THE ROOTS OF AN IDEA; PART TWO. 1977 TO 1993

The move to Lode in the autumn of 1976 thus to a certain extent coincided with the end of an intense learning and emotional experience. The events of 1977 and **The Origins of Individualism** had this background.

In 1977 I seemed to be suddenly tugged away from the theme of marriage, family and fertility, about which I had been brooding for so long and suddenly 'had' to write **The Origins of English Individualism**. Hardly had the main writing been finished, however, than I returned to the subject, in particular reflecting on what effects my paradigm shift had on my understanding on that part of the demographic problem concerned with fertility. I obviously wrote the paper in late September/early October 1977, to be revised for the Malinowski Lecture on 'Modes of Reproduction' in January 1978, a pun half to tease the Marxists, half to reflect my interest in fertility. Probably the best way to encapsulate the development of my ideas here is to quote the resume of the lecture which appeared in **Man**[1]. I first outlined the inadequacy of theories which explained the relatively low fertility of England by such factors as technology. I located the crucial mechanism as marriage. The most important part of the argument, which incorporated the findings of **Individualism** and summarized them in the demographic context.

'The reason why England breaks the hypothesis that links the means of production and the attitude to reproduction is that, as Marx realised in his criticism of Malthus, it is not the productivity or necessity of children's labour that is the key to the matter, but rather the value of children to their parents and kin (Marx 1973: 606). The solution lies in the realm of the relations of production, in other words kinship and concepts of property. What is now becoming clear is that in most "peasant" societies, where the "family is the basic unit of peasant ownership, consumption and social" (Shanin 1971, 241), in order to maximise production one must also increase reproduction. The social and the demographic units overlap. The problem is that England has been regarded as yet another "peasant" society by Marx, Weber and subsequent historians and sociologists, and we would therefore have expected an emphasis on fertility. It is now becoming clear that from at least the thirteenth century England seems to have been different from other recorded peasantries, whether in Europe or Asia, in its fundamental economic and social structure. There was no concept of "family property"; the basic unit was not a group of parents and children but the individual. This was enshrined in the thirteenth century maxim ***Nemo est heres viventis****, no-one is the heir of a living man (Pollock and Maitland 1968: 308). A child was not part of a property-owning group, a productive and consuming unit, with his parents. England for centuries before the industrial revolution had no "domestic mode of production". This view of English history, which runs contrary to the received wisdom, helps to explain why there was such an unusual fertility pattern. It also helps to explain many other features which are associated with the peculiar intellectual, social, political and economic history*

[1] See in Man, and in ed. Hawthorn

of England (Macfarlane 1978).

We may distinguish two "modes of reproduction". Where, as in most large peasant societies, the basic unit of society is a family or kin group, each new child is an asset, contributing to the welfare of the group, increasing prestige and political power as well as economic well-being. In this situation family planning goes right against the interests of both the group and the individual. The other extreme case is well documented for hunter-gatherers and modern industrial societies. It is the one where the individual is not subsumed into a family group. Here children do not provide the means to affluence or prestige, but must be chosen as one among a set of alternative paths to happiness and security. England in the centuries before the industrial revolution is also an example of this case and suggests that the pattern is not connected to the techniques of production as such but rather to the nature of ownership and the distribution of wealth. Where the units of production, consumption, ownership and reproduction are one and the same, people will desire children and fertility will be high; where the individual is the basic unit, operating in different spheres with different people, then children will not be desired in the same way. Until this fact is fully appreciated, attempts to bludgeon unwilling "peasants" to give up what they perceive to be their economic livelihood are bound to fail.'[2]

When I sent a copy of the full text to Geoffrey Hawthorn for the collection he was editing for **The Journal of Development Studies**, I received back an enthusiastic post-card (which incidentally started me off on my interest in the **hedgehog** which knows 'one big thing') dated 10 October 1977, only three months after starting to write **Individualism** which said: 'Have **just this moment** finished your "Modes of Reproduction" and wanted to say straight away **how** exciting and right I think it is. I was really thrilled.' Although later I ran into some serious criticism from other demographers (as summarized by me in XXX), this enthusiastic response was very helpful at a time when I was still finishing the draft of **Individualism** It also indicates how close the link was between the economic and social context being explained in **Individualism** and other ideas I had long been brooding over in relation to marriage and fertility.

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The period between 1978 and 1985 was on in which, apart from various diversions, such as writing **Justice and the Mare's Ale** and **Introduction to English Historical Records** , (and completing the main phase of the Earls Colne Project), I continued to wrestle almost exclusively with the **fertility** side of the problem, developing the idea in the Malinowski Lecture and doing further research on England. Mortality was almost entirely laid on one side. Throughout this period I continued to lecture and teach on demography, particularly developing my thoughts on Malthus and Boserup, and trying to take stock of important work being done n the Third World by people like Cain, Caldwell, McNicoll and others. Again I focused on fertility and the **consequences** of rapid population growth. In the mid 1980s the population paper started to be done in alternate years and my lectures sank back to the 2nd year level.

