

Growing Complexities in the Family Today: A Question of Institutionalized Familialism in Japan

Takeshi Hamano*

School of Human Relations, Department of Humanities

ABSTRACT

It has been argued that Japanese legal and policy terms hardly have responded to the growing family complexity in domestic society, as a consequence of divorce, remarriage and stepfamilies. This essay thus discusses the ways in which so-called “compressed modernity” has persistently exerted a normative effect on the concept of family in both legal and institutional discourses. Japan is no exception to the rapid worldwide transformation of domestic society and population characteristics. This is evident in the emerging issue of stepfamilies for instance, including more recently cross-national stepfamilies, which has led to changing perceptions of the family, with an emphasis on their growing diversity and unity. This essay raises a question of institutionalized familism in Japan and argues theoretical remarks on the reconstruction of the family in contemporary Asia within the global context.

KEYWORDS

compressed modernity, divorce, family complexity, institutionalized familialism, stepfamily,

1. Introduction

Today, while many individuals in East Asian societies contest the persistent traditional and conservative family ideologies that are radically rooted in the modern Asian state structure, the coexistence of a growing sense of late modern intimacy at the individual level with institutionalized family norms of the state (Chang, 2010; Hamano, 2016; Ochiai 2014b) seems to designate the common culture of contemporary East Asian families, even in Japan. Both the

* University of Kitakyushu

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decline in marriages and the increase in divorces and remarriages indicate a common trail of late modernization and the growth of more intimate and individualized partnerships in the formation of families under the international growth of “new individualism” (Elliott and Lamert, 2009; Giddens, 1992) or “institutionalized individualism” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2012), perhaps challenging the present policy of the state and legal structure that structurally and ideologically have been governing the family. There are also questions regarding the radical structure of the modern nation-state in East Asia and the extent to which those states in the new century deterritorialize the state’s sense of family in recognition of a growing emphasis on individual freedom, rights, and equities. In fact, it could be noted that new trends found in marital practices appearing in Japanese statistics are unable to cover the number of *de facto* marriages or other non-judicial partnerships, which would be anticipated in the growth of intimate partnerships in late way of late modernity (Alexy, 2020; Alexy and Cook, 2018). The national population statistics still generated in the perspective of contemporary national legal and political structures may fail to acknowledge the reality of the growing intimate partnerships in Japanese society today.

Clearly, as the number of late modern families increases—highlighting “family complexity”—, there is, for instance, a challenge for new mode of stepfamilies (King, 2009; Thomson, 2017);, as well as increasing cross-national families it is more difficult for the state to regulate their actual practices within the conventional legal and political scheme. Further, such family complexity depends on the related social systems for the achievement of individuals’ well-being. Yet, with recent legal reforms legalizing same-sex marriage in several Western countries (and some others in Asia), there is not a discrepancy between the individuals involved and the state system. In fact, one can find ways in which increasing voices advocate changes to the long-standing state frameworks to accommodate new bonds of intimacy.

Considering tensions between new family bonds of the late modern era and the conventional state legal frameworks in contemporary Japan, this essay discusses how the perception of stepfamilies has been remolded in the modernization of Japan. The stepfamily, as a primal case signified by contemporary family complexity, is still “under discovery” especially regarding the rights of children (Ganong and Coleman, 2018; Pryor, 2014). In particular, in the Japanese context, there needs to be greater attention given to stepfamilies (Nozawa, 2015; 2008; Nozawa and Kikuchi, 2021), also drawing a distinction from old perceptions of such families implemented in the conventional state systems. In this study, identifying new stepfamilies as such in Japan was explored by examining different works of literature and listening to the voices of advocates

for those families in contemporary Japan. By looking at the invisibility of stepfamilies in the legal context of the state, ways in which stepfamilies are placed in “compressed modernity” (Ochiai, 2014b; Chang, 2010) are considered in terms of the construction of Japan as a modern nation-state. Some type of extended (and complicated) families such as stepfamilies in early modern Japan were practically and legally tied to the state ideology regarding reproduction of the population and the continuation of the household by the *ie* system as a model for the prosperity of the state. As many Western studies suggest, stepfamilies, as examples of contemporary family complexity, should be observed in a different way as a result of the transformation of intimacy and growth of a sense of individuality in late modernity. However, at the normative and institutional level of the state, they are still struggling with the legacy of early modern family ideologies of heteronormative nuclear families.

