

MICHIO MORISHIMA

WHY HAS JAPAN 'SUCCEEDED'?

Western technology
and the
Japanese ethos

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Preface

This book contains the text of the Marshall Lectures which were given at the University of Cambridge in March 1981. Prior to this, in February 1981, I delivered an even more abridged version of these lectures as the Suntory-Toyota Public Lecture at the London School of Economics.

The question first of all was whether or not Japan had been successful, but no country is likely to be successful in all respects. Moreover success in one respect is closely connected to failure in another, and success and failure are often achieved in conjunction with each other. The theme of the present work is to attempt to clarify those respects in which Japan has been successful, and those in which she has met with failure, and to ask why this has been the case. In no chapter of the book, however, have I presumed to lay down in any categorical manner my own solutions to these problems.

This is in part due to my belief that, although I have purposely not written anything in the nature of a summary or conclusion, what I am trying to say is likely to be quite clear to the reader. It is also due to my believing that there cannot be a single correct solution to this sort of problem; there can at the most only be various different views. One should therefore not expound one's own personal conclusions in any ostentatious manner or impose them upon others. I am only too aware that the analysis I give only shows one side of the question, and that there is clearly a need for a *comprehensive full-scale work* on which a great deal of time has to be spent.

In this work we are not viewing Japan within the narrow vision of 'Japanese studies', but in much the same way as Max Weber viewed the capitalism of the West: Japan has had its own culture from ancient times, and the ethos of the Japanese people has been

formed over many years within this cultural environment. Any temperament of this kind will of course gradually alter in accordance with any change in material conditions, and therefore any change in economic circumstances. The reverse is also true, however. Economic structures and economic relations are also strongly conditioned by the national ethos. It is often the case that even though material conditions may be the same what may be possible in Japan may not be possible in the West and vice versa. As we shall see later, a remarkably idiosyncratic ethos prevails in Japanese society, and as a result of these ethical feelings Japanese capitalism has to a considerable extent deviated from the typical free enterprise system. The question asked by this book is why the possessors of this kind of non-Western attitude came to gain such control over the industrial techniques produced by the West. Such examination of the economies of various countries under their respective ideologies is also possible in the case of China, in the case of the Soviet Union and in the case of India and the Near and Middle East, and the current significance of such work is considerable. Max Weber's work on the religions of the world was developed on the basis of such a grand conception as this, and though his individual conclusions might be mistaken large numbers of scholars should work together to promote studies of this kind.

Anything so grandiose as a comparative theory of economic systems based on comparative religious studies is, of course, far beyond my own capabilities; the present work has been written as the volume on Japan within this vast field of scholarship. The introduction and the first chapter are preliminary sections aimed at setting out the problem in a Weberian manner. These sections are for my purpose very important, but those who want information relating to modern Japan immediately are encouraged to read Chapters 2 to 5 first of all. If they are interested (and I hope that they will be) I hope they will subsequently read the introduction, Chapter 1 and conclusion.

Up until now I have written in English only in the field of mathematical economics, where so much is expressed with mathematical formulas, and the writing of this work would not have been possible without linguistic help from a large number of people. Mrs Prue Hutton and Mrs Luba Mumford (and my son, Haruo) corrected the English in the draft of the first chapter for me. The

second chapter was written almost ten years ago with the aim of producing Japanese language teaching material for British students specialising in the study of Japan; it was subsequently translated into English by Dr Emi Watanabe. The third and subsequent chapters, the introduction and the conclusion were all translated from my Japanese language draft by Dr Janet Hunter. The 'assembly-line' with my wife making a clear copy of my own illegible draft and Janet then putting it into English has enabled me to save a great amount of time, to go far beyond the limitations of my own English and to write with much greater freedom. Her translation demonstrates the high level of Japanese language work in Britain. Moreover her specialisation in Japanese history meant that she could point out to me mistakes in my own memory and the existence of facts which I had forgotten.