[2]Man, new series, 13, p.658

Looking through my notes does not indicate any important development at the theoretical level. I had also become very interested in other topics, such as the development of theoretical structures in the social sciences.

There are some traces of development in the separate journal which I started to keep to record ideas and plans and which I shall refer to as my **Thoughts** book. On 26.12.1983 I wrote under the heading 'Fertility and the English family' that I might write a book. This would start with the *'Wrigley/Schofield findings about the peculiar fertility structure of seventeenth and eighteenth-century England. A rise in **fertility**, due to changes in marriage, the cause of rapid population rise in the eighteenth century. A conundrum resolved - but leads to **new** conundrums. Namely what were the social and other **causes** of the pattern of fertility and marriage?*' I envisaged a set of puzzles and resolutions, as follows. *The 'conundrum' (Wrigley) > resolved leads to further puzzles > resolved (by explaining the framework of reproduction) > further puzzles (why family system) > functional explanation >. I drew the whole thing as a kind of 'maze/labyrinth'.*

The next day, I tried a slightly different approach, but centring around the same puzzle. I asked whether *'In order to pursue this further, necessary to examine carefully the social framework of fertility. Is it possible to use the framework of a) Kingsley Davis b)Malthus' work to help with this? Examine Malthus carefully on this topic.*' This was be fear fruit later. Meanwhile, I went on with images of mazes and woods and trying to **escape** from the confusion, illustrated with little drawings. I also again resorted to the key difference between societies based on the individual and those based on the domestic group, as elaborated in my Malinowski lecture.

During the next few days there are further thoughts about the implications of Wrigley. Work on his **Past and Present** article (ref.XXX), and on 28th December I allude to the peculiar views of Darwin when he tries to calculate whether he should marry. There are various plans, incorporating work of Laslett, Hajnal, Wrigley and others and longer discussions of the link between romantic love and the age at marriage, the links between population and economy. On 29th I had the plan of a 14 chapter book on the subject, concentrating on English marriage and further plans appear in early 1984. A fuller plan appeared in March 1984, divided into three parts, of which I had written a draft of some 90,000 words. Further attempted summaries appear through the following months. On 16.6.1984 everything seemed in place to write a revised version on the auspicious 7.7.1984 I wrote of a *'final, gentle, re-write'*. The progress of the writing is very well recorded in a number of observations between then and early September. On 10.9.1984 I wrote:

*'Today, at 12.30, wrote the last words of the **conclusion** of the above. Although, no doubt, it will need re-shaping in various ways, at least its all more or less down on paper - in under 2 months. So, what a relief and I think, on the whole, it is a book to be proud of, though no doubt it will distress some, annoy others, and amuse some. But it is in many ways the book that has been struggling to get out since before **Individualism** and I feel the albatross slipping from my back **at last**. The work all started with my M.Phil thesis in 1967, so it is now 17 years since I started to wrestle with the subject - and many times it has seemed to get more and more unwritable. But now, I think, its in the bag and will cause, I hope, as much interest as **Individualism**, though it is*

a less aggressive and combines a 'mature' book, written, I think with malice toward none, and without the anger of ***Justice*** *etc. Above all I hope it will restore to those who used and loved through the centuries that dignity of which they have been robbed by the ranting of Stone and Shorter.*

The layout/length was this.

(Preface - to be written?)

Problems.
1. Foundations of modern society: a puzzle resolved
2. Malthus' explanation of the Malthusian solution
3. A simple model of the Malthusian marriage system.

Purposes of marriage: children
4. Benefits and costs of children
5. Separation from home
6. Insure against risk and old age

Purposes of marriage: companionship and love
7. Romantic love and arranged marriage
8. Contradicting purposes and desirability of marriage
9. Necessity for love

Rules of marriage
10. Duration and durability of marriage
11. Whom one marries
12. Economic arrangements at marriage
13. Courting and wedding

Conclusion
14. The Malthusian marriage system in perspective.'

In fact, the final version as published in **Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840**(1986) was somewhat different. In particular the first section, was reshaped into

The Malthusian Marriage System
1. Charles Darwin and Thomas Malthus
2. The importance of Malthusian marriage
3. The Malthusian marriage system and its origins.

The more ambitious first chapter with its intriguing title, 'The Foundations of Modern Society: a puzzle resolved' disappeared and the central dominance of the Malthusian framework was solidified.

