HEIRSHIP

In terms of the proximate ways in which the final Malthusian trap was avoided we appear to be moving towards a solution. In England, the age at marriage and proportion marrying 'were on a large enough scale in themselves to move population growth rates between the minimum and maximum to be found in pre-industrial societies.'[1] This preventive check seems to have been based on a sensitive relationship between production and reproduction. Thus Wrigley and Schofield argue that 'overall the evidence constitutes a strong case for supposing that the institution of marriage in early modern England functioned effectively in matching nuptiality, and so at one remove fertility, to secular changes in economic opportunity.'[2] In England, 'natural' fertility of 50 per thousand may have been lowered to 45 by biological factors (nutrition, disease, work), to 40 by lactation; the rest of the drop to between 30 and 35 was caused by the marriage pattern of late and selective marriage.

In the Japanese case, it would appear that a combination of middling marriage age, early termination of child-bearing, some non-marriage and pressures against re-marriage had a significant impact. Starting with a 'natural' crude birth rate of 50 per thousand, if biology lowered this to 40 and lactation to 35, the marital and sexual system may have lowered it to 30, and then abortion and infanticide by the remaining 5 or so points.

Yet, as soon as we solve the problem of **how** fertility was regulated, we are still faced with complex questions of **why** it was often held below the normal level. The control of fertility in agrarian societies which are growing in wealth is sufficiently unusual to make us wonder what conditions could have encouraged people to use marital and birth control techniques to supplement biology and control fertility. How was it that there could emerge in both countries what Wrigley calls a 'dilatory homeostasis', during which wealth could increase, but the expected Malthusian upsurge in fertility did not for a time occur? In order to approach this topic, we need to look at the intervening topic of motivation.

Desired family size in Japan.

Normally, pre-industrial populations aim at the maximum number of children, as many as God or the gods will give, offspring who are both useful economically, and desirable in many other ways. (give evidence XXX)

Even in the very restrained atmosphere of early modern England, where children were often considered a 'burden' and a cost, and where marriage had to be postponed until one could 'afford' it, once a person was married there seems to have been little, if any discussion, of what should be the

[1]Wrigley, Population History (xerox), 216.

[2]Wrigley, Population History, 435

maximum number of children one should aim at. There was, as far as I know, no widely accepted normal family size above which one should not go. (see Macfarlane XXX)

When we turn to Japan, we find a different situation. We have seen that the achieved family size in Japan in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was usually in the range of 3-6 children, often with a very low average of 3.5 children. Connected to this is the strong impression that the Japanese very consciously aimed at about this figure. Evidence of a widespread norm stipulating an upper number of children in Japan would go far towards suggesting an attempt to balance fertility and resources. A low upper ceiling is, of course, one of the major features of post-demographic transition populations which have very strong beliefs that two or three children are "enough".

In an early article on Japanese fertility, Dore reported 'A survey of a sample of nearly 500 farmers from four villages in different parts of Japan' which 'gave the average number of children considered desirable as 3.8.' There were considerable variations, between 3.2 and somewhat higher, but the figures were all low.[3] This idea in a survey undertaken in the 1950's (check XXX) might be thought to be recent and a sign of the demographic transition. Yet Dore cites an article of 1934 where in a northern village the writer was told 'In our family it is a tradition that we never rear more than five children in each generation.'[4] Taueber reports that 'In Kyushu...it was regarded as somehow disgraceful to have more than three children.'[5] The disgrace of having a large family was also related to the age at which children were born. As we saw in a previous chapter, it was traditionally considered indecent for women to go on having children into their forties, or when there was a daughter-in-law in the house. Statistically, they tended to stop in their mid-30's, probably having given birth to three or four children. A number of different pressures are summarized by Hanley. 'In some communities a family was mocked if it had more than three children, and it was considered inappropriate for a woman to bear and raise a child if she had been divorced, if she had a daughter or daughter-in-law living with her who was also bearing children, or if the family could not provide a suitable banquet to celebrate the birth of the child.'[6]

While there was an upper limit both in numbers and age, there was also a lower threshold. It was important for a marriage to be fertile. Whereas it was not permissible in England for a marriage to be terminated on account of barrenness, in Japan we are told '...one practice, especially prevalent in rural areas, was to delay registration of the marriage until the wife had a live birth. An old saying - still widely quoted - held that "the bride who bears no children leaves after three years".'[7] It is interesting that such a

[3]Dore, Fertility, 80

[4]Dore, Fertility, 81

[5]Taeuber, Population, 29

[6]Hanley and Wolf (eds), Family (xerox), 217

[7]Coleman, 175

long period was given; in many societies it would have been one or two years. The statistics bear out the saying. Thomas Smith reports that 'ten of thirteen divorces in the village ended childless marriages after an average of 3.0 years of conjugal living. In other words, childless marriages never became complete marriages.'[8]

This upper and lower limit suggests that parents were consciously planning their family size and composition, a fact also born out by Thomas Smith's work. It suggests, as Hanley notes, that 'Parents sought to rear a family of about three to four children.'[9]

Proximate reasons for the control of birth in Japan.

It would seem that the main reasons for conscious family limitation in Europe were mainly of two kinds. To avoid shame and punishment in having unwanted and often illegitimate children, or, occasionally, to prevent the over-burdening of a house with children. (cf Macfarlane XXX)

In the Japanese case a distinction needs to be made between two major types of cause. One explains why certain children were kept and others encouraged to die, the other explains why families set an upper threshold of live births. Amongst the former, Mrs Suzuki described conditions in the early twentieth century. 'It was thought bad luck to have twins, for example, so you got rid of one before the neighbours found out. Deformed babies were also bumped off.' She continues, 'In my case, I wasn't deformed, I was downright ugly. My parents and grandparents were very shocked apparently. 'We'll never be able to find her a husband - not with those looks', they said. My mother told me that when she first saw my face, she thought, 'What a waste of time, giving birth to a thing like that.' So attempts were made to stifle the infant.'[10]

