

MARRIAGE AND SEX

In the years that followed the first publication of the **Essay on Population** in 1798, Malthus read much more widely and made several trips round Europe. What he found, led him to revise his theory. In the almost totally new second edition of the **Essay** published in 1803 Malthus no longer saw the argument he had earlier elaborated as based on 'iron laws', but rather as a description of 'tendencies'. The normal demographic situation was one of crisis and negative feed-back, yet this was only a 'normal' pressure which could, and occasionally had been, overcome. The way to avoid it was to introduce a new element, what Malthus called the 'preventive checks'.

Malthus had noticed that while many great civilizations encouraged marriage at as early an age as possible, this was not the case in Western Europe. (Population, i,116,119,129). During travels in Norway between the two editions of the **Essay** he had noticed the various pressures which led to the postponement of marriages. He began to notice that this was a feature of much of western Europe. "It can scarcely be doubted that in modern Europe a much larger proportion of women pass a considerable part of their lives in the exercise of this virtue (i.e. late age at marriage) than in past times and among uncivilised nations." Thus a delay in marriage, he believed, was "the most powerful of the checks which in modern Europe keep down the population to the level of the means of subsistence". (ibid, i,315). He found that the most extreme case of the preventive checks of late marriage and non-marriage was England itself. "The most cursory view of society in this country must convince us, that throughout all ranks the preventive check to population prevails in a considerable degree." (Population, ii, 236). He then went on to explain why and how it had begun to operate.

What Malthus was suggesting was that there were signs that a new pattern different from the 'crisis' one was emerging. Population was held in check through the operation of fertility rates rather than through rising mortality. Malthus wrote that 'I think it appears that in modern Europe the positive checks to population prevail less and the preventive checks more than in past times, and in the more uncivilised parts of the world.'¹ Summarizing his views some years later, he concluded that 'probably it may be said with truth, that, in almost all the more improved countries of modern Europe, the principal check which at present keeps the population down to the level of the actual means of subsistence is the prudential restraint on marriage.'² Thus the particular mechanism he focused on was the preventive check of entry into sexual unions, through marriage.

In this chapter I will examine the degree to which the Malthusian 'preventive' checks of a 'prudential' kind operated to counter the inevitable power of the 'passion between the sexes'. This covers the 'Intercourse Variables' in the Davis and Blake schema outlined in the previous chapter.

¹Malthus, Population, 1, 315

²Malthus, Summary, 254

Age at commencing sexual unions.

It is now well known that the age at marriage (and hence entry into sexual unions) and the proportion not marrying was the central mechanism which affected fertility rates in north western Europe, and particularly England, in the centuries leading up to the industrial revolution. In the majority of human societies, women marry and enter sexual unions at or soon after puberty, that is in their middle or late teens. Thanks to the work of John Hajnal, we know that western Europe had an exceptional marriage pattern whereby women often entered their first sexual unions after a delay of up to ten years after puberty, in other words in their middle twenties. This seems to have been the case since at least the sixteenth century in England and elsewhere. (Hajnal ref. XXX³) Indeed, there is now evidence that the 'Hajnal' pattern was present in England from at least the thirteenth century.⁴

Within this pattern, England was the most extreme case. As Wrigley showed, during several periods in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women were marrying for the first time at an average age of 26 or older. This greatly shortened their period of being 'at risk' of having children. This helps to account for much of the restrained fertility in England. Then the population started to grow rapidly in the middle of the eighteenth century. Wrigley argues that this was caused by a drop of three years in the mean age at first marriage, from about 25 to about 22. This drop would lead to a cumulative rise in marital fertility of about 25 per cent (from 4.42 to 5.5 children). This means that 'earlier marriage alone would therefore account for more than half of the rise in the Gross Reproduction Rate.'⁵ Part of Wrigley's views have been challenged by Goldstone. He argues that 'Changes in the proportions ever married, rather than in age at marriage, must thus bear the brunt of explaining fertility shifts before 1700.'⁶ He agrees that the rising fertility of the later eighteenth century was caused by a fall in the age at marriage, but argues that this was not caused by a general fall in age at marriage but a specific change. 'A close look at the age distribution at marriage shows that after 1750 age at marriage did not shift generally towards younger ages. Instead, what occurred was a dramatic rise in first marriages by men aged 19-23, and by women aged 22 and under.'⁷ Thus, as he concludes, 'The great population boom of the late eighteenth century appears to be the result of a relatively confined effect, a major shift to much younger first marriage by some 20 per cent of the marrying population.'⁸ Whatever our views on this controversy, it is clear that

³For Europe in general, see Flinn, European (xerox), 28

⁴see e.g. Smith in Landers (ed), Fertility, 173

⁵Wrigley, Population History, 256

⁶Goldstone, Demographic (xerox), 10

⁷Goldstone, Demographic (xerox), 19

age at marriage and proportion marrying are crucial variables.

