

Preface to the Japanese edition of 'The Culture of Capitalism', published in 1993

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It is a particular pleasure and honour to introduce this translation of 'The Culture of Capitalism' to a Japanese audience since there are some remarkable similarities, and differences, as between England and Japan. Since these are not considered except in passing, in the book, it is worth making them explicit for a Japanese audience.

Capitalism and industrialism together constitute a world system, with little left to struggle against, having now almost succeeded in undermining all alternatives. Yet the absence of any necessity that this set of features would emerge as dominant is shown by the history of China, India, Africa, South America and much of 'Ancien Regime' Europe. Why and how did this happen? This book, combined with its predecessor 'The Origins of English Individualism' is the start of an attempt to answer this question.

Much of the classical work on this theme rests on the experience of the West and leads to the conclusion that there is an inevitable connection between capitalism, industrialism, equality, rationality, and individualism. They are a 'package' of features which appear to be causally connected. But there is one serious problem facing these classical theories, and that is the case of Japan.

Firstly, it can be shown that Japan has, while importing the early technology, almost autonomously industrialized and become one of the most successful of capitalist nations - and that it has done so in embryo once (in the sixteenth century) and in actuality twice (after the Meiji Restoration and after the Second World War).

Secondly, it can be shown that Japan was and is not a society based on the main components of the western experience. Individualism, egalitarianism, universalistic rationality, none of these are found in a highly developed form in Japan. Japan thus appears to have the technology and the capitalist relations of production without the supposedly necessary social structure and ideology. This has been widely noted, for instance by the sociologist Ronald Dore, the anthropologist Robert Smith and many others. So, how is one to fit this case with previous theories?

There are, of course, a number of geographical, demographic and other factors in common between Japan and, particularly, England. For instance, both countries developed their economies on the basis of textile production, in one case wool, in the other silk. Both countries, being islands, could rely on good water communications and had no need for a 'standing army' to protect them against foreign invasion. Both had an unusual 'controlled' demographic regime over a long period, the English case being described in 'Population' in this book. But this still does not get over the major problem, namely that there seems to be a very deep difference between England and Japan, in language, concepts of the self, relations between individual and group and other spheres.

One might give up at this point, and just say that they are parallel cases and that there is really not enough in common to allow us to believe that there are some deeper structural features which we could see lying behind both civilizations. It is worth trying, however, to go a little further.

It is not the individual parts that are ultimately important, but their relationship to each other; the

balance between the parts, more than their innate nature. Hence, one could have a situation where the parts are totally dissimilar, but the over-all pattern has a structural similarity. Since the secret of modern capitalism lies in how the market is constituted in relation to other aspects of the society, in other words, whether it is 'free' or 'embedded', this leads us to suspect that the solution lies in examining how those institutions which usually encompass the economy - a predatory State, a clinging family, an over-zealous religion - have been held in check, form a balance of countervailing forces.

With this in mind, we would be seeking for clues to suggest that there was something unusual about the relationship of the major institutions in Japan and England that gave the market freedom to grow and creativity to develop in all kinds of fields. How is it that both England and Japan broke through into the kind of technological, scientific and economic growth which no previous civilization had been able to achieve?

For instance, we may ask why the family system in the two civilizations was unable to provide the firm basis for the society, which would normally make kinship encompass the political, economic and religious spheres? The solution seems to lie in the curious fact that North West Europe and Japan are the only two agrarian civilizations based on cognatic rather than agnatic kinship. Structurally the kinship systems are very similar, and this has the effect of breaking the ties based on birth status. In the absence of corporate groups, kinship cannot provide the basis of politics and religion. The essay on 'love' in this volume reflects on some of these themes, though it also shows a basic difference between Japan and England in relation to the idea of romantic love.

There is again a curious feature in that Europe and Japan are the only two major agrarian societies which are known to have passed through a stage of authentic 'feudalism'. But even more significant was the similarity between England and Japan, which each had a peculiar form of feudalism - what one might call 'centralized feudalism'. The nature of this kind of feudalism and its importance as the basis for capitalism is discussed in the chapter on 'capitalism' in this volume. Its major feature is that it provides order without developing into 'absolutism'. It requires a unified and all pervasive legal structure, which is described in the chapter on 'violence'.