The destruction of malformed babies who could not work or marry is attested to by several travellers. Morse noted the 'marked absence of deformations or malformations among the people' and elsewhere commented that 'the absence of deformed persons is also noticeable.'[11] He ascribed this 'first, to the personal attention given to children, and, secondly, to the almost universal one-storied house with

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[8]Smith, Native, 117

[9]Hanley, Economic, 227

[10]Silk, 203

[11]Morse, i, 116, 34

absence of flight of stairs down which children might fall.'[12] He does not seem to have made the connection suggested by Griffis. 'In their method of rearing infants, only the hardy ones can survive the exposure to which they are subject. Deformity is strikingly rare.' Griffis gives an account of how this was done. 'It is probable that the people do not always take extraordinary pains to rear deformed infants. Exposure or desertion of children is an almost unheard-of thing.' He also echoes Morse's interpretation. 'The maiming and breaking of limbs, caused by accidents - by falling, explosions, etc., - so frequent in countries where high buildings and machinery are in general use, are rare among the Japanese.'[13]

Another particular factor was astrological. We are told that 'parents were apt to decide against the continued existence of an infant born in years of unfavourable zodiacal and calendar combinations'[14] The power of this belief was shown, as noted earlier, in 1966 when the 'traditional belief that women born in the year of fire-and-horse have unhappy marriages' led to a 25% reduction in the Japanese birth rate in that year.[15]

Yet what we need to concentrate on are the systematic reasons for the very low and controlled fertility rate, the mix of all the different techniques we have discussed, which for a century and a half balanced the Japanese population so that it did not grow despite relatively low mortality rates.

In an influential article published in XXX, Kingsley Davis used the Japanese case to argue that the main pressure which keeps down fertility in most societies is not poverty but a desire to increase wealth. He concentrated his attention on the later nineteenth century onwards, for which there was evidence at the time and argued that 'Under a prolonged drop in mortality with industrialization, people in northwest Europe and Japan found that their accustomed demographic behaviour was handicapping them in their effort to take advantage of the opportunities being provided by the emerging economy.'[16] He argued that 'faced with a persistent high rate of natural increase resulting from past success in controlling mortality, families tended to use every demographic means possible to maximize their new opportunities and to avoid relative loss of status.'[17] The central thesis is that it was not absolute poverty but, as

[12]Morse, i, 116

[13]Griffis, Mikado, i, 570

[14]Taeuber, 30

[15]Kodansha, Population, 225

[16]Davis, Change, 30-1

[17]Davis, change, 30-1

Malthus had hoped, the desire for wealth, which drove west European and Japanese populations to break out of the vicious cycle. 'Fear of hunger as a principal motive may fit some groups in an extreme stage of social disorganisation...but it fits none with which I am familiar and certainly none of the advanced peoples of western Europe and Japan. The fear of invidious deprivation apparently has greater force...'[18] Thus it was not poverty which caused the demographic transition but, miraculously, wealth. 'It was in a sense the rising prosperity itself, viewed from the standpoint of the individual's desire to get ahead and appear respectable, that forced a modification of his reproductive behaviour.'[19] He was here echoing the views of others that 'human beings do not regulate their populations in relation to the food supply, but in relation to the prestige supply.'[20]

Now that the pattern of pre-industrial Japan and England is at last visible to us in detail we can test the thesis which Davis suggested. We know that mortality was partially brought under control several hundred years before either industrialized. We know that both countries were faced with the possibilities of rocketing population within a pre-industrial economy, and indeed that respectively in the sixteenth century in England and the seventeenth century in Japan, rapid growth did occur for a while. Rather than succumbing to the usual Malthusian 'positive' checks of war, famine and disease, the inhabitants of each took preventive action, though using different methods.

The evidence that it was the desire for wealth, as much as present poverty, which motivated people in Japan was early noticed by contemporaries. With reference to the small size of families, XXX started by arguing that 'All this is ascribable to their poverty. They prefer leading as best a life as they can without encumbrances to bringing up many children to hunger and penury, and restrict the number of their children to two or three.'[21] But he went on to admit that 'Even rich families are contaminated by this evil custom, and deliberately restrict the number of their children.'[22] A memorial of 1754 stated that while fifty years before, farmers had brought up 'five or six or even seven or eight children', 'in recent years it has become fashion among the farmers not to rear more than one or two children between a couple.' He was not absolutely certain 'whether this is due to the luxurious habits that prevail among

[18]Davis, change, 43

[19]Davis, Change, ???

[20]Allison, Population Control, 178; cf Douglas, Population Control, 272 (same point)

[21]Taeuber, Population, 30

[22]ibid

them or some other causes' but was sure that 'As soon as a baby is born, its parents put it to death.'[23]

The detailed evidence for the way in which infanticide was a form of contraception within respectable families, a way of adjusting reproduction and production, was provided by Thomas Smith. His detailed reconstruction of a particular village on the basis of excellent demographic records produced several unexpected findings. Firstly, it began to appear that infanticide was not mainly a response to poverty and was not just practiced by the poorest households. 'Infanticide seems to have been widely practiced there by the most respectable and stable part of the population.'[24] He found that 'What is surprising is that the practice does not appear to have been primarily a response to poverty: large landholders practiced it as well as small, and registered births were as numerous in bad as in good growing years.'[25] Or again, he wrote that 'Although large holders had somewhat larger families than small, this balancing tendency was present in both groups, so infanticide seemed not to be wholly a function of poverty.'[26]

A number of features had to be accounted for. For instance, 'We initially thought infanticide was practiced exclusively or mainly against females...We soon discovered that this was not the case.'[27] Boys as well as girls were killed. Or again, when a child of a certain sex died, rather than allowing it to be replaced by selecting for the same sex, the opposite occurred. 'To our astonishment, there was a significant tendency for the next child to be the opposite sex of the deceased...Hence, families losing a male and left with predominantly female children nonetheless tended to have a female next, and vice versa.'[28] Beyond some speculations about ideas of bad luck and so on Smith has no explanation for this strange pattern.

