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Emerging Adulthood Transitions in Japan: The Role of Marriage and Housing Careers

Abstract

Postwar Japanese adulthood derived from a hegemonic framework in which young people formed home-owning family households featuring ‘salary-men’ and female-homemakers. Since the 1980s, however, along with prolonged economic downturn, Japanese adult transitions have become increasingly fragmented and non-linear. A growing concern has been the social, economic and ontological individualization of younger adults, resulting in a phenomenal decline in partnering and marriage, on the one hand, and sharp increases in young people either staying on in the natal home or living alone. Dominant understandings of contemporary transitions into adulthood have focused on focus on ‘delay’, especially in terms of the labour market, in context of socioeconomic decline since the bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s. This paper, however, focuses on the interaction of marriage and housing careers which play particularly important roles. Our analysis thereby contributes to both understanding of social contingencies that shape adult transitions, especially in industrialized East Asian societies, and also the role of housing and marriage markets together in mediating the attainment of full adulthood.

Introduction

Significant changes in life-course transitions among younger adults have become evident across industrialised nations in recent decades. In many cases, realignment has presented itself as a delay, with new cohorts of young people moving more slowly through standardised conduits toward adulthood: school leaving, labour market entry, marriage and family formation (see Arnett, 2000; Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011; Biggart et al., 2001; Frustenberg, 2013). For those entering adulthood in Japan's post-bubble economy, the fading of corporate welfare and income security has had a particular impact on the formation of couples and rates of marriage. As family formation declined, so to have conventional transitions into independent living and through housing careers to eventual home ownership. Indeed, the Japanese case does not simply parallel shifts in transition patterns observed in western-based studies (Sato et al., 2010), with delays in each aspect of transition appearing more intertwined and enduring.

Within Japan, declining movement through formal employment and marriage has been perceived as a social threat and a driver of low-fertility underlying current processes of social ageing and population decline (Shirahase, 2007). Indeed, recent research has illustrated that even sexual activity is diminishing among Japan's younger cohorts (e.g. Matsuura, 2005). Meanwhile, the ratio of people still unmarried at 50 has almost doubled for women and more than tripled for men between 1990 and 2010 (IPSSR, 2013). These remarkable shifts have been associated with a growing reluctance among younger people to adopt adult roles (Yamada, 1999) although many researchers have also argued that structural factors have posed particular transitional challenges to younger generations, especially those into work (see Genda, 2002; Brinton, 2010).

Rather than simple *delay* or *diversification* in adult transitions, Japan presents a specific disalignment between routes into, and the full achievement of adult life-courses. The analytical lenses of this paper are housing and marriage processes, which, we argue, have interacted to influence this transformation. Drawing on diverse data sources, we analyse how changes in marriage and partnering have undermined family household formation, which has, in turn, been enhanced by the structure of the housing system. This focus on marriage and housing in Japan aims to advance understanding of life-course processes in a number of respects. First, studies of adult transitions in Japan have largely dwelt on the effects of labour market restructuring (see Brinton, 2010; Inui, 2009; Toivonen, 2013), on the one hand, and changing courtship among younger people (see Ishida, 2013; Raymo and Iwasawa, 2005; Yoshida, 2011), on the

other. Thus, while shifting adult transitions have been an increasing concern (Miyamoto, 2004), the focus has been restrictive. In particular we consider the importance of the ‘home’ and ‘housing ladders’, as intersections of social and personal domains, in progression into full adult roles. Second, the Japanese case provides a contrast to western contexts, with ‘emerging adulthood’ – as Arnett (2000) describes the growing period of instability before the full achievement of adult status and identity – reflecting a different type of advanced modernity (Beck and Grande, 2010). In the Japanese context, the diminishing appearance of ‘economically independent and reproductive adult households’ has been especially disruptive at a number of levels. Individually, marriage and owner-occupation are closely bound together and are critical to achieving welfare security in later life. Socially, the impact has been a rapid rise in unmarried people, an explosion in one-person households and falling fertility. Individualization has been intensive in this context (Suzuki et al., 2010), but characteristically isolating and inhibitive rather than liberational.

This paper unfolds in four further sections. The first establishes how transitions into adulthood have been understood by sociologists and demographers, as well as why these positions need to be problematized and empirically examined in the case of Japan. The second section considers the outcomes in terms of declining marriage and growing concerns with ‘marriage hunting’. The third section analyses the role of the housing system and in particular the impact of housing market structures in reinforcing contemporary household patterns, and in stifling progress for non-family households. Attention finally turns to the broader and longer-term implications of diversified or dis-aligning adult transitions for welfare relations and social values, as well as the recent boom in shared rental housing, which represents a potential alternative to established notions of mature adulthood.

