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## *Japan' in an English Mirror*

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'The rise of Japan is surely one of the great epics of modern world history'.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is not easy to obtain an overview of the development of Japanese civilization. Since the 1960s there has been an explosion of research which has overturned many of the older orthodoxies. The *Cambridge History of Japan* provides us with an unique chance to take stock. Here I will consider the four volumes covering the period from the twelfth to the later twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

How reliable is the mirror which they hold up to 'Japan'? At the most general level, almost all reviewers have welcomed them. The medieval volume 'is a first-class product ...'.<sup>3</sup> '... everywhere the fruit of recent scholarship is generously served up,'<sup>4</sup> 'Richly informative'.<sup>5</sup> 'It will surely serve, for many years to come, as a fundamental and authoritative text ...'.<sup>6</sup> '... the best summary to date in English of an immensely complex period of historical development ...'.<sup>7</sup> The early modern volume, 'comprehensively and systematically displays major achievements of the last three decades' and 'will undoubtedly become and long remain a basic source in the field of Tokugawa studies'.<sup>8</sup> It provides 'a good narrative coverage of much of the important scholarship from World War II ...'.<sup>9</sup> The authors in the

<sup>1</sup> R. Bowring, Review of vols. 5, 6. *London Review of Books*, 14 June 1990, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> The periods covered are: vol. 3 'Medieval' (c. 1180–1550); vol. 4 'Early Modern' (c. 1550–1800); vol. 5 'Nineteenth Century' (c. 1800–1900); and vol. 6 'Twentieth Century' (1900–1973). The Kamakura period covers 1185–1333, the Tokugawa or Edo is 1600–1868, the Meiji 1868–1912. Volume 1, covering the period to A.D. 794 and edited by Delmer M. Brown, has also been published.

<sup>3</sup> C. Steenstrup, Review of vol. 3. *Monumenta Nipponica*, 46, 2 (Summer 1991), p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> M. E. Berry, Review of vol. 3. *Jnl Japanese Studies*, 18 (1992), p. 488.

<sup>5</sup> H. Tonumura, Review of vol. 3. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (1992), p. 397.

<sup>6</sup> A. G. R. Smith, Review of vol. 3 in *Jnl Royal Asiatic Soc.*, 3rd Series, i (1991), p. 332.

<sup>7</sup> I. J. McMullen, Review of vol. 3. *English Hist. Rev.*, cviii (1992), p. 384.

<sup>8</sup> De-M. Tao, Review of vol. 4 in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 47, 3 (Autumn 1992), p. 409.

<sup>9</sup> W. B. Hauser, Review of vol. 6. *Jnl Interdisciplinary History*, xxi, 1 (Summer 1990), p. 503.

nineteenth century volume '... have produced an expansive, detailed and authoritative volume'.<sup>10</sup> It is a '... superb comprehensive volume ...' with '... high standards of scholarship and readability ...'.<sup>11</sup> The volume on the twentieth century provides '... a depth of knowledge about modern Japanese history that is unobtainable from any other single volume.'<sup>12</sup> The quality of the essays '... will ensure that they have to be taken seriously well into the next century ...'.<sup>13</sup> 'As an inventory of postwar research—especially by Japanese scholars—this volume is superb.'<sup>14</sup>

Nothing is perfect, however, and before using these volumes, we need to note various types of criticism. The volumes are rather conservative and out of date since they were planned in the 1970s. This causes various biases. There is a rather unsatisfactory underlying 'modernization' paradigm, which is no longer acceptable but has not been replaced by anything else. That is to say, there is an assumption that 'modernization' is inevitable and uniform in its nature. Consequently there is no suitable framework for interrelating different aspects of the past. There is no sustained comparison with other nations. There are few temporal comparisons between different periods. Many important topics in Japanese history, particularly in the fields of religion, law, art, crafts, literature, popular culture, technology, and family life are relatively neglected. Much of the Japanese population is largely absent, in particular women, non-agricultural workers and minorities such as the *burakumin*. There is a down-playing of conflict in the past. There is a bias towards the centre of power and a 'top-down' approach which is related to the only marginal use of local history sources. It is difficult to get a real 'feel' for the past life of Japan because contemporary sources are seldom quoted.

These biases and omissions need to be noted when using the *Cambridge History*. We also need to know how far specific interpretations are to be trusted. It should be emphasized that, in general, reviewers do not disagree very fundamentally with most of the interpretations and summaries presented in the various essays. They mostly com-

<sup>10</sup> E. Tinios, Review of vol. 5. *Historical Jnl*, 76, 247 (June 1991), p. 265.

<sup>11</sup> D. R. Thurston, Review of vol. 5. *Jnl Asian and African Studies*, xxv, 3-4 (July-Oct. 1991), p. 292.

<sup>12</sup> S. Garon, Review of vol. 6. *Monumenta Nipponica*, 54, 3 (1990), p. 341.

<sup>13</sup> I. Nish, Review of vol. 6. *Times Lit. Supplement*, April 28, 1989, p. 279.

<sup>14</sup> T. R. H. Havens, Review of vol. 6. *Jnl Interdisciplinary History*, xxi, 1 (Summer 1990), p. 177.

mend them as lucid, fair, balanced and scholarly attempts by the leading authorities in the field. Yet a number do point out that non-experts will only gain hints that what is presented is not uncontested. For instance, in relation to a chapter in volume four, 'the historiographic controversies are invisible ...'.<sup>15</sup> In volume six 'Both the style and substance of many articles tend to . . . downplay . . . controversy in historiography' and thus the non-expert readers 'will at best be made dimly aware that the issues taken up in this book have been (and remain) subject to impassioned debate'.<sup>16</sup>

In relation to the question of the factual side of the material, most reviewers are agreed on the high standard of scholarship. Very few mistakes are mentioned and the reviewers seem broadly happy about the level of factual accuracy of the volumes. For instance, in relation to volume three, Steenstrup writes that 'I can find only comparatively minor points to gripe about'.<sup>17</sup> None of those who have reviewed volume four point to glaring inaccuracies. With volume five, Gordon writes that 'While I cannot judge the accuracy and thoroughness of all the research across this wide range of topics, the volume appears to stand on solid ground in these respects'.<sup>18</sup>

In this article, the object of attention is 'Japan'. Yet Japan will be viewed through a double set of mirrors. The first is that created by the authors in the *Cambridge History*. By looking at this mirror through the eyes of some thirty reviewers, we have discovered some of the distortions inherent in the enterprise. On the other hand, in terms of what it set out to do, the editors and writers appear to have provided a largely 'accurate', clear and authoritative set of essays, summarizing a vast amount of information which would otherwise be unavailable to the general reader. As Hauser suggested in relation to volume four, the work can be treated as 'an encyclopedia' which 'can be mined for both information and sources ...'.<sup>19</sup>

A second mirror is more difficult to evaluate, for this lies in the mind of the author of this article and his expectations. I am an 'outsider', someone who has only had the opportunity to spend two periods in Japan, and for whom it is still a 'foreign country'.<sup>20</sup> My

<sup>15</sup> Hauser, Review, p. 495.

<sup>16</sup> A. Gordon, Review of vol. 6. *Jnl Japanese Studies*, 17, 2 (1991), pp. 150-1.

<sup>17</sup> Steenstrup, Review, p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon, Review, p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> Hauser, Review, p. 503.

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to the British Council, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Hokkaido University and the University of Cambridge for the funding which made these visits (in 1990 and 1993) possible.

task is similar to that of Tocqueville when he visited the 'foreign country' of America and the method I will adopt is quite similar to his. He described this as follows: 'In my work on America, . . . Though I seldom mentioned France, I did not write a page without thinking of her, and placing her as it were before me. And what I especially tried to draw out, and to explain in the United States, was not the whole condition of that foreign society, but the points in which it differs from our own, or resembles us.'<sup>21</sup>

Instead of comparing 'France' and 'America'. I will compare what I know about the history of England from the twelfth century with what the *Cambridge History* indicates about Japan.<sup>22</sup> This placing of Japan in an English historical mirror will undoubtedly produce its own distortions. Yet they are likely to be different from those of other reviewers and even some of the errors may prove fruitful.<sup>23</sup> One of my reasons for attempting this task is that while it is not difficult to criticize a vast work like the *Cambridge History*, it is less easy to provide an account which tries to show what could be done. In making this broad survey, I will try to take seriously some of those criticisms noted above, namely that the *Cambridge History* should have been more comparative in space and time, and should have tried more self-consciously to integrate different aspects of the past.

In putting Japan within an English mirror, two contrary temptations should be noted. One is a kind of 'Orientalism' which makes Japan too 'foreign'. There is plenty of writing on Japan which exoticizes it and makes it totally different from 'the West'. This is not without some justification. In the vast differences between England and Japan in culture, religion, language and history, there are plenty of grounds for stressing the fundamental differences. The contrasts should never be forgotten, but nor should they be overdone.

My own bias is in the opposite direction. As an anthropologist who has studied a number of societies which are in every respect very different from England I have usually been faced with a set of contrasts. It is therefore a source of considerable surprise to find a civil-

<sup>21</sup> *Memoir, Letters and Remains of Alexis de Tocqueville* (London, 1861), vol. i, p. 359.

<sup>22</sup> I was encouraged to make this comparison by Norman Jacobs *The Origins of Capitalism, East and West* (Hong Kong, 1958) which compared Japan, China and Europe. For a summary and critique of Jacobs, see Alan Macfarlane, 'The Origins of Capitalism in Japan, China and the West: the Work of Norman Jacobs', *Cambridge Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1994).

<sup>23</sup> My errors would have been greater without the help of Sarah Harrison, Gerry Martin, Kenichi and Toshiko Nakamura, Mitch Sedgwick, Hiroshi Watanabe, all of whom read and commented on drafts of this article.

ization at the other end of the world which feels rather familiar. It is particularly challenging because there was little direct contact or diffusion before the nineteenth century to account for the apparent similarities. This review will tend to stress the similarities, but it should constantly be remembered that there are equally important differences, in climate, geography, economy, social structure, mentality, morality and culture.

It should also be noted that to write of 'England' creates problems. Many of my statements would be contested by some other historians. Furthermore, the question of how far the characteristics I describe as 'English' are in fact 'British', or 'West European' or even 'Western' is an important one, but one which cannot be answered here. Anyone familiar with European history will realize that many of those features which I describe as 'English' were also true of other parts of Europe and in particular of Holland. In order to simplify and save the reader tedium I have eliminated numerous sentences of the kind 'In England, Holland, southern Germany, northern Italy ...'. My task in comparing two large islands over a period of one thousand years is sufficiently complex in itself to force me to put on one side for the moment the degree to which England was different from its neighbours. It also necessitates a ruthless smoothing out of temporal, geographical, class and other differences in both countries. To change the image, this is very much history written through a telescope, two of whose distorting but necessary lenses, the scholarly biases of the authors of the *Cambridge History* and my own biases as an historian and anthropologist, need to be constantly kept in mind.

