

Preface to Japanese edition of *Marriage and Love in England* Tokyo, 1999.

Alan Macfarlane

England and Japan share many historical and structural features. Both are rocky islands off large and powerful continents. Both went through a long phase of feudal politics which managed to maintain a balance between the extremes of central absolutism and localized disintegration. Both early developed sophisticated economic systems based on a rapid development of textiles, banking and trade. Both are heirs to ascetic and individualistic forms of religion. Both shared a common population pattern, of constrained growth before industrialization and then a spurt in numbers during the industrial period. Both have a peculiar kinship system based on tracing parents through males and females equally. Their kinship terminologies have been identical for a thousand years and differ from those in other major civilizations. They have many shared aesthetic and intellectual preferences; a love of nature, a preference for the oblique and indirect and understated, a respect for custom and history and etiquette, an interest in the weather and diary-keeping.

With all these similarities, we might expect the pattern of marriage and love also to be similar. This book explores the English pattern of marriage and love over the last five hundred years. It is based on a wide variety of sources, including poetry, diaries and autobiographies, letters, legal cases, books of advice and local histories. It is a comparative study, setting the English case against the wide variety of systems known to anthropologists throughout the world.

What it shows is that England has had a much more individualistic system of marriage than Japan for many centuries. Most people choose their own husband or wife. They are not and were not selected for them by their relatives. Most marriages were based on the ideal of romantic love. Marriages were usually entered into as an equal partnership, with the major aim of companionship, rather than for the producing of children. Rules of courtship and marriage payments, the age at which marriage should occur, the type of person whom one should marry, were all consistent with this stress on individual choice. Although the Japanese and English share the unusual stress on monogamy (only one spouse at a time) and although there are elements of romantic love in the *Genji* and other Japanese literature, the Japanese system of marriage and love has long been very different.

Now, with the rapid development of consumerist capitalism and individualism, many in Japan are experiencing a new form of marital system. They may well find that the richly documented experience of England, which anticipates much of the present swing in Japan, provides a useful comparison with their own experience. They will be able to understand the set of features which go with individualistic capitalism in another civilization. This will allow the Japanese reader to reflect on how far his or her own rapidly changing situation is heading towards a model which many believe is conquering the whole world.

Alan Macfarlane