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KINSHIP AND THE MANAGEMENT OF PERSONAL RELATIONS: KIN TERMINOLOGIES AND THE 'AXIOM OF AMITY'

Introduction

This paper eschews the fashionable study of the taxonomic structures of kinship terminologies to consider the social contexts in which kin terms are used and the reasons why. The Thai and Malay material amply confirms what is sometimes ignored, that the principles of genealogical classification are but one component in the analysis of kin term usage which is in turn part of the total field of conventions ordering everyday interaction. This fact prompts once more the question of what it is about kinship —or more precisely, kinship terminology — that accounts for both its very prevalent and non-genealogical use in the societies examined.

The ethnographic record for the central region of Thailand is replete with examples of a degree of variation in the behaviour of individuals occupying specified kin statuses which makes generalization, or even the perception of order, problematic. The total lack of corporate groups based on either descent, or kinship in conjunction with some other principle, can be linked to a lack of effective kinship-based authority structures and consequent freedom in interpretation of social roles. Thus the conclusion might well be drawn that in this "amorphous" situation kinship institutions are relatively unimportant, certainly in the sense that they afford no effectively sanctioned means for the control of scarce resources. Yet the very pervasiveness of kinship in rural life suggests otherwise. Furthermore, the manner in which Thai extend their use of kin terms suggests that there is something distinctly positive about kinship which those schooled in either the significance of jural norms and corporate groups, or in the total primacy of genealogy, have overlooked.

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Recognition of the role of kinship as an ideology utilized by actors in structuring their responses to social contexts reveals many underlying consistencies in behaviour otherwise easily overlooked (cf. Kemp 1976). While this approach does much to refute John Embree's (1950) persistent myth of "loose structure", it does not reveal why the Thai resort to kinship so extensively. The answer that its moral qualities account for the importance of kin terms in social interaction also remains incomplete unless the sources and characteristics of this moral dimension are more fully explicated.

Morality, Reciprocity and Values

In an attack on transactional analysis and games theory for their reduction of social relations to the pursuit of individual self-interest, Maurice Bloch distinguishes between the causes and effects of social behaviour. However the effects of action are to be adjudged, which may well be in terms of self-interest, their inspiration may reflect moral social values and he cites kinship as a "prime example" of such moral relations which are not reducible to "perceived economic or political rewards" (Bloch 1973:76-7). For Bloch, "kinship is, very often, the best type of long-term moral relationship" (Bloch 1973:77), the latter being characterized by Sahlins' notion of generalized reciprocity. Such long-term relationships are ineffectively enforced by the social sanctions governing other modes of reciprocity. The necessary assumption that partners are, in the long run, neither going to default completely nor present some inadequate or inappropriate return, is underpinned by morality which constitutes the basis for the assessment of what is right or wrong.¹

Granted then that kinship is a moral ideology, what are its distinctive features, and why is it so effective? Meyer Fortes (1970:232) looks to the family domain. In *The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi*, the pioneering analysis of the morality of kinship, he stressed the bond between parent and child² as the source of what he has subsequently variously called the "rule of prescriptive altruism" and "axiom of amity". Whatever else kinship is, or is not, an important element consists of elaboration on what is generally designated the family domain, that small number of relationships concerned among other things with the most intense and fundamental socialization of the individual. Attribution of the source of kinship morality to this domain directs attention to the universality of the experience of parturition and rearing of young. Given the helpless and vulnerable condition of human infants, this does much to explain the force of the axiom of amity with its emphasis on uncalculated giving.³ Not only are the relationships of generalized reciprocity established in this area of the greatest physiological and social import, their psychological dimensions

add further to their effectiveness in extended and metaphorical usages.

