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Yao bride-exchange, matrification and adoption

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YAO BRIDE-EXCHANGE, MATRIFILIATION AND ADOPTION*

This paper deals with Southeast Asian Hill People whom foreigners call Yao. It concerns two dominant issues in anthropological discussions: recruitment of matrifiliates to allegedly agnatic descent groups and circular connubium in the Southeast Asian Highlands. I aim to demonstrate a functional relationship between these two phenomena and adoption; that each practice is an aspect of regional commerce.

The Yao and Pulangka

The word *Yao* is a Chinese, Lao and Thai corruption of the adjective *iu* which the people sometimes prefix to their name for themselves, *mien*. The Yao are Sinitic in origin and cultural orientations. Their population concentration is in the Chinese Peoples' Republican provinces of Kwangtung, Kwangsi and Kweichow and numbers almost three quarters of a million (Moseley, 1966, p. 162). Other Yao inhabit parts of North Vietnam, Laos and Burma. Sixteen thousand (United Nations, 1967) live in highland terrain of the Thai Laotian frontier where I carried out research in 1966-68. My observations refer principally to Pulangka village, Chiengrai Province, North Thailand. The settlement covers a clearing in the jungle of a mountain ridge, one thousand metres above sea level and has 247 inhabitants. The local community comprises nineteen dwelling-groups (*peo*) each of which is associated with a particular house.

Pulangka Yao are shifting cultivators of rice, maize and opium poppy

* This paper is an amended version of that delivered to the meeting of the *Australian Association of Social Anthropologists*, Brisbane, 1971. The material results mainly from eighteen months residence in Pulangka village during 1966-68. The fieldwork was a project of the *Tribal Research Centre*, Chiangmai and benefited greatly from the assistance, encouragement and advice of the Director, Khun Wanat Bhruksasri. The *Foreign Aid Section* of the then *Department of External Affairs*, Canberra provided me with a stipend and financed some of the expenses. I have also used data I collected during a visit to Laos in 1970.

(Miles, 1969). They earn cash by selling surpluses in the regional commercial system. Many invest their profits in bridewealth and child-purchase. This fact has profound implications for the composition and size of the two most important groups in their social organisation: the *tso* which is a localised descent unit and the *peo* which develops around this core.

Each *tso* consists of people who have a common ancestor and live under one roof. Yao emphasise an ideal that male agnatic descendants should maintain lifelong membership of the unit. But this exogamous entity often includes married female cognates and people who belong to their mother's group rather than their father's.

A *peo* is defined exclusively in terms of locality and also embraces in-married spouses of *tso* members. The starting point of my discussion is that it frequently gains additional recruits through adoption and fosterage; they account for 23 % of the Pulangka population under the age of twenty.

Many of the nineteen *tso* have at some time exchanged brides either directly or through a third party. The transaction is evident from the relationships of living members and the genealogical information that the people record in Chinese texts which feature in ceremonies of ancestor worship. My task is to justify the argument that adoption has explanatory significance for both the bilateral structure of *tso* and exchange of wives between them.

Adoption and Fosterage

A recent article by Goody (1969) suggests the necessity for drawing a sharp distinction between adoption and fosterage. I interpret the difference as follows. A fosteree becomes a resident in his custodian's household without any cancellation of his social identity as the offspring of his real parents or jural re-definition of his original kinship ties. Where relatives become fosterers they alter their role relationships but not their kinship statuses in respect to the infant.

In contrast adoption either totally extinguishes jural recognition of a person's connexions with natal relatives or results in a drastic re-definition of such links. The adoptee is jurally incorporated as the son or daughter of the adopter. If the latter is a natal kinsman, the act converts the original relationship to that of parent-child. A status change accompanies the alteration in role relationships.

What I call fosterage probably occurs in every society for purposes

of child welfare. Goody demonstrates that adoption is an ethnographically restricted phenomenon. The institution is almost if not entirely absent from the traditional societies of Sub-Saharan Africa, though widespread in Asia and Europe. Goody's thesis is that African marriage forms serve the same function as adoption elsewhere. He contends that the practice is one of several alternative reactions to the problems arising from heirlessness which confronts all societies.

