

## THE CONTROL OF WAR.

In considering the 'violent causes' which check population, Malthus wrote that 'war is the most prominent and striking feature; and after this may be ranked famines and violent diseases.'<sup>1</sup> It was not by accident that Malthus put 'War' as the first of the great 'positive' checks in pre-industrial societies. For it is not merely the killing of thousands in battles, but also the much greater effects of dislocation, often leading on to a massive number of deaths by famine and disease, which explain why war and conquest have tended to be the major form of 'crisis' in most agrarian civilizations.

Perennial warfare is the basis of many tribal societies. This is a world where it is difficult for 'civilization' to emerge. As Sahlins put it, 'The social complexity and cultural richness of civilization depends on institutional guarantees of peace. Lacking these institutional means and guarantees, tribesmen live in a condition of war and war limits the scale, complexity and all-round richness of their culture...'<sup>2</sup>

When the civilizations based on writing, cities, and settled agriculture arose, war was partially controlled, but when it occurred, its effects were far more devastating. We can see this, for instance, in relation to the massive destructions caused by wars in Egypt, India and China. The population history of Egypt shows that of the seven events which are believed to have led to massive declines in the Egyptian population between 664 B.C. and 1966, five were thought to be the result of the Persian, Macedonian, Roman, Arab and Turkish conquests. The other two were plagues.<sup>3</sup>

In India and the Middle East, 'the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century were followed in the late fourteenth century by the conquests of Timur, who ranged from Anatolia in the West to India in the East and marked his victories with minarets and pyramids of skulls.'<sup>4</sup> Landes gives a vivid picture of the area: 'nomads from the steppe, Russians spreading southward and eastward, the Afghan tribes and Mogul emperors to the east, the nations of Christian Europe in the Danube valley and the Mediterranean. The land was forever criss-crossed with armies; siege followed siege, massacre followed massacre. Even the ghastliest carnages of the Thirty Years' War...pale alongside the bloodbaths of Delhi.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Malthus, i, 153

<sup>2</sup> Sahlins, Tribesmen XXX

<sup>3</sup> Hollingsworth, diag. p.311

<sup>4</sup> Landes, Prometheus, 34

<sup>5</sup> Landes, Prometheus, 34

In China, there were eras of peace, but when these ended the numbers killed and the destruction was on an even more massive scale. For instance, the invasions and devastations of the Mongols are thought to have reduced the Chinese population to half of its former level within fifty years, over 60 million people dying or failing to be replaced.<sup>6</sup> Another immense catastrophe occurred with the Manchu invasion in the 1660s which Jones believed 'cost that vast land seventeen per cent of its population. That was a loss of twenty-five million people...'<sup>7</sup> Again in the nineteenth century, the Taiping Rebellion 'was the bloodiest war of the nineteenth century. It lasted from 1850 to 1864, causing 20 million deaths...'<sup>8</sup> Ho puts it at nearly 30 million.<sup>9</sup>

Against this background, where massive destruction continued until the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, western Europe from the sixteenth century onwards appears relatively secure. By the sixteenth century, 'the only enemy that Europeans had to fear was other Europeans;...the virulence of fighting diminished, particularly in that north-western corner of Europe...'<sup>10</sup> Jones agrees that 'Europe probably lost fewer men per 1,000 to warfare than did Asia, but it is likely that the ratio of capital equipment she lost was much less still.'<sup>11</sup> He gives details of the relative destruction, noting in particular that the water-irrigated rice cultivation of much of Asia was much more likely to be deeply damaged by warfare. The consequence was often that famine ensued after war and then there were epidemics. He thus concludes that 'Europe's overall losses seem markedly less serious than those of Asia.'<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Mokyr points out, following Jones, 'Only those parts of Eurasia that were spared the conquests of Mongols - Japan and western Europe - were able to generate sustained technological progress.'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Clark, *Population Growth*, 72

<sup>7</sup> Jones, 36

<sup>8</sup> Wright, 'War' in *Int. Enc. Soci. Sci.*, 458

<sup>9</sup> cited in Dumond, *Population Growth*, 304

<sup>10</sup> Landes, *Prometheus*, 34

<sup>11</sup> Jones, 37

<sup>12</sup> Jones, *Miracle*, 38

<sup>13</sup> Mokyr, *Lever*, 186

Yet we should not forget that all this is relative. The constant wars and battles over Europe until the twentieth century are familiar in outline to most of us. There was a state of periodic warfare that beset much of western Europe from the fall of Rome through to the nineteenth century. The Hundred Years War, the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century and, worst of all, the Thirty Years War of the seventeenth century were only the most serious and long-term of the wars which occurred.