Isolating the axiom of amity allows for recognition of other values (for example, respect for age) and sources of moral authority (as found in the "world" religions) which, while in particular instances they are closely linked with family and kinship, are nonetheless analytically distinct. Indeed, the conceptual problems of defining kinship (cf., among others, Needham 1971 and Schneider 1972) make it especially necessary to go beyond Bloch's blanket reference to kinship as a moral relationship and specifically identify the role of the axiom of amity as one moral basis for these long-term relationships. Kin terms are polysemic, some meanings are certainly not limited to kinship, and new meanings emerge with use (cf. Chaney 1978:140, Keesing 1972: 18). Yet for the participants in any social system that area of life denoted as kinship, if only by convention, does have a quality of absoluteness. Kinship abstractions possess a special cognitive reality in that they coincide (usually) with what to the participants are the objective facts of biological relations. Thus regardless of the actual facts of any individual case, kinship as a cognitive system constitutes a remarkably stable and permanent ascriptive ideology for ordering social relations.

Thailand

Kinship and morality

I have already suggested that the alleged "amorphousness" of central Thai kinship is a theoretical rather than empirical issue. Much of the basic ethnographic research was done in the nineteen fifties. In retrospect it is evident that the anthropologists' difficulties were partly due to the essentially unilinear descent models of the period.

The early ethnographers concentrated on that part of the country manifesting the absence of corporate groupings in its most extreme form. The central region has experienced the greatest impact of change for the longest period. After 1855 the traditional, fairly diversified peasant economy gave way to rice monoculture. Increased production was achieved by a vast extension in the area cultivated, many unpopulated parts being rapidly settled by ex-slaves and others freed from traditional demands on their labour. Bangchan (cf. Sharp, Hanks, Phillips, and others) and Bangkhua (cf. Kaufman) exemplify the consequences of this rapid change rather than the more stable, traditional features of rural social organization. They were part of a "frontier" society marked by the absence of clearly demarcated communities with the well developed corporate identity presumed by the "community study" for long so popular in the anthropology of complex agrarian states.⁴

While not so pronounced as in the delta near Bangkok, these features

are common to much of central Thailand and to Hua Kok, the settlement in Phitsanulok province studied at first hand (Kemp 1976). Consisting of approximately fifty houses it is without its own temple or school, and is united with one and a half other hamlets to form an administrative village (*mu ban*). Furthermore, the pattern of land holding derived from the original settlement results in many of the paddies in the immediate vicinity being cultivated by outsiders. Yet to the residents of the hamlet and its neighbourhood Hua Kok is more than just a collection of houses, mainly because kinship and locality fuse to constitute the basis of a community identity.

In Hua Kok, as in central Thailand generally, kinship is not the basis of the rural politico-economic-jural order. Given its traditional abundance, land has not been a crucial feature in determining an individual's life chances. Similarly, the absence of corporate groups and kinship succession to offices has meant that kinship institutions neither unite nor divide people in the manner that occurs when they perform these roles. Consequently the use of kinship idioms is less constrained and is important in setting the general context of social relations. In the absence of effective jural sanctions individuals can, and sometimes do, demonstrate a cavalier disregard for their obligations, yet the ideology of kinship itself remains intact and unchallenged. Indeed, exclusion from the public domain lends prominence to the moral and other qualities that kinship can express.

Comprehensive documentation is inappropriate here; let it suffice to note that central Thai kinship does indeed express the axiom of amity. Irrespective of personal feelings one should behave well towards, help, and not exploit those who are kin. When a raging drunk attacked his father with a knife the main response I heard expressed was how sinful he was. Whereas I did not collect any explicit statement of the kind found in some cultures to the effect that the only people one can trust are kin and that all others are enemies, the idea is there. Kin should make loans without charging interest, and the frequent absence of the legally required documents for rent contracts was explained by partners being kin and so not needing to resort to the formal procedures.

Of course, kin do quarrel, cheat one another, and experience difficulties in their relationships. Individuals resort to kinship, manipulate, or repudiate it with apparent impunity depending on the situation. Even so, in the absence of effective sanctions, and in the fluid and often rapidly changing conditions that mark central Thai society, the ascriptive ideology is a relatively stable base. It is also intimately associated with values expressing love and trust, facets of Fortes' axiom of amity. Interestingly the most explicit statement of this is by Lucien Hanks, one of those who has most emphasized the fluidity of social life and predominance of the pursuit of self-interest.

