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Families in Postwar Japan

Democracy and Reconstruction

Kanda Michiko lives with her husband and two daughters in rural Gumma Prefecture. Her husband's family left them their land and an old farmhouse that her husband, Masa, a contractor and carpenter, has been renovating. Most people, he says, would have torn it down and built a completely new house, but he loves working around the old structure, admiring the craftsmanship and adding, supporting, and replacing. He has expanded the ground floor, added an extra bathroom, and above all, to the visitor's eye, reveled in craftsmanlike decoration. He is an expert in filigreed wooden screenwork and he has created detailed openwork carving above doorways, in windows, and in waist-high partitions between rooms.

They have no sons, but their elder daughter, at twenty-seven, is marrying a local man who will come to live with them as their adopted son-in-law. Michiko is very pleased that the young man has agreed to be the heir and successor. He is in training to Masa in his contracting business but, as Michiko says, the younger man doesn't have the obsessive passion for carpentry her husband has.

The Kandas explain that they care more for the happiness of their children than for the family's continuation. In a traditional family with no son, the eldest daughter would be required to marry a man who would take her family's name and act as its eldest son, an old custom meant to ensure the patriline. The Kandas combine traditionalism with an easy and relaxed, even democratic, style in their family relations. They never

expected their daughter to bring a husband home. The parents support and approve their daughters' extended education and work (both have office jobs), and Michiko herself is far from a traditional rural wife. She serves visitors elegant French sweets with tea, dresses in a trendy Italian mode, and drives careening her van down the dirt roads. Her husband's passion is renovations that put past craftsmanship to modern uses. Characterizing this family as "rural," as a traditional patriarchal *ie*, or as a postwar middle-class family does not help us understand their essence. The Kandas, like most families of any era in Japan, confound descriptive categories.

Hence we survey the past half century to trace the ways that history, economics, and postwar social and political changes have amplified plurality even as leaders and institutions increasingly attempt to buttress the facade of a mono-culturally normative family. In the postwar decades from 1947 to the present, a "democratic" but strongly gender-role-determined unit has taken the patriarchal household's place. This family is designed to be capable of expanding engagement with a consumer economy even as it protects the future of its dependent elderly or its children, perpetuating older concepts of effort and "family values." What has commonly been taken as "the postwar family" now shows up clearly as a series of historically situated "family events," spanning several eras in the last half century.

As time passes, the unit of a postwar "generation" is only somewhat more useful than "decade" in the analysis of social trends. The consumer industries use these categories in mapping, and thus to some degree, creating the markets for their products and images (as we will observe in chapter 7). Families contain by their very nature at least two interdependent generations during some point in their life cycle. But in another sense, a generation means a cohort with distinct historical experiences. Prewar, wartime, and postwar cohorts are particularly characterized by their historical references to war, and the subsequent generations are said to lack a toughening experience, to have become "flabby" without a challenge. Can a family, however, be so summarily described by a decade or era? Is not each era, even one marked by an all-absorbing event such as war, experienced differently along lines of social and economic diversity? Though contested, the idea of "the postwar" is a common trope for policymakers who hope by invoking an era to mobilize private families into service to something larger than the household.

Such tags as policymakers and consumer experts may give to population segments do not survive tests of relevance at ground level. Ochiai

Emiko denies the existence of a postwar family, particularly noting that “democratization” is an inappropriate characterization of family patterns that show more continuity than ideological or structural change.¹ Even powerful images of consumer marketing may give a false sense of homogeneity in the audience they seem to epitomize. People who purchase goods may not, after all, be purchasing a lifestyle.

Each decade’s “generation” roughs out the portrait of the postwar period and helps fine-tune the historical variety of family life. The families of the 1950s and 1960s were both the first “consumer” families and the recipients of Occupation-driven ideas of equality and individualism. Images of the 1970s included ideas about alternative cultural styles and family diversification and popular recognition (if not acceptance) of *uman ribū* (women’s liberation). In fact, families experienced the further differentiation of women, men, and children as separate units within the no-longer-corporate household. The affluence of the 1980s did not “trickle down” to homogenize consumption. Not everyone could keep up with the ads in women’s magazines, the trends for furnishings and leisure. The exhortations to consume homogeneously only revealed basic differences in families’ capacities to fulfill consumption goals. Another feature of the postwar Japanese family is said to be its commitment to children’s success in the educational system. Disillusion with the failure of this “meritocracy” to provide equal opportunity according to “merit” is another dimension of difference over the past half century. Effort and merit are not enough; funding children’s climb up the ladder through expensive extras such as home tutors and after-school cram classes (*juku*) became equally important.²

Wealth—either personal or national—may have helped a child succeed in high-status occupations but did not produce comfort or satisfactions in the 1980s, when “affluent poverty” characterized many middle-class lives.³ Even among those families with resources and property there were very low “satisfaction” rates in Japan compared to American rates for wages, jobs, housing, and life in general.⁴ One woman said that by combining her and her husband’s savings they had managed to buy their condo in Tokyo, a country home in the mountains, and a property in California, all of which were filled with new furnishings, but they very rarely visited their two leisure homes and rarely even ate together in Tokyo. People with much lower incomes complained of similarly stressful discontinuities between what they could manage to own and what they could enjoy.

Media and marketing set and amplified consumer norms, what one

should be and should buy, constructing “diversity” in a semblance of choice among consumer goods and lifestyles. Consumers were typed by age and gender as well, so any family could be targeted both as a consumption unit as a whole and by its individual members’ tastes and desires. In order to maintain a high level of intensity of consumption, new products had to replace ones that had saturated the audience, and the audience itself had to be disaggregated, yielding microsegments, diverse consumer “cultures.”⁵ A young person’s choice of clothing then became a choice among a range of “styles”—am I Shibuya? Am I hip-hop?—rather than a choice between particular items. By the 1990s, marketers were scrambling to catch up with consumer realities, which had outstripped the diversity constructed by the consumer industries, as households had themselves found new ways of being diverse and centrifugal and, increasingly, frugal.

THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

The end of World War II has been called Japan’s second opening to the West. It was a time of many openings, to domestic as well as foreign sources of change and plurality. The late-nineteenth-century “opening” of Japan was organized by central social agencies aimed at defending against political or cultural colonization. During postwar reconstruction the changes were influenced more by economic than by political and social modes of organization, even as legal codes and the social order they represented were created under the direction of alien conquerors.⁶

The Allied Occupation (1945–1952) promoted a most unfamiliar family as one able to resist the Confucian antecedents of patriarchy and militaristic national ideologies as well as the threat of communism from the Asian mainland. No longer a self-sufficient unit, the new middle-class family had many tasks and functions beyond its walls and was dependent for its status on employment and education. Children were in service to the demands of schooling; adult workers worked long hours and committed themselves to the task of economic reconstruction. During the war the family was to produce soldiers; family now was to produce democratic citizens for peace and prosperity.

Families had taken the brunt of wartime devastation. Many urban households had broken up not only because their men had died or been lost in the war but because near-starvation and the loss of lives and homes in the firebombings had forced people to scatter to relatives in the countryside. Many children had been sent to the countryside during the war

to protect them from the devastation of the cities, just as were their British wartime counterparts.⁷ Survivors' stories of wartime scabbling for a few grains of rice in the bottom of sacks and barrels, learning from country cousins which wild plants were edible, going without shoes or heat in classrooms, forgoing lessons for "conscripted" war-related work in elementary school buildings, filtered down to their children and grandchildren as tales of the horror of war.⁸

The Occupation at least officially created new priorities for families, loosening the hold older generations had on the younger, and buttressing new images of family relationships with laws replacing those of the Civil Code of 1898.⁹ The power of grandfather's authority was reduced to his war stories. He and grandmother became babysitters. Daughters-in-law were released to work outside the home, though their wages were brought home to the household and did not represent economic independence. There was a readiness for change among the war-devastated population, and the fact that Japanese families and society had never fully engaged the models of uniform patriarchy and Confucian norms the official version had touted as necessary for the war effort fit the conquerors' priorities as they rearranged Japanese society.