In the case of the Thirty Years War, for example, on one estimate the consequences of the war is reckoned to have lowered the population of Germany from 21 to 13.5 million.<sup>14</sup> Kamen comes to the general conclusion 'that over the German lands as a whole the urban centres lost one-third of their population and the rural areas lost about forty per cent.'<sup>15</sup> The effects of these wars are obvious. As Mokyr notes, wars 'destroyed some of the most active centres of technological change in Europe, especially in the southern Netherlands (1568-90) and most of Germany (1616-48).'<sup>16</sup> Likewise, wars had earlier destroyed the rich potential of the Italian cities in the fifteenth century, and would be one of the major factor in the relative decline of Holland in the eighteenth. As Cipolla concludes, 'From a purely economic point of view, war was a much greater evil than the plague...War...hit capital above all, and those who survived found themselves in conditions of the most abject misery.'<sup>17</sup> Writing of another of the regional conflicts, Parker concludes that '...it seems clear that the prolonged conflict generated by the Revolt of the Netherlands served to retard the growth of the northern republic (and particularly of its landward provinces), to inflict permanent damage on the economy of large areas of the Spanish empire, and to ruin for two centuries the prosperity of 'Belgium'.<sup>18</sup>

There are some grounds for believing that devastating and destructive war was partially brought under control in much of Europe from about 1660 onwards. As Malthus was to note towards the end of the next century, 'The destruction occasioned by war has unquestionably abated, both on account of its occurring, on the whole, less frequently, and its ravages not being so fatal, either to man or the means of his support, as they were formerly.'<sup>19</sup> Sorokin was to develop this theme. He showed that warfare

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<sup>14</sup> Russell, *Violence*, 182

<sup>15</sup> Kamen, *Iron Century*, 43

<sup>16</sup> Mokyr, *Lever*, 76

<sup>17</sup> Cipolla, *Before*, 133-4

<sup>18</sup> Parker in ed. Winter, *War*, 66

<sup>19</sup> Malthus, *Summary*, 254; cf also Malthus, *Population* i, 315

increased in Europe between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, 'then by the seventeenth century Europe had attained a new integrated system of ultimate values... Consequently there occurred the decline of the curve of war-magnitude during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.'<sup>20</sup>

Nef was one of those who suggested that war in Europe went through three phases in the early modern period; medieval warfare, which was moderately destructive, then a period of increased destruction with the introduction of guns and the religious disputes in the sixteenth century, and then a tempering of war from the middle of the seventeenth century. The rising tempo of war in the sixteenth century was obvious: 'With religious zeal so little relieved by the supreme Christian virtue of charity, and armed on all sides with weapons unknown to the violent of earlier ages, an almost universal slaughter became possible.'<sup>21</sup> Yet even in this period, there were restraints: '...terrible as warfare on the Continent became, especially from 1562 to 1648, the devastation and the destruction of life might have been much greater than they were. It was restraints upon war which prevented a general collapse of European civilization following the Reformation, a collapse which....would have prevented the genesis of industrial civilization in the north of Europe.'<sup>22</sup>

This control over war, a necessary platform for later industrialism, became stronger from the middle of the seventeenth century. The next hundred years was 'an age during which, in spite of occasional setbacks, the tendency was continuously toward more pacific conditions.'<sup>23</sup> Nef is certain that this crucial development occurred. He also notes that the control occurred despite increasingly sophisticated weaponry and a build up of weapons. 'The increasing moderation of warfare from 1660 to 1740 was not brought about by a reduction in the armaments of the European states. This was the period during which the leading powers first came to maintain large concentrations of troops in peace as well as in time of war, in winter as well as in summer.'<sup>24</sup> How was war brought under control?

Nef has several theories. Three of these he summarizes thus. 'Economic development...tended to discredit the military calling as led by the rank and file. It was not sufficiently rapid to provide the means

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<sup>20</sup> Sorokin, *Society, Culture*, p.512.

