, to a lesser extent, landholding exhibit relatively better levels of statistical significance than the other variables. Thus, it is confirmed that the older the eldest child the smaller the probability for the widow to get remarried irrespective of her age at the time of the husband's death. What is rather surprising in Table 5 is the sign of the landholding variable. Its effect turns out to be negative when the age of the eldest child is controlled for, which indicates, contrary to what Table 3 suggested, that the wealthier the farm household the less likely she would remarry if everything else was held constant. True, its *p*-value is not significantly low enough but, given the results in Table 5, it is impossible to claim that the impact of landholding class was the other way round. Also, judging from the poor performance of the interaction term, the two variables seem to have acted separately.

This is suggestive because it implies that those widows' decision on remarriage was not so much constrained by the meagreness of their landed property but was more to do with the probability of the future

heir to be able to succeed eventually to the headship of the family household. It is interesting to note here that, of all the 19 cases of non-remarrying widows, 16 became the widow-headed households. Of all the 16 widow-headed families, moreover, 10 were households of tenant cultivators holding no land at all, and of the 10 nine were among thirteen cases in which the headship eventually went to the son or son-in-law. Also, this nine-case group included one widow tenant cultivator who succeeded in family continuation by adopting a son-in-law to the only daughter. All this suggests that the widows of those small landholders and tenant cultivators placed a high priority on the continuation of the late husband's family, which was in all probability their own choice.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the widow of Yasuemon, a poor Nishijo peasant who died at the time of the Tempo famine, remarried in order to keep their family on the land. According to the evidence we now have, she did so because her only son was too young to start working. Probably remarriage was the only means of «getting by» for them. However, the Yasuemon case was not typical in Nishijo since many more widows of small landholders or tenant cultivators chose not to remarry. For example, when a man called Jinnosuke, who owned no single piece of land, died in 1859, his wife took up the headship of the household. Next year the first son, Kamekichi, went into service at the age of eleven, and five years later, the second son at thirteen. Although the records ended in 1869, an 1872 document listed Kamekichi, 23, as the head of the household. Between the two dates, Kamekichi must have returned home and taken over the headship from his mother. At the time of 1872, he was unmarried living with his mother, a younger brother and two sisters. Data permitting, we would probably have been able to see Kamekichi getting married, his siblings marrying out and the household returning to the track of the stem-family life cycle. In this case, therefore, the widow shunned entering the remarriage market because the eldest son had already been ten at the death of the husband. Such differences apart, however, it is important to remember that both women' decisions were in line with a family continuation strategy derived from stem-family household rules. The strategy seems to have worked well in this relatively low-mortality peasant village.

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