What does seem to be clear is that families were very consciously exercising planning; using selective infanticide to adjust family size and composition. 'Among the apparent objectives of infanticide in Nakahara were overall family limitation; an equilibrium of some sort between family size and farm size; an advantageous distribution of the sexes in children and possibly, also, the spacing of children in a

[23]in Taeuber, Population, 30

[24]Smith, Native, 131

[25]Nakahara, 147

[26]Smith, Native, 9

[27]Smith, Native, 111

[28]Smith, Native, 114

way convenient to the mother; and the avoidance of an unlucky sex in the next child.'[29] Thus infanticide was 'practiced less as part of a struggle for survival than as a way of planning the sex composition, sex sequence, spacing, and ultimate number of children.'[30] Smith's major suggestion as to the reason for this practice is that it 'may lie in the fiercely competitive nature of farming as reflected in the land registers, and in the relation of family size and composition to farm size and farming efficiency.'[31]

Smith develops this speculation. 'Our guess is that all families wanted at minimum one or two male children on account of their value as labour and as male and replacement heirs. Small families were predominantly male, therefore, because they accepted male children, tended to eliminate females, and stopped procreation early.' Yet having achieved a certain minimum number of males, families then did not want any more 'for fear of causing future competition for the family headship and creating problems about the division of property and the care of non inheriting sons.' Thus, after a couple of males, 'female children were as desirable as males or more so...they could inherit in the event of the failure of the male line or be used to recruit an adoptive heir by marriage. Consequently, the greater the number of children a family had, the higher the proportion of girls was.'[32]

The desire to increase economic efficiency to a maximum is commented on by Hanley. For instance, she writes that 'These consistently high proportions in the working ages, even in periods of economic prosperity, combined with efforts to decrease even further the number of dependents during the economic troughs...lead us to conclude that people actively sought to achieve an age composition favourable to economic production.'[33] For instance, 'In a period of an expanding economy, younger brothers who would normally leave home or remain unmarried were permitted to marry and remain in the village.'[34] As a region's economy developed, birth rates rose, and then declined as the growth levelled off.[35]

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[29]Smith, Native, 131

[30]4 th, Native, 110

[31]Nakahara, 14

[32]Smith, Native, 127

[33]Hanley, Economic, 262

[34]Hanley, Economic, 227

[35]Hanley, Economic, 212

Although Smith does not explicitly make the connection, we could take the word 'thinning' to its logical conclusion and suggest that births of children became part of the general strategy of farming; just as one had very carefully to manipulate rice seedlings, water, the occasional animal, likewise one had to balance very delicately the family labour force through the 'cultivation' of the right number of children. In an economy which, as we have seen, was almost totally dependent on human labour, too much labour was as bad as too little. Like water or night soil on the rice fields, just the right amount had to be applied. Miscalculation would mean disaster for the whole family enterprise. Too many children would imperil older siblings and other members of the family in that highly precarious and competitive world of Japanese agriculture which Thomas Smith has so excellently described.

The situation of Japanese parents was well stated in the early eighteenth century by the Japanese philosopher Honda. 'Whenever there has been a period of continued peace, husbands and wives are fearful lest it become increasingly difficult for them to earn a living. Aware that if they have many children they will not have any property to leave them, they confer and decide that rather than rear children who in later years will have great difficulty in making a decent living, it is better to take precautions before they are born and not add another mouth to feed.'[36] Two particular features made the parents particularly conscious of the dangers. The first was the exceedingly high population density in Japan. Because only a very small part of Japan could be cultivated, densities were far greater even than in China. As Nakamura summarized the difference, 'Japan at the end of the Tokugawa period had a population of about 35 million and a density of 100 persons per square kilometre. China at the end of the Ch'ing dynasty probably had a population of more than 400 million, more than 11 times greater than that of Japan - but with a density of only 40 per square kilometre.'[37] There was also no 'open frontier' for the Japanese, thus 'The possibility of leaving congested villages for sparsely settled regions or foreign countries probably made population control a less urgent matter for the Chinese than for the Japanese.'[38]

Secondly, the organizational units of Japan were small and strong, the famous 'small group' society had a deep influence. As Dr Namihira explained, 'All of Japan was divided into very small units of responsibility and mutual control; all were limited. The borders were very strong; for instance, the borders of the village were very strong. Every small child knew exactly where the invisible line was between his village and any other. Thus there was self-limitation both at the family and the village level.'[39]

[36]Keene, Discovery, 114

[37]Nakamura, Population (xerox), 235

[38]Nakamura, Population (xerox), 248

[39]Personal communication

These two factors came together to put an enormous pressure on individuals, especially when combined with the ecological constraints imposed by wet rice cultivation. Again Dr Namihira has explained the situation thus: 'Rice has both a symbolic meaning and an ecological constraint. Rice is grown in the dry season, hence there is always a shortage of water. One family is supposed to be able to be supported by one ha. of rice land. The number of families and the size of the families is restricted by the amount of water available. The size of the rice fields decides the family ranking in a community. Furthermore, each village had its own rank. This village ranking was decided in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries and changed little. The rank of the village decided how much water it would get.'[40] This fits with Daniel Scott Smith's argument that infanticide may often have been the result of village pressure, rather than individual family wishes. 'By limiting family size, villages avoided the potentially disrupting force of a large landless population, even though excess children would not reduce family assets.'[41] Furthermore 'Japanese like to keep a certain standard of life. Too many children means that the standard of living dropped. The ranking of the family within the village was crucial. The need to divide land among many children, for instance, would lower this.'[42] Or as Nakamura put it, 'In Japan, the tendency was for all families to have a small number of offspring so that each would be able to maintain its position in the village hierarchy.'[43]

It is very rare to obtain an account of how the pressures worked on an individual, but one account, in fictional form but ringing very true elsewhere in the novel, is revealing in that it shows how complex and delicate were the pressures. It also shows that fear of poverty is inseparable from desire for wealth. Oshina had her first child, a daughter, at nineteen. When she became pregnant again the next year, 'They were barely surviving as it was, so another child was out of the question.' Sop her mother performed an abortion on her. She did not have another child for thirteen years and they looked forward to the birth of a child, which turned out to be a boy.f She became pregnant again. They had planned to send the daughter off to service which would have earnt money. If they did so and the mother had two infants to look after, she 'would be unable to do as much work as before.' The loss of her income would be 'a major blow'. She discussed the problem with her husband. 'It's your belly,' he would say, 'so you just do what you want.' He was concerned but could not order her to do anything. She could not decide what to do, so time passed. Finally at four months, she performed a self-abortion - and died in terrible pain of the ensuing infection.[44]

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[40]Namihira, personal communication

[41]D. Scott Smith, Review of Nakahara, Jnr. Japanese Studies, p.194.