The attempts at wholesale change during the seven years of the Occupation—in an unprecedented moral, political, and social overhaul of a whole nation—represented a zealous new kind of social engineering. The Allied reformers hoped to create a democratic, peaceful society out of a country that in war they had characterized as its opposite: fascistic, authoritarian, and demonically destructive. Education was to be the device for creating a new democracy in Asia, families were to be the bedrock of egalitarianism. As in the Meiji era, families were impressed with the duty to replicate the goals of the new state: husbands and wives would be equal partners, children would be nurtured without the constraints of hierarchy, and grandparents would be cared for out of love, not Confucian filial requirements. American officers used the American Constitution as a model but some went further to incorporate explicit rights and freedoms, especially for women, that had never been considered by America's founding fathers.¹⁰

The first postwar model of the family was intended both to stabilize and to shake up conventional experience of the time. As Samuel Coleman has shown, the standardization of life was an aspect of postwar society: the timing of family events, such as births of children (closely spaced, limited in numbers), the split between male and female chores with clear demarcations of tasks, the allocation of identity along with

one's work, were all new phenomena in Japanese life.¹¹ This family was vaguely American-style, a "new middle-class" image of a household with a father working outside the home, a stay-at-home mother, two or three children, and perhaps a grandparent—but well in the background, more like a family pet than a revered or feared ancestor. The model was supposed to be "democratic," though the Japanese version did not include equality in the sense of full role interchangeability between men and women. Families were to take part in community life as an aspect of democratic "civic responsibility" as individuals, rather than as households represented by the eldest male. Membership in parent-teacher associations (PTAs, a very American concept) was required, women were given the vote, and women's organizations recruited housewives to engage them in consumer activism and other "womanly" sorts of involvement in the wider arena.¹²

DISMANTLING THE *IE*

In the documentary film *Farm Song* (John Nathan, producer and director), the story of a four-generation rice-growing family in northern Japan in 1978, the grandfather pointedly says, "No one can live here who wasn't born here."¹³ He refers only to males; women live in the house but they don't "count." They marry in but were born elsewhere, and daughters "marry out." He expresses a prewar understanding of the patriarchal, patrilineal *ie* in which women functioned to work for the male lineage and provide heirs for it. This bedrock concept of family in the Meiji Civil Code had ordered people's lives—for the Meiji-era Maruyamas and the "home front" family promoted in wartime—and made predictable their duties and obligations. It did not look in the least "democratic" to the Allied authorities.

The patriarchal household, and the *ie* system itself, was to be unmanned by destroying primogeniture, by which the eldest, or a single, son inherited the house, land, and responsibility for the older generation. In the new postwar constitution, modeled on the American one, inheritance was to be equal among all children, including daughters. This division of property was supposed to loosen parents' hold over the young and permit financial independence. But the already small lots of land, though legally partible, were not so in practice. One child continued to inherit, parceling out compensation of some kind to the others.

The key to the *ie* system was the *kōseki*, or family registration. Dur-

ing the Meiji era more and more information, binding and codifying the *ie*, was included in each family *kōseki*, usually kept at a ward office or town hall. From its creation in 1871, the registry included all citizens, registered by family, for census, tax, and military conscription purposes. By the late 1880s, a family was recorded as a permanent residence, a genealogy, and a rendering of the line of inheritance through in- and out-marrying young. The Occupation policymakers recognized the *kōseki* as the key administrative nexus between family and state and replaced it with the registration of individuals, not families, permitting the registration of new nuclear households. Now anyone could establish a new *kōseki*, which would verify his or her status. Away from the main house, nuclear families could act as freestanding units without fiscal or social responsibilities to the *honke* or, even more significantly, establish autonomous legal households on their own. In practice, census takers and the local ward offices still recognized only one person as household head, and where they recorded a married couple, the household head tended to be the husband.

In addition to the change in inheritance patterns, aiming at equalizing the relationships between siblings, the Occupation hoped to provide women with rights that would establish their equality with men. Beate Sirota Gordon, a young woman of twenty-two enlisted to help draft the 1947 constitution for Japan, contributed a section on women's rights that in many ways provided more constitutional support for women than American women enjoyed—at least on paper. It was Gordon who wrote sections against primogeniture, against prejudice against illegitimate children, and in support of equal opportunity for all children in education, as legal elements in the support of women. She and other Occupation workers organizing Japanese women to support their political and legal rights found that these did not necessarily change the social and cultural frames of their lives, but it was a start. The Shufu Rengōkai (Shufuren, or Japan housewives' association), created in 1948, was at first militant. Its campaigns against price fixing and against unsafe products, and its involvement in savings promotions, gave rise to slogans like *Workers in the Kitchen* or the *Voice of the Kitchen*.¹⁴

Deeper changes came with greater prosperity, but the immediate postwar struggle for survival also created opportunity, releasing people and families into a *de facto* diversity of practices. These new accommodations to necessity—single-parent households, working grandmothers supporting disabled husbands, women and men cohabiting without marriage to

pool resources and real estate—were unaccredited by law or culture. Most families found it hard in practical terms to measure up to the prewar model or engage fully in the American model of a “democratic family.”

Families in the Occupation period (officially 1945–52, but extending throughout the period of reconstruction as well, into the mid-1960s) were struggling to normalize themselves, and the norms themselves were in flux. Each household would likely include a grandparent or two, usually in the care of one son or daughter. If the caregivers were not the eldest son and his wife, then some accommodation between siblings would be made. Well beyond the end of the Occupation, families were so strapped for space and resources that the care of the elderly, now officially the obligation of all siblings, produced a *taraimawashi* (passing around) situation in which elderly parent(s) would be shuffled through their children’s homes. Sometimes it would be the parents who would stay in the ancestral home, with a son and his family who would return as needed when the parents became dependent. In *Tōkyō monogatari* (Tokyo story), a film by Ozu Yasuhiro set in the 1950s, an elderly couple move from one of their children’s homes to another, seeking a comfortable living situation, but they feel unwanted until they arrive at last at the one-room apartment of their widowed daughter-in-law, who demonstrates true love and filiality even without the demands of blood relationship. As in many of Ozu’s films of the period, a woman’s love and steadfastness keep “family” together and demonstrate the importance of true human feeling as a source of stability in chaotic times, as the reconstruction period was.

The postwar urban home was essentially a nuclear family with additions, rather than an extended family with omissions. Activities and contributions to the household economy deviated from both the pre- and postwar norms, and economic and educational demands dominated priorities more than obligations for filiality. The wife might work outside the home, but for middle-class families, the value placed on the woman’s role as “home coach” to the child increased as education became the measure of a child’s potential. Even a mother’s engagement in full-time wage work would not diminish this responsibility. Many families, especially during the first decade of the postwar era, were just getting by, and ideologies and norms for “correct” family life were a luxury—whether they were “feudalistic” or “democratic.” The following family portraits, though labeled by decades, obviously fail to represent all families of their period. Nor are these decade markers useful as more than conveniences in encapsulating the style of an era: especially in the 1970s and 1980s,

though this kind of imaging helped style merchants frame the public's consumption habits and thus may have more than symbolic value.

THE 1950S MIDDLE CLASS,
OR OZZIE AND HARRIET JAPANESE STYLE

In 1956, Miura Akio lived with his wife, three children, and mother-in-law in Ōta-ku, Tokyo. He was then thirty-six and worked for an insurance company, to which he commuted daily on a bus and train. His wife and her mother took care of the children, and his wife also worked part-time as an accountant for a small electrical goods company near their home.

They had a house—old and very small—that had escaped the firebombing of the war. It had two downstairs rooms and one upstairs room, bath, toilet, and kitchen. Two older children shared the upstairs room and Grandmother had one room downstairs. The youngest child slept with her parents in the tatami room that by day was the family's eating and general purpose room.

They just got by: Grandmother had a small pension as the widow of a railroad worker who died in the early years of the war in Manchuria. Akio is a younger son and his elder brother was in the countryside with his parents, so he was free to support his mother-in-law. He said that taking her pension felt shameful and he half-jokingly referred to himself as a *mukōyoshi*—an adopted son-in-law brought into the family to act as heir in lieu of a son—but he had little choice. Indeed, his wife's mother cared for the children while his wife worked. They had a radio, a bicycle, and finally bought an “automatic” washing machine (requiring several human interventions in its cycle to enhance its “labor-saving” function). They were constantly at work just to provide for their daily needs—much like farming families of the time.