When we turn to Japan, if we take the two extremes of age at first marriage for women, namely the 'normal' pattern of human societies, at between 15 and 18, and the English seventeenth century English pattern of 25-27, Japan lies about half way between. Hayami's early work on Suwa county shows age at marriage in various regions and periods between 1671 and 1871. The lowest figure for any period and place is 18.3 years, the highest is 22.0. The average of the averages is 20.4 years. In Yokouchi village, of which he made a special study, the figures were identical, lying between 18.5 and 22.⁹ In his study of Nakahara, Thomas Smith found similar ranges. The overall mean was 19.9 years, with the smaller land-holders marrying at an average age of 20.5 and the larger land-holders at an average age of 18.5 years.¹⁰ On the basis of this work, Smith concludes that the figures for Nakahara 'clearly belong to the non-European marriage pattern'¹¹, though he also admits that they were 'considerably above that in many underdeveloped countries today.'¹² Thus he concludes that 'Nuptiality made only a marginal contribution to low fertility, marriage for females was young...'¹³

Hanley, however, puts a different emphasis on the findings. Firstly, she found slightly higher ages, though a similar difference between the rich and the poor. Women from richer families 'married at just over 21 while families with extremely little or no land married at over 25.'¹⁴ She argues that the 'custom for women to first marry at from 22 to 25 was prevalent at least throughout central and western Japan.'¹⁵ She cites the following figures for mean age at first marriages for various communities: 23.3 in

⁸Goldstone, Demographic (xerox), 29

⁹in ed. Laslett, 502, 508

¹⁰Nakahara, 93; Native, 121

¹¹Nakahara, 93

¹²ibid, 11

¹³Nakahara, 100

¹⁴Hanley, Economic, 286

¹⁵Hanley, Economic, 246

Fujito, 23.4 in Fukiage, 23.4 in Nishikata, 23.5 in Numa...¹⁶ The result was that in the most fertile period, namely 20-24, many Japanese women were still unmarried. The 20s are considered the most fertile years for women but, in a sample of twenty-one years from the four villages, the percentage of women in the 20-24 age group who were married was under 40 percent in thirteen of these years.¹⁷ This was not a new pattern in the later Tokugawa period. Thus in the village of Fukiage in 1683 'only 37.5 percent of women aged 20-24 were married.'¹⁸ She therefore concludes that 'the average age at first marriage for women was relatively high for women in a preindustrial society.'¹⁹ This may have reduced a woman's fertility by at least two live births, or at least 25 per cent. Hanley and Wolf believe that 'the evidence collected by our authors suggests that Japanese women have always married at a relatively late age.'²⁰

More recent work by Hayami has emphasized the class and regional differences in Japan. In terms of class, in one study class I women married at an average age of 19 *sai* and had 6.2 live births, class III women at 22 *sai* and had 4.6 live births.²¹ In another case 'Nishijo village in Mino Province - age at first marriage for the wives of the 1773-1835 cohort differed conspicuously according to land-holding. In the upper class of peasants, age at first marriage was 21.5 *sai* while in the lower class of peasants, it was 24.5 *sai*.'²² Thus the tendency was reversed, according to region. The regional variations are very important. Hayami concluded that 'it is possible to suggest that there were two patterns of marriage in Japan in the late nineteenth century - a pattern of early marriage in eastern Japan and one of late marriage in the western Japan.'²³ He related this to the relative prosperity and inheritance customs of the

¹⁶Hanley and Wolf (eds), Family (xerox), 216

¹⁷Hanley, Economic, 248

¹⁸Hanley, Economic, 250

¹⁹Hanley, Economic, 246

²⁰Hanley and Wolf (eds), Family (xerox), 5

²¹Hayami, Class Differences, 15

²²Hayami, Fossa (xerox), 59

²³Hayami, Fossa (xerox), 70

two regions.²⁴

What does seem to be the case was that there was a fairly firm idea that a girl would be both marriageable and likely to marry in an age band that began at about 18 or a little older. This can be seen most delightfully in the indicative hair styles of women. We are told that 'after twenty-one' a girl would wear certain hair styles, for 'she was now at an age when she might get married very soon, so she'd want a graceful style that wasn't too conspicuous.'²⁵ These styles divided the hair - showing the incipient break from her parents. After she married, she wore a **maru-mage** style for the rest of her life. This was 'a return to the single, round chignon, to show the woman's heart has become whole again - one with her husband's.'²⁶ Thus the 'various styles of dressing the hair of girls' allowed one to 'form a pretty accurate estimate of any girl's age up to her marriage, then the **coiffure** undergoes a definite change.'²⁷

The very late age at marriage of men in Japan, which meant that husbands were on average about eight years older than their wives may also be important. 'In Kyushu men were enjoined not to marry until age 30 or later...'²⁸, though the ages were usually a little under 30. The late age at marriage for men is shown in Smith's study of Nakahara where 'the proportion of all males who were likely to be still single did not drop below half until almost age 30.'²⁹ (give other figs. XXX) A man marrying at say 30 to a girl of 22 would already be in his mid-forties by the time she approached her usual period of ending childbirth.

Sexual relations and the end of cohabitation within marriage.