[42]Namihira, personal communication

[43]Nakanura, Population, 265

[44]Takashi, The Soil, p.28.

Expected high mortality rates and the necessity for family labour leads, in most societies, to the need for as many children as possible. In Japan the situation was already present where planned parenthood was necessary. Biological, marital and sexual patterns could be relied on to produce nearly the right number, but in the absence of any form of effective contraception the final adjustments had to be made by the most direct forms of birth control, namely abortion and infanticide. Of these, infanticide was in many ways preferable.

The reasons for this have been explained with reference to those other groups which have extensively used infanticide as a form of birth control over long periods, namely hunter-gatherers. 'The advantage of infanticide as a method of population control as opposed to methods that prevent pregnancy is that the infant can be examined before the decision is made, so that the sex and physical condition and appearance of the baby can enter into the decision.' Thus, as a form of **post-facto** contraception, it has some advantages over abortion. 'From this point of view, infanticide is rational and eugenic; the investment of parents and especially mothers in the infant is stopped just at the point when the most "expensive" portion of the investment, lactation, is about to start. The sunk cost of the pregnancy and the childbirth has been paid, and the mother has the advantage of being able to see and judge the viability of the infant before making a decision.'[45] As we have seen in the Japanese case, she can also use the Darwinian technique of a form of speeded-up natural selection, by making obstacles to survival. If the infant survives, he or she is likely to be strong enough to face the incredibly gruelling work load that most Japanese faced through the long centuries.

I will now consider some of the more general causes of a peculiarly calculative attitude towards fertility. In this analysis will be found those factors which, for the first time in history, created two large agrarian populations who withstood the natural tendency towards maximum reproduction steadfastly enough to break out of the Malthusian fertility trap. The achievement was surprising, and our modern world rests upon it. But it was at a considerable price. In essence, forces strong enough to stand up to the biological laws of disease and the urge to procreate had to be developed. A wedge had to be driven between the biological and the social. We now know that this happened and some reasons for its accidental occurrence in relation to mortality have been suggested. In relation to fertility we know the broad dimensions of the methods that were used. In England until the later nineteenth century, the check lay almost entirely in limiting the population 'at risk' by various marriage strategies. The solutions will thus lie in an analysis of the place of marriage in society. In Japan part of the force was biological. Another part was to do with marriage and particularly sexual relationships within marriage. Other parts lie in the practice of deliberate abortion and infanticide. We thus need now to turn briefly to the environment which produced such unusual fertility regimes, whose only long-term antecedents are to be found in some hunter-gatherer societies.

The break between production and reproduction.

[45]Howell, in ed. Coleman, Population, 182

One way of expressing what happened is as follows. A true market economy had developed in which children were weighed against other benefits, as they are today. In Japan, for example, 'As the economy grew, farming became increasingly commercially oriented, and the rural villages were gradually woven into a highly monetized and consumption-oriented society, people began to choose to "trade off" additional children for goods and services or the accumulation of wealth needed to improve or maintain their standard of living and their status within village society.'[46] The umbilical link between production and reproduction had been cut. This was the central peculiarity and the central similarity between Japan and England, which distinguished them, as far as we know, from all other large agrarian civilizations. The causes for this need further exploration, for they cannot be found purely within a demographic discussion.

In my work on English marriage and childbearing, I advanced the argument that the main reason for the control on childbearing in England was that the capitalist and money-conscious society had converted children into commodities; they were to be considered as 'goods' which one might 'afford' or not, as the case might be. They had 'costs' as well as 'benefits'.[47] If we look at the Japanese case, we are struck by an almost identical attitude. Thus one author writes that the 'measures taken to lower to the minimum the number of nonproductive members in the household lead us to conclude that Japanese were seeking to create a population favourable to economic production.'[48] Another tells us that '...the viewpoint appears to have prevailed that additional children represented a burden to be avoided if possible. Wealth must not be dispersed; status must be maintained.'[49] Children were compared with other goods. Thus people '...began to choose to "trade off" additional children for goods and services for the accumulation of wealth needed to improve or maintain their standard of living and their status within village society.'[50] The Japanese, like the English, were carefully calculating their labour force requirements in a very unusual manner. 'Analysis of household registration data, albeit for a small number of villages, strongly indicates that Japanese households deliberately limited the number of children they had and controlled the timing and sexual distribution of those that survived.'[51]

[46]Hanley, Economic, 36

[47]cf Marriage XXX

[48]4:700

[49]5:554

[50]5:555

[51]5:554

This is precisely the attitude which Malthus had advocated for Europe. It is the motivation which seems to lie at the heart of the rapid fertility decline we are now seeing in parts of south-East Asia and elsewhere. People sought to maintain a balance between resources and population, rather than an unquestioning drive to seek maximum fertility. Yet such an attitude is so unusual that we are still left puzzled as to what caused or allowed such a view. One way of starting to look for a solution to this is by looking at the danger of having too few heirs.

