Romantic Love and Marriage in Relation to Fertility Rate: a Case Study in Tokunoshima

出生率と恋愛・結婚の関連性：徳之島での事例研究

A Dissertation Presented to
the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
International Christian University
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

国際基督教大学　大学院
アーツ・サイエンス研究科提出博士論文

December 6, 2022
２０２２年12月６日

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENT I

LIST OF FIGURES II

LIST OF TABLES III

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1: LOW FERTILITY IN JAPAN 6

Introduction 6

The "Post-Marriage Theory": The Most Recognized Reasons for the Low Birthrates 6
- The High Cost of Living as an Obstacle to Have a Second Child 6
- Female Labor Force Participation as a Limited Measure against Shôshika 9
- Governmental Measures from 1994 to Today and their Disputable Outcomes 13

Challenges in Finding a Marriage Partner: Underrecognized Issues of Japan's Low Birthrates 17
- Challenge 1: Mismatch Between High Standards of Living and Men's Financial Situation 18
- Challenge 2: Job Precarity Contributing to Unwanted Celibacy for both Men and Women 21
- Challenge 3: Passivity in Searching for a Love and Marriage Partner 23
- Challenge 4: Lack of Adaptation in New Gender Tropes 25
- Challenge 5: Lack of Inter-gender Interaction and Communication Skills 30

Conclusion: The impact of the romantic love ideology 36

CHAPTER 2: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE ROMANTIC LOVE IDEOLOGY 39

Introduction 39

The theory of "the importation of romantic love" in Japan 40

Marriage 43
- Early Marriages as a Material and Economic Transaction 44
- The "Love Revolution" between the 16th and 19th Century in Europe: Shaping the Modern Love-based Marriage 46
- The 20th Century: Rise and Decline of the "Traditional" Marriage 48

The Definition of Romantic Love 50
- Love in Philosophy and Religion 51
  - Love as a Metaphysical Purpose 51
  - Love as a Projection Built by the Environment 54
- Romantic love in Social Sciences as the Result of Individualism and Consumerism 58

The Ambiguous Definition of Romantic Love 58
Love Only in Individualistic Cultures? 61
Consumerism and Social Disparities in Love 63

Conclusion 66

CHAPTER 3: INTRODUCTION OF THE FIELDWORK: TOKUNOSHIMA ISLAND 68

Introduction to Tokunoshima as a Remote Island 69

The History of Tokunoshima 73

Demography of Tokunoshima 81

CHAPTER 4: FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY 87

Methodology 87

About the Researcher and his Subject 91

CHAPTER 5: THE *KODAKARA* ISLAND: CHILDREN AS AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF TOKUNOSHIMA 103

An Environment Where it is "Easy to Raise" Children? 105
Children as a Source of Motivation in Life 106
Happiness vs. Career: the False Dilemma in Raising their Children in Tokunoshima 111

The "*Nantoka Naru* Spirit": Managing a Large Family with Limited Resources 118
Grandparents as "Free Electrons": A Crucial Help for Large Families 119
Children as the Cement of the Community 125

Women's Conditions Built around Motherhood 128
Maternity as a Crucial Element of Womanhood 128
Finding Happiness in Stability for Women 131
Becoming a Mother No Matter What: An Unreasonable Desire? 136

What about Men? Fatherhood in Masculine Standards 142
Being a Father as a Means of Happiness? 142
Competition and Toxic Masculinity in Fatherhood and Marriage 147

CHAPTER 6: ROMANCE, MARRIAGE, AND GENDER RELATIONSHIPS IN TOKUNOSHIMA ... 151

The Misunderstandings of the "*Dekikon*" Habit 151
The Elephant in the Room: Sexuality and Fertility Rate 151
Romantic Dekikon: a Local Application of the Romantic Love Ideology 155
Dekikon as a Conscious Choice toward Adulthood 159
The Dekikon as a Bet in Life 161

Romance, Dating, and Sexuality in Tokunoshima 164
A Sociological Interrogation on the Definition of Romance 164
The Ideal of Romance in Tokunoshima 168

Dating in Tokunoshima 171
Liminality into the Night 172
The Celebration of Selves into Gender Roles 174

Finding a Spouse 178
Sexualized Intergender Interactions and the Local Perception of Uchi and Soto 179
Social Connexions as a Matchmaking Network 187
Social Connexions as an Environment with Appeased Male-Female Interactions 188

The Choice of a Marriage Partner: Displaying Homogamy in Tokunoshima 195
Feeling for Men, Pragmatism for Women 196
The Social Stratification of Unions 198

CONCLUSION 201

The Five Challenges of Singlehood in Mainland Japan Compared to Tokunoshima 201
Challenge 1: Mismatch Between Marriage Ideal and Economic Reality 201
Challenge 2: Job Precarity Contributing to Unwanted Celibacy for Both Men and Women 203
Challenge 3: Passivity in Searching for a Love and Marriage Partner 204
Challenge 4: Lack of Adaptation in New Gender Tropes 206
Challenge 5: Lack of Intergender Interaction and Communication Skills 208

Conclusive Discussion 210
Work-Life Balance 210
Economy 211
Male-Female Interactions and Dating 213

REFERENCES 215

APPENDIXES: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE 242

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This thesis owes many debts to many people. I would like to thank my director Prof. Yoshie Moriki for her assistance at every stage of the research project. Her comments, kind encouragements, and continuous support were more than appreciated. I also thank Prof. Olivier Ammour-Mayeur and Prof. Etsuko Kato for their time reviewing this thesis.

A couple of institutions have played an essential role in doing the thesis. The MEXT scholarship provided me access to a top-tier university and a comfortable student life in Tokyo. The JICUF helped me defray my travel costs to Tokunoshima and granted me the freedom to do research without any strings. I would like to thank Prof. J.J. Suh, former director of ICU's Social Science Research Institute, and Prof. Mana Naito, director of ICU's French department, who trusted me with remote work despite the poor internet on the island.

I am grateful to my dear partner Miki Fuchiwaki, who did not only help with the Japanese language and culture when needed; she taught me how to endure the uncertain times of the pandemic and was always in my thoughts during the lonely moments in the field.

Finally, I want to thank all the people in Tokunoshima who took the time to chat, drink, sing, swim, drink, work, laugh, and drink with me. I am particularly indebted to Hajime-san, Miyade-san, Hikari-chan, and Reina. I especially thank Yuki-san for her long-lasting friendship and deep insight of Tokunoshima. Their kind help and support have made my study and life on the island a unique and extraordinary experience.

Oboradaren, thank you.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Female Employment Rate by Age (International Comparison) in 2012 10
Figure 2 Evolution of Total Fertility Rate and the Number of Births in Japan 14
Figure 3 Number of Children per Married Couple in their Lifetime in Japan 16
Figure 4 The Evolution of the Conditions of a Marriage Partner by the Years 1992, 1997, 2002, 2010, and 2015 28
Figure 5 The Evolution of Love-based Marriages and Miai Marriages per Year 30
Figure 6 The First Marriage by Periods for Women between 20 and 24 Years Old 32
Figure 7 A Drink Dispenser in Shoda, Tokunoshima.. 73
Figure 8 Fertility Rate per 1,000 Women in 2015 82
Figure 9 Proportion of Female Divorcees by Age in 2015 83
Figure 10 Survey about the Definition of “Kodakara” 104
Figure 11 The “Atomic” Families in Tokunoshima 123
Figure 12 Deserted Beaches and Elegant Restaurants... 166
Figure 13 The Five Social Connexions in Time 186

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 The Proportion of Singles Who Do Not Have Friends of the Opposite Sex 34
Table 2 The 30 Highest TFR in Japan Between 2008-2012 82
Table 3 Interviewees Profiles... 89
Table 4 Female Participants Sorted by the Number of Children 120

INTRODUCTION

Preoccupation with population decline may be as old as the states themselves (Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011). But the recent reduction of the low birth rate over an increasing death rate in most developed countries has raised concerns regarding the future of many nations since the 1970s (Chesnais, 1996). Japan has particularly drawn much attention to this issue as one of the countries with the lowest fertility rates globally. Since the "1.57 shock" in 1990, during which public opinion started noticing the demographic problem, various scholars have discussed the reasons for the "*shôshika*" (low birth rate) phenomenon in Japan, leading to a vast amount of literature on the subject (Bardot, 2022).

The consequences of a population decline induced by the *shôshika* and an aging population are multiple. Some scholars fear Japan is losing its competitiveness in the current capitalistic economic environment. As labor increases the GDP, a declining population impacts productivity and economic growth and refrains investment. With fewer people to pay taxes, public infrastructures may also be abandoned, leading to the disappearance of smaller communities. Failing economic productivity may also affect a nation's political power, which would increase its dependence on resources overseas (Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011). Consequently, the Japanese government needs to solve its demographic problems to keep Japan a competitive and powerful nation in the current system. Yet, the *shôshika* phenomenon does not only raise political concerns.

Beyond the failing economy, the low birth rate revealed a societal issue regarding the lack of access for people to their desired family life. Indeed, while 90% of Japanese single men and women want to marry and have children once in their life, the unwanted

celibacy rate keeps increasing (Endo, 2018). Even if they marry, they may not be able to have as many children as they want – the number of desired children being 2.3, while the actual number per household only reaching 1.95 (IPSS, 2015). Many Japanese men and women cannot fulfill their desire to marry and have the family they wish.

This thesis revolves around this problem. Readers may criticize heterocentrism and marriage prioritization, as the view of the family presented in the following pages is nothing else than limited. A family may be, of course, much more than a "traditional" heterosexual marriage as depicted here, and this paper fails to recognize the diversity embedded with this concept. However, the reason comes from the fact that the thesis focuses on the current major demographic trends and has to adapt to the Japanese values of family, which originate from heterosexual marriages. The number of families that do not arise from it is still too small to impact demography, especially on the fertility rate. For instance, civil unions for both same-sex and heterosexual couples are still not possible in Japan. Today, the same-sex "partnership" proposed by a growing number of regions has only been certified by less than 1000 couples since 2015, and does not offer legal protection. Moreover, adoption and IVF for same-sex couples and single women are illegal (Niijiro Diversity, 2020). One can say that Japan has much work to do to recognize the diverse forms a family can take regarding LGBTQAI+ rights and civil unions that are not marriage. Thus, the expression "family," as depicted in this paper, only refers to heterosexual married couples that have, or want to have, a child or children, even though it does not represent all aspects of the concept.

The thesis does not ask the marriage-prioritizing question of "why people can't marry and have children," but rather "why people can't marry and have children despite their will to marry and have children." One should not read the following pages as a moralistic pamphlet about marriage and family. Instead, the thesis aims to understand why people

cannot access their desire in the context of *shôshika* – which happens to be heterosexual marriage and having children.

To answer this problem, the thesis focuses on a Japanese exception: Tokunoshima. Situated in the Amami archipelago in Kagoshima prefecture, the island of twenty-seven thousand inhabitants shows an extraordinarily high fertility rate for Japan and the rest of the developed countries. Yet, it is not an exception among other similar areas and perfectly works as an example of tendencies observed in many Japanese remote islands (Ezaki, 2020). The present research focuses on why islanders manage to marry and have a family while still maintaining the same aspiration of life as mainland Japan. The cross-discipline methods with references from anthropology, sociology, demography, and gender studies will demonstrate what makes people in Tokunoshima able to achieve their life goal of marrying and having many children.

Noteworthy is the approach that mainly emphasizes marriage matchmaking, the dating process, and other pre-marital elements. Previous research shows that late marriage and life-long celibacy (*bankonka* and *mikonka*) deeply affect Japan's Total Fertility rate (Ohashi, 2013). Consequently, it is a crucial pillar of the present thesis. Yet, one cannot ignore post-marriage aspects, such as economic struggles and "work-life" balance, when dealing with the *shôshika* phenomenon. To transmit the prioritization of the pre-marital elements without disregarding the post-marital facets, the research results discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 begin with the latter and finish with the former. In other words, it starts with how people deal with family – the less crucial topic for this thesis – and concludes with how people meet a marriage partner. Although it may feel "unnatural" to go backward on the different marital stages (dating, marrying, having children), it emphasizes the crucial role of the pre-marital effects on the fertility rate.

This thesis can be divided into two parts. The first part consists of the first four chapters and discusses the methodological framework of the research. The second part, composed of Chapters 5 and 6, details the study's results with data collected in Tokunoshima.

Chapter 1 introduces and discusses the general concepts of the low fertility phenomenon in Japan. By reviewing the current literature made by demographers, sociologists, and anthropologists, the chapter argues that, although difficulties in raising children have an impact on the country's fertility, the reasons for the "*shôshika*" mainly revolve around the challenges of meeting and finding a partner to build a family with. These difficulties are primarily triggered by a lack of intergender interactions that result in a lack of communication skills, or concepts of love relationships and marriage inadequate in the current marriage market.

Chapter 2 is an additional literature review focusing on the concepts of romantic love and marriage through the specter of the Japanese ideology to link romantic feelings to marriage, sex, and procreation called "romantic love ideology." The chapter aims to deconstruct the ideology through analysis of views of love and marriage throughout human history. It argues that the "romantic love ideology" may be a new factor that impacts the Japanese fertility rate by locking romantic love and marriage into an immutable definition, even though those concepts often change depending on the individual and period.

Chapter 3 is a general introduction to Tokunoshima. An analysis of its history and demography emphasizes the island's specificities and common points compared to mainland Japan. Although exotic with unique features, such as its cultural and geographical isolation and exceptionally high fertility rate, Tokunoshima shows various connections to the rest of Japan, making it a perfect place to apply the theoretical framework mentioned in the previous two chapters.

Chapter 4 lists the methodology utilized in the research. Primary data was collected through anthropological methods, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The chapter also introduces the author of the thesis, its strengths and weaknesses, struggles and successes as a white French male researching a remote Asian island.

Chapter 5 consists of the first argument to explain the high fertility rate in Tokunoshima: the convenience of raising multiple children with limited resources. Through the local concept of "*kodakara* (children are treasure)," the chapter argues that the tight community, the active participation of the grandparents, and the cultural implication of parenthood in womanhood and masculinity have a direct impact on the islanders' ability to have families of five to seven children.

Finally, Chapter 6 analyzes how islanders meet a partner with whom they have a family. It argues that the unique ways of dating in Tokunoshima emphasize communication skills, and self-disclosure, leading to better acknowledgments regarding their expectations and the reality of the marriage market. In addition, the author observes that the tight community is a tremendous help in meeting a potential partner. The chapter lists five social connections (classmates, neighbors, colleagues, relatives, and casual friends) that encourage matchmaking and the development of social skills.

CHAPTER 1: LOW FERTILITY IN JAPAN

Introduction

Fertility is often measured as Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which represents the average number of children a woman would have throughout her life. The Japanese TFR shows both common and unique points compared to other OECD countries. Indeed, its fertility curb pattern is consistent with many other developed countries that have mostly been decreasing since the 1970s (OECD, 2020). However, Japan has the lowest share of birth outside wedlock, with only 2% of children born out of marriage; a characteristic only shared with Korea among OECD countries (OECD, 2020). Thus, the marital union in Japan is strongly related to the birth rate, as many Japanese men and women marry as a step toward having children (IPSS, 2015). Thus, this chapter proposes to look at Japanese marriage as the leading theme of the country's "*shôshika"* phenomenon. The chapter is split into two main topics: the "post-marriage" reasons in which married men and women struggle to have the desired number of children and the "pre-marriage" issues that make finding a marriage partner and, by extension, having children difficult.

The "Post-Marriage Theory": The Most Recognized Reasons for the Low Birthrates

The High Cost of Living as an Obstacle to Have a Second Child

Demographers have long observed the link between economic growth and fertility decline. During a period of significant financial improvement, infant and child mortality drops due to people expecting their children to live into adulthood. Thus, they do not feel the need to have more children anymore to ensure that a certain number survive, leading to a drop in the TFR (Minja Kim et al., 2010). This decline in fertility was observed in Japan during the post-war economic growth from 1945 to the 1970s, when the TFR dropped from 4.3 children per woman to 2 (World Bank, 2020). However, scholars have suggested that the

economic slope that followed due to the burst of the asset price bubble in the 1990s has negatively affected the TFR. Japan's fertility rate continued to decrease under the replacement level to reach its lowest level in 2005 at 1.26 (Ibid.). From the bubble burst and the economic stagnation that followed, called the "lost decades," many couples seemed to struggle to have as many children as they wanted.

Scholars have pointed out that the lack of money could be one of the reasons behind Japanese couples' struggle to reach the country's desired number of children. In the last survey of the National Institute of Population and Social Security (IPSS, 2015), 80% of couples between 30 and 34 years old said they could not achieve their desired number of children because of child expenditure. The current desired number of children (*Risô kodomo kazu*) is 2.3, which is 0.3 higher than the actual number of children per household (Cabinet Office, 2015). The high cost of living may surely be an obstacle to having children. According to a study conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office, a child costs an average of 1.5 million yen a year until middle school (Cabinet Office, 2010), while the average income for people in their mid-twenties is 3.8 million yen for a man and 3 million for a woman (National Tax Agency NTA, 2015). Moreover, the annual consumption expenditure for two or more persons in a household is approximately 3.4 million yen a year (E-stats, 2018). Having a child is costly, especially if one's family only relies on the husband's income, as it is the case for many families in the post-war period.

However, when it comes to having children, the "lost decades" have not impacted every household who wanted children, and seem only to affect families who already had at least one child. According to Ogawa (2005), citing a survey from the Asahi Journal, only 30% of the interviewed women said that the bubble burst in 1992 had affected their desire to have a child. Moreover, 80% of those women were already mothers of at least one. The women who planned to have their first child during this period did not particularly feel the

impact of the contracted economy of the 1990s. Therefore, people who think the bubble burst impacted their desire to have a child consist of women who were already mothers. In other words, the “lost decades” are not perceived as a substantial obstacle to having their first child, if desired, and mostly impact the possibility of having a second one.

Nevertheless, even though money itself may not be an essential issue in having children, many parents who cannot achieve the desired number of children would evoke a lack of balance between their work and their life. Indeed, as raising a child is expensive, people need to work more, whereas the inflexible employment practices and work culture (long work hours, frequent overtime work, and after-hours socializing with colleagues) tend to be incompatible with family life ((Retherford, 2002; Minja Kim et al., 2010). Couples struggle to make time for both their job and their families.

It is especially true for women who are traditionally responsible for the education of their children. As the “lost decades” have significantly lowered the family’s income, wives have to participate more and more in the labor force but cannot find the appropriate “work-life balance” to take care of children while working. Since 1994, married women who work 35 hours or more per week also have to spend another 30 hours doing housework (Retherford, 2002; IPSS, 2019). Thus, women are particularly affected by the imbalance between their role as mothers and their professional lives.

One can wonder if promoting female labor participation and a better “work-life” balance would help people have their desired number of children. Indeed, the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) argues that improving the balance between their private and professional life should contribute to reaching the number of children that Japanese couples desire. However, the next section will further discuss how a better female labor force participation has only a limited impact on the total fertility rate, even with more time for women to balance between their carrier and their children.

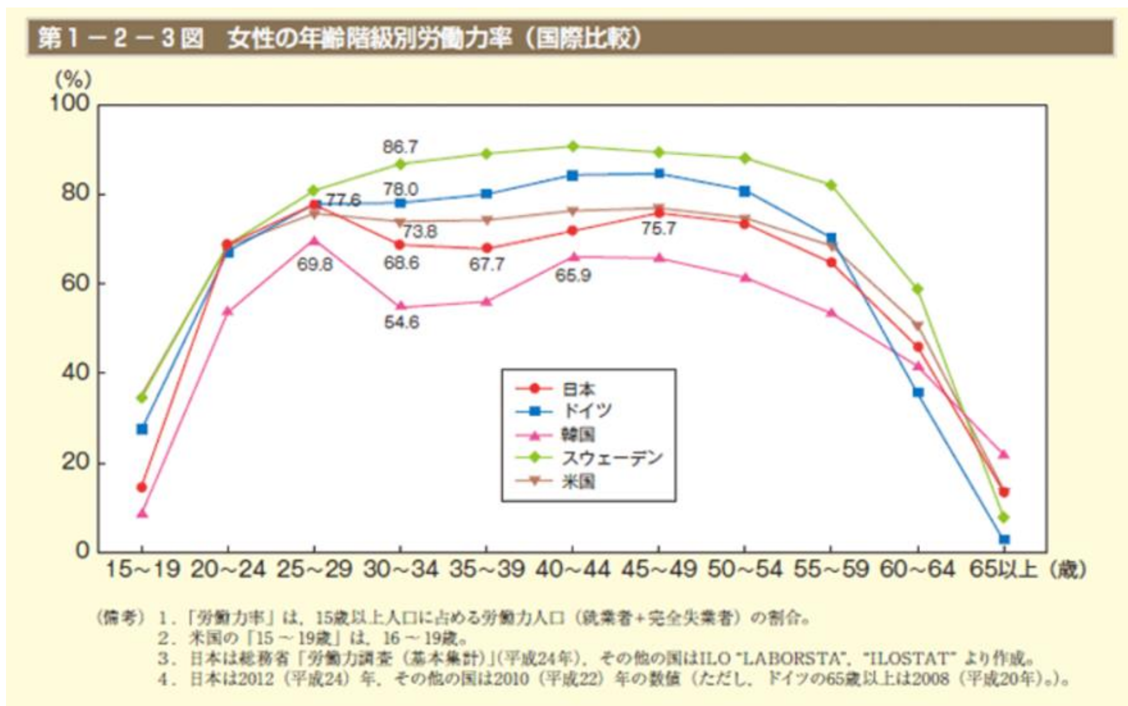
Female Labor Force Participation as a Limited Measure against Shôshika

Many scholars have been arguing that supporting women's work while raising children could help Japan's fertility rate; this idea has been stressed mainly by Ato (2000), former director of the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS). By comparing international data from various OECD countries, Ato demonstrated that the countries with the highest women's participation in the labor force are also the ones with the highest TFR (Ato, 2005). Moreover, using the same methodology, he found that countries with the highest men's participation in housework have the highest TFR of OECD countries (Ato, 2005). Countries with progressive values regarding gender equality seem to have stabilized TFR as well.

Since then, several scholars have tried to confirm his observation. Those researchers would argue that a high rate of female labor force participation would help the TFR. It is especially true when comparing the employment rate for women between 24 and 39 years old, which corresponds to the maternity age. The curb of countries with an employment rate that falls during this age group is shaped like an "M," which is considered typical for countries with a low fertility rate, like Japan or Korea (see Figure 1). In those cases, women need to quit their job to focus on raising their children, which would provoke economic and social pressures that impact the number of children that married couples desire (see, for example, Maeda, 2002; Shirahase, 2002, 2005; Kashima, 2003; Kamii, 2003). According to those scholars, women having to choose between their professional careers or having a family negatively impacts Japan's overall TFR.

Figure 1

Female Employment Rate by Age (International Comparison) in 2012



Note. Japan in red and Korea in Pink are known to have both a low birth rate and a low female employment rate between 25 and 40 years old. Retrieved from Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office.

On the other hand, some scholars demonstrated that the abovementioned observations are flawed. For example, Akagawa (2005) noticed that Ato had disregarded some data in his research. If one considers all OECD countries, the result contradicts Ato's findings. In fact, most states with a high women's labor force participation rate have a fertility rate of 1.68, which is below average (Akagawa, 2005). Moreover, looking back at Figure 1, Germany's female employment rate in blue does not shape like an "M." Yet, their total fertility rate has been stagnating at 1.50 since the 1970s (Worldbank, 2019). What may be true in some OECD countries and observed by some scholars (Suzuki, 2000; Ato, 2005) does not work in Japan. Thus, female labor force participation does not seem to have a particular impact on the number of children per household.

Nevertheless, not everybody agrees with Akagawa's findings, and several scholars (Yamaguchi, 2005; Mishra et al., 2010; Oshio, 2019) argue that both Ato's and Akagawa's perspectives are incomplete. The correlation between TFR and female labor force participation may change over time and may have limitations depending on the number of children per woman. This correlation was negative in OECD countries until 1985, meaning that female labor force participation had a negative impact on the fertility rate, but gradually became positive in the majority of the OECD countries (Oshio, 2019). Scholars argue that these changes may come from various government policies that improved work-life balance and work-family friendliness after 1985 (Mishra et al., 2010). In other words, if improving female labor force participation may not be a measure against the low birth rate as a whole, policies that promote a better balance between work and private life may encourage working women to have more children.

However, further research has shown that improving the work-life balance dynamic has limitations because of the Japanese standard of life. According to Yamaguchi (2005), improving the work-life balance for women with more than two children would encourage them not to have more children but rather help them invest in the education of their already-born children. They would privilege their children's "quality" of life over the "quantity" of children they have. In other words, measures to encourage the work-life balance while improving female labor force participation would only affect families with fewer than two children.

On a different trend, Akagawa's (2006) statistical findings regarding females' social climbing and Japan's total fertility rate were insightful. It discussed how women in hypergamous marriages – which are marriages with someone wealthier than their family of origin – tend to have more children than women in other types of marital unions. Scholars have already argued that Japanese women traditionally tend to aim toward a hypergamous

marriage (Yamada, 1998); they assess a potential marriage partner by comparing them to the wealth of their parents, especially their father's as he is likely to be the only breadwinner, and search for a husband who is wealthier than them. Akagawa had not only confirmed this theory but had shown that the norm of hypergamous marriages influences women's fertility rate. By analyzing the statistics of JGSS, he found that married women who lived in a wealthier household in their 40s than the one they were at 15 years old (hypergamous marriages) had more children than women who lived in a family of the same social condition than before (homogamous marriages), or poorer (hypogamous marriages) (Akagawa, 2005: 154). Intriguingly enough, this observation is not related to a particular amount of money in one's household. The simple act of marrying a wealthier man than their parents is enough of a reason to have more children than marrying in homogamy or hypogamy.

Therefore, the question of whether gender equality would help against the low birth rate phenomenon is particularly complicated. A higher female labor participation rate, if supported by seeing an improvement in the work-life balance of the parents, would improve married women's fertility. However, such measures would only be helpful for families under two children who desire more children. The average number of children for married couples in their lifetime is already around two (1.94 in 2015, [IPSS, 2015]), which is above the total fertility rate of 1.4 children per woman. Thus, according to Yamaguchi's observations (2005), improving the work-life balance of married couples would only have a limited effect.

The following section will argue that governmental measures against the *shôshika* phenomenon are almost all based on promoting a better work-life balance. Yet, policies from the 1990s to today have brought virtually inexistent results.

Governmental Measures from 1994 to Today and their Disputable Outcomes

Senda (2015) has observed that most of the actions on this issue have focused on "three pillars." They include reforming work based on the keyword work-life balance, expanding childcare services in the local community, and providing economic support to families that are raising children (Senda, 2015). One can notice that those three "pillars" all focus on already married couples, and most of the measures done since then confirm the government's intention to continue following the "post-marriage" theory.

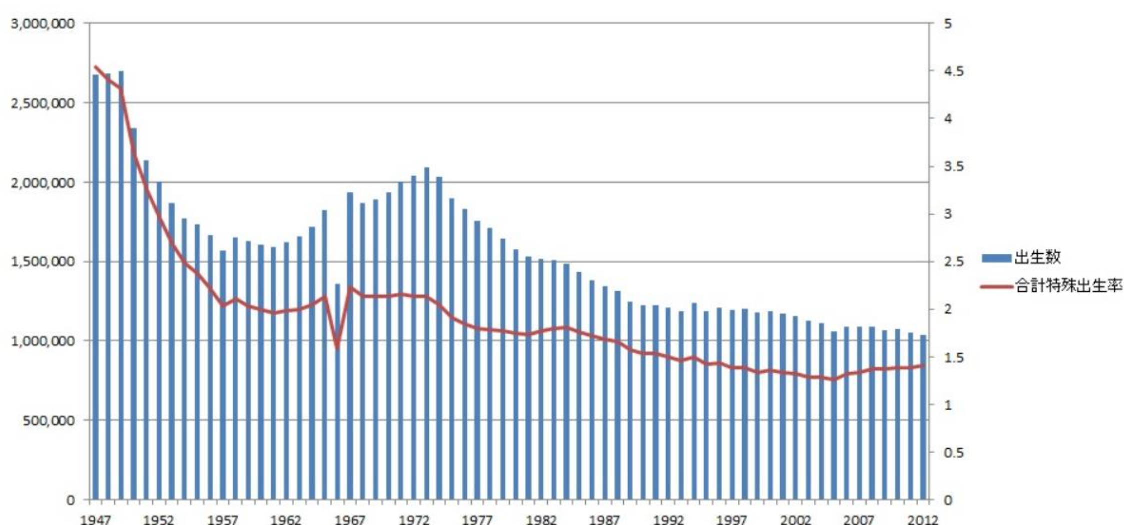
The first measure, called the "angel plan" (*enzeru plan*), appeared in 1994 as a reaction to the "1.57 shock" of 1990, which was the moment that people realized the state of Japan's total fertility rate (Ato, 2005; Akagawa, 2005). It aimed to facilitate child caring while working. Concretely, the government started to raise the number of nursery schools to allow people to focus on their work while raising their children (CAO, 2009). Realizing that the ten-year project was not sufficient, in 2000, they launched the quinquennial "new angel plan" (*shin enzeru puran*), which took into account not only child-caring services but multiplied information centers regarding health, education, and employment (*Ibid.*).

They continued their effort to allow a better "work-life" balance for parents with the Measures Against the Low Fertility "Plus One" (*shoshika taisaku purasu wan*) in 2002 (*Ibid.*), and the fundamental law and principles that governed the measures against the demographic crisis in 2003 and 2004. They also provided a child allowance of fifteen-thousands yen per month in 2010, new benefits for marriages, pregnancy, and birth in 2013, and after-school clubs in public schools in 2014 (CAO, 2019). Furthermore, in 2016, they invested one hundred million yen in improving labor conditions, employment stability, and other child support in order to help to reach a fertility rate of 1.8 (CAO, 2019). Finally, since 2017, the government has been planning a two trillion-yen project to make free of charge early childhood and college education (*Ibid.*).

However, these measures against the *shôshika* phenomenon have been rather inefficient. Jones, Straughan & Chan (2009) have pointed out that the pronatalist policies not only in Japan but also in East Asian countries seem to have failed, as they did not find any evidence that fertility has risen as a result of those measures. In Figure 2, one can notice that Japan's TFR has been stagnating since the 1990s regardless of the governmental measures.

Figure 2

Evolution of Total Fertility Rate and the Number of Births in Japan



Note. In red, the TFR curb shows that it has been steadily declining since the 1970s, regardless of the government's natalist measures. Retrieved from IPSS, 2019.

Two main aspects of the government's actions could be closely critiqued. First, the budget made to stem the *shoshika* phenomenon is still not enough. Indeed, only 1.35% of Japan's GDP has been utilized since 2015 as social aid for families, compared to 3.20% in France and 3.75% in Sweden (CAO, 2019). Consequently, the lack of commitment by the government to helping families is a preoccupation for the population, and 60% of Japanese males and females between 20 and 50 years old feel that neither the quality nor the quantity of the social services for the families is satisfying (*Ibid.*). However, investing money to help

families is not necessarily even effective against the low fertility rate. In fact, Bradahaw (2003), had compared the TFR of 22 developed countries with the amount of money their governments have spent and are spending on childcare support. Findings demonstrate that there are no direct relations between TFR and financial expenses in child care support. Takayama & Harada (1993) added that, in theory, the amount of money given by childcare support should be around 3.6 million yen per year and household to be effective. One can easily understand how doubling the average wedge of every parent can be a challenging measure to establish. Moreover, this study recognizes that theoretical number solely does not guarantee the elevation of the TFR to its replacement level. Therefore, giving money directly to the household is neither practical nor useful, and the government should find other ways to encourage people to have children.

The second critique regarding the government measures is that they focus on families and married couples only, in other words, on "post-marriage" elements. Even though helping couples to get to the desired number of children by facilitating the "work-life" balance may be relatively helpful, as seen in section 2 of this chapter, the number of children per married couple is still around two and has only slightly decreased by 0.26 since the 1970s (Figure 3). What impacts the most the total fertility rate does not come from married individuals but single people. In a country where almost all children are born after wedlock, one can identify the difficulty of finding a marriage partner as the main reason to explain the Japanese natality crisis (see Ishida, 2019; Iwasawa, 2002; Kaneko, 2004).

Figure 3

Number of Children per Married Couple in their Lifetime in Japan

図表Ⅱ-2-1　各回調査における夫婦の完結出生児数
（結婚持続期間15～19年）

調査（調査年次）	完結出生児数
第１回調査（1940年）	4.27 人
第２回調査（1952年）	3.50
第３回調査（1957年）	3.60
第４回調査（1962年）	2.83
第５回調査（1967年）	2.65
第６回調査（1972年）	2.20
第７回調査（1977年）	2.19
第８回調査（1982年）	2.23
第９回調査（1987年）	2.19
第10回調査（1992年）	2.21
第11回調査（1997年）	2.21
第12回調査（2002年）	2.23
第13回調査（2005年）	2.09
第14回調査（2010年）	1.96
第15回調査（2015年）	**1.94**

注：対象は結婚持続期間 15～19 年の初婚どうしの夫婦（出生子ども数不詳を除く）。

Note. Retrieved from IPSS, 2015.

In a comparative study of every region of Japan, Ohashi (2013) shows that singlehood is a significant pattern in areas with a low fertility rate. Indeed, places that have both a high percentage of single men and women that are above the average age of marriage (of 30.5 years old for men and 28.8 years old for women) and a high proportion of men and women single after 50 years old, are likely to have a low TFR (Ohashi, 2013). Understanding the reasons for this celibacy may be crucial in applying efficient measures against the low birthrate phenomenon.

Yet, very little has been done to help single people find a marriage partner and consider their needs. In 2015, the government allocated 300 million yen to its "marriage assistance" programs as an action against the natality crisis (Endo, 2018). However, each prefecture is in charge of the initiative, and the results are quite mixed. For example, the marriage assistance program's website for Kagoshima shows only 15 successful marriages since its beginning in 2018 (Kagoshima matchmaking support center, 2020).

In other words, the 30 years of political measures have been almost useless in countering the decreasing birth rate. The Japanese government seems to struggle to understand the phenomenon's fundamental causes. In order to make appropriate initiatives, one must accord more importance to the dynamics between celibacy and the total fertility rate. The next part of the chapter deals with the underrecognized reasons for the *shôshika* phenomenon - the difficulties in finding a marriage partner for Japanese males and females.

Challenges in Finding a Marriage Partner: Underrecognized Issues of Japan's Low Birthrates

In the most recent survey conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, the majority of the four thousand interviewed singles males and females between 25 and 34 years old say that they cannot marry because they "have not found an appropriate partner yet" (IPSS, 2015). Therefore, one can wonder what exactly makes the quest for a marriage partner so challenging in today's society. This section examines the five central discussions regarding the difficulties of finding an "appropriate partner" for single males and females in Japan.

Each part focuses on one challenge regarding unwanted celibacy for Japanese youth. The first section deals with the question of the high standards of living that the economic growth created in the 1970s, making family ideals difficult to achieve in the current financial

situation especially for men. The second section discusses how low income and employment precarity can impact the chances of marriage for women as well. The third section explores the lack of motivation to find a marriage partner. The fourth section then deals with the emergence of gender tropes that struggle to adapt to the traditional marriage market. Finally, the fifth section examines the lack of males and females interaction as the leading cause of late marriage. The gap between men and women is becoming deeper, affecting how people perceive each other.

Challenge 1: Mismatch Between High Standards of Living and Men's Financial Situation

Japanese single people seem to be aiming for a particular level of life that they desire but feel that it is difficult to achieve. This life level was created during the Post-War economic growth and developed a standardized image of family success. Yamada (2016) argues that from 1955 to the oil shock, the conditions of living could only get better. People who grew up in post-war poverty could experience significant improvements in adulthood due to economic growth. The young people could also benefit from high wages and a high purchase power (*Ibid.*). Those improved living conditions allowed people to enjoy new ways of living and the freedom to build their own families outside their parent's households.

However, it quickly shaped into a standardized image of a successful life inspired by the American middle-class narrative. Ochiai and other scholars describe the "perfect" household as one with two to three children. The parents would meet at the university or the office around their twenties. Then, after working for a few years, the mother would have to quit her job and focus on caring for the home. The father would be the only breadwinner until all the children graduate (Ochiai, 2004; Yamada, 2016; Ato, 2005; Retherford, 2010). Those different steps in life became a universal pattern to follow for Japanese men and

women. People started to marry at around 27 years old for males and 24 years old for females (*Ibid.*), and built identical perceptions of family success, represented by the image of the *salaryman* (Dasgupta, 2003). The whole Japanese society started to follow a similar and standardized path of living.

The perception of bearing children has also changed. While people before the war would see children as help for the household, post-war parents were more ambitious regarding the goal of their progeniture. They did not hesitate to invest money in their education to optimize the chance for them to have, in turn, a "successful" professional life (Retherford, 2010). From a simple help for the household, children became an investment to access a better social level.

However, these elevated standards heavily relied on a stable economy that does not exist anymore. From the first oil shock in 1973, the "lost decade" of the 1990s, to the Lehman's shock in 2008, and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, this ideal of life became more challenging to achieve for the middle-class (Yamada, 2016). Many young men, who are still expected to be the sole breadwinner of their households, feel that they cannot realize the standards of living created during the post-war economic growth. Today, 30% of single Japanese men between 25 and 34 years old report that they are not married because they lack money. In 1997, 22% had the same rationale behind marriage (CAO, 2019). Miwa (2010) also observed that the financial conditions of single men are a critical factor in marrying. She listed five typical profiles of Japanese single men and women who are less likely to marry. Men with low incomes represent one of these profiles[1] as they feel that their revenue is not enough to support a family in the medium to long term. Thus, men are subject to increasing pressure to find a stable and well-paid job before starting a family – despite the

[1] The other typical profiles of single men: those who thinks that is not the good time, those who are in a love relationship and think about it, those who do not try to marry, and those who cannot find any partner.

continuous decrease of the average income – leading to men delaying the time they marry, or see fit to marry.

This feeling of insecurity regarding men's economic strength seems to substantially impact the chances of finding a marriage partner in their twenties. Miyoshi (2013) found that men who find a stable job just after graduating are more likely to marry earlier. On the opposite trend, because the number of regular employments (*seikikoyô*) has decreased, the marriage age for men has increased. Mizunokami (2014) also confirmed Miyoshi's observation by stating that having a precarious job nowadays as the first job experience for a man decreases the chance of getting married more than it was during the "Bubble period." He added, however, that unstable work impacts the marriage rate at any age and not only impacts the younger men, as it is associated with low and insecure income. Men seem to be particularly affected by the "lost decades" when it comes to finding a marriage partner, and the ideal of being the only breadwinner of a household is becoming more and more challenging to realize in the context of the current economy.

The various economic crises and stagnations have created a mismatch between the "traditional" view of family that appeared during post-war economic growth and the reality of single men's financial conditions. Even though the first section has demonstrated that lack of money has a limited impact on couples' fertility, people still refrain from marrying as they fear that their economic strength is insufficient to reach the high standards of living created during the financial growth period. As a result, job precarity and low income have become a genuine issues in finding a marriage partner.

Challenge 2: Job Precarity Contributing to Unwanted Celibacy for both Men and Women

The last section has discussed how, despite the image of the father as the only breadwinner of the household being highly considered in Japanese society since post-war economic growth, people have been experiencing a growing precarity in employment and income since the last decades, leading to increasing pressure for men to find a stable job before marrying (Nagase, 2002; Kitamura, 2007; Tsutani, 2011; Sasagi, 2012). However, even though low income mainly affects men in their chances of finding a marriage partner, research shows it is also delaying marriage for women as well.

Nakamura & Sato (2010) have analyzed various profiles of single people in which the celibacy rate is high. They found that people with a low income had more difficulties in finding a partner, no matter their gender. Nagase (2002) had a similar observation. According to her, professional instability for young men and women is especially impactful in finding a marriage partner when they are under 24 years old. Sakai & Higuchi (2005) also confirm this hypothesis. Both men and women who experienced a period as "freeter" – people who lack full-time employment – just after graduating are more likely to delay their age to marry regardless of sex. In other words, both men and women have to postpone marriage because of the current economic stagnation.

The idea that professional instability also impacts women's chances of finding a husband may be surprising. The last section has argued that the ideal household for Japanese people is to have the male as the only breadwinner. One can wonder why women would have to find a job before meeting someone. Indeed, some scholars, such as Mizuochi (2006), have observed no correlation between a woman's professional situation and her chances of finding a husband in her twenties. However, more recent surveys, such as one conducted in 2013 by

the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare have shown the opposite, where women's professional situation does matter in finding a spouse.

The reason is that work is a formidable place to meet a marriage partner. If one follows the ideal image of the Japanese household as Ochiai described it, it is during college or at the office that a woman can find someone to marry before quitting her job. In a recent governmental study, 34% of single males and 40% of single females stated that their ideal place to meet a marriage partner would be at work (CAO, 2019). Motegi (2014) found that the majority of married women had met their husbands at the office (29.3%) or through family and friends (29.7%), confirming that the workplace is still an excellent way to meet a future marriage partner.

Moreover, men have started looking for women who may be able to earn money to support the household as well. In the same governmental study, around 30% of men stated they are looking for a woman who makes between 2 million and 4 million yen yearly (CAO, 2019). An increasing number of men may have embraced the idea that they cannot be the only breadwinner of the household and that women should also participate in the family's financial support. However, it does not mean they are suddenly comfortable sharing equal pay with their wives. Around 45% of single males say that they do not care or do not know how much money should their ideal wives earn (*Ibid.*). Women are still viewed as simple help for the household and not as one of its primary support.

Nonetheless, the rising percentage of precarious employment rate significantly impacts the marriage rate for both males and females. However, one should note that the financial situation of single males and females is not the only reason for the delay in the age of marriage and lifetime celibacy. Various cultural behaviors have impacted the chances for young people to find a marriage partner, such as passivity in looking for someone.

Challenge 3: Passivity in Searching for a Love and Marriage Partner

One could think that the delay in the age of marriage and lifetime celibacy may be due to a lack of interest in marriage. However, the annual reports of the Cabinet Office (CAO) show that most Japanese single males and females state that they desire to marry. 86.3% of males and 89.4% of females still want to get married someday in their life (CAO, 2019). Even though the numbers have been decreasing since 1982, marriage is still very attractive for young people. However, even though people want to marry, it does not necessarily mean they are actively searching for a marriage partner or a love partner.

Many scholars have explored the idea of passivity in the marriage-hunting period for single males and females. Miwa (2010) notes that the main reasons for people not to marry are due to people not actively looking for someone. In her study, 60% of single males and females are not purposely doing anything to meet a potential partner (*Ibid.*). In addition, the last governmental survey shows an even more significant number.