<sup>21</sup> Nef, *War*, 115

<sup>22</sup> Nef, *War*, 117

<sup>23</sup> Nef, *War*, 135

<sup>24</sup> Nef, *War*, 202

for wars without stint. It encouraged producers of many objects, including weapons, to retain the ancient concern with fashioning matter into forms designed primarily to give delight and, partly on that account, caused the weapons to provide ineffective instruments of destruction.<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere he puts forward other arguments, for instance human tenderness and politeness. 'Out of such traditional pageantry as that, and with the help of a polite etiquette and a human tenderness that evolved during the seventeenth century, a code of honour was forged. It was destined to have a pacific influence upon history.'<sup>26</sup>

At other times, the control of war is due to the conscience of scientists such as Leonardo or Napier, who refused to let their destructive weapons become known.<sup>27</sup> Or again it is increasing opulence itself and the desire for material wealth which is important. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries what the cultured Europeans sought was beauty, substance, and permanence in their country estates, in their cities and towns, in their public buildings and homes, and in the objects of polite living with which they surrounded themselves.<sup>28</sup> At other times, Nef suggests that it was the influence of the increasingly powerful nation states which controlled war, monopolizing, as states must, the use of violence. 'But as the sovereign states of Europe assumed more responsibility for clothing, lodging, and feeding soldiers as well as sailors, lawless pillaging and plundering became less rampant.'<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly his favourite argument, however, is the 'economy of delight' thesis, namely that "What was of primary importance in restraining war was the persistence of aesthetic principles even among makers of the new weapons of attack."<sup>30</sup>

While there can be little doubt that Nef is right that warfare was controlled, and increasingly so after about 1660, and that this is a fundamentally important feature of the build up towards the industrial revolution, his various theories to explain what happened are all somewhat unconvincing. We are left in the position of knowing that something important changed, but not why. Perhaps the most significant underlying conclusion we can draw from his account is that Europe began to enter a virtuous, instead of

<sup>25</sup>Nef, War, 228

<sup>26</sup>Nef, War, 140

<sup>27</sup>e.g. 117ff

<sup>28</sup>Nef, War, 248

<sup>29</sup>Nef, War, 226

<sup>30</sup>4, War, 128-9

vicious, circle. Up to the seventeenth century, as wealth and population accumulated, so did the negative feed-back of predatory warfare. From that date, the balance shifted; enough surplus was fed back into the forces controlling violence and there was enough desire to make money by means other than open violence. The violence of market capitalism, the Mandevillian world of concealed warfare through the war of all against all in trade and production, began to take over from the ethos of earlier centuries where it was destruction and predation which were the paths to wealth.<sup>31</sup> This theme has been interestingly developed more recently by William McNeill.

McNeill notes how the ravaging mercenary armies of the fourteenth century gave way to better paid and organized armies from the seventeenth century. It became possible to 'support professional standing armies on tax income without straining the economic resources of the population too severely.'<sup>32</sup> These armies also managed, on the whole, to keep the peace, at least within countries, so that civil wars decreased. 'Such armies could and did establish a superior level of public peace within all the principal European states.' This, he argues, started a positive feed-back loop. Peace 'allowed agriculture, commerce, and industry to flourish' and hence raised the taxable wealth, which kept the armed forces in being. 'A self-sustaining feedback loop thus arose that raised Europe's power and wealth above levels other civilizations had attained.'<sup>33</sup>

It is quite easy to overlook an absence and the case of warfare in England is a good example. For instance, the monumental **Population History of England** scarcely mentions the relative absence of the most potent of the Malthusian positive checks. There is only one brief reference to 'warfare' in the index even though Hakluyt is approvingly quoted as drawing attention in the 1580's to 'our long peace and seldom sickness.'<sup>34</sup>

There is first of all the question of foreign invasions. Unlike most Continental countries which continued to be invaded until the nineteenth century, with the exception of the incursion of the Scots in the eighteenth-century England was not invaded by a large 'foreign' army after 1066. The Armada of Philip II reached the coasts, but was destroyed by the storms. This absence from actual, and for long periods from threatened, invasion is of considerable significance. One of the negative restraints on economic growth is a political variant of the law of diminishing returns. As a country becomes richer, it becomes the envy of its neighbours. It is likely to be attacked and its delicately built infrastructure and capital destroyed - as happened time and again in historic Europe, for instance in Italy, the Netherlands, southern Germany, or over many parts of Asia. If it wishes to protect itself against this hazard, it has to

<sup>31</sup>cf Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*

<sup>32</sup>*Pursuit*, 139

<sup>33</sup>*Pursuit*, 117

<sup>34</sup>*Population History*, 234

devote a larger and larger proportion of its wealth to defence, as happened with Holland from the later seventeenth century England. was able to avoid both of these fates. It was not ransacked by conquerors for many hundreds of years, so that its wealth could accumulate and the intricate organization of communications and institutions was not disrupted. Nor did it have to spend an inordinate amount of wealth on defending itself.(For a general analysis of this phenomenon, see Paul Kennedy, Rise and Fall).