### **The Economic Miracle and its Roots**

The dimensions of the first great spurt of growth in Japan are impressive. 'By 1920 ... gross domestic product in real terms ... had risen 2.8 times since 1885. Output of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries grew by 67 percent; commerce, services, and other by 180 percent; mining and manufacturing by 580 percent; transport, communications, and public utilities by over 1,700 percent.'<sup>24</sup> Why did this happen in Japan?

<sup>24</sup> 6:386, Crawcour. A good graphical illustration of this extraordinary development is given in the *Times Atlas of World History* (London, 1978), p. 243, which shows how Japanese export rose from about 30 million yen in 1880 to about 1800 million

While it is obviously true that Japan in the later nineteenth century 'adopted from the West a tremendous amount of what was fundamental and essential to modernization . . .',<sup>25</sup> nevertheless, the *Cambridge History* makes it clear that we have in Japan a case of largely autonomous economic development. Its success was not merely the result of rapid technological diffusion from the West in the later nineteenth century. The growth did not occur in other Asian countries at that time. It appears to have occurred through liberating a widespread dynamism. 'This growth was mainly achieved not by radical technological change but by the diffusion of existing techniques, a series of small technical improvements, increasing specialization . . .', 'Japan's industrial growth before World War I was largely the growth of traditional industry.'<sup>26</sup>

Thus it appears reasonable to conclude that 'the roots of modern development in Japan appear to lie more in the thrust of past social change and organization and less in long-standing diffusion from the first countries to modernize . . .'. What seems to have happened is that there was some kind of ignition of pre-existing material. Thus we are told that 'Given this premodern history, it is no wonder that Meiji Japan was dynamic . . . The new impetus came from legal changes, eliminating occupational and residential restrictions and freeing all groups to pursue their interests'.<sup>27</sup>

Commentators are convinced that by the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan was already an unusual economy, ready for a massive burst into economic development. We are informed that 'changes in Tokugawa village conditions left a rural population well endowed for modern development', and that 'Levels of agricultural productivity, rural literacy, and local organizational growth were extraordinary for a country just beginning modern economic development'. It was an 'unusual pre-modern society in the midst of internally generated, rapid change', almost every quantitative measure shows it to be 'extraordinary for a premodern society'.<sup>28</sup>

The immense economic surge, to be repeated a second time in the later twentieth century, meant that within two generations Japan turned from a relatively isolated 'pre-industrial' country into one

yen by 1920. This staggering sixty-fold increase, even if we allow for inflation, is unparalleled as far as I know.

<sup>25</sup> 5:497, Sukehiro.

<sup>26</sup> 6:391, 420, Crawcour.

<sup>27</sup> 5:501, 565, Rozman.

<sup>28</sup> 5:525, 566, Rozman.

that could defeat both Korea and Russia and become one of the most powerful industrial nations in the world. This was not a sudden 'miracle'. Only an analysis of Japanese history over a long period will give us clues to its emergence. This history may profitably be placed alongside that of the other island which amazed the world a century earlier, namely England.

Let us start with the basic activity of agriculture. Historians of England have for a long time pointed to the importance of the growth in agricultural productivity in England between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, often referred to as an 'agricultural revolution'. This is seen as a necessary factor in explaining England's precocious urban and industrial growth. Surplus crops not only created a wealthy rural population, but helped support the rapidly growing cities. A parallel 'agricultural revolution' seems to have occurred in Japan.

In Japan, agriculture was mainly based on rice cultivation, and it was rice production that was first increased. In the second half of the thirteenth century, a new variety of rice was imported from Indochina, by way of China. Being more resistant to both drought and insects, it 'enabled cultivators in western Japan to double crop and even triple crop their paddies'.<sup>29</sup> This 'growth of agricultural productivity was the foundation on which the commerce of these periods flourished'.<sup>30</sup>

This agricultural revolution was followed by another from the sixteenth century onwards. There were new and improved crops, for instance the sweet and ordinary potatoes were introduced into Japan at the start of the seventeenth century and were important from then onwards.<sup>31</sup> In the seventeenth century a growing number of people moved away from subsistence production and produced commercial crops, tobacco, cotton, indigo, madder, rape, vegetables, so that 'In some areas, particularly in central Japan, commercial agriculture had become the predominant mode by the eighteenth century . . .'.<sup>32</sup>

It seems likely that the improvement in hoes and ploughs helped to open up the fertile river bottoms to irrigated rice cultivation from the sixteenth centuries onwards, and new kinds of highly specialized

<sup>29</sup> 3:313, Keiji; 3:376-7, Varley.

<sup>30</sup> 3:376, Varley.

<sup>31</sup> 4:682, Hanley.

<sup>32</sup> 4:215, Bolitho.



hoes continued to be invented.<sup>33</sup> As in England, farmers took an active interest in experimenting and improving production. A combination of tools, techniques and crops meant that more and richer land was opened up to cultivation. 'Providing for a more constant supply of water was only one of many methods used to increase agricultural production during the Edo period. Land was also reclaimed from the bays and shallow tidal marshes . . .'.<sup>34</sup> There was a doubling of the area of cultivated land during the Tokugawa period; in the period 1600 to 1720 alone, land use increased by 82 percent.<sup>35</sup> As a consequence, 'By the early eighteenth century, Japan's agricultural production was roughly 60 percent more than it had been a century earlier . . .'.<sup>36</sup> Thus Thomas Smith referred to changes 'of great importance for Japanese history, perhaps justifying comparison with the agricultural revolution in Europe . . .'.<sup>37</sup>

It is normally the case that increasing productivity at the village level is soon siphoned off by the powerful through raised taxes and rents. To what extent was this the case in Japan? There are hints that taxes in medieval Japan were low. Thus we are told that 'each *tan* of land was assessed a grain tax amounting to no more than 3 percent of its total yield.'<sup>38</sup> This suggests a very low tax rate. The evidence becomes more abundant for later periods. While the aim of the government and its representatives was clearly to extract the maximum from the population, for various reasons this was impossible. Thus we are told that through the Tokugawa period 'Although the national output was growing, the bakufu's regular tax income was falling'.<sup>39</sup>

Likewise, the local magnates failed to extract the major part of the growing wealth. Various conditions 'acted to reduce the actual amount of taxes extracted from the villages' so that during the Tokugawa era 'Historians now believe that, on the average, daimyo collected only about 30 percent of the crop in most areas . . .'.<sup>40</sup> This may have been a higher ratio than in pre-industrial England, but a good deal lower than in the majority of agrarian societies where 50

<sup>33</sup> 4:508, Toshio.

<sup>34</sup> 4:500, Toshio.

<sup>35</sup> 4:207, 217, Bolitho.

<sup>36</sup> 4:449, Tatsuya.

<sup>37</sup> 5:517, Rozman.

<sup>38</sup> 3:315, Keiji. A *tan* is a unit of land measurement.

<sup>39</sup> 5:593, Crawcour. The *bakufu* is the central administration.

<sup>40</sup> 4:107, Osamu.

per cent or more is the norm. This inability to cream off productivity gains also applied to the growing wealth generated in non-farming occupations, both in the rapidly expanding industries in the countryside and in the towns. Thus we are told that 'Both farmers and merchants benefited by the inability of the samurai elite to tax commercial activities effectively or to capture the productivity gains in agriculture.'<sup>41</sup> The same was true of England.

Another significant feature of the English build-up to industrialization was the rapid development of crafts and small manufactures, particularly outside the main cities, and in the textile industry. The 'proto-industrial' phase of growth of England's 'industries in the countryside' from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries is a very important feature. How does Japan compare with this?

It would appear that from at least the thirteenth century, artisans were paid much more highly than agricultural workers and from very early on, urban craftsmen found a market for their products in the countryside.<sup>42</sup> Yet, in parallel, from quite early on, and certainly from the seventeenth century many by-occupational crafts were developing in the countryside. 'Individual rural households began to develop by-employments or simple rural industries, so that even within a single domain certain villages became known for their production of goods such as paper, charcoal, ink, pottery, lacquer ware, or spun cloth.' Thus by the later eighteenth century, there was a large semi-rural, proto-industrial base. In parts of central Japan, 'the villagers spent more time in spinning, weaving, and trading than in farm work'. The figures are impressive. In these areas 'About a quarter of the rural population was employed in handicrafts and commerce.'<sup>43</sup>

As in England, where the industrial revolution sprang up as much in the semi-rural areas, so in Japan the base of the massive change lay as much in the countryside as in the cities. We are told that the 'long-run importance of local growth centres of a semiurban character is recognized by specialists on economic development . . . as an asset important to the modern transformation undertaken in the Meiji period'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it is stated that 'most traditional industries began as rural, largely part-time cottage industries'.<sup>45</sup> It was a trend further encouraged by the activities of landlords who, like their

<sup>41</sup> 4:664, Hanley.

<sup>42</sup> 3:346-7, Yamamura.

<sup>43</sup> 5:544, 584, Nobuhiko.

<sup>44</sup> 5:546, Nobuhiko.

<sup>45</sup> 6:416, Crawcour.

English counterparts, took an interest in encouraging commerce. Thus the 'new landlords responded to opportunities for commercial agriculture, transferred capital back and forth between landholdings and commercial enterprises, emulated urban practices . . .'.<sup>46</sup>

It is well known that England underwent rapid urban growth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that this is somehow linked to its industrial revolution. Turning to Japan, the urban growth patterns are even more dramatic. One aspect is the size and dominating position of the three major cities, a phenomenon equivalent to the dominance and importance of London in England. Kyoto was the first to develop into a major city. By the middle of the fifteenth century it is estimated to have had some 200,000 inhabitants, compared, for instance to the 50,000 or so of London at the same time.<sup>47</sup>

Two other great cities arose in the seventeenth century, Osaka based on the growing rice market of western Japan, and Edo (later Tokyo), the seat of the Tokugawa shoguns. By the end of the seventeenth century, Edo 'had become the world's largest city', while the populations of Osaka and Kyoto 'approached those of London and Paris, the two largest cities in the West'.<sup>48</sup> By the 1720s Edo's population was over one million. At their peak in the eighteenth century, these three cities numbered over two million inhabitants, constituting an immense pulsing heart, pushing out demand and pulling in people and goods.<sup>49</sup>

The growth of small and medium-sized cities from the medieval period is just as important. An estimate of the population of Japanese cities in the second half of the fifteenth century gives the following figures: Nara, 10,000 to 15,000; Tennoji, 35,000; Sakai, at least 20,000; Sakamoto, 15,000; Kuwana, 15,000; Hakata, 30,000 to 50,000. Most of these were larger than all but one or two English cities. Thus by the early sixteenth century there were more than twenty cities and port towns with populations of over ten thousand.<sup>50</sup> There were many different kinds of towns: castle towns, port towns and towns growing on the busy highways. The dense population was famously described by Kaempfer towards the end of the seventeenth century. 'The highways are almost one continued line of villages and

<sup>46</sup> 5:521, Rozman.

<sup>47</sup> 3:377, Yamamura.

<sup>48</sup> 4:519, Nobuhiko.

<sup>49</sup> 5:538, Rozman.

