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IDENTIFYING THE PERSON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Abstract

Household Registration in Japan:

A Site for Legal and Social Recognition

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The preamble of Japan's first modern household registration law stated in 1871: "The most primary and important aspect of government is to detail without half-heartedness the number of households and people." The nation was identified and in the process organized into administrative household units. The household register, or *koseki*, soon engendered a "*koseki* consciousness" among its registrants, and the government saw *koseki* as crucial for constructing a desired social order. *Koseki* became, and remains today, the Japanese individual civil status register and is, as such, fundamentally a database of individual civil status events. However, three general *koseki* principles governing the organization, collection and use of these data produce in concert among the registrants a general concern with the countenance of one's administrative household unit. The organization of individual data into household units creates "families on paper" that subjectively exist in parallel to social families. Data collection by way of individual notifications provides agency to shape one's own particular unit. Finally, the use of the *koseki* document for individual documentation purposes stresses the need to create and maintain a desirable administrative household. Situated at the core of Japanese society, *koseki* is thus a site for acquiring, maintaining and losing legal and social status.

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