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De Tocqueville in Japan

A rapid sketch of the nature of modernity and its causes.

Now that we live in a post-modern, post-industrial, post-capitalist world, we are well placed to look back over the last three centuries, during which the 'modern', 'industrial' and 'capitalist' world was created. We may consider the central features of the 'Great Transformation' that changed our planet and how they are to be explained.¹

A new technology was born, which allowed man to supplement current energy from animals and plants with the vast stored resources in coal and oil, and a new form of labour organization was developed based on 'factories'. To this we give the name of 'Industrial Revolution'.² This revolution was in turn based on a new experimental scientific method which encouraged the systematic exploration of the natural world; this was the invention of the method of invention or 'Scientific Revolution'. These two revolutions allowed and indeed encouraged a massive increase in world population. This was a population which, at least in the West, had gone through a 'Demographic Revolution', at last escaping from the Malthusian checks of famine and disease and replacing perennial high and uncontrolled mortality and fertility with their opposite. This was accompanied by the massive growth of cities, the 'Urban Revolution'.

Accompanying these changes was a transformation in the relations of production. The normal division of agrarian societies into the four estates of warriors or rulers, clergy, merchants and artisans, and peasants, was replaced by the class structure of owners of capital and workers; the 'Capitalist Revolution'. At the political level there was the move from rule by the rich and well born, to rule by the people; the 'Democratic Revolution'. This new political system was based on a new premise, that all men are born equal, the movement from a hierarchical to an egalitarian world; the 'Egalitarian Revolution'. Linked to this again was a movement from a status-based world, where people only had meaning in relation to some larger group, what anthropologists call 'holism', to a world based on a belief that each man and woman was separate, free, independent, with innate rights and duties, a total world in themselves, a microcosm of society; the 'Individualistic Revolution'.

¹ I would particularly like to thank the following for their advice and kindness which has contributed greatly to my ability to discuss these complex matters: Sarah Harrison, Gerry and Hilda Martin, Kenichi and Toshiko Nakamura. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Renaissance Foundation in the writing of this paper and the British Council who made a visit to Japan possible.

² Wrigley (198XX).

Finally there was the growth of 'rationality', that is to say the final expulsion of magic and religion, the elimination of miracles, the ever-closer link between means and ends, the acceptance of universal truths and a rationality that was not context bound. Thought was freed from its entanglement with the social and the supernatural; the 'Rational Revolution'. All these different revolutions, when combined, created 'modernity'.

Looked at from the perspective of other world civilizations, India, China, South America, Ancien Regime Europe, all this appeared to be a new and amazing departure. A civilization had emerged in North West Europe and was soon transferred to America which consisted of a bundle of novel and interconnected features. If we put on one side the associated consequences, namely urbanism, the demographic revolution and the growth of democracy, the central five features were industrial technology, capitalist relations of production, an egalitarian premise, an individualistic model of man, and various forms of 'rationality'.

All these massive changes occurred together and it was therefore easy to believe that they were necessarily connected. The great theorists who lived through the experience and who are our intellectual ancestors, the French philosophers, the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, the German sociologists, all believed in these necessary linkages. Whether they adhered to a 'Great Divide' theory, or a stages one, they generally concurred in believing that 'modernity' consisted of a bundle of causally interconnected features.

If the central features were new and coincided in time, it was possible to relate one to another in the attempt to explain the dramatic emergence of something new in the world. One could proceed in a circle between the various revolutions, letting one's mind rest on one or another as the prime mover, but ultimately seeing them as mutually reactive. Thus for De Tocqueville it was the striving for equality that was central; for Durkheim it was the growth of individualism; for Marx, the dialectical struggle within the relations of production; for Weber, rationalization. Each strand had its champion, but what was not in doubt was the inter-connectedness of the features. Thus modern social science, including anthropology, largely consisted of an attempt to understand and document these linkages and to watch how they absorbed the whole world. It became tempting to split the world into two parts: the West and the Present were increasingly rational, egalitarian, industrialized, capitalist and individualist, the Rest and the Past were the opposite - pre-rational, unequal, pre-industrial, pre-capitalist and holistic.

All this seemed irrefutable and self-evident, a plausible story of both what has happened and why it happened. The theories began to emerge as a guiding charter or myth for 'modern' societies. I suspect that the above roughly represents a package of associations which most of us carry around in our minds, a largely unexamined paradigm. Although one might have qualified the picture a little in terms of dating, pushing back some of the features a hundred years before 1700, the general dimensions seemed right. 'Modernity' was born out of 'pre-modernity' through a set of interconnected 'Revolutions' which were centred on the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The set of features were not only linked but were causally connected. Only by combining the ingredients

listed above could one sustain a large urbanized population in the style to which it is accustomed, or would like to be accustomed.

A contemplation of the negative cases, where 'modernization' failed to occur, or only did so weakly, seemed to bear out the associations. Taking the two largest cases, India and China, the failure to 'modernize', to develop a successful technology and open society, could directly be related to the fact that their civilizations were on the wrong side of the fence on all of the great divides; holistic rather than individualistic (in one case with caste, in the other with kinship), ranked rather than egalitarian, dominated by magic and religion rather than able to pursue rational thought, the relations of production stuck in the 'Asiatic' mode. Weber was only one among many who explored the impossibility of the growth of science, technology and industrialization in such a setting. There was only one major civilization which for a while looked as if it might challenge the paradigm, the Soviet Union. Its collapse seemed to be the final proof that it was all or nothing, the whole package, or none of it. As Robert Lowie observed of Japanese hopes of becoming 'modern', while retaining features of their Asiatic heritage, this was a contradiction in terms; "The elements of culture are too closely interwoven to permit the selective borrowing which the Japanese statesmen desired." ³

Preliminary problems with the theory of capitalist origins.

My own problems with this apparently watertight paradigm began slowly and by accident. I had for long been interested in the central case of England, one hundred years ahead of anywhere else in Europe in its industrialism, democracy and urbanism, and notable for its early rejection of magical religion and its espousal of a sort of equality and individualism. What emerged from a deeper reading of the great legal historians, an examination of the original records of English communities over long periods, from diaries and letters and other primary sources, through considering the observations of foreigners and the English themselves, was that the story was much more complicated.

For example, if one looked at England in the thirteenth century and took the major features outlined above, the country had an unexpected mix. The urban, scientific, industrial and demographic revolutions were still some way off. The formal decline of religion and magic was still to come. Yet England had strong elements of individualism and egalitarianism in its law and philosophy and what looked like capitalistic relations of production. There was very high social and geographical mobility, widespread use of money, a dominance of the market and its mentality. Thus it was neither fully 'modern', nor could it be classified as 'pre-modern'. It was already 'early modern' some three centuries before that term is usually applied by historians. ⁴

The essence of this peculiar mix in England, an antiquated and backward-looking society on the surface, a 'modern' world already nestling within, was noted by De Tocqueville. "Shutting your

³ (Lowie, Social, 21).

⁴ (Macfarlane 1978, 1987).

eyes to the old names and forms, you will find from the seventeenth century the feudal system substantially abolished, classes which overlap, nobility of birth set on one side, aristocracy thrown open, wealth as the source of power, equality before the law, office open to all, liberty of the press, publicity of debate...Seventeenth century England was already a quite modern nation, which has merely preserved in its heart, and as it were embalmed, some relics of the Middle Ages." ⁵ The findings of much social history since the Second World War has suggested that this peculiar modernity goes back even earlier than De Tocqueville suggested. The social and economic structure of England, the family system, the high geographical mobility, the absence of a proper 'peasantry', did not fit with the simple ideas of the 'Great Transformation' thesis.

Thus the English case began to dislodge the interconnected model. I say 'began', because one was still left with parts intact. Individualism and egalitarianism of a sort were still possibly linked, but there was clearly a different causal relationship with industrialization and the growth of scientific knowledge. Put over-bluntly, individualism was not a consequence of the massive upheavals of industrialization, but was present from very early on, from at least the twelfth century and perhaps long before. One could no longer believe, for instance as Robert Lowie did, in "the growth of industrialism, and of individualism in its wake..." in the West. ⁶ Individualism might, therefore, be seen as an enabling factor, a necessary if not sufficient cause of what happened later. This realization, which also suggested that the supposed capitalist 'revolution' which had been posited as occurring between the later part of the fifteenth century and the end of the seventeenth century, was largely a myth, that England had never been a 'peasant society' in the usual meaning of those words, was a serious blow but not fatal to the interconnected model outlined above.

I personally believed that I had re-thought the whole subject and examined the foundations upon which my idea were based. Of the initial connections, I was only left with three possible links, between equality, individualism and a sort of early capitalism, with a weaker link to rationality. Yet I still believed that while the timing was altered, all these different features were linked, and that fully formed industrial capitalist civilization could only be achieved in a certain way. The sociology was roughly right, it was just that the history had been wrong.

