

## **Adoption in the changes of family, kinship, and marriage: A comparative view based on studies from Micronesia and India**

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### **Abstract**

Adoption was widespread in Oceania and has been a subject of many anthropological studies. Reviewing previous studies, first I point out that adoption customs in Micronesia can be broadly differentiated into two; one is a transfer of right over a child among the same kin and the other is that between kin and affine. The former functions as a mechanism for acquiring heirs to continue a vertical line, while the later for compensating labour lost in marriage exchange.

Second, I consider the recent decline of adoption on Romonum. I suggest that the adoption between kin and affine might have decreased, while the marriage transaction which exchanges siblings between two families has increased. It is assumed that a long term exchange of labour between lineages (marriage followed by adoption) is replaced by an immediate exchange between families (sibling-exchange in marriage). Describing a peasant society in India, it is shown that both adoption and marriage are systems which are structured by the ways how land, labour and fertility are controlled in the society.

As for concluding remarks, I argue to see a link between adoption and marriage and to understand a change of the ways in controlling resources (land, labour, and fertility) as household politics over them. This perspective enables us not only to understand a recent change of adoption in Micronesia but to discuss it cross-culturally.

**Key Words:** Adoption, Sibling-exchange, Politics over household resources, Micronesia.

### **Introduction**

This is a comparative study on adoption in the changes of family, kinship and marriage. I had a chance to visit Romonum, an island of Chuuk in Micronesia for the first time in 2011. During the interviews, I was impressed by attitudes of the people to step-relations, adoption and fosterage. After returning to my country, I came to know that adoption was widespread in Oceania and had been a subject of many anthropological studies (cf. CARROLL 1970, BRADY 1976).

In the following I will review those previous articles on adoption in Micronesia. A series of discussions have been made, but I think there are confusions about different types of adoptions motivated by different factors. Adoption customs in Micronesia can be broadly differentiated into two; one is a transfer of right over a child among the same kin and the other is that between kin and affine. The former functions as a mechanism for acquiring heirs to continue a vertical line, while the later for

compensating labour lost in marriage exchange.

Then, I will consider recent changes of adoption in Romonum island, with reference to those in a peasant society of India where I had studied for a long time (cf. NAKATANI: 2008). Giving an example from a peasant society in India, I suggest that transformation of marriage and adoption, institutions which transfer productive resources such as land and labour among different groups, will be caused by the changes of the way how productive resources are controlled in the society.

This paper, in which I try to explain adoption in terms of resource control system (land inheritance, labour organization, and marriage exchange etc.), is inspired by a GOODY's paper titled "Adoption in cross-cultural perspective" (GOODY 1969). His paper has not been discussed so much by students of Oceanic adoption, partly because his definition of adoption seems not to fit into cases in Oceania and partly because most of the studies in Oceania have engaged the solidarity or sterility debate over a factor of adoption. However, I believe that control and access over productive resources are important factors, based on which a system of family and kinship is structured.

Before examining adoption studies in Micronesia, I will give a summary of GOODY's paper. In the paper he enquired into the reasons why adoption was quite common in major Eurasia such as China and India, while it was less found in Africa. Liking the uneven distribution of adoption with other broad differences of those societies, he specified the functions of adoption. His conclusion is very suggestive in the point that the institution of adoption, he says, is related to the system of inheritance.

In a society where property is transmitted from one generation to the next by vertical inheritance, adoption is often used to provide an heir for a man's property in the shape of a direct descendant, who can continue a man's name and often his worship. In Africa where the productive system makes less intensive use of land and there is less to leave in terms of restricted resources, property is less problematic and may pass through brothers or nephews; meanwhile personal continuity is often maintained through begetting sons rather than adopting. When one's wife is barren, he may get wives by polygamy, levirate, or widow inheritance. Under these conditions, the institution of adoption has not developed, while fostering (which involves no permanent change of identity) is common to take care of orphans. He differentiated adoption from fosterage and argued that the need for heirs (and for adoption) is diminished in Africa.