In the 1950s, the premises of the rising middle class began to dominate the dreams and material expectations of Japanese families. This middle-class ideology was at least in one way like that of the suburban family in America: it involved a new private and independent two-generation family.¹⁵ It differed from the American image by virtue of the fact that the husband-wife relationship focused on the rearing of children rather than on the sexual and emotional fulfillment of the couple, and relationships with other institutions shaped schedules and performance of family functions to a greater degree than in the American case.

Of course, only a degree of self-sufficiency was possible, given the pref-

erence for a sense of privacy in service to the “face” of the family, and the family’s increasing dependence on consumer industries, schools, workplaces, public transport, and other institutions outside the home. School and workplace too measured individuals’ participation and commitment, not private family work or rituals. Education and employment were as they are today, “greedy institutions” demanding the involvement of all family members, not only of the students and workers who were direct participants in these organizing establishments. For a mother, service to the school was important, from sewing the nursery-school child’s smock,¹⁶ to helping an elementary school student do her homework, to arranging *juku* and paying for the high schooler’s practice exams in addition to compulsory PTA participation. The corporate warrior husband, whatever his personal proclivities, had to participate in after-hours socializing with employers and workmates or lose credibility in the company. A wife’s work, hobby, and social life—activities not directly related to the care and feeding of the family—were restricted by time and neighborhood watchfulness (the powerful constraint of the *seken*, or the normative presence of the social surround). One woman felt she had to wear an apron when she went out, to demonstrate that she was tied to the home as a “housewife”: she removed it at the station before getting on a train to meet her friends. A wife’s struggle to make ends meet by working outside the home was of course legitimate, but rewarding professions or careers were not.

In the postwar middle-class family in Japan, the emotional intimacy between husband and wife or between parents and their children were secondary to the commitments each had to work and schooling, directly or indirectly. It was not only institutional greediness that created this constraint. In traditional Confucian households, the husband-wife relationship was “scripted” for control and discipline on the husband’s part and obedience and reverence on the part of the wife.

“Vertical” intergenerational relationships still obtained. The 1950s lexicon did not take the concept of marital sexuality beyond the needs for reproduction, and in any case, the space available to families at home allowed very little privacy for couples: the “privatization” of family referred to its separation from other larger units, not to internal privacy for individuals and couples.¹⁷ “Privacy” in this sense was lacking in rural families where a houseful of relatives precluded conjugal isolation or freedom, and in the cities where even a large apartment complex could not offer anonymity.

Urban lifestyles are varied, as they have been through the history of cities in Japan. Ronald Dore’s *City Life in Japan* describes the *yamanote*

and *shitamachi* styles of urban life in the 1950s.¹⁸ The first was an elite “uptown” life with its origins in the aristocracy and yet available to technological innovation and the blandishments of consumer marketing. The second was the traditional style of shopkeepers or tradespeople of “downtown” Tokyo, the “old middle class,” continuous in culture and practice with their forebears who had lived as thrifty and conservative working families in the same neighborhoods and occupations for generations.

The life-chance-conferring aspect of educational and occupational tracks operated more strongly for the urban than rural, and among urban, more for the *yamanote* than for the *shitamachi* households in determining family priorities and investments. The children of traditional trade and craft families had their own ladder, destined as they were to follow the family occupation for which the new middle-class credentials were irrelevant. The Miuras needed to create those credentials for their children through education, having no status they could pass directly to the children. Distinctions between *yamanote* and *shitamachi* would soon give way to more bureaucratic understandings of status and the good life in the middle class as described by Ezra Vogel in the early 1960s. His book, *Japan's New Middle Class*, describes families guided by the demands of modern institutions, organized into the “separate spheres” their gender-driven roles indicated, in service both to work and school and to the productivity the nation needed.¹⁹

There was little synergy between the goals of the Occupation and the popular yearning for a Western lifestyle on the one hand, and the experiences of ordinary families on the other. The two-generation family in Japan was in the 1950s still an exception, and the separation of work and family had only just begun to characterize people's lives. Neither law nor economics drove Japanese family culture toward the American suburban model. White-collar work in large-scale corporations was on the increase, but until the late 1970s most work took place in more traditional small-sector organizations, and most family life took place in homes where the educational system and white-collar salaried worker schedules were not the only imperatives.

THE BOOMING 1960S: WORK, HOME, AND THE GOOD WOMAN

“Farm boy makes good” could easily describe Kitazawa Jōji—“George.” He moved to Osaka from his family's home in the tangerine-growing area near Shizuoka, after a job with the U.S. Occupation forces near Mi-

sawa Base. By 1958, he had taken the name “George” as more than a nickname (but less than a legal name, since it lacks the appropriate *kanji* or characters for legal registration), left to marry his childhood sweetheart whose family had come from Shizuoka, and set up in business for himself in Osaka.

His English ability was what he planned to bank on: he started a small import business with his wife, Mariko, and he managed it *fufu* (mom-and-pop) style: he took care of the customer contacts and she did the accounting. He shook hands, read English-language papers, and tried to get his wife to cook American foods—at least at first. His *Amerikaboke* (America-crazed) style was “normal” for some Occupation workers, though those more removed from American influences saw such behavior as undignified. As a family, however, traditional Japanese understandings influenced their lives through Jōji’s wife, whose family now lived nearby. Mariko herself was neither fluent in English nor much exposed to American ways, except through her husband and the radio he kept tuned to the Armed Forces radio station. Their two children spoke little English but were studying it in school.

The Kitazawas lived in a “semidetached” style: they were almost an extended family household since Mariko helped tend her aging uncle whose senile dementia was more than her aunt could handle. Typically she would be at her aunt’s house almost every day and sometimes several evenings each week—and her cousins reciprocated by dropping by with their children constantly, forcing her to be hostess whenever she wasn’t being nurse. George’s view of married life, influenced by American base life, magazines, and movies, was less extended and more private, but he accepted her family as his own and even cooked supper and breakfast for their children as necessary, when they visited their Kitazawa cousins. The young Kitazawas, however, were more influenced by school and friends and were amused (or embarrassed) by their father’s eccentric domesticity.

“America-yearning” reached a peak during the Tokyo Olympics of 1964, which appeared as a signpost of success in the hard work of reconstruction, the evidence that Japan and its booming economy would not be left in the dust. Subway construction, large-scale building, the rapid urbanization of this period seemed focused, highly energized, and positive. Storefront English language academies proliferated and a Westerner would be greeted on the street with enthusiastic requests for “practice English.” There was unbounded optimism—and the growth of large-scale enterprises during this period began to surpass even the family-held con-

glomerates of the prewar years. Even small companies like George's could prosper in this atmosphere.

Secondary and higher education in the 1960s also experienced a boom, along with a rise in expectations among families for their children's progress along its track. High school began to be a bottom-line goal and some form of higher education became a desirable credential.²⁰ Vocational or specialized education was less valuable than the generalist liberal arts degree for "good" jobs. While George wanted to send their son to America and their daughter to an international school, his wife hoped for a local public college for the boy and a junior college for the girl.

George's lack of ultimate authority in his own house was an indication of the compartmentalized nature of their household—and of his family's own particular configuration. His wife's participation in the family enterprise did not in itself make them a traditional urban shopkeeping family.²¹ In some ways they were also the "new" middle-class family, working to support and nurture its members, whose main identities reflected their roles in school and workplace.

Increasingly, women at home symbolized the good life. The late-nineteenth-century Western "cult of domesticity" cast its shadow over postwar Japan and America alike. In suburban America, the woman at home signified peace and prosperity. In Japan, a latter day version of the Meiji period's good wife/wise mother colored images of the properly managed nuclear family too. Husbands who could afford to keep their wives out of the workforce, as in the American expression, "My wife doesn't have to work," were judged to be successful. In addition, families who could manage without children's labor could keep them out of work and in school to study for their own independent futures or maintain the lifestyle their parents had achieved and, sometimes, even to support those parents in their old age.

As Suzanne Vogel has demonstrated, the compensation for a woman who stayed at home was the glorification and "rationalization" of her role as housewife.²² And staying at home was a rational economic and social choice, as the trade-offs of work within and without the family produced a hard-nosed calculation favorable to the definition of woman as housewife.²³ And, indeed, popular culture romanticized this choice. The taste of mother's miso soup was celebrated in sentimental songs that were sure to bring tears to the eyes of drunken businessmen:²⁴ mother's domestic skills were not only scientized—as they had been in the American "domestic science" movement²⁵—they were also a means for emotional validation.

