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## ASPECTS OF MOBILITY IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL JAPANESE CITIES

A very great deal of our knowledge of urban life in Tokugawa Japan relates to the “happy society” of Genroku in the early 18th century, to the life of the theater and the gay quarters, and to the activities of the great merchant houses and the more extravagant and colorful of their heads. Extensive coverage is given theories of the state, administrative arrangements, and the discrepancies between the actual and theoretical positions of the classes of Tokugawa society. Ordinarily, mobility is treated in passing, partly because vertical social mobility is rightly presumed to have been a minor feature of that society until at least its closing period, and partly because the materials required are so difficult to unearth and so resistant to rigorous analysis. Bellah’s observation that “. . . mobility was largely within classes rather than between them,”<sup>1</sup> is apt, although Taeuber reminds us that “. . . movements of surplus youth from the rural areas to the cities were adjustments of population to resources and employment opportunities that ante-dated modern industrialization by some centuries.”<sup>2</sup> Lampard completes the thought with respect to its implications for the transition to industrialism in his remark that “. . . old commercial-administrative centers [provide] ready markets, some tradition of urban life, and constant pressure to secure a livelihood from non-farming activity.”<sup>3</sup>

The three great cities of Tokugawa Japan did indeed provide a tradition of urban life, no small part of which is closely related to the pressure on old residents and new migrants to secure a livelihood from non-agricultural activities. It is a curious feature of much of the less defensible literature on the pre-industrial city that it argues so forcibly for the view that such cities are simply not urban. This position can, in my opinion, be held only by defining into the term urban some features of the industrial system, thereby automatically excluding the cities of pre-industrial societies. It is, as I have observed elsewhere, apparent that if the cities of Tokugawa Japan

<sup>1</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan* (Glencoe, 1957), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Irene B. Taeuber, *The Population of Japan* (Princeton, 1958), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Eric E. Lampard, “The History of Cities in the Economically Advanced Areas”, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 3 (1955), 130.

were not like the cities of contemporary industrial states, neither were they like the villages of Tokugawa Japan.<sup>4</sup> Edo, Osaka and Kyoto, with their highly variegated life, very large populations, and the drama and excitement of the bustling amusement and business centers (*sakariba*), which provided a large measure of anonymity in the pursuit of this wide range of activities, were at a considerable remove from the villages of the countryside.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the organization of the wards and quarters (*chōnai*) might be tight, and their control frequently lodged in the hands of conservative wealth, but neither the individual nor the household was bound to the urban quarter in anything like the firm way in which a farmer was tied to the area in which his fields were located.

There was, in short, what appears to have been a considerable mobility of the city population in Tokugawa Japan, both geographically and horizontally within the class into which one was born or adopted early in life. For the urban dweller (*chōnin*), then, while the scope for movement was great, it was primarily if not entirely limited to movement within the broadly defined activities of the *chōnin* group. The system of primogeniture, commonly but not rigidly observed among the *chōnin*, made it necessary for children other than the successor to find a place in society. Of these children, the second and third sons have been made out to be a rather special population, their personalities and psychologies the object of much attention for signs of an achievement motivation thought to be lacking in their more settled elder-brother successors. But, of course, the careers of these non-successor children are by no means simply reflections of a drive toward success brought on by independence training. To be sure, there is some belief in Japan that successors *are* differently trained and differently treated and this belief is sometimes given half ironic recognition in the naming of offspring. I am reminded of a second son of a business house, now a university professor, whose name—Tokio—may be translated “Go, with good fortune”, and his younger brother, Tomoo, “Go and prosper”.

Nakano provides us with a succinct listing of the possible careers open to a son other than the successor among the townsmen:<sup>6</sup> (1) If the house had the financial means, he might be made head of a branch family (*bunke*); (2) He might be adopted out at an early age, or go later as the adopted husband (*muko-yōshi*) of the daughter of another house; (3) He might be sent to serve (*hōkō*) in another business house, for training; (4) He might be sent

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. Smith, “Pre-industrial Urbanism in Japan: A Consideration of Multiple Traditions in a Feudal Society”, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 9 (1960), 241-257.