The puzzle of Japan

It was with such still largely hidden assumptions in my mind that I went to Japan in 1990. At first there was no challenge to the paradigm. On the surface, the high technology and 'capitalistic' civilization that greets one in much of Japan seems very similar to that which one has left in Europe or America. Admittedly it was something of a mystery that it was there at all, for here was a conspicuously 'successful' country lying alongside those Asiatic civilizations which had 'failed', in our terms, to make the transition to industrial capitalism. The example is particularly interesting because it begins to emerge that while borrowing much industrial technology from the West, to a

⁵ (De Tocqueville , Ancien Regime , p.21)

⁶ (Lowie, Social Organization, 220.

large extent Japan was the one other case of the autonomous growth of a 'modern' industrial society, firstly and rapidly in the later nineteenth century, and then in re-building its economy and society after the Second World War. Apart from England, Japan is the only case where one can see a society 'pulling itself up by its own boot straps'. As E.L.Jones notes, "Japan was the only successful non-European industrialiser..." or as Robert Smith writes, it is "the only major industrial society yet to emerge from outside the Western tradition".⁷ So powerful has been its drive, that Ronald Dore is prepared to hazard the counter-factual guess that "I see no reason not to suppose....that...without the West's prior development of a deliberate and cumulative science applied to production - the Japanese, or rather, the inter-communicating societies of the Chinese cultural complex, would have done it themselves".⁸

Using the model of inter-connections based on the western experience, it was obvious that the outstandingly successful Japanese civilization, capitalist, urban, industrial with a controlled demography, must have been built on the association between those five key features - egalitarianism, individualism, rationality, industrial technology and the capitalist relations of production. The industrial technology is unquestionable, but let us briefly examine the other four major features.

⁷ Jones, *Miracle*, 45; Smith, *Japanese*, 5.

⁸ Dore in Hall (ed.), *Transition*, p.170; cf. Jacob, *Capitalism*, p.216, who also believed that capitalism arose 'spontaneously' and independently in Japan.

Is Japan egalitarian or hierarchical?

The essence of western egalitarianism is the premise that each person is, in theory, born equal and free, and that while there may be inequalities of an economic kind, these are superficial and not essential. There are indeed classes, but the ideal is equality. There is no permanent superiority-inferiority given by birth. This is in contrast to the majority of human societies where there is a premise of inequality: men and women, lords and serfs, masters and slaves, all are unequal by birth. Now if these are the two ends of a continuum, where is Japan? ⁹

On the one hand, we are told, equal relationships are impossible in Japan. Japan is and always has been a 'vertical' society, where every relationship is of an inferior to superior nature. This is built into the language, etiquette and all of life. Chie Nakane's work epitomizes this view. She writes that "The relationship between two individuals of upper and lower status is the basis of the structural principle of Japanese society". Or again, she argues that "The core of the Japanese family, ancient and modern, is the parent-child relationship, not that between husband and wife. So the family today also reflects the predominance of vertical relationships". Nakane, Japanese, pp.44, ,133.¹⁰ Summarizing her views, Rohlen states that "Nakane argued persuasively that the essentially building blocks of Japanese society are ...relationships based on a presumption of hierarchical difference.", concluding that "hierarchical personal relations are often central to work, religion, and other community affiliations, they tend to dominate the character of key Japanese social relationships." ¹¹

Other observers are in broad agreement. Bellah wrote that the "particular characteristic of the Japanese institutional system was its strong emphasis on the vertical axis and relatively small reliance on horizontal ties. That is, the institutional structure was held together largely through ties of loyalty between superior and inferior". ¹² As Ruth Benedict wrote, "Whatever one's age, one's position in the hierarchy depends on whether one is male or female. The Japanese woman walks behind her husband and has a lower status". ¹³ Japanese kinship is very hierarchical, even between brothers "The siblings are also hierarchically graded in a strikingly elaborate system based on seniority. One is a junior brother or a senior brother vis-a-vis every other brother, unless the two happen to have entered the group at the same time. The amount of inequality is numerically

⁹ As will be obvious to the reader, my knowledge of Japan is very preliminary. There are, however, certain advantages of a first, innocent, impression of a culture. The difficulty that occurs as one sinks deeper is delightfully described by Enright, and his remarks apply not only to the language: "The Japanese language is such that by the time you know it sufficiently well for your knowledge to make any vital difference, it is probable that you will be too enervated - if indeed you are nothing worse than enervated - to write about the Japanese people. You may not even notice them any more." (Enright, World, p. XXX). My lack of deep immersion in the culture makes me particularly dependent on the work of scholars, Japanese and non-Japanese, who have given their lives to the study of that country and accounts for my unusually lengthy quotations from their work.

¹⁰ Nakane, Japanese, pp.44, ,133.

¹¹ In Kodansha Dictionary, s.v. 'vertical society'.

¹² Tokugawa, 55

¹³ Benedict, Chrysanthemum, p.37

expressed by a combination of two unequal fractional numbers whose sum is one. Thus, two brothers are described as 4/10 to 6/10 etc...increasing in status distance in that order..."¹⁴

It is clear that the Japanese language itself makes an equal relationship impossible. As Bohannon noted, all Japanese verb endings must denote relative rank, and hence, for example as Miyoshi observed "In such interaction 'between young male equals, each speaks as though the listener were his inferior (that is, both use less polite speech); between female equals, each as though the listener were her superior (that is, both use more polite speech); between male and female equals, she speaks with (deference), he without it...'".¹⁵ It is difficult, in one sense, to conceive of a less egalitarian society.

Yet, the pervasive inequality is situational; a person is not unequal by virtue of birth (unless he or she happens to be a foreigner or **Burakamin**). Many see Japan as one of the few truly egalitarian societies, without ranks, orders, castes or classes, with very considerable opportunities for social mobility. This was noted long ago, for example, by Chamberlain. "Some have used the word 'caste' to denote these divisions; but the term is inappropriate, as there exists no impassable barrier between the different classes, nor yet any thing approaching to Indian caste prejudice. The feeling only resembles that to which we are accustomed in England, if indeed it is as strong". Chamberlain notes that "though poverty exists, pauperism does not. A genuine spirit of equality pervades society".¹⁶

The contradiction is well captured by Reischauer. "Status is vastly important. But a sense of class and actual class differences are both extremely weak. In most essential ways, Japan today has a very egalitarian society - more so in fact than those of the United States and many European countries". He believes that this is partly related to the strength of the small group. Echoing Chamberlain, Reischauer concludes that "Japanese society is rent by no sharp cleavages. There is virtually no great inherited wealth and very little degrading poverty".¹⁷ It is perhaps this which makes the Japanese themselves uncomfortable with the label of 'vertical society'. Matsumoto writes that "There is a popular, conventional theory that Japan is a vertical society. Nothing could be more mistaken. Japan is a circular society". When he visited the land of equal opportunity, "learned the hard way that it is the American society that is intrinsically vertical".¹⁸

Thus the society is based on the premise of 'situational inequality' between individuals, yet there is very little ranking of groups. It teaches us that there is a strong middle position between the two extremes represented in the usual sociological models. Such situational inequality seems perfectly compatible with advanced industrialism. Thus Japan is, depending on how one looks at it, the most egalitarian, or the least egalitarian of societies.

¹⁴Lebra, Japanese , p.179.

¹⁵(Bohannon, Anthropology, 43; quoted in Smith , Japanese , p.75

¹⁶Chamberlain, Things,95,449.

¹⁷Reischauer , Japanese ,pp.150, 174.

¹⁸Matsumoto, Haragei, pp. 121,126.

Is Japan individualistic or holistic?

We may next consider individualism. Radcliffe-Brown made the following useful distinction: "Every human being living in society is two things: he is an individual and he is also a person. As an individual he is a biological organism...The human being as a person is a complex of social relationships...As a person the human being is the object of study for social anthropologists." What we are concerned with here is the concept of the person in Radcliffe-Brown's distinction. As Mauss, who made a similar distinction, pointed out "...it is plain...that there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical." This is clearly the case in Japan as elsewhere.¹⁹

The distinction between individualism and its opposite and the assumption that 'individualism' is a peculiar and western phenomenon may be examined briefly. Let us start with De Tocqueville. "Our ancestors had not got the world 'individualism' - a word which we have coined for our own use, because in fact in their time there was no individual who did not belong to a group, no one who could look on himself as absolutely alone...". In 'modern societies', "Men being no longer attached to one another by any tie of caste, of class, of corporation, of family, are only too much inclined to be preoccupied only with their private interests....to retire into a narrow individualism".²⁰

Moving to legal historians, we find the same contrast. Henry Maine noted that "The unit of an ancient society was the Family, of a modern society it is the individual". Ancient law - "knows next to nothing of individuals, it is concerned not with individuals, but with families, not with single human beings, but with groups." "In the constitution of primitive societies the individual creates for himself few or no rights, and few or no duties".²¹ Taking up this theme, Vinogradoff suggested that "The most profound difference between modern and ancient organization consists in the fact that modern society starts from individuals and adjusts itself primarily to the claims of the individual, whereas ancient society starts from groups and subordinates individual interests to the claims of these groups."²² Marc Bloch gave this view historical confirmation: "early societies were made up of groups rather than individuals. A man on his own counted for very little."²³

Thus individualism came to be seen as the essential feature of modernity. Daniel Bell wrote that "the fundamental assumption of modernity...is that the social unit of society is not the group, the guild, the tribe or the city, but the person".²⁴ Such a belief was not only powerful, but peculiar. Dumont proclaimed that "among the great civilizations the world has known, the holistic type of society has been overwhelmingly predominant. Indeed it looks as if it had been the rule, the only

¹⁹ Carrithers, *Category*, pp. 125, 3; for Japan see Smith, *Japanese*, p.89.