The age at starting sexual relations, which was largely synonymous with marriage, needs to be considered alongside the period at which cohabitation ceased. Here we come across a curious but very significant feature of the Japanese fertility pattern which differentiated it, as far as I know, from every other agrarian population of which we have records, namely the very young age at which women

²⁴Hayami, Fossa (xerox), 70-1

²⁵Silk, 152

²⁶Silk, 152

²⁷Bird, Tracks, 80

²⁸Taueber, Population, 29

²⁹Nakahara, 91

stopped having babies.

In the majority of societies, the mean age at last child-birth, assuming both partners are still alive, is roughly 40. As Menken puts it, 'the meagre evidence available suggests that the mean age at last birth seems to vary little among populations which do not practice birth control; it was 40.9 among the well-nourished Hutterites and 41.7 in a poorly nourished English population cited by Frisch.³⁰ Flinn summarized some historical European figures for before 1750 derived from reconstitution studies and found mean ages at birth of last child of 40.9 for Belgium, 40.4 for France, 40.0 for Germany and 38.5 for England.³¹ For instance, in the classic French study of Crulai 'the age of women at the time of their last confinement lies between 38 and 41 years. In Geneva the average of mothers of whose families we have complete records is, at their last confinement, round about 38 or 39 between 1600 and 1649.³² In three other French parishes, it varied between 29.5 and 41.8, the mode being over 41.³³

In contrast, Hanley and Yamamura noted in their study of four Japanese villages that 'The highest average age at last birth' was 37 in Fukiage, 'while the lowest averages, around 33, were for Numa and Nishikata.³⁴ In Fujito village there was 'An average age of 34 at last birth.³⁵ Women in the sample villages were bearing their last child in the middle or early thirties, 'while living with their husbands at least through age 43.³⁶ The importance of this curious pattern is emphasized by Thomas Smith who notes that 'farm size affected family size by the age of marriage and the age of stopping, not by the spacing of children.³⁷ In other words, somewhat like England, the number of women at risk was being constrained, but much of the constraint in Japan seems to have come from the five or so years cut off

³⁰ Menken, Nutrition (xerox), 433

³¹ Flinn, European (xerox), 29

³² Glass (ed), Population, 616

³³ Glass (ed), Population, 616

³⁴ *ibid*, 236

³⁵ *ibid*, 241

³⁶ Hanley, 324

³⁷ Smith, Native, 121

the end of child-bearing. Although these were less fertile years, this would nevertheless have reduced the average number of births by at least one or two children. It is both significant and puzzling that 'Nineteenth-century Japanese women, on the average, stopped bearing children five or six years earlier than did their contemporary European counterparts.'³⁸ As Hanley puts it, the pattern was one where in the case of 'women in the first half of the childbearing years we observe high marital fertility but a low proportion married, whereas for women in the second half of the childbearing years we see low marital fertility but a relatively high proportion married.'³⁹

The difference in pattern can be seen if we compare England and Japan. In England the marriage often took place in the later 20's, but then fertility continued until the late 30's. In Japan, the marriage started earlier, but the narrowing of the period of reproduction to the same period as the English was achieved by pulling down the shutters early. In England in certain periods, the effective period of childbirth was 25-40, in Japan it was 22-35. As Hanley and Yamamura point out, 'An average age of 23.6 at first birth and of 34 at last birth, as in Fujito, leaves only a decade for childbearing.'⁴⁰ The fact that there were longer spaces between births in Japan would counter-balance the fact that the 'period at risk' occurred in the earlier, more fertile, period. Given the short duration of childbearing in each country, it is easier to comprehend how total fertility of between three and six children was achieved.

This only suggests other questions. In what way and for what reasons did the Japanese manage to end their childbearing so early? Although it is as yet only a surmise, it might well be that they influenced their fertility through an unusual form of marital abstinence. This was not the classic case of **coitus interruptus**, but, if a term is to be coined **maritagium interruptus** (check Latin! XXX) Or, as (Emiko ???XXX) tells me, "divorce within marriage". (this is a Japanese phrase, apparently....)

This form of contraception is not suggested by any of the historical demographers, yet there are grounds for believing that there were strong pressures within the traditional Japanese family which controlled the occurrence of sex within marriage. One of these concerned an apparently strong taboo against older people having children or perhaps even sex. In a novel we are told that 'We Japanese have always considered it disgraceful for a couple in their forties to have a child.'⁴¹ In the famous nineteenth century novel translated as **Shank's Mare**, a man in his sixties was described as scandalized that sexual activity took place with his wife, not because it was his wife, but because she was so old. 'Why it's twenty years since I gave up that sort of thing. Creeping into the bed of a wrinkled old woman indeed.

³⁸Hanley, *Economic*, 246

³⁹Hanley and Wolf (eds), *Family* (xerox), 140

⁴⁰*Economic*, 241

⁴¹Sawako Airyoshi, *The Weilight Years* (1984), 135

It's disgraceful.⁴² This attitude is suggested by the memories of a woman of the years between the wars. Remembering the tragic death of her mistress after a failed abortion, she said. 'She must have been about forty-one at the time. In those days it was considered a great disgrace to have a baby after the age of forty - they were usually either aborted or killed at birth. A middle-aged woman only had to look tired or slack off from work and tongues would start wagging.' When a woman became pregnant, her mother-in-law, 'used to come along almost every day and bait her about it: 'It's disgusting a woman your age having a baby - you want to get rid of it just as soon as you can,' she'd say.'⁴³ Other evidence suggests that part of the problem lay in the structural relations between the mother and daughter-in-law.