According to his argument, polygamous marriage is the African solution. Men with a childless living or deceased wife become either simultaneously or serially polygamous. Women with a sterile or dead husband use surrogate genitors to beget their children. The article contains the questionable assertion that monogamy is absent from Africa and that polygamy is not an Asian phenomenon. The sum of the thesis might be a statement such as the following: childless Africans acquire progeny indirectly by purchasing a multiplicity of real or fictitious spouses; in contrast, their Asian counterparts directly procure fictitious offspring.

It would be interesting to examine whether variation in the occurrence and frequency of adoption is inversely related to the incidence of polygamy. I follow a different line of enquiry which confirms Goody's proposition — that certain types of marriage may substitute for adoption. But I reject the notion that heirlessness always explains why Asians make other people's offspring their own.

Goody attacks Sir Henry Maine who he says, interprets adoption as a mechanism for increasing the size of kin groups. The criticism emphasises that in China "if a man lacked a son he was obliged in the eyes of the law to adopt one of his nearest agnates." A further quotation states, "... closely related kin with an eye to the property of the adopting family, would often force their son upon it."

Thus Goody argues, because the adoptee is already an agnate there is no expansion of kin-group size but merely a shift of filiation within the unit. The implication that heirlessness is the exclusive rationale for Chinese adoption is certainly incorrect. It ignores Freedman's observation (1966) of the "adoption of sons *taken only to swell the ranks of the family*." Freedman (p. 7) contrasts this practice with the reaction to sterility in a statement "... they (the adoptees) could be got from any convenient source."

Obviously then, Chinese who already have children acquire more for the very reason that Goody denies. Barrenness is not the only motive. We can thus accept Maine's argument that adoption may

operate as a mechanism for expanding the membership of kin groups. Among the Yao it has this and other functions that have nothing to do with adult sterility.

Child Purchase and Commerce in North Thailand

Freedman's book (1966, p. 7) refers to the 'buying' of adoptees in Southeast China. Purchase is also critical to a full understanding of adoption in Pulangka. Payment of money, goods and other types of compensation to the biological parents frequently accompanies the transfer of rights over adoptees to the *peo* in which they now reside. I shall later discuss the nature and scale of such transactions. At the outset I want to stress that the Yao regard children as saleable commodities. But while they frequently buy, they rarely sell.

TABLE 1
Origin of Adoptees (twenty years and younger) in Pulangka

Ethnic Origin		Frequency	Percentages	
Yao		4	12.5	12.5
non-Yao	Thai/Lao	19	59.4	87.5
	Khmu	5	15.6	
	Meo	1	3.1	
	Chinese	2	6.3	
	Vietnamese	1	3.1	
TOTAL		32	100.0	100.0

Table 1 indicates that 87.5 % of Pulangka adoptees in my sample were bought from members of other ethnic groups. Only 12.5 % were born as Yao. An appreciation of this fact requires some discussion of extra-village relationships.

Inter Ethnic-Group Contact

Village territories of Yao, Meo, Khmu, Akha, Lahu and Hill Tai ¹ often interdigitate in the mountains of North Thailand and Western

¹ I use the word *Tai* as general term for the speakers of Thai and Lao languages.

Laos. There is a Meo settlement fifteen minutes walk from Pulangka, a Tai village one hour away, Khmu live within a day's pony ride. The farms of Pulangka's shifting cultivators often adjoin those of Meo and Tai. Interaction with other ethnic groups is therefore frequent.

Paradoxically, the Yao have even closer ties with foreigners in more distant places. Because of the dispersal of Yao, travellers between their communities often require accommodation *en route*. The major mountain trails pass through the centres of settlements with inhabitants of various ethnic identity. Among Black and White Meo, Khmu, Lahu and Hill Tai, Pulangka adults have long established and even inherited connexions with particular individuals. They depend on the latter for horse feed, fresh ponies, meals and shelter. Such arrangements are reciprocal. The parties refer to each other as 'sahai', qualifying the term with first person possessive pronouns. *Sahai* are the main contacts for economic dealings between villages. Their visits usually give rise to informal but bibulous festivity permeated with bonhomie. The relationship is highly valued and a source of prestige. As a result, weddings and funerals in the mountains are often cosmopolitan affairs where the *sahai* of the principal participants congregate.

