The Stem Family and Its Extension in Present Day Japan

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This paper will discuss the significance of the stem family household in Japan today and attempt to demonstrate that this unit, which consists of a series of first sons, their wives and minor children, (see illustration, also Johnson 1962), has been a basic functional family form throughout much of Japanese history. It will also suggest that such a unit need not be destined to decline to smaller dimensions under the impact of recent "modernization"; indeed, it is best not to think at all of this family form as a reduction of a larger structural family unit.

Japanese Units of Family and Household

Much of the discussion in the literature does assume that the stem family is a reduction of a much larger unit called dosoku. I will summarize this popular position before taking issue with it. To do this, it will be necessary to introduce a series of Japanese terms, every bit as much to indicate what I am not writing about as to indicate what I am referring to. It will not be easy to make these terms completely clear. Not only does the terminology vary from scholar to scholar, but the terminology in itself is complex and involves a dimension of sentiment which is not included in the regular anthropological set of family and kin group variables such as post-marital residence rules, inheritance rules, household composition etc. I will avoid as many complications as possible in this presentation of terms. Since the terms are being used more and more in the general anthropological literature, and since very few have a neat translation into English, the following explanation is, I fear, necessary.

The Japanese term which corresponds most closely to the United States census definition of household is setai (or shokai). It includes all who live together under a single roof and share a common budget. It is distinguished from the term kazoku, in that the latter is concerned more with a feeling of belonging, even if a member is not, at any given moment, actually residing in the house itself (Nakano 1957:45-46). Thus, students away from a house, but not actually in a house of their own, would be in their parents' kazoku but not their setai. The anthropologist's main concern for most of his purposes is with the kazoku, not the setai.

Kazoku is contrasted with another term important in Japanese family studies, the ie. Ie emphasizes continuity of the present family members with the past (Nakano 1957:66). The ie is the focus for the tradition of a particular family and the unit where continuity of property is likely to be found. Physical coresidence seems less critical to the identification of ie than it does to kazoku. Neighboring related households could be subsumed, at least legally, under the
same ie. Some prefer the term "house" for the ie, much in the way that we would refer to the "House of Windsor" (Dore 1958:103; Beardsley et al. 1959:216).

The dōzoku is a large lineage consisting of patrilineally related ie with a main stem family and a number of clustered dependent stem families (see illustration). The word dōzoku is an academic term which subsumes many regional terms. Since the precise nature of this unit varies, the attributes of the term dōzoku will vary from author to author. One consistent feature of the dōzoku is that it is a grouping of ie, not of nuclear families.

In addition to these household units, another type of kin grouping should be mentioned, the shinrui. By shinrui we mean a kin group, loosely or tightly knit, which recognizes its relationships, and which feels some degree of mutual obli-

![Figure 1: Structural comparison of stem family and dōzoku.](image)

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The emphasis is on the lineage continuously occupying the house. The kindred unit functions in three major areas: economics, religion, and social relationships. It is the group which gathers for weddings, which may return to the ancestral home at the time of important festivals and religious celebrations, and which may be called upon, or even called together, in the event of financial difficulties which cannot be handled on the ie basis. This group is hard to pin
down since factors such as distance from the ancestral area, personal animosities, etc., may interfere with the operation of a single principle of genealogical closeness. The constituent households in such a kindred, however, are relatively free to operate in whatever manner they wish on matters concerning only themselves. The shinrui is a "sometimes thing," called together only when necessary. It probably would not consist of identical relatives on any two occasions, since the importance of the financial problem, or of the social event (wedding of a son as opposed to a daughter, a first son as opposed to a second son, etc.) or of the ritual or religious occasion, would determine the strength of the centripetal pull of the central household.

