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Cognatic descent and the generation of social stratification in Southeast Asia

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Anthropologists and other social scientists have long been fascinated by the intricacies of Indian culture and society. Consequently it seems surprising that they have given relatively little attention to the traditional states of South-East Asia which, with the exception of Viet Nam, maintained and developed an essentially Indian cultural tradition albeit in a very different setting.

In this paper I discuss a number of issues concerning the significance of the regulation of rights in women for political organization and the development of social stratification. Recent contributions to the historical record of nineteenth century Siam now make such an exercise productive for that country and provide a basis for comparison with the Malay states, primarily as they are described and analysed in J. M. Gullick's *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* (1958).

Merely to illustrate the importance of descent and marriage rules in structuring political relations is to ignore the more fundamental problem with respect to the control of women of the nature of the relationship between the spheres of kinship and marriage on the one hand and the political order on the other. Indeed, Georges Balandier's assessment of the study of segmentary societies, that "Power and 'kinship' are in dialectical relation, hence the failure of any unilateral interpretation" (1972: 77) provides a useful perspective for the analysis of South-East Asian states with their very different descent and political structures.

Specifically, the way in which cognatic descent systems are modified to suit the aspirations and interests of the powerful is a central issue in a study of the two spheres. A second issue, closely related to the first, concerns the extent to which the regulation of rights in women through marriage not only reflects social hierarchy but acts as a major generative force. In its most ambitious form my suggestion is that the Siamese classification of royalty and its associated marriage rules were generating
a system of social stratification which in at least certain respects was increasingly 'caste' like. Perhaps unfortunately for anthropological theory however this line of evolution was terminated by major changes in socio-political organization in response to western imperial influence towards the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, at a more general level it is evident in both the Malay and Siamese material that marriage, by the avoidance of certain alliances and the encouragement of others, was a means of social closure of considerable importance in the development of social boundaries and consolidation of the system of stratification.

II

In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* Claude Lévi-Strauss speculates on the way in which a generalized system of exchange eventually leads to the development of class differences and to endogamous castes. The basis of this system of generalized exchange is matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and he cites the Kachin of Highland Burma as demonstrating the way in which it can generate social hierarchies. As he notes for the Kachin, any occurrence of generalized exchange presupposes equality between the segments yet it is a source of inequality. Demographic factors combine with others such as the pursuit of advantage to result in the accumulation of women at some stage in the cycle so that "generalized exchange leads almost unavoidably to anisogamy, i.e., to marriage between spouses of different status" (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 266). Thus the conclusion drawn by Lévi-Strauss is that simple forms of generalized exchange are not viable but lead instead to hypergamy which he defines as participants in the cycle of exchange only being able to accept spouses from partners occupying a superior or inferior position in the hierarchy. The Kachin are so significant to Lévi-Strauss because they supposedly reveal "generalized exchange at the precise moment when this dramatic problem makes its appearance" (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 474). He continues: Firstly: let us consider the case in which the contradiction inherent in the hypergamous rule in some way rigidifies the cycle of generalized exchange. The cycle is interrupted, the indefinite chain of prestations and counterprestations seizes up. The partners mark time, and, placed in a position where it is impossible for them to fulfil their prestations, keep their daughters by marrying them to their sons, until a miracle sets the whole machine going again. Needless to say, such a process is contagious. It must gradually reach each member of the body social, and change hypergamy to endogamy. Only India has systematically and durably adopted this solution. (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 474-475)
Edmund Leach's criticisms of Lévi-Strauss' use of the Kachin materials are of course well known (1961), yet in his book about Lévi-Strauss Leach concedes a certain respect for the theory. When reduced to its basic arguments the idea that generalized exchange explains the evolution of primitive egalitarian society into a hierarchical society of caste and classes "sounds preposterous". Nevertheless Leach notes that "there is an odd kind of fit between some parts of the theory and some of the facts on the ground even though, at times, the facts on the ground perversely turn Lévi-Strauss' argument back to front!" (1970: 109).