The *sahai* with whom Yao have most dealings are Chinese shopkeepers in the valley townships of North Thailand and Western Laos. All Pulangka adults accept credit from the traders. They purchase cloth, kerosine, lighting utensils, cooking and eating implements, tools, horseshoes, patent medicines, salt, dry fish and meats as well as ceremonial paraphernalia such as incense and paper for manufacturing the replicas of houses and other things that they burn during ancestral ceremonies. The shopkeeper often advances payment for carpenters, builders, veterinary surgeons, doctors, silversmiths, photographers and other urban specialists whom Pulangka people consult or employ. The expense is debited to the account of the customer, who frequently pays with a supply of opium at the end of the poppy harvest.

Yao make better profits from opium disposal by dealing directly with consumers in peasant villages of lowland Tai. Among the latter are landless individuals and people who have experienced bad harvests. They provide the major outlet for mountain rice surpluses.

Pulangka farmers sell rice, opium and maize to other highland communities. In return the Yao acquire pigs, ponies and chickens, iron tools, homespun cloth and utensils such as woven threshing mats, rice baskets, pony panniers, transportable chicken coops and stools. All Pulangka opium pipes and poppy tapping instruments come from Meo

metal workers. Treshing mats and stools are exclusively Khmu products. Itinerant blacksmiths (Lao, Htin and Khmu), temper and make poppy hoes and finger knives for rice harvesting. Thus all communities participate in a complex network of debts and credit that focusses on urban centres. A market in children is part and parcel of the system.

Chinese merchants in North Thailand and Western Laos purchase children in the same way as their counterparts in pre-revolutionary Southeast China (Freedman, 1966, p. 7). The acquisition is usually an aspect of the indebtedness of Tai peasant customers who forfeit rights over their offspring to a foreclosing creditor. But the practice is not as Goody (1969, p. 66) suggests an accommodation to conjugal barrenness and it accounts for more than the large size of Chinese merchant families interested in expanding the territorial range of their operations which Freedman emphasises (Freedman, *ibid.*).

Children enter the market system as commodities for profitable re-sale. A parallel practice is debt-bondage, in which an insolvent debtor works for his creditor or provides a kinsman as a substitute. Debt-bondsmen are transferable. A third party can pay off the creditor thus gaining rights over the bondsman. I know of several Tai fathers who have used nubile daughters to cancel debts with traders. Some of the latter supply male and female bondsmen for Bangkok and Vientiane business enterprises such as restaurants and brothels.

A triadic feature of this market in people is highly relevant to the argument I develop later in the paper. A rural shopkeeper always has accounts and debts with big urban merchants. I am particularly interested in the fact that he can transfer this debt to a peasant customer who settles it with the payment of a human being directly to a representative of the city merchant. The shopkeeper may never in fact see the child, girl or bondsman involved. Figure 1 in Diagram 2 illustrates the point; a single arrow indicates the direction of credit; a double arrow the direction of payment.

I know of no instance in which Yao or Meo have sold infants to Chinese shopkeepers or become debt bondsmen or involuntary prostitutes. The situation reflects the powerful position of opium growers among agricultural people who produce for North Thai commerce. In respect to the child trade, Yao are exclusively buyers from other ethnic groups.

Pulangka Yao have purchased most of the adoptees in my sample (Table 1) from Chinese shopkeepers in North Thai and Lao towns. Eleven Tai and three Khmu were urban acquisitions. The parents

of four Tai and two Khmu lived in rural villages and disposed of their children through the *sahai* of the Yao when settling debts in opium, rice and maize.

Both Chinese whom the table lists first arrived in Pulangka with itinerant opium buyers who plied mule caravans out of Yunnan. The two boys were accepted by different Pulangka *peo* that promised to pay for them with opium at a later date. The sole Vietnamese had a similar origin. He came with a mule caravan out of Luang Prabang.

External Transaction in Adoptees and Brides

The case of a Chinese adoptee sets my line of enquiry into the relationship between child purchase and marriage. This male became a member of a Pulangka *peo* at the age of ten around 1941. The creditor did not revisit Pulangka until 1949, when he wore the uniform of one of Chang Kai Shek's Kwo Min Tang officers and had thirty armed soldiers as companions. He at first demanded three times as much opium as the amount he originally stipulated. The adopting *peo* had, however, fallen on hard times and could not pay. The fictive mother, now a deserted wife was highly reluctant to part with the youth for he was the only male member of the dwelling-groups' work gang. She asked the village headman for the opium. She and the old man then negotiated with the Kwo Min Tang. Later the troops left the village with the woman's fifteen year old daughter as the wife of the commander.

The fact that the soldiers caused the community little trouble thereafter is incidental. Of greater relevance to my theme is the nature of the exchange. The *peo* acquired an adopted son *in lieu* of bridewealth.

