

CHAPTER 4: JAPANESE HISTORY: PROGRESS WITHOUT MURDER

1. Japan viewed from an archeological perspective

I have no intention of addressing the question of how and when the Japanese settled on these islands in this book. Textbooks inform us that the Jomon period commenced approximately 16,000 years ago. The pottery of that era (Jomon ware) is markedly different from pottery crafted by the agricultural people of the succeeding culture (the Yayoi culture). For a time that difference led scholars to suspect that the Jomon people were not the ancestors of the Japanese of today. However, thanks to advancements in archaeology, we now know that the Jomon people were the forebears of subsequent cultures and of the present-day Japanese. That being the case, we must look to the Jomon culture for the roots of the Japanese people and of Japanese civilization.

According to the edition of the *New History Textbook*¹ (compiled and edited by the Japanese Society for Textbook Reform) currently in use, when we look at Japan from an altitude of 10,000 meters, we see that it is surrounded by water. In geopolitical terms, Japan's location puts it in the best possible position for resisting foreign invasions. We also notice that Japan is covered with dense forests. The Jomon people hunted wild boars and deer. They fished, and engaged in small-scale agriculture as well. They may have formed communities or villages; if so, the villages must have been far apart. There was nothing for them to fight over, so they did not wage wars, probably because the communities were so scattered.

Through recent archeological advances we know that the Jomon people kept dogs, which they used in hunting. They bonded with their dogs; they never killed them. In fact, they grieved for the dogs when they died.

People who live in the world of ice (Siberia, for instance) use dogs to pull their sleds. When the sled dogs die, they eat them. Perhaps the Siberians' environment tolerates such behavior, but in comparison, the Jomon people seem to have been gentle souls. They were radically different from the Koreans and the people of Guangdong, who are so fond of dog meat.

Eventually the cultivation of rice was introduced into Japan, and agriculture began to flourish. Such progress propelled the unification of Japan behind the Yamato court. The rice-growing culture harvested and stored its crops. Wars were bound to break out over stockpiled food. Pottery from the Yayoi period was decorated with images of warriors, and from them we know that there were wars then. But such conflicts were far smaller in scale and much less brutal than battles fought in China at that time. Moreover, there were no instances of great numbers of people being buried alive, as in China during the Shang dynasty.²

In China a writing system had been invented, and when a ruler died, *xunzang* (the ritual suicide of his wives, retainers and servants so they could accompany him in the afterlife) was practiced. The Chinese crafted and used bronze and iron vessels. All these articles were used in warfare. But the Japanese did not yet have access to tank-like vehicles drawn by four horses, nor to crossbows made of bronze, which were more accurate than ordinary bows.

Here I would like to cite an example from Japanese mythology: the story of the transfer of the

¹ *Shinpen: Atarashii rekishi kyokasho* (New history textbook, revised edition) (Tokyo: Jiyusha, 2016).

² China's earliest dynasty (ca. 1600-1046 BC).

land of Izumo. Amaterasu (goddess of the sun and earth) requested the transfer of Izumo, then ruled by Okuninushi, a descendant of Susanoo. Okuninushi asked her to build a great shrine at Izumo, which would serve as his home, and to worship him there. Amaterasu honored his request and the transfer was consummated. Not a drop of blood was spilled. The shrine mentioned in the myth is Izumo Taisha, and we learned only recently that the shrine described in Japanese mythology was indeed built (see the section pertaining to Emperor Jinmu's eastern migration in Chapter 3 of the *Chronicles of Japan*). There you will find no mention of the massacre or annihilation of defeated soldiers. On the contrary, Emperor Jinmu took the daughter of the head of a powerful clan who had surrendered to him as his wife. Jinmu was tireless in his efforts to effect reconciliation with those he had defeated. Once the Yamato court was established and Buddhism, with its taboo against killing, came to Japan, the Japanese were even more loath to take the lives of other humans.

Buddhism is a philosophy and a religion that spread throughout East Asia in ancient times. It prohibits murder precisely because one of its tenets is that all living creatures are entitled to live life to its fullest. With its emphasis on the contemplation of the past and the future, Buddhism would continue to have an extremely powerful influence on the Japanese, augmenting the Shinto culture created by farmers.