The kazoku generally corresponds to the ie but also includes those members who have left, though maintaining personal ties. The dōzoku can be thought of as a variety of kazoku and likened to a lineage group. Nagai suggests that the core characteristics for this group are:

1. "It is a locality group, a group of cooperating families and individuals, living together—sometimes under one roof—and sharing the tasks of everyday work and agricultural production" (Nagai 1953:5); and

2. "It is a compromise kin group, in that it consists of a core of patrilineally related men, and is patrilocal and thus includes the women who have married into the related families" (Nagai 1953:6).

3. A third and ancillary characteristic is that the dōzoku may include ritual or fictive kin, individuals who have no biological connection to the patrilineal ancestors (Thomas Smith 1959: 22ff).

This third characteristic allows the group to be expanded indefinitely in size if the occasion should arise. It is not critical to the definition of dōzoku, however, since units qualifying as dōzoku frequently consist only of related men and their families.

Nagai suggests that the three principal functions of the group are: "1. The regulation of inheritance patterns; 2. Organizing economic relationships and occupations; and 3. Promotion of social solidarity in a closely cooperating and interacting small group" (1953:9).
Many social scientists in Japan take the position that the dōzoku of today is a survival, a relic, of a past when such a unit was the commonplace one (Ariga 1943; Okada 1953; Hori 1959). They do not represent all thinkers on the subject, nor are their opinions on the details of this early organization always in accord. They do see the general tendency in structural change in Japan as going, however, from the extensive economic and social unit of the elaborate dōzoku to the present-day nuclear family of urban Japan. The reasoning runs as follows: Freedom to enter the urban centers, as they developed, loosened the hold of the household head (the ōya) on the dōzoku members. The new mobility and the nature of industrial society made the reestablishment of dōzoku in the cities difficult. The ultimate mobility and flexibility of the nuclear family equipped it better for the new industrial demands on the population, etc.

At least one recent historical analysis of the relation of the emerging market economy and the size of the work force within the family structure has, with a good amount of source material to back it up, linked the decrease in dōzoku size and power to the presence of a new market economy in 16th and 17th century Japan. This led to the shift in Japan, as a whole, to a money economy, making the year round support of kin economically burdensome to a master (ōya) who could hire workers for only the time needed (Thomas Smith 1959). The reasoning in this study is quite sound. There seems little doubt—even to the most critical reader—that these factors of market penetration into the rice economy, and alternative city employment, undercut dōzoku organization, at least in its classic forms. It is pointed out in this study that the emergence of the dōzoku is tied in with the need for an increased labor force for handling the larger land holdings. That kin channels were used is characteristic of Japan throughout history and, while no specific comparison is made, the dōzoku as a unit serving a parallel function to either a manorial or a plantation unit elsewhere, is quite clear.

Statements that the early form of family in Japan was the dōzoku (and by implication, the stratified dōzoku) are generally exemplified by several “classic” survivals known well to all Japanese social scientists. The tactical support for this position is based on “age-area” evidence with additional support gained from historical documents.

Distributional evidence, when carefully selected, can be used to substantiate almost any hypothesis. Certainly, contrary hypotheses can be substantiated by careful selection of data from the same general fund of information. It becomes important then, in examining this, that the source for the hypothesis be understood. If the hypothesis does not derive from the material itself, the scholar must be that much more careful in presenting all the available data in supporting his position.

THE HYPOTHESIS OF THE INEVITABLE NUCLEAR FAMILY

The specific hypothesis being examined in this paper is that the nuclear family and the fragmental kindred are a direct function either of urbanization
or of industrialization. It is not at all easy to find this statement in a succinct form in the scholarly literature. However, one can meet on virtually any campus in the country economists, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists who look upon this assumption as a given form which they can solve other problems. The position is detailed in many of the works of Max Weber, especially his *General Economic History* wherein he indicates his belief that the reduction in family size and strength is a direct function of industrialization (1950:111). This viewpoint, which permeates much of Western scholarship, has been taken over and labeled the Weberian contribution by many specialists on the family in Japan.