The solution to the problem of heirship

How could one be sure of an heir and a right mix of surviving children? This is the problem which, along with high mortality rates, leads people in many societies to have higher fertility than they may actually need or even desire. They aim the arrow above the target because the dangers inherent in its falling too low - a ghastly old age with no heirs to support one or attend to one's funeral pyre - are greater than possibly increased hardship if one has too many children. Faced with the choice of too few or too many, most people, bearing in mind their past experiences, opt for 'too many'. In fact, given the political, economic, and religious advantages of children, the very concept of 'too many' is not one that seems to apply. The more children the more wealth.[52]

How then was the problem of heirship solved in our two cases? In England the solution was the extreme one of not worrying too much. It is one of the central peculiarities of England that from very early on people do not seem to have been obsessed, at least below the level of the nobility, by the need for heirs. An advanced market economy, with the possibility of hiring in labour and protection against sickness and old age through non-familial mechanisms, meant that to have no children did not mean either spiritual or economic disaster. We see this in the fact that many people never married, that there was no evidence of sex-selective preference for male children, that there was no legal status of adoption in England before the twentieth century, that there was no 'ancestor cult'. (cf. evidence in Macfarlane, Marriage, XXX) As we shall see at the end of the chapter, heirship was relatively unimportant for most people in England.

One index of this lack of concern was the situation in relation to adoption. Anthropologists have drawn attention to the fact that in the vast majority of agrarian societies the pressure to maintain the family landholding and other assets in situations where demography may cheat one of an heir has led to a vast array of 'adoption' devices.[53] Jack Goody, in particular, has provided an excellent overview of the various 'strategies of heirship', of which adoption is a central technique in India, China, Rome and elsewhere.[54] Goody has noticed that adoption is important in all areas where there is a great desire to

[52]cf Mamdani, XXX

[53]see e.g. Maine, Early Law, 96ff; Lowrie, Adoption and Fostering (in Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences)

[54]see Goody, 'Adoption' passim; Production and

have children because the mode of production is based on family labour and on the transmission of landed property. He notes, however, that there is much less emphasis on adoption in early modern western Europe[55] and curiously that the extreme case is England.[56]

In English common law, as Goody notes[57], there is a total absence of adoption until the twentieth century. The point was made long ago by lawyers, for instance Sir Thomas Smyth in the sixteenth century who wrote 'Nor we have no manner to make laweful children but by marriage, and therefore we knowe not what is adoption.'[58] The legal position from the Anglo-Saxon period through to the nineteenth century was summarized by Maitland: 'we have no adoption in England.'[59] Of course one could make a person one's heir by various devises, for instance by will, but one could not adopt them. One could only informally 'adopt' them.[60] The legal devise of adoption, present in Roman law and very widespread in India, China etc. was absent. If we place India and England at the two extremes, then Japanese history presents a case which fits at neither end, but combines elements of both in a totally novel and unusual manner. In Japan, there was a developed money economy and a widespread use of non-familial labour in the form of servants. Yet the Japanese were more dependent on family labour than the English and we might expect the normal strong need to have plenty of children. The need for at least one child to support the parents in old age, and the strong stress on the continuity of the 'house' or 'ie', made it essential to have an heir. Japan would thus appear to have been in a position very different from England and much closer to that of India or China. Instead there was a device in Japan, special to that society, which had been elaborated over the centuries and which provided just the right mechanism for

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Reproduction, 49, 55, 66ff; Goody, Development of the Family, 72-3

[55]Goody, Production, 75

[56]Goody, Production, 75; Wheaten, Family, 616 (makes the same point)

[57]Goody, Family, 73

[58]Sir Thomas Smyth, De Republica, 106

[59]Maitland, History of English Law, 2, 399

[60]for instances of **de facto** adoption, see for example Lowe, Diary, 186; Stout, Diary, 178; Gough, Myddle, 161; Bracton, Laws, 186

obtaining both goals - a good family labour force, and one which was not determined by the accidental and uncontrollable forces of mortality and natural fertility. This was that most powerful form of **post-facto** birth control, Japanese adoption. This is the final and necessary part of the jigsaw in trying to understand the Japanese fertility pattern.

(APPENDIX. Japanese adoption. a-adopt)

Thus adoption overlapped with marriage strategies, giving families the flexibility to deal with problems of both absence of heirs and shortage of cash. The general feature was that apparent 'descent groups', the lineage or **ie**' was not based on birth (blood) but on choice (contract). As Smith puts it, 'The widespread practice of a bewildering variety of forms of adoption involves yet another principle. People do not generally unite to form groups, not even households, but are instead recruited into them.'[61] The major considerations, Smith writes, are 'the highly pragmatic ones of competence and availability.'[62]

This pragmatic drive towards flexibility and efficiency, keeping the emotional form and force of the family, combined with the choice and pragmatism of a meritocracy, is, of course one of the central reasons for the modern success of Japan, with its family-like firms, based on talent and not blood. W.J. Goode summarized the distinctive nature of this blending of two principles, again in contrast to China. 'Perhaps the single most striking contrast illustrating the difference between the family structures of China and Japan is that the Japanese father, at any class level, could supplant his heir by adopting a son of superior ability - thus further guaranteeing the success of his 'ie' (the house') and obtaining a protege who discarded his allegiance to his former family - whereas adoption in China was extremely difficult and rare, and viewed as impractical because the young man would always feel loyal towards the family from which he came.'[63]

The degree of effects of all of this will, of course, depend on how widespread and frequent adoptions actually were. Hanley has given one of the most detailed accounts of what happened. In the four villages she studied, 'persons of all ages were adopted, even some elderly women after the Tempo famine of the 1830s.' The statistics are impressive. 'Of 105 families for whom records exist for at least two or more generations, 56 families, or 53 percent, adopted sons or other relatives...'[64] Families even allowed their younger sons to leave home and be adopted elsewhere, and then when their older son died, rather than

[61]Smith, Japanese, 90

[62]Smith, Japanese, 98

[63]Goode, World, 325

[64]Hanley, Economic, 232

bringing back the younger, they adopted another person.[65] Indeed 'Adoptions were so widely practiced that in Numa in the period 1860-1871 there were more adoptions recorded than marriages.'[66]

As regards fertility rates the important thing is that this type of frequent and open adoption provided the solution to the problem of how to have very low fertility and yet ensure the continuity of the house. The way in which this worked and relieved the pressure to have large families is well described by Thomas Smith. The culture offers 'a happy evasion' from the problem of having no heirs. 'It has always been possible in Japan to adopt a male heir, even of adult age, as a husband for a daughter or outright, so long as there is property to inherit...Moreover, he is in every sense but sentimentally, and perhaps not always with that exception - legally, socially, religiously, even genealogically - the exact equal of a natural heir; and he has the bonus advantage that if he works out badly, he can be disinherited and replaced.'[67] Hanley makes the same point: 'The widespread custom of adoption can be considered one of the major reasons the pre-modern Japanese were able to limit family size in a society in which the continuation of the family line was of utmost importance both economically and socially.'[68] Adoption in and out, and the relative ease of getting rid of 'spares' through out-migration, were essential features of the Japanese pattern, just as the possibility of hiring in servants to replace children was an essential part of the English system. Both broke the nexus between production and reproduction, blood and labour, which is to be found in all other large agrarian civilizations.