According to the cabinet office, 72.5% of males and 55% of females between 20 and 29 years old do not concretely do anything to meet a "partner" (CAO, 2019). Interestingly enough, the survey asked participants about what they do to look for a "partner" (*aite* in Japanese). It does not specify whether it concerns a love or marriage partner. It seems that many males and females in their twenties are passive, even looking for a boyfriend or a girlfriend.

One may explain this inactivity because Japanese single males and females do not have a strong opinion regarding romantic relationships and marriage. At the question "If a man (woman) had all the other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you were not in love with him (her?)", 35.7% have replied "undecided," which is the highest rate of all the 11 countries observed (Levine et al., 1995). In other words, many Japanese young people seem hesitant regarding not only marriage, but romantic feelings as well. Tokuhiro

(2010) also observed this indecisiveness in her study. To her, young Japanese men and women take "too much time" in the process of courtship. As a result, they postpone the age to marry or separate before committing. Thus, this hesitance in love relationships may reveal some lack of commitment as an essential factor in explaining the delay in the age of marriage.

Scholars argue that this lack of commitment may be due to the extension of the moratorium period. It refers to the time between childhood and adulthood in which individuals build themselves. It is a time during which the young adult can experience various aspects of themselves without being preoccupied with what the future holds to develop qualities and interests that will define them as a "completed" adult (Okonogi, 1980). However, more and more young adults stay in the moratorium period longer than usual in today's context. Although this period appeared between 18 and 20 years old, it persists even after 30 years old in people born after the 1970s (Okonogi, 1980; Nishimura, 2015). Thus, many single males and females in their twenties continue to look for short-term experiences without thinking of future plans. Nishimura (2015; 2016) argues that young Japanese males and females primarily seek short-term pleasure and do not concretely think about long-term involvement. To her, it can impact their romantic experiences and their chance to find a long-lasting relationship that could lead to marrying and starting a family. Thus, the extension of the moratorium period may explain the increasing passivity in love relationships and marriage, as young males and females do not think about long-term commitments.

However, the extension of the moratorium period theory ignores the fact that young single males and females are still interested in love relationships but give up on them because of the hurdle they represent. Indeed, research shows that the youth still want a love partner but consider it too challenging to find one. Even though some young people state that they are not interested in love relationships, they are in reality only discouraged from pursuing a relationship. Takasaka (2013) has found six patterns in young males and females who say

that they do not "wish" to have a boyfriend/girlfriend ("*koibito o hoshii to omowanai*"). They include: denial of responsibility, lack of self-confidence, no apparent advantage in being in a love relationship, procrastination, and overambitious expectations (*Ibid.*). What Takasaka's respondents seem to show is not a total lack of desire for love but an indirect feeling that discourages them from expressing their desire for a love relationship.

Nishimura (2016) confirmed this observation in her study. Of the 33% of her respondents who said that they do not wish to have a boyfriend/girlfriend, 60% of them replied that they think it is bothersome (*mendokusai*) to find one. According to Nishimura, they do not genuinely reject the idea of having a boyfriend or a girlfriend; they give up on it because of the difficulties of having one. Omori has shown that young single males and females hesitate to take the first step in love relationships. Indeed, because a declaration of love (*kokuhaku*) can result in changes in a friendly relationship, many young people choose to stay ambivalent (Omori, 2016). By overthinking the process of courtship, some youth prefer to remain single rather than risking their chances with someone. In other words, the increase in marriage age has appeared not because people do not want to be in a love relationship or get married, but because they feel it is too challenging to find a love and marriage partner. However, one can still wonder about the obstacles of dating for the current generation.

Challenge 4: Lack of Adaptation in New Gender Tropes

Scholars have noticed that some of the main issues about finding a partner remain the changes in gender tropes that Japanese youth still struggle to handle. Researchers have mainly observed new non-normative masculinities and the difficulty in settling in male-female love relationships for women. For instance, the concept of "herbivore-type men" (*sôshokukei danshi*) has received extensive media coverage since 2010. Coined by Fukasawa

in 2006, it is an expression that describes a particular type of men who are passive in approaching women, are not particularly interested in sexual relationships, and are not actively looking to build a professional carrier (Morioka, 2008, 2011; Charlesbois, 2013; Owa, 2015; Endo, 2018). This conception of masculinity breaks the traditional and stereotypical view of men embodied by the image of the *salaryman*: the white-collared corporate warrior, devotee to his employer, and eager to build a carrier and to found a family he will provide (Dasgupta, 2003; 2013). The "herbivore-type men" struggle to fit in a love market where women still view traditional masculinity as an ideal (Endo, 2018). Furthermore, more than 60% of single men between 20 to 34 years old consider themselves "herbivore" (Morioka, 2011). The "herbivore" phenomenon indicates that what young men are and what women look for in a partner are mismatching.

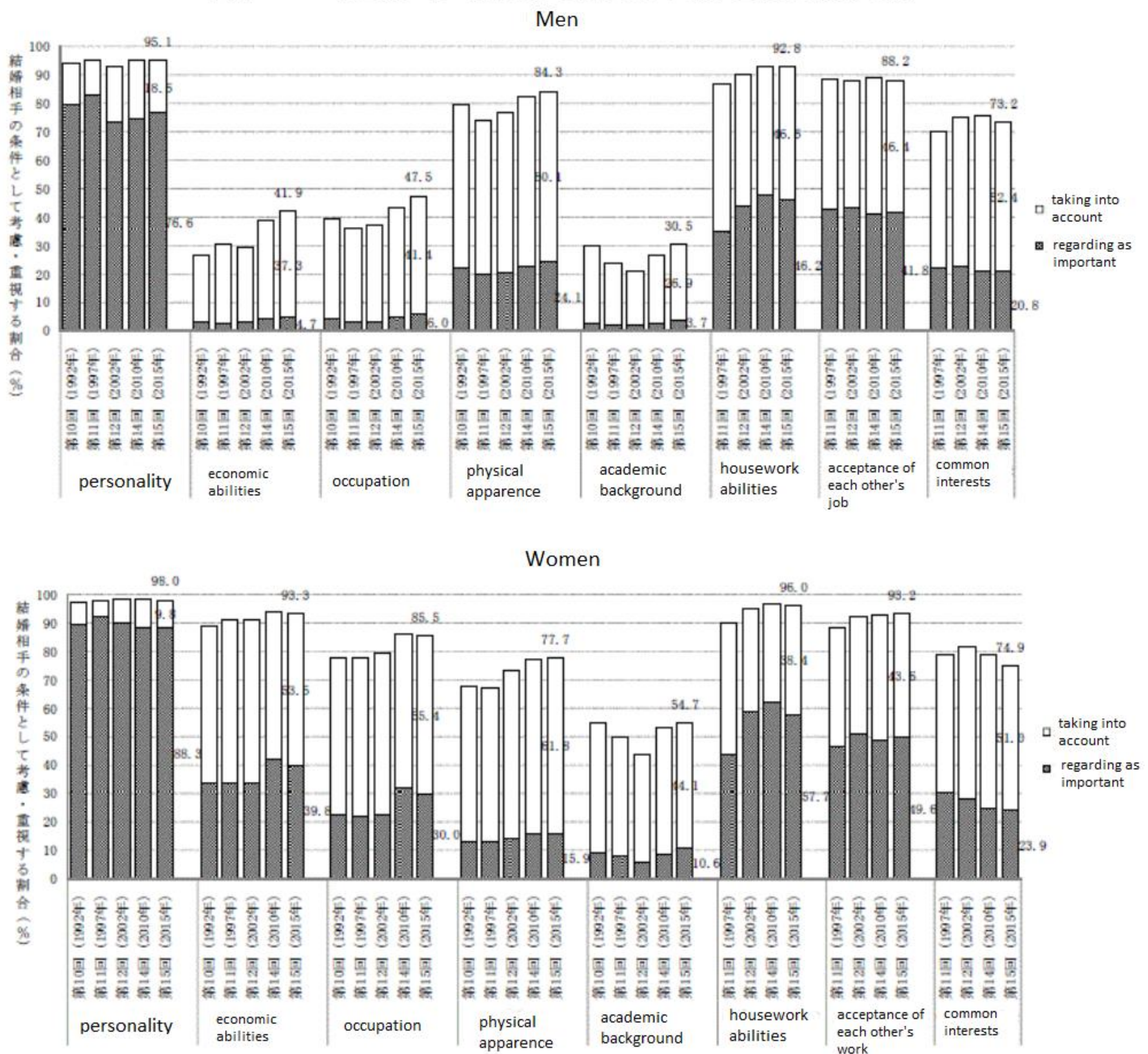
However, one should notice that women are also stuck between a standardized view of femininity and shifting gender tropes. Even though they have not received the same media coverage, one should notice how women's views on love and marriage have evolved in being trapped between "traditional" perceptions of the family and a more independent conception of femininity, making them quite selective choosing their husband. Fuchu (2016) has noticed in her study two essential elements in women's views regarding marriage. First, the female participants seem to rely on three criteria in selecting a marriage partner: the presence of romantic feelings, the potential husband's income, and his desire to have children. According to Fuchu, if only one of these criteria is lacking, the participants would reconsider even having a love relationship with the partner, as it will not lead to marriage.

Secondly, despite the female participants' wish to have a carrier and keep a professional activity, they are still looking for a partner with considerable economic strength. Women seem to continue looking for what Shirakawa (2014) called *Shôwa kekkon* or "Showa era-style marriage," in which the husband would financially take care of his wife.

On Figure 4, one can notice how women are judging important both their partner's acceptance of their wife's job and their economic abilities. In other words, women try to embrace both modern conceptions of family and couple through romantic feelings and financial independence, and the traditional view of marriage by looking for a financially established husband.

Figure 4

The Evolution of the Conditions of a Marriage Partner Between 1992, 1997, 2002, 2010, and 2015.



Note. Retrieved from IPSS, 2015.

As a result, Figure 4 shows that women seem more selective than men. They accord more importance not only to their economic strength but also to their personality, occupation, and even housework abilities. Those numerous criteria can lead to unrealistic expectations regarding their ideal husband. Yamada & Shirakawa (2013) found that one-third of single

women are looking for a man who earns six million yen a year, even though this profile represents only five percent of all single men in the Japanese marriage market (Yamada & Shirakawa, 2013, see also CAO, 2019). Those high expectations both in the economic abilities of men and their other characteristics, may be a source of disappointment for many single women.

The mismatch between the ideal qualities of a husband or a wife and the reality of both sexes' ability to fulfill those wished qualities are prevalent. Men who grew up during the economic stagnation struggle to adopt the "traditional" masculinity that society expects them to have. Women are trapped between the traditional conception of wives as houseworkers and a more progressive view of femininity as independent individuals, making them selective in choosing a husband.

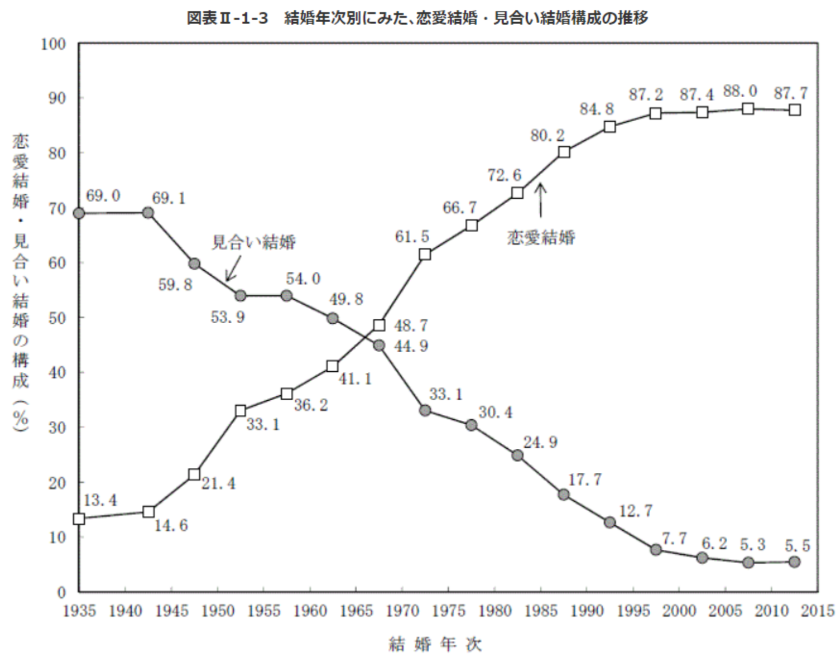
Thus, people's views on gender relationships have not evolved alongside those new gender models. On the one hand, men are displaying "softer" masculinity than people of the Bubble's generation, and women have become more proactive in terms of economic independence through the willingness to pursue their carrier. However, both sexes still seem to look for partners that correspond to the "traditional" gender role that appeared during post-war economic growth called the *Shôwa kekkon*, even though it is only a minority in the current generation. This situation may be due to a disconnexion between the two sexes leading to incomprehension and unrealistic expectations *vis à vis* their ideal love partner. The following section explores the lack of inter-gender interaction and the difficulty for people to communicate with the opposite sex that started with the crumbling of arranged marriages.

Challenge 5: Lack of Inter-gender Interaction and Communication Skills

One may think that the rapid changes in marital behavior may be one of the reasons for people having difficulties communicating with the opposite sex, leading to the hurdle of finding a marriage partner. Indeed, one can suppose that the progressive decline of arranged marriages (or *miai* marriages in Japanese) that does not require any communication skills or inter-gender interaction may have been quite impactful in the lives of young single men and women. While a majority of marital unions were arranged from 1935 to 1965, Figure 5 shows that today, almost 90% of marriages in Japan are considered "love marriages" (IPSS, 2016).

Figure 5

The Evolution of Love-based Marriages and Miai *Marriages per Year*



Note. In white: love marriage rate, in grey: arranged marriage rate. Retrieved from IPSS, 2016.

It is not surprising that various scholars have considered the end of the arranged marriages as a reason for the increase in the marriage age (Kaneko, 2003; Kojima, 2005;

Tsutsui, 2008, 2013). However, the respective curbs of the two variables, which include the evolution of age of marriage and love/*miai* marriage rates, are too different to see any direct correlations (Motegi, 2014). The decline of *miai* marriage rates alone cannot explain the increase in late marriages or life-long celibacy.

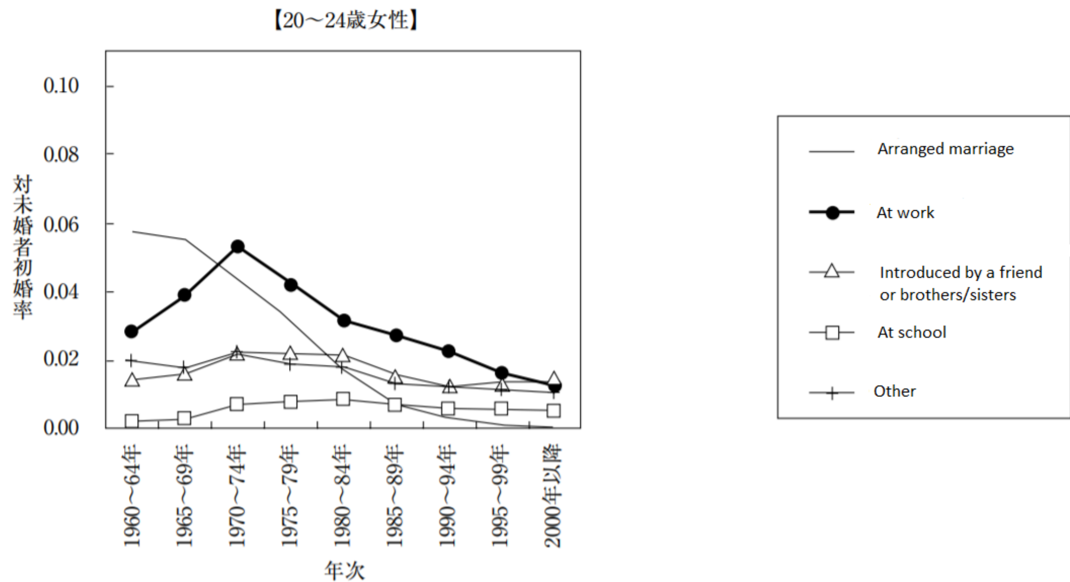
Nevertheless, recent scholars have shown that the combination of the transition from arranged marriages to love marriage habits and the consecutive economic stagnations has boosted the *bankonka* and *mikonka* phenomenons. Iwasawa & Mita (2005) argue that until 1974, meeting someone at work replaced the traditional *miai* marriage, in particular for women between 20 and 29 years old. However, the first oil shock and the employment precarity prevented them from finding a marriage partner at the workplace.

Figure 6 demonstrates that meeting a husband at work rapidly replaced arranged marriages during the post-war economic growth, however, it steadily declined after the oil shock of 1973 without being replaced in turn by something else. In other words, women who were supposed to find a marriage partner from *miai* or at work between 20 and 24 years old gradually got deprived of the two best chances to meet someone (work or *miai*), without any new alternatives[2].

[2] There is no statistics regarding how men met their wives. The reason may be because IPSS only focused on variables directly related to the TFR, which only takes into account women's fertility. As a result, IPSS probably did not judge necessary to make a survey about men.

Figure 6

The First Marriage by Periods for Women between 20 and 24 Years Old



Note. Both curbs of arranged marriages and meeting someone at work quickly declined from the 1970s without letting other ways thrive instead. Retrieved from Iwasawa & Mita, 2005.

The graph shows that marriages in Post-War Japan do not accord a lot of importance to male-female communication. Indeed, both arranged marriages or marriages with a colleague at work seem to involve a "third party" institution to find a partner that does not require particular communication skills, whereas "introduction from a friend," "at school," or "others" are mainly based on communication.

It may be surprising to associate arranged marriages with marriages at work, but in the case of Japan, both may be structurally similar, even though the latter is defined as "love marriages." Indeed, while the institution of *miai* marriages is quite self-explanatory, some scholars have shown how some companies acted directly or indirectly as a matchmaker for young single males and females, relieving them of the struggle to build social skills. According to Brinton (2011), socialization and communication during the economic growth mainly took place at work. The company that employed people became the center of human

interactions and a formidable place to find a marriage partner. People learned to interact with each other through the company to which they belonged (Iwasawa & Mita, 2005; Brinton, 2011:12; Endo, 2018). This was especially true in large companies; the corporation worked as a third party that people used for human interaction. It assured a stable job and created norms that, if followed, would help the employees find a partner (Brinton, 2011).

On the other hand, from the first oil shock to the "lost decades," people are now switching jobs in ways they do not feel belonging to one company anymore. This precarity has left people by themselves, normless, with no tools to interact with each other outside the social landscape they were used to, resulting in what Ehara (2004) calls an "anomy in inter-gender interaction." Even though the majority of single young men and women desire a marriage partner, many of them just do not know how to find one.

Thus, the disappearance of the "traditional" ways to find a marriage partner, such as *miai* or work, has created a more profound barrier between males and females. According to surveys from the National Institute of Population and Social Security (IPSS), the proportion of single people who do not have friends of the opposite sex has been steadily increasing since the 1990s. While 47% of single males and 39% of single females did not have friends of the opposite sex in 1992, the proportion has respectively increased to 70% of single males and 60% of single females in 2015. Moreover, 20% of those males and females do not want to interact with the opposite sex (IPSS 2015). Men and women are gradually experiencing the impossibility to communicate and interact with each other.

Table 1

The Proportion of Singles Who Do Not Have Friends of the Opposite Sex

Proportion of singles (18 to 34) who do not have friends of the opposite sex

Sex	1992	2002	2010	2015
Male	47.3%	52.8%	61.4%	69.8%
Female	38.9%	40.3%	49.5%	59.1%

Source: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2015)

Note. Cited from Endo, 2018, with data from IPSS, 2015 (on a sample of 2320 male and 2296 female interviewees).

Yamada & Shirakawa (2013) argued that Japan does not have a "love culture" (*ren.ai bunka*) because inter-gender interactions have been weak ever since the standardization of *miai* marriages. Thus, people do not have the ability to communicate with the opposite sex, not even after getting married (Yamada & Shirakawa, 2013: 112). As a result, people struggle to have inter-gender interactions and, by extension, struggle to find a marriage partner even today.

It is only since the 1990s that Japanese scholars have studied the lack of communication skills in love relationships. Horike (1994) is the first to find that social skills are critical to entering a love relationship. However, he did not relate his observation to the increase in marriage age and long-time celibacy. It is only since 2010 that researchers have slowly conducted empirical research about the lack of ability to communicate in relation to the low-birthrate phenomenon (Takasaka, 2013). For example, Nakamura and Sato (2010) have noted that the probability of having a partner that may lead to marriage decreases with a lack of communication, sociability, and availability. Even though this observation is quite evident, there was not much empirical research about this beforehand.

Nevertheless, some qualitative observations on "marriage hunting (*konkatsu*)" searching activities have well observed the "wall" between males and females in Japanese

society. In a compelling study of the phenomenon, Endo (2018) has formidably illustrated the disconnexion between males and females regarding communication. Not only is there a mismatch between the ideal qualities and gender displays, but people seem to lack consideration regarding their potential partner's feelings. In her fieldwork, she met many participants who seemed entirely oblivious to their interlocutor's reactions. For example, she describes her encounter with one participant in a speed-dating event who kept making her guess his island of origin without giving her the correct answer. Even when Endo eventually gave up, the man persisted in his guessing game and did not notice that she did not want to play anymore. By the time he finally answered, the allotted time for the face-to-face was over. Moreover, Endo commented that the fact that they were not able to have a proper conversation did not seem to bother the participant. In this scenario, not only was the forty-year-old man oblivious to Endo's feeling, but he also seemed satisfied with making her repeatedly guess without appropriately communicating (Endo, 2018: 17). This participant seemed to not particularly want to make any effort in conversing with the opposite sex, even though she appeared as a potential marriage partner.

This lack of effort may be related to a distorted image of love relationships. Kitamura & Sakamoto (2007) also noted that many single men and women do not see the point of making any effort to communicate with a potential partner. It may be related, once again, to the fact that people in the "marriage hunting" markets have immature views of courtship. In their sociological study of group blind dates "*gôkon*," Kitamura & Sakamoto argue that single males and females seem to believe in love at first sight (*hitomebore*). As a result, they do not necessarily put the effort into this search. They are neither actively looking for someone nor understanding their interlocutor and, thus, believe "destiny" should be enough to meet the perfect partner (Kitamura & Sakamoto, 2007). Many single men and women

who participate in matchmaking activities cannot appropriately assess what they need to do to get into a love or marriage relationship.

Thus, the lack of inter-gender interaction and communication skills may be a major reason for the *shoshika* phenomenon. In a society where love marriage has recently prevailed, the youth struggle to find a balance between expectations and reality, as they do not have the "tools" – the understanding of social norms – to navigate into this new market. While the dissolution of arranged marriages decided by the parents, and marriages with colleagues encouraged by the company, has led to more freedom in choosing a partner, it has also left the heavy responsibility to find someone by oneself.

Conclusion: The impact of the romantic love ideology

This chapter has explored the various theories explaining the *shôshika* phenomenon, which has been hitting Japan for thirty years. The current economy and new social behaviors (working women, "herbivore-type" boys) have been pointed out by the media as the reasons behind the low fertility phenomenon. However, one should recognize that the new trends are less problematic than the lack of adaptations by society to these particular trends. Many young people are missing the tools to access love relationships, which is the current standard of marital union. Since the end of the last century, they are enjoying the freedom of choosing their marriage partner more than ever, but the ways to actually find someone are still unknown for many young Japanese males and females.

Thus, the lack of intergender interaction and communication skills must be examined in more detail. In a context where love marriage prevails and where communication skills are much more meaningful in finding a marriage partner (Horike, 1994), male-female relationships should be a critical study to understand the *bankonka* phenomenon and find accurate measures to address this later on.

However, the high expectations brought into love or marriage partner are not limited to Japan. Many scholars have observed the same phenomenon in many Western countries since the 1990s. For instance, American marriage counselor Michael V. Miller (1995), sociologists Bauman (2012), and Koontz et al. (2019) have discussed how people have been becoming selective in their love relationships in a way that does not match reality. French sociologists Bawin-Legros (2010) and Illouz (2012, 2019) noticed the same trend in Europe.

The fact that the concept of love and marriage have been idealized to the point that they do not match reality anymore may be related to the many misunderstandings people have about those two concepts. In the modern conceptions of love and marriage relationships, they may be seen as something "natural" and inevitable, but also crucial in happiness[3]. Moreover, both are often associated together, and love marriage seems to have been a standard "for ages" (Caron-Verschave & Ferroul, 2015). But these conceptions are inaccurate: love, like many emotions, is taught by the social environment, and the original purpose of marriage was to pass inheritance and make alliances between families. Happiness in wedlock was not the priority for three millennia, as love marriage has existed only since a century ago.

These misunderstandings may be summarized into one Japanese concept popularized during the second half of the 20th century: romantic love ideology (in Japanese *romanchikku rabu ideorogi*). The doctrine refers to the association of romantic love, sexuality/reproductivity, and marriage (Ueno, 1992). It explains the foundations of modern thinking regarding family in Japan, and the five challenges mentioned in this chapter. Indeed, most people in Japan still thoroughly believe that the "appropriate" way to be in a love relationship is to marry and have children. Kobayashi, et al. (2017) observe that 80% of

[3]Illustrated by mainstream Hollywood love comedies such as *When Harry met Sally* (1989), *Notting Hill* (1999), *Crazy Stupid Love* (2011) etc.

Japanese men and women think romantic love is necessary for marriage. In addition, the same percentage believe that child-bearing is essential for marriage. In other words, despite observing the doctrine's decline (Tanimoto, 2016), most Japanese men and women still perpetuate the romantic love ideology.

Yet, as mentioned in the section "Challenge 4," the ideology does not represent the reality of current standards of life, and one should question its impact on the fertility rate in Japan. Before tackling the main topic of the thesis, the deconstruction of the romantic love ideology will be important in understanding the dynamics of Japanese people, especially family values essential in the thesis's fieldwork that took place on the island of Tokunoshima.

CHAPTER 2: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE ROMANTIC LOVE IDEOLOGY

Introduction

The previous literature review discussed how the views on "marriage" and "love" in Japan had affected the country's fertility rate. Due to the lack of intergender interactions, people seem to be blinded by an idealized vision of love and relationships that do not fit with reality. Consequently, finding a marriage partner and building a family becomes more challenging for single men and women in Japan. But the trend did not suddenly happen in modern times; it resulted from historical contexts built through the centuries. In Japan, successive marital changes have led to the doctrine of the "romantic love ideology." Yet, there are strong disparities between the current perception of love and marriage in Japan and the essence of those two concepts, which have existed for more than two thousand years of civilization.

This chapter attempts to understand the fundamental dynamics of love and marriage, and clarify the reality of romantic emotion and the institution of matrimony. By using research from various disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, and even literature, this chapter will deconstruct the "romantic love ideology" and try to define love and marriage as social constructs.

The first section focuses on marriage. By analyzing its history and its recent changes, literature will demonstrate that, although its characteristics have not stopped changing since it exists, its purpose has been the same until the 20th century: creating alliances and generating a successor. It is only very recently that marriage became a celebration of love.

The second section examines the question of love since Ancient Greece. Based on philosophers, moralists, novelists, and social scientists, this chapter attempts to understand

the origins of romantic sentiment. The modern and Western conception of love comes from myths and fiction and developed through consumerism to become a social norm in human relationships. Moreover, this chapter will discuss how love is deeply intertwined with individuality and seems to appear only in societies where the "self" is strongly emphasized.

The theory of "the importation of romantic love" in Japan

A literature review on such a vast topic is challenging. Many readers may criticize the "eurocentrism" of the approach when the main issue focuses on Japan's demography. The reasons for emphasizing Western perspectives are multiple. In marriage, various evidence shows that Japan has adopted Western values. Indeed, since 1947, Japan's current law regarding marriage has been based on the American Constitution, which stipulates that "marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a base" (Hendry, 2013). Even before the occupation, the Meiji restoration imposed Western family values on the population (Fukutô, 2012). The opening of Japan to the West at the end of the 19th century has shaken many institutions and values. To understand the fundamental dynamics of current Japanese marriages, one should know how it has become legally based on "mutual consent, cooperation, and equal rights." For these reasons, this chapter emphasizes Western history and Western conception of monogamous and – at least on paper – egalitarian matrimony.

Moreover, since the 1970s, the number of love-based marriages in Japan has exceeded the number of *miai* (arranged) marriages. Lately, almost 90% of marriages are based on romantic love (IPSS, 2015). Thus, it is crucial to explore the creation of romantic love in Japan. Yet, scholars have argued that Western perception of love has spread in Japan since the Meiji restoration at the end of the 19th century (Kimura, 2016; Tanimoto &

Watanabe, 2016). Romantic love would have been "imported" by Japanese scholars who traveled in Europe and the U.S.

According to those scholars, there was no word to describe the modern perception of romantic love in Japan. The writer Kitamura Tôkoku (1868-1894) then popularized the term *ren.ai* to express his love for his wife Ishisaka Mina with the famous phrase "love is the key of life" (*ren.ai. wa jinsei no hiyaku nari*) (Sakuda, 1968). Before the Meiji Era, other words that designed attractions for someone else were primarily sexual. Yanabu (2001) argues that the use of *koi*, *aijo* or *koshoku* in the *Man.yôshû* or *Genji Monogatari* mostly expressed physical attraction and never the holistic nature of romantic love.

However, not every scholar agrees that romantic love appeared only from contact with Western cultures in the 19th century. Koyano (2012) criticizes the theory of "the importation of romantic love (*yunyûhin setsuron)*" by arguing that descriptions of romantic love resembling Western romantic love existed before the Meiji restoration. He quotes, for instance, numerous *waka*, *tanka*, and *haiku* from the *Man.yôshû* and *Kagerô Nikki* (974) telling the tales of broken heart women lamenting their fallen love. The recurrent myth of Orpheus is also found in stories, books, and kabuki plays during the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) (Koyano, 2012). Indeed, *Genji Monogatari* or *Yasuna* are stories about tragic lovers separated by death, that have many common points with Western literary canons, such as *Orpheus*, *Tristan and Iseult*, *Romeo and Juliet*, etc. The pattern of painful and tragic love relationships is representative of the Western perception of romantic love, popularized by the 14th-century *troubadour*'s courtly love (Rougemont, 1972). According to Koyano, romantic love is not exclusive to Western cultures because similar patterns can be found in Japanese literature.

By questioning the monopole of Western culture toward romantic love, Koyano initiates a discussion on the universality of the sentiment. The question of whether romantic

love is experienced by each human individual, no matter their culture, has been discussed by scholars from various fields. Anthropologists presented evidence that romantic love was present in 147 out of 166 cultures they studied (Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992; Munck, 2016). They concluded that romantic love might be a cultural universal. Nonetheless, Koyano or these anthropologists may be criticized for their loose definition of romantic love. Plotinicov (1995) illustrates this problem with his research in Africa. A Nigerian man can declare being "deeply in love" with his multiple wives without asking for their consent. This conception of love would be far from the norms of exclusivity and reciprocal feelings embedded in the Western definition of love. In current Japanese values, romantic love closely resembles courtly love, which is monogamous, mutual, and mostly equal relationships (see Omori, 2014).

Reddy (2012) proposes to define the nearly universal strong desire and attachment to someone as "longing for association," while romantic love would correspond to the Western conception of love as monogamous and exclusive. In Japan today, people associate the image of love with the one directly coming from courtly love and the Western romantic feeling that is examined in this chapter (Tanimoto & Watanabe, 2016). Thus, the focus on Western history and concepts is not only convenient for a literature review on marriage and romantic love, but it is also accurate in the context of Japanese studies[4].

[4] One could also criticize the "male-oriented" and heteronormative approaches of this chapter. Indeed, the first chapter examines almost exclusively the heterosexual marriage institution while the second – especially the 1st and 2nd sections – focuses mainly on male authors and their definition of romantic love. Once again, the reason for this approach is practical and related to Japan's situation. The thesis focuses on a country in which same-sex marriage and parenting are not legal. As a result, they have minimal impact on Japan's fertility rate, which is the main interest of the thesis. Aiming too much attention at the LGBTQIA+ community in this particular writing would, unfortunately, feel irrelevant. However, one should be aware that the Western conceptions of romantic love and the marriage institution treated here reflect the values of male-dominated societies that have much work to do to apply the egalitarian qualities they prone. Men indeed created the Western conceptions of love and marriage for themselves, even though they are often disguised into equal values (see Grossi & West, 2017).

Marriage

As mentioned in Chapter 1, research shows that many Japanese single people (men but mostly women) look for economic stability in their love marriage. This pattern is directly related to the primary role of marriage in human history: building alliances and ensuring descendants. In order to understand why Japanese people value the economic features of marriage, it is crucial to know its history throughout the ages.

This section provides a broad overview of the concept of marriage, its history, and its state in the current day. Even though marriage is not a natural behavior but a social ritual, almost all societies have adopted it, making it a universal pattern of the human race. Only one community has been reported not using marriage as a significant institution: the Na in the Yunnan Province of southwestern China (Coontz, 2005). Thus, one may say that marriage is nearly a universal pattern of the human race.

However, among the various forms of marriage over the millennia[5], none of them has considered love as an essential reason to marry. Indeed, although romantic feelings could happen between a husband and a spouse, they had increasingly become the majority in western marriages only one century ago (Caron-Verschave & Ferroul, 2015). This section focuses on the evolution of marriage in Human History. The first part examines how it changed from a financial and material purpose to its romantic view. The second part deals with the current state of marriage and how it has gained diversity since the 1950s.

[5] Since the beginning of all civilizations, people have used marriage in many ways. In South Africa, a woman can be married to several men of the same brotherhood. On the opposite side, in ancient China, a woman could bring her sisters to her home as "back-up wives" (Coontz, 2005). Eskimos had cospousal arrangements in which each partner had sexual relations with the other's spouse (*Ibid.*). In the Sudan region, a young boy can be married to a deceased young girl in order to make alliances between two families (*Ibid.*). In other West African societies, a woman may marry another woman as a "female husband," while some Native American and African cultures recognized male-male marriages (*Ibid.*).

Early Marriages as a Material and Economic Transaction

No one can be sure how the first marriages appeared among early humans, but theorists remain sure that marriages were created as transactions between individuals and communities. Primitive unions, for instance, are subject to two theories among archeologists: the "protective" and the "oppressive" theories. People who support the "protective theory" think marriage developed because primitive females needed protection from the outside world. They would have exchanged their security and food against sexual exclusivity. This theory would explain why women are the only mammals that do not come into heat. They would need to be sexually available all year round to survive (Washburn & Lancaster, 1968). However, it is likely false to think that women stayed safe to take care of children and waited for the males to bring food and mate. As discovered by archeologists, early humans hunted large animals, and the whole tribe needed to participate in the effort, including females. As they did not seek special protection, the "protective theory" is likely a projection of a modern, heteronormative and phallocentric conception of marriage. Still, early humans did not live in an equalitarian, codependent utopia. Females were considered a valuable asset in alliances with other groups (Collier, 1988). The group could benefit from better genetic diversity and receive additional resources by exchanging sisters with other females. This statement is part of the "oppressive theory": the idea that marriage appeared by using women as bargaining power. However, it does not mean that marriage was specially created to submit women to men. It was a tool in a system where the female individuals were already subdued to the group's (and especially the elder's) decision (Coontz, 2005). Thus, marriage was only an extension of this social oppression, and its goal was first to collaborate with other tribes. This type of alliance-making through exchanging women may be the first step toward marital

unions. Consequently, marriage rapidly took political power when civilizations started to develop.

During the modern period, very prominent civilizations perceived marriage as the best way to establish dominance. The family was particularly helpful in making alliances and expanding one's network, and kings from various countries and eras used marriages as a strategic asset. From the Byzantine Empire or Ancient Egypt, to Clovis or Charlemagne, every ruler has dissociated love with their wedding (Coontz, 2005). An alliance with the appropriate family could certainly bring power and wealth, and an heir was helpful to keep this power. Thus, most arranged marriages were patrilineal and decided by the family. Even though it could happen that, in some cultures, the heritage was transmitted from mother to daughter. It was, for instance, the case in Japanese marriage during the Heian period (794-1185). The heritage was matrilineal, and it was not rare that a daughterless family would adopt a girl to pass the inheritance (McCullough, 1967). The husband would be treated as a "guest" when visiting the nuptial room (Ryang, 2006). Yet, the apparition of the concept of "*ie*" (literally "household") from the 12th century asserted the power of the husband over the whole family (Fukutô, 2012). In any case, the marital union only had a political, material, or economic role.

Despite the material role of marriage, love in marital unions may have happened between partners before and after the wedding. Japan's ancient books, such as the *Man.yô shû*, *Kojiki*, or *Nihonshoki* described numerous romances that led to marriage (Fukutô, 2012). However, the family would always make the final decision regarding their sons' and daughters' unions. Only by the end of the 17th century did people in Europe begin to call arranged marriages into question and the whole purpose of a wedding union.

The "Love Revolution" between the 16th and 19th Century in Europe: Shaping the Modern Love-based Marriage

Although the Edo period (1603-1867) in Japan did not show drastic changes regarding the role of marriage in Japan (Fukutô, 2012), romantic feelings began to be considered in a marital union in Europe, which would have an impact on Modern family relationships in Japan from the Meiji era (1868-1912). From the 16th century, household-making gradually evolved in France and England. Because only the oldest son would inherit his parents' fortune, he was the only one who needed to marry for monetary reasons. The younger ones, free of the responsibility to quickly find a "good" wife and provide an heir, needed to leave their families to find a job and a wife if they did not take holy orders. As it was expensive to found a family[6], the cadets tended to delay their age to marry, sometimes even staying single for their whole life. In the 1500s, one-third to one-half of all European adults were unmarried (Ozment, 2001).

At the beginning of the 17th century, marriage as an institution was gradually called into question. More and more commoners and aristocrats did not want or did not need to marry. In the late 18th century, the standard for a successful marriage was no longer about the financial settlement or the social situation of the in-laws (Vickery, 1998). More and more people became concerned about how well a family met the emotional needs of its members, and the concept of happiness gradually came into European households. In 1770 France, 40 percent of people thought marriage should be based on emotional attachment, while only 10 percent believed the same before the 1760s (Gottlieb, 1994). With the Enlightenment in

[6] Women needed to pay their dowries, but men (alongside with women) also prioritized their economic stabilities over marriage. Both usually worked as servants to save up money before starting their family business. Only then would they marry (Coontz, 2005).

Europe, the idea was that social relationships, including those between men and women, should be organized based on non-material features such as happiness[7].

The same considerations arrived in Japan during the Meiji restoration at the end of the 19th century. While the country opened to Western culture and infrastructures, numerous changes appeared inside the house. Japanese scholars who visited Europe promoted a more individualist perception of life. For instance, the writer Kitamura Tôkoku (1868-1894), who imported the concept of Western romantic love, fought for the application of Human Rights and love-based marriages in Japan (Fukutô, 2012). At the end of the Meiji period, the government also modified various marriage laws that weakened the importance of the "*ie*" and replaced it with the nuclear family. Official concubines were made illegal and monogamous unions became the norm in the wealthiest households[8].

However, despite the new introduction of romantic feelings in marital unions, the 19th century reaffirmed the domination of the husband upon his wife (Coontz, 2005). Wage labor spread a more "traditional" family vision, with the father as the only breadwinner and the mother as the house-carer. Indeed, some workers in the second half of the 19th century, especially in Britain, had enough money to provide for the whole family. Their wives had to do various domestic tasks, like house cleaning, cooking, sewing, etc., and the image of women alienated from the economic sphere gradually developed (Coontz, 2005). In Japan, the Meiji government even institutionalized the husband's domination over the other family members. Schools educated women with the doctrine *ryôsai kenbo* "good wife and wise mother," which profoundly divided the role between the man – viewed as the chief and protector of the household – and the mother – considered the assistant and child

[7] French essayists Paul Hazard (1878-1944) and Robert Mauzi (1927-2006) are famous for illustrating how the Enlightment has contributed to spread the pursuit of happiness in all Europe (Hazard, 1935; Mauzi, 1994).
[8] Although monogamous marriages were the norm, adultery was a valid reason to divorce only if the wife was accused of it. Wealthy men were not threatened by any laws to keep unofficial concubines.

manufacturer (Fukutô, 2012). From active members of the household, women started to become a support for their husbands.

The 20th Century: Rise and Decline of the "Traditional" Marriage

The early 20th century confirmed the "husband-as-the-breadwinner" model as a norm in marriage all over Western countries and Japan. Despite new access to sexuality, the institution of marriage was thriving. People married earlier than the previous generation. In 1930, one-third of white males under 24 were married in the U.S., against less than one in four in 1910 (Coontz, 2005). Moreover, even though male-female relationships were more accessible, gender disparities got more potent than ever. The model of the nuclear family, love-based marriage, and a husband as breadwinner became standardized, especially after the war period, when women were supposed to stay at home to take care of their household and their husband.

Yet, this family model led to a lot of dissatisfaction among people. Public opinion started to notice the housewives' distresses. Men also felt pressured to have a breadwinner role in a more challenging economic environment. In the context of the civil rights movement and contestations against the Vietnam War in the U.S., May 68 in Europe, or student protests in Japan, people began to question oppressing traditions. Moreover, the contraceptive pill helped change sexual habits; women could separate sexuality from reproduction, which impacted once again male/female relationships. By 1975 and after almost two decades of civil protests, various discriminative laws were abolished, while others were created to allow women to contract loans, facilitate divorce, and recognize children born out of wedlock (Mason et al., 2001). Divorce doubled between 1966 and 1975, first because people were freer to do so, and second because the vision of the family was suddenly more diverse. Japan showed similar trend, with divorce becoming increasingly

common. Since 1980, about half of marriages in the West and one-third in Japan finish in divorce (Fukutô, 2012). Moreover, people married later. In 1998, only 40% of women between 25 and 29 were married in the U.S. (Seltzer, 2004). One may conclude that people struggled to find a spouse or a husband. In reality, marriage was not as necessary as thirty years ago.

Non-marital unions have begun to develop in Western countries, changing the definition of family and intergender dynamics. In 2000, one child out of three was born out of wedlock in the U.S. Marriage, and cohabitation became indistinguishable legally and socially (Coontz, 2005). As a result, people could choose between being married or not, leading to more family diversity. At the beginning of the 21st century, only 25% of American households were married couples with children (*Ibid.*). Marriage gradually became "disestablished." It also became more common for mothers to work than being a housewife. In 2001, 30% of wives in American households earned more money than their husbands. In 1995, only 30% of working mothers wanted to become housewives if they could afford it (*Ibid.*). The "traditional" view of marriage as the man as the breadwinner has then become a minority in Western countries. Unions are more egalitarians than ever (although not perfect) and based on love rather than material reasons.