In this book I attempted to answer one half of the demographic puzzle I had been wrestling with for over twenty years, namely the reasons for the unusual demographic history of England and in particular that past concerned with restrained fertility. It had become obvious since Hajnal's work that the key lay in the European marriage system and in particular a late and selective marriage pattern which could be varied in some sort of complex relation to the economy. In this book I explored in great detail the various pressures which lay behind this system, a system which Malthus recognized in his discussions of the 'preventive check' in the second edition of his **Principles of Population**. In the final chapter I showed how the marriage system was linked to economic growth, and arose out of the early capitalist and individualistic nature of English society which I had probed in **Individualism**. Thus with this book I felt I had solved the conundrum which Wrigley had set - how did the marriage system work and what were its correlates.

In an article on 'Revolutions' written, it would appear, in the same month as I finished **Marriage** (September 1984), I summarized my theories concerning marriage. I also showed that I was still interested in the other half of the topic namely mortality. My ideas on the subject, later developed in **Savage Wars**, are worth giving to show how far I had reached in again perceiving an **oddness**. The oddness of fertility was now explained through the marriage system, but the oddness of mortality was both marked and only partly accounted for by the reasons I gave in 1984. I outlined the oddness thus.

'In the mortality statistics there were two outstanding features. First, England from the Black Death onwards seems to have escaped from the "crisis" regime whereby every few generations there would be a massive rise in mortality, usually caused by a war that dislocated an already threshold-treading economy. Such warfare would lead to massive famine and disease. In England there were, of course, continued epidemics up to the seventeenth century, and there were signs of famine deaths in Cumberland up to the same period. Yet in relation to the cataclysms which the painful history of much of continental Europe, India, China, Russia and elsewhere shows up to the eighteenth century and later, the English 'crises' are relatively insignificant in the 400 years between 1350 and 1750. A second notable feature of mortality was it is relatively low perennial level. While much higher than today, as compared to many 'pre-transition' populations we have here one of the two features of what Wrigley had termed a "low-pressure" demographic regime.[3] Infant, child and adult mortality were not as high as they are in many pre-industrial populations, a feature that is apparent from at least the fifteenth century."[4]

Although I did not follow this up, this set up a second puzzle. Why was England so free of war, famine and disease and why was there a 'relatively low perennial level of mortality'. In other words, why and

[3] Wrigley and Schofield, English Population, p.184

[4] Culture, pp.155-6

how had it escaped from both the 'classic' pre-demographic transition or 'crisis' patterns of mortality. And how had it done so very early?

The lower than expected fertility and mortality in England constituted an unusual and very early deviation from the classic 'demographic transition' model. I concluded by pointing out that perhaps we needed to think in terms of **two** demographic transitions in England, or perhaps even three. *'This flexible demographic system, one part of the Malthusian marriage pattern, was not a new creation of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, it would seem, but is evident from the fourteenth century at least. This makes it difficult to talk of the 'demographic transition' occurring in England. To a certain extent, it had already happened before the Reformation, although the equilibrium of births and deaths established at the medium level by the seventeenth century would drop to a much lower level at the end of the nineteenth.'*[5] This was an idea which would re-surface, with renewed force, some ten years later as I investigated these problems once again.

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After this burst of effort to resolve the fertility part of the puzzle I turned with relief to something else. One might sense that the first stimulus of the encounter with anthropology and the trip to Nepal was beginning to wane. The data of a comparative kind which would stimulate enquiry in relation to England was running dry. I had got as far as I could along this particular theoretical line and thought it would be good to turn elsewhere. My sense of relief and decision to turn outwards is well recorded in 20th January 1985 when I wrote in my **Thoughts** book: *'At about 6 p.m. on Sunday 20th managed to **finish** checking text and footnotes (of **Marriage**). Now Sarah will clean up on computer and then can be sent off to John Davey. Hooray! Took almost **eighteen years** from starting to collect information (for my M.Phil thesis) to the final completion of the book - though the final **writing** took less than three months. A **lovely** feeling and relief to have it off my mind and can now turn to other things without **guilt**...'*

This new thing is revealed on the same week-end under an entry 'Project India' where I wrote 'Starting to think about our trip to India. It would be nice to see this within a **wider** context of anthropological/teaching interest.' At first this in fact took us towards north-east India and the Nagas of Assam.[6] For some five or so years our efforts were mainly focused on technological innovation in relation to producing the first anthropological videodisc, in association with a large text database, new retrieval system, museum exhibition and book all based around the Nagas. The following year, in 1986, with Sarah Harrison, I paid my first return visit to Nepal, after 16 years. This would become an annual event, lasting from one to three months, and increasingly devoted to creating a long-term demographic and economic database and a film record of a changing mountain community. In 1990 we paid our first visit to Japan, which gave a third broadening to our horizons. What up to 1984 had been a problem to be solved principally on the basis of English evidence, with some comparison to a limited fieldwork in

[5] Culture, p.157

[6] Insert brief description of Naga project.