In different ways, the religious systems of Japan and England were sufficiently, but not **too** demanding. There are, of course, as Bellah and others have pointed out, some curious and interesting parallels between Tokugawa religion and Puritanism. But the similarities go deeper than this. The form of Anglican religion that developed in England and the tolerant, pluralistic, mix that developed in Japan, left the individual and group relatively free to act without too many ethical constraints. Indeed in both cases, the moral system was very relativistic and pragmatic. For instance, as shown in the chapter on 'evil', there was great uncertainty as to what was really evil and what was good. Already the 'open' and relativistic morality of modern capitalism was present.

Because of the above features, a peculiarly 'free' economy could develop in both England and Japan. The market, the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself, the widespread use of money (or rice as an alternative in Japan), all these central features of consumer capitalism developed on these two unusual islands very early on.

In both countries the absence of religious and political constraints, the high price of skilled labour, and the heightened insecurity and anxiety created by the development of a contractual society, led to the search for ever improved technologies. As Joseph Needham and others have pointed out, this is what differentiated Europe (and as we now suspect Japan) from China and India.

There are also a number of strange 'family resemblances' between England and Japan that developed at the social and mental levels over the centuries. There is a very heavy emphasis in each

society on etiquette, politeness, reserve. There is very considerable social mobility and an absence of firm social distinctions of a caste-like nature. There is a similar love of nature, of poetry, of writing diaries. There is an emphasis on education and literacy, an unusually high status for women, a curiously allusive, restrained, ascetic and 'gothic' art. There is an admiration for crafts and practical skills, a cult of the amateur and a distrust of pure intellect.

Another example of a combination of similarity and difference can be seen by comparing the systems of social control in the two civilizations. Through exploring the nature of the legal system in the two situations, one can see on the surface a real difference, but at a deeper level, two solutions to the same problem. English law is confrontational and boundary-maintaining. It basically polices the zones between the various institutions, for there are endless boundary clashes when one tries to hold politics, society, religion and economy apart.

On the other hand, in Japan, the different spheres are united at the level of the small group, rather than the individual. The groups hold themselves apart as much as possible, but the law does not have much role. The policing is done by the group. The immensely complex verbal and body (**hara**) language, powerful concepts of debt and obligation (**on** and **giri**), and the positional ethics ensure that people get their roles and relationships and duties right.

After examining England and Japan, It would seem, therefore, that we have to maintain the paradoxical stance that Japan is both in essence different, and represents an alternative to Western civilization, while at the same time it has certain structural features in common with the West, and particularly England.

Whether we look on the two capitalisms and industrialisms as similar or dissimilar depends on whether we stress the central similarity - the absence of determination by one sphere - or we stress the central dissimilarity, that while Europe has overcome this problem by keeping the spheres apart, Japan has overcome the contradictions by uniting them.

Certainly the Japanese and English experience is similar in one further way, and this is in their very long and evolutionary history. As described in the chapter on 'revolution', most societies have gone through a vast and disruptive break when they changed from a basically 'peasant' and 'pre-modern' social structure to a 'capitalist' and 'modern' one. This happened in France and much of Europe in the nineteenth century, and is still happening in Russia, China and India.

What is curious about Japan and England is that for a thousand years they have managed to change rapidly, indeed in advance of all other countries in their regions, and yet at the same time to remain at some deeper level largely unchanged. This 'continuity with change', or 'changing same' is part of the secret of their success, and part of their delight.

Whether in England or Japan, one feels that one is living 'in an old country' whose roots have not been wrenched up. Those roots could remain because in neither case did a classical 'peasant' social formation develop. The absence of this rigid division into the kind of peasant/lord structure which is characteristic of almost all agrarian civilizations is the central theme of the chapter on 'peasants' and the book on 'The Origins of English Individualism'. A similar absence can be detected in Japanese history. These two islands, developing different yet overlapping brands of capitalism, have come to affect the whole world.

It is hoped that Japanese readers of this book will be able to enrich their knowledge through reading about a civilization which is similar enough to be comprehensible, yet different enough to be intriguing. Certainly, I have found this to be the case in reverse, for 'The Culture of Capitalism' is nowhere more intriguing than when shown to be flourishing through the centuries in the ancient

civilization of Japan.

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