Hanley cites evidence from Tosa that 'it was not considered proper for a woman to have a child if she had a daughter-in-law bearing children.'⁴⁴ Taeuber reports that "'Elderly" couples in their late thirties or early forties felt it somewhat improper to have a child, especially if there was a daughter-in-law in the house.'⁴⁵

Further clues concerning sexual patterns which deserve attention emerge from a recent work on Japanese family planning by Coleman. He shows a set of characteristics which may be significant. He writes that 'Japanese sexuality is still largely confined to this dichotomy of "sex for pleasure" and "sex for reproduction"...the idea of sex as "communication" is all the more alien. Japanese sex specialists have recognized this tendency to place sex in a separate dimension from interpersonal relationships.'⁴⁶

This has several effects. The sexual relationship between men and women is conceived of as a duty - for the production of children. Since, this duty was fulfilled when a certain number of children were safely born or a woman reached a certain age, at that point men may have stopped having sexual intercourse with their wives. 'For husbands, sexual intercourse was a duty to produce offspring, summarized in the expression "obligatory fuck" (gir man).'⁴⁷ The end of this obligation was possibly a relief for the women as well. 'There are a number of signs that a larger proportion of Japanese women reject sexuality or derive less pleasure from it than do women in the West.' For instance, studies have

⁴²Shank's Mare, 76

⁴³Silk, 210

⁴⁴Economic, 265

⁴⁵Taeuber, 30

⁴⁶Coleman, c.p.175??

⁴⁷p.175

shown that it takes them longer to reach orgasm, the proportion who do not reach orgasm is twice as high as in the United States, the rates of female masturbation are much lower than in other studies.⁴⁸ It might well be that, partly as a result of the grinding hard work, the considerable burden of breast-feeding, carrying children and the threat of unwanted extra children, husbands and wives stopped sleeping together when the men were in their mid-forties and women their mid-30's. If this were so, it would explain the particularly early age at which the last childbirth occurred.

The stopping of sexual relations within Japanese marriages, and more widely the whole of marital life, was clearly deeply affected by the attitude towards sexuality in Japan. This is a very large subject and one which it is difficult to deal with briefly. Yet it cannot be avoided, since it effects not only fecundity, but also, through the transmission of certain diseases, and not only the venereal ones, the whole of mortality.

It is obvious that prostitution, brothels, extra-marital sex, bastardy and much else was widespread in the countries from which travellers to Japan came, from the sixteenth to nineteenth century. In England, for instance, there is now an extensive historical literature on many of these topics. (cf XXX). The following account is not therefore meant to imply anything about Japanese superiority or inferiority in morality. What I hope to show is that visitors to Japan, and particularly observant doctors, sensed that the attitude towards the body, sexuality and marriage was very different from that in the often hypocritical puritan countries from which they had come. The impressionistic account they give would need to be deepened by evidence based on Japanese sources for a proper analysis, but until that is done the following will provide some idea of a few of the differences.

Kaempfer in the late seventeenth century noted the very widespread existence of brothels in Japan, particularly in the towns and villages along the main highways. He wrote that 'It is unquestionably true, that there is hardly a publick Inn upon the great Island Nipon, but what may be call'd a bawdy-house; and if there by too many customers resort to one place, the neighbouring Inn-keepers will friendly and willingly lend their own wenches, on condition, that what money they get shall be faithfully paid them.'⁴⁹ He gave a description of two particularly well known villages. 'The two villages Akasaki and Goy, lying near one another, are particularly famous on this account, all the houses therein being so many Inns, or rather bawdy-houses, each furnish'd with no less than three, six or seven of these wenches, for which reason also they are call'd the great store-house of Japanese whores, and by way of banter, the common grind-mill.'⁵⁰ Travellers who passed along the high-ways took sex in the same way as they took food. 'Very seldom any Japanese pass thro' these villages, but they pick up some of these whores

⁴⁸Coleman, *Family Planning*, 162

⁴⁹Kaempfer, *History*, 2, 346

⁵⁰Kaempfer, *History*, 2, 346

and have to do with them.⁵¹ Nor were the prostitutes just women. He described how '...on that chief street of this town, thro' which we pass'd, were built nine or ten neat houses, or booths, before each of which sate one, two, or three young boys, of ten to twelve years of age, well dress'd, with their faces painted, and feminine gestures, kept by their lew'd and cruel masters for the secret pleasure and entertainment of rich travellers, the Japanese being very much addicted to this vise.⁵²