Nepal, could now be set in a much wider and deeper framework of both time and space.

The demographic problems did not disappear during this period and I continued to lecture on the subject. But it is significant that my '**Thoughts**' book contains no further reference to the population puzzles, and particularly the remaining puzzle of mortality. At times I lamented the absorption in data gathering and technology. For example on 24.8.1988 I wrote *that 'After three days of just sitting in the barn and **reading**...have realized a)what a **treadmill** we have got onto with the videodisc and the Nagas b) how **lovely** it is just to be surrounded by books, peace, and no responsibilities c) how **parched** my mind is for ideas/theories.*' Despite various good resolutions, however, I remained locked into data accumulation in particular the development of the **Cambridge Database Systems Interactive**, which I was developing with Dr. Martin Porter and Michael Bryant - the first probabilistic retrieval system working on a laptop.[7]

I had recurrent hopes of writing something theoretical, for instance on 18.3.1989 noting that *'Thought a tiny bit further (and discussed with John Davey my publisher) the eventual possibility of a big book on **The Contradictions of Capitalism**. Maybe this can be going on in the background and write next year?*' The pressures of the Naga videodisc project and adaptation of MUSCAT, as well as increasing bureaucratic pressure in the Department as Ernest Gellner drew towards the end of his Professorship and I became a sort of stop-gap Head of Department, meant that the book was not written. In any case, as the excitement of the new developments of laptop computers and videos hit me, I was happy both to tinker with new ways of collecting and analysing data. New courses on visual anthropology and the history of technology absorbed a good deal of energy and time.

In 1990 we had an immensely stimulating trip to Japan and I reported on 25.8.1990 that *'During this, among other things, started to think about plans for the next book, or possibly several papers and did a good deal of writing.'* On 1.1.1991 as term approached I noted 'Still in the back of my mind is my work on capitalism etc. which I hope to be able to develop in the form of lectures, if nothing else...' In March 1993 I heard I had been proposed for a Personal Chair and chose the slightly tongue-in-cheek title of 'Professor of Anthropological Science', which Ernest Gellner thought reflected my obvious interest in technology etc. At this time I started to plan out an archive in the roof of the barn where all my past papers could be stored, the 'fulfilling a dream I have long had...' (3.3.1991). In late 1990 I had met Gerry Martin and from then on his moral, intellectual and financial support was an enormous source of strength and helped to move my work forward much faster, so that I could start to think of pursuing theoretical matters. There are various notes on his kindness in the **Thoughts** bok, for instance under 28.7.1991 and 12.9.1991.

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In August 1991 I started to return seriously to wider theoretical matters, under a heading, *'Preliminary thoughts on England and Japan: the twin miracles'*. It was about this time also that, with Gerry's backing, I decided to put all of my 40,000 odd cards into a computerized database. Three things had come to allow this to happen - the funding to give us the computers and Penny's time (Gerry),

[7] Insert a short description of this project.

the efficient retrieval system I had developed with Martin Porter and Michael Bryant, a growing dissatisfaction with the hand system. Through the year 1992 I wrote an increasing amount on the comparison of Japan and England and began to plan out a book on the subject. The summer of 1992 was a very fruitful period, writing various pieces of a theoretical kind, on Louis Dumont, Norman Jacobs, drafts of my Radcliffe-Brown lecture and so on. I noted that *'The CDSI system 'Topics' is proving a revelation - now have about 26,000 'cards' in, thanks to Penny, and am finding it a very exciting and inspiring* ***resource.***' (30.8.1992) On that same date (exactly 3 years ago today!) I noted, *'the nice thing is that I feel* ***excited*** *- everything starting to interlink and fit together, so many leads that I do not know which way to turn, and a growing feeling, as with* ***Individualism****, that with the Japanese work etc. I am hooked into something really large - though what it is, remains to be seen.*'

On 3rd September 1992 I noted that I was reading very widely, *and 'feel that I am feeding water down through rocks of the mind into the artesian springs - to be drawn up on later droughts. This is now* ***worthwhile*** *because of the CDSI method and TOPICS database.*' I also noted that *'I have* ***written*** *a good deal.*' I estimated that during that summer I had written about 100,000 words, on Japanese, methodological and other themes. I was growing particularly interested in the process of creativity, memory, research - partly again under Gerry's influence. Some speculations on this are contained in the **Thoughts** book for 20.9.1992, using ideas from my reading of work on Coleridge.