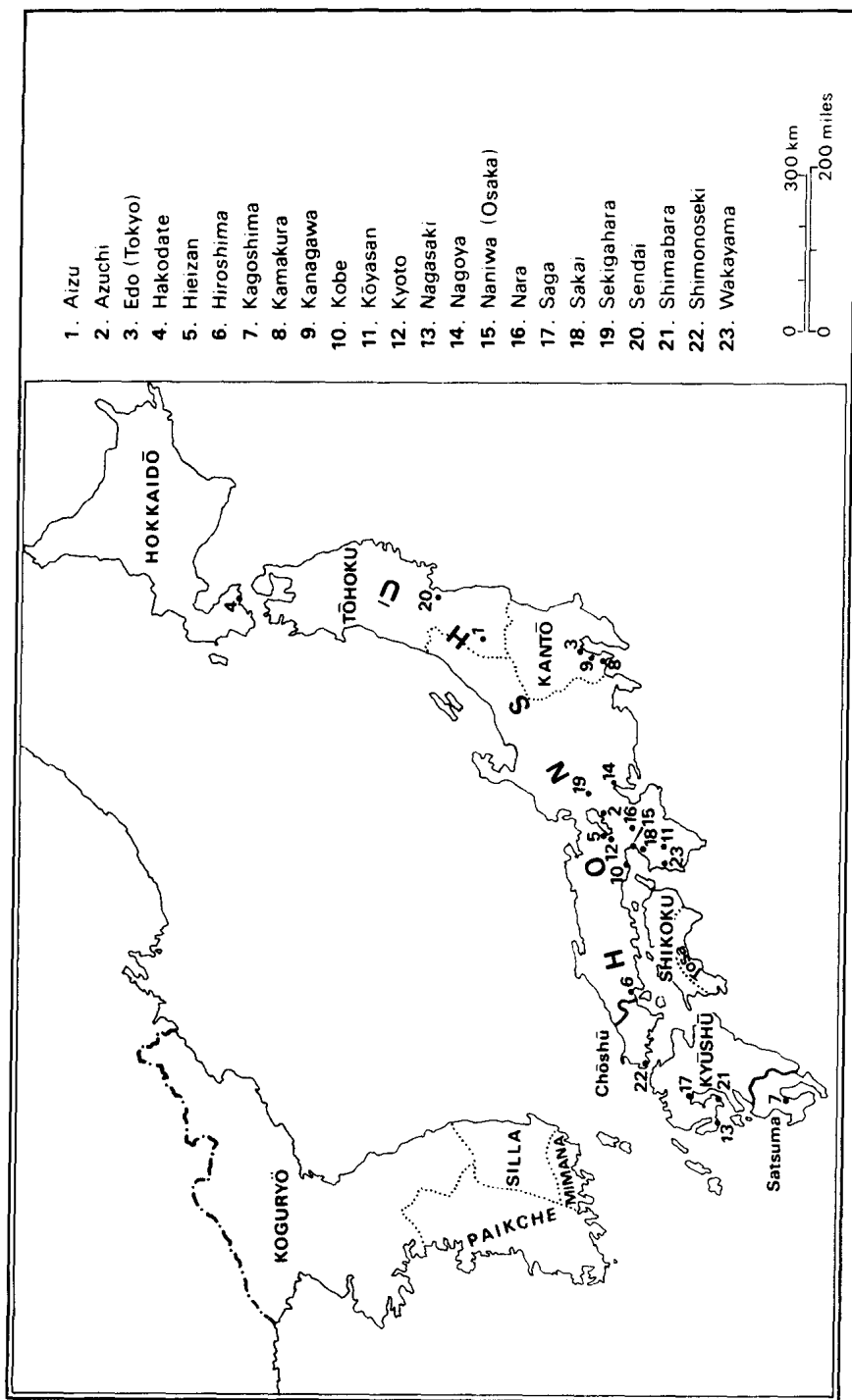
I would finally like to thank those who read all or part of the manuscript and provided me both with encouragement and with instructive comments – Professor Ralf Dahrendorf of the L.S.E., Professor Roy Radner of the Bell Institute and Professor Masahiro Tatemoto of Osaka University. The comments made by those who acted as referees for the manuscript were also helpful. This work was written at the International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines established at the L.S.E. in 1978, and I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my very deep gratitude to Mr Keizo Saji of Suntory Limited and Mr Eiji Toyoda of the Toyota Motor Co. Ltd, who donated the money for the establishment of the Centre. I would also like to thank Dr Yūjirō Hayashi of the Toyota Foundation, who was throughout a great source of help to me when the Centre was being established.

M.M.
May 1981

Acknowledgement

Ever since my days as a high school student I have been interested in history and sociology, but my knowledge in these disciplines is both narrow and shallow. This book is therefore indebted to the works of a great many authors although they have not been individually mentioned except where the reference is particularly significant. These works are all in Japanese and I do not intend to cite the names of the works, but I would like to record my thanks to these authors below as a whole.