(Hanks 1962:1257)

Minor variations in local usage and in the quality of central Thai ethnography lead me to restrict the following discussion of kin terms to data from Hua Kok with only selective references to other sources. Initially it is sufficient to treat the various words for those designated *yat kan* as native categories classifying kin according to genealogical connection. Figure One demonstrates two major features of this classification, the restricted recognition of gender, and selective differentiation of genealogical age within generation. This differentiation of age and gender is most marked for those who are both close to Ego and genealogically his seniors.

Figure One: Age and sexual differentiation: basic terms only.

Figure Two contains the full range of basic and derivative terms in normal use,⁵ and again gives emphasis to the manner in which age and gender are marked. As for affinal relationships, apart from *phua* — husband, *mia* — wife, and *mae yai* and *pho ta* for a man's mother and father-in-law, the appropriate kin terms are used with a suffix indicating affinity. Thus the elder sibling of a husband is *phi phua*, while people married to kin of Ego are distinguished by the suffix *khoi* for men and *saphai* for women. Finally, couples related by the marriage of their children are *dong kan*, one's child's mother-in-law, for example, being *mae dong*.

According to the formal scheme outlined in Figure Two, persons in the category of cousin, *luk phi luk nong* [15], are *phi* [18] if descended from elder siblings of Ego's ancestors, and *nong* [19] if descended from younger siblings. This distinction is ignored in favour of actual relative age status, and the child of a *na* [14] will be specified as *phi* if older than Ego. Another practice is for the designation *luk phi luk nong kan* to be extended to those with whom exact genealogical connection is unknown and to those *lan* [21], *len* [22], and *lon* [23], not descended from Ego's own or siblings' children. Indeed, *luk phi luk nong kan* normally replaces the words denoting kinship, *yat kan*. The category of close kin which includes siblings and first cousins is *phi nong chit*, that of distant kin is *phi nong hang*, but both are little used unless the specific genealogical information is required.

Anthropologists normally distinguish between the use of kin terms for either address or reference. In so far as this type of distinction has a heuristic value⁶ I prefer a fourfold classification which separates what may be termed "specific" from "general" forms. The former is what most anthropologists have had in mind when speaking of reference: it is the answer expected to questions about what sort of kinsman of Ego is X. It is often assumed that the answer indicates X's social identity in relation to Ego, but this is by no means necessarily so. The reply to a query about X's relation to Ego can be specifically genealogical, "He is my *na*". Yet the same speaker may respond to the question "Who is that?" with "That's *phi* X", and be observed to address X by this term, and it is this type of usage which I designate "general".

An advantage of this method of classification is that it counters any tendency to automatically exclude from discussion those instances where there is no genealogical connection, or where the terms used do not accord with known linkages. These fictional usages are all too frequently considered not as an integral part of kin systems of address and reference but as something completely separate and distinct from "real" kinship. The justification offered is that those concerned can always differentiate between "real" and "pseudo" kin ties, but this is

1. △ pu-thuat
2. ○ ya-thuat
3. △ ta-thuat
4. ○ yai-thuat
5. △ pu
6. ○ ya
7. △ ta
8. ○ yai
9. △ pho
10. ○ mae
11. △ lung
12. ○ pa

13. □ a
14. □ na
15. □ luk-phi-luk-nong
16. □ luk-phi
17. □ luk-nong
18. □ phi △
○ chai
sao
19. □ nong △
○ chai
sao
20. □ luk △
○ chai
sao
21. □ lan
22. □ len
23. □ lon

Figure Two: Kin terms; formal genealogical structure.

not necessarily so. In Hua Kok there was considerable uncertainty as to whether certain persons spoken of as kin actually were genealogically related. This had to do with the way in which the Thai generally learn and think about kinship, genealogical knowledge being little valued except, perhaps, among certain elite families. Thus I have had purportedly genealogical relations worked out for me (incorrectly according to other informants) on the evidence of remembered use of terms by kin of ascending generations.