The works by Weber and others, while ranging wide in ethnographic notation, are basically an examination of a single case, the history of social change in Western Europe. Even here, Homans (1942), Arensberg (1955), and, most recently, Greenfield (1961), note important regional variations in structural patterns not commented on by Weber.

I confess that I am not entirely certain why in the West the extended kin units are said to decline. Indeed, some suggest that it was never what many think it was (Arensberg 1960). To the extent that extended kin ties decline, one important reason must be geographical mobility. Movements from farm to city, and from city to city in quest of jobs which follow moving factories give an adaptive advantage to smaller, more mobile family units. Developed industry in the West has evolved a system of bureaucratic transfer which may be reflected elsewhere, which again makes horizontal mobility adaptive for individual families. This doesn't really satisfy me, though, since a stem family may move, or that wonderful Japanese compromise, an apartment in the city where employed, a house in Tokyo may be employed. All in all, it seems to me that there has been a "mystique" attached to urbanization when we discuss the West, which suggests that when industry began to hire individuals, not families, and where individuals received individual paychecks, the family as then constituted was bound to decline.

I do not accept the mystique. It is true that where both father and son are simultaneously employed or employable and where one is located in one area and another employed or seeking employment in another, the unit must be split. My concern is with a desired pattern, a cultural norm which will show itself where possible. New families will be nuclear ones, but they may be, and frequently are, destined to become stem families as the new generation reaches maturity. For this reason, census data does not help us, unless we know much more than it can tell us. For some purposes, census data is extremely valuable, but only when hypotheses are testable on the basis of census data.

The principal spokesmen for the Weber viewpoint on Japan add comparative support for his position. Japan is seen as a single system with an historical change in family patterns closely following those described for Europe. Examples are given from contemporary villages and cities in Japan illustrating the various stages of this change. The age-area method of support is invoked, the
examples given, and the case closed. The case for the inevitability of the nuclear family is supported by the theoretical position of Weber and others. The proofs interlock neatly, but float just a little freely in the air.

Against this mutually reinforced position, Arensberg suggested that the nuclear household is ancient in some regions of Europe (1960). A growing body of data on Japan suggests that some form of extended family seems to be surviving as a very viable unit in industrialized centers. These two additional bits of information cut away a part of the already shaky base from the nuclear-family-industrialization inevitability, and force a closer examination of the basic data. We will examine some evidence for Japan, and leave the problem of the European development to others.

Two regions in Japan are noted for dōzoku "survivals." One, the mountainous interior region of Nagano ken is considered adequately isolated in its mountains to have permitted survivals where traits have disappeared elsewhere. The second, the Tohoku region of Northeastern Honshu is extremely marginal. It is far to the north of the old core regions of Japan, and presumably is only now being influenced by patterns found earlier farther south. Other pockets of dōzoku are noted, as in the case of the apartment house Shirakawa mura, but these are isolated "survivals" and so do not characterize an entire region.

Let us examine briefly some of the most popular examples. Important cases of dōzoku are noted for Arasawa mura, Ninoye gun, Iwate ken (Hori 1959:408), Ishigami mura in Iwate ken (Beardsley, et al. 1959:269ff), in the area just north of Tokyo (immediately adjacent to the Tohoku region) (Okada 1953), and in a number of other cases for the Tohoku region (Nakamura 1956; Eyre 1955). Frequent reference to this type of organization is also made for the vicinity of Nagano prefecture, formerly called Shinano kuni (Kondo 1955:262ff).

Thomas Smith, (1959), cites other examples from historical documents, but his contemporary examples, which he uses as distributional evidence for the earlier pattern, are drawn from the Tohoku region.