Inheritance and old age.

The system of adoption and other mechanisms were intimately tied in with concepts of property and inheritance. The connection between inheritance systems and the growth of population has long been noted. For instance, Kingsley Davis suggested that a particular pattern can raise or lower the age at marriage.[69] Partible inheritance can lead to growth of population.[70] Habakkuk in a classic article[71]

[65]ibid

[66]Hanley, Economic, 230; cf also Hanley and Wolf (eds), Family (xerox), 220-1

[67]Smith, Native, 36

[68]Hanley, Economic, 232

[69]Kinsley Davis, Fertility, 217-8

[70]Kaplan (ed), 26

showed how single-heir inheritance tended to lead to less growth of population.

The point has been made specifically in relation to Japan. Jacobs[72] noted that the system of partible inheritance in China helped encourage fertility: 'Overpopulation is an old and familiar story in China...the rural areas are permanently condemned to overpopulation.' This is contrasted to the situation in Japan, with single-heir inheritance. At about the same time, Dore showed how inheritance systems influenced Japanese fertility, for example by affecting the age at marriage[73] Likewise, Thomas Smith, discussed the effects of inheritance customs in Japan on population growth.[74] Two anthropologists, Robert Smith and Chie Nakane had suggested some intrinsic link between 'one-son' succession[75] and industrialization, though they did not explicitly link this to fertility.[76]

The whole question of old age and support in sickness is also important. Usually these dire problems are solved by blood kin, who combine to help. Two alternative strategies devised to find non-blood support were developed in our two cases. In England, this was through the use of paid support, the beginnings of a welfare state (cf Richard Smith et al. XX) In Japan, it was through creating 'as if' blood kin as and when needed, as well as through the same mechanisms of money and service as in England.

This takes us out more generally into the relationship between kinship and economy, and particularly the central matter of the nature of property. Ultimately, what happened was that production become more important than reproduction - that the individual members of a family, real kin, were sacrificed for an ideal. As with so many things, the way this worked itself out in the two cases was different. In England, it took the form of the idolization of private, individual, property rights - to which everything else was sacrificed, including the link between parents and children. Property came before blood. In Japan, the ideal was the 'ie' or family - but ironically, it was not a blood family, but an artificially constructed continuity. If necessary, the actual children had to be sacrificed for the ideal. Thus, in different ways, a form of non-domestic mode of production grew up. The great split of which Weber

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[71]Habakkuk, Family Structure, 26

[72]Capitalism, 156

[73]Dore, Japanese Fertility, 66

[74]q.v. Past and Present, 60, 150

[75]in Laslett (ed), 441,517

[76]see "Mirrors", 'On Individualism'

wrote, between the social and the economic had occurred. (for elaboration, see 'Mirrors', 'On Individualism' XXX)

We see that England and Japan faced the same problem - what to do once the Malthusian positive checks had been partially removed. They did the same thing - limiting their fertility and increasing their comfort until a time when the economy began to grow so fast that they could 'afford' to relax. Indeed it became imperative that they relax otherwise the 'labour saving' devices of industrialization would run out of human labour. But once these devices had taken a hold and human labour was no longer the key, both countries went through a second demographic revolution, when both mortality and fertility went through their second fall, from the middling position in the twenties, to the low teens. In England this happened in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, about a century and a quarter into the industrial process, in Japan in the 1950's, about eighty years after rapid industrialization began.

Some pre-conditions for the fertility pattern.

In exploring further the explanations for the controlled fertility pattern which emerged very early in England and Japan, it is useful to look first at general background 'enabling' features, which they shared with some other countries. These did not, in themselves, inevitably lead to a particular fertility pattern. The history of these other countries which maintained high fertility, and indeed the history of England and Japan with bursts of high fertility shows this. Yet without such pre-conditions there would not have been the flexibility which allowed the unusual periods of lowered fertility. If we think in an architectural metaphor, these are the necessary 'foundations' which permitted something to be built, but they did not dictate the height of the building. If we proceed thus, we can consider correlations, but are not trapped into over-simple deterministic formulations of the nature: 'the nuclear family = low fertility' or 'Buddhism = low fertility' or 'islands = low fertility' or 'domestic mode of production = high fertility'.

The first important background feature lies in religion. There does seem to be some sort of relationship between the general form of religion, or ethical system, and fertility regimes. For instance, it would appear that in terms of religion, Christianity and Buddhism are the two religions above all which separate fertility from merit.[77] They are the two religions which place celibacy above marriage and which do not exhort their adherents to have children. In this they provide a different context to the other world religions and many tribal religions, which encourage high fertility, often in the form of stressing the necessity of heirs to pray for one's soul when dead. While this is a general foundational feature, a very brief acquaintance with the history of different Catholic and Buddhist societies shows that these religions often do, in fact, encourage or permit high fertility.