2. The Jinshin War: Major conflict arising from imperial succession disputes

In 608, when Prince Shotoku dispatched the third mission to Sui China, there was debate over what language to use to convey the Japanese emperor's title. The consensus was that the appellation used in China (*huangdi*) would not be appropriate. On the other hand, it would be equally inappropriate to describe the Japanese emperor as "king," since that would make him subordinate to the Chinese ruler. Then someone hit upon *tenno*, or "celestial sovereign." In Chinese the word (*tianhuang*) is used to describe the highest-ranking Daoist deities or, specifically, the North Star, around which all stars rotate.

By using the word *tenno*, the Japanese were being courteous to the Sui court and to the Tang court, which followed it, as well. But they were also demonstrating that the Japanese ruler had attained a status equal to that of the Chinese emperor, and that there was another realm beyond that of the Chinese world.

Now I would like to draw readers' attention to Prince Shotoku's 17-Article Constitution, which exemplifies the mindset of a nation's ruler. Even today it represents the fundamental principles by which the Japanese live. Article 1 contains a prime example:

Harmony should be valued and quarrels should be avoided.

Article 17, the final article, reads in part:

Decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone.

This is the underlying principle of the Japanese respect for discussions and consultations.

Article 2 offers the following instructions:

The three treasures, which are Buddha, the (Buddhist) Law and the

(Buddhist) Priesthood, should be given sincere reverence, for they are the final refuge of all living things.

Prince Shotoku designated Buddhism, which has served through the ages as a solid foundation for the Japanese spirit, as Japan's second national religion.

Blessed with a natural barrier that enabled them to live their lives without the constant fear of being invaded by a foreign power (China, in this case), the Japanese succeeded in creating a new, separate world. All the conditions necessary for the establishment of a nation whose citizens could live in peace and prosper, should those governing them so desire, were satisfied.

China, on the other hand, was always at risk. Not even the most gifted ruler, not even the ideal relationship between ruler and subjects, could protect the Chinese from invasions and possible annihilation. They could build a glorious nation, but that nation would always be vulnerable to attack by a military force from outside.

But the Japanese did not need to worry about a foreign invasion, and could instead focus on forging the ideal relationship between a nation and its people.

The Jinshin War erupted in 672, not long after the death of Emperor Tenji. It was triggered by a dispute over Emperor Tenji's successor between Prince Oama, his younger brother, and Prince Otomo, his son. Since neither side would give way, victory in war seemed to be the only possible solution. This was the first armed conflict in Japan that resulted from an imperial-succession controversy among blood relatives. In China, such wars were often blood baths involving several tens of thousands of combatants.

The Xuanwu Gate Incident (626) resulted in the enthronement of Li Shimin as the second emperor (Emperor Taizong) of the Tang dynasty. Li killed his older brother (the crown prince), his younger brother Li Yuanji, and every member of their families, for a total of tens of thousands of victims. After his father, Emperor Gaozu, relinquished the throne, Li became the wisest ruler in Chinese history, but until he grasped the reins of power firmly in his hands, he was fighting a war originating from a vicious family dispute.

Japan's Jinshin War was a large-scale conflict over imperial succession. But compared with Chinese conflicts with similar causes, it was a minor clash, and far less brutal.

On June 24 Prince Oama fled from Yoshino, where he had been living the secluded life of a priest. On July 23, Prince Otomo committed ritual suicide after having been defeated in battle. The war had lasted exactly one month. According to *Chronicles of Japan*, Prince Oama's warriors numbered 23,000 (20,000 from Owari and 3,000 from Mino). However, judging from population estimates, he probably had fewer than 10,000 men under his command. If Prince Otomo's army was about the same size, there were 20,000 combatants at most. Moreover, the great majority of them were farmers. The general commanding Prince Oama's forces, Otomo no Fukei, issued a warning: The mission of these soldiers is not to kill farmers, but to kill evildoers. Therefore, do not kill at random. This was an official notice prohibiting the killing of farmers. The Jinshin War was small in scope, and it was likely that there were not many casualties. Prince Oama had already embraced Buddhism, and therefore was averse to killing others. Even so, in previous eras there was no precedent for brutal wars, such as the ones waged in China. Perhaps for that reason, after the death of Prince Otomo, the victors treated the defeated mercifully. Eight people were held accountable and executed, and an unspecified number of persons were exiled. No one else was punished.