Consumer economics set the shape of and rationale for the postwar family. The postwar consumer boom created the atomized but savings-focused, securely compartmentalized, “suburban” Japanese middle-class family. As culturally supported form followed economic function, the two-unit, mutually supportive but role-divided household became normative by the late 1960s. The good man fulfilled his role as worker, bringing the pay envelope home to the good woman who handed him his monthly allowance and picked up his underwear from the floor of their small company-subsidized apartment. The wise mother consulted not her husband but her children’s teachers, backed up home study with snacks and coaching, and, if she needed to work, kept “mother’s hours” and was home to greet the children after school. More and more families had radios and even televisions, and nearly everyone read newspapers and magazines. The messages got out to an audience waiting to be molded.

There was little else to know about this family than what was obvious in advertising (mom in an apron, dad in a dark suit and white shirt, two children with school knapsacks) or in the children’s academic performances, the husband’s contribution to corporate productivity, or the wife’s home economies boosting the rate of personal savings. Or was there?

In fact, just like families of the Meiji era, families in the 1960s maintained their diversity and, by the end of the decade, sometimes their active resistance to the growing universalization of the “good family” model. Women bucked the trends and developed professional careers, sometimes going to extremes to do so: one woman “divorced” her husband on paper so as to be able to publish under her own name and travel for professional reasons (married women who did work-related travel were flying in the face of the Labor Protection Laws); another woman, without benefit of any sort of divorce, moved her children to her mother’s nearby home—both because it had a better school district and because then she could create a home studio in her own small apartment for her freelance cartooning. There were men who left their jobs (in what was to be called the *datsu-sara* movement of the 1970s [flight from salary, from *datsu* and *sararii*]) to go out on their own and take the risks of independent work. These cases do not typify the 1960s: instead, they presage the 1970s.

CONSUMPTION AND CREDENTIALS IN THE 1970S

Takamura Nobuo and Masako married in 1972 and their life together was continuous with their lives as university students. Their apartment

was crowded with stacks of books and long-playing records; they listened to American and British folk and rock music. Unlike George, they did not identify themselves exclusively with American culture but saw it rather as one location among others from which to draw new cultural elements, ideologies, and material goods.

One of these elements was feminism, and while Masako did not consider herself a radical feminist (to her, radical feminist meant man-hating extremist), she did imagine that she and Nobuo could “balance” their roles in a “fifty-fifty” family life, sharing tasks and decisions, an emancipated “companionate” marriage. Thinking of family as focused on a *marriage* between two sexually and emotionally bonded people, rather than considering the husband-wife relationship only as a precondition for procreational and economic family building, was a new idea. Judging the family’s success by the emotional tone of the spousal relationship was even more radical. Nobuo and Masako, coming out of the student movement of the late 1960s, felt a political need for a cooperative family style and to that added their own romantic idealization of a love relationship.

We see them in the mid-1970s now planning to have their first child and advised by her mother that their lifestyle and the urgent demands of child rearing will not mix. Masako’s mother said, “It’s all very well to have a husband help out [her phrase, not Masako’s] with household chores but men simply *can’t* care for babies.”

New models and options for family building in the 1970s preoccupied urban young couples and seemed to demand choices. Student revolutionaries of the late 1960s and early 1970s like Nobuo and Masako were not the only ones hoping to make changes; the strategies of men and women who wanted to resist the system (at least for their own sake, if not for society’s) were more generalized and “normalized” in 1970s urban culture, and the new consciousness drew in some from the rural areas too, as media disseminated urban practices to the whole nation.

The most publicized cases of course were the most aberrant: “normal” is not news. In the early 1970s, reporting on family focused on oddities: stories of dual-income/no-kids or lesbian or gay couples (in this period, more lesbians than gay men cohabited openly), retired elderly living in communes, even celibacy as a feminist political strategy to protect a woman’s autonomy.

To be defined as a couple-family rather than a procreative family was itself anomalous. And even couple-families seemed sometimes to be households of two individuals who scarcely touched home base as a cou-

ple. One 1970s husband and wife were more separated than usual, as he was a traveling troubleshooter for his company and seemed to be on the road at all times, while she managed a small dressmaking concern and was always at home. Another was a two-career household, in which neither person was home during the day to give definition to the apartment as “home.” One pair could not be defined as a “couple” at all, made up as it was of two unmarried women whose cohabitation in a lesbian relationship could not yet be recognized even by their relatives. Finally, a single man who had lived on his own for more than ten years, an economist working unpredictable hours in an international think tank, was under siege by his employers and family to get married and even he wasn’t sure why he hadn’t.

Statistically, of course, people engaging in these “deviant” practices were in a small minority. Their eccentric forms of family were not always deliberate choices, and there was little crossover dissemination of new “family cultures” to the majority of the population who may have been diverse, of course, but not classifiable as “trendy.” What probably influenced more people was media-driven, consumption-oriented “nesting.”

Maihōmushugi (my-home-ism) rather than radical action or even Nobuo and Masako’s idealism better describes the aspirations of most people in this period.²⁶ A focus on “my home,” the single-family residence inhabited by a nuclear family, shaped consumer desires as well as the emotional tone of many people’s lives. *Maihōmushugi* got families buying, and marketing to nuclear households meant a larger audience for domestic goods, with more establishments needing these goods. It too was a media construct: the images of such a family included Dad putting on a miniature green in a minuscule backyard, Mom happily puttering over a gourmet meal guided by a television in her white-tiled kitchen, a puppy leaping to catch a ball thrown between two children, a girl and a boy.

Images of the good family move fast in Japan: behind every consumption fad is a transitory notion of the good life fulfillable through the purchase of the item in question, and if you are not alert, both the trend and the chance to realize the dream it implies will pass you by. The consumer verities of middle-class family life of the postwar years must be seen both in freeze-frame and in fast-forward. The units in which people operated were the merged dyad of mother-and-child, the institutional connection of child-and-school—and the corporation-identified father. The family who played together in the ads did not always sit down together for dinner. The ironies of postwar consumerism included the

contradictions between family-focused products emphasizing a family-anchored consumption program, and the small nuclear unit whose members were divided in time, space, and function.

Dower notes that “Japan appears to be a country of formal marital stability but de facto ‘single-parent’ families where the mother-child relationship is emphasized almost to a point of unnaturalness, while the father is virtually an absentee parent.”²⁷ For corporate employees, it was out of the question to say, “For personal reasons I won’t be able to work late,” and so the elaborated establishment of the home with its microwave and electric bread maker and other technologies was merely a symbol of the “private castle” that homes were supposed to be.²⁸ That organic, integrated family of the ads for food processors and home entertainment centers in fact rarely ate those delicious meals Mom made in her state-of-the-art kitchen together, rarely sat in the same room to watch the sumo tournament or the dubbed 1950s *I Love Lucy* reruns on television. Mother (and Lucy) in the house maintained a faint, flickering image of the traditional home as an anthropomorphized place needing a person—a “housetender,” or *orusuban*—to keep it from being “lonely.”

Maihōmushugi reached a crescendo of domesticity in home decorating magazines, department store sales of large-ticket appliances, gourmet cooking schools for housewives, and American-style bunk beds—and in very Japanese-style home study desks for children. All models of this estimable piece of furniture had a front and two sides enclosing the studying child, fitted out with shelves, lights, calculator, pencil sharpener, and even—in one high-end model—a button to push to summon Mother for help or a snack.²⁹ The home study desk perhaps characterizes and encapsulates the family of this era more than the “suburban American” image of the home as playground for its members.

In the 1970s, the full force of the academic credentialing society, the *gakureki shakai*, had struck families. That child playing with a puppy in the yard in *maihōmushugi* advertisements was more likely to be studying or at *juku*, grabbing a bowl of instant ramen instead of mom-made miso soup. The belief that effort counted more than ability inspired middle-class families to get their children to work hard. By the 1970s consumer industries were active in promoting products to support the struggle: correspondence courses, tutoring, practice examinations, and cram classes would give a child an edge. And most of all, the physical and symbolic presence of Mother (as in that button on the study desk) at the core of the campaign to succeed.