Transitions to Adulthood

While the process of becoming a full adult member of society is mediated differently in each culture, in industrialised societies, transitions from youth to adulthood have historically appeared to follow a common and ‘demographically dense’ sequence (Kohli, 2007). In recent years, life-course transitions have been increasingly disrupted in many ways. Socioeconomic restructuring is argued to have extended and diversified education and employment transitions promoting a new life-course phase in-between youth and adulthood featuring movement back and forth between dependent and independent status (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Arnett

(2000, 2006), views this period of emerging adulthood as being highly unsettled with importance placed on identity and individual conceptions of autonomy rather than traditional markers of maturity. It manifests itself as leisurely and lengthy explorations of identity, lifestyle and career possibilities, and features neither a sense of adolescence nor full adulthood. Another characteristic is the diminishing salience of existing conduits of adult identities – with some increasingly omitted, such as marriage – and linear progression becoming less characteristic, with movement back and forth between steps.

For Bynner (2005), however, many studies of emerging adulthood underestimate economic destabilisation and the fundamental way individual roles and identities are shaped to match structural forces and social conditions. Indeed, social and economic shifts featuring de-industrialisation, post-Fordist restructuring and a more individualised ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), have helped undermine linear and normative paths from family of origin to family of destination. A specific issue has been ‘flexibilisation’ of employment in which education practices and job opportunities have been decoupled (cf. Mythen, 2005). More chaotic family careers and household fragmentation can thus be understood as consequences of increased precarity in transition pathways and not simply outcomes of greater freedom and the exploration of identities.

Research on Japanese modernity has been resistant to categorisations and explanations derived from western contexts (Beck and Grande, 2010). Although evidence suggests that Japanese people have become increasingly individualized (see Suzuki et al., 2010), opportunities for, and manifestations of individualism have been constrained by deeply embedded social concerns with harmony, homogeneity and intergenerational continuity that have accompanied Japan’s high-speed growth and compressed socioeconomic modernity (Sugimoto, 1997). Earlier generations of Japanese youth, especially those born during the baby-boom of the late 1940s and the baby-bust of the 1950s, were largely compelled to follow marriage and work careers shaped by the emergence of a postwar social mainstream and conditions of the economic growth. Furthermore, institutional structures have shaped routes through the adult life-course. While the state orchestrated the system, sociopolitical stability and the amelioration of socioeconomic risks were not achieved through redistributive social policy measures but rather intermediate groups of private companies and families (Osawa, 1993). Estévez-Abe (2008) has argued that the Japanese state achieved a relatively equal distribution of income and extensive protection against market risks, despite relatively modest levels of social expenditure, through a variety of state interventions including rural public work programmes. Corporate

practices, involving secure lifetime employment, seniority-based wages and company welfare, were advanced with an individual male-breadwinner's attachment to a company critical to the socioeconomic security of the household. The associated family model reinforced gender roles and the 'family as a unit' was promoted in every aspect of policy and practice (Izuhara, 2014). Routes into and through adulthood were thus corporate-centred with employers pervasive in the realm of family life. For men, getting into a better school and then a better university, and ultimately a better company guaranteed future security, while for women, getting a better husband was normatively reinforced by gendered social policy (Osawa, 1993).

In the housing context, home ownership became a social and political project that sought to widen access to this tenure (Forrest and Hirayama, 2014). Acquiring an owned home became increasingly another pillar of welfare and security, and for new household was supported by government housing loans along with financial assistance from the company and family. A housing ladder emerged as rates of urban home ownership leapt from less than 26% in 1940 to 64% by 1963 (Hayakawa, 1990). As the tenure grew it became more central to the formation of standard families and mainstream households, and ultimately embedded in hegemonic perceptions of family transitions and 'standard life-course' (Hirayama, 2007).

Since the bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s, however, economic stagnation has undermined this social order with younger people having more leeway in not following standard paths into adult life (Toivonen, 2013). Employment opportunities began to diminish and company welfare programmes were hollowed out. Neoliberal reforms in labour laws also allowed for a massive increase in non-regular contractual conditions for new employees, leading to a rise in part-time and temporary employment from 15.8% to 38.0% of total employment between 1982 and 2010. Young people were particularly affected with the rate of irregular employment among those aged 20-24, increasing to 43.1% (MHLW, 2012). As economic conditions of male breadwinner households diminished, female labour market participation increased (from 58% to 68% between 1980 and 2005), especially those on non-regular contracts. Practices concerning recruitment, pay and career pathways, meanwhile, continued to favour male workers (Hirao, 2007).

Emerging adulthood in Japan then, has to be considered in regard to a diversity of factors. Traditional western approaches have overwhelmingly focused on two strands of the transition to adulthood: the school-to-work transition and family formation. Similarly, individualization has been considered a relatively homogenous process where individuals enjoy greater agency

in shaping life-courses by taking on greater risks within a more volatile socio-economic system. Contemporary research on emerging adulthood in Japan has also focused on labour markets (e.g. Brinton, 2010; Inui, 2009; Toivonen, 2013) and marriage and family formation (e.g. Ishida, 2013; Raymo, 2003; Raymo and Iwasawa, 2005) but typically in isolation. In this paper, we bring the housing dimension more fully into the discussion. Housing markets and careers are also embedded in the framework of emerging adulthood and both reflect and critically reinforce shifting work and marriage transitions.