²⁰ Tocqueville, *Ancien Regime*, pp.102-3,xv.

²¹ Maine, *Ancient Law*, pp.126,258,311.

²² Quoted in Krader, *Law*, p.57.

²³ Bloch, *French Society*, p.150.

²⁴ Bell, *Contradictions*, p.16.

exception being our modern civilization and its individualistic type of society..."²⁵ Steven Lukes writes "as both (Charles) Taylor and Hollis make clear, there is an individualistic mode of thought, distinctive of modern Western cultures, which, though we may criticise it in part or in whole, we cannot escape."²⁶ The heart of the matter is summarized by Gellner: "a society emerged in which single individuals could apparently carry the entire culture within themselves, unaided".²⁷

Another way of showing the difference is by noting the reaction of those who visited an individualistic culture from a less individualistic one. This happened in 1853 when the great Scottish geologist Hugh Miller published his **First Impressions of England and its People**. "The Englishman stands out more separate and apart as an individual; the Scotchman is more mixed up, through the force of his sympathies, with the community to which he belongs...the (English) population exists as separate parts, like loose grains of sand in a heap, - not in one solid mass, like agglutinated grains of the same sand consolidated into a piece of freestone."²⁸

To summarize this set of observations, we may say that the essence of western individualism is the very strong conception that we have of the 'I', the fact that 'I' am separate from others, that 'I' am a bounded unit which has all the constituents of a full human actor. One might call this the Robinson Crusoe tradition. A single western individual might be lonely on their desert island, but they would be complete, a microcosm of their society, a world on their own. Each man is an island. Put in another way, man is conceived of as a molecule, a number of which constitutes a society, as in the vision of Ockham, Hobbes and Locke. The peculiarity of this view is brought into relief when we consider the reverse, namely the 'holistic' view of man which has been so widely documented whether in agrarian or tribal societies. Here the 'individual' melts away, a person is part of a larger whole, like a leg or an arm, only having meaning in relation to the whole body or group. The group comes first, the person is submerged in the group. Taking the individualistic and the holistic conceptions as the extremes of the continuum, we may again wonder where the Japanese fit.

On the one hand the Japanese are patently not individuals in the sense given to the word by De Tocqueville or Maine. This is most graphically shown in their language. Charles Macfarlane noted in 1852 that "There is a very singular fact in relation to the pronouns, which we believe to be unknown to any other language: it is that the same word may be I, or thou, or he, according to circumstances: in fact, that the so-called personal pronoun is not personal at all, or that it belongs to any person."²⁹ More recently, the anthropologist Robert Smith agrees that there is an "absence in Japanese of anything remotely resembling the personal pronoun". This is concealed by the attempt to circumvent this gap. He quotes the linguist Miller who writes that "Japanese has historically used an enormous variety of words to refer to speaker, persons spoken to, and persons spoken of..."

²⁵Dumont, Mandeville, p.4.

²⁶In Carrithers (ed), Category, p.298).

²⁷Plough, 121.

²⁸Miller, p. 395.

²⁹Macfarlane, Japan, p.305.

Japanese has this enormous lexicon of 'personal pronouns' because it never really had any 'personal pronouns' at all". As Smith notes, the effect on children is curious: "The Japanese male child, for his part, by the age of six must master the use of at least six terms of self-reference; girls of that age will employ five....With overwhelming frequency they use no self-referent of any kind." The total absence in speech of the use of words for 'I' and 'You' must mean a good deal. As Smith puts it, in "English usage...the speaker stands at the centre of the set of referents he or she will employ", but this is in total contrast to Japanese, where one stands outside oneself and refers to oneself as if one were another person.³⁰

Another indication of the lack of fixity of the individual lies in the way personal names are used in Japan. As Dalby writes, "Americans are used to having one 'real' name....In Japan, by contrast, one may have several or even many different real names, depending on what capacity is being exercised under that name....People have names appropriate to their stages of life, and they even have Buddhist posthumous names that they bear in death."³¹ This is amply documented. Japanese address each other by statuses; "Sugawara observed that the Japanese do not address each other by their names, but by their position, such as sensei or "president" or "section chief".³² Thus when the status changes, so does the name. Names in Japan are contextual and floating "Even the reading (pronunciation) of the characters with which one's name is written may vary contextually, so that an individual is called by one reading of his name by one set of associates and by another among members of another group". Smith, Japanese,79.³³

If we move from language to a wider consideration, it is often noted that in Japan the 'meaning' of an individual is relational or structural, in the mathematical sense. An individual is, to use a favourite image, an empty mirror - only when in relation to another, does the mirror become filled. An individual is the sound of one hand clapping - no sound at all. For life to exist there must be two hands. The very word for human being in Japanese is composed of two Chinese characters, one meaning 'Human' (Nin), the other meaning 'Between' (Gen).³⁴ In other words, a human being is, by definition, a relationship, not an essence or atom. Thus the very concept of the separate and autonomous 'person' is foreign to Japan.

There is a vast array of material attesting to the non-individualistic, relational, concept of the person in Japan. Let us first note some Japanese impressions of the situation. The Catholic novelist Endo tries to explain, through the words of Father Valente, a Jesuit missionary, why an individualistic religion like Christianity cannot succeed in Japan. "The Japanese never live their lives as individuals. We European missionaries were not aware of that fact. Suppose we have a single Japanese here. We try to convert him. But there was never a single individual we could call 'him' in Japan. He has a village behind him. A family. And more. There are also his dead parents

³⁰Smith, Japanese, 74, 77, 79, 81.

³¹Dalby, Geisha, pp.35-6.

³²Riesman, Japan, p.224.

³³Smith, Japanese,79.

³⁴I owe this information to Professor Kenichi Nakamura.

and ancestors. That village, that family, those parents and ancestors are bound to him tightly, as though they were living beings. That is why he is not an isolated human being. He is an aggregate who must shoulder the burden of village, family, parents, ancestors." ³⁵

Or if we turn to the psychiatrist Doi we come across observations such as the following: "In Japan, little value is attributed to the individual's private realm as distinct from the group". He notes that "... the Western-style idea of freedom also serves as a basis for asserting the precedence of the individual over the group, in which respect again it affords a marked contrast with the Japanese idea of 'jiju'", and asks "Why should this be? Why should individual freedom be such an essential and indestructible part of the Westerner's fibre?" ³⁶

A very graphic metaphor for the interdependence of Japanese society is developed by Matsumoto. "Japan is a 'natto' society. 'Natto', my pet analogy to explain the sticky nature of Japanese society, is fermented soybeans, which many Westerners find smelly, sticky, gooey, and peculiar tasting. 'Natto' though consisting of individual soy beans is only called 'natto' in its collective form". He then explains that "What moves the 'natto' as a whole are not the individual soy beans but the strings. This can easily be observed if the 'natto' is stirred with chopsticks. The quickest way to move the 'natto' corporate family is to direct the chopsticks at middle management". ³⁷

Or we may find the same account in the work of Japanese anthropologists. Lebra tells us that "Not only in economic enterprises, but in politics and even personal matters like marriage, the group tends to claim priority over the individual." The same author writes that the individual is incomplete in Japan, a part of a whole. "The concept of bun has three implications, which all derive from the image of society as an organic whole, individuals being parts of that organism." ³⁸

If we turn to outside observers, they are agreed on the same general picture. One could find many statements of the kind made by Chamberlain. "The Japanese of former days, even when political combination for any purpose was penal, always moved in families, in clans, in wards of townsmen, in posses of peasants, in any corporate way rather than as individuals", "...for in Japan the family is the social unit, not, as with us, the individual". ³⁹

Moving on to the middle of the twentieth century, David Riesman recorded his puzzlement at the absence of the concept of the individual self in Japan. He talked to Mr. Itabashi, a director of Sony, who "explained...the Japanese lack of individual selfhood in the Western sense, so that Japanese were permeable to the value systems around them..." Riesman asked about privacy. "The Japanese have no sense of privacy, Dr. Toyoda said. Each person feels his life is an open book...and perhaps for this reason also, the Japanese lack a feeling of inner life and of individuality." Riesman talked

³⁵Endo, Samurai,p.164.

³⁶Dependence, 42, 85, 90.

³⁷Haragei,pp.124. 127; see also p.128.

³⁸Lebra, Japanese, 35, 67.