### **Previous studies on adoption in Micronesia**

Studies of adoption have ramifications that lead scholars to explore aspects of kinship, land tenure, social stratification, legal systems, and genetics. The main discussions in Micronesia, however, evolved around the relative importance of kinship and demography as variables influencing rates of adoptions. WECKLER published the first article on adoption in 1953 and pointed out that adoption practices are particularly common in the Pacific. Based on the data in Mokil island, he suggested the foremost motive for adoption is childlessness (WECKLER 1953). Following this observation, literature over reasons for adoption developed a quarter of a century later. In order to understand the context in which adoption was discussed, I will review some of those studies in different islands of Micronesia (Fig.1).

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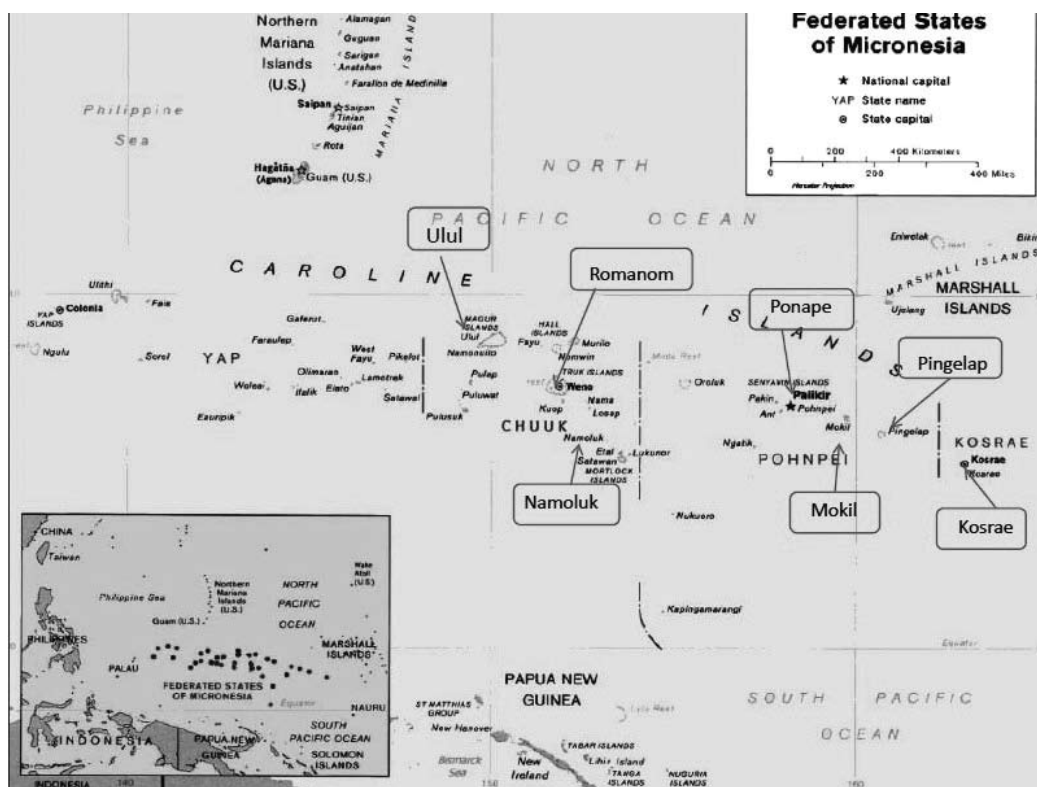


Fig. 1. Location of islands discussed in the paper.

Ruth GOODENOUGH attributed a high adoption rate on Romonum to “unevenly reduced fertility in women, most notably as a result of venereal infection, and she predicted that the rate of adoption declines in the face of more balanced fertility (GOODENOUGH 1970:337). By contrast, Marshall reported an even higher adoption rate for the Namoluk atoll, despite a more favourable fertility picture. He argued that the high rate of adoption and fosterage represent part of a larger pattern of sharing among relatives (MARSHALL 1976:47).

Looking for a single reason of adoption, some studies emphasized the sterility, while others the solidarity of kin. Little attention has been paid to the family, kinship, and marriage which are structured by the system of control and access over productive resources. Exceptionally SUDO’s paper (1977), which is written in Japanese and has not been referred so much, discusses the validity of a GOODY’s cross-cultural perspective for understanding adoptions in Oceania (Table 1).