For the Siamese data at first glance the theory appears inappropriate because of the absence of unilineal descent groups and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. However, during the period under discussion there emerged at certain levels of Thai society a pattern of exchange which in certain respects constituted a generalized system of exchange where women of one status had to marry someone of equal or superior rank to their own, and where one can speak of this pattern as being organized in terms of hierarchical relations between groups. In other words it seems necessary to question the frequent assumption that generalized exchange is necessarily based on relations between lineages expressed through matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Are there in fact social groups managing marriage relations in ways which possibly constitute an alternative path or even ignored stage in the development of caste-like arrangements?

Clearly there are problems in conceptualizing such an alternative in cognatic systems. The reason is that which has prompted some anthropologists to deny the existence of a concept of bilateral or cognatic descent. The organizing potential of kin linkages differs quite fundamentally according to whether, for certain purposes, one traces them exclusively in the female or male line and so creates the possibility of forming corporate groups, or whether they are traced bilaterally through males and females which delineates a set of kin existing only in relation to ego and his or her full siblings.

In *Comparative Kinship Systems* Bernard Farber in commenting on this contrast also assumes that the generation of social stratification by means of marriage alliances is based on unilineal descent systems. In so far as there is some validity in this view of the problem, it is with resolution in societies like Siam and Malaya which are generally characterized as having cognatic systems but where marriage alliances are of significance in expressing hierarchical relations, that I am concerned in this paper. After stating that corporate kin groups — by which I assume
he means descent groups — are characterised by jural exclusiveness whereas personal kindreds "tend towards non-exclusiveness" Farber continues:

A hierarchy of kin groups is established in which the wealthier groups are able to make more effective alliances than poorer ones. This tendency stabilizes the class structure of the society. Personal kindreds, however, have no clear boundaries of membership and lack the ability to establish alliances. Thus, according to the Leach and Lévi-Strauss position, it might be argued that the non-exclusiveness of personal kindreds inhibits the development of clearly distinct social classes. (1968: 7)

In similar vein he also adds:
Societies that emphasize kinship as a means of sustaining social differentiation appear to organize distinct kin groups on the basis of lineage segments. (1968: 10)

At a more general level what Farber is concerned with is the recognition that bilateral linkages do not constitute an effective means for organizing control of any scarce, socially significant, resources. Such linkages alone do not provide the means to establish bounded groups with rules of membership, and rules governing the relation of members to one another and with other groups recruited in like manner. Put very simply what is lacking are the characteristics of corporateness and all that this can imply.

Given this one has, in a sense, isolated the 'bilateral problem'; what then are the possible 'solutions'? One is that cognatic systems are associated with the growth of individualism so that the management of resources whether they be in people, property or whatever, is by means other than the ascription of kinship. On the other hand a very different strategy is to combine the criterion of kinship with some other such as residence and so create a corporate group. This could well be like the Iban bilek (Freeman 1958), but it might also be like the Maori hapu which in many respects looked and functioned like a 'real' descent group albeit of course not exclusively founded on descent (see Firth 1963). What though, of societies not following these strategies? Are there any other mechanisms which permit the development of a degree of corporateness as an effective means of managing social relations?

It is unfortunate that in the discussion of the kindred one of the two main perspectives, that it is ego-centred, has received so much attention at the expense of the idea of stocks, the descendants of any given ancestor. It would seem to me that an area of considerable theoretical and analytical interest noted by J. D. Freeman in his essay 'On the
concept of the kindred' has not been followed up in the way it should. Freeman wrote:

If the marriage of cousins is continued generation by generation, this results in a continuing consolidation of stocks and produces a closer cognatic network than in societies in which the marriage of close cognates does not occur. This I would suggest, is a most significant feature of some bilateral societies, for while they lack the large-scale descent groups of unilineal societies, their cognatic networks are close and cohesive and so of great importance in the multiplex relations of social life. (1961: 207)

What requires further study then is the extent to which marriage between close cognates can create increasingly corporate social groupings. Thus it is necessary to examine not just the way 'in marriage' can reinforce the political and social distinctiveness of certain stocks but also the possibility that it engenders the development of hierarchical social boundaries in the same way as matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is claimed to do in unilineal descent systems.