The danger of foreign predators combined with the desire to raid the wealth of richer countries outside one's border led, in all Continental countries in Eur-Asia, to the need to keep a standing army. This had two serious effects. One was on the destruction of the accumulated wealth of the ordinary population because of the cost of keeping a large army permanently supplied. John Aylmer in the sixteenth century described the contrast between what he saw in England and continental countries. 'O England, England, thou knowest not thine own wealth: because thou seest not other countries penury....The husbandman in France, all that he hath gotten in his whole life, loseth it upon one day. For when so ever they have war (as they are never without it) the kings soldiers enter into the poor mans house, eateth and drinketh up all that ever he hath...<sup>35</sup> A century earlier, Fortescue, who had spent much time in France, also noted the oppression of the rural population by troops, 'so that there is not the least village there free from this miserable calamity, but that it is once or twice every year beggared by this kind of pilling (pillage).<sup>36</sup>

The absence of foreign invasion, or even a serious threat of such invasion, can partly be explained by the sea, which had 'a powerful and happy influence upon the course of the English government.'<sup>37</sup> It was complemented by other factors. For instance, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the conflict between the two largest European powers, France and Spain, helped England to avoid invasion. Furthermore, it is obvious that an undefended sea would not have been a barrier without the development of the English navy. It might be thought that the navy would be a serious economic drain on England. Yet it would seem that its cost was well balanced by its advantages; unlike a standing army or foreign invasion, it was not pure 'illth'. As McNeill points out, '...contracts for supplying the British navy with all the thousands of items that fighting ships and men required tended to reinforce and expand the market mobilization of resources within the British Isles, as well as in such outlying regions as New England and the Canadian Maritimes...<sup>38</sup>

In terms of international warfare, England for many centuries was in an ideal position. It could benefit

<sup>35</sup>British Pamphleteers, i, 29-33

<sup>36</sup>Learned Commendation, 180

<sup>37</sup>Millar, Historical, 3, 124

<sup>38</sup>Pursuit, 181

from any technological advances made during the conflict of European powers, particularly in metal-working. It could raid its neighbour's wealth. Yet it was not pillaged or even seriously threatened for many hundreds of years. It was as if a wind-break had been accidentally formed around this small plot of fertile ground. This shelter was undoubtedly a key factor in the later economic miracle. As Nef puts it, the advantages of its position 'allowed Great Britain a long respite from exhausting military effort,' an advantage 'not shared by most European states'.<sup>39</sup> Holland had some of the advantages through its man-made water defences in the century after 1580. But these became stretched as the power of France increased and the thinness of the flood dike defences became apparent. England developed a virtuous spiral. Its protected position enabled it to keep its taxes low, encourage its merchants and trade, build up its fleet, and hence increase its security. It must have been obvious to Adam Smith that peace and easy taxes were intimately linked.

The relative absence of external pressures was complemented by relative internal peace. We have noted that Chambers stressed the virtual absence of **civil** as well as foreign war in England and this is indeed a second significant feature. Much of the destruction caused in continental nations, whether in Italy in the fifteenth century, France in the sixteenth, or Germany in the seventeenth, was the result of civil war, often caused by religious differences. The English were practically free of this. This was noted long ago by Creighton. He wrote that 'Although the history of the last year or two of John and of the earlier years of Henry III is full of turbulence and rapine, yet we hear of no general distress among the cultivators of the soil.' He cites evidence to show that 'the whole of that period, and of the years following until 1234, is absolutely free from any record of wide-spread distress among the lower class.' Creighton is reminded of the observation of Philip de Cominius, thinking of the same type of events during the Wars of the Roses in the fifteenth century, who wrote 'England has this peculiar grace that neither the country, nor the people, nor the houses are wasted or demolished; but the calamities and misfortunes of the war fall only upon the soldiers and especially the nobility...'<sup>40</sup> Creighton does note some exceptions, as in the incursions of the Welsh and Scots on the borders and the battles between Simon de Montfort and the King in 1264. Yet he concludes that 'on the whole we may take it that the paralysing effect of civil war seldom reached to the English lower classes in the medieval period...'<sup>41</sup> Thus he finds that concerning 'pestilence due to war and invasion', the 'domestic history from first to last is singularly free from such calamities.'<sup>42</sup>

Even the English Civil War of the 1640s was, by continental standards, a relatively mild affair. We are

<sup>39</sup>Nef, *War*, 116

<sup>40</sup>Creighton, *Epidemics*, i, pp.37-8.