Comparing seven islands mainly of Micronesia, SUDO concludes that adoption for the purpose of acquiring an heir (or heiress) is more important in the society where the size of a corporate group is smaller and lands are also privately owned by individuals. There are some societies (Ponape, Mokil, Kapigamarangi) in which adoption works as a mechanism for acquiring heirs, while in the other society (Romonum), where a corporate group is consisted of two to four generations of a matrilineage members and productive resources are collectively controlled, acquiring

Table 1. Comparisons of seven islands in Micronesia based on SUDO (1977).

Island	Researchers	Line of Inheritance	Residence	Cooperate Group (Land ownership)	Adoption
Romonum	R.G.Goodenogh(1970)	Matrilineage	Matrilocal	Matrilineage of two or three generations	There found no adoption for the purpose of acquiring a heir. Adoption never changes clan membership.
Ponape	Fisher(1970)	Matrilineage	Virilocal	Nuclear family	Adoption is related to land inheritance. A first born boy is preferred. There is a special type of adoption which plans a cohesion of different matrilineages.
Mokil	Weckler(1953)	Patrilineage	Patrilocal	Extended family	A boy is preferred for adoption. Adoption is closely related with land inheritance and practiced (within a patrilineal consanguine.) within a patrilineal consanguine.
Yap	Lingenfelter(1975), Sehneider(1962)	Patrilineage	Patrilocal	Extended family	Adoption involve a change of clan membership and land inheritance.
Kapingamarangi	Emory(1965)	Siblings	Uxorilocal	Sibling set of two or three generation	Adoption is based on a need to have a cross sex sibling.
Marshall	Spoehr(1949), Mason(1954)	Matrilineage	Matrilocal	Matrilineage	Adoption does not involve land inheritance and change of lineage membership.
Palau	Force and Force (1972)	Matrilineage	Virilocal	Extended family of matrilineal brothers	Adoption is a mean of contiuation of a lineage. Adoption unites distant kins.

&lt;Table1&gt; Drawn by the Author based on Sudo (1977)

heirs is not problematic. In the latter society the adoption has a different purpose which cannot be explained by the descent theory (SUDO 1977: 264).

SUDO further describes the adoption custom observed in Ulul island as an example of the latter society. A first child of a couple is customarily adopted by a lineage corporate group out of which the husband married. The child is adopted in compensation for his father. He argues that this type of adoption intensifies the role of a father's lineage in a matrilineal society and that it is closely related with the system of ritual exchange between kin and affine (SUDO 1977: 278).

Recently RITTER also mentioned the two categories of adoption which need to be differentiated. He addresses himself to the diachronic aspects of adoption and argues that adoption agreements are distinguished from adoption outcomes. In Kosrae there are many cases of unrealized adoption agreements. Some adopted babies do not adjust well to new environment and return to the parents. When growing old, some make a decision to return to their natural parents for several reasons. Kosraens often says "up to them" in regard to the child's role in the termination or continuation of adoption relationship (RITTER 1981: 53).

When an adoption agreement is initiated, no one knows that the adoption relation will be successful in fulfilling the expected ideas such as using the male adopter's name, inheriting his land and acting as son or daughter in his family. Thus, adoption in Kosrae does not function as a mechanism for acquiring heirs. He points out that the analytical term adoption is used in different ways. It might refer to either adoption agreements, adoption outcomes, or current adoption relationships (many of which will eventually terminate as unsuccessful adoption). The problem of carefully defining what is meant by the term adoption is extremely important if comparisons between societies are to be meaningful. One theory might deal with the occurrence and frequency of adoption agreements, as found in the Pacific society. Another theory would be necessary to explain the frequency of adoption involving land inheritance, more complete incorporation of adoptees into the new kin identity, and permanent residence change (RITTER 1981: 59).

The distinction of adoptions suggested by Ritter resembles the different types of adoptions discussed by SUDO. According to him, the former is adoption explained by exchange theory and the latter by descent theory. These distinctions are, however, analytical categories and do not fit into a local idea. I propose to differentiate an adoption among the same kin from that between kin and affine. The former is mainly for acquiring heirs and the latter for exchanging labours. Both are concerned with how to share, exchange, and distribute productive resource (land, labour, and fertility).