<sup>50</sup> 3:381, Yamamura.

boroughs. You scarce come out of one, but you enter another; and you may travel many miles, as it were, in one street, without knowing it to be composed of many villages . . .'.<sup>51</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, Japan had become 'one of the most urbanized societies in the world'. We are told that 'approximately 5 to 7 percent of all Japanese' lived in cities of over 100,000 inhabitants, as compared to two percent in Europe . . .'.<sup>52</sup> If one extends the definition of 'urbanization' to include all towns of three thousand or more persons, then by about 1700, 'Japan's approximately 17 percent urbanization . . . plus one-half the total in smaller but still substantial commercial and or administrative centres . . . approaches the highest levels in Europe and exceeds by a factor of two or three the levels reached after long histories of city building in Russia and China'.<sup>53</sup>

It is well known that the growth of cities and particularly of London had an immense influence on England's economic development. It seems likely that the same was true for central Japan. In the mid-thirteenth century, the elites living in Kyoto 'were obtaining . . . most of their daily necessities from the *shoen* located in and around the capital region'.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, those in the countryside depended increasingly on the towns. Thus 'medieval *shoen* proprietors came to rely more and more on Kyoto and other markets to supply many of the commodities they needed'.<sup>55</sup> The rapid urban growth of the seventeenth century, 'increased the demand for cotton and other commercial crops'.<sup>56</sup>

It is important that in the early phases of economic growth producers and merchants be protected against under-cutting competition. Later, however, when activity had reached a high level, such monopolies may become restrictive and need to be broken down. Both these patterns are to be found with the guilds of London, which grew in the thirteenth century, but were undermined in the sixteenth. We may wonder whether this pattern is discernible in Japan.

It is clear that guild-like organizations started early in Japan: in the mid-eleventh century 'such artisans as papermakers, weavers,

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Charles Macfarlane, *Japan: An Account, Geographical and Historical* . . . (New York, 1852), p. 272.

<sup>52</sup> 4:519, Nobuhiko.

<sup>53</sup> 5:547-8, Rozman.

<sup>54</sup> A *shoen* is a private landholding or estate.

<sup>55</sup> 3:101, Kyohei.

<sup>56</sup> 4:511, Toshio.

scroll painters, smiths, founders, and several other highly skilled specialists who had been protected by the government and the highest-ranked nobles began to produce their products “privately” and to sell them in the market’. By the end of the eleventh century, the first formal guilds (*za*) began to emerge. Thus in Kyoto ‘more and more merchants and artisans engaged in trade, and an increasing number of *za*, to which most of them belonged, congregated’. These guilds developed rapidly and were not confined to cities and large towns but also spread to the countryside.<sup>57</sup>

The importance of the protection which they afforded is stressed by historians of medieval Japan. They ‘enabled merchants to enjoy substantial monopolistic . . . power that could increase their income and ability to engage more freely in market activities in the capital region and nearby provinces’. They may also have had the effect, as in England, of regulating standards and ensuring quality. Then, as in England, when enough momentum had been generated and the guilds were actually inhibiting growth, the balance changed and the monopolies were increasingly by-passed.<sup>58</sup>

In England, from very early on, wealth was largely based on complex and extensive trade networks, combined with local manufacturing. It would seem that a similar development occurred in Japan. It is clear that the amount of trading activity in medieval Japan was very extensive. The most important part of this was internal. ‘The heart of the network was the part that linked Kyoto with the rest of Japan. From western Japan, rice, paper, salt, lumber, fish, sesame, sumac and many other products were shipped to Kyoto via Hyogo-seki.’ From this heartland, the merchant-producers moved outwards in search of new markets. During the twelfth century the ‘skilled producer-merchants’ of the capital region ‘travelled to more and more distant provinces’. The bigger merchants often went in groups or caravans, which ‘typically consisted of tens and sometimes hundreds of merchants’. There were also ‘Itinerant peddlers, travelling shorter distances’ who ‘carried their wares in backpacks’.<sup>59</sup>

This internal trade in the medieval period grew at such a rate, and such was the balance of power, that it was never throttled by the greed of powerful gentry with their extortionate tolls. Thus we are told that the ‘swelling tide of commerce was such that even the

<sup>57</sup> 3:352, 353–3, 377, 380, Yamamura.

<sup>58</sup> 3:353, 391, Yamamura.

<sup>59</sup> 3:381, 347, 383, Yamamura.

toll barriers (*sekisho*) failed to discourage it'. Furthermore there was the great advantage of the cheapness of water transport in Japan, as in England. Japan had the large Inland Sea and an indented coastline. 'Most goods that needed to be transported across the nation were carried over water when possible. This is why as many as nine major sea routes were established during these periods'. Transportation, 'especially over water, was indispensable' and there were considerable improvements in navigation, as there were also in the land transport systems.<sup>60</sup>

This firm internal base in the medieval period, providing goods for a large and ecologically diverse country, allowed the development of an international trade. In the middle ages 'Japan exported gold, pearls, mercury, sulfur, scrolls, folding screens, fans and other craft products and imported several kinds of luxury cloth; numerous varieties of incense and fragrances' and many other goods.<sup>61</sup> The scale of trade becomes obvious when we consider the size of Japan's major export at the time, silver. 'Recent studies of Japan's involvement in foreign trade revealed the surprising fact that Japan led the world in the export of silver during the seventeenth century.'<sup>62</sup> Indeed, 'Japan may have accounted for as much as one third of the world's silver output at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century'.<sup>63</sup>

Then came the sudden official closing of the country to foreign trade in the early seventeenth century, which continued in effect until the mid nineteenth century. Instead of stifling trading activity, this seems to have acted in the opposite way. Like a guild on a large scale, it protected the whole of Japan for two and a half centuries from the undermining competition of European and other goods, and helped to encourage further that commercial base that was already well developed.

It is a feature of England that the marketing of goods was highly developed from the medieval period. Not only were there extensive physical markets, but people were producing for the market, even if they lived in the countryside. We may wonder how far we have such a 'market society' in Japan.

From the medieval period, widespread commercial marketing systems had developed, with many rural dwellers buying necessities for

<sup>60</sup> 3:383, 382, 365, 382, Yamamura.

<sup>61</sup> 3:358, Yamamura.

<sup>62</sup> 4:27, Hall.

<sup>63</sup> 4:61, Naohiro.

cash and producing cash crops in order to enable themselves to do so. 'From the mid-thirteenth century, the pace of commercial activities accelerated first in the large cities and then in the provinces.' This was not just in the environs of the major cities, but penetrated out into remoter regions. By the thirteenth century, it is argued that 'the capital region, the local markets, and these port towns constituted a commercial network'.<sup>64</sup>

Hence for medieval Japanese peasants, '... trade was also important to obtaining such necessary items as salt, iron implements used in farming, and pottery to store water ... Markets where such items could be bought were held three times a month on prescribed days ...'.<sup>65</sup> The number of three-day markets steadily grew during the thirteenth century, and later six-day markets were introduced.<sup>66</sup> As a result of this, rural dwellers in Japan were increasingly exposed to the market and were forced into a cash economy. This was 'Not only in the economically developed villages of central Japan but even in the poorer villages' where it 'became possible for peasants to acquire coins by producing woodwork and charcoal and collecting firewood for sale'.<sup>67</sup>

The need for cash led to the development of a highly commercialized agriculture and craft by-occupations. Thus 'In some parts of Japan during the seventeenth century, and in most parts of the country after that, subsistence farming gave way to more commercialized forms of agriculture ... The key to this transformation was increased interaction with the marketplace'.<sup>68</sup> The first major cash crop was cotton, but later, many other crops were grown. Thus by the 1830s 'a national market had developed for cotton, silk, indigo, wax, paper, sugar, tea, *sake*, pottery, matting, hardware, and lacquer ware ... industry and trade became increasingly profitable as compared with agriculture'.<sup>69</sup>

One of the most important and early features of English development was the freedom to alienate land and other immovable property. 'Private property' was present from at least the twelfth century in England. It was possible to alienate land and other property from

<sup>64</sup> 3:360, 364, Yamamura.

<sup>65</sup> 3:327, Keiji.

<sup>66</sup> 3:364, 381, Yamamura.

<sup>67</sup> 3:328, Keiji.

<sup>68</sup> 4:510, Toshio.

<sup>69</sup> 5:588, Crawcour.

the family.<sup>70</sup> What evidence is there for the development of concepts of private property in Japan?

That a type of individual ownership and a separation of the family from the land had occurred by the eve of the Japanese period of rapid development in the later nineteenth century is not in doubt. By the nineteenth century 'Feudal variety in landholding obligations had given way to individual ownership with firm legal rights and equally firm tax obligations'.<sup>71</sup>

We may wonder when this happened. If we move to the seventeenth century, we find that private property in land, with the rights of alienation from the family, were already well established. At the highest level, as in England, there were centralized proprietary rights, with all land held of the central authority.<sup>72</sup> At the next level down, also, rights were protected. That is to say, although holding of the *shogun*, the lords also had strong rights.<sup>73</sup> Lordship, as in England, gave immense *de facto* power. Thus in the later sixteenth century under Nobunaga 'complete proprietorships' were developed. We are told that this meant that 'within their domains, the *daimyo*, as proprietary lords, held the right to assign fiefs, command military forces, and exercise police and judicial authority'.<sup>74</sup> The essence of the situation is well summarized as follows. The local landholders 'possessed legally protected entitlements to their lands, including the right to buy, sell, and bequeath their holdings. Landownership was transferable . . . small-scale private land-holders . . . could buy and sell land, expand agricultural production, and open markets'.<sup>75</sup> What the Tokugawa shoguns did was to simplify and strengthen this pre-existing system.

Moving back in time, it would appear from hints in the medieval volume of the *Cambridge History* that there was a similar multi-layered feudal model of ownership to that in England. Within this system, those at the bottom technically had user rights, but, in fact, as in England, their practical power was much greater. In the early

<sup>70</sup> See Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (Oxford, 1978), ch. 5.

<sup>71</sup> 5:4, Jansen.

<sup>72</sup> 4:103, Osamu.

<sup>73</sup> The *shogun* is literally the 'Great General', in other words the effective ruler of Japan from the medieval period to 1868.

<sup>74</sup> 4:101, Osamu. The *daimyo* are the provincial feudal lords, literally the 'great name'.

<sup>75</sup> 4:479, Toshio.



modern period the small tenants were 'given certain rights to the use of land. In a technical sense, these might be called . . . "user rights", although in actual practice they amounted to a close equivalent to what we would style ownership rights.'<sup>76</sup> Likewise 'In the early medieval period, peasants did not hold land as private property in the true sense of the word.' The proprietor formally registered the title in the land registry and because this land was the basis for certain rents, 'peasants were forbidden to buy and sell it without permission'.<sup>77</sup> The same description could be applied to a customary tenant on an English manor, who had to come to the lord's court to transfer his land; in practice, however, he had considerable rights in the holding. Likewise, in Japan it is noted that 'the peasants' rights to cultivate *myo* were protected, and the fields could be passed on to their descendants as heritable *myoden*'.<sup>78</sup>

Potentially such land could be sold off. For instance, in villages near the cities of Nara and Kyoto, 'the sale of the peasants' right to possess arable land began early. This included selling land outright, using it as collateral for a loan, and, in many cases, becoming a tenant on the land as a result of debt default'. Land became increasingly viewed as a valuable commodity and not merely as a family entitlement. Hence, we are told that 'In the mid to late medieval period in central Japan and other nearby economically advanced areas there was a great change in the perceived value of land'.<sup>79</sup> Thus we find that the complex web of multi-layered tenures which were found in English property law also seems to be found, though with some variations, in Japan.