Secondly, the family system, based on bilateral descent and the isolation of the nuclear family in terms of descent and terminology, which as a feature of large agrarian civilizations is only to be found in western Europe and Japan, is both unusual and again permits a lowered fertility. In this respect, as

[77]cf Spooner (ed), Population and Anthropology, 280 on effects of Buddhism

Kingsley Davis and others long ago pointed out, it may be different from societies with extended, unilineal, systems, which provides a foundation which does not permit low fertility. In both this respect and in the family structure, we have foundations which allow both of the options of low or high fertility.[78] Again, however, as we can see from the history of Europe, and indeed of England in the sixteenth or nineteenth centuries, it does not necessitate such a control of fertility. It provides the foundations upon which high or low fertility can be built. This is unusual and applies to western Europe as a whole and Japan, but not to India and China. For example, in relation to the latter, Nakamura points out that unilineal descent formed discrete lineages. 'The greater the membership of a lineage, the more likely it was to achieve influence and power in a locality. Therefore the lineage, like the family, favoured an increase in the member of its members.'[79]

Thirdly, as we have seen, one might explore the economic argument - the development of a highly commercialized market economy in north-western Europe and Japan, as opposed to the pockets of trade within a vast sea of agrarian peasantry in much of India, China, Russia and parts of Europe. Without money, developed markets and large cities, the split between production and reproduction which we have been witnessing could not have occurred.[80]

All of these might be seen as necessary foundations, without which the edifice of controlled fertility could not have been built. Yet many different super-structures can be built on any particular foundation. We have seen that this is true in western Europe, and that even within the history of England and Japan, the fertility rate moved from very low to very high. Beyond the foundations, continuing with that metaphor, were there any particular cultural or other constraints which dictated or allowed the shape of the building in Japan and England?

In previous chapters, always allowing for certain similarities with other parts of north-west Europe, particularly Holland, I have been arguing that these two islands present an unusual case. If that is true, then in order to take another step we need to find factors which fulfil the following conditions. They should be special, that is to say they should separate these two cases off from their continents, Japan off from China and England off from most of Europe. They should occur in **both** England and Japan. It must be possible to see how they could actually operate on the decisions which lead to the unusual fertility regimes.

The following factors meet all three criteria, though all of them tend to be a matter of degree as much as kind. Firstly and most importantly, there is the unusual mortality pattern itself, caused by other factors. The fact that mortality rates were low affected the desire and need for children. If there is a

[78] cf 'Mirrors' and 'Modes of Reproduction'

[79] Nakamura, Population (xerox), 255

[80] see 'Morrors' on economy

settled population on an island and mortality is known to be low, there is the obvious question of how to limit fertility. This was the problem which England and Japan faced. And in each case, with a different culture and history, they attempted to solve the problem in a different way.

Related to this, but different, is the question of political history. We have already encountered this in relation to the question of the maintenance of peace and avoidance of damaging civil wars through the rather unusual forms of centralized feudalism that grew up in England and Japan. Absolutism, or 'Oriental Despotism' as Wittfogel called it, may be a less likely base for the confidence needed to restrict fertility. Political insecurity, for instance, has been suggested by demographers as one of the major reasons for high fertility in some developing countries such as Bangladesh where the only people one can depend on are one's kin. (cf. Mead Cain XXX) As XXX, for example, has argued, 'The relative absence of strong nation-states in Africa to guarantee physical security may have been conducive to continual local conflicts that conferred an advantage on groupings with a large numerical size. This feature may have engendered strong cultural supports for high fertility.'[81] This is part of the wider debate about the differences between societies which are based on contractual relations within a state, and those based on patrimonialism and the family. In the latter, which would include India and China and much of **ancien regime** Europe until the later eighteenth century, the family is the major locus of political alliances and hence maximum breeding is a sensible political strategy. This had long ceased to be the case in England and Japan with their rather unusual political development from the early medieval period. In many ways, these two islands for many centuries had the most law-abiding and secure political environments the world had ever known. This was an important necessary, if not sufficient, background factor.[82]

A further factor takes us back to religion. Within the generally permitting context of Buddhism and Christianity, these two islands had an extreme and rather unusually ascetic and puritan religious tradition which may have been of added importance. There was a cultural background which would, for instance, allow many people to remain unmarried without incurring religious wrath. Nor was there any great necessity for blood heirs to ensure spiritual salvation in either case. Both religious traditions counselled self-control, sexual and bodily, though in rather different fashions.[83]

Another important similarity between the two, and one which probably contributed to their fertility patterns, were their rather unusual patterns of social stratification. Both avoided what De Tocqueville called 'caste', that is a rigid stratification system which inhibited all chance of movement. This, combined with a large amount of geographical mobility, primogeniture and other factors made the populations on

[81] Landers (ed), Fertility, 133

[82] cf Mirrors, on Law and Politics

[83] cf Mirrors

both islands very mobile. Children could and did move away, socially and geographically. There was, as Malthus stressed at great length, a powerful social pressure due to the desire to climb, or at least not to slip, down the infinite steps of a steep, but ascendable, social ladder.[84] This was one of the main reasons for the postponement of marriage in England at certain periods, and likewise was a strong consideration in family decision-making in Japan. As I argued in chapter four, though very different in many ways, both Japan and England had social structures of a 'modern' kind which were already detached from the 'normal' criteria of recruitment to status, namely blood.

The pattern of social stratification and social mobility was in turn related to the rather unusual patterns of geographical mobility or migration in these two islands. A number of those who have written on the causes of the Japanese demographic pattern have drawn attention to this. For instance, they write that 'Migration was thus as important a regulator of population as adoption, if not more so. Migration allowed the efficient allocation of labour, higher wages, the permanent or temporary adjusting of village population, and the regulation of numbers in individual households through marriage, adoption, and migration in or out for employment.'[85] Since the majority of agrarian populations, particularly those based on crops rather than pastoralism, have very little labour migration, this raises another puzzle. It also suggests another deep similarity between England and Japan, namely that they were both, through most of their history, highly mobile societies. In this respect, once again, they differed from most other **Ancien Regime** societies, where, particularly in the countryside, people tended to live in 'Le Village Immobile'.