A century later, another doctor, Thunberg, added further touches. He noted the fequent brothels, particularly in the sea ports. 'In all the sea ports great care has been taken to establish a brothel (and for the most part several) even in the smallest villages. They were commonly the handsomest houses in the place...'⁵³ He also noted a contradiction in the sexual morality. On the one hand, Japan was a monogamous society. 'In this country the men are not allowed a plurality of wives, as in China, but each man is confined to one, who has liberty to go out and show herself in company, and is not shut up in a recluse and separate apartment, as is the custom with their neighbours.'⁵⁴ On the other hand, there was widespread concubinage. 'In this country likewise the dishonourable practice of keeping mistresses obtains with some; but the children they bring into the world cannot inherit, and the mistresses are considered as servants of the house.'⁵⁵ The contradiction between strictness and laxness struck him forcefully. 'Fornication is very prevalent in this country; notwithstanding which, chastity is frequently held in such high veneration both with married and single, that when they have been injured in this point, they sometimes lay violent hands upon themselves.'⁵⁶

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a French doctor, Pompe, gave a detailed and sensitive account of sexual morality. He noted once again the widespread prostitution. In the capital alone, he thought, there were some sixty thousand prostitutes.⁵⁷ Prostitution in Japan, he argued, was 'such a remarkable phenomenon, so deeply rooted in the social structure and at the same time so pitiful that every

⁵¹Kaempfer, *History*, 2, 346

⁵²Kaempfer, *History*, 3, 53

⁵³Thunberg, *Travels*, iii, 125

⁵⁴Thunberg, *Travels*, iv, 52

⁵⁵Thunberg, *Travels*, iv, 52

⁵⁶Thunberg, *Travels*, iv, 52

⁵⁷Wittermans, *Pompe (xerox)*, 47

right-minded person can only wish that it could be prohibited at the government level.⁵⁸ The attitude towards the inmates of the brothels was strangely tolerant. 'The Japanese society does not look with contempt on these public brothels, precisely because they are public. For them this excludes every connection with crime.⁵⁹ This was part of a wider attitude. 'The Japanese does not regard a free sex life as bad, much less as sin; the word "vice" is therefore not the right term for it. Neither the religion nor the society prohibits intercourse with women outside of marriage, and this is the cause for all the remarkable acts which arouse our amazement.⁶⁰

The sense of shame and sin was very different from that in the west. 'Many people have observed, as I have, that the Japanese talk about natural situations with a great deal of frankness, which surprises newcomers. They tell stories in the presence of their wives which exceed every sense of shame, without apparently offending the ladies.⁶¹ This meant, for example, that girls who had worked in the brothels could make good marriages afterwards, despite the fact being known. 'After reaching their twenty-fifth year, these girls are set free. Their bondage is over, and I am sure people would be surprised to hear that they return to society as decent women, and yet this is absolutely true.⁶² On the other hand, because of poverty and disease, their life was often miserable. 'The humiliations they have to undergo weigh heavily on many of them, and I bear testimony to the fact that I have often treated such girls in my clinic, who were dying of lung tuberculosis as a result of distress about the role they had to fulfil.⁶³ Having treated them, Pompe concluded, 'Who would think of holding the Japanese prostitutes in general in contempt and regard them as pariahs after hearing such stories?'⁶⁴ He ended up by recommending that 'A rigid medical supervision of houses of prostitution is absolutely necessary, but there is nothing of the kind in Japan.⁶⁵

⁵⁸Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 112

⁵⁹Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 113

⁶⁰Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 112/113

⁶¹Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 40

⁶²Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 115

⁶³Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 114

⁶⁴Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 115

⁶⁵Wittermans, Pompe (xerox), 116

Many of the earlier observations were confirmed, and sometimes given statistical depth, by the English doctor Willis a few years later. He found brothels particularly prevalent in the sea ports as outside influence built up with western pressure. In one port he found 'The number of prostitutes is out of all proportion to the population, a circumstance due it is said to the crowds of native sailors who visit the place in summer in junks.'⁶⁶ In particular, 'It is computed that there are about one thousand prostitutes at Yokohama, of which number between two and three hundred are employed as mistresses of foreigners, with an average wage, at the present time, of fifteen to twenty dollars a month each.'⁶⁷ But such institutions were widely spread through Japan. 'I found that brothels were common in the larger villages and towns, and where brothels did not exist the tea house women acted as prostitutes.'⁶⁸ For instance, 'In several places in the province of Shinano (Nagano prefecture) the waiting women at the Inns act as prostitutes, in which capacity their services when rendered form an item of charge included in the bill furnished by the landlord.'⁶⁹ More generally, 'Many tea-houses have degenerated into brothels; and houses of ill-fame, of one kind or another, are very generally distributed over Japan.'⁷⁰

He suggested that there was probably an increase in the incidence of brothels, as wealth increased. 'Married men to a considerable extent frequent them, and they have been largely on the increase during the last thirty years, arising it is believed from the increase of wealth and desire of enjoying it amongst all classes.'⁷¹ Like Pompe, he noted the tolerance towards such activity. He wrote that 'when a woman returns to her relations after serving a term at a brothel, she is not looked upon as having forfeited all claim to respectability, and she occasionally marries.'⁷² Likewise, the keeping of mistresses was not considered a vice: 'keeping concubines is very common and implies no depravity. Anyone married or single, who can afford the expense, is at liberty to keep a mistress without loss of respectability.'⁷³ Yet