Bridewealth and Commerce

A brief account of the economic transaction accompanying Yao marriage is necessary before proceeding. Bridewealth is normal counter-prestation from the *peo* of a groom to the givers of a bride who lives virilocally. It usually consists of money. The amount is calculated in terms of the value of the traditional Yao unit of ceremonial currency, a silver ingot (*ngantiu*) weighing 365 grammes. In 1968 the average cash value of bridewealth transactions was Baht 4,000 or U.S. \$ 200 (Miles, 1967).

The price changes with fluctuations in the international silver market. Thus market phenomena determine the cash value of brides. The im-

portance of viewing Yao marriage payment in the wider context of Pulangka commercial economics was brought home to me by the following incident.

The village's most flamboyant rake is a man with a Tai nickname, Tongtong. The literal translation of his title is "The Golden Abdomen". He bought a nylon shirt from a travelling hawker and told the Chinese to debit the cost to the account of his natal *peo*. But the members refused to pay on the grounds that the "Golden Abdomen" owed them money from a bridewealth transaction.

Several years before the unit had sponsored Tongtong's virilocal marriage. Six months later he was dunned for a large debt accumulated over a long period of time with another trader. Tongtong then allowed the merchant to marry his pregnant wife and accepted cancellation of the debt plus a few hundred baht instead of bridewealth. The members of the *peo* had since insisted that the Golden Abdomen return to them a cash equivalent to the gross price at which the Chinese had valued the woman.

A number of generalisations arise from these observations. From the Yao point of view, brides as well as children have monetary value that is determined by the market. In matters of debt and credit both may substitute for goods and cash. Unlike members of other ethnic groups in the region, the Yao do not sell their own infants to foreigners. Their abhorrence of the notion equals their horror at the idea of Yao girls becoming prostitutes. But the Yao purchase children; they sell and buy brides. Since the value of both is determined in the same sphere of trade, brides are easily exchanged for adoptees. A woman is a jurally valid alternative to the money that an individual should present to the custodian of the child he adopts.

The transfer of the bride creates ties of kinship and affinity between the relatives of both parties. But I shall argue that it would be fanciful to regard the transaction as a result of such a motive. My contention stresses the primacy of the exchange's commercial aspects. In developing this point I shall examine its implications for situations in which brides are exchanged for brides.

Internal Transactions in Adoptees and Brides

The cases I have described so far concern dealings between Yao and outsiders. The Yao may provide brides for foreigners but I know of only one case in which a Yao male has taken a foreign wife. Members

of this community buy the offspring of parents who have different ethnic identity from themselves but never allow foreigners to purchase Yao infants. Thus while they may give a Yao bride for a foreign adoptee, they never give a Yao child for a foreign woman. It is only within the society that a Yao child becomes a substitute for bridewealth. Again, however, the commercial aspect of the exchange is very marked. I discuss three cases in which Pulangka people have adopted Yao and refer to the figures labelled Cases 1, 2 and 3 in Diagram 1.

CASE 1

The first concerns the adoptee Liusin, an eighteen year old girl who, since the age of ten, has been recognised as the daughter of Fusin, her actual mother's (Moohgwek's) brother, with whose *tso* she resides and worships. The parents of Moohgwek migrated to Pulangka prior to Fusin's birth. They had no relatives in the village.

A year later small-pox killed Moohgwek's father and her mother died soon afterwards giving birth to Fusin who became a foster-child in the mid-wife's household. Moohgwek was sixteen at the time and she stayed on in her parent's house where her lover, Fumeng, also took up residence. A few months later the couple moved to Fumeng's village, where his parents sponsored their wedding. I must emphasise that there was no bridewealth payment at this marriage because Fusin was too young to organise the negotiations and there were no other surviving members in his *peo*.

At the age of twenty-four Fusin had a wife, a son and a daughter. Moohgwek was then forty and had six children. The last born was Liusin whom Fusin demanded *in lieu* of the bridewealth that Fumeng owed for his virilocal marriage.

Fusin's claim had nothing to do with the rights attaching to his kinship status as a mother's brother. Few Yao would have such privileges in respect to their sister's child. The transaction rested wholly on two principles: that the virilocal residence of a wife gives her *peo* of derivation rights to compensation from her spouse's kin; also on the fact that an adoptee is legally valid substitute for bridewealth.