This essay, accordingly, addresses a point that is hardly concerned with the recent and growing debates about Japanese stepfamilies in the era of globalization which includes the family. The transformation of the family and the growth of its diversity will be other important issues associated with family complexity (Carlson and Meyer, 2014; Cancian *et al*, 2011; Karraker, 2013) beyond national institutional borders, which I term the “deterritorialization of the family”. Yet, most theoretical arguments about the transformation of intimacy, except for a few (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), have drawn less attention to that point. Even so, in Japan and other countries, cross-national families and their problems have been increasing (Ohtani 2020; George, 2014). Not only does this give rise to the reconstruction of the legal-political reform involving diverse couples and family formations, but it also launches questions as to the recognition of sociocultural diversities within the family unit. Remarriages and divorces among cross-national families raise the question of national borders in the age of globalization, especially with regard to “authorized” marital status, attainment of citizenship of a foreign partner and/or family members, settlement aid, and the inheritance of plural cultural heritages by the next generation. Given that the formation of a stepfamily through remarriage creates a cross-national family as a consequence, how can Japan involve the transnational family in the national legal-political structure? Taking those things into account, this essay raises a question about the ways in which this new family bonding practice embodied in modern-day stepfamilies relates to old frames of normative family-state ideologies still embedded within state institutions.

2. Identifying Stepfamilies in the Japanese Context

Increasing attention to stepfamilies indicates the advent of family complexities (Meyer and Carlson, 2014; Carlson and Meyer, 2014; Thomson, 2017) in late modernity. In contrast to the early generic and normative nuclear family model normally based on the heterosexual nuclear family, both scholars and policy makers now face how to deal with the variations and instabilities (Carlson and Meyer, 2014). Carlson and Meyer state the following:

Conceptually, complexity can result from differential attachment across a category that is and only can be discrete. For example, different children in the same residence may have different biological parents. In addition, complexity can emerge due to the variability in categories that were previously thought to be— but are not necessarily—discrete (Carlson and Meyer, 2014:7).

It is important to note that their argument regarding family complexity is by no means a proposal for reintegrating the diversities and complexities into a coherent family theory and policy; rather, the agenda is to explore—for the well-being of the child and family members—how scholars, policy makers, and practitioners introduce ideas reflecting the reality of the family today. That is, ways in which new social languages and institutions communicate with family complexities without reduction are explored. Questioning and remolding the conventional values embodied in the respective social systems e.g., law and politics as well as social norms about parenthood, childhood, division of gender, and generations within the family, indicate that stepfamilies tend to struggle with recognition and inclusion in the present legal and political scheme of the state (Claire 2017).

Beyond the origin of the term that indicates critical inquiry about the entangled family issues today, family complexity can also refer to diversity in the formation of families, including stepfamilies. In the last decades, scholars have shifted their premises about stepfamilies from normative nuclear family values to the recognition of their diversity and complexity (Ganong and Coleman, 2018). While Ganong and Coleman addressed the rapid change in the recognition of stepfamilies in the advent of radical social change in American scholarship since the 1970s (Ganong and Coleman, 2018), similar steps regarding stepfamilies are hardly seen in Asian societies, including Japan (Nozawa and Kikuchi, 2021; Nozawa, 2015; Nozawa *et al.*, 2005). Yet, these societies are also facing a rapid shift in family values e.g., changes in marriage and divorce rates, remarriages, and family complexity vis-à-vis a growing sense of individualism and self-

decision in the era of late modernity (Alexy 2020; Alexy and Cook, 2018; Ochiai and Hosoya, 2014).