³⁹Chamberlain, pp. 8,279

to a group consisting of three career women, a writer, an anthropologist and a journalist. "Life in Japan, they said, is still familistic and paternalistic. This is true not only of family life itself, where the individual is completely suppressed, but on all levels. Japanese life is a society of groups: familial, social, political, scholastic, trade union, business. One has to belong to a group or one is out, one is nothing; and all groups, large or small, are paternalistic and 'feudal'". He talked to a group of young Japanese intellectuals. One of them, Yamazaki, "added that in America mirrors are part of our mixture of narcissism and individualism: one looks to see who he is; whereas in Japan society is the mirror of the individual, and he exists only in the reflection of his actions on others."⁴⁰

More recently, Dore has argued in the same way. He concludes that "About the (relatively) non-individualist nature of modern Japanese capitalism, I take it that there is no dispute" and writes that Japan is "a nation which managed to found its industrial efficiency on being, in every one of the term's many senses, less individualistic than its competitors". He asks whether Japan is individualist and answers, "Compared with the Anglo-Saxon countries, compared even with Germany, (and one has to make some comparison, since individualist is a relative term), Japan was certainly not".⁴¹

Yet while Japan is not 'individualistic', if we approach this civilization from the Chinese or Indian traditions, the size of the unit which is needed to give meaning to a person and the degree of flexibility and impermanence, seems very different from what we find in the traditional 'holistic' societies. We are far from the caste, the extended family, the lineage, the village community. This is why Japan is sometimes characterized as a 'small group' society, and indeed the 'groups' can be very small indeed, ultimately the meeting of two persons. That most characteristic of Japanese institutions, the tea ceremony, is a complete 'community', based on two persons. Yet a tea ceremony with only one participant is unthinkable. Thus, in a curious way, Japan cannot be classified as either individualistic or holistic in the conventional senses of those words.

⁴⁰Japan, pp. 347, 218, 250, 273.

⁴¹Dore in Hall (ed.) pp.172, 184, 171.

Are the Japanese 'rational' or 'irrational'?

So what then of 'rationality'? The essence of the 'rationality' of the West can be said to be the separation out of spheres, and in particular the ability to apply the mind to problems without thought being constrained by 'irrelevant' consideration. Here I am talking of Weber's 'formal' rationality, the relating of means to ends. If one is pursuing economic goals, then the best means to achieve them are devised and one's ideas are not constrained by political, religious or social pressures. If pursuing social goals, then economic and political considerations can be put on one side. In other words, there is a mental division of labour such that means and ends are brought into ever closer association. As Gellner puts it, the West's peculiar rationality consists of its "single-strandedness, the neat and logical division of labour, the separation of functions..."⁴²

This is all part of that famous elimination of 'magic' and miracles, and the achievement of 'objective' thought. This is believed to have been one of the great achievements of the West, permitting the development of the 'scientific method'. It is part of that great 'Disenchantment of the World' of which Weber has written. As Landes, for instance, puts it, "Rationality may be defined as the adaptation of means to ends. It is the antithesis of superstition and magic..."⁴³ Its central features again come out best in contrast to the world of 'traditional' thought, as, for example, nicely summarized by Horton.⁴⁴ In that other world, thought is embedded, just as the economy is embedded. Thought is at the service of many masters, political, social and religious, as well as economic. Thus it is constantly deflected and reflected and cannot 'know' the world directly.

From one point of view this description of 'traditional' thought seems to fit the Japanese case well. Japanese thought is swayed by emotion, situational, unfixed, bending, highly context-dependent. There are no fixed points, no absolute distinctions between 'Truth' and 'Falsehood', no firm 'Laws'. Reality all depends on the social and power context. Again, this flexibility can be seen in the language, which is highly unstable, all being a matter of interpretation and context. Riesman noted that "The idea of something slightly less than, or more than, cannot be literally translated...shadings or horizontal comparisons cannot be made".⁴⁵ Roland Barthes asked "how can we imagine a verb which is simultaneously without subject, without attribute, and yet transitive, such as for instance an act of knowledge without knowing subject and without known object?"⁴⁶ Koestler describes it as "a language which shuns relative pronouns and connectives designed to give a sentence coherence; it describes events that somehow float through the air without naming the subject, gender, person and number to whom they happen."⁴⁷

⁴²Plough, 45.

⁴³Landes, Prometheus, 21.

⁴⁴Horton, Traditional Thought, **passim**.

⁴⁵Riesman, Japan, p.iii; the same point is made by Hearn, East, 83.

⁴⁶Barthes, Empire, p.7.

⁴⁷Lotus, 216.

The language is the despair of translators. Thus Ivan Morris writes in relation to the problems of understanding the language of the *Genji*, "Proper names are rigorously avoided. Direct speech is common, but the speaker hardly ever indicated. As often as not we have to guess at the subject of the sentence, and sometimes the subject will change half-way through without any warning. The mutually exclusive categories that we take for granted in European languages - past and present tense, affirmation and question, singular and plural, male and female (as identified by personal names and pronouns), doubt and certainty - have little relevance in Heian Japanese; sometimes it is not even clear whether the sentence is positive or negative".⁴⁸

Morris wrote that "You sometimes feel that you can insert a 'not' into most Japanese sentences and they will still mean much the same."⁴⁹ This is linked to the fact that the same word is used to mean 'yes' and 'no' in Japanese. One word for 'yes' in Japan, 'hai' can be taken to mean yes, but can also mean anything from yes, through maybe, to no. Really it is reflecting the other's words and intentions and saying "you know" or "you decide". A person should not say no directly in Japan. Rather he must leave it to the other's discretion to pick up the negative signals that underlie a 'yes'. As Miyanaga puts it, "the Japanese rarely say 'no' verbally, but very often indicate 'no' in behavioural cues. When the verbal 'yes' and the nonverbal 'no' are given simultaneously, a good recipient will choose 'no' over 'yes'..."⁵⁰

Since to describe a civilization as having a different form of logic or rationality might be thought invidious, let us look at the views of some Japanese authors first. Nakamura writes of "the tendency toward an absence of theoretical or systematic thinking, along with an emphasis upon an aesthetic and intuitive and concrete, rather than a strictly logical orientation."⁵¹ In discussing Japanese body language or *haragei*, Matsumoto writes "Evidence shows that the Japanese do not seem to possess principles, if the word 'principle' is to be defined from the logic-oriented western perspective. Logic is considered to be 'cold' or 'unemotional' in Japan and certainly not identical to the truth". Or again he writes, "My observations tell me that in Japan, situation takes precedence over reason. What Japanese call 'reason beyond reason' (*rigai no ri*)..." He concludes that "Similarly no human laws, no elaborate clauses in human contracts, can cover the infinitely large variety of actual situations. For this reason all conceptual constructions such as theories, laws, etc. are destined to fail eventually in the face of reality. In this sense Japanese can be called 'realists' because they never fully trust 'logos', 'principles', or 'laws', either natural or human".⁵²

When David Riesman tried to penetrate into the mysteries of Japanese thought he received the same baffling accounts, whether he talked to natives or outsiders. "The Japanese, Mrs. Hayashiya

⁴⁸Morris, *Shining*, p.290.

⁴⁹Quoted in Koestler, p.219.

⁵⁰Miyanaga, *Creative*, pp.85-6; see also the interesting discussion in Matsumoto, *Haragei*, pp. 109, 65,112; for delightful examples of the ambiguity that ensues, see Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, p. 218 and Seidensticker, quoted in Koestler, *Lotus*, 218.

⁵¹Nakamura 1968: 141, cited in Smith, *Japanese*, 111.

⁵²Matsumoto, *Haragei*, pp.8, 43, 67.

said, are trained not to respond to reason but to emotion...The language, she said, is not logical, but is based entirely on feeling. 'In translating Western literature into Japanese, we have great difficulty. We can't say 'freedom of thought,' we can only say 'freedom of feeling.'" Professor Richard Storry told Riesman that "The Japanese mentality was far more alien than the Chinese, for the Chinese would think philosophically and logically and the Japanese would not - the Japanese mentality was unique...the more he studies it, the more he was baffled by it".⁵³ Koestler noted a "type of reasoning indifferent to the 'laws' of contradiction and excluded middle, to the distinction between subject and object, between the act of perception and the thing perceived..."⁵⁴

If Gellner is right that "logical and social coherence are inversely related", then the Japanese appear to have opted for social coherence.⁵⁵ As Robert Smith writes, the Japanese have chosen "to forego universalistic knowledge, skeptical observation, and individual reflection in order to sustain a close and coherent community inherited from the long past."⁵⁶ Or as Lebra, a Japanese author, puts it "At some point or other a compromise is reached, and a fully socialised adult Japanese seems receptive to such a compromise, acknowledging that the world does not run by reason (rikutsu) alone. This is facilitated by the cultural tolerance for logical contradiction and ambiguity."⁵⁷

Thus, many people would regard the Japanese as having as different a form of 'rationality' or 'logic' to that in the West as is possible. On the other hand, from another point of view Japan is highly 'rational' in the Weberian sense. That is to say, in terms of the expulsion of 'magic', of the 'disenchantment of the world', the Japanese have long ago made the break which has only recently occurred in the West. Most Japanese thought is of the here and now, limited to the world of material phenomena. Their thought may be embedded in social relations, but not in the supernatural. There is very little magic, very little ritual, very little interest in a supernatural dimension, in the after life, no real concept of the soul. It is for this reason that many contend that the Japanese have no religion at all.