Kin terms are culturally significant categories reflecting participants' concepts of kinship and everything else that is expressed by these categories. In the past anthropologists have tended to focus upon their use as genealogical criteria for recruitment. Yet with the "general" form of reference one is concerned with a far wider range of intercourse which includes the use of kin terms in place of, or in conjunction with, pronouns, names, and other titles. The importance of the function of recruitment varies of course with the extent to which descent ideologies ascribe social roles. Where this is extremely limited, as in central Thailand, the necessity of looking elsewhere for an explanation of the widespread use of kin terms with those who are related as well as with those who are not becomes especially apparent.

Beyond the idiosyncrasies of personal habit and tactical usages of the kind discussed by Bloch in 'The moral and tactical meaning of kinship terms' (1971), there are certain clearly discernible regularities in the use of terminology. Most striking is the omission of kin terms of address and reference when the subject is a generation junior to that of the speaker. Omission is also extended to Ego's own generation, younger siblings are rarely addressed or spoken of as *nong*; personal names with the prefix *thit* (an indication of ordination as a monk), if appropriate, suffice in all conversations between adults. If still a child the semi-pejorative classifiers, *ai* for males and *i* for females, may be used in conjunction with the word for a mouse (*nu*) or a nickname. When people do address or refer to their juniors with kin terms it is usually in the presence of young children, the practice of teknonymy serving to teach a child the correct norms of conduct.

The following example indicates another notable feature, the apparently primary emphasis on age that occurs with manipulation of terms to fit actual circumstances. The village headman's younger children are about the same age as the grandchildren of an elder sister. A discussion with his wives elicited the view that these grandchildren should ignore such intergenerational terms as *a* and *na* for the headman's children but retain the correct forms of address for themselves, that is, *yai* when related through a daughter of the headman's sister and *ya* when through her sons.

It is evident that here is a society in which one is expected to defer to age and that a major tactical use in the manipulation of kin terms

is the expression of real age differences. As noted earlier, genealogical information is little valued; sometimes it is restricted to direct experience, with even the names of grandparents dead before the birth of an informant being unknown. In this kind of situation the terms used for a relationship may well be set by those used by a senior generation without reference to genealogical connection. This gives rise to two kinds of structural amnesia: first cousins may be presented by their second generation descendants as full siblings, and affinal links may be interpreted as consanguineal.

Although the terms used specify, in a formal sense, age-based status differences, they are perhaps more precisely to be associated with an appropriate quality of behaviour. Because of the demographic structure of Hua Kok and the fairly intimate knowledge required, clear evidence of this interpretation is difficult to locate. Nonetheless, I was fortunate to observe instances where this underlying quality of behaviour did receive emphasis at the expense of accuracy in rendering both age differences and genealogical status.

The most striking concerns the use of *pho* [9] (father) and *mae* [10] (mother), terms whose use is not usually extended. In this instance the head of the household and his two wives used these words to refer to themselves, and were addressed as such, in their dealings with the two grandchildren residing in the house. This occurred even though the children's real parents were also resident and themselves addressed as *pho* and *mae* by their sons. With respect to my interpretation of the significance of the quality of behaviour, it is relevant that the real father spent little time with the children. Furthermore, one of the "grandmothers", a childless woman in her forties, had been largely responsible for rearing (*liang*) the children, most noticeably when the parents were away residing in a field-house during the farming season. This childless woman was also called *mae* by the younger children of her co-wife whom she had helped rear and of whom she was very fond.

Another regular instance of divergence from genealogical structure is the dropping of the suffixes indicating affinity. The transformation from affinity to consanguinity takes its most extreme form in the husband-wife relationship. Both may use any of several terms of address for their spouses — I recorded eight for a wife and seven for a husband. To some extent these are rankable in terms of respect and politeness (cf. Kemp 1976:87-90), but what is significant in this context is that only one term, *nang* — normally translated as Mrs. — refers to the quality of affinity. Most of the others incorporate kinship terms and the most polite form of address for a husband is *phi*, which should be used even if the wife is older than her husband, as sometimes happens. The gloss of "elder sibling" for this word might suggest that it is inappropriate but, in a social world in which there are no equals.

its choice suggests the respect tempered by love and giving that is the ideal of close kinship.⁷

In similar fashion it is important to note that when people start to use kin terms fictionally with those not genealogically related they are attempting to utilize the benefits of kinship. More specifically, they are seeking to establish closer, more comfortable and trusting relations than would otherwise exist. Such attempts take place in the commercial sphere when Thai peasants try to secure an understanding with Sino-Thai merchants which will moderate their vulnerability to exploitation. Such manipulations are by no means just one-way, as the merchants themselves on occasion seek to ensure security of supplies by developing long-term personal relations with farmers.