Japan shows a similar trend of diversified marriages. Fukutô (2012) argues that a wide range of households became institutionally recognized in the 1960s. New ways of making a family based on romantic love gradually appeared, such as the *de-facto* marriages (*jijitsu kon*), partner living in a different household (*on demando kon*), Double Income No Kinds (DINKS), remarriage and "adoption" of the partner's children, single-parent families[9], etc.

[9] However, single-parent families with a father are only recognized since 2010 (Fukutô, 2012).

Yet, as seen in Chapter 1, changes in Japanese households are still slow and faltering. Japanese people continue to consider the Shôwa-style marriage a crucial feature in life. The country has followed the same post-war economic development and built the same family standards as the U.S. regarding the growth of the nuclear family, the husband as the only breadwinner, and the importance of the consumer culture. However, even though many social protests appeared during the same period as the West, social changes toward women's rights and diversity in family patterns are slow in coming (Ochiai, 2004). Many feminist scholars have objected to the lack of progress in gender equality and family diversity for more than three decades (see, for example, Imamura et al., 1996; Hirano, 2007). Today, only 2% of Japanese children are born out of wedlock, and most Japanese women still have to choose between bearing children and having a professional carrier (OECD, 2018). Yet, Japanese people have embraced romantic unions like their Western counterparts. As explored in Chapter 1, love marriages have been the majority of unions since the 1970s.

But how can romantic love be defined in this context? The following section examines the different meanings of romantic love throughout History.

The Definition of Romantic Love

The association between romantic love, marriage, and sexuality in the romantic love ideology reveals a particular position toward love. Indeed, it sees love as a tool to access a particular result. Many informants during data collection viewed romantic love as the stepping stone to marriage and family. They expected love to produce an outcome. Yet, they also admitted that their feelings were not dictated by reasonable choices (see Chapter 5). To understand this paradox, it is crucial to explore the multiple definitions of romantic love through philosophy and social sciences. Although romantic love may be viewed as "natural," with a social, moral, or reproductive purpose, one should pay particular attention to its social

essence. Romantic love may indeed be a social construct created by an individual's environment, and the doctrine seeing love as a purpose may be the source of the misunderstandings leading to the difficulties for single people to find an appropriate partner.

Love in Philosophy and Religion

Two primary "schools" of philosophers regarding love can be identified throughout history. The first, led by Plato, sees love as a metaphysical purpose (Plato, 1964). Those thinkers believe that love is to connect the individual to something greater than oneself. That purpose can be the original state of the human being, the unity to God, a so-called "greater Good," or natural reproduction. However, many aspects of this perception might be considered flawed and unsatisfactory, which leaves us with the second "school" of philosophers: the futile meaning of romantic love.

Initially inspired by Lucretius, who saw love as vain and illusive (Lucretius, 1993), this second train of thought brings love back to the self. Love is viewed as a projection of the mind that has been constructed by one's social environment. For those philosophers, love does not have any goal; it only results from one's experience, education, or surroundings.

Love as a Metaphysical Purpose

From Ancient Greece to the 17th century, many theorists and moralists saw love as a purpose to transcend the self. Plato (428-348 BC) may be one of the first philosophers to see love as a desire to reunite the two halves of our original form in searching for the good. In his myth "the Lost Unity," the philosopher argues that human beings were entities with two faces, four legs, and four arms at the beginning. These entities were composed of three sexes: male, female, and the third constituted of both. As these entities were strong and proud, they tried to defy the Gods. To punish them, Zeus split these entities in half, making humans into two different "categories" male and female. Since then, humans have tried to find their lost

half, seeking a sense of former unity. However, this quest is not without any purpose. Zeus decided that if a female and a male united, it would result in having children, and if two males found each other, they would be sexually and emotionally satisfied and be able to work productively (Plato, 1964). Plato saw the story as a parabola of love (Blondel, 1998)[10]; Love has, either way, a purpose of reproductivity or productivity. He depicts love as a desire for unity that would result in something positive and would contribute to society – the birth of children in a heterosexual relationship or productivity at work in a same-sex relationship.

Thus, with the concept of the Lost Unity, Plato suggests that love is a driving force that leads us to the good. In *Symposium* (370 BC), Plato adds that one naturally is attracted to the good. A being can only love (*Philia*) something good, in the same way that a body can only seek health and does not look for disease (Plato, 1967). Furthermore, Aristotle (384-322 BC), in his *Nichomachean Ethics* (340 BC), elaborates on Plato's idea regarding the relation between love and the good. "The perfect form of friendship (*Philia*)[11] is that between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue" (Aristotle, 1962). Moreover, he argues that a benefactor loves the person he helped more than she loves him in return. In Ancient Greece, love is regarded as a positive energy that drives people toward a productive and virtuous result.

Interestingly, another prominent philosopher who significantly influenced Asian cultures also linked love with the good: Confucius (551-479 BC). According to Höchsmann

[10]According to Blondel, even though the myth has been almost always believed by scholars to be a "truth" taught by Plato, it is possible that he did not believe the story. Indeed, he had put the myth into Aristophane's mouth, a comic playwright who contributed to the execution of Socrate, Plato's master. For Blondel, through the myth of the Lost Unity, Plato probably wanted to express the idea that one feels as a whole only when one has met someone (Blondel, 1998, p. 48).

[11]Sometimes also called "friendly love," the word *Philia* has raised questions regarding whether it can be associated to romantic love. Protasi (2008) concluded that "*philia* is the context within which *eros* [romantic love] is the main disposition and their mutual conflict [between *philia* and *eros*] is in fact a necessary condition for a romantic relationship to flourish." One should note however, that Aristotle probably refers to *Philia* as a brotherly sentiment between two men.

(2002), the Chinese scholar used the word *ren*[12] *to* express a sentiment close to *philia* and *eros*. It denotes a particular virtue of kindness with a character constituted of "human" and "two." However, Confucian love is even more connected to moral values than Platonic love. Contrary to Plato, who perceived love as a natural emotion, Confucius thought love must be acquired through benevolence and kindness to others. In the *Great Learning*, he declared that "deep love is that with which one treats the multitude" (Legge, 1971). It cannot be a selfish sentiment, but it must benefit others.

The relationship between love, the good, and helping others seduced Christian morality. Search for the Good through love is seen as a quest to unite with God. It was a leitmotiv for many religious philosophers, such as Spinoza (1632-1677), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Descartes (1596-1650), Malebranche (1638-1715), Leibniz (1646-1716), and Kant (1724-1804) who conceptualized the idea of complacent and benevolent love (Blondel, 1998). "Complacent love" is selfish and narcissistic. It is the idea that an object is loved only to satisfy one's desire. "Benevolent love," on the contrary, is about self-sacrifice and helping the loved one without asking for anything in return (*Ibid.*). In Christian morality, there are "good" and "bad" ways of loving.

Most importantly, all the above-cited scholars expose a particular view of love that is the foundation of the romantic love ideology. In their mind, love itself is not enough and must be followed by a purpose. Although love marriage was a minority during the time of most philosophers, the perception that love must achieve something can be seen as the roots that associate romantic love, marriage, and procreation. Indeed, the previous section mentioned that the 18th-century Enlightenment encouraged aristocrats and commoners to build a family based on emotional needs. One can argue that considering love a metaphysical

[12] Although similarly transcribed in alphabet, Confucian *ren* 仁 has nothing in common with the current Japanese kanji *ren* 恋 used in *ren.ai* 恋愛, romantic love.

purpose helped spread love-based marriages. While relationships with mistresses or concubines were for "nothing," marrying the one you love fulfilled the purpose of romantic sentiments (Tanimoto & Watanabe, 2016). Love-based marital unions were a compromise to remedy the unsatisfying family union while maintaining the institution of marriage.

Yet, the idea that love is a quest for the good, to unite with God, or to have a family – in other words, that love exists in order to achieve a purpose – is wholly insufficient to explain the reality of the romantic feeling. The romantic love ideology fails to recognize the diversity of love in terms of objects (homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, etc.) and behaviors (monogamy, heterogamy). The rest of this chapter focuses on deconstructing the perception of love as a metaphysical purpose and, with it, the Japanese romantic love ideology.

Love as a Projection Built by the Environment

One cannot consciously control one's emotions and desires nor orientate them toward an objective or a "correct" way of loving. The idea that there are "right" and "wrong" ways of loving - that there are purposes in love – does not only fail to give an appropriate definition of love; it may be harmful to those who do not fit in this conception. Today, LGBTQIA+ youth is five times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth in the U.S. (Lyons et al., 2019). If people could decide who to love, they would find an object approved by the majority instead of ending their life, but love is not a choice; it just falls on people for whom the only alternatives are to comply with it, or reject it and live unhappily.

Despite the flaws in seeing purposes in romantic love, the symbolic of Plato's myth of the *Lost Unity* has also inspired psychoanalysts like Freud and Lacan. They state that love exists to fill one's desire. However, this section will demonstrate that love and desires are

social constructs – a state of mind built by the social environment. Neither purpose nor "natural" aspects explain the appearance of desire and love.

The earlier thinkers before the modern age did not see right away that love was a self-construct, built through our experiences and influenced by our social environment. Nevertheless, some philosophers disagreed with the Platonist view of love that gives purpose to love. They saw love as meaningless and vain, bringing the romantic feeling to the human level and not a metaphysical dimension. By doing so, they built the basis of the idea that love is a social construct.

It is the case with Lucretius (99-55 BC), the Roman poet and philosopher of the 1st century BC, who saw it as an illusion. For him, only sexual desires and sexual pleasures were tangible, while love was only deceiving. It was only a trick from the mind that made men laughable. Using misogynist imagery, the Roman philosopher made fun of lovers who fall for ugly and smelly women and who find them qualities that do not exist. Lucretius did not think love was worth the effort.

Through Christian morality, the vanity of romantic love has been relatively ignored for the benefit of the concept of benevolent love during the Middle Age. It is only from Pascal (1623-1662) that philosophers started to mention it again. By describing Cleopatra's nose, the French philosopher argues that the lover idolizes the loved one by focusing only on one part of a whole and ignoring the rest of the person (Pascal, 1976). Love was a force that could destroy empires for only "vanity."

Pascal – and Lucretius, in his own way – anticipated the 19th novelist Stendhal's famous concept of "crystallization." For the French writer, love is a fever that can suddenly seize you. During this fever, one imagines qualities that do not exist in the loved one (Stendhal, [1822] 1965). Crystals only are common stones, but humans give them an artificial value that makes them extraordinary and precious. In the same way, when someone

falls in love, one projects an image on one's loved one that only comes from one's mind, transforming them into someone exceptional even though other people would only see an ordinary person. The concept of "crystallization" reveals that love can be considered a projection of the mind related to the social environment. The following observations will be particularly helpful in understanding the social essence of love.

For Schopenhauer (1788-1866), love is nothing but disguised sexual desires. According to him, it is present everywhere in human behavior. It is the goal of every relationship, the thought of every man, and the purpose of every act. Humans are an embodied sexual desire; they are slaves to their sexual pulsions that dictate their whole life. Schopenhauer sees love only as an illusion built by nature and a mechanism for reproduction (Schopenhauer, [1819] 1966).

When it comes to the idea that sexual desire dictates every human behavior, Freud (1856-1939) and his psychoanalytic findings are the most famous. For example, he coined the concept of "Pleasure Principle" (Freud, [1920] 1961), which is the instinctive seeking of pleasure to satisfy biological and psychological needs (Gay, 2006). To Freud, humans are naturally attracted by pleasure and try to avoid pain. This principle is particularly present during childhood when the infant only obeys the pleasure principle. Infancy is also a crucial period for love and sexuality to develop. According to Freud, romantic love appears to be a "refinding" of what the infants have experienced with their parents. A healthy love relationship would depend on whether an individual could separate from his parents or not (Freud, 1905). Freud's theories are not flawless, and many critics have lamented the lack of empirical research in his work (McLeod, 2018). However, by studying the development of the self during infanthood, he inspired many contemporary psychologists, like Bowlby, who coined the attachment theory.

The theory refers to the emotional bond that impacts our personality, behaviors, and even our learning capacity (Bowlby, 1973). How one bonds with their caregivers during childhood (during the first five to six years) affects how they behave in society and how they deal with human interactions. People with a secure attachment style will maintain healthy proximity to other people. At the same time, those who suffered from insufficient emotional bonds from their caregivers will likely cope with psychic wounds and a lack of security that would impact their relationships (Brogaard, 2016). Thus, the development of romantic feelings strongly depends on one's caregivers' education. This theory can explain why people's view of love varies between individuals; what one experiences in his childhood is unique and makes them change how they perceive love, positively or negatively.

However, it would be incomplete to conclude that romantic desire is only built during the first years of existence and depends only on the caregivers to develop a healthy sense of affection. Love can be seen as a social feeling that grows from the social environment at any stage. Rousseau (1712-1778) may be the first to talk about love's social element. He stated that love is "a factitious feeling built by society" (Blondel, 1998). It is not a feeling that would come from the inner self but something taught by the social environment. Nevertheless, the concept which introduced the social aspect of desire emerged in the middle of the 20th century with French philosopher René Girard (1923-2015) and his "mimetic desire."

Mimetic desire is the idea that desires are built by imitating other people. It means that Nature has no predetermined objects of desire; they are not a projection of our mother or father's memory, as Freud said, but they are created by the entourage in general (Girard, 2001). In reality, the object of desire itself is not the main focus. If one desires something, it is because someone else wants it. Girard calls this *Someone* the "Mediator." It can be external, meaning they are not on the same social level as the subject. For instance, it can be a king, a

tv star, or even a fictional character. On the other hand, if the Mediator is a classmate, a brother, a colleague, or any individual close to the subject, the Mediator is “internal”. Girard argues that mimetic desire can be an infinite source of conflict, especially if it comes from an internal mediation. But it also is an inspiration for a love object. The philosopher used, for example, Madame Bovary, to illustrate the theory. She dreams of a fancy life with the perfect lover through the love novels she has read. In that case, her love novels are the mediator that directed her toward the object, which is the romanticized life she desires. As an extension of Freud’s Oedipus complex[13], the “Mimetic desire” theory has been key to understanding human behavior. Even though René Girard mainly refers to literature, many psychologists and sociologists have conducted experiments on the social aspect of emotions (see Denzin, 1984). They questioned once again the ambivalent question of love’s usefulness in human behavior. Has love a purpose in human societies, or is it only the result of a particular environment? The following section explores the diverse views of romantic love in science.

Romantic love in Social Sciences as the Result of Individualism and Consumerism

The Ambiguous Definition of Romantic Love

One common approach to romantic love that has been supported by Schopenhauer (1819) is to see it as a “trick” from nature to encourage human beings to breed. Sexual desire would encourage people to have children, while love would act as a “glue,” which inspires

[13] Girard has examined Freud’s theory through the mimetic desire in his book *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), Chapter 7. According to Girard, the Austrian psychanalyst went close to the idea of mimetic desire by observing that an infant tries to imitate his father (the Mediator) and desires his mother (the object of desire). However, what Freud never managed to seize, is the uncertainty of the object of desire. To Freud, the Oedipus complex is autonomous, “natural,” and eventually leads to repression. But Girard argues that without the Mediator, there is no desire, and, thus, no repression. Desire needs to be created by an external force, it does not come from the infant itself (Girard, 1977).

commitment and increases the survival rates of the offspring. Recent “hard” scientists have looked into the question of romantic love and sexuality as “natural” behaviors. However, the answer led to even more questions.

Regarding sexuality, several observations show significant variations between the human body and people’s sexual behavior. For instance, the sperm competition theory in humans suggests that our biological body is made for polyandrous sexuality (Stackelford et al., 2015). The human body, both female and male, has adapted for females to have multiple sexual partners. Considering the long history of polygyny[14] and monogamy in the human race, one can discuss whether one’s desires are connected to one’s body and whether they grow independently from our biological “nature.” Moreover, neuroscientists have expressed their difficulties finding specific areas in the brain that activate sexual arousal as opposed to other functional responses (Mouras, Harold, & Stoléru, 2007), leading them to think that sexual arousal mostly depends on the individual. Thus, sexual desire and arousal do not seem to be preprogrammed bodily reactions but are primarily affected by learning and are subject to significant cultural, psychological, and historical variation.

Romantic love has raised even more questions among “hard” scientists. Neuroscientists have conducted various experiments in the 2000s to understand the interaction between the human body and romantic love, but the results have been puzzling (Reddy, 2012). On the one hand, some research shows that falling in love provokes hormonal changes specific to each sex and even sexual orientation (Safron, et al., 2017; Marazziti & Domenico, 2004). On the other hand, Bartels and Zeki (2004) observe that the chemical brain reactions that appear when falling in love are not much different from those of a mother bonding with her child. The human body does not seem to make differences between types

[14] Approximately 85 percent of societies in the anthropological record let men marry multiple wives Henrich et al, 2012).

of attachments in terms of chemical reactions. In other words, the distinction between different attachments is learned chiefly through one's cultural environment. Hence, "hard" scientists have observed that sexual desire and romantic love are not static and preprogrammed "natural" behaviors but involve learning and cultural variation. Even though there are visible bodily reactions, one is taught to interpret some aspects as erotic or romantic. Thus, the question of defining romantic love mostly falls into the field of social science.

However, the definition of romantic love has always been an issue, even for psychologists and sociologists. The word itself contains many significations. Psychologist Kovecses (1991), for instance, found that what people think of the meaning of love depends on the metaphors they link to its notion. Some understand it as an expression of unity ("we are one"), a feeling of insanity ("I am crazy about you"), or even as a food ("I hunger for love"). Those metaphors form a "theory" of love that is specific to each individual[15]. Thus, the making of a universal definition may be challenging. It also shows the diverse meaning that humans put into romantic love.

Scholars of the discipline of "close relationships"[16] have then tried to embrace the complexity of romantic love. For instance, psychologists Hatfield and Rapson (1987) described a series of aspects that occur when one falls in love, including physiological and neurochemical changes in the brain. Thus, love can be seen as a "complex set of feelings" (Brown, 1987). However, it is not only a chemical reaction, and many scholars acknowledge the self-consciousness of love. Solomon (1981) defines it as a "complex emotion-based decision" while psychologist Lystra (1989), also taking into account the unconscious forces

[15] An attentive mind would notice that those "theories" mirror many conceptions of love seen in the previous sections. Seeking unity through love may remind Plato's story of the "Lost Unity", while the feeling of insanity recalls *fin'amor* chanted by troubadours. Hunger for love may also be perceived to be closed to Lucretius' comparaison of romantic love to Tantalus' punishment.

[16] Initiated by Susan and Clyde Hendrick in the 1970s, it is the study of personal and intimate relationships through various disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, Communications, Family Studies and Human Development (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992).

of this so-called decision, refers to it as a "complex alignment of idea, behavior and emotion." In other words, love can be seen as a series of "feeling states, physiological symptoms, and preoccupation of attention" (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). However, one can argue that falling in love is a substantial social dimension. For sociologist Hendrick (1988), it is a "role": a socially defined set of behaviors that includes expectations from society. Sociologist Van de Vate (1981) even sees expressions of love as "policy statements" where two people declare their feelings toward each other, leading to mutual expectations that would follow this statement (fidelity, exclusiveness, etc.). Those attempt to define love through its complexity reveals an old discussion about its universality. If so complex and diverse, can every human being experience love?

Love Only in Individualistic Cultures?

As seen with Plato, what resembles current love existed for thousand years. However, it does not occur in all cultures either. As mentioned above, in Japanese, the word *ren.ai* only appeared in 1870 as a translation for Western books about love (Kimura, 2016), leading to the supposition that romantic love was not prevalent until then (see the previous discussion on the importation of romantic love in Japan).

Yet, research shows that romantic feelings are possible across diverse and heterogenic cultures as long as they share a sense of individuality. Sociologists Hatfield and Rapson (1987) argue that passionate and romantic love can be universal and occur at any age and across all ethnic groups. It may only depend on the sense of self of one particular individual or culture. Indeed, to experience "Western" love, one must live in a culture that strongly emphasizes individuality and self-identity, but also concepts of independence and social mobility (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). In other words, one must live in an individualistic society. Moreover, not only do individuals need to be aware of being a distinct

individual agent, but they also need to disclose inner areas of their privacy to their partners. Kelvin (1977) observed that because self-disclosures make one vulnerable, the feedback received will affect one's self-concept. Thus, mutual self-disclosure may trigger romantic feelings by modifying both the image of oneself and one's partner. This trigger is only possible if the sense of selfhood is emphasized in one's culture.

This supposition has been confirmed by sociologist Solomon (1981), who argued that romantic love is only possible in societies that strongly consider individuality and self-identity. In cultures where pairings and reproductions are not decided by external forces such as arranged marriages, love serves as an "attachment device" that brings people together into mating pairs. Thus, according to scholars from psychology and sociology, love and sexuality mainly depend on one's cultural environment. Through this knowledge, many scholars have conceptualized romantic love to understand the essence of romantic love.

Japan stands in a unique place regarding individualism compared to Western countries. The common opinion tends to view Japan as a collectivist society. Yet, various research shows that individualism has taken an essential role in the life of Japanese people. Takano & Osaka (1999) claims that their perception of individuality is not much different than their American counterparts. Moreover, Japanese people are more likely to perceive individualism as a positive note than predicted, even by Japanese scholars and informants (Ogihara et al., 2014). Another study from Takano & Osaka (2018) suggests that Japanese people are even more individualist than people in the U.S. The misunderstandings toward Japanese individualism may come from its relatively recent history. Ogihara (2018) argues that the post-war period had an essential role in encouraging the demonstration of the self through a higher rate of divorce (Hamamura, 2012), more unique baby names (Ogihara et al., 2015), and an increasing number of small households and people living alone (Ogihara, 2018).

Ogihara's observation of an increasing individualist culture correlates with the popularization of romantic love marriages. As Japan leaned toward individualism, romantic love thrived in human relations, leading to the romantic love ideology from the Post-War period.

Yet, another element has been considered crucial in the development of romantic love in Japan among individualism: consumerism. The following section will argue that the spread of consumption in romance after the War has encouraged the romantic love ideology to thrive.

Consumerism and Social Disparities in Love

Eva Illouz unquestionably is the most influential writer on the subject of consumerism. In her two books (2008, 2012), she has successfully identified the social drives that shape our perception of love through three concepts: "the romantic utopia," consumption in romance, and the class of love. First, she argues that capitalist societies have created a utopia of romance through advertising, the star system, or movies. Although not a new idea,[17] she emphasizes the idea that the meaning of romance itself became enmeshed with consumption, commodities, and technologies of leisure (Illouz, 2008). In other words, love has become a part of our life as consumers.

Illouz identifies that the act of dating appeared alongside the rise in real income of the early 20th century in the US. (*Ibid.*). People started to go out of the family's grip to find a love partner, and consumerism was more and more involved during the process of courtship. Romance found a significant place in the market throughout restaurants, cinemas,

[17] Marx (1976), Fromm (1956), Goode (1966) had already explored the influence of social structures on the perception of love.

cars and other commodities, and sellers started to target young couples through advertising. This system projected a standardized image of love and romance to appeal to young couples.

These images quickly became a goal to achieve in order to succeed in courtship. They presented an unrealistic vision of a successful couple and spread values, such as love at first sight, hedonism, or the idea that anybody can find someone (p.76). In other words, advertising and market created a "utopia" of romance, which was pursued by a new generation of consumers. This is what Illouz calls "the romanticization of commodities"; the idea that commodities acquired a romantic aura through movies and advertising imagery. Moreover, restaurants or cars not only became a romantic object; they ultimately merged into the habit of dating, making them necessary in the act of courtship in what Illouz called "the commodification of romance" – how romantic practices interlock with the consumption of leisure goods and leisure technologies. Offering a ring, flowers, or chocolate are commonly considered a romantic gesture, and these gestures are expected to be part of the ritual of dating.

Of course, every romantic encounter is related to commodities at different levels. Illouz identifies three types of commodification. First, it can be direct when one purchases a product, either transient or durable, like a dinner at a restaurant, a cruise, or a present. It can also be indirect when the romantic moment depends on consumption but is not the direct outcome of purchasing a good, like watching television. Finally, it can be non-consumerist when the romantic moment consists of a walk, talking, or making love. However, even the existence of the latter may be arguable. For instance, a walk in a park may require entrance fees or is funded by people's taxes, making love necessitates paying for contraception, and even someone who wants to go into the forest needs to have a car or pay for transportation fees.

One of the reasons for the prevalence of the commodification of romance is that, according to Illouz, a romantic date can be considered a liminoid ritual. A liminoid ritual, similar to a liminal ritual that applies to religious ceremonies (see Turner, 1967), is a moment of threshold in which social status and everyday life are suspended. Illouz found that people associate romance with moments outside their daily life habits. However, one can wonder if people completely liberate themselves from their social background and social pressure when dating. On the one hand, the concept of the romantic utopia in the media seems quite democratic (Illouz, 2008). As previously said, love is commonly thought to be for everyone, like consumption, which appears to be accessible to all. Indeed, by conducting interviews throughout different social classes, Illouz found that both the working-class and upper-middle-class share a common "blueprint" of romance. Everybody sees a candlelight dinner or a walk on the beach as something romantic. On the other hand, their romantic practices diverge most significantly in cultural activities (p. 250). For instance, upper-middle-class respondents tend to emphasize originality, creativity, spontaneity, informality, and authenticity when it comes to romance. They would have mocked their working-class participants who mentioned "romantic resorts" or "organized romantic weekends" because they feel "manufactured" and "clichéd."

Thus, our perception of love is rooted in our cultural capital. Coined by Bourdieu (1979), it refers to the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers social status and power. Class differences are not only visible from an economic standpoint; they are tangible in our *habitus* and education. In other words, even though media and fiction, through consumption, tend to showcase a "universal," "free," and "democratic" conception of love, our social background educates us to perceive love in a certain way.

Furthermore, this observation does not only apply to our view of love and romance but also to our choice of a romantic partner. In a union based on love, one tends to choose a

partner in the same social class as them. This is what scholars call “homogamy.” One is unconsciously attracted to someone similar to them regarding education level, income, or familial background (Bozon & Héran, 2006). Thus, the choice of a love partner is deeply embedded in one’s social environment.

The concept of homogamy is beneficial in understanding patterns of romantic love marriages and the romantic love ideology. As the choice of a romantic partner is connected to social class and consumerism, and current Japanese marriages are mostly related to the choice of a romantic partner, one can inquire about the influence of those four elements on the romantic love ideology. The historical mutual appearance in Post-War Japan of individualism, consumerism, and romantic love ideology cannot be a simple coincidence and must be considered as a whole. It is through this framework that the present research has been conducted.

Conclusion

By discussing the fundamental characteristics of love and marriage and the various shapes they have taken through the centuries, this chapter attempted to challenge the modern perceptions of love relationships and the Japanese romantic love ideology. Although one may see love-based marriage as self-evident, it is essential to understand how volatile romantic love and marriage are, and how they change depending on individuals’ socio-historic backgrounds.

Contrary to prevailing views, love and marriage are far from being “natural;” they contain moral, social, political, and reproductive meanings. One is taught to feel love and to desire marriage. Today, more and more societies have started adopting love-based unions throughout the world. Even though romance was mainly prevalent in Western countries, it

has spread to many other continents since the 1950s (Cole et al., 2009). Through modernity, love and marriage are more and more embedded together.

The present research on Tokunoshima is representative of the spread of standardized love-based marriage, and the romantic love ideology. Although a remote island with demographic characteristics reminding a “past Japan” (Akagawa, 2005), such as families with five to seven children, Tokunoshima has also adopted modern values regarding human relationships. The present thesis will utilize the methods presented in the previous two chapters to analyze the behaviors in Tokunoshima in the context of the *shôshika* and modern sociological approach.

CHAPTER 3: INTRODUCTION OF THE FIELDWORK: TOKUNOSHIMA ISLAND

This part will focus on Tokunoshima island's characteristics that make the area meaningful for research on Japan's natality. With a relatively high and stable total fertility rate of 2.4 and a population of 23, 400 (MHLW, 2017), its demography is typical of Amami and Okinawa's area. However, it is poorly documented, especially in social sciences, although the area is well known by geologists (Yamada et al., 2003) or biologists (Funakoshi et al., 2019). Thus, finding anthropological and demographic information was challenging as only a few books have been written about the island of Tokunoshima. On the other hand, it makes this research unique in multiple ways.

Indeed, although some studies have observed the common demographic patterns of high fertility between the small islands of Nagasaki, Kyushu, and Okinawa prefectures (Esaki, 2020), there is no significant research exploring the reasons for such a trend. This thesis proposes to explain why small and Southern islands in Japan have high and steady fertility while the rest of Japan still struggles to reach a TFR of 1.5 despite successive governmental measures since the 1990s. In other words, in order to understand the *shoshika* phenomenon, the present research will focus on what is working to encourage people to have children.

Second, the thesis will explore one issue that many scholars have underrecognized: the premarital reasons for the low birth rate in Japan. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the present research will argue that people struggle to find a partner to marry before thinking of having babies. Thus, the low fertility rate is not only affected by fertility issues among married couples, but also by a high number of single males and females who cannot marry. This issue

is known as the phenomenon of the *mikonka* (lifelong celibacy) *and bankonka* (delay of marriage age), introduced in Chapter1. The thesis will give a unique oversight on fertility dynamics by looking at intergender interactions, dating habits, and conception of love relationships that facilitate matches with a love partner.

The first section introduces Tokunoshima island, emphasizing its characteristics as a "remote" island. The second section will present a short history of the Amami Islands and their people. The third section announces the central theme of the thesis by listing the demographic characteristics of Tokunoshima. Finally, the fourth section is an introspection of the author, his strengths and biases as a researcher in a foreign environment, and the research method employed in the study.

Introduction to Tokunoshima as a Remote Island

With 248 km² in area, Tokunoshima is the second-largest island in the Amami archipelago and the 15th-largest in Japan. At a distance of 468km in the south-south-west of the city of Kagoshima, it falls within a humid subtropical climate (Matsuoka, 2021). The typical subtropical aura belonging to Tokunoshima is accentuated by its healthy coral reef, beautiful beaches, and yearly sunshine duration. However, despite those characteristics, Tokunoshima is not famous for being a tourist attraction. Although its geography would make it a decent competitor against other touristic tropical places such as Okinawa or Amamioshima, it suffers from relative isolation in transport. Consequently, this deprivation has prevented Tokunoshima from focusing its economy and infrastructure on tourism, affecting the island's general landscape and ambiance.

The change of scenery may strike visitors who arrive in Tokunoshima compared to other Japanese islands of the same size. There is a genuine feeling of being outside Japan with its rural landscape and the locals' behaviors and personalities. In a sense, Tokunoshima

incarnates the typical image of a "remote" island. However, its characteristics offer several discussions about what applies to the features of a remote island.

In addition to the geographical "remoteness," the particular lifestyles of the locals reveal profound cultural differences from the rest of Japan. All the informants who grew up on the mainland and moved to Tokunoshima recalled the feeling of not being in Japan when arriving on the island. Some participants would only mention the climate, the vegetation, or other sub-tropical elements that reflect the exotic part of the island. However, a more profound feeling comes from Tokunoshima, which expresses the "isolated" and "out-of-the-ordinary" characteristics of a remote island. One woman from the center of Tokyo (50) explained that, although she has traveled and lived in many places in the world (from Hokkaido to rural England and the US for several years), Tokunoshima was, to her, the most different to Japan she ever lived. She felt that rural areas of a foreign country more than 12, 000 km apart were culturally closer to mainland Japan than this island. What struck her the most was how "open-minded" and selfless the locals were toward each other. She opposed it to life in Tokyo and Saitama, where people do not actively help others. A keyword in her testimony was the sense of community that prevails in Tokunoshima.

To illustrate this idea, the same participant recalled when a violent typhoon was expected to strike the island. As a working single mother, she could not be on time to prepare the house against it and was extremely worried. However, when she arrived home, all the windows, doors, and weak points were protected by planks. Even though she never mentioned her worries to anyone beforehand, a neighbor noticed that the house was in danger and sealed the windows himself. This story shows the awareness of people on the island to be "by themselves." The neighbor helped because he knew that there was no one to help and no place to go, which may be a significant characteristic to define what a "remote island" is, which is the sense of being, in fact, isolated.

A second unique characteristic emphasizing the remoteness of Tokunoshima is the presence of two high schools on the island. Unlike rural areas on the mainland or small Japanese islands, children in Tokunoshima know they do not have to leave their hometown to complete their education. The consequences are crucial to explaining the unique dynamics regarding life aspirations and human relationships. The low level of their high school compared to Japan's standards[18] comforts many individuals not to follow the standardized image of a successful life in Japan (*Cf*: good high school = good University = good job, see Chapter 5). Moreover, islanders share the same class throughout their education, creating strong bonds between classmates. The *dôkyûsei* (classmate) relationship is central in the life in Tokunoshima. It is also an important factor in meeting a marriage partner (see Chapter 6). The existence of high schools in such a remote area may determine many unique features of Tokunoshima that will be explored throughout the following sections.

Another element that expresses the remoteness of Tokunoshima is how to reach the island. On paper, it does not seem so much isolated. Four flights a day join the island to Kagoshima, two to Amamioshima, and one to Okinoerabushima. In addition, two ferries a day go across the Amami archipelago to Kagoshima or Okinawa. Coming from Tokyo only takes four hours by plane by transiting in Kagoshima. The jet airliners from the Kyushu capital are usually fully booked, even during the pandemic, and the flight feels like going to another big city. However, the airplane ticket is costly for people non-residing on the island, to the point that a round-trip to Paris may be cheaper[19].

Hence, tourists and other newcomers would prefer to take the more affordable ways by ferry or transiting through Amamioshima. Through those means of transport, one can feel the island's remoteness; spending 14 hours on a ferry or staying one night in Amamioshima

[18] Although there is no governmental and official ranking list, Tokunoshima high schools rank at the lower hand of Japanese ranking system (*hensachi*), the public high school Tokunoshima High School ranks 6376 out of 9700 institutions. https://www.minkou.jp/hischool/school/deviation/1152/
[19] The round-trip to Tokunoshima in Autumn cost 90, 000 yen, and 120, 000 yen in March.

to catch a small propeller plane brings a different dimension to your trip to the island. Moreover, ferries and supply ships are subject to weather, and it frequently happens that the island remains isolated for a dozen days during the typhoon season. Thus, the experience of remoteness through means of transportation is relative. Tokunoshima is easy to access for business trips or local families who can benefit from hard discounts to visit relatives on the mainland. Tourists, however, have to spend excessive time or money to access Tokunoshima.

The fact that locals may travel in affordable ways changes the perception of the island's remoteness. Although they are geographically isolated, most are highly conscious of the rest of Japan. People go back and forth to Kagoshima by airplanes, and most of them (especially men) have studied or worked outside the island in Kyushu, Osaka, or Tokyo. Families also travel to the mainland for tourism. They all speak standard Japanese (*hyôjungo)* more clearly than people from rural parts of Kyushu, with an accent close to Kagoshima city. They are also used to having visitors from outside the island who come for tourism, business, or public servants sent by Kagoshima Prefecture[20]. In other words, people from Tokunoshima are not culturally isolated from the rest of Japan through easy access to Kagoshima and their life experiences on the mainland.

The island itself is also surprisingly convenient, and many facilities in the mainland are also present in Tokunoshima. The central city of Kametsu offers plenty of restaurants, fashionable cafés, "*nomiya*[21]," supermarkets, karaoke, 100 yen shops, and even a mall. The roads in the "countryside" are also full of provisions like the rest of Japan, with numerous gas stations, convenient stores, and iconic Japanese drink dispensers.

[20] Despite this openness toward the mainland, they do not have, however, much access to international connexions. Trip to foreign countries from Tokunoshima are rare as much as foreigners.
[21] Literally "drinking house," it includes izakaya, snacks, bars, and hostess clubs.

Figure 7

A drink dispenser in Shoda, Tokunoshima

Thus, defining Tokunoshima as a remote island depends on many perspectives. From an outsider, its accessibility and geography reveal isolation and exotism in a place that appears very different from the mainland. Still, locals are culturally and physically in contact with the rest of Japan, sometimes even more than rural parts of the main islands. This ambivalence in the island's identity is also present in Tokunoshima's history. The following section will show the complex relations between the Amami, the Ryukyu archipelago, and the mainland.

The History of Tokunoshima

Tokunoshima and the Amami archipelago are known to have an ambivalent identity, stuck between two different cultures. They are indeed a point of contact between the culture of Ryukyu and the culture of Yamato, giving the Amami islands unique traits influenced by both civilizations. This ambivalent identity is, of course, explained by its geographical

location. It is situated in the South of Kyushu island and the North of the Ryukyu archipelago. However, through Amami's history, one can realize how the people on this particular archipelago are neither Okinawaians nor "Yamatoians" in their minds while still being heavily influenced by both cultures. This chapter will explore the dynamics between the three civilizations (Yamato, Amami, and Rykyu) through Japan's history to show the fundamental characteristics of Tokunoshima and Amami's culture.

The earliest proof of human beings in the Amami archipelago is 30, 000 years old and found at Isen in Tokunoshima. But archeologists could not identify whether the population who arrived there was from the North or the South. However, they found fishing tools at Okinoerabujima belonging to the Jômon culture (14, 000 – 300 BCE), which induces a connexion with the rest of Japan's archipelago. Indeed, the Jômon culture was composed of hunter-gatherer societies and was sedentary to some extent. Most importantly, it was the first significant civilization that settled in the Japanese archipelago from Hokkaido to Okinawa (Imamura, 1996). Thus, the population of Amami shares this common point with the rest of Japan. However, one should recognize that the Jomon culture was extraordinarily diverse depending on the location and the period (Rasteiro et al., 2009). Even today, it remains challenging to know the "true" origins of the Jômon people, not only in Amami but also in Japan's whole archipelago.

On another note, nobody found traces of Yayoi culture (that succeeded the Jômon civilization in Kyushu to Northern Honshu) in the Amami archipelago, which may induce the first fracture between people from the main islands and the Amami population. However, archeologists discovered various tools from Amami in Kyushu, suggesting that both civilizations were in contact and shared economic and cultural assets (Kamiya, 1997).

This hypothesis has been confirmed by the documentation that appeared later. Indeed, the name "Amami" was first mentioned in the *Nihonshoki* in 657, which is the second oldest

book in Japan that compiles various Japanese classical histories. The book describes the archipelago[22] as a route to connect the South to Japan and probably used by Chinese emissaries and merchants. Thus, the archipelago seemed to be a valuable link between the different kingdoms and regions in the area. It is also possible that the Amami communities could benefit from these international transactions and were relatively affluent. However, the Amami Islands and their people were not part of any "Japanese" territories until the 17th century, as the following paragraphs will show.

Scholars have split Amami's history into four significant periods. The "Aman.yu" period was Amami's antiquity period, succeeded during the 8th century by the "Ajiyu" period that lasted until the 15th century. The "Nahan.yu" period continued until the 17th century, and finally the "Yamatoyu" which came to an end at the beginning of Meiji's restoration in the 19th century[23] (Kamiya, 1997; Naze City, 1968).

Scholars do not have much information about Aman.yu and Ajiyu periods, only that Tokunoshima was the heart of a cultural and economic network that scrolled through the Amami archipelago. This civilization thrived during the 13th and 14th centuries and had economic exchanges with the Ryukyu islanders and people in Kyushu (Kamiya, 1997).

However, from the beginning of the 15th century, the Ryukyu kingdom began an aggressive expansion of its territory and gradually invaded islands in the North. In 1466, the Ryukyu kingdom claimed almost all the major islands of the Amami archipelago, including Tokunoshima and Amamioshima. The invasion initiated the Nahan.yu period, literally the "period of Naha," the Ryukyu kingdom's capital. Even though the inhabitants could not stop the colonization of their territories, Ryukyu's records have shown various rebellions that

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[22] It is only from the 8th century that the current kanjis of 奄美 appeared in Japanese documentation (Kamiya, 1997). In the *Nihonshoki*, the archipelago of Amami writes 海見島.

[23] The four periods are designated with the following kanjis, respectively: 奄美世, 按司世, 那覇世, 大和世.

occurred up to 1537, and the kingdom had to send punitive expeditions to control the revolts. Those records show that it never was a peaceful annexation of their territory. However, historians and local people agree that Ryukyu occupation was still “bearable” compared to what will happen during the following centuries (Matsuyama, 2009).

The Nahan.yu period ended with another invasion of the Amami archipelago from a different authority: the Satsuma domain. Situated in Kyushu, it was one of Japan’s most powerful forces during the Tokugawa shogunate (1600-1868), which had fought with the Ryukyu kingdom since the 16th century. After finally defeating the same kingdom at the beginning of the 17th century, they negotiated the Amami and Kotara islands while taking the Ryukyu kingdom as a vassal (Sakai, 1968). This event set up the Yamato.yu period, during which the Amami archipelago switched under the authorities of the “Yamato” domain, the former name for “Japan.”

However, to the eyes of people living in Amami, the period is mainly known as the “brown sugar hell *kokutô jigoku*[24],” and the occupation by the Satsuma domain felt more like colonization than anything else. From 1650, Amami islanders were forced to abandon their rice culture to focus on sugar cane (ORRI, 2011). The oppression gradually became stronger from 1777, when the Satsuma domain tried to accentuate sugar cane production on the Amami island. They remove the islanders the right to sell their culture themselves, leaving only the Satsuma domain as the only beneficiary of Amami’s agriculture. Numerous famines occurred, and many died during this period (Matsushita, 1983).

In addition, not only the people from Amami were deprived of their economic activities, but their cultural habits were also significantly threatened. Indeed, many traditions in the archipelago were related to rice farming, and most rituals were based on rice seasons. The forced conversion to sugar cane shook and destroyed an entire part of Amami’s

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[24] Designated with the kanjis 黒糖地獄.

traditions and cultures (Matsuyama, 2009). The Satsuma domain also eliminated the traditional hierarchy of the island. The *Noro,* female priests who led religious ceremonies and took decisions for the community, were harassed and removed from their role as leaders. But the Amami islanders were not assimilated into the Satsuma population either. They were forced to wear clothes in Ryukyu style and could not have a family name longer than one character (a two-character name would look too close to a "Japanese" name) (ORRI, 2011).

Deprived of their culture, identity, and economy, many inhabitants had no choice but to become *yanchu*[25]. Composed of the characters "house" and "human," the *yanchu* were contracted slaves who sold themselves for up to 30 years to wealthy households in order to pay their debts. At the end of the Bakufu in 1850, one-third of Amami's population was *yanchu*, while only 300 households in the entire archipelago were *yanchu* owners (Naze City, 1968). One could still feel the impact of the *yanchu* system today, as high social disparities persist on the island.