A string of observers have attested to the peculiar lack of spirituality, or religion in the western sense, in Japan. In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu observed that the "reigning religion of Japan having few doctrines, and proposing neither future rewards nor punishments..."⁵⁸ In the nineteenth, Isabella Bird commented that "The Japanese are the most irreligious people that I have ever seen - their pilgrimages are picnics, and their religious festivals fairs." Even when one went to one of their so-called shrines, she wrote, "The impression produced by the whole resembles that made upon the minds of those who have made the deepest researches into Shinto - there is nothing, and all things, even the stately avenues of the Geku, lead to NOTHING."⁵⁹ As Ratzell put it, "The

⁵³ Riesman, Japan, pp.251, 10.

⁵⁴ Lotus, 227.

⁵⁵ Gellner, Plough, 60.

⁵⁶ Smith, Japanese, 113.

⁵⁷ Lebra, Japanese, 255.

⁵⁸ Montesquieu, Spirit,ii, p.35.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Yapp, Travellers, pp.605,614.

Japanese proverb: 'You can pray to a sardine's head if you like; it is all a matter of faith,' is...not the expression of the most heartfelt religion." This lack of seriousness, Ratzell felt, arose from the exhaustion of too many religions: "The Japanese, conceiving of shintoism only as ancestor-worship, and of Confucianism only as a system of philosophic ethics, can combine with both an almost convinced worship of Buddha....the influence of three equivalent religions has destroyed his religious seriousness." ⁶⁰

Charles Macfarlane also noted the paradox of flourishing sects and great tolerance. When Europeans arrived "There was no one established, dominant religion in the country; the most ancient faith was split into sects; and there were at least three other religions imported from foreign countries, and tolerated in the most perfect manner." ⁶¹ As Chamberlain noted, "The average, even educated, European strikes the average educated Japanese as strangely superstitious, unaccountably pre-occupied with supra-mundane matters. The Japanese simply cannot be brought to comprehend how a 'mere parson' such as the Pope, or even the Archbishop of Canterbury, occupies the place he does in politics and society". ⁶²

That this is not merely a western view of the situation can easily be demonstrated. The novelist Endo puts the following words into the mouth of the Jesuit Father Valente. "The Japanese basically lack a sensitivity to anything that is absolute, to anything that transcends the human level, the existence of anything beyond the realm of Nature: what we would call the supernatural. I finally realized that after thirty years there as a missionary. It was a simple matter to teach them that this life is transitory. They have always been sensitive to that aspect of life. The frightening thing is that the Japanese also have a capacity to accept and even relish the evanescence of life. This capacity is so profound that they actually revel in that knowledge, and have written many verses inspired by that emotion. Yet the Japanese make no attempt to leap beyond that knowledge. They have no desire at all to progress beyond it. They abhor the idea of making clear distinctions between man and God. To them, even if there should be something grater than man, it is something which man himself can one day become. Their Buddha, for instance, is a being which man can become once he abandons his illusions. Even Nature, which for us is something totally detached from man, to them is an entity which envelops mankind. We... failed in our attempts to rectify these attitudes of theirs." ⁶³

The non-supernatural, this-worldly, basis of Japanese religion is echoed by many leading experts, Japanese and Western. Thus Robert Smith cites Nakamura who concludes "with the flat statement that the Japanese take the phenomenal world as absolute...it is a profoundly important characteristic of the contemporary Japanese world view. In the past, it proved to be powerful enough to effect the transformation of Buddhism itself into a religion almost wholly centred on this world." Smith

⁶⁰ Ratzell, History, ii, 513; iii, 531.

⁶¹ Macfarlane, Japan, p.12

⁶² Chamberlain, Things, p.531.

⁶³ Endo, Samurai, 163

comments on "the peculiar construction the Japanese have placed on Buddhism, that human beings have this world and this life and none other." ⁶⁴

Another way of putting this is cited by Matsumoto, who writes that "Critic Shichihei Yamamoto calls this unique religious phenomenon in Japan 'human religion', in contrast to the 'God religion' of the West". ⁶⁵. Without going into the details, the curious absence of a supernatural, other, mystical, world seems a very old feature of Japan. Koestler writes that "Religious feeling is dead in Japan, and has been dead for a longer time, than in any of the great existing civilizations." ⁶⁶ Reischauer notes that "...the trend toward secularism that has only recently become marked in the West dates back at least three centuries in Japan". ⁶⁷ Yet it is probably much older than that. As Sansom noted in relation to the first missionaries in sixteenth century Japan, "The translation of the word 'God' has caused great difficulties in Japan, where it has been most inadequately represented by the word **Kami**, which means little more than a superior being." ⁶⁸ Bellah goes back earlier, arguing that "...the 12th and 13th centuries marked a great turning point in Japanese Buddhism during which a strong trend to free the religion from magic took hold". ⁶⁹ Yet one could go back even earlier. The **Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon**, a Japanese classic written in the tenth century almost entirely lacks a sense of the supernatural and 'religion' in the western sense. Of course, the problem is largely determined by what we mean by 'religion'. As Chamberlain observed, "Because the Japanese seem irreligious, we would be no means be understood to accuse them of being specially immoral. Even the word 'irreligious' will be considered by some of those who know them best scarcely to suit the case. The family shrine in every household, the numerous temples, the multitudes who still make pilgrimages". ⁷⁰

It appears that Japan has for long been a very pragmatic, anti-mystical and purist society, which has overcome the opposition of natural and supernatural by bringing the supernatural world down into the material. Thus again one is left with a contradiction; Japan is and was the most, or the least rational of societies. In terms of thought being embedded in the social, it is the least rational of societies, in terms of thought being embedded in the mystical or supernatural, it is the most rational. However we resolve this question, Japan is certainly very different in its logical structure from much of the West.

⁶⁴ Smith, Japanese, pp.26, 123.

⁶⁵ Matsumoto, Haragei, 92.

⁶⁶ Lotus, 268.

⁶⁷ Japanese, 203

⁶⁸ Sansom, Western World, 126.

⁶⁹ Bellah, Tokugawa ,p.67.

⁷⁰ Chamberlain, Things, p.409

Summary; the difficulty of sustaining the paradigm.

Let us take stock and see where the argument has taken us. The conventional wisdom is that a special civilization arose for the first time in North Western Europe and America in roughly the eighteenth century, composed of five main ingredients: individualism, egalitarianism, rationality, industrialism and capitalism. These were necessarily and causally linked. It was impossible to separate them. They were a bundle which has now spread and conquered the world and the downfall of the one serious attempt to separate them, communism, shows that they must go together.

Yet a closer look at the two most famous examples of the emergence of industrial capitalism, Britain and Japan, suggests that the associations are more arbitrary than we thought. In the British case the individualism occurred very early, the capitalism long preceded industrialism, the rationality came in stages and the egalitarianism was muted and early. In Japan, the industrialism emerged alongside a form of 'vertical equality', 'relational individualism' and 'situational rationality' that does not conform to either the 'modern' or the 'traditional' models.

One consequence of these findings is that our attempts to explain 'modernity' must be modified. The discovery that many of its roots are very ancient, at least a thousand years or more in both Japan and England, makes us look again at the interconnections between the different revolutions outlined above. It also makes us change the causal arrows. It becomes obvious that the ideological and social roots of a peculiar form of individualism and equality in the West long preceded industrialism. It also seems that some peculiar features of a hitherto unknown type of small-group, vertical society preceded Japan's extraordinary development into the most successful economy the world has ever known.

The Japanese case suggests that the Western type of 'modernity' and 'capitalism' are not the only paths, and that indeed the associations are accidental and historical. As Abercrombie and his co-authors have argued, the Japanese example of capitalism helps to show that "Individualism and capitalism are contingently related...", and that "capitalism has developed with a variety of cultural systems..." This is a theme which they explore most interestingly, and which others have elaborated.⁷¹

The evidence suggests that there is a third major variant in the world, which may come to replace communism as the main alternative to western capitalism. The strange combination of features which gave us 'modernity' in the West is not the same as that which is now developing in what promises to be the richest and most powerful part of the world in the twenty-first century, namely South and South East Asia. In that area there is a form of civilization which is neither 'traditional' nor 'modern' in the usual senses, it has the externals of industrial capitalism and a selection of its

⁷¹ Abercrombie et al, p. 190; for further arguments along the same lines see Abercrombie, *Sovereign*, 3, 87, 111, 121, 167, 178 885, 190; this was a point made a long time ago also by Gerth and Mills, *Character*, 423 and by Riesman, *Japan*, 72, 120. The fact that modern capitalism in the West is anti-individualist has also been widely noted, for instance Davis, *Capitalism*, p.63; Dewey, *Individualism*, **passim**.

institutional forms, but is based on concepts of the individual, of reason and social relationships which retain their otherness.

Is Japan capitalist?

Indeed, one is led to some further re-thinking about the nature of capitalism itself. All through this account I have taken the idea of 'capitalism' itself to be non-controversial, and, like industrialism, have assumed that Japan must be based on some form of capitalism similar to the west. In fact, this needs questioning. Although a large subject which cannot be pursued in depth here, a few impressions may be noted.

