

Harald Fuess.**Divorce in Japan: Family, Gender, and the State, 1600-2000.**

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In a culture recognized and regarded for its traditional emphasis on Confucian values of family and group harmony, it may seem somewhat of an affront to the Japanese for researchers, particularly *gaijin* (foreign) scholars, to undertake a critical analysis of the darker side of conjugal relationships in Japan. Divorce, although increasingly accepted as part of the changing marital and family landscape in contemporary Japanese society, has long been associated with the break-down of the family unit and, on a broader scale, the premature truncation of lineage. The latter becomes an issue if divorced children, in particular sons, do not remarry and procreate to preserve the family name. This long-standing view of divorce as a negative life course event (as opposed to marriage) has, despite recent evidence to the contrary, endured over time, making it difficult for social scientists and historians to move beyond demographic analyses and interpretations to explore and present the social and cultural determinants of divorce from diverse perspectives. To date, few have succeeded in achieving this objective (see Cornell, 1990; Kumagai, 1983; Wright, 1997 for examples). Upon reading Harald Fuess's comprehensive historical examination of divorce in Japan spanning five emperor eras (from Edo to Heisei), it is this reviewer's opinion that his name be added to the top of this select list of scholars.

Although an historian by training, Fuess transcends the traditional boundaries of disciplinary research in his adept weaving together of sociological, anthropological, political, legal, and economic threads of evidence to answer two main questions about the U-shaped pattern of divorce rates in Japan over the past four centuries. The first: why were Japanese divorce rates so high (compared to Europe and North American rates) prior to 1900? And the second: what factors may account for the gradual decline (from 1900-1960) and subsequent rise in divorce rates (1961-2000) since the turn of the twentieth century? In constructing responses to these questions, Fuess employs a triangulation of methods, collecting and evaluating data from a number of different sources including historical legal documents, qualitative case study interviews, and national surveys. This innovative approach, rarely used in social and historical research due to the multiplicity of skill-sets (quantitative, qualitative, and historical) and breadth of knowledge it requires the researcher to possess, is what sets this study apart from other historical analyses on marriage and the family in Japan. Further, since much of the archived data/information for this study is written in a system of characters that is oftentimes difficult to read and interpret for even the most seasoned Japanese historians, the author is to be commended for his diligence in accessing this material for analysis.

Beyond the important methodological contribution this book makes to the international literature on divorce and changing family structure, Fuess should be commended for the incredible scope of this project. In undertaking a socio-historical analysis of marital break-down in Japan, Fuess focuses on an examination of the individual and collective impact of political, economic, legal, cultural, and regional factors in shaping the experience of divorce from feudal to modern times (1600-2000). Even for an experienced historian, this is no small feat. In fact, it is precisely this wide casting of the net

that allows the author to debunk the myth that Japan has only recently become a divorcing society (p. 153). Indeed, Fuess's attention to key historical details from difficult-to-access archived sources provides convincing evidence that Japan has for centuries been a high divorce society, and that this can be attributed in large part to the relative ease with which spouses, particularly husbands, could negotiate marital dissolution.

The author's extensive knowledge of Japanese history, politics, and law, acquired and honed in part through previous research studies into the changing nature of intergenerational relationships in Japanese families and gendered identities and roles in society over time, provides a strong foundation for a number of interesting discussions throughout the book on the intersection of family, gender, and the state in the context of divorce. One of the most compelling points is that despite significant changes to federal divorce legislation supporting individual rights and gender equality in the family, and to a lesser extent the workplace over the last half century, divorce remains a gendered social process. His main thesis is that when it comes to divorce, women today are not all that better off than their counterparts were centuries ago. The state continues to accord differential treatment to men and women in divorce proceedings, further institutionalizing privilege to husbands over wives. A case in point is the continued existence of an enforced waiting period for wives wishing to remarry after a divorce has been legally granted; for husbands, no such wait times have ever been imposed.

In closing, this book is a must-read for social scientists with research interests in the areas of gender, marriage and the family, and demography. Its inclusion of discussions on sociological issues ranging from cultural change to gender, class and status inequality certainly make it an excellent supplemental read for graduate courses on social inequality, social institutions, and social processes.

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