⁶⁶Cortazzi, Willis, 140

⁶⁷Cortazzi, Willis, 243

⁶⁸Cortazzi, Willis, 129

⁶⁹Cortazzi, Willis, 161

⁷⁰Cortazzi, Willis, 245

⁷¹Cortazzi, Willis, 245

⁷²Cortazzi, Willis, 243

⁷³Cortazzi, Willis, 245

the conditions were awful, and he estimated that 'One third of all prostitutes die before the term of their office expires of syphilitic and other diseases.'⁷⁴ One new fact added by Willis concerns the recruitment of the prostitutes. He noted that 'Prostitutes are procured from the poor and necessitous classes of towns, being generally the daughters of small shop-keepers, artisans or coolies. The farming class contributes but few owing to the shame it would bring upon the relations of the prostitute.'⁷⁵ Often it was want that drove people to sell their relatives, or themselves, into the sex trade. 'In Japan it not unfrequently happens that when a man is reduced to poverty his daughter or wife volunteers to sell herself for a term to a brothel, and such an act is looked upon as the highest evidence of filial or conjugal affection.'⁷⁶

If we turn to non-doctors, and particularly lady travellers, from the later nineteenth century a few more impressions can be added. The American visitor Griffis gave some shrewd insights in the 1870s. He noted the effect of westerners on indigenous Japanese customs. 'In every port open to foreigners in Japan, in a few of the other large cities, but not in daimios' capitals, there is the same institution. It is Japan's own. Before they opened any port to foreign trade, the Japanese built two places for the foreigners - a custom-house and a brothel.'⁷⁷ He noted the contrast between the elegance and brutality of the brothels. 'What business is carried on in those edifices, splendid in Japanese eyes, charming to a foreigner, and appearing, beside the ordinary citizen's dwelling, as palaces beside cottages? Scores of them are ranged along the road, Shinagawa is the home of harlots, and here is the resort, not only of the ruffian, the rake, and the robber, but of the young men of the land. The finest houses in Japan belong to the woman in scarlet. The licensed government brothel, covering acres of land, is the most beautiful part of the capital.'⁷⁸ In particular, he gives us valuable insight into concubinage - both its structure and distribution. He wrote, 'It is often asked, "Are the Japanese polygamous?" The question has two answers. A Japanese has but one legal wife, but he may have two or three more women if he chooses, or can support them. One wife, if fruitful, is the rule. In case of failure of an heir, the husband is fully justified, often strongly advised even by his wife, to take a handmaid to raise up seed to preserve the

⁷⁴Cortazzi, Willis, 243

⁷⁵Cortazzi, Willis, 241

⁷⁶Cortazzi, Willis, 242

⁷⁷Griffis, Mikado, 364

⁷⁸Griffis, Mikado, 362

ancestral line.⁷⁹ On the other hand, the phenomenon was quite limited. 'After careful examination of the facts, I believe the actual proportion of men who have concubines in addition to their true wives is not over five per cent of the whole population. Of those financially able to maintain the indulgence, the percentage is probably twenty.'⁸⁰

A few years later, Isabella Bird also noted that the brothels were often the best buildings in the towns. 'Soon after leaving the **yadoya** we passed through a wide street with the largest and handsomest houses I have yet seen on both sides...From the signs I supposed them to be **yadoyas**, but on asking Ito why we had not put up at one of them, he replied that they were all **kashitsukeya**, or tea-houses of disreputable character - a very sad fact.'⁸¹ She likewise noted the ambivalence whereby polygamy was forbidden, but concubinage allowed. 'At Nikko I asked him how many legal wives a man could have in Japan, and he replied, "Only one lawful one, but as many others (**mekake**) as he can support, just as Englishmen have".'⁸² Thus she heard of a man who 'has three "wives" himself. One keeps a **yadoya** in Kiyoto, another in Morioka, and the third and youngest is with him here.'⁸³ At the end of the century, Alice Bacon noted the various grades of sexual worker. 'Below the geisha in respectability stands the **joro**, or licensed prostitute. Every city in Japan has its disreputable quarter, where the various **joro**, or licensed houses of prostitution, are situated.'⁸⁴ She likewise noted the less hostile attitude towards the profession. 'Japanese public opinion, while it recognizes the evil as a great one, does not look upon the professional prostitute with the loathing which she inspires in Christian countries.'⁸⁵ And she noted that the supply of women for the licensed houses of prostitution was particularly concentrated on the areas of north eastern Japan. 'Now, in northern Japan the winters are long and hard, and the most industrious of farmers and fisher-folk can wring only a care subsistence from the conditions of their toil. It is from these villages perhaps, more than from any other sources, that the girls are obtained to supply the

⁷⁹Griffis, Mikado, 557

⁸⁰Griffis, Mikado, 557

⁸¹Bird, Tracks, 50

⁸²Bird, Tracks, 168

⁸³Bird, Tracks, 171

⁸⁴Bacon, Japanese Girls, 239

⁸⁵Bacon, Japanese Girls, 240

joroya of the great cities.⁸⁶

The ubiquity of brothels in small Japanese towns and villages is well shown in a set of oral histories covering the period roughly 1890 to 1930 in an area to the north-east of Tokyo. This mentions brothels very frequently.⁸⁷ This account of semi-rural life is totally different from the picture we gain from comparable sources from England for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸⁸ It was a tradition which seems to have continued into Japanese communities in the 1930s.⁸⁹