Let us start with the quintessence of capitalism, the profit motive. The well-known dissections of this motive in the works of Adam Smith, Marx, Weber, Sombart, Simmel, Tawney and others do not need to be rehearsed here. Just one author may be cited. Davis in his book on capitalism, argues that the idea of the business civilization - "has as its core the idea of a money profit and of a mutual standard of values". The heart of capitalism is the profit motive, "a sixth norm of capitalism is self-interest or the profit motive..." which is "the most important of all norms of capitalism".⁷²

Yet, when we turn to Japan we are in for a surprise. Ruth Benedict tells us of the "great condemnation Japanese ethics pronounces on profit-making. Profit - when it is not a natural consequence of hierarchy - is judged to be the result of exploitation".⁷³ Thus, as Matsumoto puts it, while western "Logic tells us the money-losing programs must be scrapped, deadwood eliminated. 'Hara'-logic tells us cutting off unprofitable programs or employees only hurts and bleeds the company".⁷⁴

One particularly revealing hint of this curiously anti-profit making attitude is revealed in the treatment of the relation between shop-keeper and customer. Benedict notes that "The Japanese usually say that this 'difficult thing' is the great and rare benefit the customer is bestowing on the store in buying". She further writes that "The same attitude about indebtedness is expressed even more strongly from the Japanese standpoint by another word for thank-you 'katajikenai', which is written with the character 'insult', 'loss of face'. It means both 'I am insulted' and 'I am grateful'".⁷⁵ Related to this is the fact that Riesman was told that "We can't think in terms of the rights of individuals: in our language 'to earn money' is not expressed in terms of having a right to it, but in words that mean 'to grab it'".⁷⁶

Another hint is the difficulty which the Japanese had and still have with the concept of competition, of bargaining, which is central to the work of the 'market' in the western capitalist

⁷² Davis, Capitalism, pp.37, 258; cf. also pp.223,516.

⁷³ Benedict, Chrysanthemum, p.153.

⁷⁴ Matsumoto, Haragei, p.132.

⁷⁵ Benedict, Chrysanthemum, pp.73, 74.

⁷⁶ Riesman, Japan, 251.

world. Fukuzawa agreed to translate a work on economics by Robert and William Chambers but noted a major problem. "I began translating it ... when I came upon the word 'competition' for which there was no equivalent in Japanese, and I was obliged to use an invention of my own, 'kyoso', literally, 'race-fight'. When the official saw my translation, he appeared much impressed. Then he said suddenly, 'Here is the word 'fight'. What does it mean? It is such an unpeaceful word". "That is nothing new", I replied, "That is exactly what all Japanese merchants are doing. for instance, if one merchant begins to sell things cheap, his neighbour will try to sell them even cheaper. Or if one merchant improves his merchandise to attract more buyers, another will try to take the trade from him by offering goods of still better quality. Thus all merchants 'race and fight' and this is the way money values are fixed. This process is termed 'kyoso' in the science of economics". Fukuzawa then continued thoughtfully to himself, "I suppose he would rather have seen some such phrase as 'men being kind to each other' in a book on economics, or a man's loyalty to his lord, open generosity from a merchant in times of national stress, etc. But I said to him, 'if you do not agree to the word 'fight', I am afraid I shall have to erase it entirely. There is no other term that is faithful to the original".⁷⁷

The curious form of Japanese capitalism is analysed by Reischauer in various passages. "It might be called post-capitalist because of its leadership by salaried 'business bureaucrats' and its orientation to national service and growth rather than merely to personal salaries and immediate company profits". He sees Japan as an intersection of capitalism and socialism. "In a sense the Japanese economy is a blend of the best aspects of capitalism and socialism. It does not submit itself entirely to the unseen hand of the market, but accepts government guidance". It has provided a more ethical alternative to American capitalism. "Japan seems to have done very well with its lifetime employment system. Unemployment figures have for some time been only a small fraction of what they are in other industrialized countries and have not risen appreciably even at times of economic crisis as in the oil shocks of the 1970's".⁷⁸

Or again, Dore has drawn attention to the peculiarities. "The individualistic West ... made egoism the touchstone of its economic morality", whereas in Japan "The morality has got to come from the hearts, the wills and motives, of the individuals in it." Japanese success in its industrial growth, he argues, is due to non-market characteristics "Japan, by contrast, has grown to be the second biggest western economy precisely by incorporating these features which are deplored elsewhere, as integral functioning elements of its system of 'organised capitalism'." For instance, "Only a relatively small share of capital comes through an impersonal capital market on a purely contractual basis."⁷⁹

Finally, we may note the opinion of Morishima, that "a capitalist economy which was managed in an entirely different spirit from English capitalism - an economy combining Japanese soul and

⁷⁷ Fukuzawa, Autobiography, pp.190-1.

⁷⁸ Reischauer, Japanese, pp. 339, 325.

⁷⁹ Dore, Flexible, 1, 250, 68.

Western technology - was set up in Japan" . As Abercrombie and his co-authors conclude, "an examination of Japanese capitalism shows that rapid capitalist development is possible in a cultural context where individualism is little developed. Japanese Confucian values and capitalism have proved completely compatible." ⁸⁰ Or, as Koestler puts it, "the Japanese managed to create a competitive society sans competition, and they have stuck to this principle ever since." ⁸¹.

Is Japan based on 'Community' (Gemeinschaft) or Association (Gesellschaft)? Is it based on Status or Contract?

The degree to which Japan cuts across western categories and combines apparently contradictory strands may be examined in the context of the famous contrast between societies based on Status and Contract or **Gemeinschaft** (Community) and **Gesellschaft** (Association). These distinctions are inextricably linked to all those oppositions already discussed. The difference between equality and inequality is also one between societies based on status or ascription (birth) and those based on contract or achievement. The difference between individualism and holism is based on the same contrast; in one the individual is a freely contracting individual who associates with others, in the opposite situation, his or her status derives from birth within a larger unit (Community). The difference between modern rationality and other forms of logic is again linked to status and contract; in one case the individual is free to pursue goals on the basis of mind, will, individual inclination and hence can be 'freely' rational. In the other, thought is embedded in a wider community, dictated by relative status, whether familistic, political or religious. Finally, the difference between capitalist and non-capitalist societies, as Marx, Polanyi and others have observed, is that in capitalism worker and capitalist are 'free' to enter into contracts, whereas in most societies, the relationships are embedded in status ones which cannot be negotiated.

We may give these contrasts a little more precision by looking at the classic expositions by those who originally set out the distinctions. Tonnies' central theme is the difference between a whole which is more than the sum of the individual, a union, or Community (**Gemeinschaft**) on the one hand and an aggregate or Association (**Gesellschaft**) of distinct parts on the other. "Gemeinschaft should be understood as a living organism. Gesellschaft as a mechanical aggregate and artifact..." Individuals in the **Gemeinschaft** "remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in the **Gesellschaft** they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors". The **Gesellschaft** does not flow from the natural wills and feelings of the individuals; it is based on artificially created contracts entered into by wary individuals: "The theory of the **Gesellschaft** deals with the artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings". ⁸² In **Gesellschaft** each individual is bound to others by exchange, contracts, money. In **Gemeinschaft** people are dependent on a larger unit which is created by the three basic bonds of Blood, Place, Mind, or as we might term

⁸⁰ Abercrombie, 130, 167.

⁸¹ Lotus, 222.

⁸² Tonnies, Community, 39, 74.

them kinship, neighbourhood and friendship. 'Modern' societies in the West are characterized by **Gesellschaft**, civilizations like India or China are characterized by **Gemeinschaft**.

Tonnies acknowledged his ideas were very similar to those of Sir Henry Maine, and that in many ways **Gemeinschaft** was equivalent to what Maine meant by Status, and **Gesellschaft** was Maine's Contract.⁸³ So we may turn to Maine's famous formulation of his theory: "Starting, as from one terminus of history, from a condition of society in which all the relations of Persons are summed up in the relations of Family, we seem to have steadily moved towards a phase of social order in which all these relations arise from the free agreement of Individuals." Thus the relations of parent to child, master to slave, male to female, based on birth and ascribed status, melt away before the negotiated relations of 'free' individuals. It is in this sense that " we may say that the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement **from Status to Contract**. Thus "the society of our days is mainly distinguished from that of preceding generations by the largeness of the sphere which is occupied in it by Contract...old law fixed a man's social position irreversibly at his birth, modern law allows him to create it for himself by convention..."⁸⁴

Let us now examine where Japan lies. If, as appears from the preceding discussion, the other oppositions are combined in a peculiar way in Japan, we would expect there to be some language to discuss this intermediate category in the realm of personal relationships. This turns out to be the case. The central idea is contained in the word **giri**, a concept which is, it appears, unique to Japan: "giri she owes to no Chinese Confucianism and to no Oriental Buddhism. It is a Japanese category and it is not possible to understand their courses of action without taking it into account", Benedict wrote. Benedict, *Chrysanthemum* , p.94; cf. also p.103.⁸⁵ In the numerous discussions of this word by Japanese scholars there is considerable ambivalence as to whether **giri** can be classed as referring to **Gemeinschaft** relationships, based on status and natural affection, or **Gesellschaft** relations, based on contract

On the one hand, **giri** has the form of a status relationship. Thus Lebra agrees with Kawashima and summarizes their joint views thus: " **giri** is generated by and in turn maintains gemeinschaft relationships between particular individuals. The gemeinschaft relationship involving **giri** can be characterized by: (1) duration...(2) total involvement...(3) an imposition on the individual by virtue of his status...(4) a personal, particularistic relationship... (5) emotional ties... (6) a hierarchical relationship..."⁸⁶ Or, in the words of the anthropologist Befu, '**Giri** refers to the obligation to act according to the dictates of society in relation to other persons. It applies, however, only to particular persons with whom one has certain social relations and is therefore a particularistic rather than a universalistic norm..."⁸⁷ Thus **giri** has the moral force, emotional depth and durability which Tonnies and Maine conjured up in their **gemeinschaft** and 'Status' archetypes.