3. Taking of life anathema to Japanese culture

In 673 Prince Oama was installed as Emperor Tenmu. He proceeded to have the *Great Treasury of Sutras* copied at Kawahara Temple. In 680, when his wife (later Empress Jito) became ill, Tenmu prayed for her recovery, promising to build Yakushi Temple if his prayer was answered. Emperor Tenmu also announced that the Omi code, which had already been enacted, would be further refined. This became the Asuka Kiyomihara Code, which took effect during the reign of Empress Jito. One of the provisions of this collection of laws was the termination of the current appellation of Japan, Wa, and its replacement with Nippon. Furthermore, work began on a compilation of Japanese history; the fruits of these labors were Japan's first histories, *Records of Ancient Matters* and *Chronicles of Japan*.

In any case, the Jinshin War was fought to resolve a dispute over imperial succession, but it was small in scale. Apparently Prince Oama modeled his strategy after that of the Han Emperor Gaozu, who ruled from 256 to 195 BC. He did not, however, adopt Gaozu's brutal methods. The fact that once the outcome of the war was clear, there were no additional killings for the purpose of revenge, set a precedent that would be observed in the future. Previous conflicts involved no needless brutality, but even in the Jinshin conflict, a furiously waged war, there was no cruelty for the sake of cruelty.

Any discussion of the Japanese aversion to killing must mention the ban on eating meat issued by Emperor Tenmu in 675. That imperial order prohibited the consumption of the flesh of cattle, horses, dogs, monkeys, and chickens. The reason for the ban on monkeys was their close resemblance to humans. Chickens were included because roosters' crows tell humans what time it is. The prohibition against eating cattle and horses (because they help farmers by working in the fields) was limited to the growing season. In 676 Emperor Tenmu issued the Animal Release Order, which states that birds and fish are to be released into the wild. Together with the ban on eating meat, it adhered to Buddhist teachings, which stress kindness to animals.

Later, prohibitions against killing were issued several times, as late as the Kamakura era (1185-1333), when one was ordered by the Kamakura Shogunate. The Tokugawa Shogunate issued them as well. Among them were the noteworthy Edicts on Compassion for Living Things decreed by Tokugawa Tsunayoshi. Here I would like to emphasize the fact that even as late as the Edo period, which falls into Japan's modern era, the Tokugawa Shogunate issued an order banning the killing of cattle and horses, and another prohibiting the consumption of meat. Cattle and horses were included because they served humans. This prohibition was adhered to strictly during the Edo period, aided by Buddhist precepts honored by the common people. Today the Japanese eat beef and other meat without any hesitation. But it was not until the Meiji period and Westernization policies instituted then that they begin eating meat. In 1871 Emperor Meiji set an example by eating beef, and the Japanese were advised to improve their health by emulating this Western world.

However, the multitude of orders and decrees prohibiting the consumption of meat suggest that these prohibitions were not observed to the letter.

The warriors who emerged in the late Heian period (794-1185) were professional combatants who had to be prepared to kill, and resolutely so, when necessary. Therefore, refusing to eat meat for fear of descending into a Buddhist hell would have been a mark against their honor. So they steeled themselves and ate it.

Common people too also ate meat, using such excuses as "animals caught in traps weren't killed by humans, so it's all right to eat them." Furthermore, there were no prohibitions against

consuming fish or shellfish, as they were important sources of protein in the Edo period.

It is important to emphasize the fact that so many prohibitions against killing were issued in Japan because the Japanese had an aversion to killing humans.

4. Defining Bushido

Now I would like to examine Bushido, the moral code of Japanese warriors, or *samurai*, to shed some more light on Japanese history, which progressed without killing.

Samurai came onto the scene during the Heian period, when the power of the imperial court weakened. Privately owned parcels of land increased in number (in spite of the fact that shouldn't have been any private holdings). The self-proclaimed owners were forced to protect their property. Military groups were formed, which aligned themselves with specific nobles. The result was the formation of two large groups of warriors, the Minamoto and the Taira.

Through the 15th and 16th centuries (the Age of Warring States), and in the Edo period, when the government created a social order (with samurai at the top, followed by farmers, artisans, and merchants), the samurai headed the social order.

A detailed description can be found in *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, written by Nitobe Inazo and published in 1899. In its preface, Nitobe tells us that the distinguished jurist Emile de Laveleye once asked him if religious instruction was given in Japanese schools. When Nitobe responded in the negative, de Laveleye said, "No religion! How do you impart moral education?"³ Nitobe was at a loss for an answer right then, but after giving the question a great deal of thought, he realized that the teaching of Bushido, which took place in the home, was the Japanese form of moral education. He then proceeded to write the aforementioned book.

Some of the virtues of Bushido, according to Nitobe, are:

1. Rectitude or justice (*gi*)

Refrain from dishonorable deeds.