Some scholars argue that there is no unit equivalent to the stepfamily in Japanese yet (Nozawa and Kikuchi 2021; Nozawa 2008; Nozawa et al., 2005), although, in legal terms, there is language to describe each individual in the stepfamily (Hayano, 2008:108; Nozawa, 2008:78). For instance, instead of *haha* mother and *ko* the child, the stepmother and stepchild are called *mama haha* and *mama ko*. Here, *mama* is a prefix referring to an extended or inherited family member. Apart from an explanatory expression of *kozure-saikon* remarriage with child (Shinkawa, 2011: 2017), Japanese literature regarding stepfamilies uses the term *steppufamirī* (stepfamilies) in phonetic letters instead of giving a Japanese counterpart to the English term (SAJ Henshūbu, 2018; Hayano, 2008; Nozawa *et al*, 2005). The increasing number of stepfamilies with social parents and children, as well as biological ones, is still hardly mentioned in institutional or social discourses in Japan. Though they are sharing the happiness and struggling with psychological conflicts with extended families in both biological and social terms, some stepfamilies are still reluctant to come out as new families. As Shinkawa indicates from her survey findings about stepfamily members in Japan, many stepfamilies still hesitate to disclose their family complexity in public and many others struggle with psychological or emotional tensions privately (Shinkawa, 2017:17). Nozawa, in his comparative study of stepfamilies in the East Asian context, argues that there is a “traditional” sense of the Asian extended family based on biological kinship or blood relation that could be an obstacle for stepfamilies both biological and social (Nozawa, 2015). In this traditional context, which was genealogically and discursively constructed and essentialized in the course of the modernization of (East) Asian state (Ochiai 2014b), either grandparents and biological relatives are expected to parent the children exclusively.

Furthermore, as a cause of considerable social and psychological pressure on both parents and stepparents as well as children, many Japanese stepfamilies are facing difficulty in what Nozawa calls the “scrap-and-build” obsession (see also Alexy 2020:119). Unlike stepfamilies in Western society where there are alternative and wider family networks and different roles of the various members, the indispensability of a normative nuclear family structure results in Japanese counterparts often reclaiming the former family structure by remarriage, according to Nozawa’s findings. As a result, children in a stepfamily are likely to be disconnected from their separated parent, and the stepparents and the child have a great deal of difficulty in becoming a “true” family (Nozawa *et al*, 2005:35), which ideology has been embedded in both structural

and psychological level in modern state of Japan (Alexy, 2020; Ronald and Alexy, 2011; Ueno 2009). Insofar as normative nuclear family models based on biological kinship are prevalent and dominant in both social and institutional languages, the psychological conflicts among stepfamily members cannot be dissolved, although research studies on contemporary stepfamilies in Japan cite many cases of the creation of alternative networks of families among them (Shinkawa, 2017; Nozawa *et al.*, 2005).

3. The Family under Compressed Modernity

It would be appropriate to say that developed societies have experienced a social shift to late modernity to some extent. However, considering different socio-historical backgrounds as well as altered trajectories of the constitutions of modern nation-states, an examination of the transformation of the family should be managed in a more nuanced way. Speaking broadly, in Asia, trajectories of modernization are historically different from those in Western societies, and these warrant careful articulation in sociological theory. For instance, Chang revised the relevance of the generic social theory of modernization in the Asian context, arguing for an experience of “compressed modernity” (Chang, 2010; 2014). He explains:

Compressed modernity is a social situation in which economic, political and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner with respect to both time and space, and in which the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements leads to the construction and reconstitution of highly complex and fluid social system. ... Compressed modernity can be manifested at various levels of human experiences – e.g. personhood, family, secondary organizations, and urban spaces, as well as social units including civil society, nation. etc. (Chang 2014:38-39).

In compressed modernity, individualization does not always accompany individualism in the development of institutionalized individualization, as noted by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) in their discussion of the essential components in the development of modernity in Europe. Through the discussion about compressed modernity in South Korea and potentially in some other Asian societies, Chang attempts to differentiate modernization in the following ways. First, in considering the different trajectories of the building of modern nation-states in Asia, he insists that modernization is by no means a single linear process in the development of

individualism. Though he agrees with the idea that individualization is a common characteristic of modernization, he regards individualism as a symbolic medium uniquely developed in European Western modernity. Instead, referring to the advent of “institutionalized familialism” or “family-centered modernity” in South Korea (Chang, 2014:42), he demonstrates how the idea of “family” is engaged with the reproductive ideology of nation-building e.g., as a supplemental institution that is a substitute for possible national welfare schemes, such as those that exist in Western societies. This ideology has resulted in the growth of a sense of individualization without individualism. In addition, it can be imagined that South Korea as well as some other Asian societies have had different relationships with globalization since the late 20th century.