<sup>41</sup>Creighton, i, p.38.

<sup>42</sup>Creighton, *Epidemics*, i, p.13; see also p.547.



told, for instance, that 'Most of the clashes between the Parliamentary and Royalist armies were skirmishes resulting in few deaths. In terms of fatalities, the most serious battle was Marston Moor in July 1644, when the combined deaths on both sides totalled 4,000....More typical, though, was the battle of Roundway Down in July 1643, when the Royalists destroyed a Parliamentary army...only 600 were killed, and the rest were captured.'<sup>43</sup> 'During the English Civil War the combined armies of both sides totalled at most 120,000-140,000...'<sup>44</sup> The absence of mass destruction was noted by most foreigners. 'As respects the conduct towards each other of the opponents, even in the hot blood of battle, their mutual respect, kindness and generosity' in the English Civil War reminded Tocqueville of events in France in 1648, not the revolution of 1793.<sup>45</sup> The disturbances of the English Civil War were however serious enough to show the dangers, principally of typhus, but for reasons not altogether clear, typhus only struck in 1643 and 1644.<sup>46</sup>

The relative absence of civil war in England cannot be explained by geography alone. It was the result of constant political effort and of a judicial system that was developed from the twelfth century to iron out disputes without recourse to physical violence. The system was extremely effective in preventing damaging civil wars. Even when disputes did break out, as in Monmouth's Rebellion, the Pilgrimage of Grace, or much of the Wars of the Roses, there was little destruction. To travel round England now is to see an ancient, prosperous, landscape, where many medieval churches and buildings remain. Unlike almost every other country in the world, they have not been periodically destroyed by foreign armies or civil wars. They are the outward manifestation of a gradual and peaceful accumulation of wealth, a slow build-up which provided the necessary fertile ground for the unprecedented increase in productivity of the eighteenth century.

This is not, of course, to say that the English were not engaged in war at all. Sorokin long ago showed that between 1100 and 1900 the English were involved in one war or another for over half the time. There was no diminution of war, not in the numbers involved.<sup>47</sup> In the later period, for example it is calculated that in the years between 1689 and 1815, England was at war for 73 of the 126 years. Many of these, for instance the Napoleonic Wars, were of major dimensions.<sup>48</sup> The point is that these wars

<sup>43</sup>Clarkson, 119

<sup>44</sup>Clarkson, 120

<sup>45</sup>Memoir, 2, 378

<sup>46</sup>Creighton, i, pp.547, 556.

<sup>47</sup>Sorokin, Sociological Theories, pp.324-5.

<sup>48</sup>See Mokyr (ed), Industrial, p.219.

were fought on other people's territories.

What is certain is that the chief Malthusian positive check, war, had been brought under control in England from 1485 at the latest, and probably from the eleventh century, after the Norman invasion. On a population graph of England, the deaths in the Wars of the Roses, Civil War or any other civil war would not be discernible. The correlated famines and epidemics which war brought all over the continental land-masses of Europe and Asia were also absent. The most dangerous threat to human kind, the chief form of insecurity and break upon planning, was thus largely eliminated in England many hundreds of years ago. It is difficult not to see this as a key element in its unusual development in the eighteenth century.

Although we have noted other factors, the central advantage of England seems to have been its sea defence. Peace, prosperity, a balance of political power and islandhood seem to be linked. In order to see whether this is a real connection, we may turn to an even more dramatic instance of a large, sea-girt, island, namely Japan.

### **War in Japan.**

That Japan was effectively protected from the threat of foreign invasion by sea was obvious to Kaempfer, writing in the 1690's. It was not merely the width of the sea, over one hundred miles as compared to the mere twenty of the English channel, but also the nature of the sea and the coasts of Japan that he thought important. 'The Sea, which encompasses the Islands of Japan, is very rough and stormy, which with the many rocks, cliffs and shoals, above and under water, make its navigation very dangerous.'<sup>49</sup> 'The steep and rocky coasts are washed by a sea full of cliffs and shallows. There is but one good port known, fit to harbour ships of any considerable bulk: this is that of Nagasaki, the entry whereof is very narrow...'<sup>50</sup> Hence, 'Japan is so well guarded by nature itself, that it hath still less to fear from a foreign enemy. An invasion was attempted but seldom, and never with success. This valiant and invincible nation never obey'd any other commands, but of their own Princes.'<sup>51</sup> A hundred years later Thunberg was equally impressed and amazed. He wrote 'that no foreign war should have been waged for centuries past, and interior commotions should have been prevented...this must appear as improbable, and, to many as impossible, as it is strictly true, and desiring of the utmost attention.'<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Kaempfer, i, 160

<sup>50</sup>Kaempfer, 3, 306

<sup>51</sup>Kaempfer, 3, 309

<sup>52</sup>Thunberg, Travels, iii, p.vii.