The colonization by the Satsuma domain did not go peacefully throughout almost three centuries of oppression, and many riots occurred during the period of the "brown sugar hell." One of the most emblematic uprisings, called the "riot of Intabu," happened in 1864 in Tokunoshima when a farmer was unfairly accused of fencing, and tortured in front of Tokunoshima's inhabitants. The population surrounded the governmental facilities and proceeded to siege the building. As a result, the farmer was released and acquitted, which was considered a significant victory for the peasants against the Satsuma domain. The story of the riot of Intabu – a handful of peasants against a powerful invader – is still known today as a proud moment for the people of Amami. It is said to have inspired the opposition against the American occupation afterward, and people continue to tell it at local schools (Kamiya,

[25] Designated with the kanjis 家人.

1997). It may even have an echo during the protests against the settling of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma into Tokunoshima in 2010.

The fact that the story is still viewed as an essential date for the people of Amami shows the ambivalent identity of the archipelago. While most Japanese positively see the Satsuma domain as a crucial part of Japan's history and culture, it seems that people from Amami mostly remember the cruel oppression they imposed on them. Still, they do not forget that the Ryukyu kingdom also invaded them, although they share the brutal invasion from the Satsuma domain with the Ryukyu people. In an apparent paradox, they also proudly display the house used by Saigo Takamori during his exile in Tokunoshima[26], who was one of the most famous samurai of the Satsuma domain, known for his rebellion against the new Meiji government. Thus, the Amami people's identity cannot be simply assimilated to Ryukyu or Yamato. However, it cannot be considered either an independent culture spared from any influences from the major civilizations surrounding them.

This ambivalence continued even after the Meiji Restoration and the unification of Japan. While most of the country benefited from high economic growth initiated by heavy investments from the Meiji government, the Amami archipelago, newly integrated into the Kagoshima prefecture, could not access any increasing budget. Indeed, the Kagoshima prefecture decided in 1888 to establish the "budget for the independence of Amami," limiting the prefecture's investment in the archipelago (Nishimura, 1993). As a result, the Amami islands' economic growth was twice inferior to Japan's average between 1888 and 1940.

[26] The reason for this display, even though Saigo Takamori only spent 17 days on the island, might be puzzling as he was part of the clan that oppressed the archipelago for two centuries. The image that remains from the samurai in the island is related to his rebellious and masculine spirit rather than his clan appartenance (depicted, for instance, in the character starred by Ken Watanabe in Edward Zwick's movie *The Last Samurai* (2002)). It is a characteristic that can be linked to the Intabu riot or the demonstration against the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

The war period may be the first time the Amami's population was considered entirely "Japanese." In 1931, the government abolished the discriminative "budget for the independence of Amami" and encouraged its people to move to the newly colonized Chinese province of Manshu. Many men from the archipelago also enrolled in the military during the same period (Kamiya, 1997). The father of one informant (74) was one of them. He recalled that this is how his father learned to speak Japanese while his wife only knew the island's language, proof of how distant people from Amami were toward the rest of Japan, not only in their culture but also in their way of communicating with them.

When the war broke out against the U.S., the Japanese army built many fortresses in the Amami and the Ryukyu archipelagos to defend the islands. However, one can assume that the reasons were more practical than anything else. Indeed, the Japanese army may have considered those islands more strategic places to refrain the Allies from progressing to the mainland than Japanese soil that needed to be defended against the invaders. However, when the Japanese defeat became inevitable, generals based in the Ryukyu and Amami did not hesitate to force the population to commit group suicides to demonstrate devotion to the Japanese empire. In other words, the Japanese military would consider people from Amami and Ryukyu as Japanese only during the most practical or gruesome periods. Fortunately for the population of Amami, the archipelago was relatively spared by the war, and "only" 633 persons were counted as dead or disappeared because of airstrikes and group suicides (Nishimura, 1993).

When the U.S. occupation began, people from Amami were once again alienated from the mainland. The American generals decided that the archipelago and the Ryukyu islands would be entirely under American command, making circulation with the main islands almost impossible. People who were enrolled in the Japanese army or sent to Manshu could not return to their homes but clandestinely. As the trip back was hazardous, many

islanders died trying to get to their families, and almost no newspapers or governmental agencies would report the missings (Naze City, 1968). Thus, Amami and Ryukyu were physically and politically alienated from the main islands.

In September 1948, the Showa Emperor stated that the U.S. could have a lease on "Okinawa and the other islands" for 25 to more than 50 years. This message, showing no firm intentions to get back the southern archipelagos under Japanese command, left a strong sense of abandonment in the people of Ryukyu and Amami (Kamiya, 1997). Nevertheless, despite being isolated from the Japanese nation, the people from Amami protested against the American occupation and showed eagerness to rejoin Japan. After a decade of demonstrations led by the famous poet Izumi Hôrô, the Amami islands finally reintegrated into Japan in 1953, one year after the American occupation of the entire nation officially ended (*Ibid.*).

Even though the Amami archipelago suffered much discrimination by the mainland in its modern history, its people in the post-war period reaffirmed their Japanese identity. For instance, people used to sing *shinmin'yô* songs in karaoke, which were usually about the retrocession (Kamiya, 1997). In 1996, the 25th of December became a commemoration day celebrating the retrocession of the Amami Islands to Japan, where local political figures gathered in front of Izumi Hôrô's monument in Oshima.

On the other hand, Okinawa and the rest of the Ryukyu islands stayed under American command until 1972, and the relations with the Amami archipelago deteriorated. For instance, people native to Amami but living in Okinawa lost the right to vote or even got evicted from their homes (Naze City, 1968). While Amami people were considered "non-Japanese" for a long time, they suddenly became "non-Okinawaian." To Nakamura (1984), the two archipelagos have since then had antinomic relations.

Thus, the history of Tokunoshima is embedded with complex relationships with the two bigger archipelagos of Japan. In this manner, the island has developed unique cultural characteristics and interesting demographic trends. The following sections will address them by listing the various patterns that make Tokunoshima appealing for this thesis.

Demography of Tokunoshima

As mentioned multiple times in the previous chapters, Tokunoshima has a high and steady fertility rate quite above the replacement rate of 2.1. Indeed, in 1983, the three districts "*chô*" of the Tokunoshima island had an average TFR of about 2.5. From 1987 to 1992, it slightly increased to 2.6, and the department of Isen even reached a TFR of 3.0. In 2000, the average TFR of the three departments returned to 2.5. In 2017, it slowly decreased one more time to 2.4 (MHLW, 2017). Comparatively, Japan's TFR had steadily dropped from 2.05 in 1974 to 1.26 in 2005 to difficulty reach 1.4 in 2017.

However, Tokunoshima is not the only exception in Japan's archipelago. In fact, it is very typical of all the small and remote islands in the Southern area, from the Amami to Okinawa archipelagos (see Table 2).

Table 2

The 30 highest TFR in Japan between 2008-2012

表 2　市区町村別合計出生率（2008～2012年）における上位30市町村

順位	都道府県	市町村		合計出生率	順位	都道府県	市町村		合計出生率
1	鹿児島県	大島郡	伊仙町	2.81	16	沖縄県	宮古郡	多良間村	2.07
2	沖縄県	島尻郡	久米島町	2.31	17	鹿児島県	出水郡	長島町	2.06
3	沖縄県	宮古島市		2.27	18	鹿児島県	大島郡	瀬戸内町	2.06
4	沖縄県	国頭郡	宜野座村	2.20	19	福岡県	糟屋郡	粕屋町	2.03
5	長崎県	対馬市		2.18	20	鹿児島県	熊毛郡	屋久島町	2.03
6	鹿児島県	大島郡	徳之島町	2.18	21	沖縄県	豊見城市		2.03
7	沖縄県	国頭郡	金武町	2.17	22	鹿児島県	熊毛郡	南種子町	2.03
8	沖縄県	石垣市		2.16	23	鹿児島県	大島郡	知名町	2.02
9	長崎県	壱岐市		2.14	24	熊本県	球磨郡	山江村	2.00
10	鹿児島県	大島郡	天城町	2.12	25	鹿児島県	大島郡	和泊町	2.00
11	鹿児島県	大島郡	与論町	2.10	26	鹿児島県	大島郡	喜界町	2.00
12	沖縄県	島尻郡	南風原町	2.09	27	鹿児島県	熊毛郡	中種子町	2.00
13	熊本県	球磨郡	錦町	2.08	28	滋賀県	栗東市		1.99
14	熊本県	球磨郡	あさぎり町	2.07	29	沖縄県	糸満市		1.99
15	沖縄県	島尻郡	南大東村	2.07	30	沖縄県	沖縄市		1.97

資料：人口動態統計特殊報告

Note. Retrieved from Ezaki, 2020.

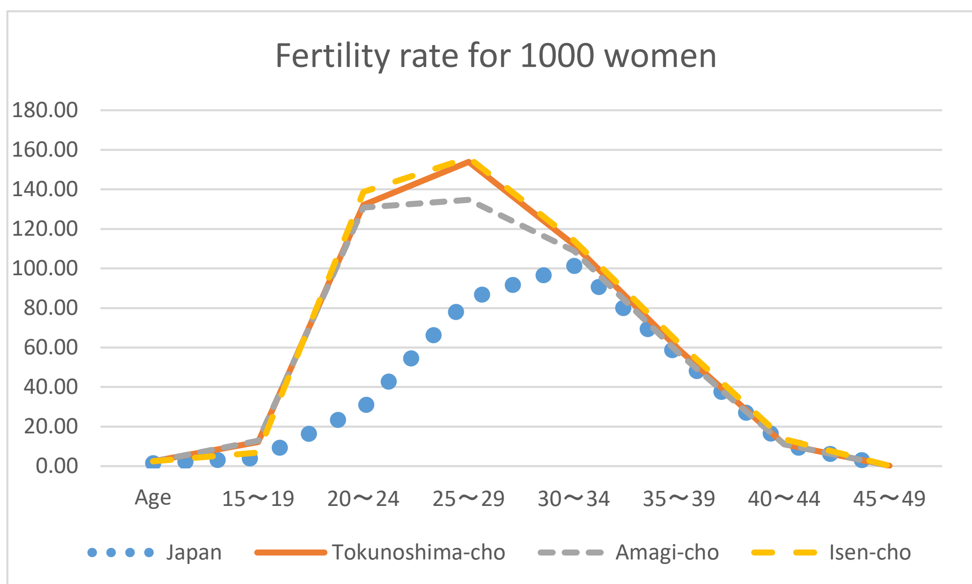
Of the 30 departments with the highest TFR in Japan, 17 wards are considered "remote islands," shown in grey on the table. Tokunoshima's departments are respectively in first, sixth, and tenth positions. Not shown in the table is the TFR of Hachijojima and Mikurajima in Tokyo Prefecture, which reached 2.45 in 2016 (ICDC, 2016). Even though the number of inhabitants, fairly low, makes their TFR negligible, it confirms that a high TFR in Japan is a characteristic of remote islands situated in the Pacific Ocean. However, one should acknowledge that the only areas that reach or go beyond the replacement level are in the Amami or Okinawa archipelagos (with the rare exception of Tsushima and Iki islands in Nagasaki Prefecture).

One common trait between the islands with high TFR is women's age at the birth of their first child, which is exceptionally low compared to Japan's average. Looking at the

birth rate for 1,000 women in Tokunoshima island, one can see that the proportion of women who give birth between 20 and 24 years old is seven times higher, and twice higher between 25 and 29 years old than the country's average. It then rejoins Japan's average for women between 30 and 34 (MHLW, 2015).

Figure 8

Fertility Rate per 1,000 Women in 2015 (data retrieved from IPSS, 2015)



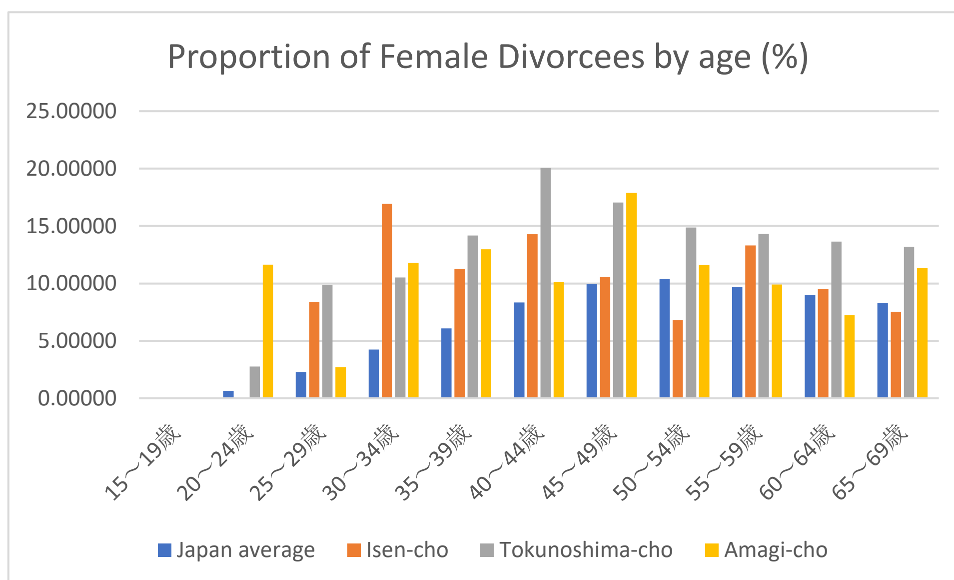
This trend may remind the "old Japan" before the oil shocks in the 1970s, as highlighted by Iwasawa and Mita (2005) and their observation on the marriage age (see Chapter 1). Indeed, some scholars concluded that the high TFR in remote islands is explained because they follow the "traditional" way of building a family: marrying and having babies early in their lives (Akagawa, 2005). Marriages in early life in Tokunoshima are exceptionally high compared to the main islands – 45% of women between 20 and 24 and living in Tokunoshima island are married, compared to only 7% in the rest of Japan. One could assume that remote islands are only a reminiscence of the Meiji to Shôwa eras lifestyle, with a high percentage of arranged marriages happening for women in their early 20s.

However, the results of this research will show that family views, at least in Tokunoshima, are not built around the Meiji-Shôwa traditions.

Divorce is an excellent indicator to prove that family standards have evolved even quicker than in the rest of Japan. Looking at Figure 9, one can see that the proportion of female divorcees is significantly higher than Japan's average in any age group.

Figure 9

Proportion of Female Divorcees by Age in 2015 (data retrieved from IPSS, 2015)



Divorce is indeed widespread in Tokunoshima. In 2017, there were 83 marriages and 45 divorces (Kagoshima Prefecture, 2020). Compared to Japan's number, there were 600, 000 marriages and 212, 000 divorces in 2017 (MHLW, 2017). In other words, while the number of divorce cases represents approximately more than half of the marriage cases in Tokunoshima, it only represents one-third of marriage cases in the rest of Japan's average.

Another data that shows more flexible family behaviors in Tokunoshima island than in the rest of Japan is the rate of remarriage, which is also exceptionally high. Indeed, while 20% of marriage cases in the whole archipelago were remarriages in 2017 (MHLW, 2017),

67% of weddings in Tokunoshima were remarriages (Kagoshima Prefecture, 2020). The average age of remarriage is, however, relatively similar. Men and women respectively remarry at 40.9 years old and 37 years old in Tokunoshima (*Ibid.*), and 41.5 and 39.6 years old in the rest of Japan (MHLW, 2017).

High divorce and high remarriage rates would probably appoint Tokunoshima with flexible values compared to Japan's other rural and urban areas. However, other data show that the island also shares many common points with the main islands. The most significant of all is the lack of people who do not marry at all. Indeed, the low number of life-long celibacy (*shôgai mikon)* shows that marriage remains meaningful in the islanders' lives. 7.9% of women between 50 and 64 were never married in 2015, compared to 8.8% in the rest of Japan (MHLW, 2015). Tokunoshima seems to share a similar opinion toward marriage than the main islands: it is an essential part of one's life that is difficult to avoid.

Another interesting similarity between Tokunoshima and the rest of Japan is their negative natural population growth. While Japan in 2014 suffered from a natural population growth of -0.2%, Tokunoshima island had a negative natural growth between -0.5% and -1.1%, similar to other districts of the main islands (MHLW, 2014). In other words, even though Tokunoshima's TFR is exceptionally high, the population is naturally declining in the same way as in other rural areas in Japan.

The reason is that the island's population is dramatically aging, even quicker than the rest of the archipelago. Indeed, around 32% of its inhabitants are more than 65 years old, against 26% in Japan. The median age in Tokunoshima is also very high: 54 years old, against 46 in the rest of Japan. Finally, the proportion of people between 20 and 40 is only 21% against 30% in the rest of Japan (MHLW, 2015). Thus, Tokunoshima suffers from the same syndrome of an aging society that is affecting the main islands and other developed countries, even despite an exceptionally high total fertility rate.

In addition to negative natural population growth, Tokunoshima, like other rural areas in Japan, also lacks attractiveness for young people compared to the cities (Ezaki, 2020). As a result, some youth prefer moving to Kagoshima, Tokyo, or other big cities to find a job or a family. However, the number of people leaving is far less dramatic than in the rest of Japan's rural areas and does not reach 1% per year. The Isen department of Tokunoshima even manages to attract people and has a (slight) social growth of 0.5 by providing financial support to families. Although people moving to Isen are likely to be families from the other Tokunoshima's two wards and not people from the main islands.

Indeed, Tokunoshima struggles to be economically attractive. First, salaries are too low compared to the main islands. The latest census shows that the average monthly pay is 262, 000 yen compared to Kagoshima prefecture's average of 318, 000 yen, which is already lower than the country's average of 329, 000 yen (MIC, 2015). Jobs on the island also remain lowly qualified with low perspective, as the leading professional activities are in agriculture (25%), construction (10%), and retail business (11%) (MHLW, 2015)[27]. As a result, the island's population will likely stagnate or slowly decrease but will certainly not increase soon.

Thus, Tokunoshima follows many patterns typical to rural regions in developed countries while still having unique family behaviors compared to the rest of Japan. On the one hand, Tokunoshima island suffers from an aging population that struggles to attract new households in stagnating economic activities. On the other hand, the population follows rare family patterns in developed countries. People marry, divorce, and remarry more often than average and have more children than the rest of the archipelago.

[27] Tourism would come to mind as a major economic activity for a tropical island. However, Tokunoshima suffers from strong competitions between Amamioshima island in the North and Okinawa archipelago in the South. It is also thinly served by airplane companies which prioritize the destinations cited above.

CHAPTER 4: FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Methodology

The present research results from a five-month stay in Tokunoshima divided into three trips. A preliminary journey of 7 days was conducted in September 2019, followed by a four-month stay between August and November 2021. Finally, a one-month complementary trip was made in March 2022. I have managed to conduct recorded in-depth interviews of 49 participants (29 women, 20 men) and nine recorded discussion groups between two and five individuals, in addition to the daily, unrecorded, casual conversations that were highly insightful in collecting data.

Although the numbers were not optimal due to the circumstances, I managed to counterbalance the lack of quantity with heterogeneous profiles that gave a broad overview of life experiences on the island. The youngest participants were 21 years old, while the oldest was 74. Twenty-nine were married, seven-teen were single, and one was a widow. Three female participants had their first child between 16 and 17, and one mother had her first child at 36 years old (one man had his first child at 40 years old). Female participants' oldest age to have a baby was 40 years old. The youngest age to first marriage was 16, while the oldest was 40, men and women included.

The average number of children per female participant was 2.11, and the number of children per male participant was 2.8. Eight participants did not have children during the time of the interviews (six women and two men). Eight participants were unmarried, sixteen had experienced at least one divorce, and six had experienced at least one remarriage. All the eight divorced female participants had experienced the life of a single mother on or outside the island. Two had experienced raising a child outside wedlock. The significant differences in life experiences collected during the fieldwork tend to show heterogeneous

lifestyles on the island. By this heterogeneity, the research conducted is relatively representative of the population. However, one could notice that the average number of children per female participant falls short of the current TFR of Tokunoshima. The issue comes from the fact that there is an overrepresentation of people not originating from the island (nine out of the 28 women), which affects the average number of children per woman. By only taking into account female participants from Tokunoshima, the number goes up from 2.11 to 2.83, which is close to its current TFR.

Table 3

Interviewees Profiles[28]

	Sex	age	Occupation	Status	First marriage age	Children	Age at first child	Origin	Number of marriages	Number of divorces
F1	F	45	Midwife	Married	26	4	26	Tokunoshima	1	0
F2	F	28	Housewife	Married	20	3	20	Tokunoshima	2	1
F3	F	50	Public Servant	Divorced	41	2	35	Tokyo	1	1
F4	F	26	Part timer	Unmarriec	0	0	0	Tokyo	0	0
F5	F	33	Free lancer	Married	33	0	0	Kanagawa	1	0
F6	F	57	Public Servant	Married	27	3	27	Tokunoshima	2(with the same man)	0
F7	F	35	IT	Married	24	2	27	Tokyo	1	0
F8	F	31	Secretary	Married	16	4	17	Tokunoshima	1	0
F9	F	33	Music Teacher	concubina	0	0	0	Tokunoshima	0	0
F10	F	49	Kindergarten assistant	Married	24	2	24	Tokunoshima	2	1
F11	F	28	Nurse	Single	0	0	0	Tokunoshima	0	0
F12	F	48	Employee	Married	24	5	27	Tokunoshima	1	0
F13	F	33	Secretary	concubina	0	0	0	Osaka	0	0
F14	F	34	Public Servant	Married	29	2	29	Tokunoshima	1	0
F15	F	39	Public Servant	Married	39	2	27	Tokunoshima	1	0
F16	F	40	Public Servant	Divorced	20	2	21	Tokunoshima	1	1
F17	F	44	Public Servant	Married	27	3	27	Tokunoshima	1	1
F18	F	40	English teacher	Unmarriec	0	0	0	Kagoshima	0	0
F19	F	41	Secretary	Unmarriec	17	3	17	Tokunoshima	0	0
G1	F	45	Public Servant	Married	29	4	30	Tokunoshima	1	0
G1	F	35	Public Servant	Divorced	17	5	17	Tokunoshima	1	1
G1	F	31	Public Servant	Married	18	4	31	Tokunoshima	1	0
G1	F	20	Public Servant	Unmarriec	0	0	0	Okinawa	0	0
G2	F	38	Housewife	Married	35	1	36	Tokyo	1	0
G2	F	26	Guesthouse tenant	Married	24	1	25	Okinawa	1	0
G3	F	27	Housewife	Married	20	4	20	Tokunoshima	1	0
G3	F	28	Housewife	Divorced	20	1	20	Tokunoshima	1	1
G4	M	44	Employee	Married	25	5	25	Tokunoshima	1	0
G4	M	44	City Concillor and CEO	Divorced	20	5	21	Tokunoshima	3	3
G4	M	21	Employee	Unmarriec	0	0	0	Tokunoshima	0	0
G5	M	40	Construction worker	Married	20	6	20	Tokunoshima	1	0
G5	M	50	Employee	Divorced	26	2	26	Tokunoshima	1	1
G5	M	48	Employee	Divorced	35	1	35	Tokunoshima	1	1
G6	M	44	Employee	Married	30	5	30	Tokunoshima	2	1
G6	M	44	Construction worker	Married	30	5	30	Tokunoshima	2	1
G6	M	44	Construction worker	Married	26	3	26	Tokunoshima	1	0
G7	M	36	Construction worker	Divorced	24	2	24	Tokunoshima	1	1
G7	M	41	Public Servant	Married	22	2	22	Tokunoshima	1	0
G8	M	44	Construction worker	Married	27	2	27	Tokunoshima	1	1
G8	M	44	Construction worker	Married	24	2	24	Tokunoshima	2	1
G9	F	27	Secretary	Married	26	1	26	Tokunoshima	1	0
G9	F	27	Nurse	Married	18	2	18	Tokunoshima	2	1
M1	M	42	Employee	Married	40	1	40	Tokunoshima	1	0
M2	M	68	Taxi driver	Married	22	4	22	Tokunoshima	1	0
M3	M	50	Kindergarten director	Married	24	3	24	Tokunoshima	1	0
M4	M	30	Construction worker	Unmarriec	0	0	0	Tokunoshima	0	0
M5	M	63	Photographer	Widow	24	3	24	Tokunoshima	1	0
M6	M	74	Retired post officer	Married	28	3	28	Tokunoshima	1	0
M7	M	47	City Concillor and CEO	Married	23	7	23	Tokunoshima	1	0

This overrepresentation is not an issue itself, as the study is not quantitative. However, it shows a slight bias regarding the "typical" life of people on the island. On the bright side, I had the chance to get a profound overview of the life of people moving to Tokunoshima,

[28] Interviews have been encoded as the following: F: female informant, M: male informant, G: group discussion.

their convenience and their struggle, and a complete comparison with their life on the mainland.

Data collection was produced through two methods. The primary approach was in-depth interviews between 40 minutes to three hours, and multiple sessions with the same informants happened. They mostly took place at the informant's house, in public spaces such as cafés or restaurants, or in the common area of my guesthouse. The interviews were semi-structured with questions that invited self-reflexiveness and open remarks (See appendix). They were divided into seven categories: girls/boys relationships during childhood, dating and finding a marriage partner, marriage and becoming parents, everyday life, raising children, divorce and remarriage in connexion to parenthood, and happiness. In addition to the seven topics, the conversations were adapted to the informants' situation by considering whether they were from Tokunoshima, unmarried, divorced, single, parents, etc.

It is important to note that every name cited in the following pages is an alias. Names that appear in narratives, profiles, and dialogues are randomly selected Japanese pseudonyms that relate only to one's gender. Unless specified in a footnote, every transcription of interviews is translated into English by the author.

The second approach was participant observation. Although the pandemic made public events rare and challenging to get close to people, drinking parties and group activities outside were valuable in data collection. I also worked several times as a farming drone assistant and potato gatherer, giving plenty of chances to have daily conversations with locals. Although the talks were rarely recorded, they were substantially valuable to the research. The absence of the typical patterns of an interview (recording device, agreement documents, or prepared questions) was indeed an advantage in smooth dialogues.

A third method in data gathering may be cited: the analysis of publications on social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Line. Islanders are more active in SNS than

mainlanders and publish a non-negligible number of stories, photos, or written thoughts daily. Although social networks cannot be considered trustable information sources by any means, they give a unique oversight of people's daily interactions and gender relationships. One can learn much about someone by studying what they want people to know about them.

The recruitment of informants was made possible through four distinct persons who generated a snowball effect. Each of them introduced people from similar social backgrounds as follows.

One of the Isen town hall managers provided educated and working female participants. One young mother, met by chance, introduced young, uneducated mothers from Isen and Amagi. The tenants of my guesthouse provided participants living in Tokunoshima city, with a majority who were not from the island. Finally, one man, owner of a house painting company and city counselor, also met by chance, introduced working men from Isen with various educational backgrounds.

Although those four heterogeneous sources were not deliberately chosen and just happened to graciously help with my research, they provided a wide range of profiles that resemble Tokunoshima's population. As a result, they made possible the comparison of the social classes and the analysis of the island's social stratification that are explored in the thesis.

About the Researcher and his Subject

Starting the Theoretical Framework

Pre-research fieldwork of one week was conducted in September 2019, during which I went to Tokunoshima on my own with very few preparations. During this preparative trip, I established two primary goals that were (quite easily) achieved. The first one was to check how islanders would interact with me – a young white male researcher – how easily I could

talk with them about my research theme and understand each other without any issues. People were exceptionally welcoming and did not hesitate to start a conversation with me. They were also very open-minded and pleased to share their experience and opinion about my research topic. Finally, I did not have any particular issue communicating with them, especially with people from the baby-boom generation and younger, as they spoke with me in standard "*hyojungo*" Japanese. It was, however, more problematic to talk with the older generation, as the islander dialect is an entirely different language. Fortunately, most elder ones can also speak Japanese, and the particular conditions of the pandemic restrained me from approaching people over 75 years old.

The second objective was to start building a network with local people and gathering information about the island. In some fortunate events, I could visit two town halls (Isen-chô, to which I went twice, and Tokunoshima-chô) and the local social security office. I managed to gather some data regarding the island's demographic trends and had several improvised interviews with people working in the Isencho town hall – some of them lasting for more than an hour. Finally, I managed to stay in contact with some employees working in the same town halls with whom I visited the island. I also had the chance to work in a sweet potato field for a day and could even stay one night at a local's house after a party and various local activities (snorkeling, watching a bullfight, visiting local monuments). These multiple experiences gave me enough assurance to conduct fieldwork in Tokunoshima.

The reason Tokunoshima inhabitants were friendly to me is not explained only by pure kindness. Of course, people were exceptionally accommodating and helpful, and I desire, more than anything else, to express all my gratitude to the people I met there. However, as a researcher, I must also keep in mind not to draw an "exoticist" image of a real place and try to understand the reasons for those very positive interactions. Many locals are proud of their island and desire to promote it outside the Amami archipelago. Consequently,

most of them were eager to share their life experience with me, a foreigner from a University in Tokyo. In fact, when I arrived on the island to do my fieldwork two years after the preparative trip in August 2019, many people thought I came there after the recent nomination of the archipelago as a UNESCO natural world heritage. International recognition seems to hold much hope for the locals to get more visibility.

Foreign researchers have not explored the *shôshika* phenomenon too much – and even less in Tokunoshima – leaving this task to Japanese demographers, sociologists, and anthropologists. The lack of interest by foreign sociologists and anthropologists, especially those who conduct qualitative studies, might be due to the difficulty in interacting with people in a theme that is, in appearance, a very Japanese issue. This point raises two questions crucial in developing my thesis: "Is it only a Japanese issue?" and "is it challenging to conduct qualitative research on this theme"? This can also be translated into a more personal interrogation: "why would I, a foreigner, should treat on this subject" and "how I am going to conduct qualitative research on it"?

The answer to the first question may be evident for many readers as research is, of course, not limited by borders. However, one may still question the stakes of such research; why not leave this Japanese problem to the Japanese? To whom the reply is simple: low fertility has been no longer a Japanese issue for a long time, and many developed countries are suffering from a similar total fertility rate (Europe: 1.51, Canada: 1.5, Thailand: 1.5, Hong-Kong: 1.1, South Korea: 1 [The World Bank, 2021]). Interestingly enough, among the developed countries with a relatively low birth rate, some have tropical "remote" islands with an above-average fertility rate. It is the case in France, for instance, in which overseas' departments reach an average TFR of 2.4 (with a peak of 5.01 in Mayotte), while its mainland TFR stagnates at 1.9 (INSEE, 2018). Although this pattern does not reflect all

developed countries with tropical or sub-tropical overseas departments[29], the similarity between France and Japan makes it worth putting this research in a global framework. Therefore, besides Japan, the international literature may benefit from what is observed in Japan and its tropical islands.

The answer to the second question will be developed in the next paragraph, in which the advantages and disadvantages of conducting qualitative research in Japan as a foreigner are discussed.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Many foreigners living in Japan seem to have heard or experienced some discomfort when interacting with Japanese locals. One of my French professors humorously told me that some Japanese would stubbornly try to talk to you in English, no matter how good your Japanese and how bad their English is. According to him, the reason is that many Japanese are convinced that communication has to be problematic between them and foreigners. Those interactions should make foreign researchers concerned about completing their fieldwork in social sciences. How to conduct smooth interviews with someone who builds such a wall based on their preconceptions of your "non-Japaneseness?" Fortunately for me, throughout five years living in Tokyo and my time in the field, I rarely experienced this kind of discomfort. Although I have felt treated as a foreigner – it would be pretty ambitious to pretend to fit entirely into Japanese society – I have never considered my identity a handicap in communicating with Japanese locals.

It may be, of course, just naiveté, and I did not feel the discomfort surrounding some interactions even when they happened. However, the main reason I communicate without

[29] For instance, British overseas departments have only a slightly higher TFR than the mainland (The World Bank, 2021).

issue with Japanese people is my appearance and behavior, which fit the image many Japanese people have constructed around the typical *gaijin*: a white male, not too tall or physically impressive, eager to learn about Japanese culture. My Asian origins (my mother is half-Vietnamese) may also give people a sense of familiarity. Even though not everybody notices it, it may help break down the barriers people make toward foreigners, consciously or not. I remember how flattered I was the first time someone asked me if I was *hâfu* (half-Japanese), which I interpreted at the time as a sign that my Japanese skills had improved enough to appear as someone of Japanese origin. It is possible that they may comment only on my appearance, but the fact that people keep asking about my supposed "Japanese origins" shows that I may provide a sense of familiarity despite my "gaijin-ness" aura. In any case, I had never encountered a moment when my status as a foreigner made interaction impossible, neither for my research nor my daily life in Japan.

In Tokunoshima, I could sometimes feel that my status as the "familiar gaijin" even gave me a sense of privilege. People I encountered were happy to show me around and introduce me to their friends for interviews. Even though it sometimes felt like a brand new pet that you show off to your entourage, it helped me conduct research immensely. They would organize drinking parties (*nomikai*) to interview their friends or invite me to lunch. I do not believe people would have the same interest in me if I were a Japanese student from Tokyo. One (Japanese) acquaintance of my age who moved to the island three years ago told me that she could not meet any young people there, to the point she even thought no adults in their twenties lived in Tokunoshima. But from my perspective, people between 25 and 35 years old were the first to approach me and introduce me to their friends of the same age. I could bypass the social wall between islanders and outsiders by using their curiosity toward me. In exchange, I became an opportunity for some local people to improve their social status, show me off on social networks for young people, or be the evening event for drinking

parties. I even discovered that one man was using me to bet money with his friends on how many people I could interview in one month. Although one could feel this method was disrespectful to me, it gave plenty of opportunities to talk and socialize with diverse profiles of men and women between 40 and 60 years old, an age range I struggled to approach at first.

Moreover, my identity was an advantage to engage with people and get quickly into the heart of my research. I could avoid various etiquette and speak freely about personal topics, even with someone not particularly close. I think most people do not feel the pressure of being judged by Japanese norms, letting them develop ideas or explain behaviors that may be embarrassing to talk with a fellow citizen. In addition, the fear of being harshly judged lessens, but the desire to criticize declines as well.

One could cite, for instance, Kondo (1990), who had a deep introspection of her identity as a Japanese-American. Her appearance, "entirely" Japanese, did not match her American education during her fieldwork in Tokyo. She reported that many people did not tolerate her behavior and language skills blunders, as if her Japanese blood should have been enough to teach her how to act appropriately. She had to make immense efforts to behave in a Japanese way, at the cost of changing her identity to the point that she could not even recognize herself in a mirror in a public place (*Ibid.*). I am fortunate enough to enjoy the best of both worlds; not too different that would make interactions awkward, but different enough to pardon my language or etiquette mistakes. When I behaved outside Japanese etiquette, most people went along with it. Sometimes a friend of theirs would explain that what I did or said was rude. For instance, during a drinking party, a man was talking about how he had been raising a pitbull on the island. I was curious about getting such a particular race in Tokunoshima and asked him how much it cost to bring it from Kagoshima. He politely replied, but one of his friends, to whom I am the closest, quickly commented that I should

not ask questions about the cost of things. It was apparently rude to talk about such topics with someone you barely met – something a foreigner like me was not aware of (also, I did not expect the price to reach several thousands of euros). In that case, my status as a foreigner helped me not darken the mood with my indelicate question, and the conversation could go smoothly without reluctance. Thus, I could remain myself all along my field trip.

People on the island were also particularly eager to speak "freely" with me about their life. The closeness of the inhabitants and the danger of gossip put people in a delicate situation when expressing their opinion. The fact that I did not belong to the community lessened the risk of having negative views circulate on the island. Some participants told me straight away that they could tell me anything about their love and marriage experiences because I was doing research and because I was "me," which one can interpret as "being a foreigner."

My gender is also an advantage in conducting research. In a society still highly patriarchal, a male is lesser judged in his life choice. Martinez (2004), for instance, reported that she felt pressure to stop her fieldwork in the Kuzaki village and go back to her duty as a woman, which is supporting her husband. When asked about my age and activities, I could see that some people would make incongruous faces when learning that I am still a graduate student even though approaching my 30s. Still, nobody directly questioned the usefulness of my research compared to a regular worker or told me to fulfill my role as a man. Most of them would understand my presence in the field as an investment for my professional carrier – something still challenging to conceive toward women in the eyes of many Japanese people.

Sure, it would be naïve to think my identity alone as a white male was enough to interact with the locals smoothly. Studying the language and the culture for almost ten years helped avoid "rooky" mistakes that many foreign anthropologists make. Those mistakes

could be related to etiquette, such as not "reading the room[30]" or misanalyzing behaviors uncommon in one's culture, as well as essentializing some patterns of Japanese culture. Indeed, some researchers that are not specialized in Japan tend to simplify many behaviors in their analysis. According to Rosen (2000), the essentialization of Japanese culture has been inherited from the colonial time when ethnography served an imperialist agenda. However, this argument paradoxically shows an essentialization of ethnographic studies. Nowadays, it is less an unconscious wish to make Japanese culture inferior than a simple lack of knowledge paired with preconceptions toward Japanese people. Before going to the field, one should meticulously study the culture with the most local sources to avoid essentialization.

Finally, the last advantage I benefitted which made my research more manageable, was my habitus. Even though only a few cross-cultural researchers consider it essential, social class distinctions surely have their importance. As Bozon & Héran (2006) argued regarding matchmaking, people from similar social backgrounds tend to get along. This observation directly echoes the Bourdieusian concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1979) – the socially ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that make one's identity. The closer one researcher sociologically is to the population they study, the easier it is to settle in. When approaching people, *habitus* is also distinguishable in cross-cultural research and must be regarded when conducting research. Raised by a nurse and a music teacher in a small town in the South of France, I did not feel too much as a "stranger" when interacting with Tokunoshima locals. Most people indeed correspond to the same education level as the environment I grew up in.

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[30] *kûki o yomu*: to sense the mood and knowing not to push further a situation, as Japanese people tend to refuse only by suggesting it. It is part of *Kejime*: "correctly reading the context for what it is and acting accordingly" (Tobin, 1995).

The struggles encountered during the fieldwork mainly were, without any surprise, related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially planned for Summer 2020, we decided first to postpone it to Autumn 2020, as cases were already extremely high all over the globe. The situation in Japan was tough to anticipate. On the one hand, the pandemic seemed under control. The government even encouraged tourists to travel throughout Japan by giving them financial advantages through their "go-to" campaigns. On the other hand, the Tokyo Olympics were postponed, and people, particularly in the countryside, were overly afraid of urban dwellers. When asked about the situation in Tokunoshima, local contacts all declared that the island was not "as welcoming as the usual." Leaving no choice but wait for the circumstances to get better. By Spring 2021, I resigned to hope that the pandemic would not end in the following months. I decided to go to the island when I got vaccinated, regardless of situation in Japan.

The decision was hard, packed with uncertainty and moral dilemmas. The risk of bringing or spreading the virus on an island with many elderly persons with very little access to hospitals and care institutions was concerning. From the beginning of the pandemic until the end of the fieldwork, I doubted whether my research was worth risking people's health. And the whole time, I could not help to feel guilty and selfish about conducting research in this situation. Even though my study may have some social benefit, it would be not very honest not to acknowledge that the field trip to Tokunoshima was, before anything else, to complete my thesis in which I had already invested almost three years.

After receiving my vaccine jabs in France in June, I left Tokyo on August 18th to Tokunoshima, which may have been the worse period to go so far. Because of the spread of the Delta variant, COVID cases were at the highest ever recorded in Japan, and the news began to report overcrowded hospitals. Tokunoshima was not spared, and two clusters were located a week before I arrived.

In addition to my concerns about whether I would bring or spread the virus, I started to worry whether people on the island would even talk to me. What happened once I arrived was, fortunately, mostly positive. Some people would not particularly care about me coming to the island, some were understanding and kindly cautious about my presence, while others showed some distance toward me. It was particularly stressful to never know in advance which category my interlocutors belonged to, which greatly complicated the data collection, but the majority of respondents were considerate and helpful.

However, the questionnaires I made relied on participants being familiar with me, as the theme was relatively personal. But social gatherings were discouraged, making the recruitment of interviewees more problematic than ever. Fortunately, the people managing my guesthouse were not only understanding but also tremendously supportive. They organized many gatherings, such as barbecues, and invited various people to meet and engage about my research. It enabled me to provoke a snowball effect quickly and begin data collection right after the two-week quarantine.

Still, the help I benefitted from as soon as I arrived did not mean I could conduct research as though the pandemic was not happening. It remained tremendously more complicated to meet people than during an ordinary period. One particular hurdle was that every community event was canceled during the time I did research, which was essential for me to meet new participants and to observe the crucial dynamics that happen inside the *shûraku* (neighborhood). The annual festival of bullfight (*tôgyû*), in which almost all the island participates, was also canceled.

Challenges to strengthen relationships quickly appeared, as restaurants, izakaya, and other night facilities were closed, as well as gyms, onsen, and sports facilities until early October. The difficulties were not only in meeting people but also to keep engaging with

them regularly. I felt that many locals were eager to connect with me. However, the island lacked activities to bound.

Finding a place for conducting interviews was also problematic, as most cafés were closed. Even though people did not seem unwilling to discuss with me for in-depth interviews, the lack of open public spaces was an issue. After three weeks of struggling, I decided that in-depth interviews should not be my priority but complement the participant observations, which gave more results than anything else.

Even collecting hard data from town halls became an issue. As receptions were closed, every exchange had to be by phone or e-mail. However, the people were not very responsive due to the ongoing vaccination campaign in which most workers were involved. Although most information regarding demography was available online, it remained challenging to get answers.

Fortunately, after six weeks under the state of emergency, public spaces re-opened, drastically easing data collection on the island. Going to cafés, restaurants, izakaya, and even hostess bars (*kyabakura*) and "*okama* bars" (bar held by travesties) helped build deep and solid relationships with locals and engage in various intimate conversations. The network of informants greatly expanded through those activities and let me interact with multiple people and create a snowball effect from different social groups, ages, education, and origins.

Besides the pandemic, I quickly met an unexpected obstacle to my research: the lack of availability of male participants. Even though talking with men was not an issue for casual conversations and friendly gatherings, they were usually busy — are just not motivated — to participate in in-depth interviews. They would gladly invite me to have a drink with their friends but made it complicated to meet in a café where I could conduct an in-depth interview. The first reason is that men are busy during the weekdays and would rather spend time with their family during the weekend. However, I could still perceive some reluctance to meet me

face-to-face and share their opinions even when they have time. During the rare in-depth interviews, men's replies were usually vague and short. They also struggled to answer abstract questions such as "what is the role of a father/mother," or other questions about feelings and life. This lack of availability and reluctance by men to talk face-to-face reflects a specific norm of masculinity that will be taken up later in the thesis. Thus most of the findings regarding men were discovered through casual conversations without recording, group discussions during drinking parties, or through experiences from women toward men.