It is thought that England's precocious development into industrialism must have been linked to the growing use of money from a very early date. From at least the twelfth century, and probably well before, monetary values had penetrated deep into the English economy and hence there was a large demand for coinage. From the tenth century onwards, England had the best silver coinage in Europe. We may wonder how widespread the use of coins and monetary reckoning was in Japan and from how early.

There is considerable evidence that from a very early period there was a large demand for cash and a wide and rapid penetration of

<sup>76</sup> 4:124, Osamu.

<sup>77</sup> 3:329, Keiji.

<sup>78</sup> 3:122, Kyohei. The *myoden* means literally the 'named paddy (rice)', in other words a land unit for determining yearly taxes and services.

<sup>79</sup> 3:329, Keiji.

monetary values in Japanese society. Clearly money was widely used in the cities of medieval Japan. By the middle of the thirteenth century 'coins were being used daily by residents of the capital and other large cities as the principal medium of trade'.<sup>80</sup> What is more unusual is the penetration of cash into the countryside. 'In the thirteenth century, coins imported from Sung China gradually came into common usage, and by the end of the century, this practice had spread to the village level. Merchants from the capital purchased with coins products from the villages. In the fourteenth century it became common practice to exchange *nengu* for coins and submit it to the proprietor in that form'.<sup>81</sup> Nor was this confined to the central part of Japan for 'as early as the 1240s, coins were used in the remote Ou region in the north'.<sup>82</sup>

The amount of coins that were needed, even when rice was often used as a medium of exchange, can be seen from the imports of Chinese coins from an early date. So large was the import trade that in 1199 the Chinese issued 'an unsuccessful decree to prohibit the export of its coins to Japan'. By the middle of the thirteenth century, 'documents show that nobles and temples paid cash for most wages, stipends, clothing allowances, ceremonial costs, some transportation costs, and the like'.<sup>83</sup>

Likewise, land was being bought and sold for cash. A particular study of land sales at the end of the twelfth century, showed that of 187 sales, '139 were conducted using rice as the medium of exchange, 7 using cloth, and the remaining using cash'. As the flow of Chinese coins continued, the 'money sickness' as contemporaries termed it, 'spread rapidly'. Thus by the early fifteenth century a Korean envoy 'was surprised to discover the prevalent use of money . . . Even those travelling from one end of the country to the other, he noted, did not carry provisions because coins were accepted everywhere . . .' By the later fifteenth century, it is concluded that Japan had developed 'a highly commercialized and monetized economy . . .'.<sup>84</sup>

In England, the penetration of cash had meant that from the twelfth century at least, rents in kind had been 'commuted' into

<sup>80</sup> 3:366, Yamamura.

<sup>81</sup> 3:328, Keiji. *Nengu* literally means 'annual tribute', that is the basic dues paid to the lord in rice or other commodities.

<sup>82</sup> 3:366, Yamamura. The Ou region is the northern part of Honshu, the main island of Japan.

<sup>83</sup> 3:359, 367, Yamamura.

<sup>84</sup> 3:367, 359, 383-4, 395, Yamamura.

cash, with immense consequences for the flexibility and commoditization of land. It appears that the same happened in Japan, perhaps about a century later than in England. Commutation (*daisenno*) 'became prevalent during the latter half of the Kamakura period', in other words the thirteenth century onwards. This commutation, among other things, enabled the cultivators 'to plant more efficient mixes of grains, vegetables, and other cash crops'.<sup>85</sup>

Given this rapidly growing tide of monetization, we might expect that, as in England, we would find some interesting financial developments in Japan. This is indeed the case. One example of this is in the development of paper money. The oldest surviving evidence of a bill of exchange is dated 1279, and they began to be used from the second half of the thirteenth century. They were used 'to alleviate the costs and risks of transporting cash over long distances for trading, paying dues in cash ...'.<sup>86</sup> Such bills were very similar to English bills and bonds. They were just one form of sophisticated monetary device.

Another kind of paper money was developed by the *daimyo*. 'By the middle of the seventeenth century, it had become standard practice ... to pay samurai with certificates, good for the amount of their stipends and collectable from the *daimyo*'s granary.' A third device was the development of rice futures. In Osaka in the early eighteenth century, 'there were already some thirteen hundred rice brokers ... Soon they also started to deal in futures by buying and selling rice certificates as negotiable instruments that entitled the bearer to withdraw a specified amount of rice from the warehouses'.<sup>87</sup>

The rapid monetization of the economy was also reflected in the development of a banking system. Part of the roots of this lay, as in England, in religious foundations. Moneylenders were often monks in the large monasteries.<sup>88</sup> As well as these early proto-banks, in the later eighteenth century 'mutual trust cooperatives' were set up in Japanese villages and 'these cooperatives came to function as commercial banks for commoners'.<sup>89</sup> In parallel, 'the domain administration developed a banking system by establishing a depository that issued certificates of deposit, offered loans and stored goods and promises of future goods'.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> 3:361, 368, Yamamura.

<sup>86</sup> 3:367, Yamamura.

<sup>87</sup> 4:547, 562, Nobuhiko.

<sup>88</sup> 3:368, Yamamura.

<sup>89</sup> 4:653, Najita.

<sup>90</sup> 5:77, Jansen.

What is of particular interest is that, reflecting the large number of lenders and the relative security and orderliness of the society, the interest rates in Japan were so low. We know that very low rates of interest were prevalent in England in the early modern period, of the order of 5–10% per annum, as compared to characteristic rates of between 30–100% to be found in many 'developing' societies. In Japan we are told that in the later seventeenth century the interest on debts was between 5 and 7% per annum.<sup>91</sup>

We may wonder what effects all these different economic features had. One characteristic of England since the twelfth century has been its wealth, and the fact that this has been widely distributed. In terms of housing, clothing, diet and general standard of living, it was a very affluent 'pre-industrial' society. This growing wealth, particularly in the period 1550–1750, was a crucial factor in the industrial revolution. How does Japan compare with this?

It would appear that while less affluent than England, the revision of Japanese economic history which is summarized in the *Cambridge History* suggests that in the two hundred years leading up to the rapid economic growth of the later nineteenth century, Japan was a relatively wealthy society. It was thought until recently that the Tokugawa period, roughly the seventeenth to mid nineteenth centuries, was one where the mass of the population were miserable and exploited. 'In the 1980s, Marxists and non-Marxists alike found evidence that during the Tokugawa period the standard of living did rise.'<sup>92</sup> There are 'signs of a growing rural prosperity, new and larger houses, improved diet, better clothing' in most of Japan by the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>93</sup> As in England in the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, so in Japan a century later, there was a housing revolution, so that 'By the late eighteenth century, some well-to-do farmers lived in houses resembling samurai residences . . .'. There was also probably a rise in rice consumption per head.<sup>94</sup>

The general impression of growing affluence in town and country is well portrayed by the following irritated account of a Japanese village in 1830. 'Everyone has forgotten the righteous way. Now everyone is working for profit . . . In the villages we now have hairdressers and public baths. If you see houses you see flutes, *samisen*, and drums on display. Those living in rented houses, the landless,

<sup>91</sup> 4:223, Bolitho.

<sup>92</sup> 4:661, Hanley.

<sup>93</sup> 4:538, Nobuhiko.

<sup>94</sup> 4:664, 680–1, Hanley.

and even servants have *haori*, umbrellas, *tabi*, and clogs. When you see these people on their way to the temples, they seem better dressed than their superiors'.<sup>95</sup> The relative affluence of Japan can also be indirectly judged from such facts as that the countryside could support such a large urban population and that, as we shall see, there were surprisingly low mortality rates. The question of famine and food shortages tend to be overlooked in the *Cambridge History*. Yet it could be argued that they were less severe than, for instance, in China or India at the same period.<sup>96</sup>

Although there have always been major differences between the Japanese and English systems, for instance between a rice-cotton economy and a corn-pastoral-cloth economy, it is illuminating to see how many similarities there were. Yet even when we have established some notable similarities, we have only begun the historical task. By remaining within the economic sphere, we explain little. In order to *understand* why these two exceptional cases of economic development occurred we have to move into other realms. Many societies developed money, markets, cities, trade, craft production and yet remained locked in an agrarian order. What other factors do we need to consider in order to probe more deeply into what happened on these two islands?

### Population

One of the most powerful factors affecting economic growth, often negating short bursts of increased productivity, is the population pattern. It is therefore of considerable interest to compare the population dynamics of England and Japan.<sup>97</sup> Japan almost exactly paralleled England's demographic pattern, although the changes occurred about a century later. In England there was a considerable growth of population in the sixteenth century, which then slowed down. For the one hundred and fifty years before the industrial break-through, the population grew hardly at all. It then started to grow rapidly in the middle of the eighteenth century. In Japan there

<sup>95</sup> 5:79. Jansen. A *samisen* is a musical instrument with strings, somewhat like a banjo; a *haori* is a short coat; a *tabi* is a sock with a divided toe.

<sup>96</sup> See Alan Macfarlane, *The Savage Wars of Peace: England, Japan and the Malthusian Trap* (Oxford, forthcoming 1996/7), ch. 4.

<sup>97</sup> This is the theme of my forthcoming book *The Savage Wars of Peace*, cited above, which provides fuller documentation.

was considerable growth in the seventeenth century. We are told that between about 1550 and 1720 'the country's total population grew from roughly 12 million persons to approximately 26 million to 30 million . . .'.<sup>98</sup> Then the population growth rate slowed down so that the total was hardly larger in 1860 than it had been in 1720. It then began to rise again during the early burst of economic activity, as the growing economy required more labour.<sup>99</sup>

The over-all effect of this unusual pattern was that, in the precarious build-up to rapid economic growth, gains in productivity were not eaten up by a rapidly growing population. People became conspicuously richer, but did not invest their growing wealth in producing a larger number of children.

Just as revealing as the absolute curves of population and resources are the mechanisms by which this balance between the two was maintained. Instead of finding a demographic regime similar to that which characterized other Asian civilizations and most of Europe, where very high fertility is balanced by very high mortality, England and Japan were both exceptional in having a pattern with relatively low mortality and fertility rates for at least a century and a half before their respective industrial spurts. The levels of death and birth rates were approximately a half to two thirds the levels to be found in most other agrarian societies at the time. Thus we are told that the 'demographic rates in the late Tokugawa villages were remarkable for a premodern society. After falling from seventeenth-century levels, the crude birth and crude death rates were in the twenty to thirty range rather than in the forty to fifty range often observed in the recent history of less developed countries before death rates plummeted'.<sup>100</sup> This gave both England and Japan a number of advantages, including a more balanced age structure and a more secure environment within which individuals could plan their lives.