Ando Yoshio, Aoyama Hideo, Arisawa Hiromi, Banpa Masatomo, Cho Yukio, Hayashiya Tatsusaburo, Hirschmeier Johannes, Hosoya Chihiro, Kaizuka Shigeki, Kanaya Osamu, Kawasaki Tsuneyuki, Kitayama Shigeo, Kobayashi Takashi, Matsumoto Seicho, Matsushita Kōnosuke, Murakami Shigeyoshi, Nagahara Keiji, Nagazumi Yoko, Nakayama Shigeru, Naramoto Tatsuya, Nozawa Yutaka, Oka Yoshitake, Ōkawa Kazushi, Ōtsuka Hisao, Sakamoto Taro, Sakudo Yōtaro, Shinohara Miyoei, Sugimoto Isao, Suzuki Ryōichi (the historian), Tamura Encho, Tanaka Sōgoro, Tōyama Shigeki, Tsuda Sōkichi, Wakamori Taro, Watanabe Shōkō, Watsuji Tetsuro, Yamaguchi Kazuo, Yasumoto Biten, Yui Tsunehiko.



1. Aizu
2. Azuchi
3. Edo (Tokyo)
4. Hakodate
5. Hieiizan
6. Hiroshima
7. Kagoshima
8. Kamakura
9. Kanagawa
10. Kobe
11. Kōyasan
12. Kyoto
13. Nagasaki
14. Nagoya
15. Naniwa (Osaka)
16. Nara
17. Saga
18. Sakai
19. Sekigahara
20. Sendai
21. Shimabara
22. Shimonoseki
23. Wakayama

Major places and areas of Japan and Korea mentioned in the text

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Introduction

I

Whereas Karl Marx contended that ideology and ethics were no more than reflections of underlying material conditions – in particular economic conditions – Max Weber in his ‘Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ made the case for the existence of quite the reverse relationship. He considered that it is the ethic that is given, and any type of economy which necessitates the people’s possessing an ethos incompatible with that ethic will not develop; rather the emergence of an economy compatible with this ethic is inevitable. It was from this standpoint that Weber examined the world’s major religions.¹

Weber’s conclusions concerning Confucianism can be summarised as follows. They are that Confucianism, like Puritanism, is

¹ Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, I (1920), II (1920), III (1921), J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Tübingen. The famous ‘Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ (*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*) and ‘Confucianism and Taoism’ (*Konfuzianismus und Taoismus*) are both contained in the first volume.

There are, of course, criticisms of Max Weber’s thesis; for example the idea that the capitalist spirit had already been in existence since before the birth of Protestantism put forward by L. Brentano. What Weber was interested in, however, was the relationship between the Protestant ethic and ‘modern capitalism’, and he believed that there existed a fundamental difference between Modern Capitalism and the capitalism which had previously existed. There is also the criticism made by R. H. Tawney that Weber not merely oversimplified both Calvinism and the spirit of capitalism, but that he also either underestimated or totally disregarded the part played by factors unconnected with religion (for example the political ideas of the Renaissance) in the intellectual movements conducive to the development of economic individualism. Even more criticisms can probably be brought forward by specialists in the case of Weber’s work on China. What we are concerned with here, however, is not whether Weber was, or was not, right. The problem here is to consider the questions raised by Weber in relation to Japan. See L. Brentano, *Die Anfänge des Modernen Kapitalismus* (1961) and R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

rational, but that there exists a fundamental difference between the two in that whereas Puritan rationalism has sought to exercise rational control over the world Confucian rationalism is an attempt to accommodate oneself to the world in a rational manner. Furthermore, Weber concluded, it was exactly this sort of mental attitude among Confucianists that was a major factor in preventing the emergence of modern capitalism in China.

Despite this judgement Weber observed: 'The Chinese in all probability would be quite capable, probably as much as if not more capable than the Japanese, of assimilating capitalism which has technologically and economically been fully developed in the modern culture area.'² It must be said, however, that the ideology of Japan, or at least the most important of Japan's ideologies, is also *Confucianism*. Since Weber made very few positive observations on Japan, it is not at all clear, at least from his 'Confucianism and Taoism', whether or not he himself considers Japan to be a Confucian country.³ Furthermore, whether or not Weber considers that the 'capitalism' which the Japanese have acquired is of the same kind as the 'modern capitalism' in conformity with the Protestant ethic is also very unclear. Here again no positive statement is made. However, despite these imperfections the above extract is in itself sufficiently suggestive of new lines of research.