Although housing careers are clearly entwined, both culturally and materially, how housing pathways vary between contexts has not been broadly examined (cf. Beer and Faulkner, 2011; Calvert, 2010; Forrest and Yip, 2012). European research has suggested that routes into adulthood are not only defined by natal home leaving, but are bound up with movement through different types of housing tenure. In particular, Mulder (2006) identifies that in some contexts, especially those where homeownership is normatively embedded with marriage and child bearing, that unfavourable shifts in housing market conditions can undermine family formation. Indeed, household and housing tenure transitions provide identity markers and economic foundations necessary for achieving adult status with, typically, the achievement of homeownership synonymous with maturity and independence, and providing a basis for long-term partnership and fecundity (Mulder, 2006; Mulder & Billari, 2010). Housing systems are thus critical in mediating transition from dependence to independence

This paper is particularly concerned with processes by which housing contexts mediate adult transition and the dynamics of home leaving, new household formation and family careers. In Japan, recent research has already suggested important links between housing and life-course transitions (Hirayama and Ronald 2008, Izuhara 2014), as well as the salience of urban conditions and housing markets in shaping the life choices of younger people (Ronald and Hirayama, 2009). The indication has been that declining marriage is being translated into an explosion of both one-person households and people staying on indefinitely in the parental home; and that the housing system plays a significant role in the processes. There are, furthermore, important implications for understanding interactions between households and housing, and social atomization and individualisation that are critical to the increasing precarity of younger people in Japan. Our argument extends the debate concerning structural, economic transformations or increasing agency in delaying adulthood (i.e. Arnett, 2000, 2006; Bynner, 2005), by considering processes underlying the emerging patterns of young people in reaching or adopting independent adult status.

Marriage and family formation

Across developed societies, less marriage and lower fertility has been explained by longer waiting periods prior to bearing children, with cohabitation often providing an alternative (Arnett, 2000). In most contexts marriage has lost salience as a marker of adult status and as a conduit to parenthood and socioeconomic independence. In Japan, on the other hand, marriage remains fundamental to child bearing and achieving economic security, and a central aspiration for young men and women alike (Ochiai, 2014; Raymo and Iwasawa, 2005, Retherford, et al; 2001). Thus, while understanding of emerging adulthood and reflexive modernisation emphasise explorations in identity and lifestyle, and the freedom to experiment with sexual relationships, adult transitions in Japan arguably reflects more a disalignment between desires for hegemonic marital relationships and means by which to realise them. This is not to suggest that attitudes have not changed, but rather, structural factors play significant roles.

While the average age of marriage has progressively increased¹, there has also been a substantial rise in people who do not seem to be marrying at all. Between 1995 and 2010 the ratio of women aged 25-29 who were still unmarried advanced from 48.1% to 54%, while the rate of women aged 30-34 increased from 19.7% to 26.6%. Among men, equivalent non-marriage rates escalated from 66.8% to 69.3% and 37.3% to 42.9% (MIAC, 2013). Data suggests, that this represents more than just a large delay in the age Japanese people settle down, and reflects a society in which a growing group of people are not partnering. The latest national survey on Attitudes toward Marriage and Family (IPSSR, 2011) found that of the growing number of unmarried people aged 18 to 35, 61% of men and 49% of women aged 18-34 were not engaged in any kind of romantic relationship. This represents a 10% increase on five years earlier and an overall trend towards men and women simply not getting together at all. A comparison of cumulative sexual intercourse rates in different birth cohorts (Matsuura., 2005), found that while the age at first sexual intercourse fell for generations born 1960 to 1975, average age has again risen for more recent generations of young people. Another recent study indicated that 30.2% of unmarried men in their 30s and 14.8% of women have never dated (Meiji Yasuda Insurance, 2013).

¹ The average at first marriage is now 31 years old for men and 29 for women (Cabinet Office, 2011)

In Europe, by contrast, although marriage has also declined, unmarried conjugal partnerships function similarly and often produce children. According to Jones (2007), although the chance of never being married at 34 years old in Western Europe is 53%, if we include those who cohabit with a partner, we have an ‘effectively single’ rate of about 33%. Furthermore, as many current singles will have been in a partnership at some point before, the group who are ‘single, never-cohabited’ is only around 23%. In contrast, according to recent Japanese survey data, as few as 2% of single men and women currently cohabit as an unmarried couple and only 9% have ever experienced cohabitation at some point before their mid-30s (IPSSR, 2011). In comparative terms, although Japan demonstrates a similar ratio of singles to Europe (47% for men and 32% for women aged 30 to 34), due to low past and present cohabitation, the number of ‘effectively single to this point in time’ is much higher. Moreover, although numbers of cohabiting individuals were increasing until 2005 (the figure declined in 2010), they have not contributed significantly to the formation of households with children (about 1.7% of children in Japan are born outside marriage).