4. Institutionalized Familialism in Modern Japan

Here, let us look at one of typical cases representing the struggle of stepfamilies in contemporary Japan under compressed modernity, although, comparing to Chang’s study in South Korea, Ochiai remarks Japan’s longer process of modernization than other Asian states, in reference to Japan under “semi-compressed modernity” (Ochiai 2014b). Hayano, in several debates, has pointed out the legal predicament that stepfamilies have encountered recently. First, he points out the different socio-legal structure of the Japanese family established during the Meiji era as the constitution of the modern nation-state, explaining that the *ie* system was endorsed in pre-war Japanese family law along with the state ideology of Japanese Imperialism (Ninomiya, 2014: Ueno, 2009). In this family law aimed at sustaining the *ie* system institutionalized by the *koseki* birth registration by household basis as a micro terminal of the body of the nation through governance of the population, its legal principle was devoted to the continuation of the household. In other words, it did not refer to the welfare or rights of the people. Ninomiya elaborates:

“The ‘ie’ system, which required the members of a family to follow the orders of the household head, was described metaphorically as reflecting the relationship that existed between the emperor and the nation – where the emperor is father, the empress is mother and the nation’s population the children. The ‘ie’ system also consolidated the family state *kazoku kokka* ideology, which demanded that the orders of the emperor be obeyed unconditionally. ... It was only the *koseki* that made the ‘ie’ discernible to the eyes of the nation. In this way, the *koseki* was not a mere register of family relations, but rather it exemplified and actualized the model that constituted the foundations of the family in the Meiji Civil Code” (Ninomiya, 2014:174-75).

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As the national principle of the family state *kazoku kokka* indicates, this “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006) of Japan as a modern nation-state had been grounded by this principle, which had as its structure the *ie* system discerned by *koseki*. Even today, pointing to *koseki* registration in post-war Japan and family law, Endō insists that this pre-war *ie* ideology still remains, identifying people by household instead of as individuals. Post-war Japanese family law does not recognize the use of different surnames within married couples yet (Endō, 2013:56). In a similar vein, Hamano (2017) attempts to identify the Japanese family in the context of ideological state apparatus of the state. Ironically, under this “institutionalized familialism” (Chang, 2014:42), the father or his firstborn son as the successor of the household is signified as the household chief who is responsible for the prosperity of the Japanese according to pre-war Imperialism. Under Meiji Japanese family law, legally assured equal rights were granted to stepfamilies including adopted children and biological families, insofar that they belonged to the household (Hayano, 2008:108).

Speaking generally, socio-legal frameworks of the state rarely reflect upon family complexity and its transition in the functional sense (Thomson, 2017; Pryor, 2008: 2014). Reviewing new stepfamilies in the institutionalized context, Pryor argues that “the law is reluctant to sanction stepfamilies and fails to support stepparent-stepchild relationship[s] with full legal endorsement” (Pryor, 2014:179). Calling them “legal strangers,” Pryor noted that, regardless of state or region, both modern family law and legal specialists mostly recognize the family by biological or adoptive relationships. In her critique of the significance of endorsing and maintaining the non-biological parent-child relationship in stepfamilies, it would be fair to say that Pryor did not intend to neglect the significance of this biological partnership, no matter the reason for the separation of parents and child including the breakdown of the family. Yet, indicating the improvement of the rights and welfare of children at the global level, she has referred to Section 4 of Article 9 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCROC),¹ acknowledging the perpetual maintenance of the biological relationship including the right of the child to know his/her biological parents and arguing, “There is a tension between children’s need for biological

¹ The section stipulates: [W]here such separation results from any action initiated by a State Party, such as the detention, imprisonment, exile, deportation or death (including death arising from any cause while the person is in the custody of the State) of one or both parents or of the child, that State Party shall, upon request, provide the parents, the child or, if appropriate, another member of the family with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall of itself entail no adverse consequences for the person(s) concerned.

families and their need for social families, a tension exacerbated by the ambiguities of the legal system” (Pryor, 2014:180; Edwards *et al*, 1999).

In the Japanese post-war era, family law reform that officially declared the abolition of the ideology of the family state (Nishimura, 1978), but the inclusiveness of family complexity has hardly appeared yet. There has been a failure to grant today’s stepfamilies adequate legal rights as official family members, which has triggered calls for a subsequent policy making process and social citizenship for them. While the invisibility of emerging stepfamilies in the discourse of domestic legal contexts is still the case, Hayano reported that through the mid-2000s, the ratio of remarriages involving children and the formation of stepfamilies has been growing steadily, representing 20% of all remarriage cases (Hayano, 2008:109). Under such circumstances, a key discussion regarding stepfamilies and law in Japan is about the rights of multiple families in the legal structure. With the increase in awareness of the rights of the child in cases of family complexity, legal language is expected to secure the well-being of the child for biological and social families (Brown *et al*, 2015; Manning *et al*, 2014). The notion of extended or inclusive family is important so that a child in this family situation is legally recognized.