A recent compilation of accounts of life in nineteenth century and early twentieth century Japan gives ample documentation of the sale of girls to brothels.⁹⁰ The numbers were very large, particularly in years of dearth and from the northern counties. For instance, we are told that 'In 1934, the number of girls sent from the six northern prefectures to work in brothels (4,521), geisha houses (2,196), restaurants where drinks and entertainment were provided, (5,952), and cafes (3,271) was enormous.⁹¹ The treatment of the inmates of the brothels was often vicious⁹², and parents often did not wish to send their daughters there. Yet the decision to go is more complicated than this, especially in desperate years in desperate regions. 'The parents insist that they will never let their daughters go, even if they cannot eat, but the daughters say they cannot bear to see their parents suffer an, with a greater sense of self-sacrifice...⁹³

⁸⁶Bacon, *Japanese girls*, 328/29

⁸⁷cf pp. 41,42-3,45,69,83,90,160,177,203,233 and there are also mentions of geishas on other occasions 58,105,139,153,156ff,160ff (see also the novel about a merchant son and his sexual life, Sarah ref XXX)

⁸⁸e.g. Atkinson, *Forty Years*; Thompson, *Lark Rise*; Blythe, *Akenfield*

⁸⁹see Embree, *Suya Mura*, 131

⁹⁰Hane, 129, 134, 210-11

⁹¹Hane, 115

⁹²cf Hane, 216

⁹³Hane, 115

The acceptance of a high level of extra-marital sexuality by husbands, or of sexual encounters by those men who were unable to marry, is clearly related to the absence, in Japan, of the Christian belief that marriage and sex are identical. The idea that sex outside marriage was 'sinful', an old tradition in the West, is hardly developed in Japan, as one can see whether one looks at the great novels such as the **Genji** or the long history of open 'pornography' in art. What effect did all this have on marital fertility, let alone disease patterns?

A further study of this dimension might suggest that extra-marital sex, or just flirtation with women other than one's wife, may have been a very important part of a pattern which kept down marital fertility, particularly once a certain desired number of children had been reached, or a man had lost his wife. Other aspects of the pattern, including the long gaps between child-births and absence of widow remarriage, could all have been importantly affected by the ease of extra-marital liaisons, whether with prostitute, concubine or geisha. It has been observed that the separation of sex for pleasure and for reproduction means that 'Pleasureful sex is extramarital' in many families in modern Japan.⁹⁴ Once the need for heirs was satisfied, the man might often have ended sexual relations with his wife. One aspect of this was noted long ago by Hearn. 'Concubinage, the privilege of the rich, had its evil side; but it had also the effect of relieving the wife from the physical strain of rearing many children in rapid succession.'⁹⁵ As for the fertility of the prostitutes and concubines, it would require further research to see what happened in such cases. The rather bizarre theory of the eighteenth century demographer, Short, for instance, suggested a mechanism for lowered fertility among such a group. 'From a Mixture of several genital liquors come barren; Hence common Prostitutes (whilst such) rarely conceive; who yet, when married, and faithful to their Husbands, breed and bear as well as other Women.'⁹⁶

The proportion not married.

The age at commencing and 'ending', marriage was combined with the second feature of the 'west European marriage pattern', namely the proportion ever married. In the majority of human societies, almost all able-bodied women marry and have children. Only in western Europe, did relatively large numbers of women never marry. England was an extreme case. In the period 1600-49, some 20.5 per cent of women never married, and in 1650-99 the proportion was even higher at 22.9 per cent.⁹⁷ For a pre-industrial agrarian population to have nearly one quarter of its women never marrying is very unusual. There were even periods when the rates were up to 300 per thousand, or nearly a third of all

⁹⁴Coleman, *Family*, 175

⁹⁵Hearn, *Kokoro*, 149

⁹⁶Short, *Increase*, 28

⁹⁷Wrigley, *Reconstitution (xerox)*, 176

women did not marry.⁹⁸ This high proportion never marrying in the later seventeenth century meant that the preventive check could be lowered if necessary. Thus in 1700-49 the never marrying proportion dropped to 11.6 per cent and in 1750-99 to 5.9 per cent.⁹⁹ The levels were beginning to approach those normal in other, non-European, societies.