More generally, it is through kinship that one is most easily fitted into a local community, indeed the very quality of community itself is best expressed through the language of kinship. During my first period of field work there was a man who had moved into Hua Kok some five years earlier. He asserted that he was a kinsman of the headman, whom he accordingly addressed as *ta* [7]. This link which he could not document represented no special claim on the headman, rather it offered the settler and his family a means of integrating themselves into the life of Hua Kok as a whole, since it consequently implied some kin or affinal link with almost everyone else in the hamlet. An even more graphic example is recorded by James Riley. In his study of a village in Chainat, which exhibited a relatively high degree of community integration, he notes that everyone in the settlement is considered a kinsman "by virtue of the fact that they are fellow villagers" (Riley 1972:79).

Analysis

Thai society is based upon the premise of inequality: there are no relations between equals, a fact expressed in various forms of the *phu yai* — *phu noi*, big man — little man, relationship. This inequality is also reinforced by Buddhism, with its emphasis on the individual with his private fund of merit and the belief that this can be reflected in social rank. These moral and other values underpin an inequality which is expressed by kinship terminology while having nothing to do with kinship *per se*. Yet there exists a wide range of other words offering the Thai ample opportunities to mark respect, specify social distance and indicate the formality of social contexts. Thus, to explain the use of kin terms in defiance of the genealogical facts by reference to the premise of inequality alone is clearly inadequate. Rather, the evidence suggests that while expressing the hierarchical aspects of all Thai relations, kin terms do far more. They offer a means of transforming otherwise calculating, competitive relations by the ideals of love and trust, in other words, by the axiom of amity. Yet the axiom

of amity as an explanation of why kin terms are used so extensively is itself clearly incomplete. Thai kin terms are in accord with, and express, the moral and other cultural principles of hierarchy which pervade the totality of Thai society. Their use has thus to be interpreted in the light of their expression of hierarchy and distance, and in their moderation of the calculative, competitive aspects of these principles by resort to the axiom of amity.

Malaysia

Many of those features discussed above are also observable among Malays: there is an emphasis on generation and relative age within generations, and kin terms also appear to be used freely with scant regard to the genealogical facts. So can the same analysis be offered as for the Thai, and does the Malay ethnography provide any additional insights into the analysis of terminological usage?

One must, of course, qualify any conclusions, however tentative, by admitting the myriad problems of comparison. Furthermore, there is a tendency for the anthropology of the Malays to develop its own traditions and culture, as has also happened in the anthropology of the Thai. Even so it is readily evident that the answer to the first question is positive, though there are certain differences in the ethnography and its interpretation, if not actual behaviour, which merit consideration.

Firstly, kinship is far more explicitly recognized and consciously used as an insider - outsider distinction. "I quickly observed how early Malay infants are taught to identify *malu* (shame) with association with strangers who, not motivated by any positive sentiments of relatedness, could bring one into the most horrible of circumstances" (Banks 1972:1257).

Secondly, there appears to be a far greater verbal emphasis on the special qualities of behaviour between kin. It is not just in the use of kin terms that kinship appears to be a more prominent mode of social articulation than in Thailand. "Ideally, Malay custom, reinforced by Islam, enjoins certain obligations on kin, and these are constantly referred to verbally. Assertions as to the desirability of helping by small services and exchange of goods and services between all close relatives (*saudara dekat*) as much as possible . . . are frequently heard" (Nagata 1976:402).