CASE 2

Fooh is the adopted daughter of her natural mother's elder sister Tzotim. Her biological father came from another village and was an

originally uxori-local husband in Tzoitim's *peo*. He paid no bridewealth. This man took Tzoitim's sister home to his natal village when she was pregnant with Fooeh, her first born child. The then unmarried Tzoitim claimed the baby as soon as she was weaned. The adoptive mother has since had two other children by an uxori-locally resident husband; both are matrifi-liated.

CASE 3

The case shows how bridewealth debts may persist for several generations. Naili's mother, Naitzim was born into the joint family of her father and his brother. The *peo* then included Naitzim's parallel cousin Naitzam who had a premarital daughter called Tzaitip. Naitzam married Lawsan who lived uxori-locally for a time. He then took his wife and step-daughter to reside permanently in his natal *peo* but paid no bridewealth.

Tzaitip had a premarital child and then married a man who had recently acquired a Tai boy by cash purchase. Her husband, who never lived uxori-locally agreed to forfeit both this boy and his first born child by Tzaitip as a substitute for the bridewealth he owed Lawsan. Neither of these children ever saw Lawsan who had them delivered directly to Naili. Thus Lawsan paid for his wife and her child with the children of his daughter's husband.

In sum then, just as Yao may use their women as brides to pay off commercial debts they owe to outsiders, they can settle bridewealth debts amongst themselves by using their own or purchased children, who become adoptees of the bride-givers.

Adoption and Matrifi-liation

Diagram 1 also illustrates my next main point. As stated earlier *a priori* or retrospective bridewealth payments in cash or human form validate the viri-local residence of a wife and patri-fi-liation of her children. For example, Fusin (Case 1) has paid bridewealth and lives viri-locally with his actual and patri-fi-liated offspring. Similarly, Naili's son, Singfo (Case 3) has a viri-locally resident wife and patri-fi-liated children. But why are Naili, Singfo and Tzoitim (Case 2) matrifi-liated? Let us focus attention on Singfo (Case 3).

His father, Naili's husband lives uxori-locally and has paid no bride-wealth. In this respect he has many counterparts in other Pulangka

DIAGRAM 1

CASE 1

CASE 2

CASE 3

CODE	 = Residential Unit	 = Descent	— = Marriage	↪ = Passage of Adoptee	\$ = Adoption
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genealogies. But in contrast to some other husbands who were formerly uxori-local, Naili's husband's marriage was celebrated by a wedding which the bride's *peo* sponsored thus terminating the possibility of the son-in-law taking the wife to his natal *peo* and patrifiating any of his offspring. On the other hand, Lawsan (Case 3) and Fumeng (Case 1) never went through a wedding sponsored by their brides' kin. After a period of uxori-local residence they withdrew their wives and later paid bridewealth in the form of adopted children.

Now consider Naili and Tzoitim (Cases 2 and 3). I must stress the fact that neither of these individuals are adoptees. In contrast with Liusin (Case 1) and Fooeh (Case 2), they were not born into other *tso* and later transferred. Like Singfo (Case 3) they were matrifiated recruits by birth. Their fathers lived for some years in the wife's *peo* and then became viri-local. Naili and Tzoitim remained in the natal *peo* when their mother shifted to their father's. The siblings of the two women are of interest. Naili's father had to adopt her younger brother who was born before the move. The siblings born afterwards belonged automatically to the patrilateral *tso*; Tzoitim and her sister (Fooeh's mother, Case 2) were born before their parents' departure; their other siblings who are patrifiated later.

I have no doubt that the Yao regard the retention of Naili and Tzoitim by their matrilateral and natal *tso* as representing the cost of the father's viri-local marriages. In other words matrifiation of offspring is equivalent to adoption as a substitute for bridewealth.

Only by examining the phenomenon in relation to hill-community trade does this fact become apparent. My original interpretation of matrifiational membership in *tso* ignored the economic context and attributed the occurrence to looseness in the implementation of agnatic recruitment principles. Equally incorrect was the initial assumption that bride-exchange between Yao *tso* is a matter of alliance obligations and the responsibilities of affinal status.

Commerce and Bride Exchange

Pulangka fathers display great remorse in forfeiting rights over children who become adoptees and matrifiates in other men's *tso*. They fear and abhor the situation in which a nubile daughter may be forced to marry against her own will; this circumstance occurs in bride-exchange.