Most families at this time had at least two children cramming for the

entrance exams to high school and college, and parents would spend almost the same amount for girls as for boys, even if the career goal they had for daughters was still ultimately the good wife/wise mother ideal. A girl's marriage credentials depended in part on her education; the rationale was that through her schooling she would be better qualified to act as a motivating home coach to her own children. In the Meiji period a seventeenth-century Confucian tract by Kaibara Ekken, *Higher Learning for Women*, was touted as curriculum for the good woman that also philosophically justified gendered education in the nineteenth century.³⁰ And by the 1970s, another rationale for higher education urged her along the monolithic, narrowing educational track, to prolong her schooling. Even without ideological support for it, women were entering the workforce, where their credentials mattered. Married women began to consider more than stop-gap work. (Now, more than 50 percent of working women are married, and up to 68 percent of married women work. The gap between image and reality, between women's commitments and time available, is thus very great.) During the 1970s, participation in the labor force by female graduates of high school and college became almost universal among women. The M-curve charted women's work lives (see chapter 5) and served as a life-course predictor as much as a statistical gauge of women's career patterns. During the 1970s and 1980s, the dip in the chart of women's employment during the years of early child rearing represented a near-mandate to leave work to engage fully in family roles. Later the dip flattened out: fewer take more than the maternity leave to which they are now entitled, and now, bell-like, the curve has almost become an inverted U, demonstrating that there are more women who must, or do, take work as continuous in their lives.

Young women in the 1970s fully expected to work for some period before marriage or the birth of their first children, and to return to the labor force when their youngest entered full-time schooling, or later, depending on the family's needs. They began to want work that was interesting and that defined them more. Most young women lived in their natal homes during their bachelor work years: employers did not want to hire unmarried women who did not live with their parents, seeing them as potentially unstable or "wild." Young working women with few expenses fueled the economy by their spending. Female consumers would lead the boom of the 1980s and tended to participate in the culture of affluence by their purchases, the media that led them and their uses of leisure.

BUBBLE AND BOOM IN THE 1980S

Muta Haruko, a young office worker in the early 1980s, left her parents' home by 7:45 every morning to catch a bus, then a train to work. She had often stayed up late the night before and, trusting to a trained reflex, slept standing up holding the strap, waking just in time for her stop. At the end of the day, if she was lucky, her employer wouldn't stay late and she too could leave work in time to reach the department stores before closing. She says she almost never returned home without spending money on the way, at least for cakes or fruit for her family, but more often for clothes, music, or supplies for quilting, her hobby.

Haruko was also saving money for her wedding. By the 1980s a young woman's wedding was her family's largest expense next to housing and work before marriage provided her contribution.³¹ Haruko had a bank savings scheme to help her plan for big indulgences such as trips to Hawaii and Hong Kong (for her trousseau and household items for her new home).

Obviously, Muta Haruko was not the free-spending Japanese traveler depicted in Western media. The Japanese tourists and investors overseas who snapped up Louis Vuitton luggage and Hawaiian real estate indeed had become the image of Japan's economic success in the 1980s. As the bubble of land values swelled, more Japanese did in fact look abroad, either to spend on more transient pleasures there the savings no longer seen as adequate for the purchase of even a modest home or condominium in Japan or, taking a lump sum payoff for early retirement, to purchase for investment or retirement a larger unit on the Gold Coast of Australia, on Waikiki, or near a golf course in California.

Of course, offshore investing was not possible for everyone, nor was travel. Haruko herself complained of deprivation: as she and others who lived in the "affluent poverty" sketched above said, they lacked time and space for all their schemes. Many of course did not have the luxury of such "poverty," without the assured salary and benefits of the middle-class "corporate slave." During the 1980s most young women were encouraged to leave the workforce at marriage age (and sometimes summarily fired as a nudge toward the "correct" role). Thus for Haruko, marriage was an economic as well as a social necessity. The dream of the single-family home had become harder and harder to realize. Even without a known prospective spouse—like many other young women, she was saving and accumulating for an establishment whose male inhabi-

tant was only at the moment lightly sketched—Haruko figured her first married home would be only a tiny apartment with two “living” areas and a combined kitchen-dining area, plus bath and toilet.³²

The fact that time was the missing element in people’s lives compressed amusements into either telescoped or virtual getaways. Tokyo Disneyland became in the 1980s the most favored dating destination, as a safe and easy escape into a contained adventure.³³ Even if consumers could afford the (Mercedes) “Benz,” or a vacation in Europe, overloaded work schedules meant the full enjoyment of such luxuries was almost impossible. Social requirements also intruded on “off-duty” recreation. On a week’s holiday in Europe, 1980s tourists spent on average 3.5 days shopping for the compulsory *omiyage*, mementos owed to family and colleagues at home in exchange for their absence: Haruko estimated that she spent about \$1,500 on gifts during one trip to Hawaii. Vacations cost, in more ways than one.

Ritualized shopping and relative deprivation, the soullessness of accumulation and the emptiness of ambition also characterized discussions of lifestyle and morality during this period. If there was one tendency that characterized most Japanese editorial commentary in the decade of the 1980s, it was malaise about the present and doubt about the future, amidst the security and plenty that supposedly insulated them from the troubles of the West.

Young people in particular—youth in bloom or in orbit, out of touch with reality—were the media’s target in discussion of the “new breed” of youth. Complaints focused on their ultra-materialistic self-centeredness, their disavowal of the values of hard work and thrift that had fueled Japan’s engine of postwar economic success. These people were the “grasshoppers”³⁴—not saving, but hopping from job to job, spending on novelties and fashion rather than looking to future family-building, home owning, and elder care. They were afflicted with the “three Mu’s”: *mukandō* (immovable); *mukyōmi* (no curiosity); *mukanshin* (no motivation).³⁵ The market created them; the media decried them.

Of course, these young people, together with the elders who raised and condemned them, were not a uniform “breed.” Some of those who had finished their schooling by the early 1980s (whether they were among the 60 percent of the age group whose terminal credential was a high school diploma or the nearly 40 percent who completed some form of higher education) did not have the choice of job-hopping, goods-grazing, and jet-setting.

The life chances of rural youth, for example, were still considerably

different from those of their urban age-mates. Farm-raised boys were educated in the same national curriculum and, if their parents could afford to lose their labor power *and* pay for their fees, they too went on to some sort of college or university. But if the family—farm, shopkeeper, restaurateur, trade, or craft—owned its own source of income, there was likely to be considerable pressure on a son or daughter to take on the responsibility for its continuance. Eldest sons of farmers particularly were subject to this pressure even if most farm-bred youth took modern-sector employment in nearby towns. As long as they lived on the farm, they were farmers, and their wives were farmers' wives.

In the 1980s, even women in the countryside had a chance to become new-breed young women with an interest in freedom, luxury, or at least a delayed commitment to marriage. If the choice was theirs, these young women and their urban counterparts would make their marital decisions independent of the needs of families, theirs or their future husband's. They coined the phrase *baba nuki, kaa tsuki*, meaning "without grandma, with car," describing the desirable future husband. Mothers-in-law represented the oppression and immobility of the old-style family; cars represented the free-wheeling youthful style of the modern couple. Many farmers or eldest sons of any trade with an intact three-generation household often resorted to using bride-import services from Southeast Asia and the Philippines, to bring young women willing to marry and live in large families, work hard, and have more than the 1.57 children per woman of reproductive age (the well-publicized birth *shokku* of 1990).

The effects of Japanese media and marketers' constructed diversity began to show in families of the 1980s even before the recession at the end of the decade demonstrated its fallacies and limitations. People knew what they didn't have and denigrated what they did have. And the gap between the haves and the have-lesses became much more apparent. Further, the promise implied by the "meritocracy," engaging people's energy and will through the notion that hard work would yield success, seemed empty to the many (most) who couldn't squeeze onto the "lifetime employment" track, guaranteeing a cradle-to-grave package of benefits, security, and promotion. Those who did were far from wholehearted about its benefits, constrained as they were by its limitations.

It was in the 1980s that stories in the press began to appear about *karōshi*, "death by overwork," in which salaried workers would literally work themselves to death through long hours and stressful jobs. This phenomenon would not in itself have reached public consciousness if a few families of dead or disabled workers had not begun to protest and

even sue companies. *Karōshi* became a legal corporate issue, and not just a matter of family bereavement, and companies tried to enforce family leisure time to show their worker-friendliness and reduce legal costs.