Sometimes explicitly, often only by implication, statements emerge from the material on Japan indicating the various authors' acceptance that the trend in family structure has been from an earlier, elaborate dōzoku in a generally continuing downward direction until the small urban nuclear family is reached. To the best of my knowledge, the same sort of statements about the reduction of extra-familial or extra-household ties are not as common. Fewer authors seem to concern themselves with the problems of the extent of kin-ties in the urban setting. There is little doubt that many, if not most, Japanese sociologists see a decrease in kin mutual obligations as the trend in modern Japan, but statements to this effect are hard to pin down. One recent discussion to which we shall return takes as its starting point the assumption that such relations will show a reduction in Japan's post-war years (Matsushita 1960).
THE STEM FAMILY AS AN OLD FORM IN JAPAN

In examining the evidence for these assumptions on change, and applying them to my own field work in Aichi prefecture, many discrepancies become apparent. The village studied was a relatively isolated mountain community, combining rice agriculture with forestry. Forestry, however, was recent, and the traditional economy was based on rice agriculture. Almost without exception the village showed a pattern of stem-families, with only the newly established or first generation families having less than the necessary number of nuclear families to show this stem form (this pattern is well illustrated in Koyama 1960 and 1961: 37). However, the relationship between genetically related households within the village, while cordial and close, showed only weak financial and ritual connection, and these were always within a single generation of removal. Social relationships, especially the sort involving weddings and funerals, remained strong according to the degree of relationship of the two households. There was no domination of older brother over younger brother, or cousin over cousin, however, as one would find in a strong and hierarchical dōzoku. Also, the work load in agriculture was handled in general by a single household, and kin were called in only in emergencies. The kin called were those of the bilateral kindred as described above, not a unilineal dōzoku. On checking back through the historical documents, I found that, to the extent that any pattern was reflected in them, this relatively free fissioning of related families appeared as an old pattern, extending as far back as the records went, to the beginning of the Edo period, i.e., the early 17th century (Johnson 1961 and 1963a; Andō 1959; Miyamoto 1957).

From what rapid surveying I could do for the neighboring villages, I found this pattern of brittle kindreds to be true for the rest of the villages in the county with one notable exception. North of Nagura one of the hamlets of the neighboring town of Inabu is immediately adjacent to Nagano prefecture. This hamlet, even today, shows important indications of kin hierarchy in ritual matters. Also, this single hamlet possesses documents from the Edo period which indicate clear kin-exploitation on the part of the senior household of the related and dependent branches. The differences in patterns indicated in the records of these two neighboring hamlets could not be explained on the basis of differential isolation. If anything, the Inabu hamlet was more closely integrated to the Edo period power centers than was Nagura. Indeed, the Nagano area in general was a closely integrated region, with major post-roads connecting it to the important regional center of Nagoya. Isolation and the persistence of old patterns could not be rallied to explain this discrepancy.

Furthermore, an examination of the history of the Tohoku region dōzoku of today (where the material was available) shows them to be rather new families, although, to be sure, the pattern itself can be quite old. One such unit was the family and adopted kin of a minor Tohoku industrialist, whose dōzoku unit was underwritten by his urban earnings (Eyre 1955). Another, a Meiji period unit, was initiated by a landowner who amassed enough money
on the local market to purchase a large tract of unirrigated land and constructed an irrigation system. Then, as a landowner, he inaugurated a dōzoku, primarily with his former workmen as fictive kin (Nakamura 1956). Other cases reinforce this idea that many, if not most, of the present-day Tohoku dōzoku units have their origin not in survivals from the ancient past, but as recent manifestations of the market economy. This is not to say that Smith’s historical examples are spurious. This does seem to indicate, though, that ancient dōzoku are less common than believed before, since where they are found today they are frequently modern or late manifestations. The Nagura material would indicate that not all villages were dominated by dōzoku in the past. Possibly the dōzoku pattern was a way of insuring labor where large holdings were present, but we have no assurance that these large holdings were characteristic of all society.