At the end of November 1992, I wrote that *'My aim is gradually, over the next 6 months, to detach myself and from September on move the responsibilities over to Marilyn [Strathern], so that by July/August she is coming to be effectively in charge of larger matters.'* The following term was extremely busy, particularly as all my goods were moved out of my room (mercury clearing) and I was running the Department (again) etc. But during another visit to Nepal in March-April 1993 I wrote down many further thoughts on the general theme of the comparison of England and Japan. The topics were noted on 3.5.1993 in my **Thoughts** book, and included *'family, work ethic, law and crime, individualism, equality, rationality, capitalism'*. What is significant is the absence of anything to do with demography. Through May and June further plans for this book were noted, but none of them alluded to demography. In August we visited Japan again and I wrote down further thoughts and gathered a great deal more material.

This takes us to 16.9.1993 when I gathered my thoughts together in my **Thoughts** book. I looked forward to further writing, free of a number of pressures, and intended to start by gathering together various pieces which *'might appear as two books - one a comparison of England and Japan -* ***Essays on the Origins of Capitalism****. The second 'Encounters' with various major thinkers about half of which is done...a three-way comparison between Nepal/Japan/England would be ideal.*' Five days later I contemplated four possible works, one on **Encounters** with thinkers, *one* ***'Essays on Comparison'*** *along the lines which I have already outlined - kinship, work, law etc. one on 'Strategies of Research: methodology in historical anthropology*'. And finally *'Contradictions of Capitalism', an historical, in-depth, comparison of the growth and nature of 3 types of civilization - Japan, England, Nepal - including causes of creativity.*' I also noted developments in ethnographic fieldwork and filming, computer development and possible a CD ROM

of Earls Colne. As I noted *'This should keep me going for next 8 years, on top of lecturing, reading, travelling etc.*' I then commented that *'In a way, what one is doing is trying to approach the huge intractable problem of modernity/capitalism/industrialism etc. from a number of different directions.*'

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Are there any signs in the period 1986-September 1993 that the demographic puzzles which I'd left in 1986 were still in my mind? In particular, are there any signs that I was even daily becoming aware that our encounter with Japan suggested that it might throw any light on the remaining puzzles of the role of demography in the industrial revolution and origins of capitalism?

In July 1990 I rapidly wrote a good deal comparing England and Japan. The third chapter was on the 'Similarity between England and Japan'. In this chapter, I considered 'demographic explanations' for the origins of modern capitalism and industrialism, which was the puzzle behind the writing I wrote:

'An explanation which has become increasingly powerful is the demographic one. Recent work in historical demography has shown that the pattern of European population growth, and particularly English population, differs quite considerably from that in other large-scale peasant societies about which we know. The characteristic pattern of most peasant societies may be termed a 'crisis' one, in other words fairly long-term swings with population building up and then being cut back, with a positive feed-back, in true Malthusian fashion, between agricultural production and population. Hence China, India, Egypt and parts of Europe had such a pattern.

What differentiated England, particularly, was that for a number of centuries, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth at least, two things happened. Firstly, population grew (by comparative standards), very slowly indeed. Secondly the usual Malthusian link between economy and population appeared to be broken. There was no longer necessarily population growth when agricultural production increased (cf. Spengler et al.); consequently capital accumulation occurred. Then, when labour was critical, population started to grow rapidly. Thus the fit was just right - holding back and then a spurt. Curiously, the only other, almost exactly equivalent pattern (though achieved by other means) was Japan.

Yet to describe this necessary pattern is not to explain it. Demography is an intervening variable, the intersection of many other patterns and in itself requiring explanation. Since the demographic pattern was both crucial and unusual, it requires explanation.'

In a later passage in the same draft I elaborated on this somewhat as follows.

'Another curious similarity is that, as opposed to most 'traditional' societies, the population of both Japan and England grew very slowly in the several centuries before the industrial spurt. In England, there was slow growth from 1450-1750, in Japan from 1600-1850. During this period, the gains of increased productivity through an agricultural revolution in both cases, were not

absorbed by the Malthusian mechanism of rapidly growing population. Again, in both cases, the fact that the two nations were islands may have given some sense of crowding and an anti-natalist attitude. But the roots of the controlled fertility were probably deeper than this.

The difference was that of the mechanisms used to control population. In England it was the 'Malthusian marriage pattern', in other words the desire for status delayed marriage. In Japan, since marriage was a group decision, and less amenable to individual choice, it was through what Malthus called 'vice' (in other words manipulating mortality rates through infanticide and abortion) rather than through limiting fertility, that population was controlled. But in each case there was a consciously planned rationality, a weighing of costs and benefits which made it possible to decide when to start and stop having children.'