In the following study I hope to throw light on the fact that in certain important respects Japanese Confucianism is very different from the Confucianism of China. In addition the Taoism which was introduced to Japan at the same time as Confucianism underwent considerable modifications and changed to emerge as Japanese Shinto. In Europe, Protestants split off from Catholics as a result of a different interpretation of the same bible; the rebels then built up a completely new work ethic – Weber's so-called

² M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, I, 1920, p. 535.

³ In 'Die asiatische Sekten und Heilandsreligiosität', however, Max Weber does discuss Japan. (See *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, II, pp. 295–309.) But his knowledge of Japan is not very extensive and his understanding would not appear to have been very deep. He regards the warrior class as having played the most important social role in Japan, and believes that the whole ethos and attitude to life of the Japanese was formed quite without regard to religion. However, as we will see later on, during the Tokugawa period the warrior class received a profoundly Confucian education (in the Kamakura period the samurai was deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism), and in the Meiji period compulsory education meant the people as a whole received a Confucian education. Weber makes no more than a passing reference to Japanese Confucianism, perhaps because he did not regard Confucianism as the principal ideology of Japan.

'spirit of modern capitalism'. In exactly the same way Japanese Confucianism started from the same canons as did Chinese Confucianism, and as a result of different study and interpretation produced in Japan a totally different national ethos from that prevailing in China. In Europe, with its contiguity of land between one country and another – and compared with the distance Japan lies from the Chinese mainland and the Korean peninsula even such countries as the British Isles, divided from mainland Europe by the English Channel, are as good as contiguous with their neighbours – because it was Catholicism which was first disseminated, any subsequent extrication from the arms of the Catholic faith necessitated a revolt or a revolution.

In an isolated Japan, however, it was impossible for Chinese Confucianism to spread in an unmodified form, and it was inevitable that from the very beginning the Japanese people should to a greater or lesser degree take over the doctrines in their own way and apply different interpretations to them. The religious revolution was carried out quickly, and probably unconsciously, on board the ships coming from China and Korea or on the beaches of the Japanese coastline. If one looks at things in this way the chain of events whereby differing interpretations of the same bible nurtured different ethoses among different peoples and helped to create totally different economic conditions can be said to have a certain validity not just when applied to the West but also when applied to the East.

Confucius regarded benevolence (*jen*), justice (*i*), ceremony (*li*), knowledge (*chih*) and faith (*hsin*) as among the most important virtues, but believed that of these it was benevolence (*jen*) which was the virtue which must be at the heart of humanity. Confucius believed that man's nature was fundamentally good, and considered in particular that the natural affection existing between relatives within one family was the cornerstone of social morality. According to Confucius the practice of morality did not lie in people's discharging the dispensations or commands of any transcendent being; it was when the natural human affection found within the family was extended without animosity beyond the confines of the family, both to non-family members and to complete strangers, that human nature had reached perfection and the social order was being appropriately maintained. Those who had acquired this kind of perfect love of humanity were spoken of as men of benevolence, or men of virtue (*jen-che*).

Confucius believed that to become such a person should be the ultimate objective of all moral cultivation. As might be expected, filial piety (*hsiao*) and the discharging of one's duty as a younger brother (*t'i*) became important virtues under Confucianism. Filial piety consisted of respecting one's parents, taking good care of them and acting according to their wishes; the obedience commensurate with a younger brother meant adherence to the wishes of elder brothers and seniors. In addition harmony (Ch. *ho*, Jap. *wa*) was essential for the achievement of benevolence. Harmony signified people's being in accord with one another and preserving accord within society, but this concept of *ho* also embraced a kind of harmony which was essentially harmful, being no more than one person's blindly following another. Similarly bravery (*yung*) was also frequently regarded as a precondition for this achievement of benevolence, but a brave person was not necessarily a benevolent person; bravery was something which must be directed towards the right ends. Confucius detested those people who, though they might be courageous, had no regard for courtesy.