Despite these differences, kin terms are extensively used non-genealogically in much the same way as in Thailand. In his 1972 article David Banks suggests an essentially historical explanation based upon his analysis of social change in Sik, a hilly region of Kedah in north-western Malaya. Given the former rather isolated rural community

organization in Sik, kinship was often encompassed within the local community of a small cluster of settlements. The relative abundance of land prevented the internal competition for resources that can divide those who, by virtue of their common kinship, should be generous and uncalculating with their resources.⁸ However, since the Second World War this isolation has been terminated and a consequence is the greater frequency of contact with outsiders. At the same time an increasing scarcity of land has meant that the certainty of economic welfare through, and because of, kinship has been seriously eroded. One response has been an increase in the fictional use of kinship as people seek to establish close and supportive relations.

The same interpersonal dimension is emphasized by Narifumi Maeda in his brief comparison of Malay and Japanese forms (Maeda 1975). Whereas rural Japanese society has been structured very much in terms of corporate groups, such forms are markedly lacking in rural Malay society. After citing Banks (1969) that "for Malays kinship is an interpretation that is a kind of clothing that can be put upon any kind of social relationship, viewed from another angle", Maeda adds that "when Malays use this kind of 'clothing' they freely choose a particular kind of relationship according to the situation but do not use the family or kinship as a definite entity" (Maeda 1975:164).

Maeda is particularly instructive in that he makes the same kind of association between the character of local community organization and the apparently diffuse and flexible nature of Malay kinship as have others for the central Thai context.⁹ Unlike Japan, the emphasis in Malay society is on interpersonal relationships, not corporate entities,¹⁰ and this, given its implications for the articulation of authority, does much to explain the relatively underdeveloped jural aspect of kinship roles. Nevertheless, the Malay example is more complicated than the Thai because of the legal and moral qualities of Islamic teaching on family and kinship.

In a later paper (1974) focusing on the structure and use of kin terms, Banks discusses what he interprets as the very simple basic Malay terminology and the large number of affixes specifying birth order within sibling sets, degrees of collaterality, etc. Banks' data reveal how the kind of information collected by specifically genealogical investigation in no way accords with the terms one hears used.

Markers which specify the degree of collaterality are dropped, whereas those retained indicate birth order within sets of siblings. In other words, there is no distinction drawn as to the degree of consanguinity with respect to parents, their siblings, and their cousins. The result fits with the conventions of "general" address and reference distinguished earlier: here is another example of the utilization of a genealogically imprecise or even "incorrect" kinship identity in structuring and expressing interpersonal relations.

What is notable about this "general" use is the relative paucity of the system contrasted with the richness of the basic reference code with its full range of markers used when the goals are specifically genealogical. A similar point might be made for the Thai with respect to the dropping of affinal markers, yet the Malay data discussed by Banks differ in one major respect. This is the degree to which real genealogical connections (or their absence) as specified by the "correct" use of terms are submerged and hidden from third parties. This is because the sibling order terms affixed to *pak* (father) and *mak* (mother) denote some more general social identity, whereas *pak* and *mak* alone indicate something far more specific, though again not necessarily genealogically "correct", and so are used with great caution.

The reason for such caution is the potency of such "emotionally charged" words and the claims they represent on others. While rightly perceiving a moral dimension, Banks mistakenly attributes it exclusively to the field of religion. Given the fact that "Islam enjoins strict codes for conduct upon genealogical kin although it rewards gift giving and the development of kinship sentiments with or without blood relationship" (Banks 1974:63), this view is understandable. Yet, viewed comparatively it is readily apparent that while the specifically Islamic teachings on kinship do constitute an important moral component, they are secondary to the essentially moral character of kinship itself.

In other words, Islam has served to reinforce and "develop" the intrinsic characteristics of Malay kinship ideology with respect to the norms of exchange among kin, which are, it appears, far more explicitly phrased among Malays than Thai. Nevertheless, the ideological core through which these relations of generalized reciprocity are expressed remains kinship rather than religion.