2. Courage (*yu*)

Retain your self-possession even in the presence of danger or death.

3. Benevolence or compassion (*jin*)

Use your strength to help others.

4. Politeness (*rei*)

Avoid disrespectful behavior.

5. Veracity and sincerity (*makoto*)

³ <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12096/12096-h/12096-h.htm> (retrieved 11/20/2017).

Abandon thoughts of personal gain

6. Honor (*meiyo*)

Take pride in doing what is just.

7. The duty of loyalty (*chugi*)

Be loyal to the bitter end when such loyalty is deserved.

These virtues resemble aspects of chivalry, which arose in Europe in the 9th century, and was observed through 15th century. It was developed by knights and other military men and constituted a way of life, though not codified, for them to follow. In that chivalry stressed sacrificing the welfare of individuals for a greater good, refraining from cowardly behavior, and respecting justice, it had much in common with Bushido.

In Korea, for a short time in the 7th century, during the Unified Silla dynasty (668-935), groups of young men called Hwarang, or Flowering Knights, were active. The Hwarang did not spring up spontaneously, but were selected by the Korean court. They do not hold up to comparison with Japanese samurai, but it was an honor to be chosen as a Hwarang. They were warriors who despised cowardice, and took pride in their ability to demonstrate strength *and* compassion.

In other words, both samurai and knights had chosen an occupation that involved participating in warfare. But both also had adopted a value system whereby they avoided meaningless conflicts and needless killing.

Yamamoto Tsunetomo, a samurai from Saga who lived during the Edo period, wrote *Hagakure* (In the shadow of leaves), which was destined for great acclaim. In it he wrote, "Bushido is the way of death." By that he meant that a samurai must obey any and all orders issued by his master, no matter how unreasonable they may seem. If his master orders him to die, he must obey right then and there. Such conduct smacks of stoicism, but this is a principle by which samurai lived. When they followed the precepts of Bushido to the letter, they were able to conquer all their lowly desires and live as ideal samurai.

Therefore, even when samurai took their own lives to take responsibility for some infringement, they were not dispatched (for instance, decapitated) by someone else, but they retained their honor by committing ritual suicide (*seppuku*). Apparently there is a tremendous difference in the fear and pain that accompany death when one is killed by someone else or by one's own hand. And that represented pride and honor for samurai. The samurai of the Edo period who adhered to the principles of Bushido did not indulge in showy luxuries. They had great compassion for the common people in their charge, and made great efforts to insure that the common people were safe and contented. Led by such distinguished warriors, the Edo period persisted for 260 years. It was followed by the Meiji Renovation, and with the declaration that all social classes were equal, Japan became a modern nation. Bushido then became, at least to some extent, the national character.

For that reason, there was no need to offer religious instruction per se in Japanese schools, just as Nitobe explained. It is because of Bushido that the Japanese are honest, brave, and kind.

Even in the Greater East Asian War (which includes World War II), the Japanese drew upon the spirit of Bushido.

I believe that if the Japanese were pitted against any army, and the two sides had similar equipment, the Japanese would prevail. In battles waged during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese fought with all their might. They were subjected to harsh criticism to the effect that the rank and file were quite capable, but the higher the rank, the more ineffective the officer. It's true that there may have been a few incompetent officers, but I am confident that Japanese officers were generally capable and honorable.

There is a saying that goes, "The cherry among flowers, the samurai among men." Cherry blossoms open suddenly and fall just as quickly. Samurai of ancient times gave their lives for their masters. Ever since Japan opened up to the rest of the world the basic Japanese moral principle of patriotism has been held in high respect. Though some may disagree, when soldiers vowed to die for the Emperor, they were not spouting ideology, they were expressing a basic Japanese moral principle. The Japanese had so few resources, and as they approached the Battle of Leyte Gulf, they realized that to strike a severe blow against the US, and perhaps gain some leverage in peace talks, their only recourse was suicide attacks. The Japanese military took that drastic step.

The Japanese have every reason to be proud of their patriotic martyrdom, with its basis in Bushido; it is a respected national characteristic. For that very reason, it is of the utmost importance that accounts of suicide squads and those Japanese who chose death before surrender be passed on to future generations.