Loyalty (*chung*) and faith (*hsin*) were the two virtues of sincerity. Loyalty implied sincerity vis-à-vis one's own conscience, i.e. an absence of pretensions or selfishness from the heart; faith meant always telling the truth. Faith was therefore the external expression of loyalty; whereas loyalty was a virtue which existed in relation to oneself, faith was a virtue which existed in regard to relationships with others. However, in just the same way as the keeping of a promise to commit an injustice was an act of wrongdoing, so loyalty by itself could not be considered perfect virtue. Loyalty could only be practised in conjunction with justice, or righteousness (*i*). Similarly the most important virtue, benevolence (*jen*), had to be tempered by justice and reinforced by knowledge; a simple, spontaneous humanity was not enough. Confucius described a true gentleman (a *chün-tzu*, or one replete with virtue) in the following manner:

For the perfect gentleman there are nine considerations. These are a desire to see clearly when he looks at something; a desire to hear every detail when listening to something; a desire to present a tranquil countenance; a desire to preserve an attitude of respect; a desire to be sincere in his words; a desire to be careful in his work; a

willingness to enquire further into anything about which he has doubts; a willingness to bear in mind the difficulties consequent on anger; a willingness to consider moral values when presented with the possibility of profit (*The Analects of Confucius*, chapter 16).

Confucius advocated what he called the principle of virtuous government – meaning a method of government which would strengthen the people by means of morality and serve naturally to bring about order in society by raising the level of virtue among the people. He strongly rejected any idea of constitutional government on the grounds that under the principles of constitutionalism order is imposed upon society by law and those who break the law are penalised, so that people come to think how they can best avoid punishment, and the resulting society has no sense of shame. However, even in a society under the sway of the principle of government by virtue something analogous to the laws found in a constitutional society is essential. This was referred to by Confucius as *li*, or ceremony, by which he meant norms established by custom but which were less rigid than laws. Confucius' maxim was 'guidance by morality, control by ceremony'. Given this he believed that 'people will come to have a sense of moral shame, and to act correctly'. Confucius' belief was that it was especially incumbent on those in the upper levels of society to act in accordance with the dictates of ceremony. A ruler must deal with his subordinates in the fashion stipulated by custom; a rich man as well must conduct himself with decorum and according to ceremony.

However the Confucianism which was understood and disseminated in Japan was not of this kind. It is also generally believed that the differences between Japanese Confucianism and Chinese Confucianism became greater and greater with the passage of time. This can be shown by looking at the imperial injunction issued to members of the Japanese armed forces in 1882. This injunction was written from a Confucian standpoint, but was in no way a specific ethical code allotted to a limited social group, i.e. members of the armed forces. Following the establishment of the Meiji government the traditional caste system had been abolished, the warrior class had lost its prerogatives and a system of conscription had been introduced. As a result the obligation of national defence fell to the population as a whole, and all Japanese people were considered as

potential soldiers. The Imperial Injunction to Soldiers and Sailors was written on the basis of this sort of consideration, and was simultaneously an imperial injunction to the nation which had to be observed by the people as a whole. In this document five of the Confucian virtues were emphasised – loyalty, ceremony, bravery, faith and frugality; no special consideration was given to benevolence, the central virtue in China. This neglect of the virtue of benevolence can be said to be quite natural in as far as the injunction was specifically aimed at members of the armed forces or the people as potential soldiers; but if we compare this with what was considered to be the essence of the soldierly or warrior spirit in China under Chiang Kai-shek or in ancient Korea certain characteristics of Japanese Confucianism become absolutely clear. In Chiang Kai-shek's army the major elements required for a soldierly spirit were wisdom, faith, benevolence, bravery and strictness; in the ancient Silla dynasty of Korea the qualities stipulated for soldiers according to the *hwa-rang do* (way of the perfect soldier – the Korean equivalent of Japanese *bushido*) were loyalty, filial piety, faith, benevolence and bravery.⁴ Only faith and bravery are virtues common to all three countries. Benevolence is common to both China and Korea, but there is no mention of it in the case of Japan. Loyalty is common to both Japan and Korea but does not appear on China's list of virtues.