CHAPTER 5: THE *KODAKARA* ISLAND: CHILDREN AS AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF TOKUNOSHIMA

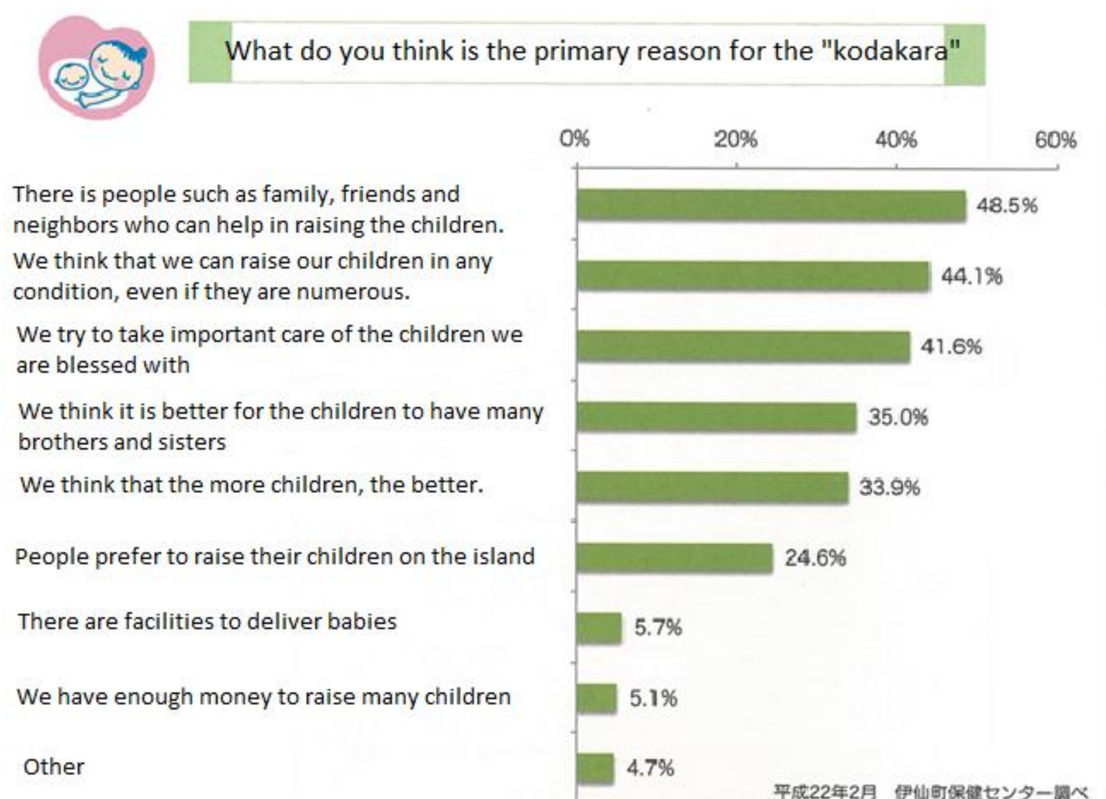
When asking why Tokunoshima has such a high fertility rate, most researchers, journalists, and officials invoke the expression "*ko wa takara*" or "*kodakara*" in English, "children are a treasure." It may leave dubitative the scholars looking to explain why people have more children than the mainland. First, when asked what they think the expression means, only people working in the health department of Isen town would show a visible understanding of the matter by saying that children are an essential feature of Isen culture. The expression has become almost a political slogan emphasizing the town's characteristics, which takes pride in being one of the highest TFR in Japan. On various committee reports, tourism association websites, other papers focusing on the island's fertility rate, and even the local airport, "*kodakara*" links the demography to the idea of a tight community that encourages people to have three or more children (Matsuoka, 2021).

In reality, most participants did not think much about "children as treasures" and would improvise a response about how mutual help from the family, friends, and neighbors facilitates childrearing. A survey conducted in 2010 by the social security center of Isen town on 700 Isen inhabitants confirmed the vague definition of "*ko wa takara*." To the question "in your opinion, what is the cause for the expression '*kodakara*'?". 49% said that it comes from the mutual help you get from family, friends, and neighbors to take care of your children, 44% thought that it comes from the idea that you can raise children somehow, even if they are numerous, 41% replied that it comes from the idea to take special care of the children you are blessed with, 35% argued that it comes from the idea that the more brothers and sisters a child has, the better it is, 34% said it comes from the idea that the more children you have, the better it is (Isen Town, 2010). In other words, the expression "*ko wa*

takara" seems not to have a fixed definition but several meanings depending on the individual.

Figure 10

*Survey About the Definition of "*Kodakara*"*



Note. Research conducted by the Health Center of Isen in 2010.

The second issue with the expression comes from the semantics of the word "treasure." Indeed, comparing a child and a treasure implies an idea of rarity. A treasure ceases to be a treasure if everyone has it. It is supposed to be something that one cherishes and takes excellent care of. From this point of view, children in Tokyo, for instance, would correspond better to the definition of a treasure. Most parents on the mainland invest more time and money in their unique or two children than islanders. Not to imply that people in Tokunoshima do not take care of their children properly; the time spent as a family may even

be longer. However, when considering only the preciousness or rarity, the children of Tokunoshima would not correspond to what we commonly call a "treasure." Also, would not any culture consider their children a treasure in one way or another? It may be challenging to find a civilization that does not take any particular care of its progeny.

Still, one may wonder why this island, in particular, chose to adopt the idea of children as a unique characteristic. Has the expression a meaningful application in the islander's culture and daily life? What is the relationship between children and Tokunoshima? Are children a unique feature of this particular island? The Chapter will explore the elements that make children the center of Tokunoshima's culture and social interaction.

An Environment Where it is "Easy to Raise" Children?

Despite the inconsistency in defining the expression *kodakara*, all informants with children from the mainland, Tokunoshima, or Okinawa agreed that the island is convenient for raising children. They praise its small size, climate, proximity to nature, and helpful communities. For instance, a mother (33) of four children working full-time agreed when asked if the island was easy to raise children.

> Mother: You are surrounded by nature, and there is a lot of freedom [*jiyû*].
> Author: *Freedom?*
> Mother: You know, the family is close, and it feels like you are liberated. When something happens, people come to you to talk with you. You're never isolated. I think that's the most important thing when you raise children. Yes, I think that's the main thing [that makes the island easy to raise children]. (Aiko, 31, four children)

The sense of “freedom,” the closeness of the community, and nature have a tangible impact on parents’ work-life balance compared to the rest of Japan. The size of the island drastically reduces their burden in terms of commuting time. Children can come back home by themselves after school, while parents have more time to take care of daily housework (cooking, cleaning, groceries, etc.) when they live less than 15 minutes by car from their workplace. Children also require less active surveillance as the tightness of the community developed in the neighborhoods makes it so that there is always someone who knows where they are. Despite working full-time for both parents, islanders never expressed struggles in their work-life balance.

Yet, the convenient environment to raise children does not only come from the material benefit of living on a small-scale subtropical island. The local culture helps parents take care of their progeny in unique ways. This section explores the different patterns inherent to the *kodakara* culture.

Children as a Source of Motivation in Life

People in Tokunoshima value the importance of children through their projects in life. To many islanders, children are more than an investment; they are a reason to “do your best” (*ganbaru*). The narrative of Rieko (50), a single mother from Tokyo, powerfully represents the positive view of local people toward children.

In her 30s and working as a public servant, she fell in love with Tokunoshima after a professional trip. She decided that it may be the place to realize her long-time project of having her farm. She then left her job and her boyfriend in Tokyo and moved to Tokunoshima to set up and have a new life there. However, while preparing for her trip, she learned she was pregnant with her ex-boyfriend. Worried about delivering a baby alone with no job and no entourage, she contacted her acquaintances on the island to tell them that she

had to postpone her move for an indefinite period. What they responded to the news that she was pregnant made her realize how people in Tokunoshima consider children an essential part of life.

First, their reaction on the telephone was a thrilled "congratulations." Even though she was unfamiliar with them, they all seemed genuinely happy for her. They saw the arrival of a child as good news, no matter her precarious situation. Second, they did not seem to understand why she had to postpone her move to Tokunoshima because of pregnancy. They encouraged her to go to the island while pregnant and have the child there.

Slightly doubtful and worried about delivering a baby on her own in a precarious professional and economic situation, Rieko still reconsidered the idea of not postponing her move and asked other islanders. After discussing it with several local people, they all assured her that it was no problem for her to come to the island in her situation. She followed their judgment and moved to the island without a job or boyfriend while pregnant.

Sixteen years have passed, and Rieko is now the owner of a growing animal farm, a house she designed and built "herself," and a single mother of two girls[31]. Even though she admits that there are many challenges and life can be demanding, she considers her "adventure" a virtual success due to the immeasurable support she has been benefitting from islanders.

Her story is representative of the island's view toward children. First, it reveals the "*nantokanaru*" spirit. People would privilege having children in a precarious situation rather than not having children at all. It also shows how islanders link femininity to bearing children: because Rieko was a mother, she could benefit so much from the help of the islanders. The following sections will explore those two elements in more detail. For now,

[31] From two different pregnancies.

let us focus on another characteristic of the "*kodakara*" expression: how children are a source of motivation to achieve goals in life.

Indeed, in the eyes of Rieko's acquaintances, the fact that a child was coming in the middle of her project to start a new life was the opportunity to try hard (*ganbaru*) to make it work. They took it as good news because, instead of a burden, a child may be the catalyst to work hard in your life. This view toward children dominated many interviews with women and men. When asked about the merits of having children, a vast majority replied that "having children makes you want to do your best (*kodomo ga irunara, ganbareru*)." To islanders, children give the will to persevere in life.

Another narrative perfectly illustrates this point of view. Aiko (33) has been a full-time worker for six years and a mother of four children. Although she has been working part-time jobs for ten years since becoming a mother, she praised the numerous benefits of working full-time, despite the challenges of taking care of her children simultaneously. When asked if she would have worked full-time if she had no children, Aiko replied that she would not have the "honest" life she has now if not for her children (*matomoni ikitenai*).

This observation may be an initial element in understanding the expression "*kodakara"* in Tokunoshima. A treasure is something precious enough that you fight for it. In the case of Aiko, her children give her the motivation to work full-time in order to take better care of them.

> I want to buy things my children want on the go or delicious food without having to think hard about the money. […] Having children gave me the strength [to work full-time]. (Aiko, 33, four children)

Because of the children, she gets the energy and the will to work hard. On the other side of the spectrum, islanders may feel pressure to have many children. If it makes you a

"hard worker," it may mean that people with no children are considered unmotivated in life. As Aiko explained, she would probably not live an "honest (matomo)" life if she did not have children. Although she did not explain much about what she meant, one can easily guess that she sees a childless life as a selfish and lazy existence.

This point of view directly echoes the famous expression created by Yamada (1999), "single parasites (*parasaito shinguru*)," that encompasses the whole Japanese society. Yamada observes that many young adults of the past twenty years stay at their parents' homes instead of marrying and moving into their own place. While still benefitting from a full-time income, they use it to consume goods instead of "investing" in a family, and rely on their parents for the daily expenses. According to Yamada, as they use their money only for themselves, they do not actively contribute to society. Moreover, they are one of the reasons for the existence of the *bankonka* phenomenon (*Ibid.*).

In Tokunoshima, the "single parasites" are a minority, but may feel the same criticism as mainlanders. The pressure to marry and have children may be direct. For instance, one female informant who corresponds to the definition of the "single parasite" (28 years old, single, living with her parents, and working full-time) declared that her grandparents would always ask her when she marries anytime they met. Another male participant (44) confessed that he had severe difficulties having a baby with his ex-girlfriend. He became the target of mockery by his friends who called him "seedless (*tane no nai*)." However, the pressure is usually indirect and takes the form of normality and mimesis. People want to marry and have numerous children because their entourage is married and has multiple children. Marrying and having children are folkways, as defined by Sumner (1979), and represent what "should" be done. In Tokunoshima (and many parts of the world), singlehood and childlessness are "abnormal" situations.

Moreover, those direct and indirect pressures are not only targeting single and childless men and women. It also affects married people with only "a few" children. One female participant (45, with four children) explained that young couples are usually incited by their entourage to have more children.

> There is the influence of the community, we say [to families with a few children]: two children are not enough, have more! (*kodomo futari ja sukunaiyo, motto uminasai!*) (laughs). (Yuko, 45, four children)

Interestingly enough, the participant did not see this "influence" as a negative pressure by the community; it was a statement about the island's norm toward the number of children. People with no or only a couple of children are not explicitly harassed. However, they may feel like a minority and outside the norms defined by the community.

One should also note that social reproduction is crucial in understanding how large families in Tokunoshima have become the norm. People who grew up in households with many brothers and sisters also want their children to be surrounded by numerous siblings. Many participants expressed their will to have more than three children by seeing small households as having a negative impact on the children. They would call children from those households "*kawaisô* (cheerless, comfortless)" or "*sabishii* (on their own, lonely)." They usually directly relate those comments to their childhood experience, during which they grew up with at least three other brothers and sisters. A period that they qualify as "*nigiyaka* (animated)," in opposition to the "lonely, *sabishii*" life of families with only a couple of siblings.

Thus, having more than three children in a household is viewed as benefitting both parents and children. For parents, having many kids gives them the motivation to work hard and live an "honest" life. For children, it lets them grow up in a social environment in which

they do not feel by themselves. On the other hand, as previously mentioned, it may pressure single men and women and "small" families to fit into the local norms of having more than three children. They may be considered "single parasites" or lazy parents for not taking the opportunity to "try hard (*ganbaru*)" to raise more than three children.

Yet, having numerous children presents various challenges. One, in particular, is to offer them the opportunities to build valuable skills for their future. Having more than three children reduces the resources that parents can invest in their education. Living on an isolated island also refreins the children to adapt to life in economically dynamic areas on the mainland. In other words, parents may have to sacrifice their children's careers over the comfortable life on the island and abandon the hope of overcoming their social conditions. The following section will explore the parents' aspirations for their children's future within a stratified society.

Happiness vs. Career: the False Dilemma in Raising their Children in Tokunoshima

As explored above, when parents from the mainland describe their experience raising their children on the island, they usually affirm similar observations: Tokunoshima is tremendously convenient. Besides the tight community, there is nature, warm weather, short distance travel for parents to be at home, classes with less than 20 students, active teachers, and plenty of occasions to develop their social skills with children and older generations. For instance, one mother from Tokyo reported going to Tokunoshima as one of her daughters was a victim of bullying at her school. She heard that the cities in Tokunoshima economically supported households from the mainland willing to raise their children there. She decided to move to Amagi, the Northern part of the island until her daughter finishes middle school. She noticed quick progress in her daughter's ability to fit in and her development of social skills. Within six months on the island, she made new friends and could continue her

education normally. Many parents from the mainland expressed similar observations with improved social skills and activeness. The island is not only convenient for raising children; Tokunoshima is suitable for shaping happy individuals.

However, some parents also raised many concerns about the education and cultural level on the island. Despite the comfortable conditions to raise their children, they deplore a lack of stimuli in their everyday lives. Indeed, activities do not vary much in a small and isolated place. Travelling is hard, and outdoor occupations are limited to beach activities. Schools also cannot offer a vast range of tasks with only a handful of students in each class. In those conditions, it may be challenging to escape from boredom.

Some parents lamented the lack of cultural stimulation for their children as well. Although local municipalities make considerable effort to engage children in the local culture, with classes that teach Tokukunoshima's history and languages, they may have to do it at the expense of the knowledge of the outside world. Many parents worry their children may not fit in the big cities of Japan.

Finally, it is challenging for parents to make their children focus on their homework. According to some participants, the education level is relatively low. As many jobs only require technical degrees, students do not value homework and school much. An English teacher from Kagoshima explained this lack of motivation to the presence of high schools on the island. As every level can enter the high schools in Tokunoshima, they do not have to study hard to graduate. In addition, students know that the island's high schools cannot grant access to prestigious universities. Consequently, they do not feel the need to focus on their homework. The low level in Tokunoshima's school is one more element that may isolate their inhabitants from the rest of Japan. Many interviewed parents worry that people who have an education in Tokunoshima may struggle to adapt to the life of the mainland while pursuing or after finishing high school.

Still, most locals seemed philosophical about Tokunoshima's condition in raising children. Even though their career and future are limited, they accept sacrificing them to benefit their well-being. As long as children are happy, it is not a problem if they do not pursue a wealthy career. Yet, parents from the mainland seemingly have a dilemma. They may stay in Tokunoshima and have fulfilled kids who will have difficulties fitting in anywhere else. Or they may leave the island and have lesser conditions to raise their children, but with better chances to thrive in a career. However, this dilemma is, in fact, an illusion. It hides a societal issue that is accentuated in Tokunoshima: social reproduction (Marx, 1967), in which the cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) has a crucial impact on the children's future.

Indeed, despite the standard view that the island will limit children's education and cultural level, I have met some brilliant youngsters and other people originating from Tokunoshima who managed to fit into Japan's education system. Several participants have their children currently studying at universities in Tokyo, and one informant was a graduate from one of the top universities in the capital. Many islanders also master arts and technics rare in Tokunoshima. For instance, the daughter of one of my acquaintances is a brilliant high school student. At 14 years old, she can already communicate in English, play Chopin's Fantaisie Impromptu on piano, and practices Japanese calligraphy and *shamisen* after school. I also interviewed through video conference a young adult woman who grew up in Tokunoshima and is now a qualified saxophonist teacher in Paris. She is not only a talented professional musician; she also perfectly speaks French and shows openness toward foreign cultures. Besides those direct encounters, many people mentioned relatives living abroad in various domains. Although rare, islanders can overcome the cultural and material limits naturally created in this isolated environment.

Thus, the position regarding education in Tokunoshima drastically varies. On the one hand, some parents are satisfied with letting their children grow up on the island. On the other hand, many parents, especially from the mainland, worry about the children's lack of cultural openness and stimulus to develop in a globalized world. Yet, I have met or heard about enough people who succeed in the mainland's education system and in foreign countries to see that this openness is possible. A sociological analysis of the informants is necessary to understand this apparent paradox. Indeed, the lack of openness, the worries about this lack, or the ability to overcome this lack are deeply related to participants' social backgrounds.

Three categories of parents can be observed to whom the opinion is directly linked to their conditions.

The first group concerns local islanders with low educational backgrounds. It includes men and women who finished their education after middle school or high school. Their professional activities revolve around the primary and secondary sectors. They are likely the most attached to Tokunoshima, and most never left the island for an extended period. Their leisure revolves around typical activities on the island, such as fishing, raising a fighter bull, pachinko, or watching and betting on bullfights. They reported not feeling any competition at school and not giving importance to studies, except in sports. Consequently, they admit not pushing their children to do their homework and prioritize their "happiness" over their professional careers. Most do not seem worried about their future, nor do they deplore any school-level issues from the local schools.

The second group includes islanders and mainlanders with average educational backgrounds. They are parents with technical or undergraduate degrees who experienced life outside the island. Their hobbies remain around typical Japanese activities on the mainland, such as hula and traditional Japanese dance, kendo, "Pokemon Go" with friends, etc.

Although they describe the island as ideal for raising children, they are the most concerned about the lack of outside stimulus. They tend to orient their children toward a professional career by giving importance to homework. Most of them will eventually study at universities or technical schools on the mainland.

The final group of parents on the island concerns the higher educated class. They have a graduate degree or are from households with high cultural capital, such as the director of a private school on the mainland, classical music teachers, professional photographers, etc. Their hobbies focus on arts and sciences, such as calligraphy, music, snorkeling, or whale watching. Although they do not necessarily prioritize a professional career over the happiness of their children, they push them to study the most they can and stimulate them in domains close to their center of interest. Because they have themselves enough knowledge – or know people who have the ability – to teach and open their children to rare and advanced hobbies, they do not see the island as a rigid limitation in children's development and education. However, most children from this background will likely leave Tokunoshima after middle school to go to more renowned establishments on the mainland.

Thus, the apparent dilemma of sacrificing "happiness" over a career and vice-versa reveals a stratified society accentuated by the island's isolation. People with low education and cultural capital will struggle to elevate their conditions. Not only their education level will stop them from finding well-paid jobs that are usually on the mainland, but their social background may be an obstacle to fitting in outside Tokunoshima. For instance, a young participant (male, 21) quit his hairstylist school in Kagoshima as he could not conform to Kyushu's "culture." He then returned to Tokunoshima to work in a construction company that did not need diplomas. Raised on the island, he "chose" to sacrifice his career for "happiness" by staying close to his homeland. However, his "choice" was strongly limited by his social background.

People with average education levels and cultural capital are the most subject to the "dilemma." Knowing the advantages and limits of Tokunoshima and the mainland, and having the qualification and the social capital to fit in, they can "really" choose where to live and what to sacrifice for their children. However, they do not have the ability to overcome those limits. For instance, the mother who came with her harassed daughter is aware of the lack of stimulus on the island and the low level at school. Still, she does not see alternative ways to solve the issue and is ready to prioritize her daughter's well-being over her education level.

People with higher education levels and cultural capital are the only ones who manage to overcome the lack of stimulus on the island. One mother with a master's degree and originating from Tokyo – the mother of the 14-year-old pianist cited above – gave a representative explanation of Tokunoshima's social stratification.

> As I was forced to believe high-level education would be a promise to the future, it is a bit difficult to see someone feeling comfortable without making efforts, but at the same time, when I see those families helping each other with lots of kids, living close with three or four generations, I wonder what should be true happiness[32]. (Rieko, 50, two children)

Although she does not talk in terms of social groups, she sees on the island a distinct way of thinking about education and happiness that she is not used to. despite not necessarily agreeing, she understands the value of having an education without any means of production. But the most interesting is how she overcomes the lack of stimulus for her daughter.

> I mean, actually, there are a lot of lessons taught by highly skilled lecturers and instructors such as shamisen, swimming, karate, piano, and so on. They

[32] The interview was conducted in English.

> can be comparable with the ones or even superior to those in the middle of Tokyo. I'm quite confident on it as I have some experiences in other areas including Tokyo, though this is not necessarily the case for the most of parents in Tokunoshima, I guess.

This informant has not only the tools – the social capital – to find cultural and social activities on the island; she also has the knowledge – the cultural capital – to judge the quality of the teachings. However, she is aware that her ability to understand and value those activities is rare in Tokunoshima. Thus, she is confident in giving her daughter optimal stimulus and education even though the island does not seem to offer it at first glance.

Thus, overcoming the island's isolation regarding education and professional career depends on social class. Social and cultural capitals are crucial in determining the ability to adapt outside Tokunoshima. Despite the optimal environment for raising children, islanders are subject to social stratification in the same way as mainlanders. Yet, the next section will demonstrate that it does not significantly impact the number of children per household. Indeed, despite significant social inequalities, families from various backgrounds have more than three children. In other words, the *kodakara* culture overcomes not only the stratified barriers of the society; it ignores the material hurdles of low-income households. It seems to have universal characteristics in which anyone can support large families.

Still, a culture firmly focused on natality that privileges large families is not enough to materialize the ideal of having more than three children. As discussed in Chapter 3, Tokunoshima is part of one of the poorest regions of Japan. The following section explores how households support their children with limited income.

The "*Nantoka Naru* Spirit": Managing a Large Family with Limited Resources

When asked whether they felt economic pressure to raise children, most participants would confirm that they are sometimes worried about education fees, their children's future and health, or how to make ends meet. Still, it does not refrain them from having a large family with more than three children. Two answers would usually come out regarding this unusual number of children in Japan. First, many parents argued that there are no additional hurdles to having children after the third. When a third, fourth, or fifth child arrives in the family, the older ones are already big enough to care for themselves properly and help their siblings in everyday life. Parents may also utilize clothes or equipment the older ones do not need anymore. Hence economy of time and money. Second, many parents replied with an iconic expression that symbolizes Tokunoshima's way of living: "*nantoka naru*."

Roughly translated as "we'll manage somehow or another," the expression shows the islander's calm and confidence to tackle issues as they come. Moreover, it reveals how having children comes above any future worries that may happen in life. The priority for islanders is to have children, and only then would they solve economic and material issues as they appear. They seem to have an opposite view toward children compared to people on the mainland, who would consider having children only if the appropriate conditions are met (Fuchu, 2016). The last section will further explore ideals and expectations toward children, but it is crucial beforehand to understand how islanders manage to concretize the "*nantoka naru* spirit." The following section will explore why people in Tokunoshima perceive that raising children is more manageable than on the mainland.

Grandparents as "Free Electrons": A Crucial Help for Large Families

Various possible variables may positively impact the fertility rate in Tokunoshima. Yet, despite several promising hypotheses, several counter-examples called the most common conjectures into question.

A first assumption may be that women with many children were the ones who married earlier in their life without divorcing. Interviews during the first weeks in the field contradicted this hypothesis: one woman with four children married and had her first child at 30 years old, and one with three children married, divorced, and remarried. Thus, the variable was relatively weak. Even though there are correlations between the age of marriage, stability of marriage, and the number of children per woman, they are not as strong as imagined to explain the existence of families of three to seven children (see Table 3).

A second hypothesis was that education level, social classes, or professional activities impacted the TFR. Women with low education levels, or on the opposite, from a privileged upbringing, would have more children than others. This time, no correlation at all was found between those variables. Even though I have not interviewed university graduate women on the island (who are most likely to live on the mainland), women with relatively high education, such as several technical school diplomas and skilled jobs, have as many children as women with no qualifications (see Table 4).

Table 4

Female Participants Sorted by the Number of Children

Sex	age	occupation	Education	status	First marriage	Children	Age at first child
F	48	Employee	College degree	Married	24	5	27
F	35	Public Servant	Public servant degree	Divorced	17	5	17
F	45	Midwife	Nurse and public servant degree	Married	26	4	26
F	31	Secretary	Highschool	Married	16	4	17
F	45	Public Servant	Public servant degree	Married	29	4	30
F	31	Public Servant	Public servant degree	Married	18	4	31
F	27	Housewife	Highschool	Married	20	4	20
F	28	Housewife	Highschool graduate	Married	20	3	20
F	57	Public Servant	Public servant degree	Married	27	3	27
F	44	Public Servant	College degree	Married	27	3	27
F	41	Secretary	Highschool	Unmarried	17	3	17
F	50	Public Servant	Master degree	Divorced	41	2	35
F	35	IT	College degree	Married	24	2	27
F	49	Kindergarten a	Highschool	Married	24	2	24
F	34	Public Servant	College degree	Married	29	2	29
F	39	Public Servant	College degree	Married	39	2	27
F	40	Public Servant	College degree	Divorced	20	2	21
F	38	Housewife	Highschool	Married	35	1	36
F	26	Guesthouse te	Highschool	Married	24	1	25
F	28	Housewife	Highschool	Divorced	20	1	20
F	26	Part timer	College degree	Unmarried	0	0	0
F	33	Free lancer	College degree	Married	33	0	0
F	33	Music Teacher	College degree	concubinag	0	0	0
F	28	Nurse	Nurse degree	Single	0	0	0
F	33	Secretary	Highschool	concubinag	0	0	0
F	40	English teache	College degree	Unmarried	0	0	0
F	20	Public Servant	Highschool	Unmarried	0	0	0

Note. The profiles of female participants of the present research show no correlation between their education history, professional activity, age at first marriage, age at first child, and the number of children they have. Only their origins (whether they are from Tokunoshima or not) seem to affect the number of children, with various exceptions.

Yet, one common characteristic that shows among all women with three children and more quickly appeared through the interviews: the presence of active grandparents in raising children. Indeed, all the participants with many children stated that their own parents were actively helping in raising their children. On the opposite, families who do not have access to their grandparents' help are more likely to have two children or fewer. In other words, the

grandparents' participation in raising the children of one's household considerably impacts the number of children.

Although statistics regarding the grandparents' activity in childrearing were not conducted during the present research, informants with four to seven children all recognized substantial help from their parents or their partner's parents. For instance, a mother of five children (Fumiko, 48) showed gratitude toward her mother-in-law.

> Me: What did you feel when you learned you were pregnant?
> Fumiko: Well, first I was like: "it happened!" (laughs)
> Me: You felt happiness?
> Fumiko: I wanted children, so of course, I felt happy.
> Me: Did you have any worries?
> Fumiko: No I don't think I felt worried at all.
> Me: Why is that?
> Fumiko: Well, I knew my mother-in-law was here to help, she was very nice to me.
> Me: Is it normal that the parents help you to raise children?
> Fumiko: Yes, it's very ordinary. (Fumiko, 48, five children)

Another mother of four children (Saeko, 31) also describes the emotional support she could benefit from her parents.

> Me: Did you get help after having your children?
> Saeko: Yes, a lot.
> Me: From who?
> Saeko: From my parents.
> Me: What kind of help did you get?
> Saeko: Everything! (laughs) You know… how to deal with your emotion during and after pregnancy. My parents often asked me how I was doing and advised me to feel better. And, of course, they bathed the children, among other things. (Saeko, 31, four children)

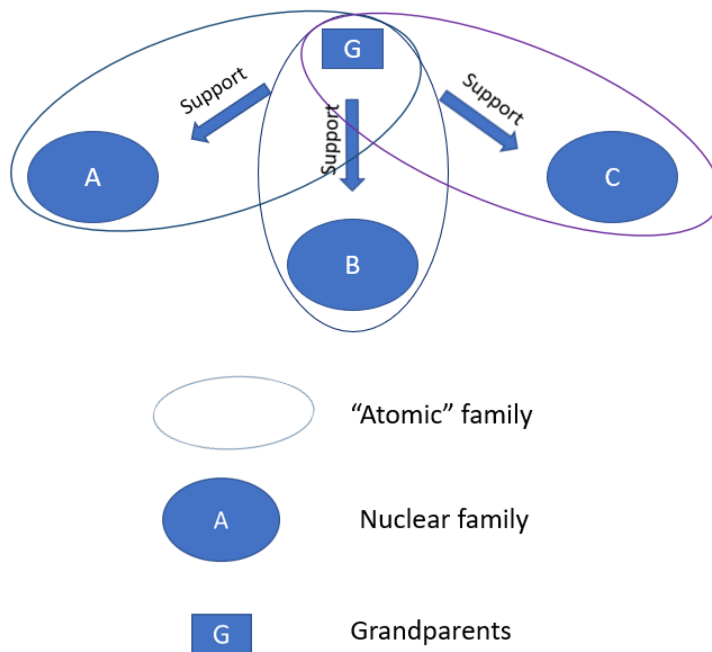
Grandparents have an active part in childrearing that goes beyond material help. They may interact at an intimate level with their children or children-in-law[33].

Yet, households do not live in an extended family *per se*, and most families are nuclear. Thus, the grandparents do not usually live with the parents and grandchildren. They act as assistants in raising the children without belonging to the household. The island's small size makes quick travels easy for them to come to their sons' houses and support them rapidly. Hence, they are, in a sort, the "free electrons" of the nuclear family. One could even continue the analogy of the physical properties of the matter by making Tokunoshima's families "atomic." The "atomic" family would be composed of the nuclear family (nucleon), helped (surrounded) by the grandparents (the free electrons). However, what differs from the physical characteristics of the atom and its analogy is that those free electrons do not revolve around only one nucleon. Grandparents interact with every other nuclear family of the same family, such as aunts, uncles, and cousins.

[33] Although women were more than inclined to recognize receiving help from their parents or in-laws, no male informants gave similar information. The reason may be pride, and because men do not have an active part in daily childrearing (except when it concerns their grandchildren). See following section on fatherhood and masculinity.

Figure 11

The "Atomic" Families in Tokunoshima



The grandparents' support dramatically varies depending on households, their needs, and their abilities to provide. It can be economic support, grandchild caring, material support (giving unused furniture, clothes, cooking for the family), etc. It can also be some land on which the nuclear family can build a house or directly a home to live. For instance, one informant lives in a secondary house on her parents' property. It is a convenient and cheap way for the grandparents to take care of the children when the parents are busy. They come almost daily to play with the grandchildren, help the mother with the housework, and check if there are any issues they may assist with. They may also offer a job to their child or share the head of the family's company. However, despite their closeness and the daily life they share with them, they do not commit "full-time" to the particular household, and their responsibilities toward their grandchildren are limited. Hence, the analogy with the free

electron: although they are present in the daily life of their children and grandchildren, they are not part of the household as in an extended family.

Their help may also drastically vary according to the household. On an island on which children are numerous, it is expected that the grandparents have to assist numerous homes. Thus, they have to assist several families simultaneously. They also have to choose who to prioritize among their three or four married children who have a new family. The grandparents' help is not equal in any sort of way. In the same genealogy, some children receive immense support, while some are entirely autonomous. The prioritization depends on factors such as income, time, or room to care for their progeny. For instance, when one household lacks money for lodging, the parents may offer land or directly contribute to purchasing a house. When the parents work full-time and do not have time to take care of the children, the grandparents may host the children, cook dinner, bring them to the park, etc.

But the grandparents' help is not necessarily related to the needs of one's child. The sex and place also profoundly impact who the grandparents assist. Married daughters, for instance, are usually given less priority. Even though most marriages are neolocal, the newlywed couple adopts the husband's name. Maybe as a reminiscence from the virilocal traditions, the families consider that the bride is now part of her husband's. Consequently, the grandparents usually support their sons' households. They rely on their son-in-law's family to assist their daughters in need[34].

Sons and daughters who left the island also received less assistance than those in Tokunoshima. The grandparents cannot help the families living on the mainland the same way they assist those on the island. Although they may send money or material help, the

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[34] Some unions are matrilocal, or neo-matrilocal, in which the husband is "adopted" (*mukoyôshi*) by his wife's family, while still neolocal. In that case, the grandparents will support their daughter's nuclear family. The *mukoyôshi* would happen when the husband's family lack vital ressources.

isolation of the island refreins the grandparents to be as active as they are with children living in Tokunoshima. They also do not have as many children as sons who live on the island, lowering the need for help from the grandparents. One informant (male, 63) declared that he went into debt to pay for his three children's universities on the mainland. Although he is still assisting one of his sons living in Tokunoshima (hiring him in his photographer agency, for instance), the two daughters living in Tokyo and Osaka are entirely independent. Distance is a crucial factor in the grandparents' help.

Thus, the presence of active grandparents in helping in children's care is crucial in explaining the high number of families with three or more children. By assisting in the daily life of their progeny in many ways, they act as a safety net for new or soon-to-be parents. In this environment, young adults who wish to be parents may fulfill their desire to raise children without worrying about their economy and availability. They know that someone can assist them when they are in need; hence the *nantoka naru* spirit can develop. However, grandparents are not the only help that parents can benefit from. The following section will show how the tight community is as crucial in assisting parents in raising their children.

Children as the Cement of the Community

Coming right after the grandparents in terms of importance to raise more than three children, the community shows its crucial role in assisting families. All participants listed it as the second reason for finding Tokunoshima an island where it is easy to raise children.

What can be called a "community" here is the clean definition of Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* over *Gesellschaft*, a society (Crossman, 2021). *Gemeinschaft* combines social ties and in-person interactions defined by traditional social rules that result in an overall cooperative social organization in a small-scale, homogenous society. On the other hand,

Gesellschaft refers to impersonal and indirect social ties that do not necessarily need face-to-face interactions.

Social interactions in Tokunoshima will be further explored in Chapter 6. However, it is important to note how the concept of *Gemeinschaft* applies to the island's daily life. It is especially crucial to deal with the idea of homogeneity, even on a small island with a uniform population. Indeed, not everyone in the "community" takes an equal part in the mutual help of children. For instance, childless people – especially men – are not much active in assisting other families in their surroundings, and they do not receive much help from them in return. On the other hand, informants emphasized that the older people in their neighborhood were tremendously helpful in assisting child care. However, because there is not much "exchange" with them as they cannot help them back, mutual help that creates a sense of tight community mostly comes from parents, especially mothers. Thus, what the section calls a "tight" community – and what most of the informants seemed to identify as such – comprises people who have children from one or several social connexions. They consist of five social bonds: classmates, neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family, and are vital links in which islanders interact in various ways. Chapter 6 will explore those social connexions in further detail.

The content of the mutual help among people of the same community is various and resembles the assistance of the grandparents in the atomic family. It may be hosting your neighbors' children for an evening when their parents are undisposed or accompanying them at the park. Most importantly, mutual help can also take the form of material exchanges, such as unused clothes or toys, but it also can be food and other commodities. For instance, one household producing potatoes or other vegetables may offer them to other families. When in need, someone may give detergent or other washing utilities. Thus, the mutual help inside the communities goes beyond simple information sharing or slight exchanges of goods.

It may feed children and give them vital elements for survival in households that cannot afford it.

Those exchanges are not hard bounds by which people have to abide. There is no solid moral duty to pay back the exact amount received from their neighbor. Some households receive more than they give, while some offer more than they receive. Still, the ability to provide something to someone is crucial in being part of the community. People, especially women, who cannot participate in the community's care of the children may feel slightly alienated. For instance, many working women (unmarried or mothers) from the mainland explained that they do not have many friends among the islanders. It may come from the fact that they do not have time or the means to help their neighbors. They are also not used to asking for and receiving help from people around.

The fact that the community's interaction mainly revolves around children caring shows how Tokunoshima's culture focuses on their progeny. They are not only a motivation to *ganbaru* – trying hard in life as seen in the previous section, but they are also the cement that puts the community together. Parents – especially mothers – can create bounds by helping each other. Older generations may also find a new *ikigai*, a *raison d'être*, a purpose in life by taking care of and spoiling the neighborhood's children. It reveals the essence of the *kodakara* culture, and the development of the *nantoka naru* spirit. Islanders know they can count on their entourage to help and create many new bounds through their children when it comes to founding a family. On the other hand, people without children, without time to help, or with no need to be helped may feel alienated from their surroundings (See Chapter 6 for further analysis).

An attentive reader may notice that the so-called community that takes care of the island's children mainly comprises women. Even though men may be active in raising children, it primarily defines the role of women. In other words, raising children is an

exclusive feature of womanhood on the island. The following section will demonstrate how women's conditions revolve around the idea of having children.

Women's Conditions Built around Motherhood

Maternity as a Crucial Element of Womanhood

Research in Mainland Japan has longly observed maternity as a crucial element of womanhood. Lebra-Sugiyama (1984) has defined it as a filiocentric identity in which women perceive their whole existence through their life as a mother. They are more likely to find their *ikigai* (life's worth) through their children than men (*Ibid.*). Consequently, Lebra-Sugiyama noticed that Japanese women are willing to endure negligence and abusive behavior for their children's sake. The relatively low divorce rate in Japan may be explained through the filiocentric identity. Mothers would wait until their children have ended their education before considering divorce. Although women in Tokunoshima are most subject to the filiocentric identity, the well-spread divorce and remarriage make the island a unique place to explore the link between womanhood and motherhood[35].

To understand this link, one should look at men's points of view on the matter. Indeed, one question that was surprisingly challenging to reply to for male informants was the number of children they had. Men who had children in a previous marriage hesitated to count them as theirs. On the opposite, they included the children their current wives had with their ex-husband but mentioned them as *tsurego*, children "brought by their spouse." Divorce and remarriage – prevalent in Tokunoshima – are convenient for understanding the strong relationship between womanhood and motherhood.

[35] However, one should note that the well-spread divorce is comform with Lebra-Sugiyama's observation on filiocentric identity. The only reason mother's in Tokunoshima are freeer to divorce is related to the *nantoka naru* spirit and the support of the community. They can afford to leave their abusive husband only because they know the material needs of their children will not be drastically affected.

Divorce and remarriage redefine the link between parents and children in a way strong enough to ignore their biological relationships. A mother's new husband will become the father of her children, even though he is not the progenitor. He will take care of them the way he would with his "own" biological children, raising them and economically supporting them. On the other side of the spectrum, some fathers would completely lose contact with their biological progeny when divorcing, especially if the mother does not need economic support[36]. Thus, the status of the father is strongly related to marriage. However, this redefinition of the parents by the marital status over the biological relationship only goes one way. While the father may change following a divorce or a remarriage, the birth mother will remain the mother in almost every case. It is ingrained in the islanders' minds that the children will stay with their mother in case of a divorce.

Biological fathers have almost no words to say in the process, leading to many frustrations. On a small island where it is easy to meet someone you know by chance, they have to accept that the children they conceived and raised are no longer their children. One acquaintance (33) had his first child at 20 years old but divorced quickly after. His ex-wife remains on the island and is now remarried.

> Sometimes in Kametsu, I see my ex-wife with her now-husband and the son we had together. She completely ignores me, and I have to do the same. Even though I feel like meeting them and asking how they are doing, I can't. It's just not my family. (Daisuke, 33, two biological children, one dependent child)

[36] Japan's legal system is famous for its lose grip on divorce rights. Jones (2012) states that "as there is no Japanese constitutional jurisprudence establishing a fundamental interest in having and raising children or otherwise recognizing a constitutionally-protected dimension to the parent-child relationship, decisions about children made by Japanese judges are essentially a form of administrative disposition made in the absence of law." In other words, in case of disagreements during a divorce, the custody decision comes from the personal opinion of a judge, and not the application of a law. In 2022, the penal code remains the same (Haraguchi, 2022). It has been the source of numerous unresolved kidnapping case from divorced parents.

He accepts that the relationship and the child he had with his ex-wife are a thing of the past. Remarried, she has completely cut links off with him and chose her new husband as the father of their son. The man has no other choice but to abide by this situation.

One may think that his life resulted from a particularly complicated divorce at a young age. However, cutting off any relationships with the biological father and considering a new husband as the "real" father is widespread in Tokunoshima. Many participants recalled similar experiences, sometimes with emotions. When one male informant divorced, his ex-wife left Tokunoshima for Okinawa with their two daughters. Although he could initially see them several times a year, she stopped allowing him to visit as soon as she remarried. It left him with a strong sentiment of abandonment, which multiplied with the reaction of his daughters.

> I remember having them on the telephone asking me why I didn't come this year. It was a very difficult period for me. (Kyosuke, 44, five biological children, three dependent children)

The way children accommodate the situation mainly depends on their age. Still, even children who experienced life with their biological parents, or only with their mother, may treat the new husband as their father. When asked her dad's name, an eleven-year-old girl, whose mother was a single mother until she was eight, spontaneously replied with the name of her mother's now-husband. Although she did not have a father until she was eight years old, she considers the man she knows only from three years ago as her father.

The view on divorce in Tokunoshima is not only a way to reorganize families in remarried households. The fact that the mother is seen as the only legitimate guardian says a lot about how womanhood is linked to motherhood. Women on the island are supposed to

take care of their biological children, while the father's "identity" may change. This reasoning occurs in a context where gender roles are highly divided, where women work as house carers while men are economic supporters. In this context, women's conditions are oriented toward motherhood to the point that bearing children is vital for their survival. The following section explores different narratives showing the strong link between womanhood and motherhood in Tokunoshima and how their conditions orient their life choice toward motherhood.

Finding Happiness in Stability for Women

Several acquaintances and participants were mothers at a very young age among the interviewees. Two women (Harumi, 21, and Saeko, 31), in particular, were pregnant at 16 years old, and are now mothers of three and four children. As both never divorced and have a stable marriage with their husbands and multiple children, the "teenage mistake" exception can be excluded to explain their early pregnancy. The fact that they continued to have children after that shows the absence of regret and a positive image of motherhood throughout their experience as very young mothers.