The evidence at least casts some doubts on the time coordinate of the transition or so-called transition from dōzoku to stem-family. The stem family would seem to be an ancient form, found alongside the dōzoku, and characteristic of communities where holdings were not greatly concentrated. There is evidence, at least in the Nagura material, that large holdings were culturally mitigated against by a rule, or at least a general practice, of dividing those large holdings that did develop among a number of heirs. I consider that this mechanism contributes to the perpetuation of a basic egalitarianism which is characteristic of one class of Japanese villages (Johnson 1963b). The material gathered by Michigan at Niūke, (Beardsley et al. 1959), would give a fair measure of support to this statement. As complex as Japan is today, and as complex as her history has been, it is no wonder that a variety of social forms are to be found. We can speculate that this variety is partially a response to different socio-economic pressures from region to region and time to time, and partially a result of some form of pluralistic culture onward from the time of the Yamato conquest (Ishida 1962; Egami 1962; Ono 1962).

THE PROSPECT FOR THE STEM FAMILY FORM

A second problem, the future of the prospect for the stem family form of the ie, remains to be considered. In Nagura, at least, there is no tendency for this type of family to break down. The rural families, if they are not new, have either all the necessary components for a stem-family, or else would have, had all members lived. This form in Nagura has survived at least the century of transition to a money economy. Workers train their own sons to accompany them in their lumbering jobs, and a father-son team is a regular phenomenon. Small mill owners also take their own eldest sons into the business, the sons remaining in the home. Needless to say, the farming father-and-son unit is standard. Nothing in the nature of the immediate future of the village would indicate a change away from this.

Do the urban areas follow the same pattern? A standard description of urban Japan regularly gives the impression that the unit there is the nuclear
family. However, Ronald Dore (1958), and Robert Smith (1960) have called our attention to two distinct urban patterns, one ancient and traditional, the other new. The first of these is referred to in Tokyo as the *shita machi* or "downtown pattern." Here, the tradition of the urban artisan and the merchant class of the Edo period (and probably of even earlier times) is to be found. The stem family is the basic family unit, and the way of life, the attitudes of local cooperation, of open emotion, of following traditional folk art and music, and so on, are seen to continue virtually unchanged, only updated.

The second type is known in Tokyo as the *yamanote*, or suburb (a "fringe," literally "the edge of the mountain"). This pattern or way of life is remarkably similar to that of the American urban or suburban upper middle class. The typical yamanote resident is an office worker or salaryman. He is in government, commerce, or a minor functionary in industry. That the pattern is remarkably Western cannot be denied, but the mechanism for change here would appear to be every bit as much an acculturation to the Western European and American way of life, on a conscious level, as it would be one of parallel development. It is not the way of life of the urban working class. Everything coming from Japan which is based on actual field work indicates that the urban working class is remaining at least within a pattern of variation on its traditional orientation and its traditional family pattern, rather than scrapping it for something new (Abegglen 1958).

I do not suggest that families are not getting smaller. Clearly the successful birth control drive assures that they are. The structurally complex family in Japan, however, is not losing this complexity in its industrialization. It is true that younger men are probably gaining a greater voice in family affairs and university graduation virtually assures that an individual will join the yamanote group. The statements on trends in Japan all too often come from these graduates, with the source material based on their own experiences, not on observations of others (see Befu and Norbeck 1958).

**AN ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS**

At the very least an alternative hypothesis can be offered, supported by the material mentioned, and having some support in other literature. It is suggested, first of all, that the stem family is a stable and not an unstable form, as Le Play suggested. This family is able to adjust to stable urban conditions since there is nothing implicit in the possibility of economic self-sufficiency for the younger generation which requires that all aspects of the family authority system break down. First of all, wages are low, and the pooled resources of two or more generations is an economic asset. However, even where earnings are high, as in the case of urban merchant and artisan families, this nucleating of the family does not automatically take place. The fairly long history of labor by young girls in mills and factories—girls from rural as well as urban settings—has not led to a revolt by these girls from the family system
of traditional Japan. When they work, they work for the family. Some may drop this pattern and cut loose from family ties, but this is an alternative, not a necessary move.