Lifestyle issues became matters related to economic prosperity, even to national security, not just topics for private off-duty examination and concern. What happened in the private space of family life, in the *uchi*, in essence a space outside the rules and critical focus of society, seemed now to be subject to invasion by policymakers. What would lie ahead in the 1990s as issues for public concern would make Muta Haruko's life look conservative and predictable.

MATING, MARRIAGE, AND DIVORCE

Shock headlines contrasting the greater number of divorces now than twenty years ago still do not place Japan in the high-divorce category. In the immediate postwar years, divorce declined even though legal access to divorce improved for women. By 1988 the rate of divorce per 1,000 persons was 1.26 and Japan as a modern nation ranked very low indeed compared to the United States. By the end of the 1990s, there was a rise to 2.00 per 1,000 persons, still half the rate of the United States (figures 1, 2).³⁶

The rising rate of both informal and legal divorces has been attributed to changes in arrangement and expectation: what people want from marriage, especially what women want, is changing. Young women say they are looking for men whose life skills—meaning earning power and stability—are good. The “new” man, who will share chores and child rearing, may be a women's magazine ideal, but realistic young women set a high value on a stable and prosperous household (independent of other relatives, however). Some women in their twenties say they want an exciting romantic relationship in marriage, but by their early thirties, financial and social support becomes their goal.

Among most young people dating is common but is not seen to be a preliminary to marriage. Many young women spend more time socializing with female than with male friends. Boyfriends are not usually fiancés but may be amusing companions, good sexual partners, or glamorous accessories, depending on a young woman's point of view. Fiancés are another matter.

Getting to marriage means more organized research and a commitment more to the institution than to an individual, according to those

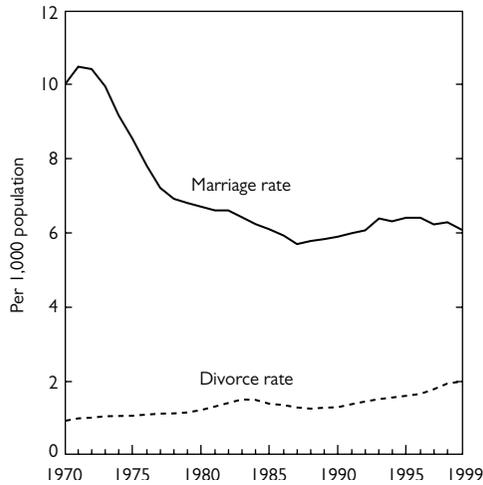


Figure 1. Marriage and divorce rates, 1970–99. From Ministry of Health and Welfare, *Statistical Handbook of Japan* (Tokyo, 2000).

now delaying marriage to their late twenties or early thirties. There are now about five thousand “marriage information services,” which offer alternatives to traditional connections leading to *omiai* (arranged meetings of prospective spouses), which families or close friends might provide. Like some American dating services, the services are often computerized and personalized with individual interviews (and often videotaped for customers).³⁷ Men are said to need these but to feel some stigma in using them, as it means some kind of “arrangement” that may seem either feudalistic or evidence of a person’s social inadequacy. Women are more matter-of-fact, saying that using them is modern and better than using family connections. Expressing one’s preferences freely within the sphere of family may lead to friction. Turning down a computerized image is easier than saying no to the son of one’s father’s colleague in front of assembled relatives.

The ways individuals can meet and contract marriages are highly diverse now, as are the various formations that count as family.³⁸ If a couple living alone is a “family,” the older generation’s views of suitability matter less. If a woman’s earnings are substantial, the earning potential of a future spouse may not be quite as important. If, supporting herself and living alone, a woman does not want children, she can take lovers or cohabit with a boyfriend or lesbian partner. The choices are many and

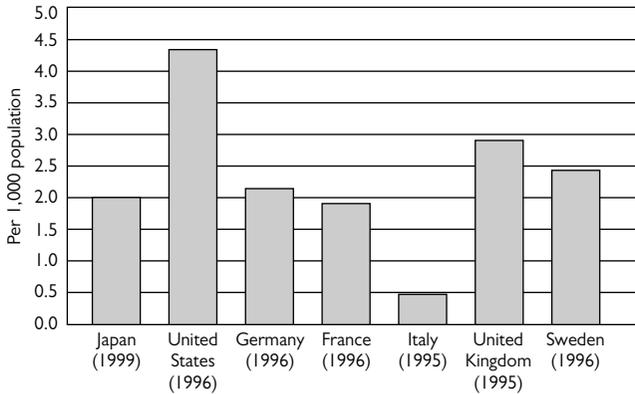


Figure 2. International comparison of divorce rates, 1995–99. From Ministry of Health and Welfare, Statistics and Information Department, Minister’s Secretariat, Summary of Vital Statistics (2000).

are, it seems, in the hands of women who engage them more fully: men appear still to want a more conventional match, and their employers expect them to marry.

Weddings have changed too, both because younger generations can make choices for themselves and because the range of choices has increased with postwar economic changes, including current recessionary options. Prospective spouses themselves can choose because they have made contributions to the cost of the wedding from their own salaries, and because pleasing the young is now a priority of families as well. The use of wedding halls and hotels is most popular, employing efficient and experienced professional staff who deal with the complicated details and protocols involved. Families without in-house experts (grandmothers) on wedding decorum feel more comfortable with a predictable and acceptable package of ritual, meal, and guest management that meets social expectations.³⁹

Weddings are far from cheap, even under the recession conditions of the 1990s, and a young woman’s calculations of style, location, and cost often precede her choice of a spouse. Like the “hope chests” of young American women in the first half of the twentieth century, in which they lovingly stored linens they embroidered toward marriage with still unknown bridegrooms, the savings accounts of young Japanese women receive regular infusions toward the ceremony with a man who seems only an accessory to the event. A typical Japanese hotel or wedding hall ceremony in 1990 cost on average about \$35,000 for some one hundred guests. This outlay would cover ceremony, reception, the rental of wed-

ding kimono and other bridal party apparel, as well as the small gifts given to guests (though the total can go much higher, the money gifts given by attendees help offset it).

There are more choices to make: the most expensive is a Shinto wedding in full kimono with priest and attendants, a sake-sipping ritual (three special flat red lacquered cups of sake, swallowed in three rapid sips each) with a full ceremonial Japanese meal. More popular now for romantic and budgetary reasons is a Christian ceremony. Most wedding halls or hotels have both a Christian chapel and a Shinto hall, and the Christian one comes with a minister and perhaps a three-woman choir. Other lower-cost options include shipboard ceremonies on cruises, or weddings in Guam or Hawaii. Some entrepreneurs offer full videotaping so that those left at home can “participate” later.⁴⁰

NARITA RIKON, OR THE HONEYMOON’S OVER

Divorces are as various as marriages. The rise (or media hype) of “Narita” divorce in the 1990s, the separation of a newly married but already disillusioned couple as they land at Narita, Tokyo’s international airport, exposed the problem of motivation and commitment in marriage. In particular, as the bride usually initiated the dissolution, it questioned young women’s commitment to the idea.

An unmarried woman in her late twenties said that several of her friends had recently divorced after very short marriages. Their parents pressured them to marry and, to relieve this pressure, they did. Their divorces were releases from the bargain, she explained, for now they were free to find a better match themselves, since their parents now saw them as difficult to place, “damaged goods.” Waiting until the early or midthirties to marry was about on a par with being a divorcée, in the marriage market. She herself felt sad for these women and a little shocked at what seemed a cold arrangement and simply hopes her family will give her no grief over waiting a little longer.

Why marriages end is an unanswerable question, and some say women are to blame, both because they have nurtured romantic illusions about a relationship with their husbands and because they have too little commitment to the institution of family, preferring to focus on themselves rather than on others. The separation of men’s from women’s roles within the family has been blamed as well, since it forces women to be more independent. Their distinct role assignment allows women a sense of authority they might use outside the home as well.

The impasse in communication may create a *de facto* divorce: not a legal separation even, but what is called *kateinai rikon*, or “in-house divorce” in which spouses have almost nothing to do with each other and may even live separately. For understanding and sexual companionship, men have long turned to bar hostesses or perhaps a younger woman from the office. In the 1990s, it became apparent that women were seeking these things outside marriage as well—but in their case, usually as solace during or after the dreadfully pressured years of seeing children through “examination hell” into college. Companion bars and dance halls have sprung up where women (usually middle-aged) might spend time with a young man hired there as a gigolo for the evening. Women mentioned that they had had affairs outside marriage as well, sometimes with co-workers, sometimes with old flames.