Yet, given that the process of modernization is contingent upon its historical and regional backgrounds, it would be wise to consider the ways in which a legacy of compressed modernity is recognizable in Japan’s post-family state since the mid-20th century. In the Japanese legal discourse, a relative (*shinzoku*) in Japanese retains exclusive rights and duties pertaining to the child according to the law. For example, Article 725 in the Civil Code defines a relative according to three classifications: 1) a relative by blood within the sixth degree; 2) a spouse; or 3) a relative by affinity within the third degree. The definitions of relatives or legal family seem to recognize a broader family resulting from either biological linkage or a marital relationship. Those definitions of the family in the Japanese legal context are unlikely able to recognize social families, which embodies Nozawa’s notion of “scrap-and-build” model of the Japanese stepfamilies. Furthermore, this is the case among children of non-marital partners in stepfamilies, resulting in several debates over the legal rights of the custodial child and the related duties of actual parents, with children being legally exempt unless they are involved with a relative through legal adoption (Hayano, 2008).

Normative family concepts in legal terms can be followed based on the social fact that the Japanese ratio of non-marital children among all children born is much lower than in Western countries—only 2.11% in Japan as of 2006, 43.66% in the U.K., 49.51% in France, 29.96% in

Germany, 55.47% in Sweden, and 38.50% in the U.S. (MHLW, 2015:184). The birth rate among unmarried couples are still sanctioned by cultural norms and social systems. Veiled by this still normative recognition of the family based on the biological and heteronormative nuclear model since the foundation of the state, some children in the stepfamily or children of non-marital partnerships are consequently situated in vulnerable circumstances, being excluded from the basic rights of the child and parental duties regardless of the complexity and diversity of the family to which they belong. Regarding this normative family values still affecting the Japanese through the legal system, Alexy argues as follows:

Despite contemporary expectations that the law should not be involved in families, Japanese laws have long structured how families can be organized through the interlocking “stem family” (*ie*) and “household registration” (*koseki*) systems that built normative family forms and the mechanisms to police them. In the current moment, only the *koseki* system remains legally operative, although the *ie* system continues to influence how families are imagined and legislated. In contemporary families, and at moments of divorce, many people frequently refer to this historical, but now legally defunct, *ie* system when describing what makes a family “normal” or describing what is best (Alexy, 2020:89-90).

Namely, “the still prevalent postwar standard family model and the coexisting older extended family tradition provide the sociocultural context within which Japanese stepfamily members form their family relations” (Nozawa, 2008:82). Above all, beyond a discussion about legal recognition and possible reform, stepfamilies today shall be debated inclusively in light of the rights of the child and citizenship in society beyond the state.

5. Globalization of Family Complexity: Cross-Cultural Stepfamilies

In the recognition of family complexity in contemporary society, this essay has prompted a view about stepfamilies and their social circumstances in Japan. Lastly, it refers to possible cross-cultural stepfamilies in Japan, as it pertains to the diversity of the family through marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Consideration of cultural diversity of the family, as well as its social aspects, has become critical for the achievement of adequate social support structures for the family today (Cross et al, 2018). Inheritance of cultural heritages of parents is also significant as it pertains to the child’s right to cultural heritage (Karraker, 2013). As the family is open to globalization, one has to recognize possible stepfamilies of cross-cultural families in the context