The neglect of benevolence in this fashion, and the emphasis placed on loyalty, must be regarded as characteristics peculiar to Japanese Confucianism. As mentioned earlier, benevolence was considered in China to be the central virtue of Confucianism. In Japan no especial importance was attached to it even in Shōtoku Taishi's Seventeen-Article Constitution of 604, which was written very much under the influence of Confucianism. It would not be true to say that the virtue of benevolence has continued to be completely disregarded throughout the history of Confucianism in Japan. However, this relative neglect of benevolence does not date only from the Meiji period; it is something which goes back a very long way. In Japan it was loyalty rather than benevolence which came to be considered the most important virtue, and this became more and more the case as Japan approached the modern period.

Furthermore the meaning of loyalty (Ch. *chung*, Jap. *chū*) was not

⁴ See Ozaki Tomoe's essay (in Japanese) in *Dai-ikki Heika Yobi – gakusei no Ki*.

the same in both China and Japan. As previously mentioned, in China loyalty meant being true to one's own conscience. In Japan, although it was also used in this same sense, its normal meaning was essentially a sincerity that aimed at total devotion to one's lord, i.e. service to one's lord to the point of sacrificing oneself. Consequently Confucius' words 'act with loyalty in the service of one's lord' were interpreted by the Chinese to mean 'Retainers must serve their lord with a sincerity which does not conflict with their own consciences', whereas the Japanese interpreted the same words as 'Retainers must devote their whole lives to their lord.' As a result loyalty in Japan was a concept which, in conjunction with filial piety and duty to one's seniors, formed a trinity of values which regulated within society the hierarchic relationships based on authority, blood ties and age respectively. In Japan there was no question of the concept of loyalty and faith being considered two sides of the same coin, as was the case in China.

This concept of loyalty became more and more apparent from the Tokugawa period, and was especially obvious in its last years, becoming widely diffused among the Japanese people. This view of loyalty was not something of recent origin. As early as the time of the *Manyōshū* (an anthology of poems compiled in the latter half of the seventh century), poems spoke of loyalty towards the Emperor. In 749 Ōtomo no Yakamochi wrote:

At sea be my body water-soaked,
On land be it with grass overgrown,
Let me die by the side of my Sovereign!
Never will I feel regret.

It was in 753 that Imamatsuribe no Yosofu, a frontier guard, wrote:

I will not from today
Turn back toward home –
I who have set out to serve
As Her Majesty's humble shield.⁵

Loyalty in this sense of service to one's lord could frequently find itself in conflict with loyalty in the sense of being true to one's own

⁵ Translations from Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai version of *The Manyōshū* (Tokyo, 1940).

conscience. However, in Japan this contradiction was not a serious one. In much the same way as conscientious pacifist activity was not permitted in Japan up to 1945 (and since then the Japanese constitution has nominally precluded the existence of a fighting force), so in Japan in earlier times the command of a lord counted for far more than the conscience of the individual. Throughout Japanese history up to the present individualism has never prospered, and, as a result, a strong, serious advocacy of liberalism has been virtually non-existent. The Japanese have been required to obey their rulers, to serve their parents, to honour their elders and to act in accordance with the majority factions in society. There has been little margin left over to grapple with problems of conscience.

Such an interpretation of loyalty could also conflict with the ideals of filial piety (Jap. *kō*)⁶ and harmony (*wa*) (the Chinese virtues of *hsiao* and *ho*). This was because the orders of a ruler could conflict with parental wishes or with the majority opinion in society. As we shall see later,⁷ Japan's first great political thinker, Shōtoku Taishi (573–621), prohibited dictatorship by the Emperor, so that his orders would not be in conflict with the majority opinion in society. Even so orders issued by the Emperor could still contradict parental wishes. Taira Shigemori (1138–79) encountered just such a paradoxical situation as this, and lamented it with the words: 'If I want to demonstrate my loyalty I must be deemed not to have filial piety; if I try to show filial piety I shall not be loyal.' But Japanese long after Shigemori would probably have chosen loyalty above filial piety. This was the case even when the Emperor's command might not reflect the feelings of the majority. When the Emperor issued a command which was unreasonable and tyrannical it was the man who overcame his own conscience and obeyed his master's injunction who was the loyal retainer, not the one who complied with the dictates of his own conscience and the will of the majority in society and refused to obey. The Japanese do not reproach such a person with an inadequate conscience; when he is in the wretched position of being unable to follow the dictates of his own conscience he attracts only their sympathy. While Chinese Confucianism is one in which bene-

⁶ The structure of the Chinese family was very different from that of the family in Japan. The concept of filial piety, therefore, was quite naturally not precisely the same in both countries.

⁷ See Chapter 1 below.