After our first visit to Japan, I had immediately linked the new data into the wider theory and was beginning to realize that there were odd similarities and differences in relation to the **fertility** strategies of the two islands. There is no mention of **mortality** as yet, but clearly I was puzzled and felt that the demographic pattern was both important and 'requires explanation'. My acquaintance with Japanese history and demography at this time was very superficial and it was only over the next few years that I started to read the classic works by Hayami, Thomas Smith, Taueber, Hanley and others.

A couple of years later, I was asked to review Vol.IV of the new **Cambridge History of Japan**, covering the early modern period. I wrote the review in August 1992 and it reveals how my thinking was developing as I read more about Japan and in particular read the chapter by Susan Hanley on 'Tokugawa society: material culture, standard of living, and life-styles.' I wrote as follows, in relation to the growing wealth of Japan in the seventeenth century.

'What is unusual, however, is that the increasing wealth created in this way was not drained away by the usual forces which have arisen so many times in history. One of these is the Malthusian rise of population. There is an extraordinary parallel between the pattern of population in Japan and England, though in Japan everything happened about a century later. Population first grew rapidly in Japan in the seventeenth century as the agricultural revolution took hold; it then remained stationary for a century and a half while wealth built up; it then grew again in the early phase of industrialization. The mechanism of control was different; in Japan there was more emphasis on abortion and infanticide, rather than late and selective marriage. But the basic feature was the same, namely that the economic and the social had become separated. This led, for instance, to a situation where as wealth increased, completed family size in the late eighteenth century was only, on average, three and a half children (p.699).

Indeed, both Japan and England seem to have escaped early from that famine and epidemic dominated Malthusian world several centuries earlier than anywhere else. This volume has fascinating material on the high expectation of life, the absence of serious epidemic disease, the relative infrequency of serious famines (p.698). Indeed, estimated life expectancies *'are higher than many Japanese*

scholars find believable' and are similar to those in favoured parts of Western Europe (p.699).'[8]

The basic similarities of the restrained fertility and surprisingly low epidemic and endemic mortality rates was now becoming apparent. Having found this volume so stimulating, I decided to expand my review to include all **four** of the new volumes of the **Cambridge History of Japan** which would cover the whole period from the final decades of the twelfth century and the middle of the twentieth. This provided a new and unique chance to gain an overview of Japan over a period of over seven hundred years, which could be placed alongside what I knew of England. I wrote my review in July 1993.[REF] It was a greatly expanded version and in many ways sets out the parameters for the later book on **Savage Wars**, though I did not realize that this was what I was doing. It is therefore quoted here in full, as a summary of where I had got to in my mind in early 1993 and an indication of how I was now trying to expand my English and Nepalese models in relation to a third case, Japan.

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'**Population**.

It has for some time been apparent that one of the keys to the economic break-through in England and parts of north-western Europe lay in the unusual demographic pattern. In essence the connection is as follows. Almost all agrarian societies have suffered from what is known as a 'crisis' or 'high-pressure' demographic regime, namely one where the Malthusian predictions hold good. If there are gains in resources, these are soon swallowed up by rapidly rising population through a high fertility rate. There is then a rise in mortality through war, famine or disease, or a combination of these. This cycle inhibits long-term and sustained economic growth. It was characteristic of much of India, China and continental Europe up to the nineteenth century.

Only in parts of north-western Europe did this not occur. In these areas a 'homeostatic' or 'low-pressure' pattern emerged whereby population remained almost static for long periods even though wealth was increasing in a sustained way. High mortality did not suddenly emerge to cut back the population. The mechanisms to achieve this slow growth were, in England and other areas with the pattern, a less than maximum fertility. Where does Japan fit in?

It is worth noting first that Japan almost exactly parallelled England's pattern in terms of its overall growth of population, although the changes occurred about a century later. In England there was a considerable growth of population in the sixteenth century, which then slowed down. For the one hundred and fifty years before the industrial break through, the population grew hardly at all. In Japan there was considerable growth in the seventeenth century. We are told that "Although accurate statistics were not kept at that time, some demographers and historians place the growth rate in the range of 0.78 to 1.34 percent annually between 1550 and 1700...the country's total population grew from roughly 12 million persons to approximately 26 million to

[8]Historical Journal, 36, 2, (1993) pp. 433-4

30 million at the time of the shogun's census in 1721." (4:539, cf. also p.664) But then the population growth rate slowed down over the next 150 years, so that it only grew to xxx in 1870, a growth rate of only xxx percent per year. It then began to rise again rapidly during the early burst of economic activity (5:560), as the growing economy required more labour.