<sup>5</sup> John Friedmann, “Cities in Social Transformation”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4 (1961), 86-103.

<sup>6</sup> Nakano Takashi, “Shōnin no shakai” [“Merchants’ Society”] in Fukutake Tadashi, ed., *Nihon no shakai* [Japanese Society] (Tokyo, 1952), p. 88.

as an acolyte (*kozō*) to a Buddhist temple to prepare for a career in the priesthood. A daughter could hope for one of a similar variety of futures: (1) The most common, of course, was simply to go as a bride to another house; (2) She might be adopted out early to another family; (3) If the family could afford it, her family might take one of their clerks (*tedai*) as her adopted husband and set up the couple as a branch house (*bunke*); (4) She might be sent as a maid to serve another house, with hopes for a good marriage through their good offices; (5) In a variety of circumstances affecting normal succession of the eldest son, her family might take an adopted husband for her and make him the successor to headship of the main house (*honke*).

It seems well at this juncture to point out a common feature of all these solutions to the problem of what to do with the surplus sons and daughters who were not to succeed to the headship of the house. It has, perhaps, been overlooked in the many analyses of the effects on non-heirs of the system of single-heir inheritance. In every case, it is the family which assumes initial responsibility for the placing of the children in some context within which it is hoped they will be able to prove themselves. While he begins with an early disadvantage, the non-inheriting son may, through a combination of the care with which he is placed by his family and by the exercise of his own initiative, once given a position from which to pursue his career, rise to heights nearly equal to or even beyond those attained by the successor in his native house. The temple acolyte is potentially an abbot; the trusted clerk may, through marriage to the daughter of his master, himself become the head of a main house; the cautiously selected adopted husband may be a candidate for high status. Similar concerns for the future of the daughters of a house are reflected in the disposition which the family makes of them. A girl who goes as a maid in a wealthy house may herself become the wife of a son or clerk who later becomes a house-head; a girl may be married into a good family for business and other considerations, but her status there is of some concern to her family; she may even, through a combination of circumstances, be the individual through whom the continuity of her family line is assured, if it proves necessary to take for her an adopted husband in the absence of a regular successor. In short, the non-inheriting children are not, as is so often implied, simply thrown out upon the world to make their mark. Quite the contrary, much care may be taken to assure their futures by cutting them off early from the family in order, actually, to guarantee them a degree of success which might be denied them if kept too long in their family. In any event, it is usually the family which makes the decision, not the child.

Both sons and daughters might marry in the city of their birth, and sons might go into the same trade or business as their fathers and elder brothers, but there was a significant amount of movement between cities and trades, for purposes of both marriage and apprenticeship. Furthermore, as we shall see, there appears to have been a great deal of moving about within the cities,

changes of business location, and shifting of business activities from one trade to another. All this suggests that the constant pressure to secure a livelihood necessitated some flexibility of commitment not only on the part of the individual but the household as well, particularly among small business houses, a flexibility perhaps under-reported for pre-industrial Japan.

The under-reporting, if that is what it is, may be attributed in large part to the tendency to concentrate on the great merchant houses and the rather rare families of very long genealogy at the expense of the small merchants and artisans. It is my intention to direct attention to some scattered data for the city of Kyoto in the late 18th and the first three quarters of the 19th century, which although fragmentary, do seem to me to suggest the outlines of a situation of great importance for our understanding of the nature and extent of mobility in this, presumably the least stable of the three great urban centers of Tokugawa Japan. I shall lean heavily on the inestimably valuable work of Nakano and Yokoyama,<sup>7</sup> reinterpreting some of their extremely interesting data. The conclusions are my own.