Table 1 Marriages in Japan, by Nationality

Year	Total	Japanese Couple	Non-Japanese Wife and Japanese Husband	Japanese Wife and Non-Japanese Husband	Non-Japanese Couple
1980	778,624	767,441	4,386	2,875	3,922
1985	739,002	723,669	7,738	4,443	3,152
1990	725,727	696,512	20,026	5,600	3,589
1995	795,323	764,161	20,787	6,940	3,435
2000	801,466	761,875	28,326	7,937	3,328
2001	803,287	760,272	31,972	7,755	3,288
2002	760,503	721,452	27,957	7,922	3,172
2003	743,714	704,152	27,881	8,158	3,523
2004	724,139	680,906	30,907	8,604	3,722
2005	718,102	672,784	33,116	8,365	3,837
2006	735,132	686,270	35,993	8,708	4,161
2007	724,169	679,550	31,807	8,465	4,347
2008	730,473	689,137	28,720	8,249	4,367
2009	711,511	673,341	26,747	7,646	3,777
2010	703,943	670,007	22,843	7,364	3,729
2011	665,393	635,961	19,022	6,912	3,498
2012	672,289	645,212	17,198	6,459	3,420
2013	663,740	639,125	15,442	6,046	3,127
2014	647,086	622,619	14,998	6,132	3,337
2015	638,745	614,180	14,809	6,167	3,589
2016	624,559	599,351	14,851	6,329	4,028
2017	611,319	585,409	14,795	6,662	4,453
2018	591,098	564,629	15,060	6,792	4,617
2019	603,665	577,088	14,911	7,008	4,658

Source: NIPSSR (2021)

of evolving cultural diversity of the family members through multiple languages, cultural values and religious faiths, and so on. Not only do both the families and their supporters think about the well-being of stepfamilies of family complexity; they may also absorb any arising internal cultural differences and contesting norms as a consequence of the making of new family.

If we consider the idea of the family is contestably reformed in-between the both global values and domestic norms in Asia, the rise and growth of cross-cultural families by cross-border marriage with a foreign citizen and families of non-Japanese residents can be depicted as primary cases. As Table 1 indicates, cross-border marriages reached their peak in the early 2000s and remained stable throughout the decade. Despite that the overall decline in the incidence of marriage is significant in Japan, the actual share of cross-border marriages as a percentage of all

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Table 2 Divorces in Japan, by Nationality

Year	Total	Japanese Couple	Japanese and Non-Japanese Couple	Non-Japanese Couple
1995	200168	191024	7992	1152
2000	265752	251879	12367	1506
2005	263163	246228	15689	1246
2010	253135	232410	18968	1757
2011	237358	217887	17832	1639
2012	236996	219118	16288	1590
2013	232821	216187	15196	1438
2014	223562	207972	14135	1455
2015	227614	212540	13675	1399
2016	218076	203853	12945	1278
2017	213439	200603	11659	1177
2018	209451	197289	11044	1118
2019	209696	197849	10647	1200

Source: NIPSSR (2021)

marriages relatively has been growing in and even outside of the country. In 2015, 3.3% of all marriages in Japan were cross-border marriages. Furthermore, if we take a closer look at those families of the Tokyo metropolitan area and other neighboring prefectures, the ratio in these areas was almost 5% (MHLW, 2017). As for the country of origin of non-Japanese partners, those of Japanese males are of Asian-origin. There is more of a diverse cultural spread among the partners of Japanese women, who are from different parts of the world (MHLW, 2007). According to the datasets based on the 2005 census, it was estimated that approximately 6.9% of children were living with at least one foreign parent in Japan, among the entire number of households with children throughout the nation (Takaya *et al*, 2013:64). The actual number of children of cross-cultural or non-Japanese families is still too small to draw wider social recognition or public attention in Japan. The government has not introduced any policies at the national level which would address the failure of basic education as well as supplemental Japanese language education to introduce multi-language education, as well as specific social supports, especially at the grassroots level. There are voices which advocate for urgent radical legal and political reforms for the rights of children of a multicultural society, regardless of their legal status or social conditions of their parents (Vogt, 2017; Chitose, 2008). Those arguments dismiss the cultural heritage rights of those cross-cultural children living in Japan. Not only should those children be guaranteed equal social rights; they also have the rights to adopt cultural heritages of their parents - no matter where they live.

The divorce rate of cross-marriage couples in Japan has been higher than Japanese couples and foreign couples in Japan. In 2015, the total divorces of both cross-national and non-Japanese couples combined was almost 7.5% of the entire cases for the year see Table 2. Under such circumstances, it is alleged that there are certain numbers of foreign wives mostly Asian-origin who left their children and came to Japan by themselves. While these women make a new family life, their left children are brought up by their grandparents and relatives, aided by remittances and indirect supports from their mothers in Japan (Harashima, 2008). Japanese cross-national families are, in this sense, situated in the translational environment in that account. Japanese parents of these cross-national families are normally apt to be irresponsible for their stepchildren in distance, some voluntary develop a translational kinship with them across borders, while taking care of his cross-national family in Japan. This case also signifies the recent family complexities in Japan: first, their families are technically stretched beyond two countries; next, the marital practice of the couples include both marriage and remarriage at the same time; and children of these cross-national families are brought up in negotiation with cultural diversity given by their cross-national parents.