The other aspect of demography, namely migration patterns, is equally significant. One of the surprises emerging from the recent study of English social structure in the later middle ages was the discovery that unlike the situation in most agrarian societies, there was a very large amount of geographical mobility. It has been found that most people moved to other villages and towns during their

<sup>98</sup> 4:539, Nobuhiko.

<sup>99</sup> 5:560, Crawcour.

<sup>100</sup> 5:555, Rozman.

lives. The majority of those who lived into adulthood died in a place other than that in which they had been born.<sup>101</sup>

Unfortunately, there is not a great deal of discussion or evidence on migration for the medieval period in the *Cambridge History*. Yet from the seventeenth century, at least, there are hints of a large amount of labour migration. One author writes of the 'extraordinary urban-urban migration . . . the high levels of rural-urban migration necessary to produce and to sustain the unprecedented Tokugawa urbanization, and the massive rural-rural and small-town migration that emerged in the second half of the Tokugawa period'.<sup>102</sup> This was partly due to the 'massive flow of population to the cities' during the seventeenth century,<sup>103</sup> but there was also more local migration. 'Increasingly during the second half of the Tokugawa period, high rates of migration became evident also in the villages, much of it directed to other villages and to local towns other than the castle cities'.<sup>104</sup> Thus even in the countryside, despite the ideals of closed community life, 'the high rates of migration' made the realization of this ideal impossible.<sup>105</sup> If this impression is correct, the causes for this high migration, as well as its consequences, need to be established. It was clearly a feature of both England and Japan and would have provided the labour mobility needed for the growing economies.

### Stratification

Although there is revisionist questioning of the view, it has for long been believed that England from the thirteenth century onwards was characterized by a peculiarly 'open' and flexible social structure, with many 'estates', but few absolute barriers to the upward progress of the wealthy.

Between the twelfth and late sixteenth centuries, it would appear that Japan was also an unusually 'open' society. It is difficult to speak of castes, classes or even estates. Thus one author writes that 'there was as yet no particular differentiation among an artisan, manufacturer, peddler, merchant, or a worker engaged in providing services,

<sup>101</sup> See Macfarlane, *Origins of English Individualism*, ch. 3.

<sup>102</sup> 5:559, Rozman.

<sup>103</sup> 5:557, Rozman.

<sup>104</sup> 5:556, Rozman.

<sup>105</sup> 5:557, Rozman.

except perhaps in their economic success or failure.<sup>106</sup> Neither in theory nor practice was there rigidity in the large urban and commercial sector. The same was true among the large numbers of those who worked on the land.

In England we know that one of the unusual features of medieval society was the absence of slavery and the unusual fact that even serfs were 'free' men with individual rights in relation to all but their masters. One obtains a very similar impression in Japan. The largest group, those whom historians term 'peasants', was relatively free. We are told that 'it is clear that the *shoen* peasants could act fairly freely and that on occasion they both allied with and resisted the *jito* and *shoen* proprietors'.<sup>107</sup> Thus the same author concludes that 'the medieval peasant was basically a "freeman" (*jiyumin*)'.<sup>108</sup> A 'free' peasantry of this kind is unusual. It remained free in England and Japan over the centuries that followed.

The only groups who were not 'free' were the servants and retainers. Thus servants could be bought and sold, and their children removed. Yet, we are told, 'they were not accumulated in great numbers or forced to work under cruel conditions but, rather, were treated as part of the family in the patriarchal system'.<sup>109</sup> They could even be adopted as heirs. Thus developed the institution of servanthood, which is again found in its most widespread form in England and Japan. This institution, providing vital labour mobility, was to flourish in later periods in both countries.

Another form of labour organization which is again found in abundance in both England and Japan is apprenticeship. We are told, the 'son of a merchant or craftsman began to learn the trade from about the age of ten by becoming an apprentice (*detchi*), either at home or, more commonly, in another household. If he were apprenticed out, the term was usually ten years. He would live as a member of his master's household with the other apprentices and servants and would receive only his meals and, twice a year, a seasonal change of clothing'.<sup>110</sup> This account is almost word for word applicable to England.

It is recognized that while neo-Confucian thinkers recommended a four-order system, 'it was never given a legal basis, and its artifi-

<sup>106</sup> 3:514, Ruch.

<sup>107</sup> 3:120, Kyohei. *Jito* are military estate stewards.

<sup>108</sup> 3:121, Kyohei.

<sup>109</sup> 3:309, Keiji.

<sup>110</sup> 4:721, Shively.



ality and imprecision must be kept in mind.<sup>111</sup> The outward signs of the absence of rigidity are numerous. We have already seen that in relation to geographical mobility there was considerable movement. Furthermore, we have seen that there was much movement between occupations, with many farmers having by-occupations. This fluidity was shown in externals such as dress. Thus 'one would expect to find that dress varied by class and income in a highly stratified society' yet 'what is remarkable for Tokugawa Japan is how similar the basic cut of the clothing was for each class.' Thus we are told that the 'daily wear of men of both the samurai and merchant classes was remarkably similar in basic style . . . dress in fact was gradually being standardized and class differences minimized.'<sup>112</sup> What factors seem to have prevented real barriers from being set up?

Firstly, it was impossible to maintain any distinction between craftsmen and merchants. Secondly, within each supposed 'class' there were great differences in actual wealth and hence instability was introduced into the classification system. We are told that '*bushi* included not only the shogun and the daimyo but also the humble servants of samurai. Farmers ranged from rich landowners and village headmen to tenants and agricultural servants.'<sup>113</sup> Thirdly, the distinctions between the supposed top group, the samurai, and the rest were soon blurred. For instance, while 'Intermarriage between samurai and commoners was considered inappropriate', in fact '*bushi* were permitted, not uncommonly, to take commoner wives' and hence 'A kind of cultural levelling occurred . . .'<sup>114</sup> The mechanism of adoption added to this fluidity; many rich commoner's children were adopted into the samurai ranks.

The fact that the samurai as a group were unable to maintain their relative economic position during the Tokugawa period undermined the rigid ideal. 'The meaning of class was undercut most of all by the gradual erosion of the financial position of much of the samurai class in the middle of the seventeenth century, while at the same time the income of urban commoners was rising . . .'.<sup>115</sup> Yamamura noted that under the pressure of economic necessity, class distinctions became 'virtually nonexistent'.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>111</sup> 4:708, Shively.

<sup>112</sup> 4:692-3, Hanley.

<sup>113</sup> 4:711, Shively. *Bushi* were the military aristocracy, also referred to as the samurai.

<sup>114</sup> 4:711, Shively.

<sup>115</sup> 4:711, Shively.

<sup>116</sup> 5:531, Rozman; cf also 547.

Finally, everything became purchasable on the market, including the highest ranks. For instance, in 1793 'the *han* provided the convenience of a price list for status, from 50 *ryo* for wearing a sword to 620 *ryo* for full warrior standing'.<sup>117</sup> This was merely regularizing what was already in place; the possibility of easily exchanging wealth for status, the hallmark of the stratification system of modern societies. All this helps to explain why, at the Meiji restoration, the remains of the system of separate estates evaporated so very quickly and why 'Japan lost its class distinctions far more quickly and far more thoroughly than England did'.<sup>118</sup>

### Education and Literacy

In England, the use of paper and writing was highly developed by the later middle ages. Then, in the three centuries leading up to the industrial revolution, there was a growth of educational facilities; the founding of many schools, the development of printing, the spread of popular reading. The relatively high levels of general education and literacy are often thought to be a pre-condition for the development of a complex urban-industrial civilization.

Turning to Japan, we may start with the very rapid developments of the later nineteenth century, when it is widely recognized that there was an unusual degree of education and literacy. We are told that the 'legacy of the earlier spread of education was vital to the new society in many ways'.<sup>119</sup> Such literacy meant that the central government even before the Meiji restoration could communicate with the population, and the volume of information that could be transmitted 'seem[s] to have been exceptional for a society at such a comparatively low level of per capita income'.<sup>120</sup>

For the later period, 'Ronald Dore has traced a chronology of change and wrote that by 1868 Japan was transformed into a literate society'.<sup>121</sup> This was related to the rapid growth of schools and academies in eighteenth-century Japan. 'Domain schools were being founded more rapidly than ever before; private academies mush-

<sup>117</sup> 5:79, Jansen. The *han* were the 250 feudal domains during the Tokugawa period.

<sup>118</sup> 4:704, Hanley.

<sup>119</sup> 5:561, Rozman.

<sup>120</sup> 6:398, Crawcour.

<sup>121</sup> 5:560, Rozman.

roomed throughout the land; and over a thousand parish schools for commoners appeared'. Thus 'literacy was advanced nationwide by increased enthusiasm for founding schools throughout Japan . . . 59 domain schools were established between 1781 and 1803. But soon the pace accelerated.'<sup>122</sup>

In England, Protestants stressed the importance of education so that each individual could read the bible and be an intelligent believer. Likewise in Japan there seems to have been support for the rather unusual idea that it would be good to have an educated populace. Evidence of this attitude is widespread. The noted Confucian scholar Jinsai, who was himself the son of a lumber merchant, observed: 'It will not do for *chonin* and farmers not to have learning'.<sup>123</sup> In another book for merchants he wrote: 'It goes without saying that those of low status should also learn writing and arithmetic and should also learn to read a little.'<sup>124</sup> Thus 'education, particularly that of the common people, remained a matter of concern' in eighteenth-century thought.<sup>125</sup>

What is particularly interesting in the Japanese case is that the education was secular and practical. Nor was it the preserve of the elite. We are told that 'Popular acceptance of schooling hinged on its relevance to mobility aspirations'. In other words, it was linked to the high social mobility which we have already noted. Hence 'Secular and practical, popular education responded to the widespread desire for self-improvement and to opportunities to apply improved skills'.<sup>126</sup>

The evidence for widespread literacy is available in the amount of written material that still survives. Thus historians have 'pointed to the accumulation of village archives, administrative and legal documents of all kinds, and commercial records.' The statistics of printing and the book trade tell their own story. Before 1590 there was almost no printing in Japan, except in Buddhist monasteries. Yet 'within a century, well over ten thousand books were in print, sold or rented by more than seven hundred bookstores.' Even allowing for the relative size of population, this was probably a higher ratio of books in print and bookstores to the population as a whole than

<sup>122</sup> 5:72, 57, Jansen.

<sup>123</sup> The *chonin* were city dwellers, especially in the great cities of the Tokugawa period.

<sup>124</sup> 4:718, Shively.

<sup>125</sup> 4:455, Tatsuya.