The over-all effect of this unusual pattern was that, in the precarious build-up to rapid economic growth gains in productivity were not eaten up by runaway population. People became conspicuously richer, but did not invest their growing wealth in children. Thus it is noted that the "remarkable fact is that the overall population appears to have remained at roughly the same man-land ratio throughout the Edo period." (4:26) This in itself would not at first seem to be so remarkable when we remember that the area of cultivated land doubled in this period. Yet the curiosity becomes apparent when we add the further fact that was a huge growth in cities and towns and in the productivity in land as well as a growth of crafts and manufactures. Thus while the land-person ratio remained roughly constant, the population was conspicuously richer at the end than at the beginning, and this wealth was widely spread through the population.

Just as revealing as the absolute curves of population and resources are the mechanisms by which this balance between the two was maintained. Instead of the 'high-pressure' demographic regimes to be found in all other Asian civilizations and most of Europe, England and Japan both enjoyed a 'low-pressure' regime, with relatively low mortality and fertility rates. Thus we are told that the "demographic rates in the late Tokugawa villages were remarkable for a premodern society. After falling from seventeenth-century levels, the crude birth and crude death rates were in the twenty to thirty range rather than in the forty to fifty range often observed in the recent history of less developed countries before death rates plummeted". (5:555)

If we start with mortality rates, we find that in Japan, as in England, death rates were surprisingly low for a pre-industrial society. We learn that in sample villages from the later eighteenth century onwards "most crude death rate averages were in the twenties per thousand, even in years of hardship. Death rates were more frequently below twenty than above thirty." (4:698) If we remember that such rates are characteristically in the upper thirties or mid forties per thousand in many agrarian societies, we can see how impressive this was. Indeed, so low were the mortality rates, that "Estimated life expectancies for the same samples are higher than many Japanese scholars find believable...". The expectation of life at birth in the later Tokugawa period was in the forties, and this meant that two year old children "had a life expectancy similar to those in Western Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, and one not much different from that in Japan in the early twentieth century." (4:699)

The improved diet which we noted earlier was probably one cause. Another was a combination of good sanitary arrangements and the possibility of quarantining this island against epidemic diseases from the mainland. On what was, in many ways, a very crowded island there was a surprisingly low incidence of those diseases which are associated with density. "The net result of Japanese customs with regard to sanitation was a much lower incidence of epidemic

diseases than in Europe and other parts of the world. Cholera was absent until the mid-nineteenth century and then was readily contained, and typhoid seems not have been a problem...Even dysentery...was not the killer of children that it was in the West in the nineteenth century." (4:698) Among the possible contributors may have been the custom of carefully storing night-soil and then using it in agriculture. The absence of plague (did China have plague? A.M) and smallpox, is remarkable, and must have been related to Japan's geographical position.

Thus not only were perennial mortality rates low, but the periodic major scourges which cut back numbers in other pre-modern populations, whether in Mediterranean Europe, Russia, India or China, were even more conspicuously absent in Japan than they were in England or Holland. Like England, for a period of five hundred years before industrialization, there were no huge losses through war or foreign invasion. Such absence of war was clearly related to the absence of major epidemics.

Furthermore, there seems to have been a rather unusual pattern of famine and dearth. In England, the cycle of famines, which still afflicted much of Europe, Scotland and Ireland until the nineteenth century, had been eliminated by the fifteenth century at least. On the whole, it would seem that Japan also escaped from repetitive famine and dearth very early. During the whole period from 1500 to 1900 there are only three recorded periods when there were really serious food shortages, in 1732, in the Temmei famine of 1782-1785 and the great Tempo famines of the 1830's. In the first of these, locusts swarmed over much o of western Japan and in the resulting period, rice in Edo and Osaka "cost five to seven times as much as it had during the glut of previous years". (4:451) (I am not yet certain, however, whether there was famine as well.) In the multiple year shortages of the 1782-5 period, which "were caused by summer cold spells...due chiefly to the large amounts of volcanic ash thrown into the atmosphere by an eruption of Mt. Asama." (4:496) No-one knows how may people died, but we do know that the shogun's land-tax revenue fell by more than a half. (4:466) In the four years of very bad harvests in 1832-6, we are told that tens of thousands of persons died. (5:119)

Thus the storms, droughts, volcanic eruptions, locusts and other natural disasters made Japan more volatile than England. Yet such was its growing agricultural wealth that it was in a position in 1832 where almost the whole rice harvest could be lost and no serious dearth occurred: "By itself, one bad season was an irritation rather than a tragedy". (5:118) It was only after four terrible harvests that famine emerged. One author points to the "relatively few famines and deadly epidemics during these centuries" and the fact that "two major crop failures of multiple-year duration (in the 1730s and 1780s) plus other poor harvest years did not decrease the population of this already-crowded country." This was because the Japanese "had sufficient surplus in normal or good years so that food could be stored." (4:688)

Given the absence of the usual checks to rising population, we may wonder how population was held back. As one author puts it, "The question, then, is why the Japanese had low birthrates during centuries of gradual but clear upward growth of the economy, a rise in income, and an improved standard of living. The answer is that Japanese were limiting family size through a

variety of measures, and they were doing so to maintain and improve their standard of living, rather than as a means of coping with dire circumstances..." (4:699) Let us examine this important suggestion a little further.