We are fortunate in having fairly good data for the 82-year period 1786–1867 for an area called *Koromo-no-tana-chō* in Kyoto. Table I gives the total population figures for the *chō*:

TABLE I  
Koromo-no-tana-chō: *Changes in Population from 1786–1867*

	1786	1866	Loss
Population	206	135	–35 %
Number of houses ( <i>ie</i> )	35	24	–32 %
Number of houses with servants, apprentices, clerks, etc.	18	13	–28 %
Number of male employees	105	59	–44 %

The decline in all figures is the striking aspect of these data, which are taken from annual registrations.

The figures of Table I reveal change, but say nothing directly about mobility. In Table II is shown the length of duration of the total number of houses registered throughout the 82-year period, 343 in all. The registers from which these figures are taken, called the *shūmon nimbetsu-chō*, were compiled annually. It was the responsibility of property owners to present to an official the required information, comprising the name of the house-

<sup>7</sup> Nakano, "Shōnin no shakai", pp. 79-136; Yokoyama Sadao, "Kinsei toshi shūroku no dōtaisei to shūdansen" ["Movement and Grouping in the Urban Community of the Late Modern Period"] in *Gendai shakaigaku no shomondai* [Problems of Modern Sociology] (Tokyo, 1949), pp. 523-546.

TABLE II  
*Duration of Houses (ie) in Koromo-no-tana-chō: 1786-1867*

Number of Years Appearing in Records	Number of Houses	%
1	96	28.0
2	69	20.5
3	43	12.5
4-5	33	9.4
6-10	58	16.9
1-10	299	87.3
11-20	19	5.4
21-30	7	2.2
31-70	13	3.6
71-	5	1.5
11-	44	12.7
	343	100.0 %

head, his place and date of birth, and his temple affiliation. All family members and quasi-family (*jun-kazoku-nin*) members were also listed by name, age, and temple of affiliation (which might differ from that of house-head). A daughter who had married out was listed, as well as the place and family into which she had married, and the date of the marriage. For quasi-family members, the name of their guarantor (*mimoto, yadomoto, oyamoto*) was given, with the date on which they entered service and the reason for which they were taken in. The figures reveal a startling rate of turn-over, with only 12.7 % of the houses registered for longer than 10 years and almost half (48.5 %) registered for only 1 or 2 years.

This rapid turn-over is highlighted by the figures for the same 82-year period in terms of the number of generations of duration of all the houses reported in the same registers (Table III):

TABLE III  
*Generation of House-Heads: Koromo-no-tana-chō, 1786-1867*

Generation	Number of House-Heads	Percent
1st	312	91.0 %
2nd	17	5.0
3rd	6	1.7
4th	6	1.7
5th	2	.6
	343	100.0 %

Thus, less than 10 % of the house-heads reported in the registers represented any generation of succession to the headship above the first. These small merchant houses do not participate in the claims to genealogical longevity of the larger, wealthier houses. Virtually the entire population of the quarter in the last 80 years of the Tokugawa period were members of small families, with neither claim nor pretensions to the legitimacy of antiquity. They have left no house-codes and few of them have left house-names (*yagō*). That there was a considerable difference between these small merchants, liable to fail in business or to move on to try their luck elsewhere or to find themselves without a successor, and the larger, wealthier merchants is pointed up by the comparative figures contrasting all other merchants of Koromo-no-tana-chō with the one large *yagō* of the quarter, Chigiriya (Table IV), established in 1650.

TABLE IV  
Duration of Houses for Period 1786–1867 in Koromo-no-tana-chō:  
Total Compared with Largest and Most Powerful

Number of Years	Total		Chigiriya	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Up to 5	241	70.4	32	59.9
6—10	58	16.9	8	15.4
11—30	26	7.6	6	11.5
31—	18	5.1	7	13.2
	343	100.0	53	100.0

It is clear that the life expectancy of even those houses bearing the name Chigiriya was not great, for only about 25 % lasted longer than 10 years. It is worthy of note, however, that in comparison to all other houses in Koromo-no-tana-chō, the Chigiriya *yagō* was easily the most likely to endure. Whereas only about 5 % of the other houses lasted longer than 30 years, 13 % of the houses of Chigiriya had a life span longer than 30 years. The advantages of solid financial backing and the presence of a large number of bearers of the same *yagō* to help out in emergencies are doubtless reflected in the tendency of Chigiriya to persist.