Historically, arranged marriages played an important role, with this approach still accounting for 29.4% of marriages as recently as 1982. By 2005 the ratio had fallen to 6.4%. Various studies have thus looked to dating and marriage markets as the cause – and solution – to the decline in coupling (e.g. Ishida, 2013; Yoshida, 2010). Even the state has become involved, with special agencies established by local governments to assist people with mate-searching activities. Indeed, an entire industry has emerged that provides young people with socializing opportunities in order to assist marriage hunting (*konkatsu*). Nonetheless, despite the focus on interaction, shifts in employment and the structure of welfare are also of significance.

In particular, improved education and labour market participation among women is argued to have increased their capacity to live without a husband, while also reducing the available pool of appropriate partners (cf. Raymo and Iwasawa, 2008; Shirahase, 2007; Tsuya et al., 2005). Fukuda (2009), however, has more recently argued the reverse: that a high earning potential of women with post-secondary education leads to a greater likelihood of marriage. While there has been a growing expectancy of wage-earning wives, married women are also still expected to take primary responsibility for care of children and elderly parents, as well as domestic duties. Younger cohorts of women have however, become more resistant to the double burden of paid and unpaid labour, with shifting expectations of a suitable husband: with a growing concern with both romantic notions of love and the willingness of a potential partner to share domestic responsibilities (Nakano and Wagatsuma, 2004). At the same time, hypergamy

(marrying up by income and age) is still dominant² and while many women have become better off, the availability of well-paid and securely employed men has diminished (Tachibanaki, 2010). For men, economic restructuring, meanwhile, has eroded their capacity to support families, with many reluctant to marry until they are financially secure, which may come much later in life, if at all.

Declining marriage then, appears to derive more from frustrated expectations than the exercise of freedom and individuality. Data from the latest Attitudes to Marriage Survey (IPSSR, 2011), strongly suggests that hegemonic notions of marriage remain powerful, with the vast majority of young men (86.3%) and women (89.4%) aged 18 to 34 wanting to get married in the future. This represents only a slightly drop since 1980 (from 91.8% and 92.9%, respectively). The primary merit of marriage was identified as ‘having your own children and family’, which increased between 1987 and 2010 as the main priority for both men, from 19.9% to 33.6%, and women, from 33.2% to 47.7%. The biggest obstacle was identified as money by both genders, with ‘residence for married life’ second for men (19.3%) and a close third³ for women (at 15.3%). Framed as a reason for *not being able to marry*, most singles aged 25 to 34 identify finding a suitable partner as the main issue, with this being a slightly larger concern for women (51.3%) than men (46.2%).

FIGURE ONE AND TWO HERE

There are, nonetheless, some tensions between the desire for security and self-realization. Indeed, the most attractive aspect of single life remains ‘freedom in action and lifestyle’ (65.1% for men and 71.4% for women). As Figures One and Two illustrate, among those aged 25 to 34, the most common reasons for *not getting married* are, ‘do not feel the necessity’ and ‘do not want to give up freedom or comfort’, with the former more significant for men (31.2%) than women (30.4%), and the latter more for women (31.1%) than men (25.5%). Qualitative research has indicated that younger generations of Japanese have sought to resist the gender divided roles of their parent’s generation and seek more from their lives and relationships (Nakano and Wagatsuma, 2004). Concomitantly, however, a life without marriage is also

² In the 2010 Survey of Attitudes to Marriage and Family Among Japanese Singles (IPSSR, 2011), 66.5% of female respondents intended to marry someone older (down from 91.1% in 1987)

³ Getting ‘approval from parents’ remained a strong concern for women, at 17.1%

understood to enhance socioeconomic precarity and preclude the possibility of having children. For most women it also constitutes exclusion from the corporate-male-breadwinner welfare system.

Individualization seen through the lens of contemporary conjugal relationships thus demonstrates a particular form in Japan that, while reflecting elements of emerging adulthood in regard to the salience of an unmarried, 'in-between' life stage featuring greater self-reflexivity, is distinctly atomized and enduring. Individualisation in this case is characterised by structural transformations that intersect employment, gender and welfare, that are undermining the formation of couples and conjugal partnerships. This is particularly problematic as very few unmarried people in Japan live together as a couple or produce children (Raymo and Iwasawa, 2005). Moreover, cohabitation and other types of household formation do not represent adequate alternatives to marriage as means to achieve full independent adult status, as we now examine.