They indeed both insisted that they "chose" to be mothers at this age. When asked if they thought about abortion when they learned they were pregnant, both positively replied. Still, they decided to keep their babies.

> I thought about [abortion], but because at my age it was legal to have a child, I felt I could try. […] Also, I always wanted to have children [since I was a child]. I felt I wanted to have something that was only mine [*Jibun dake no mono ga hoshiina tte kanjideshita*].(Saeko, 31, four children)

In her reply, Saeko expresses her strong desire to have children, even at a young age. As she became pregnant during her first year in high school, she took the chance to fulfill this desire. However, one can perceive this "choice" as the result of a lack of opportunity for young women. To Saeko, being a mother is the finality of being a woman. Other elements in her life may be irrelevant or secondary. Hence the second part of her reply: "I felt I wanted to have something that was only mine."

This phrase is particularly intriguing in terms of meaning. It may refer to the idea of owning something (in that context, "someone") with the idea that a baby would be what she has. It also refers to a sense of accomplishment. A baby would be what she created in her life. Thus, a baby is the fruit of a fulfilled desire, something she did by herself, for herself. Still, the fact that she considers having a baby an achievement shows the lack of opportunity for young female islanders. There are indeed plenty of things in life to own or accomplish besides having a baby. It could be a professional career, personal life experiences that build her, a particular item to own, or any other goals to reach. Thus, one may question her idea of having something that is only hers. To her, the desire to have or accomplish something could only take the form of a baby. Even as a teenager, she could examine her future and see the limit of opportunities to fulfill her life, and only being a mother could be the solution.

This discussion opens the question of what happiness is for women in Tokunoshima. Socio-psychological studies define happiness as a mixture of personal achievements and interpersonal engagements (Kitayama et al. 2006). Saeko's explanation for having a baby so early in her life – "I felt I wanted to have something that was only mine" – perfectly matches the socio-psychological definition. Moreover, research shows that Asian countries are more likely to link happiness to stability, peacefulness, and tranquility (low arousal positive affect) than Western countries (Lee et al, 2013). The fact that Saeko seeks happiness (achievements, interpersonal engagements) in being a mother confirms this observation. Although women

in Tokunoshima are eager to feel a sense of accomplishment that would make them happy, as Saeko expressed it, they also know there are limits to fulfilling them. As a result, a vast majority of the female informants look for happiness in stability and normality.

To the question "have you ever thought about happiness," many replied using their daily life experience.

> Hiroko: I think it is about feelings. The feeling of being fulfilled in various ways.
> Me: Can you give me an example?
> Hiroko: Well, I don't have any stress in my life. Probably something like that, this is why I feel happy. Also probably because of the proximity with nature. It's something obvious [*atarimae*], but when you think about it, it's something easy to make you happy. Oh, and also because the island is easy to raise children, I think it is linked to happiness. (Hiroko, 57, three children)

Another discussion during a focus group interview with two young mothers (27) was very symbolic of the idea of happiness in daily life and stability. To the same question, one woman found happiness in normality.

> When I got my first child, I had various problems with my ex-husband, so after that I wanted a normal life. I didn't want something particular, just something without issue, without having to take care of weird things happening, with a husband who lives at home, and help with the house. It's from the things that are the most obvious [*atarimae*] that I can feel happiness. (Hana, female, 27, two children)

After experiencing a painful divorce at 21, and now remarried, she feels that happiness is related to stable family life and a "normal" household in the post-war family standard. One may note the common use of the word *atarimae* (normal, obvious, natural) between the two different interviews to explain their definition of happiness. But the most

intriguing part comes from her friend, a mother of one child of the same age, who also participated in the discussion.

> Kyoko: I think I've never thought about happiness, actually. (long pause)
> Hana: The fact that you never thought about this shows that you're happy.
> Kyoko: I guess so. Happiness is happiness. Nothing particular… Like in love, not having any worries is happiness. Like my husband does not go gambling or cheat on me. I guess this is happiness. (Kyoko, 27, one child)

Once again, the idea of stability in marriage is seen as a crucial factor in being happy. More interestingly, the fact that she confessed to never thought about happiness is positively viewed by Hana and Kyoko. It is not associated with sadness, but on the opposite, linked with stability. Especially compared to her friend and other participants, she has been experiencing the most stable romantic life possible. Dating her now-husband, who was her first boyfriend at 16, they have been together for more than ten years, without any significant trouble (described as gambling or infidelity on both parts). By acknowledging her enviable situation compared to her friend's experience, she concludes that she is happy.

This perception of happiness contradicts the post-modern view on the topic. Bauman (2000) conceptualized the contemporary conditions of modern individuals with the word "liquidity," in which all of our aspirations are "unable to keep any shape or any course for long…" and "…prone to change…" (*Ibid.*). Thus, happiness seems unreachable as it changes as soon as we grasp it because achieving one's goal tends to be unsatisfactory. It echoes the numerous studies conducted about the choice of partner in Japan and how many single men and women have become "picky" with their romantic ideals (see Chapter 1). However, female islanders do not seem to believe in such a "liquid happiness " form of fulfillment.

One may explain this difference by seeing female islanders as more realistic than other post-modern societies in developed countries. They would consider happiness only in

things that they can grasp. It would explain why their answers focused on daily life, "normal" (*atarimae*) things, or relationships without troubles. It reveals that women on the island are aware of the limits of their conditions.

Indeed, Tokunoshima does not offer a wide range of prospects for female islanders. As explored in the previous section, the main hurdle is the cultural link between womanhood and maternity. Women must prioritize their role as mothers over their education and professional careers. Consequently, parents invest time and money in long studies for their sons as a priority, and many women resign to stop their education after high school.

Moreover, many female informants would not see education as the ramp with which they could access happiness. Most participants with a high school diploma explained that they chose not to go to university or technical school. The reasons mostly remained around the wish to stay in Tokunoshima, as studying after high school means leaving families and friends. It also means abandoning the stable and comfortable life they have been enjoying. For instance, one assistant nurse (Mako, 27) did not see the benefit of going to a nursing school and is happy with her current situation.

> Mako: If you take the example of women on the island, assistant nurse (*kaigo*) is nice. It's a hard job but it is worth it. It's also easy to get employed. For women without qualifications, it may be the best option.
> Me: By the way, you didn't want to become a qualified nurse (*kangoshi*)?
> Mako: I thought about it plenty of times, really. But in the end, I think my current situation is enough. (Mako, 27, no child)

Despite the presence of a nursing school in Amamioshima, the nearby island, she did not see the benefit of investing a couple of years into becoming a qualified nurse. After working for almost ten years and living at her parents' without children, she definitively has

enough savings to afford nursing school. Still, she prioritizes her current life stability over investments in a better-paying profession.

Thus, women have learned to prioritize constancy over investing in education or a professional career. They seek situations with low risk and low benefits that make their life comfortable in the long term. This conception of life is clearly linked to their relationship between womanhood and motherhood. In Tokunoshima, as women feel “natural” to become mothers, they build their aspirations around the idea of motherhood. They also prioritize their children over their professional careers and seek a husband who can provide. In other words, they are willing to sacrifice their independence and personal aspirations to complete their role as mothers.

Thus, it is not surprising that female islanders find happiness in stability and “normality.” Their idea of happiness is linked to optimal conditions to fulfill their role as mothers, hence “normal” things. It reminds the Confucian way of happiness through “good life” and “perfect virtue,” where happiness consists in fulfilling ethical desires and actions that provide the good (Luo, 2019). However, it drastically limits their choice of life and leads women toward maternity to the point of making unreasonable choices, which would worsen their conditions. The following section will explore different narratives of women living in Tokunoshima that reveals that longing to become mothers is not based on reason.

Becoming a Mother No Matter What: An Unreasonable Desire?

As explored with Saeko’s citation, the desire to become a mother comes early in women’s lives. A crushing majority of the female informants stated that they wanted children as soon as possible. One particular narrative shows the strong will of women to be mothers no matter what.

Karina (27) became pregnant at 18 years old with a boyfriend she dated for a couple of months. Although she was happy and ready to become a mother, her boyfriend's parents encouraged them to have an abortion.

> After introducing me to his [her boyfriend's] parents, they told him that raising a child can be tough; even though you are willing to do your best, it's still something difficult. So because of that, he lost his confidence and wanted me to get an abortion. (Karina, 27, four children)

Four months pregnant and pressured to terminate her pregnancy, Karina described a harrowing operation, physically and emotionally. As the fetus was too big for a standard abortion, the doctor provoked a miscarriage with chemicals, and she needed to deliver the dead fetus. Moreover, her boyfriend did not come to support her while she was on the operating table, feeling entirely by herself. The interview took a very emotional turn, as Karina could not hold her tears while talking about her experience that happened ten years ago. It was clear that this moment left deep wounds in her that would not heal quickly.

Still, despite this excruciating moment in her life, she became pregnant a second time a few months later. This time, her boyfriend agreed to marry her and raise the child. Today, they have four children and live in a stable marriage. In the "end" – although at 27 years old, it remains difficult to call this an end – she stated that she does not regret persevering in becoming a young mother and fulfilling her desire to raise children right after high school.

Karina's stubbornness to deliver a child after such a negative experience raises questions regarding the essence of her desire for maternity. Why would she risk a second pregnancy with the same man after that? It was especially puzzling as, during the interview, she showed deep knowledge about contraception and a long experience using condoms during high school. The second pregnancy (and the three next that followed) were deliberate and conscious.

One could explain her strong will to become a mother as a means of survival to get material support from the community; yet, the desire for maternity goes beyond any practical needs. Indeed, one hypothesis was that becoming a mother would improve their living conditions. By bearing children, women get access to adulthood and the help of their parents and parents-in-law to build their own households. It gives them a reason to leave their childhood home and become independent adults while still being supported by their genitors. Remaining childless would prevent them from benefiting from their parents. On an island where job precarity is the norm for women, their choices are to leave Tokunoshima or stagnate with their parents with no concrete prospect if they do not become mothers. Yet, although the hypothesis is correct regarding marrying (see Chapter 6 on *dekikon*), it does not explain the strong desire for women to become a mother.

Indeed, the will to become a mother goes beyond the necessities of getting married and accessing adulthood. The following narrative shows that the desire to bear a child may not necessarily be related to reason.

Hatsuko (41) is a single mother with three children (16, 17, 22). One of her particularities is that she was never married, even though her children all have the same father. Indeed, she met him when she was working in a hostess bar at 17 years old and became pregnant at 18. As her partner was already married, they spent five years together in an adulterous relationship that resulted in three children. Yet, the question of marrying him never came up.

> Me: Did you want him to marry you?
>
> Hatsuko: No, I've never thought about that.
>
> Me: Did you want to raise the children by yourself?
>
> Hatsuko: Well, before breaking up, he used to spend quite some time at home. Until the eldest was four, we took care of the children together. Until the eldest went to kindergarten, I'd say I wasn't taking care of them alone
>
> Me: During this time, did you live together?
>
> Hatsuko: It was mixed; he stayed a few days a week before going back to his wife. (Hatsuko, 41, three children)

Contrary to many Japanese single people on the mainland, Hatsuko did not express the wish to marry at least once in her life (see Chapter 1). However, she did want children at an early stage and did not hesitate to become an 18-year-old mother.

> Me: What did you feel when you knew you were pregnant?
>
> Hatsuko: [long pause] Well, I did not see abortion as an alternative, actually.
>
> Me: You never thought about abortion?
>
> Hatsuko: Never, just for the second child because I was taking some medicine and didn't notice my pregnancy, so I was worried about his health. But the doctor told me it was okay, so there was no problem.

Women in Tokunoshima see motherhood as a natural stage of their life. They rarely question the conditions in which they raise their children. Yet, contrary to marrying, being a mother is not a stepping stone to a better life. Hatsuko, for instance, did not show an improvement in her social and material condition of being a mother from an adulterous relationship. She had to work harder, sacrifice all her free time to take care of her children, and life was stressful enough to the point she admitted to being violent toward them

sometimes. Still, she was willing to raise their children by herself (with the help of her parents and her partner before breaking up[37]), no matter how.

This strong desire for maternity expressed by Saeko, Karina, and Hatsuko, despite a young age, precarious situations, and painful experiences, seems to go beyond logical choices. The improvements in their life are exclusively emotional, and the purpose of having children is only to fulfill their longing. Hatsuko's life conditions even deteriorated after becoming a mother. Yet, she was willing to become a mother.

Most informants themselves have difficulties explaining this desire. To the question "why did you want children," the answers revolved around the Girardian mimesis, such as "because I had myself plenty of brothers and sisters, so I wanted my children to experience the same thing" (Female, 48), "I just always wanted to be a young mother, when I was a child, I saw those mothers in their 20s and thought it was nice [*iinâ*]" (Female, 27), or "I feel like the more children, the more lively [*nigiyaka*]" (Female, 41).

Informants did not reveal any practical purpose or external pressure to become mothers. They all expressed the surge to have children that appeared from their own childhood. Women in Tokunoshima have a close link between maternity and womanhood, which is, in a sense, one of the main elements of the *kodakara* culture.

Of course, it does not mean that all women on the island have a deep desire to become mothers. Mako (27), for instance, expressed her reluctance to have children and be married.

> Mako: [talking about being a mother]I don't want to lose the time I have for myself, my sleep, and I want to be able to travel anytime I want.
> Me: Did you always feel like this since you were a child?

[37] She mentioned during the interview benefitting from the help of the community, especially, the neighbor's elder women. They would keep an eye on her children while she was working at a *snack* and *izakaya* at night. It appears that the presence of children overcome her uncommon status of the cheating partner. In the *kodakara* culture, children must be protected no matter their situation. Still, she insisted that material supports she received during child-rearing came from her own parents.

> Mako: No, only three years from now. Like before, everybody wanted to marry and have children. So I felt that, when you meet someone you get along with, you have to marry straightaway. […] But then, I enjoyed having a salary and I felt that I wanted to do other things. […] I have plenty of aspirations, but if you marry, you lose them [*kekkon wa ganbô ga nai*].

Looking at her friends who became mothers earlier in their lives, she discovered that she prefers prioritizing her time and money for herself rather than children. Although Mako is an exception among female islanders living in Tokunoshima, most women who left the island may feel the same as her.

Interestingly, she initially bore the same desire for marriage and children as other islanders and only lost it at 24. In her interview, Mako implied that she might have followed the same path as her counterparts if she had met someone she got along with. However, after enjoying the material freedom of a full-time salary, she realized that being a mother presents more inconveniences than advantages in her life.

Mako's narrative confirms that the deep desire to be a mother for female islanders is not linked to improving their material conditions. Many women have to sacrifice time, money, and sometimes independence to become mothers and fulfill their longing for children. Yet, the majority of female islanders are willing to do it. Although some informants admitted regretting having children so early in their lives, no participants declared they wished they were no longer mothers.

Here may lie the essence of the *kodakara* expression: it is the deep desire to have children as soon as possible, no matter the conditions to raise them and no matter the sacrifices to make. It is a desire cultivated as early as elementary school through various experiences such as having numerous brothers and sisters or seeing close friends becoming mothers themselves. This desire is an integral part of Tokunoshima's culture, so deeply ingrained that islanders themselves do not notice it.

But this desire does not concern only women. Male informants also showed strong aspirations to be fathers and found a family. However, what they expressed was not necessarily a desire for fulfillment but a way to escape from loneliness.

What about Men? Fatherhood in Masculine Standards

Being a Father as a Means of Happiness?

Scholars have not observed the same link between Japanese manhood and parenthood compared to womanhood. For instance, Lebra-Sugiyama (1984) noticed that Japanese men are less inclined to see their *ikigai* (life's worth) in children than women. Still, masculine standards revolve around family and men's ability to run a household. Dasgupta (2003) argues that manhood and masculinity are built around the *salaryman* (white-collar worker) image: the "corporate warrior" who will sacrifice his personal time for his company while providing for his wife and children. In Tokunoshima, where white-collar workers are a minority, a similar idea of masculinity and manhood has spread among adult men, and a large majority of the male participants and acquaintances demonstrated their will to become fathers. They seem to link fatherhood to happiness and *ikigai* more than men on the mainland.

Although a non-negligible part would jokingly explain it as the result of intense sexual desire (see Chapter 6), informants who were comfortable with the topic indicated actively working on founding a family. For instance, Teru (44) met his first wife at a technical school. However, despite their effort, she did not get pregnant, and they divorced a short time later.

> Teru: I was teased by my friends, who repeated things like 'you got no seeds in you [*tane ga nai, tane ga nai*]'
> Me: Was it [the impossibility to have children] the reason for your divorce?

Teru: No, of course not (laughs). But if we could have children, maybe things would have been different, who knows. (Teru, six children, with one *tsurego*)

After splitting up the marriage, he got introduced to another woman from his mother's acquaintances at 39 years old. This time, he diligently visited a sanctuary in Tokunoshima famous for miraculous fertility[38]. Teru now has six children, including one *tsurego,* and is willing to have at least another. He says he goes to the temple once every year to demonstrate gratitude.

Teru's narrative shows in various ways that men in Tokunoshima also long to become fathers. First, although he did not directly associate their inability to have children as a reason for his divorce, he acknowledged that it may have been avoidable if he could have built a family with his first wife. Children seem to be the cement of wife/husband relationships. Moreover, despite his age, he is not reluctant to have numerous children. Even at 44 years old, with a fifth baby under one year old, he declared desiring even more children to have an equal number of boys and girls. Acknowledging that he is aging, he is still willing to "do his best" (*ganbaru*) to raise his sons and daughters until they become adults, invoking the "*nantoka naru*" spirit.

Like women, men expressed their aspiration to have many children "no matter what." Moreover, even though some men would express a personal, "natural" desire to become fathers with abstract replies such as "I always wanted children," some men were more likely than women to acknowledge external forces to become fathers.

[38] The sanctuary Matsubara situated in Amagi is apparently famous in Kagoshima Prefecture since a childless policeman sent to Tokunoshima had children after visiting the place.

Takeshi (42) spent twenty years in Tokyo before returning to Tokunoshima. Considering himself a "herbivore-type" man, he did not want to marry or have children until he came back to the island.

> Takeshi: Actually, I myself didn't want much to have a household, but in my entourage, everybody is married and has children, so I thought that I should follow the expected trend (*hitonami*). You know, in Tokyo, there are plenty of single people around you, so you don't feel impatient (*aseri ga nai*) to get married and have children. But after coming back, you know, I was the only single guy, and everybody was asking me if I managed to find a girlfriend. Something I didn't like, so I thought I should do the same.
> Me: Did you feel pressured by your entourage? Did they ask you "when do you get married?"
> Takeshi: Always! It never stopped! Never stopped! Really, never stopped.

Takeshi's reply reveals the two main elements that construct the cultural aspiration to have children on the island: mimesis and pressure from the community. When living in Tokyo, his entourage was constituted of single people; there was no mediator (from the Girardian explanation of mimesis) to drive his desire to become a father. It changed after returning to Tokunoshima, where he felt impatience (*aseri*) to have a family. However, this impatience was not only an internal longing coming from his new environment; it was built by direct pressure from his entourage to become a father. He felt that he needed to follow the trend (*hitonami*). Even though many islanders (men and women) did not acknowledge it during the interviews, there are external elements that create their aspirations of becoming parents. Those elements, when assembled, take the form of the *kodakara* culture.

In addition to the strong desire to have children created by the cultural environment, men were more likely than women to link their family life to happiness. Indeed, while

women mentioned stability, "normality," and everyday life as a goal for happiness, men almost always related only happiness to their fatherhood.

Aki (47) gave an illustrative explanation of his vision of happiness through the eyes of a father of seven children.

> Japan is an altruistic country. We work hard, not for ourselves, but for our family. This is why we're happy. Working hard is not to eat delicious food. It's to be able to give your family delicious food. This is how I see happiness. [...] When you eat a very nice and expensive steak, you can't really enjoy it if you are alone. (Aki, 47, seven children)

As a local councilor and a self-made company owner, Aki showed pride in his accomplishment as a man and a father. By giving his definition of happiness, he also revealed his vision of masculinity and fatherhood as someone who provides for his family and finds happiness in it. To him, working hard should be for one's family's sake; another example of the Confucian conception of happiness.

Moreover, the second part of Aki's reply shows the close link between happiness and loneliness in the eyes of male islanders. Indeed, through fatherhood, men do not only seek a finalized image of happiness; they also try to escape loneliness.

During a group discussion among four men between 40 to 50 years old, each participant gave their opinion. Although the married informants declared being happy, one divorced participant confessed not seeing any point in life.

> Man 1: (*on happiness related to fatherhood*) Even just sleeping with your kids gives you plenty of happiness. Although they stopped while growing up (laugh).
> Man 2: Me, I have no idea what this happiness makes you feel. Like, now, life is boring. Living is not fun at all.
> Man 3: Someone lost his money at the *pachinko* today? (everybody laughs)

> Man 4: If you have a woman, maybe life feels more fun, I guess?
> Man 3: Also job has a big impact, if you're tired at your job, you know…
> Man 2: It's not really that. It's just I wonder why I live. Like since I'm..
> Man 3: Sorry Sonny, just tell him that we don't care about this, he'd understand.
> (laughs)
> (indistinct hubbub between the participants)

This short discussion gives a formidable illustration of how men oppose happiness to loneliness. To the exception of Man 3, who was trying to keep the conversation in a light mood, the participants demonstrated the importance of the family in their well-being. Man 1 expressed happiness when sleeping with his children at night, and Man 4 saw being accompanied by a woman as a solution for unhappiness. The declaration of Man 2 regarding the absence of meaning in his life could be interpreted in various ways. However, his profile makes his statement another example of the dichotomy between happiness and loneliness. Married only at 35 to a hostess after a one-night stand that resulted in pregnancy, they divorced immediately. Since then, he has been living on his own without any contact with his child. Although he did not expressly formulate it, one can interpret his dissatisfaction in life due to his loneliness.

Other interviews confirmed the dichotomy "happiness/loneliness" through the expression *nigiyaka*. When asked why they wanted a big family, most men used this word which can be translated as "animated," "lively," or "busy." Male islanders seem to see happiness in vibrant and active life and would do their best to avoid living on their own. However, being surrounded by a large family may not only have emotional values. It can also bring social benefits in a highly competitive environment where strong masculinity is culturally encouraged.

Competition and Toxic Masculinity in Fatherhood and Marriage

This strong masculinity may often be in the form of machismo. Gilmore (1991) argues that machismo is divided into three characteristics: virility, valor, and virtue. All of them are subject to display and competition among men of the same community. Because it is present in various cultures (Bonnemère, 2002), Tokunoshima men unsurprisingly have many in common with the masculine behavior observed in Andalusia by Gilmore.

Indeed, one of a visitor's first impressions when arriving in Tokunoshima is how men are attracted to competition. For instance, men admit that they regularly bet money with their friends on diverse activities in their everyday life. It can be bullfights, baseball matches, local elections, or even cars passing by. Some men even bet money on the number of people I could interview in one month. In other words, gambling seems to be men's primary source of leisure. It shows the invasive competitive spirit of islanders that defines many of their masculine behaviors.

Thus, it may be not surprising that another reason for competition may be the number of children. As it is culturally admitted that men should provide for their families, the more children they provide, the more money they show deploying, the more successful and wealthy they look in the eyes of the community. As Aki took pride in raising seven children and felt happy in providing for everybody by himself, having a large family is a sign of accomplishment by men.

During a casual conversation about contraception, an acquaintance (Kosuke, 45, five children "as far as he knows") jokingly talked about his responsibility as a man.

> Kosuke: Well, I'd love to use condoms, but, you know, I'm too big, it doesn't fit!
> Me: But what if your partner becomes pregnant? Would you pay for the abortion?

> Kosuke: No, I'd tell her to keep the child. That's my responsibility to provide, even if we don't marry. I'll financially take care of the baby until he graduates high school. (Kosuke, 45, five children)

The discussion was not part of an interview, and the content was said in a jokingly manner, so one should not take this man's comment as an honest declaration about men's responsibility. However, it is interesting to see how he relates the masculine attribute of his "oversized" penis with the idea of providing for any hypothetical child he could have during sexual intercourse. As the discussion was about his masculine attributes, he linked the stereotypical trait of the size of the penis with the ability to provide.

In Tokunoshima, showing strength as a man comes with the idea of having many children as possible. Encouraged by the "*nantoka naru*" spirit, men do not hesitate to prioritize the number of children over the condition in which they raise them. As a result, it can trigger several toxic behaviors among married couples.

Indeed, all nine female informants and acquaintances who experienced a divorce (or separation after concubinage) declared having suffered domestic violence from their former husband/companion[39]. Although the sample is small and does not represent the population of Tokunoshima – as the research's topic was not about domestic violence, it hints that it is widespread on the island. I was myself indirectly exposed to this type of brutality at the end of my stay. One of my closest local acquaintances was assaulted by her boyfriend to the point of hospitalization and the involvement of the police.

Although violence toward women is in any patriarchic culture worldwide (Kasturirangan *et al.,* 2004), one may see the *kodakara* culture as an additional cause of

[39] The question of domestic violence with married women was a sensitive topic to explore during interviews. Married females informants would usually expressed their satisfaction in marriage, whether it is true or not. Yet, as divorce is spread and socially acknowledge, one can estimate that my married informants did not experience such a thing during the time of my research. They would have otherwise most likely divorced.

domestic violence. As it is likely to be triggered by stress and the inability to cope with it (Umberson *et al.* 2003), the pressure to have multiple children and be able to provide for all of them might result in violent behavior toward the spouse or children. Combined with the fundamental elements that trigger DV, such as patriarchy, daily sexism, and alcohol, the island might create the "perfect storm" that encourages brutality toward women[40].

Thus, gender norms, in particular, are deeply ingrained in parenthood. This chapter has explored to which extent being a mother is being a woman, and being a father is being a man in Tokunoshima. Having children is viewed as something obvious and natural for many islanders. They bring external benefits, such as social status or help from the community and the family, and internal benefits, such as happiness and desire fulfillment. Despite several disadvantages, such as the loss of time and money or the absence of freedom to move, male and female islanders who remain in Tokunoshima are willing to have three to seven children in their life. The strong desire to build a large family constitutes most *kodakara* culture. Thus, it has a profound impact on the fertility rate on the island.

Yet, can the *kodakara* culture be a solution for the ongoing *shôshika* phenomenon on the mainland? A knowledgeable reader would recognize many common traits between the islanders and the mainlanders. Indeed, people from other regions of Japan may share Tokunoshima's gender norms, the Confucian view on happiness, or the deep desire to found a family. Only the intensity in which they are applied may differ, and the readiness to raise seven children in a row is specific to the island because of the invaluable support held by the community and the family that contribute to the "*nantoka naru*" spirit. In other words, the fundamental cores of the perception toward family, children, and gender do not vary much

[40] Despite the new perspective of seing the local cultural pattern as a trigger in domestic violence, one should still be aware that the fundamental sources of such behaviors come from patriarchy, daily sexism, and the use of alchohol. The *kodakara* culture does not explain by its own the culture of violence toward women that exists anywhere in the world. However, the topic goes outside the focus on this thesis and cannot be explored further.

compared to the mainland. Thus, the *kodakara* culture may not be a solution to the low fertility rate in Japan, as it is fundamentally similar to the perception of family in mainland Japan. It is, however, an impactful element to understand how islanders manage a family of four or more children. Yet, although it opens discussions on helping married couples to have as many children as they want (see Conclusion), the *kodakara* culture is not a relevant solution to the *shôshika* phenomenon.

As seen in Chapter 1, more than the hurdles of raising children, the inability to find a proper marriage partner is the main reason for the *shôshika* phenomenon. The following chapter will show that islanders have easiness in meeting love partners. It will explore to which extent Tokunoshima presents the optimal environment in matchmaking for marriages.

CHAPTER 6: ROMANCE, MARRIAGE, AND GENDER RELATIONSHIPS IN TOKUNOSHIMA

The Misunderstandings of the "*Dekikon*" Habit

The Elephant in the Room: Sexuality and Fertility Rate

One of the early discoveries made in the field was the absence of wedding ceremonies in Tokunoshima. Most participants explained that they did not organize a proper wedding except for a small gathering between the families involved. It is especially astonishing in Japanese culture, as weddings are often idealized, and considerable economic resources are displayed during the event (Matsuki, 2019). One reason for the absence of the wedding ceremony is the lack of money. One local professional photographer, whose studio is also a party hall for rent, explained that, although there were weddings some decades ago, the two "lost decades" had significantly impacted the marriage market. However, the other reason mentioned by almost all informants is that their marriage was a *dekikon.*

Among the married people met on the island, an overwhelming majority married because the woman was getting pregnant. Japanese demographers call this inclination the "birth in which the period of marriage is shorter than pregnancy (*kekkon kikan ga ninshin yori mijikai shusshô no kekkô*)" (MHLW, 2021). They compare the day of the marriage with the first child's birth. If the latter is shorter than the nine months of pregnancy, the wedding happened due to pregnancy. Under this explanation, the phenomenon is better known as "*dekikon,"* an abbreviation of the expression "*dekichatta kekkon,*" roughly translated by shotgun marriage – a marriage that happened because the woman became pregnant.

The average *dekikon* rate in Japan is a decreasing 18% compared to its peak in 2000 of 25% (MHLW, 2021): less than one marriage out of five is due to a sudden pregnancy. Although there is no available data for Tokunoshima, local informants said that more than

70% of marriages are shotgun marriages. The *dekikon,* as its English translation "shotgun marriage," holds a negative image. It is seen as a rushed and unplanned way of building a family for people who could not control themselves enough in one way or another. The fact that many marriages in Tokunoshima are *dekikon* – paired with the high fertility rate – reinforces the image of carefree/happy-go-lucky islanders who do not think much of consequences during sexual intercourse. Many islanders themselves would even clearly admit it.

When introducing myself and giving a general explanation of my research (the *shôshika* phenomenon and why people in Tokunoshima have more children than the rest of Japan), the majority would provide a straightforward answer usually related to sexuality. Many people would use various expressions to explain the high fertility rate by an increased number of sexual intercourse, even when they are not asked. Some women would politely say that "there is nothing to do on the island[41]," while some men would jokingly reply that "we are all sex maniacs here (*minna sukebe dakara*)."

Islanders themselves believe there is a link between sexual intercourse and birth rate. One acquaintance even confessed that he tried to see a correlation between the strong typhoons that hit the island in Autumn and the fertility rate. While the island is isolated for a dozen days several times during the typhoon seasons, he thought it would encourage people to have sexual intercourse that would lead to pregnancy.

However, despite the robust assessment that sexual intercourse leads to pregnancy, research shows no correlation between high sexual activity and the number of children in a household. Countries with frequent marital and non-marital sexual intercourse or high esteem for sexuality (Wylie, 2009; Durex Global, 2005) do not have high fertility (The

[41] It could also be interpreted by the fact there are many housewives who do not have anything else to do but raising children, as viewed in Chapter 4. But according to the context of those conversations, the relation with sex is more believable.

World Bank, 2021). Greece, for instance, is known to be the country with the most positive image toward sex in the world and the most sexual intercourse per year. Yet, it has one of the lowest TFRs globally at 1.2. Moreover, intimacy in married couples in Tokunoshima is not different from on the mainland. Married couples usually do not sleep together. Instead of the typical *kawanoji* (see Moriki, 2017), the mother usually rests with the children while the father sets himself in the living room. Intimate intercourses are rare and do not exceed once a month, even for married couples under thirty years old. One female acquaintance (28) admitted that, even though she would like more intimate moments with her husband, sex requires too much organization between finishing the daily tasks and waiting for the children to sleep. Another 27-year-old acquaintance declared that she does not even remember the last time her husband kissed her. Islanders do not have an exceptional tendency to have sex with their spouse more often than the rest of Japan.

Still, one could easily perceive a link between the high rate of *dekikon* and the high fertility rate. One of the initial theories to this observation supposed that the lack of knowledge about contraception – not the high number of sexual intercourse – was the independent variable to explain the propensity. Because people do not use any birth control, shotgun marriages were prevalent. Consequently, considerable parts of the interviews tested the hypothesis, focusing on the informants' knowledge of the matter. The results were partially compelling but left with an unexpected conclusion.

As anticipated, most people on the island do not use a condom or any other contraception. Because the island is small, and the chance to meet someone you know while shopping is tremendous, people prefer to use withdrawal as birth control instead of risking the embarrassment of buying condoms in front of an acquaintance. Many islanders also think that withdrawal is enough to prevent pregnancy, a belief spread during adolescence between teenagers. However, the high consciousness everybody had regarding contraception and the

use of a condom was surprising. Indeed, most participants (males and females) stated that they had used a condom at least once in their lifetime. They also seem well aware of its usefulness and familiar with its use.

The use of a condom seems quite popular during high school[42]. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Karina (28) confessed that she had protected sex with her boyfriend almost every day during her high school senior year. Before joining her, he would buy them in a convenience store or get them from friends and bring them with him. A male participant (64) confided that he took the role of the condom supplier during his high school time. Because his school was in Kagoshima city, he could buy them in the anonymity of the urban area. When he returned to the island during school holidays to visit his family, he passed them to his friends as souvenirs. Thus, people from different generations and sexes seem familiar with condoms. In those cases, the goal of a condom is mostly birth control, and most people seem aware of problems related to teenage pregnancy.

Thus, one could deduce that the widespread *dekikon* in Tokunoshima is more controlled and voluntary than it may look. Although unwanted pregnancies do happen more often than in the rest of Japan, it does not explain the crushing majority of shotgun marriages on the island. People seem more conscious about birth control than expected. Especially nowadays, with the spread of the internet, getting condoms without risking the embarrassment of buying one in a public space is easier than ever, and many adult (married or not married) couples are using them. Thus, it is necessary to look at the phenomenon as if shotgun marriages were deliberate.

The following section will argue that the strong association between love relationships and building a family is why there is such a high number of *dekikon*. Indeed,

[42] No informant stated using the contraceptive pill or other contraceptive in high school or after. It is representative of Japan where only 2.9% of contraceptive users take the pill (CAO, 2019).

most unmarried people on the island enter a love relationship to get married and found a family. First, let us explore how the Platonist view of romantic love fosters the *dekikon* habit.

Romantic Dekikon: a Local Application of the Romantic Love Ideology

Chapter 2 has discussed and deconstructed the romantic ideology as a modern conception of family life. Romantic love is still thoroughly associated to marriage and family. It explains why Japan (and Korea) have the lowest birth rate outside wedlock among the OECD countries (OECD, 2018, see Chapter 1). Thus, in contrast to the West, where weddings can be only about the celebration of love between two individuals, Japanese people mostly marry as the premise of having children. However, it does not mean romantic love does not influence the marriage partner's choice. Japanese people tend to seek equally emotional connexion and strong feelings toward each other, and stability and capability to take care of others in a romantic partner (Tokuhiro, 2010). In Tokunoshima, the association between romance and marriage is prevalent. People would seek a marriage partner through their romantic experience. Consequently, romantic love is not viewed as an end in itself but as a tool to access marriage and family.

In this close community where everybody knows each other and gossip is easily spread, people are concerned about the community's opinion toward them. Women are especially targeted when it comes to "goalless" romantic relationships (and sexual intercourse) and would avoid being seen while having casual relationships with someone on the island. In order to enjoy a love relationship without being the target of harmful gossip, they hide during the first days. When the relationship gets longer, more serious, and impossible to hide, they officially show interest in building a family with their partner[43].

[43] See next section about premarital dating for further detail.

Informants explained that the discussion regarding marrying and having children comes in the early stages of the relationship, sometimes even before the first physical contact.

When one female informant (28) started to get invited by her now-husband to drive or drink, she straightly asked him what his purpose was.

> I wanted him to be clear right away […], like, you know, 'what do you want exactly?' things like that (laughs), first we talked really like friends… you know… at that time I didn't want to marry right away, so I didn't want to give him false hopes as well. […] Then he told me that he liked me […] So we talked about that for about three hours, things like 'if it's not as a premice for marriage, I can't go out with you' […] And after we agreed about our relationships, we started to date. (Emika, 27, three children)

Although she was interested in him as a love partner, she would not start the relationship before being sure it was a premise of marriage. Some people in their 30s and 40s who are divorced and wish to remarry would even enter a love relationship with the only goal to found a family. Marriage, then, would be considered only when the woman becomes pregnant. Islanders thoroughly apply the romantic love ideology, in that they equally consider their personality and sexual compatibility and their intention to marry and have children.

From this practical reason comes a cultural association between romance and having children. Marriage is believed to be a cement of a love relationship. The narrative of Hana (28) represents this link very well.

Hana had her first marriage from a *dekikon* at 18 with a high school classmate but quickly realized her husband was not a good person (sometimes violent, borrowing money to use at the *pachinko*) and divorced a year later. When recalling that time, she told me that she idealized family life, and thought that "as long as you have a child, everything should be okay (*kodomo ga dekitara iinoni).*" She then dated another man for some time but later broke

up with him. Her comment on this relationship was that "it was a waste of time (*yokei*)." Finally, she started to date a childhood (*dôkyûsei)* friend with whom she felt secure. She felt happy to find someone she already knew, who "had nothing to hide." Moreover, she admitted that it is bothersome to meet someone new, so being with this childhood friend was the best option. "It is not really because I love him (*suki*), but I feel safe, I feel stability in him, so we happened to date very naturally." However, considering her past experiences with men, she still had doubts about marrying and having another child. Her now-husband persuaded her by first reassuring her and telling her that he would take care of her and her already-born child, as well as the new children they may have. Finally, he convinced her by stating that "if we don't have a child soon, we are going to lose interest in each other (*hayaku kodomo o tsukuranaito, kokoro ga hanarete iku*)." Thus, she married a second time at 26 after she became pregnant again.

The three love relationships Hana described during the interview reveal the strong links between romantic love and building a family. While she was deeply in love with the first one, it felt natural to have a child with him. To her, a child would have been the natural continuation of her romantic relationship. She recalls becoming very much in love with him and thought it should be enough to marry and have children with him. However, she admitted to being reckless and having not thought through the consequences of marrying this young to someone she did not know very well. The comments regarding her second boyfriend also show the association between romance and having a child. Because nothing particular happened between them, she called this relationship a waste of time. Although she was vague while talking about him, it appears that she was looking for a specific result to happen with him.

To Hana, a love relationship is not an end in itself; it needs to accomplish a role in her life. Her now-husband displayed this role when they discussed marriage and having

children. Her statement may feel at first that she dissociated romantic love and marriage. Her comment, “it is not really because I love him,” may be viewed as the rejection of any sentiment in marital union. Yet, her choice to marry her now-husband and the word he used to persuade her into marriage reveal her beliefs on the romantic love ideology.

At that point in her life, at 26, she already had a stable life as a single mother; she worked as a nurse and got all the help she needed from her parents (the child even calls her father “papa” instead of “grandpa,” proving how close they are between generations). She did not *need* to marry again in terms of material necessities, and through her experience, she was unsure whether she should marry again. Still, although not much talkative about what attracted her to him, she dated him without genuine intentions to marry. Her now-husband convinced her by displaying the link between romance and family. To make their relationship “bloom,” not being a “waste of time,” and to continue in the long term, they should have a child and marry. Hence, his declaration: “if we don’t have a child soon, we are going to lose interest in each other (*hayaku kodomo o tsukuranaito, kokoro ga hanarete iku*).”

This view of romantic love reminds the Platonist and Cartesian explanations of its existence. It is not an end in itself but a tool to access something else. To islanders, the goal of romantic love is to marry and have children. Thus, committing to a romantic relationship is viewed mainly as the prelude to having a family. It explains why unmarried adult couples do not use birth control and why *dekikon* are a majority in Tokunoshima. A child should be, in their opinion, the result of its parents’ love. Thus, the *dekikon* habit is not a reckless and unplanned pregnancy but the accomplishment of romantic relationships[44].

[44] This type of “prepared *dekikon*” may be associated with another Japanese word: *sazukarikon*, the “blessed” marriage. It is the act of deliberately waiting to get pregnant to marry. Although the differences are minimal, one may argue that marriages after pregnancy in Tokunoshima are more expected than prepared. They continue their romantic relationship until the girl becomes pregnant, but do not purposely behave with a child in mind as in a *sazukarikon*. Yet, they know it should happen shortly.

Moreover, the following section shows that a marriage followed by pregnancy is strongly associated with adulthood. In order to become an adult, one should start a family.

Dekikon as a Conscious Choice toward Adulthood

The three following narratives demonstrate that *dekikon* is not limited to unqualified and very young mothers such as Hana. Asako (45, four children), Yukiko (57, three children), and Yuriko (45, four children) all married after becoming pregnant. Still, several characteristics make them different from Hana. First, they all had a first marriage relatively later, respectively, at 26, 27, and 29. Second, they all spent their early twenties in big cities (respectively Yokohama, Kagoshima, and Osaka), where they graduated from technical schools. They all started to date their now-husband there, but only one out of the three met a man not originating from Tokunoshima. They are qualified workers: respectively a midwife, a museum custodian, and a section manager in a community health center, who have always worked full-time while raising their children. They also have had a stable marriage and never divorced[45]. Finally, they all married and had children after returning to the island. Even Asako and Yuriko, who lived in concubinage with their now-husband in Yokohama and Osaka, said there was "no need" to marry them at that time. The only reason they gave regarding why they married, was that a child was on the way ("*dekita kara*").

Those three narratives reaffirm that *dekikon* is controlled and conscious. They spent their early twenties studying and working, even living with a romantic partner. Then, when they felt the appropriate moment, they decided to have a baby and marry simultaneously. Interestingly enough, they all felt like founding a family in Tokunoshima instead of the big cities of the mainland. One reason is the various convenience of raising children, as explored in Chapter 5. The second reason is that they considered living on the mainland only a step

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[45] Yukiko divorced once but remarried the same man.

toward adulthood. When asked why they returned to Tokunoshima after spending five to ten years in Kyushu or Honshu, most male and female informants would reply that they had enough "fun" and needed to "really" work. Life in the mainland is only a moratorium period between adolescence and post-adolescence to experience and learn things before becoming a responsible adult. Adulthood, thus, would be to have children, and the best way to access it is to marry. Still, one could wonder why *dekikon* is necessary, even for rather educated women who control their pregnancy and professional life.

The reason comes from the lack of money and their dependence on their family. Indeed, young people do not have the necessary means to move out of the family household (*jikka*) by themselves. They need their parents' economic and material support. Having a child is an excellent way for young people to leave the bosom of the family while still getting their help. One female participant (Kyoko, 28) dated her now-husband from 13 years old but married only at 26 after becoming pregnant. Until then, they used to live separately.