There are only three recorded attempted invasions of Japan in the two thousand years before 1945. The first was at the end of the eighth century, possibly by the 'Tartars'. It was repulsed after initial successes.<sup>53</sup> The second and third were those by Kublai Khan in 1274 and 1281. Both were unsuccessful, due to a combination of the weather (storms), rocky coasts and the mobilization and determination of Japanese warriors.<sup>54</sup> No-one attempted another invasion until 1945. Even the threat of invasion was absent throughout Japanese history and the country was never pillaged by outsiders. Like England, there was a natural barrier within which her wealth could develop. Japan's shield was even stronger than that of England and, given the tempestuous, wide and rock infested sea, it was not even necessary to build up a defensive navy. Not until the American war ships arrived off the Japanese coast in the 1850's was the inadequacy of the sea defences felt.

The absence of a standing army or navy for defence was complemented by the fact that the wide sea made it unattractive for Japan to invade other countries. The only large external attack launched by Japan before the 1880's was in 1592 when Hideyoshi invaded Korea. Ultimately the campaign was not a success and it was not repeated. Thunberg at the end of the eighteenth century was thus almost right when he wrote that 'The Japanese have never given way to the weakness of conquering other Kingdoms, or suffering any part of their own to be taken from them.'<sup>55</sup> Japan was thus free from the need to raise heavy taxation for armies and the destruction caused by international warfare over the thousand years before its industrial revolution passed it by. The balanced political system which I outlined in chapter five above, owes a great deal to the absence of foreign threat or temptation. As Semple noted, '...people who have already secured the fundamental elements of civilization find the partial seclusion of an island environment favourable to their further progress, because it permits their powers to unfold unhindered, protects them from the friction of border quarrels, from the disturbance and desolation of invading armies, to which continental peoples are constantly exposed...'<sup>56</sup>

Being an island does not necessarily ensure internal peace and Japan often gives the impression of being a society which had many of the trappings of war. Kaempfer had noted that the Japanese were a "warlike people" and it was upon his great work that Malthus found what he thought was the solution to the puzzle of how a country which Thunberg described as filled with people who lived with "such happiness and plenty" could nevertheless control their population. Kaempfer's extracts from Japanese chronicles showed "bloody wars", and as compared to China "the greater frequency of wars and

<sup>53</sup> Kaempfer, i, 298; Thunberg, Travels, iii, 261

<sup>54</sup> see Camb. Hist.3, 411-423 for details

<sup>55</sup> Travels, iii, 258-9

<sup>56</sup> Semple, Geographic, 434

intestine commotions".<sup>57</sup> Yet, if we examine the history of Japan over the thousand years up to its spurt of economic growth, the situation does not appear quite so simple.

After the pacification of Japan by Nobunaga and Hideyoshi in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, from about 1600 to 1850, Japan had the most complete and lasting period of absence from any kind of war, external or internal, that any major agrarian society has ever known. This was noted by Fukuzawa in the later nineteenth century. He commented that '...the 250 years of Tokugawa rule during which there was no warfare is unmatched in world history' allowing the Japanese to "live in this incomparably peaceful society."<sup>58</sup> More recently the same point was made by Mutel. Japan '...experienced a long period of peace that lasted two and a half centuries. It should be said that such a long period of internal and external peace is exceptional in world history.' Mutel believed that 'it constituted the absolutely necessary precondition for the development of the forces of production.'<sup>59</sup> This peace was not inevitable. There had been many disputes and battles previously. It was a triumph of organization and ability, based on the ruthless and astute politics of Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu. The delicate machinery which kept the powerful daimyo in check for several centuries was undoubtedly helped by the absence of land neighbours with whom they could ally, but it was nevertheless in large part due to astute governmental organization.