CONCLUSION

It is suggested, then, that this stable stem family type is sufficiently generalized in its nature to conform to the needs of the changing technology of Japan. After all, the nuclear family in the Western world was of the same sort. The family farm on the western frontier was not technically equipped any better than the extended family farm in the East of Europe. Two different traditional patterns are represented, each doing a fair job. In Japan, the two patterns of the traditional stem family and the newer nuclear family can do this also.

The dōzoku, on the other hand, is a specialized family form. It is utilized in areas, or in situations, where kin is the appropriate channel for organizing labor, and where there was, or is, a need for a large number of workers. In the past this was true in large holdings in Japan and is also true for large ones now. The Tohoku is the most recent (aside from Hokkaido) of the Japanese agricultural areas. It is the frontier, or was, not long ago. Other frontier situations do not show a survival pattern, they show variations on the patterns carried to the frontier by the pioneers. The American frontier was opened by nuclear families because the pioneers came from regions where the family farm and the nuclear family were the cultural norms (Arensberg 1955). In Japan, there are large family organizations in many of the old and traditional urban occupations. Artisan dōzoku are many. Potters adopt apprentices, and one of these adopted heirs or several of them carry on the family tradition. Theatrical groups show common last names because the young actors and actresses are adopted as members of the family. Interlocking family enterprises in industry and commerce are a common phenomenon in Japan as in the rest of the world. The family does not have to give way under these urban or industrial influences.

This is not to deny the concept of evolutionary change in culture. Major changes in the social structure of Japan have occurred, and these changes, based on cultural patterns unfamiliar to the Western world, have manifested themselves in a manner somewhat different from that with which we are familiar. Status differences between members of previously ascribed classes have changed, and mobility is now possible to a degree not thought of in Edo times. It would be a mistake to think that complete freedom from traditional groups or anomie results necessarily in this mobility. There is no reason why an upwardly mobile individual in Japan must be free of his family. Were the group a complex lineage or clan, the unit would be too specialized to adapt to this change, but the stem-family is not. A young professional can climb the social ladder and carry the whole stem group with him; he need not abandon it or free himself from it. The functional prerequisites of change here need not alter this stable unit, and, indeed, it is a thesis of this paper that it

• has not.
NOTES

'This paper in an earlier version was read as a part of a symposium "Family Life in Peasant Societies" at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association held in Minneapolis in November, 1960. Field work on which this paper is in part based was carried out in a period from July, 1956 to June, 1958 with the support of a Social Science Research Council predoctoral research training fellowship. Some additional material was collected while the author was a recipient of NIMH Small Grant M-5221 (A). Neither NIMH or SSRC in any way bears any responsibility for the conclusions drawn here.

The revised version of this paper owes much to the detailed criticisms of the earlier version offered by Miss Michiko Takaki, a graduate student at Columbia University. However, it should not be thought that she concurs with all, or even most of the conclusions reached here. Help in formulating ideas presented here was given by Conrad Arensberg. Helpful criticism of this paper was offered by Edward Norbeck, Osamu Shimizu, Robert J. Smith, Estellie Smith and Shirley and David Stout.

I have relied on an examination of the Japanese family (Fukutake, ed. 1957a). There are other important works which have been consulted (e.g. Fukutake 1952, 1957b, Koyama 1960, Matsushima and Nakano 1958). Several of the contributions to this volume deserve a full dress presentation to the general reader, and we hope that such a presentation can be made in the near future. Within the present space limitations it is necessary to select only certain aspects of the discussion for presentation.

The complicated nature of Japan's social structure, and the great mobility evidenced throughout Japanese history, requires distinctions of this sort which do not have counterparts in most of the anthropological literature in this country. If we translate kazoku as family, we would have to almost imply an intent to return to the physical household to make it comparable to the word "family" as it is used in tribal societies. However, the definition for setai is too restrictive for "family," since it excludes individuals who would be included in any consensus of who should be included when we say "family."

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