> Me: Did you ever think about living in a concubinage with your now-husband?
> Kyoko: Yes, but we couldn't find a place to rent in Amagi.
> Me: But now that you are married, you could find one?
> Kyoko: Well, now we live in my family's home. My father left and is now living with his mother. He told us that we could use his house. (Kyoko, 28, one child)

When asked why they did not try to move together before that – as it was apparent that their relationship was serious – she replied that there was no place to live. But now that they are married with a child, the parents found a way to house the newly married couple. The family accepted the young couple to move together in their house only when the child was coming. Only then they gave economic and material support despite the 13-year-long romantic relationship.

Consequently, shotgun marriage can also be used to pressure the parents to get independence and marry someone they disapprove of. When another participant (Yukiko, 57) expressed her wish to marry her now-husband, their parents did not initially agree to the marriage[46]. Still, after spending almost ten years in the mainland, she felt ready to marry at 27 and became pregnant at the same age. Consequently, the parents could not say much about the sudden pregnancy and accepted the union. This type of marriage reminds the previous narrative of Karina (see Chapter 5), whom her current husband's parents paid for the abortion. Despite the painful experience of delivering an aborted baby, she became pregnant a second time right after. The parents could not ask for a second abortion and accepted the marriage this time, even though they did not strongly agree. They are now supporting the young couple by hiring their son to their sugar cane field business.

In those cases, pregnancy was a pressure point for the parents. Both Yukiko and Karina wanted to access adulthood – in other words: marrying and having children –without cutting their families off. The sudden pregnancy made them accept the union and support the young household while maintaining a good relationship. Thus, the *dekikon* habit can be a tool for young people (educated or not) to become "true" adults and build their own families while still getting the support of their parents.

The Dekikon as a Bet in Life

Still, there are high risks in having a baby with someone you never lived with. One could even see this way of marrying as a bet in their life. First, marrying and moving together only after pregnancy is taking the risk that the partner may not be accommodating. Second,

[46] When asked the reason, she vaguely replied "because we were too close (*chikakute…*)." I initially thought it was because their parents did not want her to marry someone in the neighborhood (as he was described as a childhood friend during the interview), the implied reason, however, may be that they were too close *genetically*. As the island is small, unions between cousins is rather tolerated, but not much approved either.

the fact that they do not use birth control may be considered a tacit agreement between the two partners that the relationship is serious. However, it does not necessarily mean that it is understood the same way for both. This was, for instance, the experience of Sara (28).

Sara met her ex-boyfriend right after graduating high school. As Hana mentioned in the previous interview in Chapter 5, she was deeply in love with him, and, because their financial situation (and their parents) allowed it, they decided to move together. Even though Sara said that she used condoms during her high school period, this ex-boyfriend never used them with her. To Sara, it was the tacit agreement that both were ready to marry and have children. Thus, she naturally became pregnant right after moving together. However, he seemed reticent to marry immediately, arguing that he wanted to graduate from his hairstylist school before marrying. Yet, even after getting his hairstylist license and the child's birth, he still refused to marry her. They broke up a few months later, leaving Sara alone with her child.

> Me: When you lived with him, did you think of building a family together?
> Sara: That’s what I thought, so this is why I became pregnant with him. But he actually didn’t want to, apparently. […]
> Me: Did you have a proper conversation with him about that?
> Sara: Yes, but… he said things like ‘maybe a little bit later.’ But you know, I was deeply in love with him, and we lived together, so…(Sara, 27, one child)

Sara’s narrative reveals how risky it can be to consider *dekikon* as a tool to access marriage and pregnancy. The choice of having unprotected sex with a partner so early in her life was similar to a bet: you rely on luck to find a responsible man. After the separation, Sara returned to her father’s house with her child. Her transition to adulthood took an alternative path in which she still struggles to escape. As an uneducated single mother with

an eight-year-old child, she remains dependent on her parents to survive with very few options for the rest of her life.

In a society that strictly associates womanhood with motherhood (see chapter 5), women need to take a high risk in order to access adulthood. But in the context of Tokunoshima, it is less reckless than it sounds. Indeed, it is also in the men's interest to quickly become independent adults, and many informants reported having better luck than Hana and Sara. It is the case, for instance, of Harumi (21) and Saeko (31), who both married at 16 years old, following the same pattern as Hana and Sara. However, in their case, both husbands took their responsibilities. Harumi's husband, who also was 16 at that time, quit school and started to work. He is now co-owner of a pizzeria in Kametsu with his brother and supports his wife and three children. Saeko's husband was 21 when they married and currently works in a local business in Isen. Although she has to work full-time to feed their four children, she reported having a stable and comfortable life. Both would admit that life is tough, but none of them regret marrying and having children so early in life.

Both husbands could benefit from this union as well. For instance, Harumi's husband could enter her wealthier family as a *mukoyôshi*[47], and start his own pizza business, and Saeko's husband could access adulthood and independence from his parents. Thus, both parties (men and women) can take advantage of a shotgun marriage, despite the image of being a rushed and unplanned decision for young people.

The widespread habit of *dekikon* reveals a peculiar way of thinking about romantic relationships. Shotgun marriage can be a way to enter adulthood and independence for young people, but it is a high-risk decision that can have brutal consequences, especially for women. Still, people in Tokunoshima consider it the natural result of a romantic relationship. If it

[47] Literally "adopted son," it means that the husband entered his wife's family by taking her name.

does not result in a child, it is regarded as a waste of time and effort. Thus, islanders seem to strongly associate the qualities of a romantic partner with those of a marriage partner.

The question of whether this unique way of thinking *dekikon* impacts the fertility rate is still challenging to answer. On the one hand, there is a strong correlation between the high TFR of Tokunoshima and the prevalence of *dekikon.* On the other hand, the relatively "controlled" aspect of the habit shows that shotgun marriages are planned the same way as a wedding in the mainland. Thus, the causation is still unclear. However, this "romantic *dekikon"* shows that romance may not be viewed the same way as their counterparts in the mainland and may be an additional element in understanding Tokunoshima's high fertility. The following section will describe the dating habits and the male/female relationships in romantic settings on the island.

Romance, Dating, and Sexuality in Tokunoshima

A Sociological Interrogation on the Definition of Romance

The question of dating on the island has been surprisingly challenging to tackle with many informants. When asked: "what do you do when you are the both of you?" or "what do you do on a date?" people would take time to reply. Usually, after a few minutes of thinking about it, they would acknowledge that "there is nothing to do on the island." Islanders seem to struggle with the idea of dating in Tokunoshima. This reaction allows questioning what a romantic date in contemporary human cultures is. Illouz (2008) has already defined romance as a liminoïd ritual – a ritual that enables individuals to escape the daily routine (see Chapter 2). She also adds that it is spontaneous with what she calls "inverted" social interactions in which people can reveal their "true selves." However, although the characteristic of "spontaneity" that brings out people's "true selves" may be appliable in some cultures and social classes, one should not ignore that romance is always

a seduction ritual. Even for long-standing married couples, romance is still related to the wish to appeal to someone. It may not be toward the love partner itself, but their friends and family. A picture of a couple on the top of the Eiffel tower aims to show the entourage how enviable the couple is. Romance is not the revealing of the "true self," as Illouz pointed out, but the revelation of an ego. It echoes the definition of romantic love explored in Chapter 2 as a feeling that develops in individualistic societies. Romantic love exists only if the self is strongly emphasized. A date can be romantic only if it celebrates the two individuals involved in it. Thus, this thesis defines a romantic date by two characteristics. One is liminality as a ritual outside everyday life, as Illouz identified it. The other is the "celebration" of the selves of the two participants during a date.

This "celebration" may take many forms that can be divided into two categories: external and internal. The external celebration of selves is social. Its goal is to elevate the individuals inside a couple among a social group. It can be a picture posted on social networks, a date that involves a public event (birthday cake in a restaurant, public marriage proposal, etc.), or, in the case of Tokunoshima, the simple fact of showing up downtown as a couple. The internal celebration of selves involves intimacy and seclusion. This date separates the couple from the outside world, putting them into a bubble where the two individuals can focus on themselves. Although it usually takes place at home (such as a romantic dinner at home or the current trend of "Netflix and chill"), it can also happen in public spaces such as movie theaters and going for a drive. As the next section will demonstrate, in Tokunoshima, most dates are internal celebrations of selves. Going out in external celebrations will not summon liminality and may be harmful to the couple who will be strongly subject to gossip.

Getting back to the question that "there is nothing [romantic] to do on the island," this answer may sound baffling to a western mind or a city dweller. With plenty of beautiful

natural spaces, several rather fashionable cafés, and fancy restaurants, the island does not lack so-called "romantic" places. Indeed, deserted beaches and fancy restaurants are easily associated with the above-mentioned romantic characteristics, as they provide a place to be alone that sticks out from everyday life (liminality) and the celebration of selves encouraged by the low number of visitors. Thus, one should be surprised to think that Tokunoshima has no romantic aura.

Figure 12

Deserted beaches and elegant restaurants

In fact, several participants originating from Osaka and Tokyo listed their preferred dating spots. One woman (33) from Osaka downtown took the act of dating in Tokunoshima seriously. She explained in much detail her favorite places to go with her boyfriend. When they are the two of them, they usually go on a boat to see the sunset, have dinner in an Italian restaurant serving wine and visit their favorite "snack" bar with subdued lights and red furniture. Her description of her dating spots matches the standard image of people regarding romantic habits observed by Illouz (2008, 2012). Despite what islanders seem to believe, there are, indeed, "things" to do during a date in Tokunoshima. Still, they seem not to respond to the same criteria as people from the city regarding romance. What mainlanders are educated to see as romantic is viewed differently by islanders. Using anthropological vocabulary, they do not associate the same "symbols" (Sapir, 2020) with romance.

Interestingly enough, people in Tokunoshima still have the same "blueprint" of romance directly inspired by courtly love, as a liminoid and private/personal experience (celebration of selves). Yet, the dating spots described by the former participant differ on the

island. Indeed, how could you find a beach liminal when you had seen it every day of your life since you were a kid? How can a café or a restaurant be a celebration of the self when you know the waiters and the other customers? In the islanders' minds, the experiences of the beach and nature are more related to family outings than spending time with a loved partner. They have barbecues, go snorkeling and play football or baseball on the beach with their children and other families. Cafés and restaurants are also places to go with friends. Going there as a date would expose them to the risk of meeting someone they know and gossiping that could harm their reputation. They are social and interactive environments that leave no place for only two individuals. Still, when asked about what they imagine as an ideal date, people would give answers that coincide with the idea of liminality and celebration of selves.

The Ideal of Romance in Tokunoshima

When asked about her ideal date, Emika (28), a married young woman with three children, was thrilled by this question. She gave a precise – and passionate – description of what she would like to do if she could. Interestingly enough, her reply was split into two parts. The first part was in direct relation to the previous topic we were discussing, which was the lack of romantic time as a married couple. Consequently, she first linked her answer about her ideal date to this issue.

> I want to do normal things, something we can always do, like swimming together – like I did with you last time – driving, taking selfies together. […] Until now, I've only dated 'indoor type' people, but I'm more an outdoor person, so I want to do things I haven't done yet. (Emika, 27, three children)

Then, she started to let her imagination run about the ideal date.

> I want to have a date as the children do, as a high school student (laughs) […] I want to go to the big cities, and date like you can do there, like go shopping only the both of us, going to cafés, oh, and manga cafés, because I never did that. […] I want to do all the things I've never done before. […] On the island, there is no place to walk. In the big cities (*tokai*), you have shopping districts. I want to walk while holding hands because you can't do it here. […] On the island, that would be embarrassing because everybody watches. There are tons of things I want to do.

Emika's reply mainly revolves around novelty. Mother at 20, she expresses her hard desire to do romantic things she did not have the chance to do in her life. In other words, her image of the ideal desire is strongly related to liminality. Even in the first part of her response, by saying she wants to do "normal things," her idea of normal is still disconnected from everyday life. What she calls "normal" are doable things impossible to perform because of a lack of time in her daily routine (going to the beach[48], taking selfies, etc.).

The second part of her reply also confirms that liminality is a crucial characteristic to what she considers a romantic date. Indeed, she specifies that the ideal date would be out of her everyday life, especially in big cities. From the eyes of an islander, big cities represent the most out of the ordinary – still accessible – activity to do with a love partner. Her reply coincides with other respondents, who pointed out Tokyo Disneyland, Christmas illuminations, Yomiuriland, or travel to the big cities such as Tokyo or foreign countries. They made a clear distinction between the island and romance. Incidentally, many

[48] Replying "going to the beach" seems to be in total contradiction with what has been said in the previous paragraph. An attentive reader would notice in her quote that she went to the beach with me. When I invited her with some of her friends as a social gathering to meet new islanders, I learnt in my big surprise that it was the first time they went snorkeling in their life (!). Before meeting me, she did not know the potential romantic aspect of going to the beach. Although I have not directly talked about the beach as a potential dating spot, she seemed to have noticed it by herself, and pointed out during the interview. This part of the reply is strongly related to the experience she had on my contact. It proves that mimesis – in Girard's definition (1961, see Chapter 2) – is a strong desire builder. Although she grew up without paying particular attention to the beach, her new experience of snorkeling with an outsider changed her perception of her environment and created the new desire to experience it with her husband.

respondents who lived on the mainland declared that they used to date often but stopped after coming back to Tokunoshima. The island does not seem to be a place for romantic behaviors in the eyes of islanders.

Moreover, those responses are also strongly inspired by consumerism. The two distinct parts in Emika's answer show how she distinguishes what she calls "normal things" on the island to do with her partner from the highly commodified romantic dates in the big cities. What makes her ideal date unique is not only the liminal aspect but also the fact that money is involved. If the informants from the island had the chance to go to Tokyo, they would not want to picnic in the imperial garden or admire Mount Fuji in the sunset. They want to go to shopping districts, restaurants, and amusement parks. Their idea of a romantic date is strongly associated with money.

One could see this association as a test toward the male partner to verify his economic strengths, as he is expected to provide. But there is a more organic dimension to that vision of romance. Informants were all eager to live those commodified experiences, not necessarily in a pragmatic way, but because they desired to do it. They usually have discovered those places by reading magazines or online articles and, most importantly, by seeing their friends' Instagram stories who show the experience of those romantic dates. In a concrete application of Girard's mimesis, desire is shared through a mediator (Girard, 1961). As it is one of the most iconic consumerist goods of recent history (Nolcheska, 2017), it may be evident that the object (romantic date) is also associated with consumerism.

Thus, regarding dating, islanders distinguish their life on the island from the romantic, liminoid, and commodified activities in the big cities of the mainland. Although they have a definite idea of a romantic date, it does not apply on the remote island. It explains why they think there is "nothing to do" in Tokunoshima when it comes to romance. To them, there is no place on the island where they can adequately escape the daily routine while celebrating

their love and fulfilling their consumer desire. In fact, during my whole time on the island, not a single time the word "romantic" (*romanchikku*) was employed, despite conducting interviews that were strongly related to the topic. Still, unmarried young couples must meet, and one should wonder whether it is entirely separate from romance.

Dating in Tokunoshima

After being insisted on the question on the date and getting over the "there is nothing to do" reply, informants would usually evoke what they call "*doraibu,"* the anglicism of "drive," which means "to go for a drive." It is by far the favorite way of dating on the island, and all participants, no matter their age and gender, had experienced it. Still, the importance of the car in the dating process does not mean that it is particularly idealized. All participants insisted that the "*doraibu*" was a default choice rather than a truly desired activity. Because there are only a few occupations for couples, they resign themselves to building a romantic mood by driving around the island.

Surely, showing off and driving an expensive or stylish vehicle may be a means of seduction in any modern society. Illouz (2008) argues that contemporary romantic expressions are defined inside the consumer reality, in which abstraction is essential. The act of "*doraibu*" contains many characteristics of the commodification of romance. Anyone could picture the perfect romantic stroll in a convertible car, heading to the sunset, surrounded by the ocean and palm trees. However, the reality of the island makes every stereotypical image of romance in the tropics impractical.

First, the car itself does not show any particular symbol of seduction and seems only to be a practical tool there. The tropical climate can be brutal on car bodies, so maintaining an expensive vehicle may be extremely costly, even meaningless, as the salty air would eventually get over any human effort. An acquaintance passionate about cars told me that,

after working for Honda on the mainland, he returned to Tokunoshima, bringing his colossal SUV. Even though the trip to the island with the car cost a third of the vehicle's value, it was so impractical that he had to sell it at Kagoshima. He sadly concluded his story by telling me: "who do you want to impress on this island, anyway?" which brings us to the second point: the absence of liminality. Once again, the "*doraibu*" does not seem at first to apply to the definition of a liminoid experience. Although it is common to do it in Japanese cities, where "*doraibu*" takes place on the weekends and works in opposition to the regular train commuting, on the island, however, the car is always used during everyday life. It requires a specific set of mind to turn it into a romantic environment.

In order to turn the car into a dating tool, the actors during a date have to pay attention to the two major characteristics of romance previously mentioned: liminality and celebration of selves. The following paragraphs will explore how people find romance in the car through two concepts: liminality into the night, and the celebration of selves into gender roles.

Liminality into the Night

Indeed, although the previous paragraph mentioned that a car is a daily-life tool, it can still hold the properties of a liminoid ritual by the isolation and the relative anonymity it offers to a couple. Isolation, because the car brings the feeling of being only by yourself, separated from the outside world, where nobody can hear what is happening inside, and vice versa. Anonymity, because a couple can meet by doing *doraibu* without being recognized by the community. However, it may not be enough to transform a stroll in a car into a romantic date. Vehicles are easily recognizable, and people tend to look at who accompanies who. I cannot count how many times people would stare at me while driving with a female islander. In those conditions, a newly formed couple doing a romantic *doraibu* would be quickly the target of gossips, and their situations instantaneously known by the community.

The link with everyday life would remain, and liminality would not be summoned. Therefore, couples need to consider another aspect to make a *doraibu* romantic; time.

Time itself may be a crucial element in turning the daily-life car into a liminoid ritual. Of course, doing a *doraibu* during the weekend is a way to escape the "everyday aura" of the vehicle, and many couples drive on Sunday. Still, the problem of the link with the community remains, and only "official" couples[49] who are not afraid of gossip tend to date during the weekend. Thus, the most effective way to "summon" liminality is to go at night. It is not surprising that dates are preferred at night anywhere in the world, as it is a significant and noticeable fracture into *daily* life. This is also why many rituals that include liminality (such as religious rites) happen at night during particular times of the year (Olwig, 2005). The night offers all the prerequisites to invert and subvert daily social interactions necessary for liminal and liminoid rituals (Turner, 1976). Besides the escape from everyday life, the night also brings many advantages to a romantic date. In Tokunoshima, it is indeed effective to remain anonymous, as the darkness and the car headlights make any vehicles unrecognizable. Neighbors are also less likely to notice whether someone has left their home. Thus, the addition of the feeling of isolation, anonymity, and the night can turn the *doraibu* into a liminoid ritual. They enable subverting social arrangements by making individuals indistinguishable, isolated from the community during a determined period, and offer a window out of daily life. It is during this liminoid secluded environment that the second element of romance can happen, which is the celebration of selves.

[49] Those "official" couples are usually older couples who already have children, known to be in stable relationships, or divorced individuals enjoying a new love relationships.

The Celebration of Selves into Gender Roles

Indeed, once the couple feels protected from the outside world in this "social Faraday cage" that the car represents, they can start focusing on themselves. One may think that a simple drive may be negligible in dating, but being only the two of them gives a precious opportunity to analyze the compatibility of the two individuals. Hence, the destination itself is irrelevant. One woman (28) recalls one "driving" date when she and her boyfriend were so passionate about their conversation that they drove around the island twice in a row without being bored, which roughly corresponds to 150 km. This moment was crucial for her to know about her partner's personality, intentions, and compatibility. However, *doraibu* is not only about understanding each other; it serves as a setting to fulfill the role of men and women. One particular narrative shows how driving is valuable to judge your partner through the spectrum of expected gendered behaviors.

Mako (28) had her first date as a *doraibu*. As a nurse working nightshifts, she was exhausted this day in particular. She explained that even having a conversation with her partner was an effort. Things got even worse after they stopped to buy some coffee, and she began to feel nauseous. She confessed feeling bad for her boyfriend as she was sometimes even unpleasant with him, irritated by the fatigue. At one point, she even asked him if she could close her eyes and stop talking for a while. However, despite what she called a "failed" date, her boyfriend was extraordinarily understanding and responded positively to her requests. She could feel his kindness, tolerance, and, most importantly, his interest in her. They both agreed to see each other again and have been dating since then.

Mako's narrative reveals that the *doraibu* is a practical tool to not only know her partner better but also to reproduce gender roles. By acting as they did during the date, they perfectly created an atmosphere for a romantic celebration of selves. It was the set of a play in which both actors had a specific function. While she "celebrated" his understanding

personality for tolerating her moody behavior, he "celebrated" her as a desirable woman by being understanding. Thus, the celebration of selves is not only about taking time alone to know each other better; it is about elevating the individuals to another status. Of course, this celebration is determined mainly by gender, and the roles attributed depend on whether you are a man or a woman.

One could see similarities between the depiction of courtly love and Mako's narrative. Indeed, her partner displayed many aspects resembling the Knight-servant image: a man ready to endure his partner's caprices while remaining faithful and obliging to her (Rougemont, 1972). Mako also fulfilled her role as the passive and desirable demoiselle of *fin'amor* poems. Despite not being much responsive – which would make *troubadours* willingly consumed in pain (Yalom, 2012) – she is still worth using up time and money. Moreover, both act according to the typical power relationship of courtly love: the man is still the one in control. Indeed, by praising his woman, the courtly love poet still chooses which women's characteristics are noticeable and which parts should be ignored. He controls the relationship's dynamic by being the only actor, while the woman remains passive. In the case of Mako, her partner is the one who drives, chooses where to go, and pays. He is the one who organized the date while she only had to follow along. One could even see this relationship as a commodified ritual in which the man is the consumer and the woman the product. Despite feeling unwell, Mako's date was successful because both could still fulfill those gender roles.

This unequal dynamic was also present in discussions with other female participants regarding the ideal date. The previous section showed how islanders distinguish dating in Tokunoshima from the commodified experience of romance in cities. What can be added is the strong wish of women to be led by men during their ideal dates. They want them to actively reserve and pay for restaurants and other romantic activities. They also want them

to choose which places to go, without the women having anything to say – although they still need to be reassured in advance in case their partner makes a mistake. In other words, they reproduce the same gendered scheme of courtly love, as the woman being the passive and desirable object/product, while the man takes the role of the active Knight-servant/consumer. But this scheme is not only present in *doraibu* or the ideal date for islanders. It is prevalent in other alternative ways of dating typical of Tokunoshima.

When asked about other dating activities besides *doraibu*, participants would list various occupations related to the rural environment. The most common and typical dates there take the form of hunting vipers, bull walks, rabbit spotting, or working in sugar cane fields. Although they do not sound very romantic at first (at one point, I even thought some participants were joking), they all conform to my participants' image of romance. First, they are a convenient way to be alone and display liminality and celebration of selves, taking place in isolated and private areas (they are also suitable alternatives for dating during the day while keeping anonymity). Second, most are strongly related to gender roles following courtly love. Indeed, all the activities listed above have the characteristics to be masculine. Women only have a minimal role in those kinds of dates. They would not actively hunt vipers or walk the bulls on the beach. They would be present and follow along with the task. During a date in Tokunoshima, the man displays masculine characteristics, showing his ability to kill a viper or lead a one-ton fighter bull on the beach. The woman only has to be desirable and make pleasant company. She serves as an audience and a reward (if the date is successful) for the man.

Thus, this section has shown how people in Tokunoshima date and perceive romance. Although the activities differ from what has been observed in the mainland by not seeing the tropical environment as a romantic material, islanders still have a similar "blueprint" of romance. In Tokunoshima or elsewhere, a romantic date is always related to liminality, the

celebration of the individuals/selves, and a commodifying ideal experience. Moreover, the main occupations revolve around strongly gendered roles between a passive and desirable woman and an active and obliging man. In other words, the conception of romance is not different from the standard views of less isolated places. What differ are the ways to perform those romantic gestures. Even though islanders themselves do not see them as ideal, they have found ways to conform to the general idea of romance.

To conclude this paragraph, one could wonder whether those alternative ways of dating impact the TFR. The previous section has explored the vital link between romantic love and building a family. Dating is indeed one of the tools to access a family, and sexuality is prevalent in the dating ritual. Consequently, the act of *doraibu* may be highly influential in the conception of children and *dekikon*. Because of the secluded environment that the car may offer by going freely anywhere on the island, it seems easier to find intimate places to spend time. Participants usually listed three common locations to have sexual intercourses that correspond to the different steps of the proximity of the partners. Newly formed couples would usually have sex in hotels, then would change to the car itself to save money. Finally, when the community is well aware of the romantic couple, they usually spend intimate time at home.

Thus, sex during a romantic date that may result in *dekikon* is common and natural. The fact that many dates occur in a private environment (liminoid, internal celebration of selves) may affect the shotgun marriage rate. Indeed, compared to the mainland where the first outings for couples happen in public, the transition to intimate settings may happen quicker. Many participants stated that they began to have sexual intercourse on the second date[50]. However, the fact that it happens relatively quickly compared to the mainland and is sometimes unprotected does not mean that it is reckless. Many people knew their partner

[50] It may even happen quicker depending on how well the informants knew their partner before dating.

already long before dating. As the island is relatively small, people who date are not strangers to each other. The following section will explore to which extent people meet and choose their romantic partners.

Finding a Spouse

This section will explore the heart of the issues put into light in this study: the difficulties for single people to meet a romantic partner with whom they will found a family. It will show how it is easier to meet someone in Tokunoshima than on the mainland. Through human connexions and social interactions, most islanders do not know the struggle of finding a marriage partner. Indeed, despite the variety of profiles among my participants, a vast majority agreed on one point: they never thought it was challenging to meet a romantic partner on the island. This statement may change depending on criteria, and the next section will explore the issue. However, most people – men and women of various ages, single and married – stated that they were satisfied with the ability to find a romantic and marriage companion in Tokunoshima. This observation comes in contrast with research done on the mainland, in which the majority of single Japanese men and women cannot find an appropriate partner (see chapter 1). Indeed, finding a romantic partner seems more evident than in mainland Japan.

One particular narrative perfectly represents how easier it is to meet a marriage partner on the island. Hiroshi (40) grew up in Tokunoshima city, the "urban" area of the island. After high school, he moved to Tokyo to study at a reasonably respected university. Then, he decided to stay in Tokyo and worked as a teacher in a cram school for more than 15 years. His romantic life was idle. After graduation from university, he quickly broke up with his girlfriend and could never find anyone else afterward. Coming near his 40s without any chances of meeting a marriage partner and getting tired of Tokyo, he returned to

Tokunoshima at 37. After one year on the island, he found a new job and married right after. His first child was expected to be born a month after I interviewed him.

Hiroshi's narrative is an indicative example of the contrast between his experience on the mainland and Tokunoshima. Despite desiring a girlfriend and his wish to marry and have a family, he could never meet anyone in Tokyo. Yet, in two years in Tokunoshima, he accomplishes what he could not do in 16 years in Tokyo. Interestingly, he always considered himself a "herbivore-type" man (see Chapter 1), and never felt like actively looking for a romantic partner, neither in Tokyo nor Tokunoshima. Although he did not change his personality or behavior, he could find a wife quickly. The difference comes from the vast network he benefitted from on the island. However, before going deep into what makes Tokunoshima an island where it is easier to meet someone, one should look at the foundation of male-female interactions. The following section will explore the intergender dynamics framed into particular social bonds.

Sexualized Intergender Interactions and the Local Perception of **Uchi** *and* **Soto**

After one drinking party with locals, one would quickly assess that human relationships are more sexualized than on the mainland. Or, at least, sexuality is less hidden than in the rest of Japan. Men, especially, do not hesitate to talk about their sexual experiences. For instance, they would discuss their enjoyment of meeting with professional workers. They would recommend which "soap houses" (brothels) to go to in Kagoshima or Amamioshima[51], or their masturbation experiences, even while drinking with women. One man in his 60s proudly told me (in the supermarket while I was accompanied by a 50-year-old woman he knew) that Facebook banned him 25 times after posting nude pictures found

[51] As the number of brothels is legally determined by the population size, Tokunoshima is too small to accomodate "soap-houses" or other establishments that offer tariffed sexual intercourses.

on the internet. During almost every drinking party, someone would ask me why I would not try to have sex with a female islander during my stay. Men often express their interest in sexual intercourse and do not feel any taboo about discussing it openly.

Even though men are more likely to express desire and start conversations about sex, some women do not hesitate to go on this theme as well. Two women even offered me casual sexual intercourse with them after drinking parties. One straightly asked me to go to a hotel with her, and one flirted while trying to get me drunk. The first one was not from the island but a hostess from Fukuoka who came to Tokunoshima to work and, more importantly, to collect men. She admitted counting the number of people she had sexual intercourse with. She was about to reach her fiftieth partner in three months when I met her. Another man kept trying to organize me intimate moments with one of his single female employees of the same age as me. Extra-marital affairs are numerous on the island and, when it concerns the husbands, are not necessarily the reasons for a divorce. They even discuss it during drinking parties with ease between colleagues, males and females included. Thus, sexuality seems predominant in male-female interactions, especially at night, when the topic becomes almost inevitable. But this sexualization is also visible during daytime in more indirect ways.

In parallel to the environment of *nomikai/*drinking parties, it is perceivable through the caution used during male-female daily interactions. For instance, they try not to be seen alone with individuals of the opposite sex. Married women, in particular, would avoid these situations. The research was made complicated because of this behavior, most married women of my age had to be interviewed in groups. Spreading gossip is one of the island's favorite activities and is usually related to extra-marital affairs. They are particularly harmful to women whom the community may reject. One participant explained that she lost contact with almost everyone among her friends and colleagues after her divorce, as she was wrongfully accused of cheating on her ex-husband. In this context, one could perceive the

intense sexualization of intergender relationships. Contacts between someone from the other sex with no considerable age difference are usually seen in a sexual way, and behaviors must adapt.

People must be careful even in situations that do not involve presumable sexually compatible individuals. For instance, I got myself along with a single mother in her 50s from Tokyo who had been living in Tokunoshima for 15 years. She offered me to stay at her new home during the fieldwork, but after discussing it with locals, she finally turned back her offer, realizing that people may talk about hosting a 29-year-old man for a couple of months. Even friendly relationships between two generations may be a source of gossip among islanders.

Still, it does not mean that every male-female interaction is endowed with a sexual character. In total opposition to what has been discussed, the absence of sexualization in particular situations may feel deceitful. What may appear sexually ambiguous was different from the islanders' point of view. The following three vignettes explore my misunderstandings toward circumstances that may seem sexually ambiguous to me – or at least deceitful in terms of the type of relations – but felt natural and unsexualized to the locals.

<Vignette 1>

A friend invited me to practice paraglider. One of his former classmates in his fifties had a license and was willing to teach us the basics on a beach. He arrived with a young woman half his age, who told me that she was not born on the island but came some years ago with her boyfriend from Tokunoshima. I assumed that the man who owned the paraglider was possibly the boyfriend's father, from how they interacted without any awkwardness. From my point of view, I could never picture an older man casually inviting a young woman

for activities on the beach, as it could be quickly misinterpreted and sexualized. However, it turns out that she only lived in the same neighborhood (*shûraku*) as him. He casually saw her around and asked her to come. She then took the opportunity to learn about paragliders.

<Vignette 2>

During the preparation fieldwork in 2019, I met people on the airplane who I thought were a couple. Both near their sixties (the man was a retired English teacher and the woman an office worker in Isen town hall), they were returning from a weekend trip in Amamiôshima. After exchanging a bit, I learned that they were not a couple but two childhood friends and classmates (*dôkyûsei*). Despite being the most open-minded as possible, I could only assume that these kinds of activities were privileged, or even reserved, in a marital context. But those two seemed to enjoy traveling in a friendly manner. One may think they had an affair, but it was doubtful as they did not demonstrate any shame or will to hide their relationships. They even accompanied me just after landing at the Isen town hall to meet one of the woman's colleagues with whom I could get local demographic data.

<Vignette 3>

The second time I arrived in Tokunoshima, the woman in charge of the guest house I reserved on the island came to the airport to pick me up. She was accompanied by a man around 40 to 50 years old who held her 18 months daughter while she was driving. As the man seemed quite used to holding the baby (casually talking to me while soothing it), I wrongly assumed that he was a relative, maybe a young grandfather or at least an uncle. I understood a week after that he was, in reality, the husband's colleague (*dôryô*) in his agricultural drone company, who helped in the guest house from time to time. My surprise in learning this came from various uncommon traits in this relationship. First, he was roughly

20 years older than the couple in charge of my guest house, which is usually rare in such a close and friendly relationship. Second, he spent much time inside the property. Even though I learned that both the husband and him worked together, I could frequently see him for dinner, bringing grilled fish he caught at low tide during his free time. Third, how he casually held the baby in the car, and how the mother acted would deceive anyone about their relationships. I understood that he was used to holding the baby because he takes care of her when her mother works in the field. He keeps the baby away from the sun when she operates her tractor.

Thus, male-female relationships in Tokunoshima seem puzzling at first glance. On the one hand, they seem highly sexualized, with many remarks that showed how women are often treated as sexual objects and men as lecherous animals. On the other hand, I encountered many occasions during which the male-female exchanges were deprived of sexual tensions. A man and a woman enjoying a friendly trip together, a man used to taking care of a child who is not his, a young woman accompanying a man in his 50s for activities on the beach, etc… In a "common" etiquette, people would likely avoid this type of relationship (especially involving an older man and a young girl). Still, islanders did not see any sexualized behavior in any of those circumstances.

To understand this paradox, one should look at the Japanese concept of *uchi-soto*. It distinguishes groups of people depending on whether they are "in-groups" and "out-groups." It is said to define human relationships in Japan, as people do not interact or speak in the same way with everyone (Osaki, 2008). For instance, "in-groups" may be defined as family, friends, but also the company one is working for, a school (*Ibid.*), or even a country (Okamoto, 2014). The interactions between individuals inside the groups are different from people outside. One example is the use of *keigo*, the honorific way of speaking Japanese that

is usually employed toward "out-groups" (Masamune, 1996). One does not talk the same way to someone from the "inside" or the "outside." People in Tokunoshima seemed to have the same application of the concept of *uchi-soto*, but with different definitions. Even though there are boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, one could perceive different layers in islanders' perception of what is inside (*uchi*) and outside (*soto*). I have identified three distinct social circles that compose the social groups of Tokunoshima.

Those connexions are demarcated through geographical and human environments in which the male-female dynamics respond differently. There are three primary social circles that correspond to different bounds: the *shûraku* (neighborhood) relationships, the *dôkyûsei* (classmates) relationships, and the *dôryô* relationships. Gender norms in those three types of connexions are more flexible and enable the connexions above, respectively vignettes 1, 2, and 3.

The *shûraku* bound is exclusively geographical. It refers to people living in the same locality, where neighbors help each other and participate in local events such as *matsuri* and annual festivities. The bounds in the *shûraku* are strong as people usually share their everyday lives. The ties built in the *shûraku* are especially beneficial for mothers to help each other. When one is busy with work or personal matters and the grandparents cannot help, she can rely on someone living in the *shûraku* to take care of her children, send them to school, or feed them until she is available again.

The *dôkyûsei* relationship, in contrast, does not relate to geographical links but to school life. As they usually all grow up together without switching schools, the connexion comes from the experiences between classmates and the colossal network built and maintained from school to adult life, and even after retirement. It can count more than a hundred individuals, depending on the generation. The *dôkyûsei* usually keep in touch through social networks such as Facebook or Instagram, but most importantly, Line and its

group discussions. The *dôkyûsei* interact at two different levels: the group and the individual. The group gathers during yearly festivities and drinking parties organized throughout the year for various reasons (birthdays, children entering primary, middle, or high school, etc.). Individual interactions happen when someone needs specific help that a particular *dôkyûsei* can offer. As a sudden entrance into the islander's daily life, I was often the reason for using the individual level of the *dôkyûsei* network. It could be related to my research: "one of my *dôkyûsei* has six kids, you should meet her," "one of my *dôkyûsei* works at Tokunoshima town office, he may have the information you need," or just to do some activities: "my *dôkyûsei* has a boat, we could use it for fishing." This bound is by far the strongest of the three. It starts from the beginning of primary school and only ends at the death of the individuals. It even goes beyond the island, and the *dôkyûsei* who do not live in Tokunoshima anymore are still part of the network and continue to interact with the other classmates through social networks and yearly events.

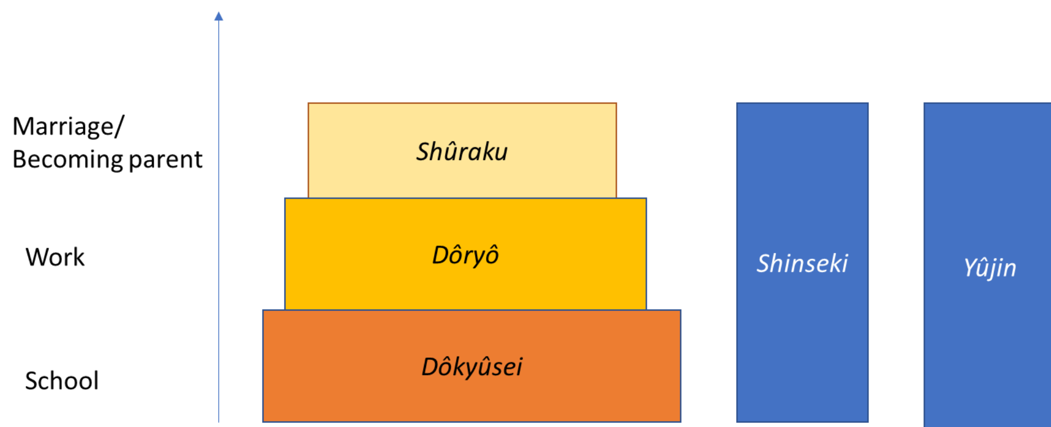
The *dôryô* connexion, or the colleague network, is both geographical and human-related. People working in the same place often live in similar areas and share their daily life in the office. Consequently, the relationships with colleagues are a mix of *shûraku* and *dôkyûsei* relationships. Although the *dôryô* connexion is related to their professional activities, it can be used in personal matters. One of my participants, a native of Tokyo, related her involvement in a car accident on a Sunday. After being brought to the hospital and having a health check-up (with only light wounds), she noticed two of her colleagues at the reception. She first thought it was a coincidence, but they told her they came here to check on her and bring her home. Even though she did not ask for help, and it was the weekend, her colleagues did not hesitate to interrupt their Sunday activities (one was actually drunk) when they learned she had some trouble.

One could add to those three connexions *shinseki* (family) and *yûjin* ("regular" friendship), which enable the same kind of mutual aid between actors. As discussed in Chapter 5, the grandparents, for instance, are crucial in helping the mother raise her children or even giving a place to live for the young married couples. However, people in Tokunoshima are also in contact with brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, or other family members. Thus, they may work as a *dôkyûsei* bound, although, to my observation, it remains weaker. "Regular" friendship may be the rarest on the island, as many friendships happen through the *dôkyûsei* relationship. Still, some "regular friends" are created through drinking parties, nursery school, or leisure activities. However, "regular friendship" connexions do not seem strong enough to summon significant mutual help. They usually do not go beyond friendly activities, such as outings.

One may see those five social bonds as circles created in distinct periods of individuals' lives. For instance, the *dôkyûsei* connexion appears during school life, the *dôryô* connexion is formed in early adulthood when one starts to work, and the *shûraku* bond is strengthened after marriage. Only *shinseki* and *yûjin* are not linked to a particular time (see figure). However, they do not stop once another bound appears. On the contrary, they may merge and form vast social connexions in which people interact.

Figure 13

The Five Social Connexions in Time



These five connexions are not only useful for mutual aid, but they also work as solid networks that put people in contact with each other. Thus, they are significant for meeting new people for various purposes. In the case of this thesis, the networks are highly beneficial to finding a marriage partner. They are not only convenient to be introduced to a potential partner, but they also enable trustful bounds in which male-female interactions work outside the high sexualization of daily life. The following two sections will explore how the above-mentioned social connexions are crucial in matchmaking. They are first a convenient network to meet a partner, but they also work as an environment where gendered behaviors work differently with few sexual tensions between males and females.

Social Connexions as a Matchmaking Network

Among the vast majority of people who replied that it was not difficult to find a love/marriage partner, many explained that they met their partner through the mentioned five social bounds. One can identify two ways to use them: direct and indirect. Direct connexions are when people from the same circle date or marry. For instance, many people reported that their first marriage partner was a *dôkyûsei,* or from the same *shûraku.* But because those

connexions are so strong and stay on during people's entire life, it is not rare that *dôkyûsei,* for instance, marry decades after they meet. It is the case of Hana, seen in section 1, who married a *dôkyûsei* after knowing him for 20 years.

The second type of connexions is the indirect connexions. They are the use of a network outside the individual's connexion. The most common use of indirect connexions is the introduction to someone by another person: for instance, someone who introduced his *dôryô* to a *dôkyûsei,* which works exactly like the introduction of a colleague to a friend. Coming back to Hiroshi's narrative, his easiness in quickly finding a marriage partner is due to those indirect connexions to the networks. Coming back from Tokyo after almost 20 years, he was still part of his *dôkyûsei, shûraku,* and of course, *shinseki* connexions. Thus, the community regularly introduced him to potential wives. Although he did not tell the exact number of women he met in view of marriage – and only repeated "a lot" – he seemed to have quite the choice. In fact, he purposely refused many proposals as he believed that marriage should be related to love and that he was not ready yet to share his life with someone after such a long time of celibacy. Still, after two years of "inflicted" *konkatsu,* he has successfully found a wife.

Thus, the social bonds in Tokunoshima are a convenient tool to ease the search for a romantic/marriage partner. People constantly keep in touch with other group members in an active and vast network in which individuals can meet, introduce, or be introduced to a potential partner.

Social Connexions as an Environment with Appeased Male-Female Interactions

However, the social connexions inherent to Tokunoshima inhabitants do not only work as simple matchmaking networks. They are social environments in which gender norms differ from regular interactions. The three vignettes mentioned earlier demonstrated

how sexualization is less present – or at least works differently – inside those connexions. The qualities of the social connexions are evident during drinking parties. Women, in particular, may have a completely different experience of a *nomikai,* whether they are inside or outside the connexion.

For instance, many female participants who are not from the island – thus outside many social connexions – reported having negative experiences with men during drinking parties. One particular expression resonated through the several young women interviewed: fauvism (*yajû*). There is a drastic line separating women outside and inside those connexions. Because men will almost always approach them in impolite manners[52], women who are not from the island refrain from going out at night with other female friends who are also from somewhere else.

One informant from downtown Osaka (Yuriko, 33, in concubinage, no children) expressed how she had to change her outing habits after settling in Tokunoshima.