Adult transitions and the Housing System

The astonishing rise in younger unmarried people has driven a remarkable shift in household arrangements in recent decades. This has, furthermore, been shaped by the specifics of the housing context, which we now explicitly examine in order to illustrate its role in diminishing transitions to economically independent and biologically reproductive adult roles. Housing careers are similar to marriage ones to the extent they structure life-course progression and the realisation of socioeconomic independence. They also conceptually feature a 'ladder' where the first rung (home-leaving) defines a critical life-course transition to an independent household (Beer and Faulkner, 2011). In many contexts, full (un-mortgaged) home ownership represents a zenith in a housing career that not only sustains particular adult identities, but also forms an economic basis to later retirement and intergenerational exchanges of wealth and care (Doling and Ronald, 2010). However, contemporary transitions across societies appear to have become more complex with evidence of often chaotic and non-linear pathways among young home-leavers (e.g. Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2014), and often connected to deregulated routes through adulthood (Forrest and Hirayama, 2009). In Japan, while postwar housing markets were structurally embedded with standard households and family formation, in the post-bubble economy the housing system is reinforcing a form of individualisation and transition processes seem to be breaking down.

Between 1950 and 1990 house price inflation was rapid and almost continuous, with the state increasingly intervening through the Government Housing Loan Corporation (GHLC) to sustain finance for owner-occupied, family housing careers (Oizumi, 2007). This helped fuel the economic bubble of the 1980s as well as the 1990s crash, with both events undermining the stability of, and flows into, the owner-occupied housing market. Although prices declined, a deteriorating labour market and increasingly frustrated marriage eroded the capacity and desire for new households to either form or enter the housing market⁴. Meanwhile, in context of growing neoliberal influences, in the 2000s state support for housing faded with the withdrawal of GHLC loans and further reductions in the already small public housing sector⁵.

FIGURE THREE HERE

Changing housing policy and market conditions added to the obstacles faced by younger people attempting to transverse hegemonic life courses, and, as Figure Three illustrates, there has been a remarkable reversal of post-war housing trends. Rates of owner occupation among independent households under-thirty fell from 17.9% to 7.5%, and for 30 to 39 year-olds from 53.3% to 39% between 1983 and 2008. This decline has been linked with the fall in early life transitions (see Hirayama, 2013) with, according to the latest Population Census, an average 12% drop between 1985 and 2005 in the formation of new family households in the 25 to 29, 30 to 34 and 35 to 39 age categories. It appears that under post-bubble conditions, movement into an independent household and up a housing ladder has become problematic. The outcome has been a dramatic shift in housing and household careers featuring a boom in unmarried post-youth adults either staying longer, or indefinitely, in the natal home or living alone as a one-person household. Both of which inhibit the formation of conjugal couples and the achievement of independent adulthood.

Remaining at parental home

Individuals either remaining in parental home, or returning to it following an unsuccessful transition to independence, account for much of the fall in new family households, and while

⁴ A new apartment in greater Tokyo is still 7.9 times average annual income, and in Tokyo city 9.4 times higher (Demographia, 2013).

⁵ The share of public rental housing fell from 7.5% of housing in 1988 to 6.7% in 2003

less than one-in-ten people aged 30 to 34 lived in their parent's homes in 1980, this increased to more than one-in-four by 2010. For people aged 25 to 29, more than 40% still live 'at home' with their parents (cf. Hirayama, 2013). The root of this 'failure to launch' for many younger people arguably lies with diminishing employment and marriage prospects, but also the lack of housing alternatives for low- or no-income singles. Nishi and Kan (2005) have identified a growing relationship between work and household situation for those aged 20 to 34, with the unemployment rate of those living with parents increasing from 4.1% in 1980 to 9.7% in 2004, compared to average cohort rates of 2.5% and 6.8%. Similarly, the latest IPSSR survey (2011) found that while the ratio of unmarried people (age 18-34) living with parents is 70% for men (75% for women), the rate is 66.7% for full time employees compared to 83% for those in irregular work and 88% among the unemployed⁶.

For post-adolescent youth with limited income there are few alternatives to staying on in their parent's homes. The fact that older cohorts had an historic opportunity to cheaply access larger, owner-occupied homes, has also allowed them to protect their offspring from exposure to housing costs, sustaining middle-class living conditions. At the same time, the ratio of people aged 65 and over living with an unmarried child has advanced from 10.8% in 1985 to 18.5% in 2010 (MIAC, 2013), suggesting that many of Japan's older people are being cared for by adult children who have not managed to form families of their own. This appears related to housing conditions, with the past embedding of home ownership facilitating intergenerational exchanges, but also hindering housing transitions for the next generation, who face entirely different market conditions.