<sup>126</sup> 5:560, Rozman.

anywhere in Europe at the time. Particular books were published and re-published for a voracious audience. Thus a dictionary originally made in about 1444 saw about eight hundred editions between the late sixteenth century and the early Meiji period.<sup>127</sup>

The rapid expansion of the book trade is impressive. For instance, 'By 1659 the publication and sale of books had so expanded that Kyoto dealers began to publish, for the benefit of booksellers, lists of works currently available. Starting with 1,600 titles in twenty-two subject categories, the classifications expanded to seventy-two as more and more different kinds of books were published . . . [a list in 1696] . . . ran to 674 pages . . . 7,800 titles . . .' By about 1720, we are told, there were about two hundred publishers in Kyoto alone.<sup>128</sup>

Books were not only read in the central area of Japan, but penetrated to the remotest communities. For instance, 'Takizawa Bakin, perhaps the greatest and most successful of the authors of lengthy "reading books" (*yomihon*), wrote that his books were read even in distant Sado Island.'<sup>129</sup> Such books may have reached these areas on the backs of peddlers who 'went about the streets and into the countryside with book frames on their backs piled high with books for sale or rent.'<sup>130</sup> The Japanese early developed the lending library. The peddlers rented out books, while in Edo there were in the eighteenth century 'some eight hundred book-lending shops (*kashihonya*) which were organized in twelve guilds . . . and they rented books for periods of fifteen days.'<sup>131</sup>

## Kinship

It became clear in the 1960s that the English pattern of kinship and marriage was old and rather unusual, predating the industrial revolution by hundreds of years. It then became reasonable to suppose that it was one of the causes, and not the consequences, of the urban and industrial revolutions. It is therefore of interest to see whether the Japanese family system was also of a nature to encourage, or at least not impede, economic development. Though the *Cambridge History* does not deal in detail with these matters, there is

<sup>127</sup> 4:715, 725-6, 721, Shively.

<sup>128</sup> 4:731, Shively.

<sup>129</sup> 5:68, Jansen.

<sup>130</sup> 4:732, Shively.

<sup>131</sup> 5:68, Jansen.

enough scattered through the volumes to suggest a tentative answer to this question.<sup>132</sup> Three interesting features may be noted.

The first is the flexible, contractual and artificial nature of the Japanese family. In almost all civilizations the central family unit is a 'natural' grouping, a 'community' of blood-relatives. In Japan we are given the impression 'of an extraordinary family system that is both demanding in its concern for status and flexible in its acceptance of adoption and family limitation as means to these ends'.<sup>133</sup> While the 'ie' or 'house' is the 'characteristic feature of Japanese society . . .', this was not a natural unit, based on real blood links. We are told that the 'house was not identical with a consanguineous family unit; it incorporated as members unrelated persons such as employees (*hokonin*), and it was possible for an adopted heir who had no blood relationship to the other members to succeed to its headship.' Thus, rather than being a natural kinship group, the 'ie' 'may be described more accurately as an artificial functional entity that engaged in a familial enterprise or was entitled to a familial source of income.'<sup>134</sup>

The family in Japan seems to have been the result of a curious mixture of status and contract. 'On the one hand, the house was expected to carry out a particular function, to act as a *gesellschaft*. At the same time, it also had the characteristics of a family like organic social unit, or *gemeinschaft*.'<sup>135</sup> This artificiality, whereby links between blood relatives rapidly weakened with time, can be seen, for instance, in the link between the family's main line (*honke*) and its branch lines (*bunke*). The relations tended to weaken 'as the latter formed strong ties with other warrior houses in their geographical areas, becoming in the process more independent of their former blood relations'.<sup>136</sup>

This flexibility and artificiality seems to have been one of the principal reasons why it was later possible to expand the family principle into entirely non-blood organizations such as business firms. Family-like, but artificially created, these quasi-groups have played an enormously important part in providing cohesion for Japanese commercial and industrial society. There was in medieval Japan the 'extended "uji" system in which family and "family-like" bonds

<sup>132</sup> For a more detailed comparison of the Japanese and English family systems, see Alan Macfarlane, 'On Individualism', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 82 (1993).

<sup>133</sup> 5:552, Rozman.

<sup>134</sup> 4:373, Masahide.

<sup>135</sup> 4:376, Masahide.

<sup>136</sup> 3:130, Susumu.

extended over branch (*ichimon*), allied (*fudai*) and even subordinate (*kenin*) families surrounding the main line of an aristocratic lineage.<sup>137</sup> Something similar can be found in Japanese business organizations in the later twentieth century.

One mechanism which led to this peculiarly flexible situation was the widespread possibility of non-kin adoptions. 'Adoption was readily accepted as a means to provide continuity or to bring a meritorious successor into an important post. Continuation of the blood line clearly was a lower priority than was perpetuation of the *ie*.'<sup>138</sup> Such adoption in turn was but one feature of the unusual system of inheritance in Japan.

In almost all societies, inheritance is automatic; all (male) children receive an equal share in the family estate. In fact it is often misleading to use the word 'inheritance' since there is joint ownership by all the living members of a family. The idea of 'disinheriting' one of the children, or of selecting one of them, or of bringing in non-kin to succeed, is inconceivable, since it immediately implies 'private' ownership by the older generation. In fact, all children have a fixed birth right in the estate.

Thus we are in a different realm of ideas when in England from the twelfth century disinheritance becomes possible and male primogeniture spread through the population. This pattern is not to be found as the dominant mode in any large civilization outside England. The only exception to this rule is Japan. We are told that in the early medieval period, up to the twelfth century, '... partible practices were the norm, with women included in the regular inheritance pool.' Yet, during the authentic feudal phase in Japan, as in England, the pressure to narrow inheritance within the nuclear family and away from brothers and their children increased. Thus from the later twelfth century, '... the tendency was strong to eschew lateral for vertical inheritance, which meant that clanishness in property matters remained relatively undeveloped.' Thus we are told that 'In place of unencumbered, alienable rights to daughters, for example, life bequests and annuities were set up, with reversion to the principal heir or his heir as part of an emerging system of entail'.<sup>139</sup>

At the same time, partibility gave way to impartible inheritance, with one heir alone inheriting. So 'divided inheritance gradually gave

<sup>137</sup> 3:10-11, Mass, quoted by Yamamura.

<sup>138</sup> 5:550, Rozman.

<sup>139</sup> 3:86, Mass.

way to unitary inheritance, which granted the entire family holding to the head, to whom his siblings were then required to subordinate themselves.<sup>140</sup> The pressures against the other siblings increased. 'Fathers, moreover, began enjoining inheriting sons to maintain the integrity of family holdings and to reduce or eliminate secondary recipients'.<sup>141</sup>

Although these practices did not become universal, there was effectively a change which is almost exactly similar, both in nature, timing and perhaps cause, to the English case. It became possible and indeed necessary, in England through sales and written wills, in Japan through wills and adoption, to direct the inheritance in a certain way. There was no longer automatic heirship. We are told that 'fathers (and mothers) could write and rewrite wills and progeny might be disinherited . . . it was left to the house head to select a principal heir, who might be a younger son.'<sup>142</sup> This was a tradition that was unchanged until the twentieth century.

Without any listings of inhabitants for the period before the seventeenth century, it is impossible to be certain about the size and structure of the medieval Japanese household. Once listings appear, we find that the size and structure was almost identical to that in England at the same time. With single-heir inheritance and the shedding of the other children, who either migrated away or remained unmarried, the Japanese household, like the English one, was relatively small and simple during the three centuries leading up to the spurt of economic growth. There is one difference, however. In Japan, but not in England, there was ideally a 'stem' family arrangement whereby the elderly parents would live with the inheriting son and his family. This made the Japanese household somewhat more 'complex' and on average about one third of a person larger than the English household.

## Politics

The characterization of the political structure of Japan over the last thousand years, and the ways in which this compares with England is of central importance. Yet it is particularly difficult to deal with

<sup>140</sup> 3:130, Susumu.

<sup>141</sup> 3:86, Mass.

<sup>142</sup> 3:86, Mass.

in a short space because we are contemplating unusually dynamic and contradictory systems in both cases. What follows can only be a very preliminary sketch.

As Tocqueville long ago argued, it appears that there are two extremes to which societies tend to gravitate, complete fragmentation or complete integration (absolutism) and that it is very difficult to maintain a balance between them.<sup>143</sup> In the Japanese case, we are told that in the medieval period 'Hakuseki identified two crucial trends ... One was the steady decline of imperial authority all through the tenth and eleventh centuries ... The other was the ascendancy of the aristocracy of the sword and, with it, a comprehensive tradition of non-centralized rule ...'<sup>144</sup> Thus 'centrifugal tendencies were strongly evident in every social phenomenon of medieval Japan ...'.<sup>145</sup> Many historians locate the period of authentic feudalism from the later twelfth century when Yoritomo created the offices of military governor and military estate steward, which 'represented no less than a merging of the systems of vassalage and benefice'. Yoritomo 'became a feudal chieftain, and Japan was thereby launched on its medieval phase. Japanese history was part of world history, with east and west exhibiting similar patterns'. There was 'the emerging dominance of warrior authority and the declining power of the central proprietor over the land, its revenues, and inhabitants'.<sup>146</sup>

Throughout the following centuries, not only was there a division of power at the centre, between Emperor and Shogun, with their separate courts and authority, but also power grew at the periphery. The *shugo* or local military governors consolidated their military power in the medieval period and later the 'daimyo drew their primary authority from their ability to exercise power and to maintain local control ...'.<sup>147</sup> This tendency towards the fragmentation of power increased in the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth centuries.<sup>148</sup>

It thus looked as if Japan, like fifteenth-century England during the Wars of the Roses, was disintegrating with over-mighty subjects

<sup>143</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland* (New York, 1968), ed. J. P. Mayer, p. 4.

<sup>144</sup> 4:615, Najita.

<sup>145</sup> 3:93, Kyohei.

<sup>146</sup> 3:260, Keiji.

<sup>147</sup> 3:278, Keiji; 226, Hall.

<sup>148</sup> 3:231, Akira.



breaking away from the centre. Instead, in both cases, a dynasty arose which through its ruthless and efficient exercise of power created a form of late, centralized, 'feudalism'. In England this was the Tudors, in Japan the Tokugawa. The mixed forms which they created, a blend of centralization and delegation, continue to puzzle historians.

Japanese scholars find it difficult to characterize the years between Nobunaga in the late sixteenth century and the Meiji restoration of 1868. On the one hand, the political system looks like a form of restored feudalism, after the interruption of the Onin wars and their fragmented aftermath. Thus Nakamura Kichiji 'concluded that the "kinsei" age witnessed the reformulation under the Tokugawa shogunate of the essential components of medieval feudalism in a more politically stable and highly organized form.'<sup>149</sup> Western scholars have used such phrases as 'late feudalism' or 'centralized feudalism' as labels to translate 'kinsei'. Yet the difficulty is shown by the fact that Japanese scholars tend to think of the Edo period as 'being more feudal than modern, whereas the Western historians think of the same era as more modern than feudal.'<sup>150</sup>

The problem seems partly to stem from the fact that, as Maitland wrote of England, Japan at this time could be seen to be either the most feudal or the least feudal of societies. On the one hand, the fact that the whole of Japan was unified under powerful shoguns during the Tokugawa era, who required the allegiance and attendance of their feudal lords, seems to suggest centralization. Not only did the principal lords have to reside in the capital in alternate years, but also the 'sixty-eight provinces were divided among 250 feudal lords, or *daimyo*, all to some extent autonomous but all having sworn. . . . undying loyalty to the Tokugawa Shogun.'<sup>151</sup>

On the other hand, the alternative tendency, that is towards the destruction of all local autonomy, was absent. As one writer puts it, perhaps thinking of France or Germany, 'By comparison with European societies under similar circumstances, one is struck by the lack of effort on the part of central authority, the bakufu, to increase its powers after the mid-seventeenth century.' Thus there were many checks on absolute power during this period. 'We think immediately

<sup>149</sup> 4:97, quoted by Osamu.