The Yao place great stress on the ideal that both sexes should have

the freedom to choose their own conjugal partners. They encourage pre-marital sexual experience and other forms of experimentation in domesticity. Illegitimacy is condoned and often welcomed. Yet in some cases this freedom is curtailed in prescriptive marriage. The explanation lies in bridewealth indebtedness; it is not a consequence of the responsibilities attaching to kinship or affinal status.

Some years ago Africanists suppressed the term 'brideprice' because of its connotation that payment for wives is somewhat equivalent to slave purchase. Lévi-Strauss (1949, p. 238) also ridicules the notion that where prestations of material goods accompany marriage, women are bought for things. His whole theory rests on the proposition that kin groups exchange brides to establish and maintain affinal alliances. In this viewpoint the economic aspect of the transaction are secondary. I argue the contrary.

When a female member of a Yao *tso* chooses a husband whose *peo* insists on virilocal residence and patrification of children, the bride receivers must indemnify the givers. They may provide the payment in cash or other valuables. To accumulate the materials Pulangka residents must participate in regional commerce which as we have seen entails debthood. Some succeed in their enterprises; others fail. Entry into any credit relationship entails an understanding that a creditor may nominate the form in which an insolvent debtor must settle.

Unindemnified wife-givers among the Yao are matrimonial counterparts to the Chinese trader who can force individuals into debt-bondage or parents into the forfeiture of rights over children. Some demand matrifiates or adoptees as substitutes for bridewealth; others insist that a female member of a debtor's *peo* abrogate the right to marry according to her own choice.

Bride exchange results; like matrification it is an alternative to the material counterprestations that wife receivers otherwise provide their affines. Now let us examine the structure of such exchange.

I noted eight cases in which *tso* of people living in Pulangka exchanged brides directly. In other words, a male member of a girl's *tso* gained a wife from the group into which she had married. Whereas the first woman chose her own husband, the latter had no option. These matches involved two descent groups only. I have also recorded four examples in which three descent groups participated in such transactions. Each is equivalent to circular connubium in that the original matrimonial debtor marries a woman from the *tso* of his affines' affines. Figure 3, Diagram 2 illustrates the point.

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3 (*Circular Connubium*)

Tso B has received a bride from A; C from B. B is in A's debt, C in B's. But instead of giving one of its own women to A, B has claimed a bride from C not for itself but for A. B has thus avoided forcing one of its own girls to marry against her will. In other words, circular connubium occurs among the Yao in the absence of rules that it should do so. The prescription is a matter of debt and credit, not an expression of rights and obligations of kinship status. If C had the cash to pay B the latter could indemnify A and there would be no exchange of brides. Far more relevant to an understanding of the phenomenon than kinship and affinity is the parallel between other types of indirect exchange illustrated in Diagram 2.

The country shopkeeper uses the girl he can demand from a peasant to settle his own debt with a metropolitan trader (Figure 1). A man substitutes the two children that his daughter's affines owe for her marriage as retrospective payment to a third descent group from which his own wife and her child derived (Figure 2). An insolvent *tso* abrogates the right to claim a bride from indebted affines to the group to which it owes a bride (Figure 3). In each case the exchange involves a third party.

These parallels are more than mere analogies. They are manifestations of the value which human beings have as commercial commodities in the market oriented economy to which Yao bridewealth is geared. Bride-exchange and matrification are by-products of commerce.

CONCLUSION

As far as I am aware, there is no precedent for the type of economic determinist interpretation I have given for the phenomena on which this paper focusses. The explanatory force of my approach may be unique to the Yao living in and around Pulangka. But analysis of one society generates hypotheses that may stand the test of application in other ethnographic regions. I conclude with some tentative propositions in this regard.

I am confident that cross-cultural comparison will confirm the argument that adoption is more than an accommodation to heirlessness. I have described a situation in which it is a substitute for bridewealth; matrification has the same function.

Recruitment of matrifiliates to allegedly agnatic entities occurs in many societies where bridewealth is an established institution. The

phenomenon is a prominent subject of controversy in recent Melanesian anthropology.²

Do matrifilial recruits to New Guinea Highlands descent groups substitute in part or *in toto* for the material prestations that bride-receivers transfer to bride-givers? Does adoption have an equivalent function?