⁸³ Tonnies, *Community* , pp.211-2.

⁸⁴ Maine, *Ancient. Law*, pp. 169, 170, 304.

⁸⁵ Benedict, *Chrysanthemum* , p.94; cf. also p.103.

⁸⁶ Lebra, *Japanese*, p.93n.

⁸⁷ In *Kodansha Dictionary*, s.v. giri.

Yet there is equally strong evidence that the basis of **giri** is contractual, an act of will, a decision to enter and maintain such a relationship. As Benedict wrote: "Giri to the world can roughly be described as the fulfilment of contractual relations - as contrasted with gimu which is felt as the fulfilment of intimate obligations to which one is born". Or again, "Marriage in Japan is of course a contract between families and carrying out these contractual obligations throughout life to the opposite family is 'working for giri'". Likewise, "In China, many such relatives, and much more distant ones, would share pooled resources, but in Japan they are giri or 'contractual' relatives".⁸⁸ The idea of 'contractual relatives' is a curious one which we shall examine below.

The essence of **giri** is well caught by Nitobe. "I speak of 'gi-ri', literally the Right Reason, but which came in time to mean a vague sense of duty which public opinion expects an incumbent to fulfil. In its original and unalloyed sense, it meant duty, pure and simple - hence, we speak of the 'Giri' we owe, to parents, to superiors, to inferiors, to society at large, and so forth".⁸⁹ Thus it is the sort of duty which we tend to associate with contract.

Apparently at the opposite extreme to contract is **Ninjo**, which is pure **gemeinschaft**. Befu defines it thus: '**Ninjo** broadly refers to universal human feelings of love, affection, pity, sympathy, sorrow, and the like, which one "naturally" feels toward others, as in relations between parent and child or between lovers." in Kodansha, s.v. giri).⁹⁰ Yet we can see how **giri** falls exactly on the borderline, combining the constructed, artificial, contractual element in the way the relationship is entered, with the natural, status-like, emotional content and form in its operation by the way in which **ninjo** and **giri** overlap. This is well shown by Doi who writes that "...'ninjo' and 'giri' are not simply opposed but would seem to exist in a kind of organic relationship to each other". Or again, he explains that **giri** "seems to be definable as the feeling involved in the type of relationship that, unlike relationships such as those between parent and child or between siblings, in which 'ninjo' occurs spontaneously, have 'ninjo' brought into them, as it were, artificially". The result of this is "that 'giri' relationships, whether with relatives, between master and pupil, between friends, or even with neighbours, are all in areas where it is officially permitted to experience 'ninjo'. If this idea, which Sato Tadao has expressed in the phrase 'giri' continually aspires toward 'ninjo'....."⁹¹

We may briefly examine this intermediate category of **giri** in its two major traditional settings. Firstly, in the field of Japanese kinship, we find that we are dealing with a phenomenon that lies on the exact intersection of status and contract. This was observed by the Chinese anthropologist Hsu, who invented a new term to describe the peculiarity. "The fundamental principle governing iemoto is what he calls 'kin-tract', combining a kinship model with a contract model".⁹² Or again, William Goode noted the peculiarity. "The feudalization of Japanese family relations, in contrast to those of

⁸⁸ Benedict, *Chrysanthemum*, pp. 95-6.

⁸⁹ Nitobe, *Soul of Japan*, p.25.

⁹⁰ In *Kodansha Dictionary*, s.v. giri).

⁹¹ Doi, *Dependence*, pp.33-4.

⁹² Lebra, *Japanese*, p.88.

the Chinese, may be further seen in the 'oyabun-kobun' relationship...its essence is that of patron and protege or lord and vassal...Both kin and non kin might become proteges of a man, just as both kin and non kin made up the dozoku, the near equivalent of the Chinese clan..."⁹³

The relations within the family itself are usefully thought of as 'giri' since almost all of them are contractual or artificial. For instance, as Doi explains, "If one looks up 'tanin' in a Japanese dictionary, the first definition given is 'persons with no blood relationship to oneself', while the second is 'persons unconnected with oneself'. "Yet", he continues, "ties such as those of man and wife, or those acquired via the parental relationship, such as those of brothers and sisters, have a potential 'tanin' quality; it is said that 'husband and wife were once basically 'tanin' and that 'tanin' begin with one's brothers". Only the parent-child relationship is pure **gemeinschaft**, "other relationships become increasingly 'tanin' as they move farther away from this basic relationship..."⁹⁴

Hence the extraordinary power of adoption of non-kin, disinheritance of the heir, and other features which make Japanese kinship simultaneously powerful and flexible, a perfect combination of blood and contract. This has been noted by all the leading Japanese anthropologists. For instance, Lebra writes concerning the extended household or, "Because an ie is based on a cluster of kinship roles, real or fictive, its solidifying principle is farthest from that of a modern bureaucracy. However, the ie is foremost a corporation perpetuating itself as a unit independent of its constituent members and functioning to attain its goals. Biological kinship must be sacrificed, if necessary, in the interest of the corporation."⁹⁵ Or again, Smith notes that "...recruitment into the permanent positions in a household is with great frequency made on completely non-ascriptive grounds. Persons recruited into the position of successor-head and his wife always enter them as adults, and neither need have been born into the house in question." He helpfully continues that "The frequent adoption of successors shows clearly that the Japanese household is essentially an enterprise group, not a descent organization, and that passing over a son in favour of an adopted successor for the headship among merchants, craftsmen, and artists is a manifestation of a universalistic element in the definition of the role of the household head".⁹⁶

The other area where the ambiguous quality of the **giri** relationship is shown is in the relations of a feudal nature between lord and man. Benedict wrote that "The great traditional giri relationship which most Japanese think of even before the relation with in-laws, is that of a retainer to his liege lord and to his comrades at arms. It is the loyalty a man of honour owes to his superior and to his fellows of his own class". She continues that "Giri then was a loved face-to-face relation dressed in all the feudal trimmings. To 'know giri' meant to be loyal for life to a lord who cared for his retainers in return".⁹⁷

⁹³ Goode, World, p.324; see also p.357.

⁹⁴ Doi, Dependence, pp.36-7.

⁹⁵ Lebra, Japanese, 172.

⁹⁶ Smith, Japanese, pp.89-90.

⁹⁷ Benedict, Chrysanthemum, pp.97-8.

The presence of a relationship which combines the emotional commitment of status, with the flexibility of contract, whose only real equivalent in the West is marriage, has far-reaching effects on the whole of Japanese economy and society. For instance, in Japanese business, neither the pure contractual market principle works, nor the pure hierarchy of status. As Dore points out, this is not easy for economists and outside observers to comprehend. "What the literature does not fully take aboard is the possibility of an intermediate alternative - 'relational contracting' (Goldberg, 1981)..." He continues that "Such relationships ramify widely throughout the Japanese economy - relationships involving a degree of trust and moral obligation going well beyond the minimal requirements of honesty..."⁹⁸ Or again, Nakane notes the "difficulty of establishing contractual relations along western lines in a modern industrial enterprise in Japan", which gives rise to the famous life-employment system.⁹⁹

Japan seems to combine elements of the two extremes, hence its character can only be caught by using paradoxical and contradictory phrases such as 'flexible rigidities', 'artificial **gemeinschaft**', 'non-ascriptive Community', 'achieved status, 'kin-tract' or a whole host of other cross-cutting labels. Basically it could be suggested that it takes the shape or form of **Gemeinschaft** - in other words there are small and real 'Communities' formed, which have the feelings and sentiments and multi-strandedness of real Community. Yet, contrary to the model put forward by Tonnies, these 'Communities' are **artificially** created, flexible, open to recruitment and expulsion.

Now there is a certain element of this in the many 'corporations' of western society - guilds, fellowships, companies, clubs and so on. We might, for instance, note the importance of the corporate tradition in western political philosophy.¹⁰⁰ Yet these corporations are distinguished by always being of limited ends and purposes. They do not totally absorb the individual. The nearest equivalent in the West are monastic institutions and marriage. In Japan there is total commitment and involvement in small 'holistic' units of a face to face and multiplex kind, yet they are units which are not given automatically by blood or locality, but rather through recruitment to band of followers, the extended household or 'ie', the modern company. This complex intersection between two normally distinct and, many would have thought, incompatible bases for social interaction, is what makes Japan both puzzling and intriguing - and powerful.

How are we to understand Japan?

a. Convergence or separateness?

We may finally wonder whether this 'otherness' is decreasing under the pressure of 'Western' civilization. This is a large topic, but it is worth noting that two of the leading contemporary analysts of Japan have argued that there is little sign that this alternative civilization is converging with the

⁹⁸ Dore, Flexible, 77.