<sup>150</sup> 4:8-9, Hall.

<sup>151</sup> 4:425, Tatsuya.

of the balance of power within the political structure—the remarkable network of checks and balances at almost every level.<sup>152</sup>

What is clear is that the 'central fact of Tokugawa history was the bakufu's inability to improve the imperfect political controls with which it began the period throughout the two and one-half centuries of its rule.' Consequently it was forced to accept 'its role as the greatest of the feudal lords', thus closing itself 'off from the possibility of devising a more rational centralized structure'.<sup>153</sup> What is more difficult to understand is why this balance was maintained.

One hint as to why the *daimyo* were, in practice, 'left with considerable freedom in the administration of their domains' is suggested. 'The *bakufu* found itself caught between the desire to reduce daimyo military capacity so as to lessen the likelihood of rebellion, and the necessity, for purposes of defence and the maintenance of domestic peace, to keep a certain level of military force in readiness.'<sup>154</sup> The fact that the threat of external invasion was minimized by a sea barrier around each of these islands is clearly of great significance here in altering the balance between the centre and the periphery. For instance, it meant that in neither case was it necessary to maintain a standing army. Such armies often lead directly to the imposition of heavy taxation and absolutist government.

This dynamic tension between centre and locality provides a particularly propitious setting for economic growth. There are two overwhelming threats to a growing economy. One is too little order; the other is too much. Too little order, in other words a world of disintegrated anarchy, absence of predictability and enforceable contracts, of marauding bands and warfare, makes the development of economic enterprises of any scale impossible. A firm, unified, political and legal system is needed on which to build a modern economy.

It is clear that both England and Japan provided sufficient order. The very low interest rates on loans, among other things, bore witness to the security. With no successful foreign invasions for many hundreds of years, and a powerful centre, contracts would be honoured and plans could be made. In both England and Japan there was enough order over a period of more than five hundred years, something which was absent in the majority of civilizations. Yet too much order is as dangerous as too little.

<sup>152</sup> 4:30, 23, Hall.

<sup>153</sup> 5:72, Jansen.

<sup>154</sup> 4:159, Hall.

By 'too much' order, I mean the situation of centralized predation by an absolutist and powerful State, which we witness so often in the history of India, China, Russia, France or Spain, where the State or local lords become so powerful that they over-tax the merchants and the agriculturalists. Usually, when wealth accumulates, the State, Church or local lords seize it. The curious balance of power in these two islands, however, created a situation where this other extreme was also excluded.

This topic could also be pursued in relation to the legal system of Japan. Unfortunately, it is only for the medieval period that the *Cambridge History* considers the nature of law in any detail and so I will confine myself to that era. It would appear that as 'true feudalism' developed towards the end of the twelfth century, Japan's legal system became remarkably similar to that developing in England about a century earlier. In the first place, both the Japanese and the English rulers tried to make sure that legal process replaced war as the major mechanism for settling disputes. 'Indeed, it was Kamakura's objective to bottle up potentially explosive situations in litigation . . .'.<sup>155</sup>

As in England, this was achieved through a double process. On the one hand the ruler's council became the fount of justice: 'from its beginning the council became the arena for a rapidly modernizing system of justice'.<sup>156</sup> On the other, there was the delegation of jurisdiction to lower levels in the power structure. 'The right of jurisdiction in criminal matters, the third area of proprietor rule, combined police and judicial powers. This included the authority to take punitive action against *shoen* peasants who violated the law. In addition, it allowed the proprietor to enforce criminal sentences, including acquiring confiscated land and property for himself'.<sup>157</sup>

As in England, the system was not primarily based on a written code of laws derived from a foreign model. In England the Roman Law principles were largely rejected, in Japan likewise the earlier Chinese codes were replaced by a law based on local customs. 'Because Kamakura had no written laws at first or any philosophical traditions and because the country's estates were accustomed to having individualized precedents (*senrei*) made the basis of judgments, it was natural for the *bakufu* to stress procedure over prin-

<sup>155</sup> 3:78, Mass.

<sup>156</sup> 3:75, Mass.

<sup>157</sup> 3:320, Keiji.

ciple'. Thus 'confirming local precedents served as the foundation of Kamakura justice', and from this came 'basic attitudes toward impartiality, modes of proof, due process, and the right of appeal'. The general description of the ensuing law could be applied word for word to England at the same period: 'the system was thus closely calibrated to the needs of a society that was lawless yet litigious, restive yet still respectful of higher authority.'<sup>158</sup>

The results of this process of gradual, local, assemblage of law on the basis of custom were, not surprisingly, very similar in Japan and England. One effect was that both systems were flexible and worked on an *ad hoc* basis. In the Japanese case, for instance, 'Because the society of the vassal was itself ever-changing, it was readily anticipated that the code, like a constitution, would be supplemented by legislation'. The flexibility was needed to deal with the 'limitless variety of estate-based customs'.<sup>159</sup>

The major sanction in such a legal system was not the power of an absolutist state, but rather the attraction of a reasonable and fair system. In both England and Japan the appeal was to reason and self-interest, rather than to fear. In Japan, law 'represented not so much the creation of binding rules as the establishment of standards; its underlying principle, "*dori*", conveyed reasonableness, not literalness.'<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, justice was not primarily a matter of the exercise of State power to benefit the State, but rather a service which the rulers provided to improve the life of those who lived in the society. This is rather unusual. Thus a 'case in 1187 demonstrates the enormous potential of a system of justice whose principal objective was equity for the litigants rather than aggrandisement by their judges'. The system of law that was developing was thus not of the inquisitorial type, the State versus the citizen, a type which is characteristic of absolutist political systems. Rather it was of the adversarial or confrontational kind which is also the basis of the English system: there were suits before the judges, the 'system was accusatorial, with litigation initiated by the plaintiff.'<sup>161</sup>

Thus, by the middle of the sixteenth century, the legal systems of Japan and England looked as if they were heading in the same direction. Then, just as in the case of trade, social structure, and so many

<sup>158</sup> 3:75, Mass.

<sup>159</sup> 3:79, Mass.

<sup>160</sup> 3:78, Mass.

<sup>161</sup> 3:75, 76, Mass.

other features of Japan, the Tokugawa rulers blocked the further development of this effective adversarial system. For three centuries the legal systems of England and Japan diverged, to re-unite again in the second half of the twentieth century when Anglo-American law was introduced after the Second World War. Since the *Cambridge History* devotes no attention to law after the thirteenth century, this is not a story that can be told using these volumes.<sup>162</sup>

## Religion

Religion is another subject that is largely omitted after the medieval volume of the *Cambridge History*, so again the treatment here will have to be very preliminary. The first thing we notice is the similarity between the monastic organizations in Japan and England. Many have commented on the fact that the real location of early capitalism may have been in the western monastic tradition. It was here that wealth was built up, banks originated, new agricultural methods developed. Monastic institutions, we are told were 'one of the most important contexts for Japan's artistic, intellectual and even entrepreneurial freedom and originality.'<sup>163</sup> Indeed, as Collins elsewhere points out, 'Buddhist monasteries, like the Cistercians . . . acted as corporate entrepreneurs. They provided the leverage to escape from the familistic organization of the economy, and a methodical economic ethic that rationally calculated and plowed back profits into further investments.'<sup>164</sup>

Yet, like the guilds which they paralleled, even monasteries can become an impediment to economic development at a certain point. In both England and Japan at the end of the middle ages the monasteries were disbanded by the respective unifiers of these two island nations, by the Tudors and the Tokugawa, and their wealth and land absorbed more generally into the society. This is one way in which the religious traditions of the two areas may have been an essential background feature.

Equally interesting are the dominant principles of the religions in the two areas. In a very rough sense, both the form of Christianity that predominated in England before and after the Reformation as

<sup>162</sup> For a more detailed account, see Alan Macfarlane, 'Law and custom in Japan: some comparative reflections', *Continuity and Change*, 10(3), 1995.

<sup>163</sup> 3:507, Ruch.

<sup>164</sup> Randall Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 71.

well as the mixture of Buddhist, Shinto and neo-Confucian systems of Japan may be termed 'puritan'. That is to say, they tended to play down external ritual and gave unusually low emphasis to priests, stressed proselytizing, put an emphasis on asceticism, simplicity and self-discipline. All these characteristics, as Max Weber noted, are not unpropitious for the development of capitalism.

These features are well known for England, so let us look briefly at the Japanese case. The proselytizing aspect is evident throughout the period. For instance, '... all the schools of Kamakura Buddhism actively proselytised among lay people'. Secondly, the interior, individualized, nature of Japanese Buddhism, with its stress on private salvation of the individual, the importance of faith and belief, is also apparent. 'They drew their inspiration from their own personal realizations, and they sought a path of salvation that each and every individual could follow'.<sup>165</sup> Later this individual salvationist approach was widely adopted. 'According to Shosan, one's ideal as a human being should be to live in a spiritually free, autonomous fashion'.<sup>166</sup>

Thirdly, the asceticism and emphasis on the elimination of waste and the superfluous, represented famously in the simplicity and rejection of material objects in many schools of Buddhism, is evident. It affected the merchants as well as other parts of the population. 'The Japanese therefore made a virtue of necessity and created a material culture that focused on the simple ... The result was an almost total elimination of waste ...' As a result 'One can see that almost every element of the Japanese life-style resulted from an attempt to live well using the least amount of resources'.<sup>167</sup> As Weber pointed out, this attitude is especially important as a counter-balance towards the natural tendency towards conspicuous display and destruction as surpluses increase.

Another feature was the 'this-worldliness' of Japanese religion. We are told that 'In China there was widespread religious faith in Heaven as a transcendental entity that governed human destiny, and this faith had become an important element of Confucianism. The Japanese, by contrast, never developed a religious faith in the idea of Heaven'.<sup>168</sup> It would not be difficult to argue that English Protestant and even pre-Reformation thought was also largely 'this-worldly'.

<sup>165</sup> 3:578, 569, Kazuo.

<sup>166</sup> 4:414, Masahide.

<sup>167</sup> 4:693, 694, Hanley.

<sup>168</sup> 4:404, Masahide.

The striking similarities in religious orientation only leads us to wonder what it was that led to the similarities. The fact that a religion like Buddhism or an ethical form such as Confucianism takes such different forms in the neighbouring countries of China and Japan suggests the way in which beliefs react to a local political, economic, cultural and other ecology.