III

In the traditional 'Indianized' states of South-East Asia there generally occurs a system of cognatic descent which nonetheless is closely associated with a hierarchical social system. One might of course assert that given the organization of the state, kinship and marriage has little to do with the arrangements of political life, but this is to misrepresent the case. Even without further documentation it should be readily apparent that the consequences of structuring relations by an equal emphasis on links through mother and father are likely to be most disadvantageous for those with positions, with influence and wealth, to preserve.

South-East Asia is the home of some of the most ideologically absolute systems of monarchical rule ever devised. The King of Siam was technically the owner of the land and the people living upon it. He was a cakravartin (Thai: cakraphad), a universal ruler, and at certain periods his association with Hindu deities was stressed (Rabibhadana 1969: 40-44). Yet in practice he was often weak. The fact that all sovereign power was vested in the monarchy resulted in the absence of those checks and balances which could defend and protect the legitimate claims of some aspirants over others. There was too the problem of how to exercise control over a country today the size of
France, for much of the nineteenth century somewhat larger, given the administrative technology then available. In practice of course the country was ruled by a bureaucratic class, sometimes described as aristocratic, the *khun nāṅg*. Even then the degree of direct control was limited, being restricted to a relatively small area around the capital. In more distant parts of the kingdom local governors exercised a high degree of autonomy and beyond them were the vassal principalities whose allegiance fluctuated.

The four major categories of people in Siamese society were the royalty (*cao*), the bureaucratic nobility (*khun nāṅg*), freeman (*phrai*), and slaves (*thāḍ*); members of the Sangha, the Buddhist monkhood, were outside this ordering system for the time that they remained monks. A variety of modes of differentiation were in use, the most encompassing of which was the *sakdi nā*, usually translated as 'power over fields', which in practice was a points system with slaves at the bottom with 5, freeman with between 10 and 25, petty officials up to 400, the titled nobility 400 plus, and the King at the apex of the system with an infinite *sakdi nā*.

While social strata clearly existed it would be a mistake to assume a neat horizontal pattern. With the decline in rank over the generations there were royalty whose *sakdi nā* was far less than that of many titled officials. Once royal rank was lost, theoretically at least, descendants of royalty became commoners though it seems that in practice they were absorbed into the *khun nāṅg*. Moreover the status of those bearing the two lowest titles of royalty, which were introduced in course of the early Bangkok period (1782-1873) was intermediate between royalty proper and *khun nāṅg* officials. At the lower levels of society differences between slaves and freemen were also less than the names of these categories suggest. Indeed, freemen sometimes chose to become debt slaves in order to better their condition by linking themselves exclusively to a benevolent patron.

As stated above, the aristocratic officials, the *khun nāṅg*, constituted the bureaucratic elite; their titles were those of the positions they occupied. They differed from European aristocracies in that the title was their office and there was no formal hereditary principle whereby sons succeeded to the positions of their fathers. Nevertheless access to high office was restricted along lines of kinship in that only officials possessed the right to present sons to the King at audience, and only boys so presented were invited into the *mahādlek*, the Corps of Pages which functioned as an informal government service academy. Indeed,
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according to David Wyatt only sons of the three uppermost grades of titled official has easy access to the mahādlek (1968: 219). Given the ideologically absolute monarchy yet state of dependence of the King on the administrative services of the khun nāng, capable rulers pursued their interests by a skilful use of the principle of divide and rule. This policy was facilitated by the largely competitive and ‘personal’ nature of the system. Families maintained their aristocratic status for only as long as they retained office over the generations.

They thus sought to ensure that their offspring were sponsored by those of the highest rank and ultimately by the King himself by means of patron-client ties. The competition moreover was exacerbated by the high incidence of polygyny leading to considerable over-production of aspirants to government office. Not surprisingly the powerful, in the attempt to pack offices under their control with kinsmen and extend their sphere of influence, on the one hand pursued good relations with the King and on the other sought alliances with otherwise rival families. In both instances the establishment of marriage ties was of primary importance.