The general position in Japan does not fit readily into either the west European or 'non-western' pattern. Thus we are told that 'Birthrates dropped along with nuptiality in the eighteenth century as increasing numbers of individuals failed to marry and as women married late and shortened their span of childbearing.' (5:554) Not only were marriages postponed even later in 'years of economic hardship', but 'It was also the custom for only one son in each household to marry', (4:700) for 'marriage was largely restricted to the head of the household or his successor.' (5:553) Even in the early seventeenth century there is evidence that 'a sizable number of agricultural labourers dependent on and perhaps residing with patrimonial landlords did not marry.' (5:553) This trend continued. Thus 'Various village studies have demonstrated a gradual and long-term decrease in the percentage of married women that accompanied the decline in household size.'¹⁰⁰

The specific figures, however, are not entirely satisfactory. Hayami showed in his study of Suwa county that the proportion of women aged 21-40 who were married tended to vary from 70 to 80 per cent, with an average of 77 per cent.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, this includes those aged 21-23 who would shortly marry. But even allowing for that, it would seem that we might be getting rates of 15 per cent of non-married women, which is not far from the European pattern. (qv Hajnal XXX) Hanley also found that 'the percentage of women never married was higher than it is today' and that in most periods '80 percent of the women aged 35-39 were married.' Though she warns us that 'these percentages should not be misconstrued as representing women ever married; they are for women living with their husbands at the time', they are not inconsistent with a figure of 15 per cent women never married.¹⁰² This also fits with her statement that 'On the average, most households contained one woman in the childbearing ages, but nearly a third of these were unmarried.'¹⁰³ More recent work by Yoichiro Sasaki and Susan

⁹⁸see graph, 262; Wrigley, *Population History*, 252

⁹⁹ibid, 176

¹⁰⁰ibid

¹⁰¹Hayami in Laslett, 501

¹⁰²Hanley, 250

¹⁰³ibid

Hanley again suggests that perhaps 20 percent of those aged 30-9 were not currently married, though in some cases this was caused by death of a spouse or divorce.¹⁰⁴ Kalland believes that 'Many people remained unmarried and households with bachelors and spinsters were common',¹⁰⁵ though Feeney cites some evidence which tends to suggest a modification of the high figures of non-marriage¹⁰⁶, and Cornell has argued forcefully that spinsters were rare in pre-modern Japan.¹⁰⁷ As she points out, it is significant that there is no word equivalent to 'spinster', meaning an unmarried woman.¹⁰⁸

Thus, in terms of proportion ever-marrying, the Japanese pattern was again probably less extreme than the English, but there was much more non-marriage than in most Asian societies. As Hayami summarizes the situation, 'In Japan, although the proportion marrying was higher than in the West, it did not reach 100 percent at any age.'¹⁰⁹ The Japanese figures, however, may be brought more or less into line with the English by a second feature which is less often noticed, that is the question of what happens when a spouse, and particularly the husband, dies.

In England, there was a custom which demographers have sometimes described as 'serial monogamy', namely that after a marriage was broken by the death of a spouse the widow or widower usually, and fairly swiftly, re-married. For instance, on the basis of a listing of a seventeenth century English parish, Laslett found that of the 72 husbands in a village, no less than 21 were recorded as having been married more than once. Laslett concludes that 'once a man reached the marriage age he would tend to go on getting married whenever he found himself without a wife...The law holds for women too, but is weaker in their case...'¹¹⁰ In fact, I remember working on this in the case of Earls Colne and coming up with suggestions that women re-married more easily than men, and more quickly. Which surprised us at the time. (to check XXX) With fairly high adult mortality, this would keep women, in particular, in the 'at risk of conception' category. In England, according to Burn, both common law and church law in the

¹⁰⁴Hanley and Wolf (eds), *Family (xerox)*, 140-1, 213-6

¹⁰⁵Kalland, *Famines*, 54

¹⁰⁶Feeney, *Rice*, 29

¹⁰⁷Cornell, *Spinsters (xerox)*, *passim esp.* 338

¹⁰⁸*ibid*, 335

¹⁰⁹Hayami, *Fossa (xerox)*, 61

¹¹⁰Laslett, *Lost World*, 104

seventeenth century allowed a widow to remarry at any time.¹¹¹

Yet in a couple of asides, Smith suggests that this may not have been so in Japan. He noted that 'remarriage was less frequent than we had imagined'¹¹², elaborating on this as follows. 'We had expected a higher rate of remarriage in incomplete marriages than we found. Only one in three widowers and one in five widows remarried.'¹¹³ It may well be that once again the demographic statistics have uncovered a cultural attitude which was both powerful and deserves more attention. A hint of this is given in the classic film about post-war Japan, **Tokyo Story**, where towards the end of the film the widowed daughter-in-law is urged by her parents in law to get re-married. They are aware of how difficult this is for her to contemplate, but stress that 'The old days are gone when a widow couldn't re-marry.' It is quite consistent with the structure of a Japanese family that once a daughter-in-law had some children and settled in, it would be very disruptive if she re-married. A hint at the difficulties of the situation is given by Inouye. 'A widow is, as long as she remains in the family, maintained by her son or daughter's husband. Until recently she had, if she wishes to remarry, first to return to her own family and become a spinster again, so to speak, by re-assuming her maiden name.'¹¹⁴ This is something to look at further, as I suspect it is an important pattern. (XXX) Along with other features it would reinforce the short duration of the period of child-bearing, but by terminating it unusually early, rather than starting it at the unusually late age as in England.

¹¹¹Burn, Ecclesiastical Law, ii,416. For some indications of rapid rates of re-marriage see Hair, Population Studies, 64. For some reflections on medieval re-marriage, see Firth, Inheritance, 91, Bennett, Pastors, 35.

¹¹²Smith, Nakahara, 14

¹¹³ibid, 100

¹¹⁴Inouye, Home, 218