⁹⁹ Nakane, Japanese, 82.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, see Bell, Contradictions, p.258.

West. Dore asks whether Japan is becoming individualistic? "If that is indeed the underlying trend, then it is moving at a glacial pace...In many respects, on the contrary, the old 'groupish' characteristics have been reinforced by the vicissitudes of the last decade." ¹⁰¹ Robert Smith is even more categorical. He argues that Japan is "a complex industrial society that I believe to be based on premises fundamentally different from our own" thus showing, in his words, "that there are alternative ways in which a mass society can be constructed." Nor is it converging: "Now it would appear that the reverse has happened, for we have been considering what turn out to be relatively new styles of group commitment". ¹⁰²

b. Perplexity and contradiction.

The perplexity of the European observers, and the Japanese themselves, is well known. This is not just caused by the fact of the obvious reversal of all things normal to western thought in Japan, though that is perhaps symptomatic. Sir Rutherford Alcock noted that "Japan is essentially a country of paradoxes and anomalies, where all - even familiar things - put on new faces, and are curiously reversed. Except that they do not walk on their heads instead of their feet, there are few things in which they do not seem, by some occult law, to have been impelled in a perfectly opposite direction, and a reversed order. They write from top to bottom, from right to left, in perpendicular instead of horizontal lines; and their books begin where ours end, thus furnishing examples of the curious perfection this rule of contraries has attained. Their locks, though imitated from Europe, are all made to lock by turning the key from left to right... this principle of antagonism crops out in the most unexpected bizarre way in all their moral being, customs and habits. I leave to philosophers the explanation - I only speak to the facts. There old men fly kites while the children look on; the carpenter uses his plane by drawing it **to** him, and their tailors stitch **from** them; they mount their horses from the off-side - the horses stand in the stables with their heads where we place their tails, and the bells to their harness are always on the hind quarters instead of the front; ladies black their teeth instead of keeping them white, and their anti-crinoline tendencies are carried to the point of seriously interfering not only with grace of movement but with all locomotion, so tightly are the lower limbs, from the waist downwards, girt round with their garments; - and finally, the utter confusion of sexes in the public bath-houses, making that correct, which we in the West deem so shocking and improper, I leave as I find it - a problem to solve. "

The difficulty for many is that the lines of classification, the normal associations, seem different. In Japan we have an anomalous case, combining and cross-cutting in ways that seem arbitrary to us and destroy our cultural logic. Ruth Benedict noted some of this peculiarity: "During the past seventy-five years since Japan's closed doors were opened, the Japanese have been described in the most fantastic series of 'but also's' ever used for any nation of the world". She continues that the "Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and

¹⁰¹ Dore, Flexible, 249.

¹⁰² Smith, Japan, 6, 64, see also pp.138-9.

aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways".¹⁰³

To these we may add the contradictions we have noted above; the most and also the least 'rational' of societies, the most and the least egalitarian, freed from large caste and kinship groupings yet not based on the single individual, a curiously anti-profit maximizing form of capitalism. These contradictions have not lessened over the years. As Thomas Smith writes: "Other examples come to mind: the drive to rationalize operations in business firms organized on the family principle; indoctrination in the values of the hierarchical family in an egalitarian educational system; the emperor cult and class struggle in the labour movement".¹⁰⁴ As Chamberlain noted, so strong are the contradictions, that the Japanese "are inclined rather to view contradiction as of the very essence of the facts of life". It is only for us that it is all so surprising and unpredictable. "The contradiction is only occasional, it only manifests itself sporadically and along certain - or uncertain lines; it is more like a fold in a garment, a crease which you know not where to expect..."¹⁰⁵

The challenge to comprehension is considerable. Riesman asked Kato how Japan combines lack of individualism and successful industrialization, "We found no satisfactory answer to our questions - not that intellectuals or anyone else in any society really understands how it hangs together". Yet anthropology, as Riesman observed is likely to prove essential in untangling what is happening. "Michida continued that if the Japanese people have trouble understanding their own culture, they don't see how foreigners can understand it...Again I said that cultural anthropology would be of great profit to Japan since it would indicate that in principle no culture is incomprehensible to a person who wants to get through the blockages..." Riesman, *Japan*, pp. 72, 319.¹⁰⁶ Thus an anthropologist might start with the conviction of Levi-Strauss that the "ensemble of a people's customs has always its particular style; they form into systems. I am convinced that the number of these systems is not unlimited and that human societies...never create **absolutely**: all they can do is to choose certain combinations from a repertory of ideas which it should be possible to reconstitute."¹⁰⁷ An attempt to understand Japan would suggest that even if the kaleidoscope contains known pieces, it has been shaken in a way that is deeply baffling.

As Baechler has observed, "Despite lavish effort, the mystery of the origins of modernity remain almost intact..."¹⁰⁸ Gellner's suggestion that we should accept "the fortuitous, contingent opening of a normally shut gate...the accidentally open gate model (exemplified by Max Weber)", looks even more attractive in the light of the experience of Japan.¹⁰⁹ Yet, the fact that the gate has been pushed open in two different ways, at the two ends of the world, leads us to hope that we may be

¹⁰³ Benedict, *Chrysanthemum*, pp.1, 2; compare p. 204 for other contradictions.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Agrarian*, 208.

¹⁰⁵ Chamberlain, *Things*, p.303, 409.

¹⁰⁶ Riesman, *Japan*, pp. 72, 319.

¹⁰⁷ Levi-Strauss, *World on the Wane*, p.160.

¹⁰⁸ In ed. Baechler, *Europe*, p.39.

¹⁰⁹ Gellner in Baechler, 4.

able to see some structural principles behind both cases. As Norman Jacobs puts it "The historical-comparative method making use of Far Eastern materials, makes it possible to arrive at conclusions which are more generalized, universal and valid than those to be drawn by remaining bound to the experience of western Europe, or so-called primitive societies elsewhere..." Jacob, *Capitalism*.¹¹⁰

In all this talk of peculiarities, we should, of course, heed the warning of Kames that "People who live in a corner imagine that everything is peculiar to themselves", and therefore take particular notice of those outsiders who visit the corners.¹¹¹ When Montesquieu visited England in 1739 he wrote "I am here in a country which hardly resembles the rest of Europe".¹¹² Likewise Casanova wrote when he visited England in 1763, "Nothing in England is like the rest of Europe. Everything in Albion has a special character...their general style of life does not resemble in any particular that of other peoples: and above all their cooking".¹¹³

Yet Japan is even stranger than England and therein lies its intellectual attraction. Its extraordinary nature was noted by Isabella Bird in 1880: "Japan offers as much novelty perhaps as an excursion to another planet."¹¹⁴ Or as Griffis put it, "it acts like mental oxygen to look upon and breathe in a unique civilization like that of Japan. To feel that for ages millions of one's own race have lived and loved, enjoyed and suffered and died, living the fullness of life, yet without the religion, laws, customs, food, dress, and culture which seems to us to be the vitals of our social existence..."¹¹⁵ For the historian or social anthropologist, interested in diversity and the non-necessity of certain paths of development, the case of Japan is a delightful reminder of the complexity of the world and the fact that there are still surprising and different universes to be discovered. Indeed, in the rather ethnocentric words of Steffens, "Sometimes it looks as if Japan were created as a satire on and for Western civilization."¹¹⁶ I am sure that this unexpected quality is something that would have intrigued and excited A.R.Radcliffe Brown, who believed that "use of comparison is indispensable. The study of a single society may provide materials for comparative study, or it may afford occasion for hypotheses, which then need to be tested by reference to other societies; it cannot give demonstrated results."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Jacob, *Capitalism*, pp.1,219.

¹¹¹ Kames, *Sketches*, ii,85.

¹¹² Quoted by De Tocqueville, *Ancien Regime*, p.89.

¹¹³ Quoted in Wilson, *Strange Island*, p.iii; for further evidence see Macfarlane, *Individualism*, ch. 7.

¹¹⁴ Yapp, *Travellers*, p.601.

¹¹⁵ *Mikado's Empire*, quoted in Yapp, 601; see original.

¹¹⁶ Steffens, 1931 in Yapp, *Travellers*, 602.

¹¹⁷ Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure*, 194.

SHORT TITLES OF WORKS REFERRED TO

Abercrombie et al.,(ed.) Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism
Baechler (ed.), European Miracle
Barthes, Empire of Signs
Bell, Contradictions of Capitalism
Bellah, Tokugawa Religion
Benedict, Chrysanthemum and Sword
Bloch, French Society
Bohannon, Anthropology
Carrithers (ed), Individual
Chamberlain, Things in Japan
Dalby, Geisha
Davis, Capitalism
De Tocqueville, Ancien Regime
Doi, Dependence
Dore, Flexible Rigidities
Dore in Hall (ed.) Dumont, Mandeville to Marx
Endo, Samurai
Fukuzawa, Autobiography
Gellner, Plough, Sword and Book
Goode, World Revolution and Family Patterns
Griffis, Mikado's Empire
Horton, Traditional Thought
Jacob, Capitalism in East Asia
Jones, European Miracle
Kames, Sketches of the History of Mankind
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Koestler, Lotus and the Robot
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