The previous studies have debated the factor of adoption, but most of them have assumed that the state of childlessness is a primary condition for recipients and the donors have economic difficulties with many children. This proposition also needs to be reconsidered in the case of adoption between kin and affine. DAMES analysed the motive for giving children in adoption and argues against the notion that adoption acts as a balancing mechanism to level differences in family size in response to economic needs (DAMES 1983).

His Pingelap data show that one-third of the donor families gave up their firstborns, and that over two-thirds of the children adopted came from families with

no other child or only one child. In a patrilineal society of Pingelap, the dominant form of adoption is one by maternal grandparent. Asked about the preference for giving children in adoption to maternal rather than paternal grandparents, a chief informant of Dames tells that the daughter's husband may be asked to pay for the work of his wife by donating a child to the maternal grandparent<sup>1</sup>. Also, in many cases unwed mothers live with their parents and divorced women return with their children to their parents. Upon marriage or remarriage, these women tend to leave their children behind to be formally adopted by the grandparents. In reviewing the role of kinship in Pingelapese adoption, Dames argues that the importance of bilaterality is evident (DAMES 1983: 338).

This type of adoption found in Pingelap is an oppositely directed transfer of a child which is observed by SUDO in matrilineal Ulul society. In both cases the purpose of adopting a child is to compensate for lost labour. The adopted child moves in another direction that his/her father in matrilineal residence or mother in patrilineal residence moved. The same type of adoption between kin and affine was observed in Romonum, too. GOODENOUGH (1970) counted 18 cases out of 57, while 28 cases are adoptions among a kin. She did not recognize a functional difference of the two because she considered a high rate of sterility among women at that time as a main cause of adoption in Romonum. However, the people of Romonum most probably knew the different function played by two types of adoption.

Recently overall rates of adoption have declined in Oceania. According to DAMES, the rate of adoption among a kin seriously declined on Pingelap to the extent that such a sample is meaningless in its small size. What does happen with the other type of adoption to compensate for labour of a person who married out? In the next section, I will make an assumption about the change of adoption in Romonum, based on a comparison with a peasant society in India.

#### Changes of adoption caused by the change in controlling productive resources

I interviewed to some families in Romonum about their kinship and affinal relations. Though it was a sample survey to just a dozen of families, I was surprised to find out four cases of marriage transaction which exchange siblings directly (Fig. 2).

The direct exchange of siblings is found in recent marriages after the 1990s not

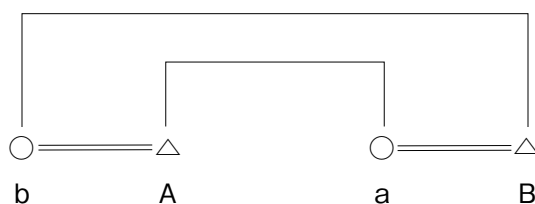


Fig. 2. Direct exchange of siblings in marriage.

<sup>1</sup> The same type of adoption is reported by Ritter, too from Kosrae where maternal grandparents are more likely to adopt than paternal grandparents, a phenomenon WILSON (1976: 84) found in Lelu village in 1964.

According to Ritter some people feel that the maternal grandparents should be given a child to compensate for losing their daughter (RITTER 1981: 52).

in old marriages. The increase of the sibling exchange in marriage seems to be related with the change of ways in controlling productive and reproductive resources (labour, land, and fertility of woman), because marriage transactions are a means in which households attempt to adjust labour needs, transfer property and reproduce themselves.<sup>2</sup> The adoption between kin and affine might have decreased in Romonum, while the marriage transaction which exchanges siblings between two families has increased. It is assumed that a long term exchange between lineages is replaced by an immediate exchange between families.

These changes, I guess, happened in a recent situation where a lineage solidarity and interdependence of different lineages are getting weak under the influence of modernisation. Compensating a lost labour of a man by adopting a child takes a long time until the child grows up. It is not sure that the adopted child will stay with the adoptees in the future and work for them. On the other hand, the direct sibling exchange results in a total equivalence at a shorter period between what is given and what is received. People must have preferred a short term exchange which seems to be more assured.

The discussion I proposed here cannot be attested with a lack of the empirical data which tell a present situation of adoption in Romonum. Instead, I will describe a case from a peasant society in India to show that adoption and marriage will change in accordance with changes of social systems which control productive and reproductive resources (labour, land, and fertility of woman). It helps to explain the causal link of those changes.