The relevance of these questions to Indonesian societies is evident from the following publications. Loeb's (1935) article about Sumatra describes a special form of marriage among the patrilineal Batak which carries the designation *ambil anak* (lit. "take-the-children" marriage). The husband pays no bridewealth and lives uxorilocally. His offspring belong to the line of their mother's father.

Cunningham (1966 and 1967) reports exorbitant bridewealth transactions between Atoni localised lineages and states that "if the payment is not made . . . the children join the mother's descent group." (1967, p. 5). He describes situations in which fathers filiate all but one offspring to the patrilineal descent group and says that the giving of a child to its mother's brother "is an aspect of the prestation to wife-givers of which bridewealth forms a part." (*ibid.* p. 7).

Finally, I shall relate my interpretation of Yao circular connubium to the literature about the Kachin. The four cases I have noted for Pulangka conform almost identically with the *gumlao* Kachin model (Leach, 1954) wherein a localised lineage demands a bride from its affines' affines (the *dama* of *dama*). I focuss attention on Lévi-Strauss's assumption (1969) that circular connubium can be attributed to the following rules (Diagram 3).

- (i) Ego must marry his MBD and ego's sister her FZS.
- (ii) Ego's FZD is the obligatory spouse of ego's MBS.

Circular connubium is inevitable where such principles are the prescriptive bases for marriage. But as we have seen from Pulangka data the same phenomenon may occur in a society that does not attach the marital obligations I have summarised to kinship statuses.

The following question appears relevant. Do *gumlao* Kachin organise their marriages in accordance with consanguineal relationships or is their use of kinship terms for affines a mere idiom for expressing a marital arrangement based essentially on economic factors?

² See for example, Meggit (1962) and de Lepervanche (1967-68). Since completing this manuscript I have learnt of Koentjaraningrat's article (1966) about West Irianese Bgu amongst whom "when the brideprice has not been paid at the time agreed upon, the first child born to the couple must be presented for adoption to the wife's relatives." (p. 238).

DIAGRAM 3 *Kachin Circular Connubium*

Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is not a prescription in Kachin society despite the inference of many text books and other publications about these people. Kachin men may take wives from any lineage with which they have no definite cognatic connexion (*lawu lahta ni*) (Leach, 1954, p. 74); further, provided a man does not go through a *num shalai* wedding he may marry any woman outside of incest range who is not bespoken. In other words, marriage with a MBD is only one of many available alternatives. The obligatory aspect of Kachin affinity is not that a man must marry a particular type of relative but that he must refer to his affines as particular types of kinsmen.

When a man marries an unrelated wife he refers to her brother as MBS; if his sister married a non-relative, the same individual calls her husband's sister FZD. The crucial problem in Kachin circular connubium is the basis for the claim that the person whom ego calls MBS has made on the woman ego refers to as FZD; (the *dama* of *dama*). Lévi-Strauss's interpretation is that the genealogical relationship between the two jurally prescribes their union. I postulate an alternative explanation which arises from the observation that many couples so related do not have a jural responsibility to marry each other. I argue that the obligation to engage in such a union arises only in particular economic circumstances.

Kachin have an economy which is remarkably similar to that of the Yao. They grow cash crops in addition to subsistence foods. For centuries they have participated in commerce between China and the lowland populations of Burma (Leach, 1961). Enormous outlays of bridewealth (Lévi-Strauss, 1969, p. 255 ff.) take place amongst such people who certainly regard human beings as commercial commodities. Debt bondage, child purchase and slavery are traditional features of their regional economy (Leach, 1954, p. 299 ff.).

I am suggesting that circular connubium occurs in Kachin society because some men are unsuccessful economically and have become insolvent matrimonial debtors to the descent units from which their wives derive. They therefore use women as substitutes for bridewealth. My hypothesis is as follows:

Kachin lineages cannot engage in direct exchange. A strict prohibition on a man's marriage with a woman of his *dama* prevents a matrimonial creditor from demanding a wife from the descent unit, (B) to which his own lineage, (A) has furnished a bride. Instead he claims a woman from a third lineage, (C) to which (B) has given a wife.

In short I postulate that circular connubium occurs among the Kachin only in cases of bridewealth indebtedness and regardless of the genealogical connexions between the parties. I realise that this hypothesis would collapse under evidence that Kachin lineages which marry in a circle pay bridewealth in full. But the literature contains no evidence either way. I have assumed the reverse in order to illustrate the utility of alternative to Lévi-Strauss's theory that the Yao material suggests.

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