Now I'd like to discuss the view that Bushido would never have come into being if Japan had not been at peace, which may seem, at first glance, contrary to conventional wisdom. But the fact is that while samurai kept Japan at peace, a spiral turning in a favorable direction was at work, and Bushido became even stronger in a peaceful society. If the spiral had been broken from outside and a great number of people were killed unjustly, it would soon have disappeared. One need only look at the tragedy of the Hwarang on the Korean peninsula. There the threat of foreign invasion was constant, the spiral was cut, and Bushido never came into being. Objective conditions differed between Japan and Korea where Bushido was concerned.

Since warfare was the objective of the samurai, a casual glimpse makes one think that the existence of samurai and warfare were two faces of the same coin. In that case, then one could conclude that the mere existence of samurai was harmful to peace because they destroyed peace and caused wars. But this was a simplistic conclusion.

While samurai needed to be strong, they were also required to be kind. Since they were able to kill, when Bushido, which restrains them from killing meaninglessly, was born, the objective of the samurai became maintaining and preserving peace. The two Chinese characters used to write *bushi* or "warrior" are 武士. The right-hand side of the first character (戈) means "halberd," and the left side (止) means "stop." The word formed when we combine these two components and then follow them with the character for "man" means "someone who stops wars." My aversion to Chinese characters notwithstanding, I believe these two characters express the *raison d'être* of the samurai quite eloquently.

But from a Chinese perspective, the characters for *bushi* seem quite incongruous. In Chinese the second character means "scholar-official." The Japanese notion of the dual path of cultural and martial arts is totally alien to the Chinese. A man of letters and a man of the sword are considered two separate beings, and since the Song dynasty, the Chinese political structure has given precedence to men of letters.

To elaborate a little more, suppose a man knows that he will eventually be going into battle and that he may be killed. He would, normally, be terrified. For a warrior the first hurdle to overcome is the conquest of that fear. In other words, a warrior must begin by acquiring the self-control to overcome the fear that his survival instinct gives rise to. He must accomplish that by controlling his will to live, which is the most important aspect of the human spirit. If he manages to succeed, he deserves to be proud of himself.

He must be kind to the weak, and never torment them. He must not kill recklessly, and he must also be prepared to die when a great cause is presented to him. He is able, ultimately, to become an ideal human being, an ideal member of society, when he is able to conquer his fear of death. Therefore, as Nitobe Inazo wrote, samurai do not need to undergo moral education by means of religious instruction, because Bushido provides the moral path to tread.

Compared with Westerners, or with Muslims or East Indians, East Asians are less religious. Views on life and death differ by ethnicity. Bushido, like religions, tells you to contemplate death and to always be aware of death, but besides that, samurai also seek aesthetics as a “practice” that transcends religion; Bushido is superior to religion, and even to the standards of good and evil.

Earlier I mentioned how warriors and peace form a spiral, and I would like to mention it again. Warriors are prepared to engage in battles of all sorts at any time. But for such warriors to emerge in society, that society must be largely free of war. If not warriors will not emerge. If warriors must conquer their fear of death, and take pride in doing that, then society must admire and value them.

In societies where unjust deaths are a matter of course, there is no latitude that will permit the luxury of admiring the proud warrior. When the will to live is denied and humans are casually killed, humans cannot be faulted for doing whatever is necessary to survive. Even if in their midst there are kind people who do not kill and who are kind to the weak, society does not have the leisure to appreciate such behavior.

In China where the people are sacrificial lambs, caught up in someone else’s battles and casually killed, samurai warriors will definitely not appear. The good spiral between warriors and peace will never form.

In a battle arena of a Japanese war, warriors fulfill the leading roles. Farmers, artisans, and merchants are something like spectators, as at a sporting event. The civil wars fought in China during the modern age, where every member of the population was forced to participate, were entirely different. That is why, in Japanese wars, warriors or soldiers play the leading roles; Japanese wars are sporting and fair play prevails.

The fact that warriors and knights appeared in Japan and the Western world is proof that at those times society was orderly, and that unjust killings were not common practice. The fact that warriors appeared in Japan means that the Japanese had built a peaceful society.

The presence of warriors created peace, and peace encouraged the appearance of more warriors. In other words, the spiral of justice functions. If a foreign people were to invade Japan and war broke out, with cruel deaths being the rule rather than the exception, Bushido would disappear. But since Japan is surrounded by water and was provided with a natural barrier, there were no foreign invasions, and Bushido advanced by leaps and bounds. Japan became a peaceful nation with few wars.

Of course, even in Japan there was an Age of Warring States (1467-1603) during which there was continuous warfare, beginning with the Onin War in 1467, similar to the Spring and Autumn period in China (771-476 BC).