Another important factor was the nature of their economies - very commercial, textile-based, with advanced agricultures, and early and widespread use of markets and money. Of course, many of these features can be found in pockets all over the world. The cities of Italy or France, or China and India had all these features. But the English and Japanese economies seem, like the Dutch, to have been money-dominated and market-oriented, with a permeation of commercial values into the countryside and an economic integration based on good water communications, which was exceptional. Having children became a matter of weighing up costs and benefits. The relations between kinship and economy, which are at the heart of fertility strategies, was deeply affected by the sophisticated economies which had sprung up on these two islands, as described in chapter three above.

The effect of all these multiple pressures was that the size of family and number of children was sensitive to economic pressures. But it is important to note that while this differentiated both Japan and England from most 'peasant' civilizations, the mechanisms were different in the two cases. In the Japanese case, a notion of very fixed 'slots' or ecological spaces, seems appropriate. These were not easily expandable, partly because of shortage of land, particularly rice land, partly because of organization and taxation constraints. Even when wealth increased considerably through the growth of

[84]cf Malthus, Marriage, ch.1

[85]Hanley, Economic, 255

bi-employments from the seventeenth century, this did not lead to larger families. The reason for this is given by Smith, namely that 'non-agricultural occupations continue to be carried on mainly in conjunction with family farming.'[86] The families may get richer, but not larger. The system of single-heir inheritance, which is so very unusual, yet widespread in Japan, reflects this ecological constraint. In each generation there is one heir; additional children are a problem. As Nakamura put it, '...primogeniture and associated institutions were probably important factors limiting the size of families in Tokugawa Japan because the presence and favoured treatment of the heir led to inevitable dissension and conflict within the family, an intolerable condition within the 'ie' structure.'[87] Of course, as Hayami points out, single-heir inheritance was not universal,[88] yet it was the dominant form and primogeniture does not authorize 'the formation of families by sons other than the eldest...'[89] Sometimes there was ultimogeniture, sometimes it was the oldest child of whichever sex, as in parts of north-east Japan.[90] The important point is that there were slots, or breeding spaces, and that they were constrained. 'A large number of children on a small farm was almost as disastrous as no children at all.'[91] Thus the Japanese case has one element of the 'peasant' model, namely the idea of fixed spaces, determined largely by agricultural resources. On the other hand it is very different from other cases in only allowing one heir to succeed to such a space - and often choosing a non-blood heir to fill the niche.

At one time it was thought that a similar model would be appropriate for England, namely that there were 'niches' which had to be filled and that such things as age at marriage, proportions marrying, numbers of children, could be explained best by analogies with animal populations and breeding territories. It has become increasingly apparent that this is not a useful approach. For example, Walter and Schofield write that 'in England since the sixteenth century the preventive check operated through the mechanisms of the wage-economy, rather than through the filling of niches.'[92] It is not the problem of filling of 'niches' through strategies of heirship which is important, but a much wider problem of earning a

[86]Smith, Sources, 35 cf also 97

[87]Nakamura, Population (xerox), 256

[88]Hayami, Myth, 3-4

[89]ibid, 4

[90]Hayami, ibid, 28

[91]Hanley and Wolf (eds), Family (xerox), 197

[92]Walter, Famine (xerox), 300

living in a market economy. Schofield's view has been endorsed by others. Thus XXX writes that 'Recent research on early modern England, however, has led to a greatly reduced emphasis on the demographic significance of inheritance, whilst enhancing that of a normative living standard or, "culturally determined moral economy" (Schofield, 1989).'[93] For instance, in relation to the costs of children, 'The criterion on which the model is based is a predominant concern to minimize the current cost of children over a finite period of dependency, rather than a preoccupation with the problems of inheritance of "heirship".'[94] We are told that 'Attempts to understand European marriage characteristics and their associated fertility consequences through models that rely heavily on property, its mode of transmission, and its social distribution have had limited explanatory success.'[95] And hence, 'In the individualistic society, fertility is likely to be determined by influences that are mediated through markets, both domestic and international, and geographical movements that can be both internal and external; it is also susceptible to influences of welfare policy and policy shifts on the part of those who fund and manage welfare systems.'[96]

This shift of emphasis has been exemplified and supported by the review of the Wrigley and Schofield by Goldstone. He stresses that the fluctuations in fertility is determined by changes in employment opportunities and real wages, rather than the number of 'ecological niches' available. For instance, he writes that 'Empirical evidence of the nuptiality response to short-term harvest and mortality fluctuations shows that in early modern England people tended to follow **welfare-dependent** nuptiality control. That is, fluctuations in harvest quality and wheat prices did evoke corresponding fluctuations in nuptiality, while fluctuations in mortality appear not to have evoked increases in the formation of new households.'[97] One could, to a certain extent, adapt this to the 'ecological niche' argument in the sense that Goldstone argues that from the middle of the eighteenth century, growing industrialization provided new opportunities for people to marry and set up homes.[98] Yet it is a very different situation from the normal agrarian environment, for people are now dependent on fluctuations in wages and job opportunities rather than inheriting land or traditional craft occupations.

[93]Landers (ed), Fertility, 107

[94]Landers (ed), Fertility, 112

[95]Landers (ed), Fertility, 178

[96]Landers (ed), Fertility, 181

[97]Goldstone, Demographic (xerox), 16

[98]cf Goldstone, Demographic, 25-29

Two final points may be made. Firstly, many of the features were accentuated or permitted because England and Japan were islands. Being a large island off a sophisticated Continent probably gives one the best of both worlds; superior ideas and technologies can cross the sea, but diseases and war are easier to keep at bay. Wealth can be let in, and Illth be kept out. There can be little doubt that if either of these countries had been joined to their mainlands the outcome would have been totally different. Yet this is, again, just a permitting cause. There are other large islands, for instance Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Borneo, Iceland, Ireland or the Philippines which have had very different fates. Part of this can no doubt be explained by colonization, a fate which Japan avoided. Yet islandhood is so large and obvious a factor that we constantly need to bear it in mind. It shaped all those other determining factors - the ease of water transport encouraged trade and helped the growth of large cities, the absence of foreign threat allowed a relatively balanced, non-absolutist political system, and the distance from these continents allowed idiosyncratic legal and religious systems to grow up. These in turn influenced fertility and mortality patterns.