> Yuriko: I usually go once a month to drink with girlfriends at Kametsu, for a "girl party." But, yeah, male islanders, you know, they are looking for women (*onna o motometemasu*).
> Me: Even if you say that you're married or have a boyfriend?
> Yuriko: Even if I say so, they are like: "I'm okay with that, just give me your phone number" or "let's drink together tonight." […] So I guess there is this feeling of danger here. (Yuriko, Osaka, 33, no child)

[52] One should note, however, that direct sexual assaults are rare, as such an act will not go unnoticed by the community, and is strongly disapproved. At the exception of one female informant who was disturbed at night by the sudden visit of her drunk neighbor, I have only heard one story about a woman who was assaulted by a taxi driver, but the veracity is difficult to confirm. In fact, even the participants who told me having negative experiences with local men emphasized that they do not feel "too much" in danger.

Many other informants from Tokyo or Okinawa also stated that they prefer meeting their friends at home. During a group interview, two women expressed their disappointment in not being able to have fun in local bars.

> Women 1 (28, Okinawa, married, one child): For men, if they go out at night, they call this "socializing," (*tsukiai*) but if women do that, even if they are married or mothers, they are seen as loose girls (*asondeiru*).
> Women 2 (35, Tokyo, married, one child): Yes, that's why I feel uncomfortable (*kyûkutsu*) in going outside. If I drink out, I'd definitely meet someone I know, so I need to be extra careful about what I do. So at the end, I would rather invite my girlfriends to home and have fun there.

In addition to being bothered during drinking parties outside, female mainlanders need to reduce their enjoyment at bars to avoid being misjudged. As a result, they prefer to meet at home during the afternoon, despite their wish to frequent bars.

Yet, establishments serving alcohol at night or publications on social networks are full of women (young or not, married or single) who enjoy an evening drinking with friends in public spaces. Many local women do not seem to care about being misjudged or approached by men while having fun. They may freely and openly drink among men as long as there are from the same social circles. One young female informant (21, three children) declared that she goes to a karaoke bar at least twice a week with her friends. Thus, even though male-female relations may seem highly sexualized to women outside those circles, the interaction within the social connexions (especially *shûraku* and *dôkyûsei*) work differently. Thus, men and women can enjoy appeased interactions when having fun at night and drinking alcohol together without judging each other. In a way, the inter-gender interplays within the social bounds seem deprived of sexual tensions.

Yet, it does not mean that those nights are deprived of sexualized interaction and that romantic pairings are impossible within the groups either. On the opposite, they are

convenient to find a marriage partner because of their networking, and because male-female interactions in the same social group offer clarity regarding a potential partner's intention.

They allow more trust between men and women because people know each other very well, and judgments are relatively absent. The reasons Hana chose to marry a *dôkyûsei* revolved around this faith. During the interview, she emphasized the idea that she did not consider her now-husband as a romantic partner for more than twenty years. However, she always appreciated her sense of familiarity and trust in him.

> Me: What was the process of changing from being a good friend to dating your husband?
> Hana: Well, I always knew him and we always had quite a particular relationship. But I don't know why suddenly I felt romantically attracted to him… Maybe I was just lonely! (laughs) […] I was dating someone before him, but it was just a waste of time, but after that, he was here for me, and it started to catch my eyes (*ki ni naru*). When I told him that, he thought it was a love declaration! (laughs) So this way, we really discussed about dating and that's how it started, I think.

The fact that Hana could communicate her deep feelings with this *dôkyûsei* brought them together to discuss a potential romantic relationship. It is through communication and trust that they finally dated, then married.

This trust also works through indirect connexions. Emika, for instance, had her now-husband introduced by a *dôkyûsei*.

> Emika: First I didn't like [my now-husband]. On the contrary, I hated him. (laughs)
> Me: Why did you hate him?
> Emika: Well, he looked like a womanizer (*charai*). […] But first I was just drinking out with friends in common. At that point in my life, I just wanted to meet new friends, so this was when I got introduced to him by a *dôkyûsei*. Because he was a friend of a *dôkyusei*, I still accepted to talk to him even though I didn't like his type. And one day, he invited me to go out, but I had a big fever. And you know what he did? He came to my house just to leave some fruits and groceries, and left right away! From Tokunoshima to Amagi, it takes 40 mns by car, you know, so I realized that he was indeed a nice guy. (Emika, 27, three children)

Although Emika did not trust her now-husband first, she still agreed to converse with him for the sake of her *dôkyûsei,* who introduced him to her. She realized his kindness and genuine interest in her through the additional effort of letting him contact her. This effort could only be justified by the sense of trust she had toward her *dôkyûsei.* Thus, the social connexions create an environment that is not only convenient to meet or introduce a new partner; they are a separate setting in which male-female interactions are less sexualized, more transparent, and more trustworthy than outside the social bounds.

On the opposite side, the social connexions may work as a substantial apparatus of exclusion. The previous chapter and paragraph already explore how women from outside may be primarily viewed as sexual objects. But being outside the social circles of Tokunoshima may be an issue in the daily social life of any outsiders, males and females included. People outside the circles may struggle to fit in Tokunoshima properly. They have to rely on only one or two connexions to carry out social tasks, and pairing with a romantic partner can even look impossible. Michiko (26) is a single young woman from Shikoku who came to Tokunoshima as a trainee in agriculture. She is now working in the touristic

department of a city office. Although Michiko has been in Tokunoshima for two years and would not mind dating a local man, she recalls almost never meeting people of her age. In her case, and as many other outsiders coming to Tokunoshima for work, Michiko can only rely on the *shûraku* and *dôryô* circles. Unfortunately, they include only men and women in their fifties and no individuals of the same age.

Moreover, now that she has been on the island for an extended time, the curiosity she could benefit at first as a newcomer has faded out, and developing her social network has become more challenging. She even has abandoned the idea of meeting new people on the island.

> Your social network grows widely once, but then it stops. I guess there is still plenty of people to meet on the island, but in my daily life, I think I now want to meet people outside [the island]. (Michiko, Ehime, 26, no child)

After two years in Tokunoshima, she begins to feel fatigued in trying to fit in. Even though she has not made any friends of her age, she does not feel the need anymore and has accepted the idea that she will not meet people in their late 20s on the island. At one point, she even thought there were no young adults there. The primary issue is that she does not belong to any *dôkyûsei* network, which is the immediate connexion for friendly outings[53].

Other outsiders' testimonies confirm the lack of social interactions with local people. When asked if they have friends on the island, many from various backgrounds and profiles directly reply that they do not. Activities during their free time revolve around families – if

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[53] One could also think that the reasons for not finding friends of her age may come from her professional activities and marital status. As a single woman working fulltime during the week, she indeed is a minority among the large number of housewives who are not available during the weekends. Still, I have seen plenty of women doing outtings together even though there were not a homogenous group. Although there are indeed mismatchs in terms of free time, housewives and unmarried women on the island manage to spend time together. However, it requires additional efforts to organize outtings with single working women, and only happens with close friends who are from the same *dôkyûsei* connexion.

they have one – or solitary occupations such as watching movies at home, going to the beach, picking up clams, fishing, and snorkeling.

The only exception discovered of outsiders who have relatively fit on the island are hostesses and former hostesses (*kyabajo*). Working in a highly social environment with many clients being local people, they do not struggle to meet anyone – at least men – of their age. Indeed, a hostess's job is to keep customers company by drinking, chatting, or singing karaoke with them. They are "paid drinking friends" with whom local people may spend the night in a group or just by themselves[54]. Thus, it is easier for them to find someone to date, and many female participants from the mainland who settled on the island were former hostesses. Although they do not have a shiny reputation as *mizushôbai*[55] workers, they usually are tolerated as wives. Interestingly enough, many informants who worked in hostess clubs admitted that they did not come to Tokunoshima to live. Their project was to work in the *resort baito*[56] sector before returning to their hometown sometime afterward. They choose to stay on the island only after meeting a romantic partner. They usually stop working as hostesses when the relationship becomes serious and find a job on the island using the network through their local romantic partner.

Thus, the *kyabajo* may be the only outsiders who can overcome the hurdle made by the exclusive social connexions of Tokunoshima. In fact, all the female informants who met their husbands on the island and married there arrived as *kyabajo*. This observation may be intriguing as, even though the *kyabajo* have privileged access to social connexions with islanders, they do not have a monopoly on it. Public servants who are transferred to the island by the Kagoshima Prefecture, for instance, do share their social lives with locals through the

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[54] One should note that they are not prostitutes, and, even though the hostesses dress up in feminine ways to attract male customers, paid sexual acts are not allowed.

[55] The "night life" busines. The expression covers hostess clubs as well as direct prostitution.

[56] Roughly translated by "small job in resort," it designates travelling to work in touristic areas while benefitting from the local activities. In Tokunoshima, many girls from the mainland come to work as hostesses at night, and can enjoy free diving sessions the day offered by their employers.

shûraku and *dôryô* bounds. They participate in community events and drinking parties with neighbors and colleagues. Still, even though some public servants meet their marriage partners in Tokunoshima, they were outsiders and not islanders.

The fact that hostesses are so popular as wives among islanders may say a lot about the criteria to choose a spouse. Hostess bars on the island may work as an indirect matchmaking agency, and many male customers go to those places with the assumption that they may meet someone there. Even though no establishments promote physical relationships with their employees, and the services focus only on chatting and drinking, affinities between customers and women who came as *resort baito* happen relatively often[57].

The Choice of a Marriage Partner: Displaying Homogamy in Tokunoshima

Even though this research does not have enough quantitative data to affirm the following statements fully, it is still essential to consider the stratification of the societies in Tokunoshima, even in qualitative research. Social classes and gender define the choice of a partner (Bozon & Héran, 2006), and interviews and analyses in this thesis have been conducted through this spectrum. Thus, following the observation made by Akagawa (2005, see Chapter 2), the informant's unions have been analyzed by their qualities of being hypergamous, hypogamous, or monogamous. The final section will also show that the choice of a marriage partner, depending on socioeconomic status and sex, may determine people's place to settle. In other words, what makes people choose to stay or not in Tokunoshima is strongly related to their gender and education level.

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[57] There are, of course, many customers (even married men) who visit hostess bars with the expectation to have casual sex with the employees. They may be successful or not, depending on the clients and the hostesses. However, the majority of the interviewed women explained that, even though the *resort baito* system is mostly to enjoy their time on the island, casual sex with islanders is not the priority. Male customers also admitted that their attempts to have casual sex with a hostess are likely to fail.

Feeling for Men, Pragmatism for Women

Let us first explore how male informants justified their marriage's choice. When asked what they like in their wife, men would reply with more abstract vocabulary. Although not much talkative and usually embarrassed to give a proper answer (many male participants preferred to joke instead), they tended to express reciprocity in feelings: "because I get along with her." They also emphasize matches in their liking "because I like her (*suki*)," "because I thought she was cute." Moreover, many men would bring out feminine attributes to justify their choices. The several sexual jokes inspired by the questions may reveal that appearance is essential to men. "Because I like her bum," "because I'm a breast fetishist (*oppai fecchi*)" came up between other jokes such as "because she forced me to" in order to avoid revealing their feelings, especially during group discussions. Still, it shows that men consider femininity a factor of attractivity for a marriage partner. The jokes may partially reveal what is socially acceptable to look for in a wife. Thus, it is no wonder why hostesses are so popular as wives in Tokunoshima. They not only bypass the hurdle of the social connexions; they also respond to the typical images of a desirable woman. Hostesses display more "femininity" because they care more for their appearance with makeup, outfits that reveal more "flesh," and showy hairstyles. They are also young, likely have no children to care for, and are more available than other working mainland women. Finally, most of them have low education. The last element seems to be a primary variable to explain the matching between male islanders and mainland hostesses. Every hostess I have met who quickly found a local boyfriend was a high school graduate. Among hostesses, university graduate women were likely to go back home or struggle to find a boyfriend. This statement is also applicable to local women.

College-graduate women are more likely to settle on the mainland, while high-school-graduate women may live in better conditions on the island. The difference, however, is that many female islanders prioritize their marital status over their professional careers. Thus, many may return to Tokunoshima to marry or follow their husbands back to their hometown. Most female informants argued that the capacity to build a family was one of the most valuable criteria in their choice of a partner. Indeed, compared to men, women replied that their partner's economic situation was a priority over appearances and liking. Women who had a first negative experience in marriage would even distinguish romantic love from marriage. Emika (27) admitted that she first looked at her now-husband's financial situation; only then would she consider his personality.

> Before, I liked handsome men, but, after thinking about it, I prefer someone nice for marriage. And someone with a stable economy. I don't care about his face, as long as he has some money and has a great personality" […] "Because I wanted to be a *sengyoshufu* [housewife]." […] "I don't think it's possible to marry someone I'm in love with anymore. (Emika, 27, three children)

While quoting almost word by word XIIth century Emperess Marie de Champagne without knowing it (Yalom, 2012), Emika reveals a pragmatic view of marriage. After her first failed marriage at 20 with a man without money and many debts, she became most aware of the importance of a husband's financial situation. Her testimony follows many similar statements from other female informants. The vast majority seek economic stability in their marriage.

This observation seems, at first glance, to be in total contradiction with the beginning of the chapter. Indeed, it was first argued that marriage (through *dekikon*) was a continuation of romance. To islanders, it is through marriage that romantic love may thrive, and the link

between the two elements seems particularly strong. Yet, many participants seem to distinguish love from marriage. Women who had a first negative experience especially pay attention to their partner's financial situation. Like Emika who denied any romantic feelings for their second husbands, many women would remarry only if their partner is economically reliable. This paradox is easy to understand: even though romantic love does not seem to work without marriage, marriage may work without romantic love. A stable marital status overcomes any romantic feelings.

The Social Stratification of Unions

The reason for prioritizing a pragmatic marriage over sentiments is explained by Emika in her previous quotation as well. She expresses her wish to be a housewife (*sengyôshufu*) and uses it to justify her practical choice in marriage. This desire shows how being a housewife is still positively viewed in Tokunoshima. It echoes past studies that revealed how attractive being *sengyûshufu* is for Japanese women in a society that prevents them from thriving in their professional careers (Imamura, 1996). Emika, and many other participants, believe that her life may be more comfortable as a homemaker that depends on her husband's salary.

Thus, women seem to perceive marriage as their primary way to survive. A professional career is only secondary, as women's central role is to care for the house (see the previous chapter). They feel like their role is not to contribute financially to the household. Consequently, they look for a partner with a stable income. Even educated women with a higher socioeconomic background tend to perceive their situation as "abnormal." For instance, one participant (Female, 44, married, three children) explained that she hides from her husband the fact that she earns more than him. She thinks her husband would feel bad if

he learned that he is not the family's breadwinner[58]. Women seem to embrace the unequal dynamic between gender as something "natural." These gender disparities may be translated into the sociological termination of hypergamy. Indeed, by looking for a husband with a decent salary, female islanders aim to marry someone with a higher socioeconomic status. On the other hand, men do not seem to care about their wives' background as long as it is less than theirs. Hypergamous unions for men are rare and may deprive them of the masculine role of being the breadwinner.

Still, there is a fracture between the ideal marriage partner and who they accept to marry. Women reveal a solid tendency to wish for hypergamous marriages. Men, on the opposite, would prefer hypogamous unions. However, the most durable couples on the island are homogamous. Although the research lacks quantitative data to confirm this assertion, most participants who married without being divorced and directly expressed happiness in their lives were married to a partner from the same socioeconomic background. In other words, despite the wish for women to find a husband with higher socioeconomic status, the current research shows that the most durable unions come from people with a similar background. Thus, this observation confirms at the same time previous papers conducted in Japan regarding the ideal partner (Akagawa, 2005; see chapter 1), and in other developed countries where love and homogamous marriages are prevalent (Bozon & Héran, 2006). While Japanese women – including Tokunoshima – tend to look for a partner with unequal socioeconomic status, love unions that are the most stable are usually from people from the same background.

Therefore, stratification research may reveal the hidden dynamics of "successful (durable)" unions. People with similar socioeconomic status and history tend to get together

[58] Interestingly enough, despite their unregular situation as she earns almost twice as her husband, she still act like a housewife. She does not only take care of the children, she also is in charge of the family's budget, which is traditionally the role of the wife.

in love marriages. On the other hand, it also shows an unequal system where women depend on their husbands to move or remain on the island. Indeed, the wish for hypergamous unions and being homemakers for women is a solid chain in women's freedom to circulate. By looking for hypergamous marriages and aiming to be economically supported by their husband, they deprive themselves of the freedom to leave the island, especially in "lower" classes where the husband is more likely to remain on the island.

The section has explored why people in Tokunoshima declare that they do not find it challenging to meet a marriage partner. Using the solid and trustworthy network created by the local social connexions, they benefit from the numerous occasions to face potential marriage partners in their daily life. They also have rich intergender interactions in those closed social circles in which it is easier to communicate with the other sex. One may see a solution to the previous five challenges of Japan's society identified in Chapter 1. The conclusion of the present thesis proposes a comparative study of those five struggles observed in Japanese single men and women with the cases of Tokunoshima.

CONCLUSION

The Five Challenges of Singlehood in Mainland Japan Compared to Tokunoshima

This thesis has explored the multiple elements affecting the fertility rate in Japan. Tokunoshima proves that an exceptionally high TFR is possible even in developed countries. Yet, one may discuss whether the island offers workable characteristics in mainland Japan or whether the cultural behaviors in Amami and Okinawa are too distinct from the rest of the archipelago to take measures based on their example. The answer to this question depends on multiple perspectives. For instance, one clear distinction between mainland Japan and Tokunoshima's environment appears with access to marriage. People in Tokunoshima do not seem to have the same issues as on the mainland. Yet, as mentioned in the previous section, they share the same aspirations and ideals when it comes to the choice of a marriage partner. In Tokunoshima and mainland Japan, people consider the "*shôwa kekkon*" ideal, but the intensity with which they believe in this ideal differs. Islanders are more inclined to compromise their marriage aspiration to have a family, while mainlanders would rather wait for their conditions to meet the "perfect" marriage. In order to understand the cultural dynamics that enable islanders to have more children than mainlanders, it is crucial to consider the differences and similarities between the two populations. This section is a comparative analysis of the "five challenges" to marrying depicted in Chapter 1. It will examine the contrast and the common points between mainland Japan and Tokunoshima.

Challenge 1: Mismatch Between Marriage Ideal and Economic Reality

The first challenge showed the divergence between the ideal standard of life and the reality of the marriage market. People look for the Post-War inspired conditions to marry, which are almost impossible to achieve in the current economy. The situation in

Tokunoshima is mixed. On the one hand, islanders seem well aware that the ideal household of the husband as the only breadwinner who provides for the whole family is challenging to reach. On the other hand, women only remain the "secondary" economic source, and their main occupation is still domestic chores. Even though many earn the same or even a better salary than their husbands, especially in the "higher" social classes, their "main" role remains house caring. This situation put women under extreme pressure as they have to economically support their household and take care of most tasks at home. Still, many women do not complain about their situation. They admit that life is busy and demanding but do not regret their choice.

Interestingly enough, many participants, both men and women, have emphasized the growing role of men in the participation in housework. Among the tasks men are willing to do at home, they usually list washing the dishes, sending the children to school, bathing them, doing outside activities with them, or launching the laundry machine. Some male informants even invoked the end of the *teishukanpaku* – the domineering husband – for the benefit of the *kakâdenka*, the overbearing wife. However, one should note that the participation of men in domestic chores is still ingrained in the patriarchic system. Men do not equally do housework and do not take care of children as seriously as their wives. Although they all agreed that their wives would not let them go to drink if they had not fulfilled their tasks at home, fathers feel natural that, while they are drinking for several hours until night during weekdays, their wives do not have any choice other than to take care of the children.

Thus, even though islanders themselves seem to promote a more equalitarian view of domestic duties, it is still deeply ingrained in Post-War living standards. The idea that women should mostly take care of the household and the children is deep-rooted to the point that it is invisible to islanders.

Tokunoshima's men do not seem to feel the same pressure as the mainland's regarding their ability to found a family in the Post-War standards. Their insecurity toward their economic strength in the mainland is lesser in Tokunoshima because they feel that tasks between men and women are more equally distributed. Women economically contribute to the household while men take care of some domestic duties. However, this system that appears equalitarian is still built on the foundation of patriarchy. On the contrary, the pressure of men to economically support the household has only been transferred to women who are ready and resigned to economically contribute to the family while still fulfilling their duties as "housewives." In exchange, men are only willing to "help" in domestic duties, even though they have lost their role as the only breadwinner of the household.

Challenge 2: Job Precarity Contributing to Unwanted Celibacy for Both Men and Women

Chapter 1 has revealed that job precarity is a substantial hurdle for single people on the mainland to commit to family life. Studies showed that men and women in precarious professional situations struggle to marry and have a family. The two reasons are that people do not imagine themselves founding a family if they are not sure they can provide for their children. They will refrain from marrying and having children if they are in a precarious situation. Second, an unstable job means that they often change companies and cannot use the social circles at their job to meet a potential partner. However, people in Tokunoshima do not seem to have the same concerns, even though their economic and professional situation is even more unstable than the rest of Japan.

Indeed, job precariousness in Tokunoshima is more than visible in daily life. With many unskilled labors, the prefecture with the cheapest minimum wage in Japan, and few job prospects, many islanders struggle to have a stable income (see Chapter 3). Most people

have to find a secondary source of money besides their regular job to supplement their salary and pay their debts. Those secondary jobs (*fukugyô*) often revolve around agriculture, which does not offer appropriate opportunities to meet a marriage partner as well.

Yet, islanders do not have the same struggle regarding marrying, even for people in a precarious situation. First, their set of mind is close to what was called the *nantokanaru* spirit in Chapter 5. As children are an end in itself and the priority in life, they see everything else as secondary. To the eyes of islanders, an unstable life is not necessarily a brake on the desire to have a family. Second, while mainlanders use their job as their primary matchmaker (the *dôryô* circle), people in Tokunoshima usually privilege the social connexions of *shûraku* and *dôkyûsei*. Thus, even someone in a precarious situation that makes him change his job regularly may find a marriage partner, as they do not need to rely on the company where they work to meet someone.

Challenge 3: Passivity in Searching for a Love and Marriage Partner

Research on the mainland shows that many single Japanese men and women refrain from actively looking for a marriage partner. Even though the vast majority desire to marry sometime in their life, many give up because of the high hurdle of finding an appropriate partner.

People in Tokunoshima do not seem to meet the same struggle. An overwhelming majority of local informants affirmed that they do not find it challenging to meet a marriage partner on the island. One can explain this radical difference between the mainland and Tokunoshima by the use of the social connexions discussed in Chapter 6. They act as solid and trustworthy networking in which intergender relationships are simplified. They facilitate various social exchanges and smooth the finding of a romantic or marriage partner.

Thus, the concept of "passivity" used in studies on the mainland to analyze the behavior of single people is irrelevant. In the tight community of Tokunoshima, where social gatherings are frequent and intergender contacts daily, they do not need to "actively" look for a partner. Consequently, matchmaking happens more "naturally" than on the mainland. They meet "by chance" during drinking parties between *dôkyûsei*, gatherings organized by the *shûraku*, or by the introduction from a family member (*shinseki*). In a sense, they are as "passive" as people on the mainland observed by scholars, but they have more opportunities in their daily life to meet a potential romantic or marriage partner.

Interestingly, even local participants who admitted having difficulties finding a romantic partner had plenty of romantic experiences. Most of them were young male adults who had just begun their professional careers. Yet, when asked about their past romantic experiences, they replied having had several girlfriends in middle and high-school. What they feel is challenging in finding a romantic partner is only a struggle in an instant t. It is far from being a characteristic of the phenomenon of *bankonka* or *mikonka*. Likely, they will eventually meet someone soon by using the social bonds of Tokunoshima.

However, the easiness of meeting a marriage partner depends on age, gender, and origins. Chapter 6 has already explored how exclusive the social circles can be toward outsiders, especially mainlanders. But several single local men and women lamented struggling to meet a marriage partner even though they are part of the social circles. One man (35) was dating a woman from Kagoshima in long-distance love. Because none of them wanted to leave their hometown, they finally broke up after a 7-year relationship. At 35, as an office worker in a local library, he laments the hurdle of meeting an appropriate partner. One woman (28) strives to find a marriage partner. Working in a pachinko building for forty hours a week, she also struggles with men.

Still, what those two participants have in common are not tangible elements such as their social status or profession. The main issue for them may come from their appearance and behavior. Indeed, they do not fit the current characteristics of prevalent trends in masculinity and femininity. The woman does not display much femininity with short hair and light makeup, while the man reveals a lack of confidence and strength with nervous tics and an inability to maintain eye contact. In other words, they are not popular in the eyes of potential marriage partners on the island.

Thus, another type of exclusion that affects potential matchmaking comes from standards of seduction. Fixed images of masculinity and femininity especially define those norms. The following section will show how male and female islanders follow a relatively strict and "traditional" codification of gendered behaviors.

Challenge 4: Lack of Adaptation in New Gender Tropes

Chapter 1 discussed how new gender tropes affect the marriage market. People are still looking for a spouse with characteristics of the Post-War period, even though masculinity and femininity have significantly evolved. The mismatch has created unrealistic expectations toward potential partners and exacerbated the difficulties for single people to marry.

In Tokunoshima, expectations toward family life remain ancred in the "Shôwa marriage" image. Men are supposed to provide stable revenue, and women are assumed to take care of the house. Even though discussions above regarding Challenge 1 have shown that roles have evolved, they tacitly admit that the Post-War "traditional" family style is ideal.

However, what remains unchanged is gender tropes. In Tokunoshima, men display strong masculinity by being muscular, loud, talkative, generous with their money, and not emotional. Women have to work on their femininity by taking care of their appearance with

heavy makeup, dyed hair, and being cheerful. Respecting those gender tropes may be the most crucial trait to successfully finding a romantic or marriage partner on the island. Thus, it is not surprising that the most "popular" individuals are also the ones who marry the earliest. For instance, Aiko, Hana, and Emika, who respectively married at 16, 18, and 20, and did not struggle to remarry quickly, are also women praised by their entourage for being beautiful and popular (*bijin*, *moteru*).

One particular example that caught my attention was during an interview session with Emika and a *dôkyûsei* of her in a café. While chatting, they met another male classmate working as a waiter whom they had not met in ten years. When he approached, he quickly recognized the beautiful Emika but could not put a name on the other girl's face, even though they had spent their entire education together. After the interview, I took the opportunity to ask Emika why the waiter did not recognize her friend. She replied that she was very unpopular in high school as being overweight and not taking care of herself. She changed only after 25 by taking care of how she dressed, putting on makeup, and losing weight. Emika also emphasized that she finally met her first boyfriend only after those drastic changes.

This example shows how islanders pay much attention to appearance and femininity. First, even after spending 12 years in school together, the man could not recognize the less popular *dôkyûsei*, and only remembered the pretty girl. Second, Emika's friend experience shows how crucial displaying femininity is in order to access a romantic relationship on the island.

Men are subject to the same patterns. If they do not follow the standard masculine norms mentioned above, they may find it challenging to meet a romantic partner. The male informants who were single even after their past thirties were usually overweight or puny and displayed a lack of self-confidence. Interestingly enough, most of them had regular jobs.

It may sound surprising as many participants emphasized stable income as the utmost quality for a desirable husband. It confirms that following the appropriate norms of masculinity may be even more essential to meeting a marriage partner than having a reliable economic situation.

Thus, the fact that most islanders do not struggle with finding a partner may be explained by the adoption of those sexualized gender tropes. They follow expected gendered behaviors ancred in people's minds. Men show strength and self-confidence that make them appear as reliable husbands; women display femininity that demonstrates desirability.

But why can islanders maintain the expected gendered behaviors to get a romantic partner while mainlanders struggle between new gender tropes and ideal qualities? The last section will explore the reasons for the disparity between Tokunoshima and mainland Japan: the presence or absence of intergender interactions.

Challenge 5: Lack of Intergender Interaction and Communication Skills

Chapter 1 argues that Japanese people have fewer daily interactions with the other sex. The majority of single men and women do not have friends of the opposite sex, which creates barriers and misunderstandings toward expectations of a marriage partner. This issue is at the heart of this thesis problematic and has been continually taken into consideration throughout the chapter. Yet, there are still some elements that need clarification.

In Tokunoshima, the frequency of intergender interactions is significantly different from what has been observed on the mainland. The vast majority of the informants affirmed having many friends and daily conversations with someone from the opposite sex. Even workers in notably gendered jobs (nurse for women, stable workers for men) stated they have plenty of friends and interactions with the opposite sex.

One reason to explain this difference is, once again, the prevalence of the social connexions on the island. As Chapter 6 argues, islanders use them not only as networking but also as a particular environment where intergender interactions work in more trustful and appeased ways. Thus, people have friendly and daily relationships with people of the opposite sex. Moreover, because of the predominance of social circles, people have developed better communication skills and know how to express their intentions toward a potential partner.

Many islanders show easiness in expressing their desire, at least more than mainlanders. For instance, one could return to Mako's narrative, whose dating habits were explored in the "*doraibu*" section. The way she met her now-boyfriend represents very well her ability to express her needs. While she was regularly going to a local gym to exercise, she noticed him working as the staff. In order to engage in conversation, she found him on Twitter, on which she started asking him questions about the gym. They gradually changed the topic of their discussions until she invited him to go out. Mako showed a substantial rupture compared to what has been observed on the mainland, where participants of previous research prefer to be ambivalent toward a potential romantic partner. She did not hesitate to look for him on social networks and ask him out, revealing her intentions and desire. It is even more surprising on a small island where gossips are predominant and where women usually keep their roles of passive and desirable object.

Mako's ability to express herself may come from the lack of application of the concepts of *tatemae*. It refers to behaviors one displays in public, in contrast to *honne,* which defines the "true" feelings and desires (Doi, 1986). The fact that the two words are opposed reveals that Japanese culture tends to repress personal feelings and aspirations in public (see Lebra, 2004 for a complete analysis of the interconnexions of selves in Japan). On the other hand, islanders do not seem to have a profound knowledge of those concepts usually

ingrained in Japanese culture. Although they generally know the words, they do not seem to make them the center of their human interactions. For instance, one participant explained that her husband did not know how to use *keigo* (the polite way to speak Japanese) until he went to Okinawa for technical school, which was problematic to integrate. Even today, he struggles to have business conversations with people from the mainland. Yet, he is a sociable man with many friends and a large professional circle, making him a successful businessman and a lovable husband. Thus, the lack of application of the two concepts *honne* and *tatemae* in Tokunoshima not only determines daily human interactions; it positively affects their ability to express their desire and their ability to communicate, at least in the inner circles. People do not hesitate to ask for help and discuss their opinion.

Conclusive Discussion

Although not everything in Tokunoshima is a solution to the *shôshika* phenomenon, policymakers may find a surprising number of practical actions to facilitate people having a family. The conclusive remarks of the thesis explore what can be done in Japan using Tokunoshima's characteristics to raise the fertility rate. It is divided into three topics: work-life balance, economy, and intergender interaction. It will demonstrate that the elements to remedy the *shôshika* phenomenon are both material and cultural.

Work-Life Balance

As research and government policies have demonstrated (see Chapter 1), the work-life balance is crucial for married couples to reach their desired number of children. With the help of the community and, most importantly, the grandparents, parents (fathers and mothers) can deal with their full-time jobs and childcaring. An additional element that has not been treated in the thesis may be the low commuting time between work, home, and school. It is unlikely that the time to travel to work reach thirty minutes by car in

Tokunoshima. Consequently, people are more available to manage daily tasks and are less likely to be in stressful situations during parenting.

A better work-life balance may also affect the matchmaking process. With more availability (physical and mental), dates may become longer and more often than on the mainland. It may facilitate the choice of a partner and increases the chances of meeting someone to have a family with. People may also be more inclined to get involved in a romantic relationship if they do not suffer from stress at work, which is a factor already observed in mainland Japan (Kitamura, 2011).

In order to cope with the work-life balance, various measures may be implemented. For instance, the government should encourage companies to make their employees work from home (WFH). Although productivity is still controversial regarding WFH, research shows that it is beneficial mainly for the employees' mental and physical health (Mohamed et al., 2021). Infrastructure in child-caring and romantic matchmaking must be consolidated as well. As explored in Chapter 1, Japan has one of the lowest portions of its PIB used for child-rearing among the OECD countries. Only 1.35% of Japan's GDP was utilized in 2015 as social aid for families, compared to 3.20% in France and 3.75% in Sweden (CAO, 2021). The Japanese government has also implemented matchmaking systems organized by each city hall, but their effects remain underwhelming (Endo, 2018). In other words, public investments must be made to help single people and parents to lower their stress due to material concerns and help them in matchmaking and parenting. A better work-life balance may benefit parents who desire to have more children and single people looking for a family to build.

Economy

In addition to the work-life balance, the apprehensions toward an unstable economy are crucial in matchmaking and family building. Tokunoshima addresses the low income

and job precarity issues with the community and grandparents' assistance to help needy families. But the preoccupations and expectations toward children also significantly differ from the mainland. Most parents in Tokunoshima are less likely to expect their children to go to college or follow the "path of success" (good high school=good university=good job) of mainlanders. Thus, islanders are less inclined to invest or borrow large amounts of money for their children's futures and feel less stress toward the economy. Moreover, they are more willing to adapt their family style to their economic situations. Even though the *Shôwa kekkon* remains the ideal marriage style, islanders do not hesitate to reevaluate their standards of life (dual income, single parents, etc.) to accommodate the reality.

As explored in Chapter 1, the persistent scheme of the *Shôwa kekkon* is more problematic than the actual individuals' economic situations. What must change (and can be changed) is more likely positive opinions about "alternative" unions. Japanese men and women should take more into consideration common-law marriages, double incomes, and divorce. In other words, the diversity of marital unions must be considered by Japanese people both culturally and legally. Single men and women may be less afraid to have a family if they are less worried about following the strict pattern of the man as the only breadwinner and the woman as the caretaker in a marriage "for life."

The expectations toward children should also embrace the same diversity. The perception of success in life must consider other elements than simply academic achievement, which is firmly embedded in social stratification (Chapter 6; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Less academic expectations for one's child may make people not wait for the ideal (and sometimes unrealistic) conditions to have a family, which may result in having children sooner. In other words, the economic hurdles that single people and parents (single or married) face in their ability to marry and have children are cultural. Measures to remedy

this situation should be educational. Japanese people must embrace more flexibility regarding marriage, family, and children.

Male-Female Interactions and Dating

Finally, the thesis has demonstrated how crucial intergender communication is in matchmaking. With tight social groups, such as the *dôkyûsei*, that last their whole life, individuals in Tokunoshima have daily and profound social interactions with people of the other sex. In addition, no informant suffered from competition at school. Even men and women who gave value to studies and aimed for famous universities declared that they always used cooperation in school with male and female classmates. Islanders demonstrated facilitation to communicate with someone of the other sex in various contexts (professional, friendly, romantic, etc.).

The ways of dating on the island have also adapted to the local conditions. They do not require many resources while still containing the two elements of romance: liminality and celebration of selves. *Doraibu*, rabbit spotting, and other local "dates" are also cheap and easy to access. Not only is it more accessible to date in Tokunoshima, but it requires more communication skills and depends less on a third party to get a "successful" relationship from a date than on the mainland. Single men and women are more encouraged to rely upon their human qualities (charm, humor, physical attributes) than material property (money, choice of the dating spots such as expensive restaurants, etc.).

Thus, male-female interactions must be critically encouraged in mainland Japan to help people have the family they want. One way to imitate the result of the social connexions in Tokunoshima might be by giving gender study classes at school to improve male-female communication skills. Gender equality must also be enhanced in Japanese society, as daily and unsexualized interactions would create healthier relations between the sexes. It may

result in improved dating methods in mainland Japan with less passivity and reliance on third parties to meet and seduce a partner, as observed by previous research (Endo, 2018).

The thesis has demonstrated that, although Tokunoshima suffers from the same economic and material issues as mainland Japan, and has similar family values regarding the *Shôwa kekkon,* they manage to solve them through better solidarity between young adults and the community, and positive opinion toward alternative family styles. Imitating Tokunoshima may be an idealistic solution for Japanese megalopolises, but policymakers may still find ways to counteract many issues related to the *shôshika* phenomenon by observing some patterns. Indeed, Tokunoshima has shown that what affects the fertility rate is not material problems *per se*, but the stress induced by the work-life balance, the economy, or the lack of intergender communication. What remains to do is, of course, immense. However, Tokunoshima is proof that some slight cultural adjustments may modify entire communities' behaviors.

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APPENDIXES: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Facesheet
#
日付(date) :
性別 (gender):
年齢 (age) :
仕事 (activity) :
今、結婚していますか (Are you married)？ □はい(yes) □いいえ(no)
今、同棲していますか(are you in concubinage)？ □はい(yes) □いいえ(no)
今、独身ですか(are you singe)？□はい(yes) □いいえ(no)
結婚したことがありますか(have you ever been married before)？ □はい(yes) □いいえ(no)
何歳で初婚しましたか(how old did you marry the first time)？
離婚したことがありますか(have you ever divorced)？□はい(yes) □いいえ(no)
再婚したことがありますか(have you ever remarried)？□はい(yes) □いいえ(no)
何年間結婚していますか/していましたか(how long have you been married)？
子供がいますか(do you have any children)？□はい(yes) □いいえ(no)
何人いますか(how many)？
初めて子供を持ったのは何歳でしたか？(how old did you get your first child)

結婚している方と結婚したことのある方へ(to informants who have been married at least once) :
どうやって結婚相手に出会いましたか(how did you meet your marriage partner)？
現在の結婚相手と結婚した理由はなんでしょうか(what are the reasons for your marriage)？
普段の結婚相手との日常生活を教えていただけませんか(趣味、家事、テレビ、友人とあうこと、お出かけ、デート…)(can you tell me about your daily life with your partner (hobbies, housework, date, etc)？
両親の仕事 (what are your parents' activities):
何人兄弟ですか(how many brothers and sisters do you have)？
結婚相手の仕事 (your partner's activity)
結婚相手の両親の仕事 (your partner's parents' activities)
結婚相手の実家は何人兄弟の家族ですか (how many brothers and sisters does your partner have)？

子育てについて(about raising children)

徳之島は子供を育てやすい環境だと思いますか(do you think Tokunoshima is an environment appropriate to raise children)？☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
なぜですか(why)？
子供を持つことは、メリットとデメリットは何ですか(what are the merits and demerits of having children)？
子供を産む前もそう思いましたか(did you think the same before having one)？

結婚相手の出会い方について(about meeting their marriage partner)
結婚はメリットとデメリットが何ですか(what are the merits and demerits of marriage)？
理想の結婚相手を教えていただけませんか(could you tell me your ideal marriage partner (personality, revenue, activity)？(性格、所得、仕事)
徳之島で結婚相手に出会うのが難しいと思いますか(do you think it is difficult to meet a marriage partner in Tokunoshima)？ ☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
なぜですか(why)？

男女関係について(about men-women relations)

学校では競争がありましたか(did you feel competition at school)？☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
学校では異性の友達がいましたか(did you have friends from the opposite sex at school)？☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
異性とのコミュニケーションがよくありましたか(did you have a lot of interactions with the opposite sex)？☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
現在、日常的には異性との交流がありますか(Today, do you have interactions with the opposite sex in a daily basis)？☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
現在、異性の友人がいますか(do you have currently friends from the opposite sex)？☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
現在、何人ぐらいいますか(how many do you have currently)？

恋愛について (about romantic love)
恋人を作るのが難しいと思いますか(do you think it is challenging to have a boyfriend/girlfriend in Tokunoshima)？☐はい(yes)　☐いいえ(no)
初めての恋人は何歳でしたか(how old were you when you had your first boyfriend/girlfriend)？
恋人と月何回会いますか(how often do you meet your boyfriend/girlfriend)？
会うときは何しますか(what do you do when you meet them)？
理想の恋人を教えてくれませんか(could you tell me your ideal boyfriend/girlfriend)？
理想のデートを教えてくれませんか(could you tell me your ideal date)？

離婚と再婚について(about divorce and remarriage)

離婚はメリットとデメリットはなんですか(what are the merits and demerits of divorce)？
もし離婚したら子供に悪い影響だと思いますか？なぜですか (do you think divorce has a bad influence on children)？
再婚はメリットとデメリットはなんですか (what are the merits and demerits of remarriage)？
もし再婚したら子供に悪い影響だと思いますか？なぜですか？(do you think remarriage has a bad influence on children)

浮気について (about infidelity)
徳之島では浮気が多いと思いますか(do you think affairs are numerous in Tokunoshima)？
浮気は離婚の理由だと思いますか(do you think infidelity is a reason for divorce)？
浮気をしたことがありますか (have you ever experienced infidelity)？☐はい(yes) ☐いいえ (no)

幸せについて(about happiness)
子宝の理解はなんですか(can you tell me your understanding of kodakara)?
幸せのことをよく考えますか？なぜ？(do you often think about happiness)

Additional questions to informants originating from outside Tokunoshima

1. 徳之島と本土の比較 (Tokunoshima compared to mainland)

島に着くと、どんな感じでしたか？何かにびっくりされましたか(what did you feel the first time you arrived in Tokunoshima ? What surprised you the most)？

地元に比べると、日常生活はどんな感じですか (compared to your hometown, how is daily life here)？

地元に比べると、人間関係がどのように変わりますか？コミュニケーションがとりやすくなりました？逆に難しくなりました？人々が助け合うことを感じましたか？それか逆に競争激しいですか (compared to your hometown, is there differences in terms of human relationships ? Do you think islanders are easy to communicate ? difficult ? Do you feel they are more solidary? Or that there is competition)？

女対女の関係 (how are your relationships with someone from the same gender)？

男女関係 (how are your relationships with someone from a different gender？

2. 徳之島の独身の生活 (life in Tokunoshima as a single)

溶け込むのは難しかったですか？友達を作るとか、恋人を見つけるとか？どこで出会いましたか (Was it difficult to integrate, to find friends and a romantic partner)？

いつ結婚するの、いつ子供を産むのって聞かれたことがありますか？それは地元と違いますか？また、結婚とかのプレッシャーを感じましたか？(Have you ever been asked/pressured to marry and have children, is it different from your hometown)

3. 徳之島でのお母さんの生活 (life as a parent in Tokunoshima)

徳之島の人との関係が変わりましたか？どのように (Have your relationships with islander changed after becoming a parent)？

友達も変わりましたか (Have your friends changed)？

「子宝」ってよく言いますが、どんな理解していますか？周りに助けを得ましたか？(can you tell me your understanding of kodakara)

4. これからの徳之島 (About their future)

地元に比べると、子供が徳之島で育つのはどう思いますか？メリットとデメリットがありますか (compared to your hometown, what do you think of raising children in Tokunoshima, what are the merits and demerits)？

ずっと徳之島に住むつもりですか？違うところへ行ってみたい？本土に戻りたいですか (do you see yourself always living in Tokunoshima, or do you want to travel, or go back to your hometown)?