It is tempting to see this as totally contrasted to a period of 'feudal anarchy' and bloodshed before Nobunaga. But just as it is a mistake to assume that England was awash with war and blood before 1485, so it would seem that devastating civil wars were largely absent in Japan even before the Tokugawa era. The first western history of Japan, by Kaempfer, drew attention to a number of wars mentioned in the Japanese chronicles. There were the struggles between the Genji and the Heiki in the twelfth century, further civil wars in the 1320s and the 1460s.<sup>60</sup> If we turn to more recent histories of Japan, these wars are put into context.

The first lengthy English language history of Japan was written by George Sansom. Sansom believed that internal war had only a limited destructive impact within Japan. The most extreme period of civil war occurred in the years up to 1428. 'The armed conflict between the two Courts had lasted for fifty years...' From this 'It might be supposed that the national economy would suffer from the plague of armies and the depredations of greedy barons.' Sansom however argues that 'medieval warfare was not in fact especially deadly or destructive.' Thus the "damage done by warfare to the true economic

<sup>57</sup>Malthus, i, 138

<sup>58</sup>Civilization, 167

<sup>59</sup>quoted in Baechler, Capitalism, 138

<sup>60</sup>Kaempfer, i, 307, 309, 316, 321

foundation of the country, its rice fields and its forests, was almost negligible. The industrious cultivators were usually unhurt, though from time to time they were inconvenienced by being conscripted for war service.' After all, whoever won the battle would continue to want the revenues from the countryside. This was an internal conflict, not the marauding of foreign armies intent on plunder. 'Even the country's total loss in manpower was not serious, for death in battle was not so common as the military romances would have us believe, and few civilians were killed.'<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Sansom puts forward the argument that 'the civil wars in some respects served to stimulate and not to reduce economic activity.' It stimulated entrepreneurial activities to supply the armies and led to 'the improvement of communications.' Thus 'there is no evidence...that the total product of agriculture and industry declined during the civil wars...On the contrary, it seems to have increased.' Japanese warfare thus seems to have provided that "pure army of consumers" of which Mumford and Veblen spoke, but warfare was organized in an unusual way so that it did minimal damage.

As for the earlier periods, although there were the well known battles between the Heike and the Genji, and the rise of the Kamakura and Ashigawa shogunates, again the impression from Sansom is that most of the population were relatively isolated from warfare. Thus 'War' and 'Warfare' are absent from volume one of his history, which covers the period up to 1334, in contrast to the several dozen citations in volume two. An interesting insight into the kind of small-scale and limited warfare practiced in Japan at this time is given by Frederic. When the Mongol troops invaded Japan, '...the Japanese were utterly astonished to find that the Mongols did not fight in accordance with the laws of chivalry practiced by the samurai: the first horseman who advanced towards the disembarked Mongol troops, loudly shouting their names and challenging their adversaries to come and pit their strength honourably against them in single combat, were met by showers of arrows and promptly surrounded by a multitude of soldiers who massacred them.'<sup>62</sup>

Sampson's account is not contradicted by the recent survey of Japanese history contained in the 'Medieval' volume of the **Cambridge History of Japan**. The index refers to the Gempei War of 1180-5 and the Onin War of 1467-77. Otherwise there are three references, to the 'Kanno disturbance (1350-2)', the 'Nambokucho disturbance (1336-92)' and the 'Nigatsu disturbance (1272)'. Otherwise there is no reference to war. There is very little in the volume to suggest a society which was seriously devastated by civil wars; rather we have a picture of an affluent and largely peaceful country, where small sections of warrior knights fought small-scale battles from time to time. As in England, it would seem that a largely homogeneous population, not differentiated by language, religion or other bitter divisions, did not descend to such barbarities as the destruction of crops and animals on a large scale. The prize was power, not plunder, and the ruler would not benefit from destroying his future subjects. Such island civil wars seem to have been elevated strategic games, kept within an arena, and largely hedged off from the real damages which international wars create.

<sup>61</sup>Sansom, ii, 181

<sup>62</sup>Daily Life, 177

The situation for medieval Japan has been described, perhaps a little whimsically, by Frederic. He believed that "The Japanese, a fearless and courageous fighter, despising death, was for all that not really a man of war. He was first of all a ..."countryman" who loved his small plot of native land, his province, and who rejoiced to see order and peace prevailing there. He was deeply distressed by a state of war, even shocked by its unseemliness..."<sup>63</sup> The paradox was that the Japanese 'did not think of war as other than an opportunity for winning personal glory. Poetic knights despising death, they were not really warriors at heart.'<sup>64</sup>