It has been argued that marriage and new household formation are closely related in Japan (Hirayama and Izuhara, 2008) with reason to assume that post-youth adults living independently of parents are more likely to marry (Raymo, 2003). According to the annual panel survey of young adults conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2007, a higher proportion of single men and women in their 20s and early-30s living independently got married in the preceding five years (Figure Four). There were also gender differences with the effect being ostensibly stronger for women in their early-20s and for men in their late-20s and early-30s. These effects can be explained in part by differences in the average ages that women and men get married. It may also be related the link between job security, income and the likelihood of marriage among men (Tachibanaki, 2010). In other words, those who can

⁶ For women the respective figures are 76.3% compared to 85.6 and 86.9%.

afford to live independently are more likely to be backed by a secure income, connecting employment status to housing independence as conditions for marriage. Nonetheless, even for those who do leave the natal home to form an independent one-person household, housing market conditions can be restrictive for further adult transition.

FIGURE FOUR HERE

Living Alone

While in most developed societies policy measures exist that support early housing careers (see Forrest and Yip, 2012), in Japan, public rental housing targets vulnerable family households and elderly singles. Few benefits are available to individuals living alone and there are no cash benefits for tenants. Company rental housing units offered to new recruits have assisted housing transitions to independent living in the early postwar period. However, this pillar has also receded in recent years with, according to the Institute of Labour Administration Survey (2007), half (49.5%) of companies which owned dormitories for single employees closing or consolidating provision since 2000⁷. The introduction of rental assistance is a current policy discussion in Japan, and the needs of younger people are a particular concern. How to introduce a user subsidy is also an issue. In many countries age is factored into eligibility and benefit calculations with an assumption that younger people will live in shared accommodation⁸. In Japan, however, living in a shared home with non-family members is extremely rare (around 2% of people in their 20s), and the overwhelming majority of unmarried people who manage to leave the natal home become one-person households.

Nationally, the ratio of one-person households advanced from 15.8% to 32.4% between 1980 and 2010, and is expected to reach 37.2% in the next two decades (MIAC, 2013). While other demographic groups (particular widows and divorcees) have been important, ‘never married’ people under 40 have been a driver of this trend. The housing system meanwhile has shaped a particular manifestation. Firstly, the small size (see below) of the average rental unit makes such housing particularly suitable for single people with one income, living alone. The

⁷ The rate of downsizing was particularly severe among large companies with 1000 and more employees (58.4%), compared to their small-size counterparts with less than 300 employees (21.4%) although few smaller companies (84%) did not even own company dormitories before 2000.

⁸ For example, in Britain, single people under the age of 35 in private rental accommodation are normally only entitled to housing benefits (local housing allowance) at the shared accommodation rate (renting a single room in a shared house) and are not expected to have their own flat.

constitution of the sector has thus been affected by changing demand with 57% of private rental units occupied by single-person households in 2005, up from 48% in 1990 (MLIT, 2013). Secondly, a new market of super compact condominiums catering to economically established singles has emerged, especially in central urban districts (cf. Kubo and Yui, 2011). Nonetheless, for younger adults seeking independence, renting alone is the primary option with, for example, around eight-in-ten one-person households aged 25 to 29 renting privately. There is also a connection to economic status with around 81% of one-person households renting in this age group⁹ earning less than five million yen a year (Hirayama, 2013).

While achieving residential autonomy may increase chances of marriage in comparison to living in the natal home (Raymo, 2003), it usually necessitates a prolonged period of living alone and presents other obstacles to early life-course transitions. Firstly, due to the restructuring of economic conditions, chances of moving on to home ownership for singles are limited. Home purchase typically requires a 25% deposit while mortgage costs have increased as a proportion of disposable income by around 50% since 1995. Saving conditions for renters have also deteriorated, with the ratio of disposable income spent on housing increasing from 12.4% to 19.9% for single men under 40, and from 19.0% to 24.7% for single women (MLIT, 2013). Ostensibly, becoming a dual income household has become central to moving up the housing ladder. In Japan, nonetheless, cohabitation is rare and home-purchase often a condition of marriage rather than an outcome.

Secondly, the nature of the rental stock can be restrictive to the formation of relationships. While Japanese owner-occupied housing is comparable in quality and size, rental housing is much smaller in comparison to other societies¹⁰. According to the Land and Housing Survey, around 50.6% of rental housing is less than 49m² and more than half of this is less than 29m². In Tokyo, where 52.3% of housing is rented, 40.9% of rental units are smaller than 29m². Furthermore, although the officially designated minimum living space for single occupants is 25m², only 80.4% of private tenants met this minimum standard for space (MIAC, 2013). Critically, along with the growth of one-person households has been a boom in compact one-room apartments that while facilitating routes into independent living for many, are particularly small and limiting: typically comprising a single room with cooking facilities for one (see Kubo

⁹ The rate is 63.4% of those aged 30 to 34

¹⁰ Owner-occupied homes in Japan have an average of 124m² of floor space, whereas rental homes have 46.3m². In Germany by comparison the respective ratio is 124m² to 76m², in France, 114m² to 76m² in France, and in the UK, 95m² to 75m² (BCJ, 2013)

and Yui, 2011; Ronald and Hirayama, 2009). These dwelling types are not conducive to the development of relationships, and their proliferation is also crowding out other forms of housing more suited to couples and potential child rearing in this tenure. Blocks of compact apartment units have, meanwhile, been considered disconnected from the neighborhood and their residents, particularly isolated (TMG, 2004)