In Japan, it was once thought that Zen Buddhism determined many of the unusual cultural features, but it is now argued that Zen was itself largely a reflection of pre-existing Japanese traits. The same is true in England when we note the similarities between the Puritan sects of the seventeenth century and their predecessors such as the Lollards of the fourteenth. In the Japanese case we are told that 'the aesthetics of the age evolved directly from earlier times. The criteria of Zen in the arts—simplicity, suggestion, irregularity—coincided with feelings that were also indigenously Japanese and had always governed native tastes'.<sup>169</sup> The chronology suggests that it was Zen that was a re-enforcing reflection rather than a cause.

Another difficulty in measuring the influence of religion is that it is not sufficient to look at the internal structure of the religion, its dogma and practices. We also need to consider the relation between different religions and between religious and other institutions. In particular we need to investigate the relation between the polity, the economy and the religion before we can infer the role religion plays in economic development. In terms of the relation of politics and religion, two things stand out in both the English and Japanese cases.

The first lies in the way in which politics and religion were separated at the apex of power in both cases. In Japan, until the Meiji restoration, the ritual ruler, the Emperor, had little power. It was the Shogun who ruled. The same separation was achieved in Europe and in its extreme form in England. This was done partly by separating the King from the Papacy. When the two tended to merge in the concepts of Divine Kingship at the counter-Reformation, England, Holland and other areas had separated themselves. Though the Crown was now the head of the Church of England, the King or Queen was not a prelate and was under the Law, a ritual power balanced by Parliament. Never, in the five centuries leading up to the major economic transformation in both societies, did the ritual and the political coalesce in England or Japan. Indeed religion and

<sup>169</sup> 3:489, Varley.

politics often came into unresolvable conflict in England. The same was true in Japan, where, for instance, 'Nichiren's brand of Buddhism was itself unorthodoxly activist and came close to a Christian-like martyrdom cult.'<sup>170</sup>

This dynamic tension caused by a balance and separation of powers, which allows for freedom of thought, belief and action, was complemented by a second major similarity. This is the way in which religion itself was fragmented. Usually there tends to be a wide uniformity so that heterodox movements are crushed as heresy by the State. In England and Japan the 'heretics' turned into 'sectarians'. In England by the later sixteenth century, a major heresy, Protestantism, had put out many branches and this fragmentation grew through the seventeenth century. It was widely acknowledged that a central cause of the freedom of English thought lay in this tendency. It provided in the religious field, an equivalent to 'centralized feudalism' in the political field. There was a central power, Anglicanism, but it was one which could not destroy dissent. The same was the case in Japan, where three religio-ethical traditions, Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism were maintained.

Turning finally to the famous Weber thesis on the effects of religion, it is not difficult to show that neither English puritanism, nor Japanese religions actively proselytized on behalf of capitalism. Neither Calvin nor Nichiren and others went out to exhort their disciples to make profits. What was needed was much less than this positive exhortation, merely an absence of that powerful condemnation of economic activity which is the more normal message of world religions. We may briefly examine this.

There is obviously a contradiction in the attitude towards profit in both English and Japanese culture. On the one hand, as a means to an end, social, religious or otherwise, the honest and diligent pursuit of reasonable profit is ethically acceptable. This was formally discussed at some length in eighteenth-century Japan. Thus Banto argued that 'Merchants must see their work not merely as the extensions of their virtue but as fundamental to the well-being of the nation.' Joken argued that 'Commerce, for example, was vital to distributing agricultural and handicraft products through a system of exchange . . . commerce served the well-being of the entire country.'<sup>171</sup> Seiryō 'argued the justice and morality of calculation and profit'.<sup>172</sup> It would

<sup>170</sup> Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory*, p. 238.

<sup>171</sup> 4:655, 631, Najita.

<sup>172</sup> 5:86, Jansen.



not be difficult to find their counterparts in seventeenth-century England.

On the other hand, as in England, there was always an uneasy feeling that private profit, as an end in itself, was immoral. One should not seek profit as an end, but as a means. 'Profit should exist only on behalf of the people. "The usefulness of benevolence . . . reaches men in the form of profit . . . To abandon the self is to profit the people. The ideograph for profit is the name for unprincipled (action) when it is used privately. When one profits the people, its use is benevolent".<sup>173</sup> Until recently, and perhaps even today, 'the concept of the "invisible hand" was never widely accepted; profit beyond what was necessary for a decent livelihood required some other ethical basis, usually a claim of service to the state, a justification that was fully consistent with Confucian thought.'<sup>174</sup>

Alongside this, however, both in England and Japan, we can see a constant search for wealth. The world revealed in the literature of later seventeenth and early eighteenth-century England is very reminiscent of that to be found in the Japanese *Millionaire's Gospel* of the same period.<sup>175</sup>

Nor was this new in either case. Going back three centuries in each society, the world of merchant activities and commercial and entrepreneurial success revealed by Chaucer's pilgrims and the merchants of London in the fourteenth century appears to be very similar to the glimpses we have of medieval Japan. There, we are told, the '*nouveau riche* appear in many forms in medieval fiction, and in some instances the entrepreneur emerges as a cultural hero. Perhaps the most famous such manufacturer-merchant is Bunsho, the salt maker, from the story *Bunshososhi*'. Or again, stories, comic plays and popular songs of the later middle ages in Japan, 'reveal a people down to earth, unwilling to pine away in the face of hardship, entrepreneurial, imaginative, hardworking, combative, ambitious, self-reliant, persistent and even brazen.'<sup>176</sup> There could not be a better description of Chaucer's characters.

Adam Smith is reputed to have believed that 'little else is required to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence but peace, easy

<sup>173</sup> 5:251, Harootunian.

<sup>174</sup> 6:448, Crawcour.

<sup>175</sup> I. Saikaku, *The Japanese Family Storehouse, or the millionaire's gospel modernized* (Cambridge, 1969), trans. G. W. Sargent.

<sup>176</sup> 3:516, 515, Ruch.

taxes and a tolerable administration of justice'.<sup>177</sup> In fact, each of these *desiderata* requires very unusual preconditions. It seems to have been the case that Smith's conditions were fulfilled in these two countries because neither religion, politics, family organization nor a combination of these were so constituted that the usual negative feed-back mechanisms, that is war, predation, religious inquisition or kin pressures, were powerful enough to halt the growing economies in their tracks. The opulence developed and has now transformed the world.

### Science and technology

In the forgoing analysis, stress has been laid on the similarities of England and Japan. It is worth ending by looking at one of the areas where they differed. This difference was the one which is probably most critical in explaining why, without the western intervention, Japan would almost certainly have remained as a high-level commercial economy, but would not have become industrialized.

The contrast lies in the area of technology and science. What appears to be absent in Japan was the growth of an experimental science and a rapidly developing technology, without which the English industrial revolution would not have occurred. It is perhaps for this reason that these topics are largely missing from the *Cambridge History*. Apart from allusions to improvements in agricultural tools and in craft activities, very little attention is paid to important technological break-throughs in Japan. This omission may well reflect the reality, namely that there were few inventions and that in so far as there was very considerable innovation, it consisted in refining techniques which had come from China.

The situation in relation to 'scientific thought' is complex for there are traces in Japan of something similar to the background of what happened in England. There was a fundamental realization that society was an artificial creation, constantly changing, and something that should be studied in a dispassionate way. There was a critical, doubting, attitude, which questioned received truths. The aim of

<sup>177</sup> The remark was attributed by Dugald Stewart and is quoted in John Hall, *Powers and Liberties* (Oxford, 1985), p. 141.

thinkers was to grasp the principles of things. There was a separation of thought from religion and politics so that speculation was possible. There was a belief in an objective, external, reality which could be studied. There was an interest in practical knowledge and experiment.<sup>178</sup> All these features were present by the middle of the eighteenth century. They help to explain the thirst for western knowledge and the explosion of technological advance from the later nineteenth century. Yet two forces were absent which probably meant that though the conditions were ripe there would not have been a scientific and technological revolution without the influence from the West.

In England there grew up from the twelfth century a well-endowed and separate set of institutions whose aim was to pursue knowledge as an end in itself. These were the Universities, later to be supplemented by other institutions such as the Royal Society. We may then ask where the equivalent institutional centres for promoting knowledge were in Japan.

The nearest to centres of learning were the monastic institutions of Japan, virtually destroyed in the later sixteenth century and never significant as centres of practical science. After their elimination, until the founding of the first universities after the Meiji restoration, there were no institutionalized 'scientific' centres. The organized pursuit of the deeper principles of knowledge as a full-time occupation, and the teaching of these methods to each generation, does not seem to have been considered a necessity in Japan. This absence may be one of the crucial reasons why the potentially open and speculative Japanese attitude never produced much 'science'.

The second absence can best be seen in the relations between these islands and their Continental partners. It is obvious that England on its own, without the developments all over the rest of Europe, would not have achieved much. The heritage of classical thought, brought back through the Arabs into southern Europe and spreading north, was essential. Japan did not have this tradition and Chinese science, as Needham has shown, reached a plateau early on and then stagnated. We only have to undertake the thought experiment of swapping the islands, putting Japan alongside Italy, France, Germany and Holland, and England alongside China, to realize how much the chance of the neighbouring Continent was responsible for what happened.

<sup>178</sup> 4:601-630, Najita.

### Conclusion

By the early eighteenth century in the English case and a century later in Japan, two rather unusual societies were emerging on the respective islands. The Japanese case has been rather less well known until recently. With the publication of the latter four volumes of the *Cambridge History* we can begin to see what happened. On an island that was at that time little known to the rest of the world an unusual economy, polity and social system had developed, very different from that of its gigantic Chinese neighbour.

Japan now had one of the most literate, commercially organized and urbanized populations in the world. All it needed was the added ingredient of western science and technology, an opening up of the social structure and encouragement by a new government. Japan would then grow rapidly into the most powerful country in East Asia and indeed one of the strongest in the world. The momentum, like that of England, had been built up gradually over many centuries.

None of this was inevitable in either case. In trying to provide a model of what happened we have to balance several different levels of causation. We could do this by linking the discussion to Braudel's famous three levels of time: geographical (long-term) time, social time (factors such as population patterns or kinship systems) and 'events', in other words rapid political and other happenings.<sup>179</sup> At the level of geography, there were features which provided advantages for these two islands and shaped their political and economic systems. At the level of institutions, not only the nature of their patterns, but also the timing of events, as we saw with the development of guilds or monasteries, seem to have been propitious. Yet because we read history backwards, it is always necessary to end by stressing the chance events. If the Armada off England or the fleets of the Mongols off Japan had not been destroyed by storms, if William had not conquered England or Perry arrived in Japan, their histories would have been very different. All we can do is show some of the inter-locked features which lay behind the emergence of the first industrial urban societies respectively in East and West.

<sup>179</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London, 1976), i, p. XXX.

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In order to reduce the bibliographic apparatus in this review article, only the volume, page number and author's name are given in the text. For instance, 3:489, Varley, would refer to volume three of the *Cambridge History of Japan*, page 489, in the chapter by Varley. If two or more quotations within one paragraph are taken from the same author, the page numbers, in order of quotation, are indicated after the last reference.

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