Some support for Frederic's views can be found in two otherwise unexplained facts. The first was the history of the samurai after 1600. That a warrior estate could continue in existence almost unchanged for 250 years without fighting a single battle or even skirmish is difficult to understand, unless we realize that it was the ethic, Bushido, that was important, and not the fighting. Their war-like ethic, combined with absence of actual fighting, is partly explained by the paradoxes of the zen art of war.<sup>65</sup> Secondly, there was the curiously muted form of weapons used in fighting. In the medieval period, as Frederic notes, 'one fact is a continual source of wonder' namely that the Japanese were 'equipped with sadly inadequate weapons (except in single combat when their swords performed wonders)...'<sup>66</sup> Even when they encountered superior weapon systems, they did not emulate them - an unusual lack of interest for a nation which normally accepted and adapted superior technologies from outside with great alacrity. When the Mongols attacked, the Japanese encountered 'powerful bows, cross-bows, swivel-guns, bombs', yet 'they did not think of equipping themselves with better arms!'<sup>67</sup> The cross-bow and other lethal weapons were not copied. Limited, single-combat, close warfare by a few warriors was what they liked. When, in the middle of the sixteenth century, a new range of gunpowder-based weapons were brought to their attention by the Portuguese, they were rapidly copied and even improved on. Nobunaga and Hideyoshi used them to overcome feudal resistance. But then they were banned and largely abandoned.(REF XXX) Cannon and hand-guns were not wide-spread. Hence the shock of the third intrusion of foreign war technology when Admiral Perry steamed up to Japan in the 1850's.

<sup>63</sup>Daily Life, 175

<sup>64</sup>Daily Life, 179

<sup>65</sup>See Thomas Cleary, *The Japanese Art of War* (Boston, 1991).

<sup>66</sup>Frederic, 179

<sup>67</sup>Frederic, *Daily Life*, 1779

The absence of war and the fear of war through most of English and Japanese history can be seen by three interesting indicators. The first is the question of city walls. In war-torn countries, which include all other agrarian civilizations of which we know, cities try to protect themselves with vast walls against various kinds of predator. Some English cities did have walls in the medieval period, but certainly from the fifteenth century onwards they were left to fall down. In Japan, most cities had never been built with walls; even those modelled on the massively walled Chinese cities, Nara and Kyoto, dropped this feature when the plans crossed the sea to Japan.

A second absence concerns fortified dwellings. Again, with the constant haunting fear of war, most of the wealthy surround their houses with fortifications, walls and ditches. The mass of domestic architecture in both Japan and England, from the sixteenth century at least, did not incorporate these features. There were, of course, daimyo castles in Japan, as there were castles in England, particularly on the borders with Wales and Scotland. Yet the mass of the population lived either in unwalled towns, or in unfortified houses in the countryside.

A third absence concerns weapons. It is well known that the English population was largely unarmed from at least the sixteenth century. At the start of the Civil War in the 1640's there was a rush to find weapons and it was discovered that very few people had them.<sup>68</sup> In Japan the situation was even more dramatic. We have noted the rejection of guns. Likewise, while the samurai continued to carry their two swords as a mark of status, the mass of the population, namely the more than ninety per cent who were not of this rank, did not carry weapons. Indeed there was a very rigorous control of all use of weapons. As an early, sixteenth century traveller noted, 'For it is a custome here, That whosoever drawes a weapon in anger, although he doe no harme therewith, hee is presently cut in peeces: and doing but small hurt, not only themselves are so executed, but their whole generation.'<sup>69</sup> Again, it is not difficult to see how, during long centuries of peace, two island populations concentrated their weapons into the hands of a few - the navy, some armed mercenaries, the 'Yeoman of the Guard'. The fact that the English police are still largely unarmed, or that Japan is practically free of guns and gun crimes, are only two side-effects and indicators of this absence of weapons.

The absence of serious war in these two cases is important in itself, for the absence of misery and destruction and hence the contribution to the happiness and delight of human beings. Yet the effects of war, as many noted, was less in its direct killing, but in the dislocations which led to the arrival of its sisters, namely famine and disease. Usually many more are killed through the disruptions to agriculture and social structure, and hence dearth and epidemics, than are directly killed in battle. The effective absence of the first Horseman of the Apocalypse needs to be assessed in conjunction with that of the second, famine. If the absence of war had been offset by constant famine and destitution, the blessings

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<sup>68</sup>cf figs, etc in **Justice**

<sup>69</sup>Purchas, *Pilgrims*, p.136.

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of peace would have been limited.