

Civil Lawsuit Database for Prewar Japan

<Overview>

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Objective: To provide basic information for examining issues such as effects of legal service on economic development and effects of socioeconomic structure on legal service demand, by compiling prefecture-level panel data on civil lawsuits for prewar Japan

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Period: From 1885 to 1925 (The data points are 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915, 1920, and 1925.)

Variables: Number of civil lawsuits, number of civil lawsuits on pecuniary issues, number of lawyers, period from acceptance to judgment, population, urban population, and number of factory workers

Major data sources:

Annual Report on Civil Case Statistics (Minji Tokei Nenpo) by the Ministry of Justice, various issues

Imperial Statistical Yearbook (Teikoku Tokei Nenkan) by the Bureau of Statistics of the Cabinet Office, various issues

Major research findings:

It was found that urbanization, not industrialization and financial development, increased the demand for monetary lawsuits. At the same time, the inefficiency of the legal system impeded economic and industrial growth, but this was conditional on urbanization. In other words, the inefficiency of the legal system impeded industrial and economic growth only in urban areas. These findings suggest that community-based contract enforcement mechanisms worked well in rural areas until they were superseded by the formal legal system, with the progress of urbanization and weakening of community ties.