More recently Judith Nagata has taken up the issue of the association between reciprocity and kinship in a discussion of the way in which upwardly mobile individuals attempt to transform the character of their relations with poor kin into that of patron to client. In the Malay context this does not so much result in a change in the kin terms used as in a shift in the management of the gift giving which is so explicitly a feature of Malay kinship. Thus in the ceremonial activities surrounding *rites de passage* there is a generalized reciprocity of goods and services known as *tolong menolong* which allows for considerable asymmetry in contributions according to resources. The critical feature in this context is the way in which any "extra" contribution is made. Where the donor is not true kin it may be phrased a *sagahuti* or *hadiah sagahuti*, "something from the heart", but for a kinsman to present a gift in these terms "is to lay claim to a social status increment . . . and is tantamount to denying the kinship by magnanimously and gratuitously offering something over and above what is required" (Nagata 1976:403).

Nagata also refers to a second type of aid given to kin at times of difficulty, which is similar to the Islamic form of charity known as *sedekah*. Again she cites examples of richer kin suddenly beginning to refer to their offerings as *sedekah*. With these and other changes Nagata states that, whereas the terminology of address and reference does not immediately alter, in the following generation more senior terms than those merited by "strict biological age and generation" will probably be used (Nagata 1976:406).

To conclude, the Malay material is readily susceptible to the same type of analysis pursued above for the Thai. There are differences; Islamic teaching and rules on family life are both more precise and better sanctioned than their Buddhist equivalents. More generally, examples cited suggest that kinship in Malaya was traditionally far more prominent in determining an individual's life chances than was the case in central Thailand and that this image of the past is still highly important to Malays. This would at least in part explain the care with which the terms *pak* and *mak* are used. Nevertheless, with their sibling order affixed these words imply no such specific and sanctioned claim on others, and so are used far more widely and freely. Such a conclusion supports my earlier interpretation of the Thai use of terms as freely tapping the morality and values of kin categories at least partly because these terms belie no formal jurally sanctioned commitment.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion raises doubts about many of the more recent approaches to kinship analysis. Karl Heider in 'Accounting for variation: a nonformal analysis of Grand Valley Dani kinship terms' (1978) has rightly and skilfully drawn attention to the extent to which different individuals vary in their use of kin terms. His systematic data on this issue also go far beyond what I have been able to present here in documenting the way in which some kin terms are used by the Dhani for non-kin, whereas others are used in a very restricted manner in accordance with genealogical connection.

Nevertheless, Heider's whole argument is phrased in terms of the genealogical record — the management of genealogical space — and I consider that the Thai and Malay material seriously questions the value of this kind of approach. To assume that the basis of kin terminology is genealogical does not explain why people use kin terms. Heider notes with respect to the term *ami* that the "consensus focal" is Mother's Brother, yet more than half of his informants named a non-relative individual as "focal", and nearly two thirds claimed some non-relative as *ami*.¹¹ He seeks to explain this by reference to role behaviour — a Dhani needs an *ami* in many social and ritual situations and, given the demographic structure, in the face of a shortage of natural *ami*

individuals go beyond the kin group to obtain one. Heider confesses that he does not have sufficient evidence to test his assumption that "the Dani adjust to the rigidity of role requirements by loosening kinship term structure" (Heider 1978:229). The weakness of this assumption, though, is more fundamental in that it reveals an underlying determinist and over-simple view of the relation between kin labels and social roles, and ignores the whole issue of the polysemic character of the term *ami*, one meaning of which appears to be "shell giver" (Heider 1978:229).

In other words, the situation described by Heider parallels much of the Thai and Malay material in suggesting that use of kin terms is part of a far broader, more general system of expressing and, on occasion, manipulating social identities and relations. To be sure, the model is genealogical, and this quality imbues the terms with all kinds of moral undertones; but it is this model rather than genealogical connections *per se* which explains the effectiveness of kin terminologies in constructing and expressing social relations.

It is thus worth questioning the conventional distinction drawn between "real" and "fictional" kinship. Specifically, the assumptions behind Julian Pitt-Rivers' discussion of pseudo-kinship now require qualification. Referring back to the Thai material, where the forms used between and for kin diverge from what is genealogically correct, then, one has what Pitt-Rivers has designated "fictive" usage. However, in many of the Thai examples the Pitt-Rivers' notion of "figurative" use is more appropriate, because what is implied is a quality of behaviour rather than a status (Pitt-Rivers 1968:408). This and the distinctions between general and specific usages raise questions as to the overall relation of "pseudo" to "real" kinship and of the value of the seemingly precise analytical distinctions drawn between fictive and figurative forms. It seems to me that these distinctions made by Pitt-Rivers in the nineteensixties are typical of anthropological concerns with the definitional boundaries of social phenomena. More recently kinship has come to be recognized as far less tangible, as an area of family resemblances with no single feature sufficient for classification. Thus although it remains useful to start with the genealogical criteria, it is necessary to move quickly beyond them.