One of the most striking events brought about in these days was Japan's ratification of *the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Parental Child Abduction* in 2014. Both social and political debates on Japan's participation to the signatory to this international convention resulted in the rise of questions about Japanese institutionalized familialism *vis-à-vis* the growing international family values embodied in the Convention, as to the right of child, shared parenting and family diversities in domestic society (Hamano, 2020; 2017). The actual statistical proportion of remarriages of non-Japanese parents with children in Japan is not clear, but one could argue that debates on stepfamilies in Japan and some other regions in Asia are necessary to consider possible cross-cultural stepfamilies, including both biological and social families from different cultural backgrounds. Analysis of family complexity should include indicators such as social status e.g., gender, income and place of residence and the possible cross-cultural environment of those families.

In the context of both social equity and cultural rights for the sake of the children, under the Asian "compressed modernity," extended families and their diversity through stepfamily-making will likely struggle more with normative family values oriented to the interest of the state. Previous discussions on stepfamilies, with an emphasis on the rights of the child and respect of individuality of all members, made a great contribution to the development of the rise

and recognition of the challenges of these new families, dismantling the normative biological nuclear family models embodied in the state legal-political systems. Theorizing stepfamilies and improving public policies and social supports on that premise will lead to critical inquiries about the re-contextualization of the new family ties in the old family bonds embedded within the state system. Above all, taking possible cross-cultural or multicultural stepfamilies into account, the question of the family in late modernity, in the consideration of stepfamilies, can be reframed in its theoretical and practical explorations beyond national borders.

6. Conclusion

By their flexibility and diversity, stepfamilies can be drawn as a radical practice of the reconstruction of the intimate family circle in late modernity, in contestation with modern nation state systems. In Japan, it is reported that approximately 57% of divorced couples 143,834 out of 251,136 cases as of 2007 end up leaving with the child or children (MHLW, 2009). Through an educating process of child custody and separated parenting with their ex-partner, it is noted that some of them will eventually decide to create a stepfamily through remarriage. Given that the discussion in this article on Japanese stepfamilies can be situated in a wider discourse of achievement of the diversity of families in Asia, we might ask a question as to the way in which the Asian nation-state will embrace the complexity of new families within the state systems, *vis-à-vis* transforming themselves in the global context, while considering several critiques of the emergence of new policing of the family for the interest of the state (Goodman, 2006; Honda and Itō, 2017). In the dynamics of local-global intersections within the family, there is always a tension between the family and its state norm. While components of the family are faced with changing values and norms of the global world, they are, on the other hand, accommodated and regulated by the normative structure of the national formal structure. This would especially be the case when it comes to the moment of the transformation of the family members and its structure, influenced by marriage, divorce, adoption, and even remarriage. In the situation where all participants of the family meet a new facet of remaking the family, they had no choice but to refer to the normative state system, which, in some case, dismisses the challenge of these families to reform a family of their own.

Examining ongoing issues and debates around stepfamilies calls for a theoretical debate of the family in Asian late modernity. In the meantime, it has become a key landmark of inquiry

about the authenticity of modern families in relation to the nation-state. The family in our society is associated and maintained within the complicated structure of dependence on different social systems. The family is unable to separate itself from such a structure of interdependence, while questioning, claiming, and struggling with the improvement of the rights of individuals – including children.

In Asia, the challenge of the family today is a question of modernity itself. Institutionalized familial structures functionally have been an ideological component of Asian nation-states at the normative component, as a consequence of the compressed modernity, yet, through several debates surrounding contemporary stepfamilies in this article, this family-centered-modernity is scrutinized in various ways. In addition to this national challenge of the family, this article argued that a further attention to the increase in the number of cross-cultural stepfamilies should be taken into account. Not only is the Asian family-state being contested by the exploration of stepfamilies; it now stretches the modern family beyond the normative nuclear biological hetero-normative family model, with the possibility that trans-border stepfamilies in our society are also socially and culturally extending their intimate sphere across national borders.

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