In a peasant society in Rajasthan, north-western part of India, the marriage of bride-service which is followed by matrilocal residence was common before the land reform in the 1950s<sup>3</sup>. Bride-service refers to the transfer of labour from the groom to the bride's family. At that time, most of land in Rajasthan was controlled by the state directly or by the feudal lords (holders of the estate given by the state). The peasant family held tenancy rights over a certain piece of land and inherited it from generation to generation. Since land was plentiful, if infertile, the most important productive resource was labour.

In getting married, a boy used to work for the girl's family for a certain period. During the pre-marital service to his in-laws, he was sometimes given a tenancy right by the girl's family or by the landlord in her village if he worked hard and was favoured by them. Then, he continued to stay in his wife's natal village after completing his service. In those days, peasants easily shifted to any village where they could get a tenancy right and daughters used to play a key role to deliver it to her husband. Thus, I found several cases of bride-service marriage with matrilocal residence among men beyond age 70 when I interviewed in 2003. However, I did not

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<sup>2</sup> SCHLEGEL and ELOUL discuss that the determining factors in marriage transactions lie within household organization since it is households that give and receive partners in marriage. The marriage transactions are ways in which households attempt to adjust labour needs, transfer property, and reproduce their social status (SCHLEGEL and ELOUL 1988).

<sup>3</sup> The data of marriage alliance among a peasant society was mainly collected in 2003 in a Rajasthan village (NAKATANI 2008).

find even a case of it among men under age 50 who got married after the land reform.

When a peasant family got a private ownership of land, the land was registered by a name of a household head and inherited by sons not by daughters. Living in the village of his wife became considered to be dishonourable, because he does not have any right over land in her village. Patrilocal residence was enforced in the peasant society. The marriage of bride-service became also unfavourable, since it does not involve a transfer of right over land.

Today, a boy marries either paying money to a girl's family (bride-price) or giving his sister instead of cash to his brother in-law (sister-exchange). The new system of adopting a son in-law as an heir has appeared for those who have no son. In this way the systems of marriage and adoption have changed. This change was mainly caused by land reform which gave private ownership of the land to its male cultivators, but at the same time, it deprived peasant women (daughters) of rights to inherit tenancy and of the chance to live in their natal places. The system of marriage and adoption had changed in a close relation with change in the way of controlling land and labour.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this paper, I discussed a link between a recent change of adoption and that of marriage. Describing a peasant society in India, I argued that adoption and marriage are systems which are structured by the ways how land, labour and fertility have been controlled in the society, and in which a household as a cooperate unit deals with issues of labour needs, of property inheritance, and of social and biological reproduction.

In the traditional societies in Micronesia, main productive resources of land and people were collectively controlled by each lineage cooperate. Marriage was a system to transfer human resource between lineages for reproduction and an adopted child who moves to affine was a compensation for the resource lost in marriage. The transfer of resources in adoption was not only conducted between lineages, but within a lineage. The former consolidated a tie between different lineages, while the latter consolidated solidarity of a lineage.

Recently in Micronesia, private property is getting more and more important. Even in the matrilineal society of Romonum, for example, the amount of property which is inherited from a father and owned by an individual or siblings has been increasing, while some of compounds and houses are still collectively owned by a matrilineage group. There has been a tendency in which a unit of controlling resources is getting smaller. It resulted in an increase of sibling exchange in marriage and a decreasing of adoption in Romonum. Adoption, a long term exchange of labour between lineages is replaced by sibling exchange in marriage, a short term direct exchange of labour between families.

A reviewing of previous studies made clear firstly that there are two types of adoptions in Micronesia; one is adoption among a kin for acquiring heirs and the other is adoption between kin and affine for exchanging labour. Secondly it was discussed that the former type of adoption is explained by a descent theory and the latter by a system of exchange and distribution. However, both types of adoptions and their changes, I argue, can be understood by a perspective which sees them as politics of



household over resources. Adoption among a kin is a mean for controlling recourse vertically while adoption between kin and affine and marriage of sibling exchange are both means for controlling resources horizontally. Empirical analysis on changes of adoption custom and on household politics over resources in Romonum will be a research subject in the future.

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