Koromo-no-tana-chō was a quarter in which there was no concentration of a single trade or business. We have figures for 1864, just before the great fire called *teppō-kaji* of that year, which show that for the area called Minami-chō there were 21 shops, representing 10 different trades and specialties. The largest single business was that of clothier (*gofuku-ya*), represented by 6 houses. Of the 21 households, 17 were tenants. All the evidence suggests that the economic life of the smaller independent businesses was extremely

precarious and it is, of course, these very houses which fail to make a comeback in the records subsequent to the fire which wiped them out.

It might be objected that the *chō* is not the unit with which we should be dealing, but rather that the *kabu-nakama* (guilds) of various kinds represented the stable units of the time. That this is hardly the case is illustrated by the examples of the Nijō drug-wholesalers' *kabu-nakama* in Kyoto (Table V):

TABLE V  
*Membership in the Nijō-gumi Drug-Wholesalers' Kabu-nakama*  
Kyoto: 1866 and 1887

Number of Member Houses of a Given <i>Yagō</i> (Bunke – Bekke)	1866	1887
1	20	15
2	4	7
3	5	3
4	3	2
5	3	4
6	1	1
7	2	1
8	1	2
9	—	—
10	—	1
11	—	—
12	—	—
13	1	—
14	1	—
Totals	41	36

The situation here is rather like that of the mixed trades of Koromo-no-tana-chō, for almost half of the names listed are represented by only one house. Only two are really very large, one with 13 member houses and one with 14. Clearly the 20 years which elapse before the next figures are available were ones of great change in the world of the Japanese merchants, but several features of the shift stand out—and structurally they are highly reminiscent of the changes noted during Tokugawa. There are now five fewer names, and the proportion of one-house listings is now 42 %, not 50 %. Eleven of the groupings have remained stable, with the same number of members, at least; 13 have declined in numbers; only 5 have increased; 7 have appeared on the scene; 12 have disappeared completely. What stands out is this: no groupings which in 1866 had more than one member-house

had disappeared by 1887. The two groupings which in 1866 were largest were also among the three largest in 1887. Like Chigiriya of the other district which we have discussed, they weathered change while their smaller, less tightly organized and more independent guild fellows fell by the wayside, victims of the changing commercial system as their counterparts had been to other pressures in the Tokugawa period.

We have not dealt with questions of vertical mobility in the foregoing pages because trustworthy evidence is extremely scarce. What we have done is to illustrate by some selected examples a situation which suggests that the movement of people, the shuffling of households and individuals, and the swift pace of change, all part of a pattern so often cited as characterizing the brave new world of Meiji Japan, was no stranger to the townsman of the late Tokugawa. For at least a hundred years before the official beginning of Japan's industrial effort and the growth of her industrial cities, important learning had gone on—the cities waxed and waned in size as did their constituent parts; businesses succeeded or failed; workers came and went; new households budded off from old ones within the trade or into some other business; a man of parts could hope to make his mark; the less talented or less fortunate slipped into less rewarding activities, and were shunted from place to place, finally to drop from the registers of their own or their adoptive houses.

The very little that we have of autobiographical material for men of the small-merchant class shows varied patterns of success and failure, rise and fall of fortune, and above all a sense of movement within the confines of their class in terms of their personal fortunes which, save for details of practice, has all a very modern ring and could, indeed, be duplicated with little difficulty for commercial enterprise of the period since the beginning of Japan's "modern century".

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