Divorce is far from the common, almost “normal,” experience it has become in America.⁴¹ There has been a rise in Japanese acceptance of divorce in unhappy marriages, according to opinion poll responses. In 1984, 65 percent said that divorce was unacceptable, with more men (73.2 percent) than women (66.9 percent) opposed to divorce. In 1998, however, approval of divorce for unhappy couples rose to 54 percent. Overall, and continuing today, the older the respondent, the more opposed to divorce. The stigma for divorcées has been somewhat reduced, particularly for middle-aged women who have done their job of raising children and supporting husbands at key points in their careers. In fact, the number of divorces occurring after twenty years of marriage has doubled in the last twenty years. But even a woman who initiates a late divorce (*jukunen rikon*, or divorce at maturity) may be blamed for the failure of her marriage. No-fault divorce is rare, though the laws seem to permit a version of this. Divorce proceedings themselves are difficult or humiliating, demand long separations, favor mediation and conciliation, and have contestable interpretations for divorce that include abandonment, incurable mental illness, and adultery. These in part were established to protect women from arbitrary or whimsical deprivation of economic support but can keep them in marriages that produce hardship and anguish.

While the core of a Japanese family is *not* the husband-wife relationship, but the parent-child bond, divorce represents more than a break between spouses. A divorced woman with children is seen as putting her children at risk, as they will be stigmatized, bullied, and isolated by schoolmates, assumed by teachers to be doomed to failure, and possibly passed over by top companies for hiring. At the very least, it is assumed that a divorced mother, almost always a working mother, will not have

the time or energy to help her children succeed in the educational system. Many women interviewed reported a period of their marriage in which there had been a strong possibility of separation or divorce, but most had stuck it out “for the sake of the children.” In spite of this, there has been a rise in mother-headed households amounting now to 2 percent of all households in the past decade. The tie between husbands and wives is seen as fragile without the motivating presence of children. *Ko wa kasugai* (children are the bond between husbands and wives) may be a factor in the relatively low rate of divorce in young families.

A TAXI DRIVER'S SPIEL ON THE 1990S

Driving a Tokyo cab is not the high-adventure, risk-prone, cowboy activity a frightened rider unaccustomed to Japanese taxi rides may think it is. It is a job based on information and communication, from memorizing the Tokyo street atlas to listening to garrulous drunks. Cab drivers need to know everything and, according to Hamada Goichi, he himself is the most encyclopedic of them all.

Goichi is a fine commentator on the families of the 1990s: he came of age in Tokyo in the 1970s but his parents' roots were in the snow country of Aomori and the Kansai countryside. He says he is an “instant Edokko”—telescoping into one the (minimally three) generations of Tokyoites it takes to be a genuine child of Edo.

His perceptions of change over the past three decades and of the diversity that now exists in family shape, experience, and values give us a better view of these confusing times than can any one family. The families of the 1990s are as hard to categorize as those the Meiji officials came across when they tried to create a unitary Japanese family from the variety—or chaos—of the times.

Goichi's grandmother in Aomori had been divorced and remarried—rare for the times but tolerated in the small village where she lived. Goichi's father didn't get along with his stepfather so he left home at fifteen to go to Tokyo and didn't return. His mother was the third of three daughters of a grocer in rural Kansai and, according to her, was lucky to marry at all, as her family had fallen on hard times in the war and had no dowry money. A cousin knew Goichi's father, who was a shop apprentice in Tokyo, and off she went as a bride to this unknown man in an unknown city.

Both Goichi's background and his job make him tolerant of the many ways there are to be a family. He has little in common with textbook

middle-class families, who, he says, are “boring,” but in any case, a “normal” family is unusual: they all have odd bits and corners that don’t fit the mold. He points to in-house divorce, which leaves women in early middle age emotionally dependent on their kids and sexually starved. He counts among his passengers some middle-aged women who regularly patronize “gigolo” bars where male escorts “make them feel like women again”—and a few young “office ladies” who prefer the transvestite bars where women dressed as male hosts are “real gentlemen.”

He also knows a couple who go by different names, as the woman has found a legal way to revert to her maiden name for career purposes. This woman like others has a paper divorce when she needs it, to handle the problem of overseas travel or other times when she needs to use “her own name.” He knows a lesbian couple who, he says, quarrel like any older couple comfortable enough with each other to gibe and parry publicly. He knows young men who play the field—but come home to mother. He says young women these days are more out and about than the young men, who, he says, have no street wisdom about women and are often shy and uncomfortable. He worries that they can’t be serious about family building because “they have no confidence.”

Goichi himself is a man about town in many senses: he is well versed in the town—his job and self-identity tie him to Tokyo—and he is everywhere; his knowledge of high and low and in between knows no barriers. He tells you not to believe the fancy images of family life created by television and advertising: no one lives like that, he says. And he warns you equally not to believe the downside stories, the horror stories about family murders, incest, victimization of the elderly. He says they are just like the ads: to sell you something. What Goichi cannot begin to sum up as a “family of the ’90s” is a collection of accommodations and expressions of familylike feeling. These may show up as diversity, deviance even—and a set of media sound bites trying to make coherent images out of messy realities.

In 1989 the recession officially came to Japan. Recessionary thinking colored most people’s lives, encouraged by the cultural habit of deliberate self-diminishment and the public discourse associating scarcity with motivating and productive values such as hard work and thrift. Those who had been worried that materialistic youth were going to the dogs in the 1980s could at least be hopeful that they’d have to tighten their belts and get to work.

Japan was becoming more like the rest of the world as it experienced the shocks of economic downturns, downsizing, and unemployment.

Mainstream employees might be at risk, but those most strongly affected were at the economy's margins. The inhabitants of the Sanya area of Tokyo and similar day laborer doss-house quarters in Osaka and Yokohama are where the bottom has dropped out. Goichi knows several of the older men in Sanya by name. These are people, he explains, with no real name, men who lack family, lack a place in society, lack a roof over their heads, and ultimately, lack a self. And, as James Fallows noted, no women and children turn up in homeless shelters and soup lines.⁴² The men are invisible and hidden from middle-class view. Many Japanese are not aware of the existence of the homeless and the areas that are for the most part managed by organized crime and Christian missions rather than by governmentally funded social services. They owe their lack of visibility, it is said, to their lack of family.

But for the successfully employed young family, the 1990s made less difference. Following a predictable life course, a young couple marry and leave their natal homes to live on their own; they have a few two-career years and some "togetherness" as a couple. Then when their single child is born, the wife takes at least a maternity leave, and two-role parents replace a two-career family. Whatever equality or mutuality had existed in the couple's performance of household tasks before childbirth tends to disappear when the woman becomes a mother and the man a father.

There has been little change in attitude about who is responsible for homemaking: over 90 percent of respondents in the prime minister's office annual poll for 1995 said that cleaning, washing, cooking, and cleaning up after meals are women's responsibilities.⁴³ Over 80 percent called household finances and shopping the wife's chores and well over 70 percent identified child care too as a female activity. In spite of this "preference" there was a slight rise in men's housekeeping activity between the 1980s and 1990s in both dual- and single-income households, but there was also a rise in women's reported housework time in dual-income households, so it appears that a rise in men's time on these tasks did not mean a lessening in women's. New consumer products have been created for the woman who must perform her cleaning chores at night, including "quiet" washing machines and vacuum cleaners that will not disturb anyone's rest.

SEPARATION — IN ROLE, NAME, AND LAUNDRY

In the 1990s other separations exacerbated this role division. *Tanshin funin*, or job-related separation, created two-household nuclear families

in which one member, usually the husband, lived on his own in a remote city on a job assignment (which could last years) while the woman and child lived in the original city, instead of moving with the husband. The usual reason given was the family did not want to interrupt their child's educational experience, even though the existence of a national curriculum, giving all students at any grade level across Japan the same study plan and even textbooks, should make school-to-school mobility more rather than less possible.

The intensity of the mother-child household is said to be dangerous to both parties. The isolation of the husband is pathological for him as well, perhaps triggering stress-related illness and even death. The requirement to split the family destabilizes it: the system arranges, the system disarranges.