The major mechanism for lowering fertility in western Europe and particularly England was the 'west European marriage pattern' of late and selective marriage. (cf. Hajnal) Although not as extreme as England, it is now clear that Japan had roughly the same pattern over the several hundred years leading up to its economic spurt. As regards age at marriage, it would appear that with first marriage for females there was a "tendency to late marriages" in the Tokugawa period, though not as late as those in England. Women in Japan married for the first time "in their early to mid-twenties" (4:700), while in England it was usually in their mid-twenties. There was also selective marriage, with large numbers of persons never marrying. 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." (ibid)

Even relatively late age at marriage and large proportions not marrying was not sufficient to keep the fertility rate low enough, given the low mortality and the aspirations of the Japanese. In England and parts of western Europe, the main supplementary technique used was probably some form of 'family limitation' or contraception. In Japan, another method, which is still much preferred, was used, namely abortion and infanticide.

We are told that "All scholars agree that the Japanese resorted to abortion and infanticide as a means of limiting the number of children within marriage". It appears that "descriptions of abortion, abortionists, and the effects of this practice are abundant, this form of birth control is known to have been widely practiced throughout Japan. Abortion was an undesirable practice but was not a 'sin'." Indeed, it was condoned by the belief that infanticide was a "a means of 'returning' an infant at birth before it had become an individual and a part of society. That is, it was thought of as a form of postpartum birth control." Of course, a number of societies practice abortion and infanticide in periods of acute shortage and desperation. What is really significant is that it was not this pattern that we observe in Japan. Various studies reveal that "these methods were practiced equally in good times and bad, in villages with growing economies, and in those with limited resources for growth." (4:699-700)

The result of delayed marriage, selective marriage and some form of family limitation was that completed family size was well below that encountered in most agrarian civilizations. Whereas in the majority of peasantries completed family size is of the order of between four and

six, in Japan we are told that "In rural village samples, the average number of children in the completed family from the end of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteen was only three and a half children." As the same author points out, this "would have ensured a male heir for most but would have prevented numerous children..." (4:699)

As we shall see later, the ease of adoption of heirs lessened the need to have large families, particularly sons, and was hence an important factor behind this unusually low fertility. It was part of the answer to the much wider question of why there should have been such a pressure against 'natural' fertility.

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 they case might be. They had 'costs' as well as 'benefits'. (cf. Marriage) 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." (4:700) 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." (5:554) Children began to be 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". (5:555)

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". (5:554) Thomas Smith believed that the objectives of those who practiced infanticide in the villages he studied were to achieve "an equilibrium of some sort between family size and farm size; an advantageous distribution of the sexes in children; possibly the spacing of children in a way convenient to the mother; and the avoidance of a particular sex in the next child". (quoted in 5:555)

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. The attitude sought to maintain a balance between resources and population, rather than an unquestioning drive to seek maximum fertility. The high degree of flexibility, security and relative affluence that is needed as a pre-condition for such a view has often been stressed by demographers. Thus it tells us a good deal about the conditions in early modern Japan and England.

There was the widespread possibility of hiring non-family labour through the institution of

servanthood and hence the non-necessity of a large family labour force. There was the flexibility of adoption in the Japanese case. There was the relative affluence and the possibility of protecting oneself in old age through savings. There was the political security. There was the expectation that those children one did have would live. All this was, of course, circular. There was a 'virtuous circle'. People could plan and limit; they became richer; it was then easier to plan, just as Malthus had argued. Yet it was a very unusual situation in the world until recently.

The result was that the Japanese demographic situation was unusual by Asian standards, but remarkably like that of western Europe. Writing of Japan, Yamamura concluded that "all evidence points to a remarkable similarity with pre and early industrial population trends in Europe and no similarity at all between Tokugawa Japan and the other nations of Asia today". (quoted in 5:555) More generally "Social indicators such as mean household size, birthrates, death rates, life expectancy, sex ratios...increasingly came to resemble those in modern societies" (5:562) The consequences in both north-western Europe and Japan were immense.'

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Thus by early 1993 my mind was filled with many different experiences, problems and ideas developed over the previous thirty years of study. It is perhaps helpful to step back from this chronological account for a moment and look at the three central rivers which finally flowed into the Savage Wars of Peace and its sequels one by one, before taking up the story of the last few months before I started the book.

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