Discussion

While international research has emphasized alignments between school leaving and employment, on the one hand, and increasing self-reflexivity and the exploration of identities, on the other, our examination of adult transitions in Japan has taken a middle course. By doing so it has attempted to embed partnering, marriage and housing practices with structural and subjective explanations for delayed or emerging adulthood. Individualization is strongly related to shifts in late modernity regarding shifting frameworks of risk and security (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In western contexts, this implies the rolling back of the welfare state, the waning of family and the flexibilisation of labour. In Japan, state-led developmentalism, corporate paternalism and the male-breadwinner standard family model together once constituted a framework that resisted individualization and sustained social stability during the era of rapid economic growth. Japan's compressed modernity has subsequently produced a more distinct second modernity (Beck and Grande, 2010) and, as the security of 'enterprise society' has faded, greater pressure has arguably come to bear on the family (cf. Ochiai, 2014). For those entering adulthood in the post-bubble economy, the fading of corporate welfare and income security has had a particular impact on the formation of couples and rates of marriage. As family formation declined, so to have conventional transitions into independent living and through housing careers. Both marriage and housing careers are, nonetheless, pillars of welfare stability and transition through them still critical to achieving full socioeconomic independence and countering risk.

Comparative research has pointed to international convergence in terms of emerging adulthood, but also consistent cross-national differences within it (cf. Buchmann and Kreisi, 2011). Welfare regimes play a part in mediating transitions, accounting for international differences, with movement from the parental home to independent status occurring much earlier in social democratic and liberal regimes (such as Northern Europe) where either welfare entitlements or markets provide the basis of early departures (as well as cohabitation and

extramarital children), and later ones in the Southern European regime (Billari, 2004). Japan ostensibly shares features with the latter where the family is more important to welfare conditions and home leaving occurs later (and is normatively linked to marriage and child bearing). However, employers have also been central pillars of welfare in Japan, quite rigidly structuring standard families and the ways they are formed and reproduced. The state has thus not been required, until recently at least, to provide alternative assistance for younger people, and has, rather, focused on complimenting the company system (i.e. establishing a broad educational infrastructure). As enterprise society has been hollowed out, however, its membership has contracted with a growing number of youth compelled to fall back on individual resources and, in many cases, the natal family. In this sense individualisation has more salience than individualism in understanding changing adult transitions.

Social attitudes have also been attributed to particular patterns of adult transition (see Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011), with more socially conservative societies associated with later home leaving. Nevertheless, relationships between values and welfare structures are difficult to pull apart. In Japan, discourses surrounding the family are powerful, but belie a disjuncture. For Ueno (1994), while relatively low divorce and extra-marital births have been taken to indicate consistency in Japanese families, other indices have illustrated significant decline: i.e. sharp increases in people not marrying at all and declining fertility. Essentially, 'family' and 'marriage' remain normative axes but no longer align so well with the social processes by which people move through adult life-courses. Moreover, family norms also hinder the formation of alternative lifestyles and aspirations that would facilitate alternate adult transitions.

Of course, many Japanese people do marry young and most get married by their early-30s. Nonetheless, delays and diverse pathways are becoming characteristic and growing numbers are not marrying at all. This may well represent a proliferation of emerging adulthood and an escalation in reflexive individualization (cf. Arnett, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). On the other hand, Japanese emerging adulthood is deeply rooted in social and economic restructuring and manifest in a particularly isolated form – characterized by being or living alone – that, based on the data presented above, suggests younger people are being prevented from, rather than choosing not to, marry and adopt hegemonic, reproductive adult roles. Life as a post-youth singleton has, for many, become an enduring condition and not just a life-course delay, as demonstrated by rising numbers of 'never-married' people aged over 50. The impact of socioeconomic restructuring on emerging adulthood has been powerful with recent shifts in

adult transitions demonstrating a particular precarity, especially in context of the limited support outside standard family careers. Furthermore, as we have also illustrated, the persistent singledom intrinsic to contemporary Japanese early adulthood – living either alone or with parent/s – has a marked impact on housing career transitions that shape an incomplete version of adult status and only a partial achievement of economic independence.

Although the connections between housing and individualization have been examined in but a few contexts (Beer and Faulkner, 2011), Japan presents a remarkably insightful case. A particular combination of housing stock, market conditions and urban dwelling practices has helped translate *not getting married* into a particular form of residential isolation. Arguably, the growth of urban single dwellers, which now account for around half of all Tokyo households, may be considered a type of super-individualization where people are spatially atomized and isolated. The significant rise of young men and women staying on as adults in their parent's homes arguably reflects another form of isolation which relies on the family to support an individualized life course; typically one with fewer chances of finding a partner. At the same time, young singles in Japan do not seem to exhibit strong individualistic aspirations and cling to hegemonic notions of marriage and family careers.