A seemingly trivial home appliance, the washing machine, capitalized on the distinction. The creation by Hitachi of a two-chambered washing machine, marketed in 1989, makes it possible to wash two loads of laundry at the same time, and advertising demonstrates that it should be used to separate the husband's dirty underwear from the laundry of the rest of the family. "My husband's underwear? First I scrub [each piece] thoroughly with a brush and then I throw them into the washing machine . . . of course, I would never wash them with mine or my daughter's because his are so dirty." In some of the commercials for this machine, a housewife is shown picking up her husband's underwear with long chopsticks. According to Nakano Osamu of Hosei University, these were popular in the 1990s as women could not accept things associated with maleness, like drinking, smoking, and sweating.⁴⁴ The *pantsu wake arai ronso*, or "issue of separate pants in the laundry," became a concern about the distance and "dissing" of men within the family. Other forms of verbal rather than physical separation may be equally symbolic and less trivial.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Takegawa Sayako applied for a research grant in the name she had been using for years as a research psychologist and scientific writer. She won the grant that would take her to England and duly sent in her paperwork to the Ministry of Education, responsible for disbursing the grant. The documents included a photocopy of her passport in her married name, Iguchi Sayako, which she did not use in the application. The ministry noted this discrepancy and refused to issue the funding until she legally

changed her name on the passport *or* registered herself officially in her married name for all professional purposes. Both are untenable options in her view, and she has hired a lawyer to help her before the term of the grant expires.

Family separation of a symbolic sort also began to appear in the 1990s, as some women in these *nyū famiri* decided to keep their maiden names, a practice relatively rare in Japan. The two-surname family is called *fufu bessei* and flaunts both tradition and law, as Japanese family law forces both parties to a marriage to have the same last name—not necessarily his, but *one* only. *Bessei* or “separate names” are a real hassle, as the woman’s employer may harass her, passport officials may deny her documents in her maiden name, and her health insurance may remain inaccessible in her husband’s family name. In 98 percent of registered marriages the husband’s family name is listed as the official name of the couple—but more and more couples are unregistered, or cohabiting. An unregistered marriage leads to other problems. A child born to the marriage, for example, will have difficulty registering for schooling or will have a discriminatory note on the application. This difficulty may in part account for the very few, less than 1 percent, of births outside legal marriage.

The two-surname family is seen as a “women’s issue,” but it is part of a wider concern over the *kōseki* system, family registration, as noted above. The *kōseki* register becomes a legal document cited or referred to for passports, job applications, or private investigations into the background of prospective spouses. In the 1990s and earlier, protests against the ubiquity and availability of these records focused on the discriminatory uses to which the documents might be put: families of *burakumin* (former outcaste community) origin, for example, were subject to background searches for work and marriage. By 1976, *kōseki* were no longer public record and could be used only for official purposes, but this regulatory change was not enough security for many.

NEW WORDS FOR THE NEW FAMILY

In contrast to the constraints and images of the old Family, the new ones have inspired language and imagery—trendy words and phrases that have been created in media and marketing and have become part of the popular discourse surrounding family change. The *fukugan shufu* (many-faced housewife) is one of the milder coinages, describing the housewife who does not stay home but instead has created a busy collage of a life

of activities. She is also called *soto-sama* or “outdoor lady,” the opposite of the traditional *oku-sama* meaning “indoor person.” Such an individual is also a *tenuki okusan*, a “no-hands” housewife, who, after her day of work, tennis, pottery class, or lecture series, stops at a department store basement food hall to pick up a range of prepared meals or foods for her family’s supper. These caricatured women are usually not wage earners, but of course the prepared foods work equally well for those coming home after a full day of work; they are not only for the women derided for their lives of “three meals and a nap.” The foods are often, as some women say, better than they could make themselves; their families know they are treats, not a stopgap.

Other linguistic evidence for men’s separation from women’s lives came in trendy phrases like *Gorby teishu*, or “Gorbachev husband,” good at handling diplomacy away from home but poor at domestic life. Men reviled in this way can scarcely be blamed for staying away from home, with *kitaku kyohi-shō*, or “home refusal syndrome” coined as the adult male equivalent of *tōkō kyohi*, or “school refusal” demonstrated by children who have become averse to the pressures, academic and social, of school and therefore play truant. Such men stay at the office, engage in more after-hours *nomunikēshun* (from *nomu*, to drink, and the English word communication, hence communicating through drinking), even rent a capsule room in a capsule hotel night after night. Such behavior may be understood as part of the job and may not immediately signal dysfunction within the family.

Retirement may reveal hidden dissatisfactions too. Advertisements for Japan Rail in the 1990s showed elegantly attired youthful older couples standing next to a bullet train about to take them to rural Japan for a second honeymoon, but more often couples’ lives are just as separate at home as they were before retirement. The language used to describe the hapless homebound and dependent retired male says it all: *sōdaigomi* (big bag of garbage), or wet fallen leaves, clinging and sticky. “Retirement-pension” divorces allow the woman one-half of the pension and her freedom, a flight into “woman’s heaven” or *onna tengoku*, that period of a woman’s life when she has neither children nor husband to care for. A middle-aged woman with financial freedom and good health can indulge herself in those hobbies, travel, and the companionship of other women that her younger prototype, the *soto-sama*, has only on a part-time basis. This image of womanhood has led a significant number of older men to state in public opinion polls that they wish to be born women in their next incarnations.

WOMEN WHO SAY NO

Younger men too seem to be suffering from women's flight from marriage: they complain that women refuse marriage in the first place, that many "just want to have fun." Men's view of marriage tends to be tied to serious responsibilities, and indeed many employers urge young male employees to marry as soon as possible as an indication of their own seriousness of purpose and willingness to take on adult commitments. If a man reaches thirty unmarried, the path up the corporate ladder may be limited and his family and employer may put pressure on him to find a bride. One bachelor, in his early forties, found himself accused of homosexuality or of "marriage-phobia," a condition more often seen in women than men; he is being backed into an arranged marriage to prove his maturity and sexual identity—or, he says, he will have to leave Japan.

To help the young men along, personnel managers hire "office ladies" with an eye to the young unmarried workers' future family lives. They position suitable OLs (who wouldn't be hired if they weren't suitable as future brides) in clusters of three and four at desks near suitable young men, assuming, they say, that a young man has no time or imagination to think beyond the women sitting near him in considering a future spouse.⁴⁵

Young women are now delaying marriage as long as possible, especially young working women in large urban areas. The intent of the 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Law (see chapter 5) was to provide women with equal access to jobs and salaries equal to those of men. While the law has no teeth in it, its template for employment conditions for women encourages women to stay at work and discourages employers from placing discriminatory pressure on women to leave the workplace for early marriage. The "*croissant* syndrome"—leading women to choose the glamour of a career over the responsibilities of family⁴⁶—attracted many women now in their late thirties who, like their cartoon counterparts in America, are said to wonder why they "forgot to have children."

The one major concern keeping women to their traditional roles and family duties is the increasingly likely fact of caring for their, or their husband's, elderly relatives. What David Plath has called the "Confucian sandwich" affects women most particularly,⁴⁷ and the wide female readership of the best selling novel *Twilight Years* by Ariyoshi Sawako is evidence of the engagement and distress among women attempting to fulfil the "sandwiched" roles of nurturer to the young, nurse to the elderly. As we will see in chapter 6, in many families a new bilateralism means

that senior parents of either the husband or the wife or both may demand their care. Most families still hope to avoid institutional care for relatives as long as possible, and yet there are long waiting lists at the best nursing facilities. In the late 1990s, particularly, there was a rise in nursing home building, but it is not keeping up with the demand.

Mobilizing families in the early twenty-first century to function as organic integral units, as sources of solace and support for their members, is supposed to diffuse the burden on social service agencies. That there is no one postwar family to reform and cajole into fulfilling these functions is eminently observable; not only is the target moving, it is multiple and idiosyncratic, requiring particular strategies and supports to engage each family, rather than the Family supposed by policy and ideology, in its unique and increasingly difficult task.

The protean Japanese family at the beginning of the century parallels its prototype one hundred years ago. The Japanese government has relied on families to nurture and prepare the young to be citizens, and to give the elderly a safe haven and support. And once again the government is mobilizing to support—or insist on—a predictable, compliant, and singular Family out of plural families whose behavior has often been unpredictable or at odds with public images. In chapter 4 we look at children whose lives are diverse and changeable, as unlike the official version of the Good Child as are the official Family and the families we have seen.