But warfare in Japan differed from that in China in that it did not involve the common people or farmers. Historians indicate that when warrior leaders went into a battle, they believed that the gods would not favor them if they behaved unjustly. They did not kill needlessly. Unlike the Chinese, they did not mow people down for no reason.

Battle methodology during the Age of Warring States closely resembled that employed during the Spring and Autumn period. But even so, in Japan warriors were the leaders, and civilians did not get caught up in the fighting. It was different from China, where the entire state was in utter chaos. Though battles were fought during the Age of Warring States, it was not truly an era of warfare.

When battles were fought in Japan, farmers became spectators; they knew that they would not be harmed. At the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, toward the end of the Age of Warring States, farmers reportedly took their boxed lunches up to spots high in the mountains from which they could safely enjoy the proceedings. In Japan, once the outcome of a battle was determined, and the leaders of the losing side had committed seppuku or otherwise acknowledged their defeat, there was no massacre of the men who had served under them or of farmers living in the losing domain. One exception was Oda Nobunaga. He reacted to Akechi Mitsuhide's revolt (just before Nobunaga had achieved control of all Japan) by disemboweling himself. Nobunaga had also burned temples on Mt. Hiei in 1571 and killed priests on Mt. Koya. He refused to allow opponents to surrender, and massacred them. But his methods made him an exception in Japan. He must have adopted Chinese methods of warfare. Perhaps he thought he needed to emulate the Chinese since he was a commander during the Age of Warring States. He seems to have been dispassionate about his actions.

In 1572 after Nobunaga defeated Odani Castle, he drank sake from the defeated Azai Nagamasa's skull. This act also had a Chinese precedent. Furthermore, in the Battle of Nagashino in 1575, Oda lined riflemen who were to shoot at Takeda Katsuyori's men in three rows, and ordered each row to shoot and then reload, in succession. This way there was someone shooting at all times as long as the barrage lasted. I believe that this particular story was invented after the fact. But if true, it too has a Chinese precedent. The first Qin emperor lined soldiers armed with bows that took a long time to load and had them shoot in succession.

Additionally, Nobunaga's economic warfare should be taken into account. Textbooks mention his emphasis on economics, particularly commercial activity such as free markets and open guilds.

He may have been inspired by conflicts that took place during the Yuan dynasty, which also waged commercial warfare.

If the cruel methods of waging war that Nobunaga employed had become common practice, a great number of people would have been killed unjustly. It would have become impossible to predict death, and Bushido would not have developed. However, Nobunaga disappeared from the scene before that could happen.

5. No tradition of cannibalism in Japan

My intent for this chapter was to elucidate on Japan's history and how its annals contain very

few accounts of killing. Now I would like to address cannibalism.

A scrupulous examination of any nation's history will reveal instances of cannibalism. But China is the only nation where wars gave rise to cannibalism, which became ingrained — part of the culture. In other nations cannibalism had one cause: famine.

The Marxist economist Kawakami Hajime (1879-1946) produced a book entitled *Agricultural Administration*. In it he refers to a travel journal kept by a physician named Tachibana Nankei, who was travelling in western Japan toward the end of the Edo period, during the Great Tenmei Famine. Tachibana recounted a story told him by a pilgrim he encountered on the road. The pilgrim stopped at a certain house where he discovered an old man and his daughter who were starving, just barely alive. His heart went out to them, and he offered them his own food, but they wouldn't accept it. The old man told him that even if he ate it he would still have no food on the following day. Accepting the pilgrim's kind offer would only prolong their agony.

In Tachibana's journal kept during his travels in east Japan, he mentions someone in Tsugaru who resorted to cannibalism, eating even his own child.

Therefore, there have been instances of cannibalism in Japan. Kawakami's book relays an account of someone in 14th-century England who killed and ate his own child to fend off death from starvation. And I have heard that during the Greater East Asian War, Japanese soldiers lost in the jungles of the Pacific islands and Southeast Asia ate the flesh of dead soldiers. Such tales cannot be completely dismissed. But all of them differ greatly from the Chinese tradition of cannibalism becoming so entrenched that it became part of the culture; its practice could be triggered by even the slightest sign of famine.

As I wrote in Chapter 2. I doubt that Confucius, who taught the precepts of Confucianism, ever ate human flesh, but I think that people he knew were certainly part of the cannibalism culture. Even today, illegal organ transplants are being done without a second thought.

My conclusion: Japan's history tells the story of a culture that flourished without killing.