The housing context of emerging adulthood has transformed the meaning of home for many post-youth adults. While the word 'home' in Japan also denotes family in the Japanese language, and has historically been a symbol of stability and permanence, it has become a recent focus of social transformation and a 'conduit of atomization for younger generations' (Ronald and Hirayama, 2009, p.2836). For Allison (2013) a new form of 'homelessness' has emerged and is being experienced by increasing swathes of Japanese young adults, both in a literal sense, but also figuratively as a sense of not belonging. While natal home dwellers and one-person households in compact apartments live in dwellings, many are not establishing the sense of 'home' that forms the basis for a full and secure adult life. Allison thus describes such lives as ones of 'ordinary refugeism' (p.43).

The restrictive notion of home embodied by male-breadwinner nuclear family households and detached owner-occupied houses has, however, recently begun to open up to one other vision of collective living. Since the turn of the century a growing phenomenon has been '*share house*', with a number of private real estate companies attempting to meet growing demand for low-cost rental housing among young urban singles by converting dwellings that have become unoccupied due to shifting family and commercial demand, into shared houses with communal facilities for non-related renters. Despite the absence of a culture of home sharing, a tentative

boom has taken hold with, according to a survey by the leading company (Hitsuji Real Estate, 2014), an increase from less than 400 rooms in shared houses in Tokyo in 2000, to 17,500 by 2013. Most sharers are post-youth adults with an average age of 27.8, and around two-thirds are women, although, along with growth in mixed gender houses, the ratio of men is increasing.

To some extent these collective lettings compensate declines in company dorms that once housed many parental home leavers. However, shared houses are also associated with a new type of fictive family constituted of non-related members who not only share dwelling space, but are explicitly involved in a social act of living together. Critically, shared housing represents an unexpected use of the housing stock as well as a pioneering approach to living an adult life outside the bounds of either a corporation or the hegemonic family household, which has been largely unheard of among developed East Asian countries.

Conclusions

This paper has sought to illustrate how the housing system mediates adult transitions from dependent to independent status, and more precisely different life-course transitions involving family, housing and work. While not unique (cf. Forrest and Yip, 2012), in Japan the interconnections are particularly strong. For example, unlike traditional co-residency, contemporary marriage determines independence from the parental home. Having a secure income is also the basis for forming an independent household. The housing system, meanwhile, regulates the dwelling type and tenure that different types of new household can access. An outcome of the socioeconomic changes of recent decades has been a rather rigid form of emerging adulthood featuring a growing number of young single people living ‘alone’ with their parents, or simply forming a single-person household. This ‘in-between’ life stage is quite distinct from the identity exploration and lifestyle experimentation identified in western societies (e.g. Arnett, 2000). Our analysis also suggests then that connections with welfare relations, regime restructuring and a specific manifestation of individualization, and may thus also have salience for understanding recent booms in young urban singles in other developed East Asian countries, such as South Korea.

The social implications of continued declines in family formation are considerable even though forming an independent household on ones’ own can also represent a means of achieving adulthood. A specific issue is the diminishing basis of the family as welfare provider. In context of societal ageing in Japan, with more than a quarter of the population aged 65 and over,

increasing numbers of older people, especially home-owning parents, are relying on adult children to care for them. An increasing ratio of these are, as we have seen, unmarried people in their 30s and 40s living in the natal home. However, as ‘never-marrieds’ age, they will not have the same kinship networks to fall back on. Furthermore, while flows of inheritance provide a buffer (Izuhara, 2002), ageing single people are unlikely to become homeowners. For women in particular, achieving home ownership and marriage are strongly tied, with the chance of an unmarried woman achieving home ownership around one in twelve (Hirayama and Izuhara, 2008). While buying your own home is important to achieving adult status, it is even more important to accessing good quality housing as well as a large financial asset and an income-in-kind (as an un-mortgaged owner-occupier) that provides security in later life.

Critically missing are state interventions that compensate the decline of enterprise society, standard families and linear housing careers. Social policies remain orientated toward family households as a means to support younger adults despite their declining salience. Clearly, new policy approaches that allow post-youth adults to become independent in the absence of traditional mechanisms, such as getting married and finding a permanent full-time job, are now imperative. Considering the links with other domains, new housing policies (such as housing allowances) may be particularly effective. Since the turn of the century, Japanese governments have given particular attention to changes in the family, but remain focused on conventional nuclear family types in terms of changing relationships between married spouses (to support more working women). Other household configurations and life-courses (i.e. one-parent families, cohabiting couples and one-person households), have received little assistance. Indeed, the latest Abe administration has led a pro-family campaign encouraging dependence on, and the utilization of, family resources to absorb emerging social risks. A necessary requirement, nonetheless, would be a different kind of safety net to support post-youth adult transitions away from the parental home and into a more secure and flexible housing sector.

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