There is no general answer as to why people use kin terms the way they do. Even so it is obvious that the extent to which they feature in social exchanges is in part dependent on their "fit" with other aspects of social organization, the extent to which they reflect and express the values found in the wider society. Both Thai and Malay terminologies do this in offering ample opportunities for meticulous hierarchical differentiation between those in most frequent and proximate contact in societies marked by their emphasis on inequality. At the same time, in not marking out a "fixed and bounded collectivity" their

kinship systems follow those of far simpler societies such as the Kalinga in that kinship "serves as the focal premise by reference to which the actor's social universe is polarized into a field in which the rule of amity prevails, and into its contrary, ultimately perceived as the outside world, in which it does not" (Fortes 1970:232). Since, however, in these complex and rapidly changing societies social interaction is no longer (if it ever was entirely) limited to real kin, the tapping of kin values for close interpersonal contacts is readily appreciable.

NOTES

- 1 Like Bloch in 'The moral and tactical meaning of kinship terms' (1971), I refer to Raymond Firth's definition of the term moral: "...quality from the standpoint of right and wrong. Morality is a set of principles on which such judgements are based" (Firth 1961:183).
- 2 "It is the axiom, clearly stated by the natives and apparent also in Tale values and usages, that the fact of having begotten or borne a child creates an absolute moral bond between it and its parents" (Fortes 1949:162).
- 3 To argue thus is not to fall into the trap of familicentric or genetic views of kinship (cf. Lane's critique (1980) of Fortes), because no assumptions are made about either the existence of *the* family or the biology of reproduction.
- 4 Fifteen years after the publication of the first Thai community study, a venture with which he was closely associated, Lucien Hanks wrote of Bangchan: "When our team of anthropologists from Cornell University entered Bangchan in Thailand, we expected to find an 'organized village'. We searched many a month for its center, for its integrating structure — without success. Bangchan had a name, but not even the glimmering of a community. Individualism seemed to reign supreme." (Hanks 1968:30.)
- 5 Certain polite and formal terms have not been included in the main text because of their very limited use in Hua Kok. These are: *sami* - husband, *phanraya* - wife, *but* - son, and *butying* - daughter.
- 6 Bloch (1971) ignores the distinction. Whereas his point that address and reference represent differing tactical uses and therefore require joint consideration is valid, it is nonetheless useful to be able to specify precisely what is happening, hence my fourfold classification.
- 7 This type of usage is by no means unique to the Thai; it is recorded for the Burmese and Vietnamese in Cooke (1968). Haas (1969) refers to Cooke and discusses Wolf's (1966) report of a similar usage in Taiwan. Banks also notes its occurrence among Malays (Banks 1974:58).
- 8 "In traditional Malay kinship relations the mutual interests of all concerned ideally transcended any individualistic urge for self-betterment at the expense of one's kinsman. One did not conceive of his relationship to his kinsman in terms of profit and loss, for these things were a kind of tabooed anti-kinship." (Banks 1972:1269.)
- 9 "Malay community, traditionally and to a certain extent today, is a rather amorphous gathering of people and houses. One community merges with another at the edges, and it is very difficult to discern the boundaries of each, geographically and socially, unless the natural environment comes into play." (Maeda 1975:165.)
- 10 "Although the Malay family is the basic unit, it is not the building block or keystone of social structure, as Japanese eyes may see it to be; inter-

personal relationships always dominate interfamilial ones, if any such exist." (Maeda 1975:164.)

- 11 "Focality" refers to first responses to questions, which were initially about the relationship of X to Ego, and secondly about who belonged to a particular category.

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