A very noticeable consequence of such a policy was the existence of a large royal harem, most of whose members were daughters of senior officials, the rulers of distant provinces and vassal princes. However this means of ensuring the loyalty of those whose daughters or sisters were secluded in the palace presented certain difficulties for a monarch because of the bonds of kinship with inferiors or possible competitors engendered by those unions. In contrast, the presentation of daughters to serve in the palace, in the hope that they would become consorts of the King and produce children, could be highly advantageous for the nobility and was actively pursued. From the point of view of the monarchy the political problem was how to gain the benefits of such arrangements without any disadvantageous commitment to those occupying what were at least conceptually servant-like positions. A second associated problem was how to regulate the general proliferation of people of royal blood brought about by the size of the royal harem. Although both problems were most pronounced for the Siamese they were also experienced by Malay rulers who were often polygynous. Moreover the symbolic hierarchy between the Sultan and district chiefs was perhaps especially important and to be protected in situations where the former was weak and often ineffectual.

In all cognatic systems the potential rate of proliferation of royalty necessitates the existence of some form of ‘shedding’ whereby the
numbers of possible claimants to the throne are restricted. In the English system royalty are recruited bilaterally but the dynasty sheds members at each generation. In the English case the exclusion of children from non-succeeding daughters and grandchildren of non-succeeding sons reflects an emphasis on males with respect to the succession (Goody 1966: 30). In South-East Asia in those traditional states where descent is usually traced bilaterally the response has been in two directions. The first is for the preferential treatment given to males to develop into a royal patrilineage which is subsequently reinforced by endogamous marriage, and one may cite Perak and Selangor as exemplifying this type of solution (see Gullick 1958). The alternative is what is normally referred to as a system of declining descent, signs of which have been noted in Siam, Cambodia, Burma and Java (Surakarta) (Jones 1971: 115-125) whereby rank is reduced over a limited number of generations.

What distinguished the Siamese type of shedding procedure from European systems such as the English was the existence of marriage rules which effectively created a restricted royal corporate group and countered the potentially vast proliferation of royals due to the high incidence of polygyny. Now that these rules concerning the marriage of royal women and the practice of polygyny have been abandoned all that remains is a dynastic system in which there is a graduated decline in rank with each generation that separates the individual from a monarchical ancestor.

In contrast, the traditional 'fully developed' Siamese system was quite different despite its usual designation as being one of declining descent. My analysis of rules governing the Siamese royal family in the nineteenth century indicates that rank was primarily determined by marriage and that the overall system of ranking must be interpreted as being based on marriage classes. The mechanism by which this was managed was one whereby the rank of both parents received equal recognition in determining the rank of their child. The rule of hypergamy played an important part by effectively restricting the unions of all royal women to within the royal group. Such a rule countered the effects of the absence of any patrilineal principle by preventing the dispersal of the royal 'blood' through women. It also served to concentrate the qualities of royalness within the royal group itself and the marriage of a royal male with a woman from the same class countered the principle of declining rank.

Looked at in terms of declining descent the occurrence of marriage
between close kin, notably between half-siblings, may be interpreted as a means of retaining and concentrating the divine qualities of royalty inherent in the royal line. Such an explanation however is inadequate in that any systematic use of in-marriage could serve to prevent the dilution of royal 'blood' among those not of the succeeding line of royalty. Furthermore, one may argue that while at least some of the divinity associated with kingship was vested in the person of the King and therefore to be communicated via kinship, much more was vested in the office itself. On the other hand, viewed as a ranking system based on marriage classes it is possible to explain not just the situations in which rank did decline in each generation, but of those cases where it did not. Furthermore the suggested approach offers a means of interpreting the anomaly in the purportedly generational ranking system noted by Haas, namely that children of a king by a queen are of the first rank whereas those by wives "not of royal birth" are of the second (Haas 1951: 585).

Apart from limiting competition for the succession the method of classification upon which royal rank was based exercised an important influence on the development of social stratification in Siam. As the Chakkri family consolidated its position after the foundation of the Bangkok dynasty in 1782 royal rank became increasingly differentiated internally and the importance of marriage between close kin became more pronounced. Hence, in analysing the actual organization of royalty within the period one is faced with a dynamic situation in which the size of the family and number of ranks increased as did the number of cross-cutting ties established by marriage. This line of evolution was first restricted towards the end of the fifth reign and then terminated at the succession of the sixth king in 1910 who remained a bachelor until 1922.

In terms of the structuring of social relations an important aspect of the period 1782 to circa 1873 is the way in which the rule of hypergamy combined with the classification system in the development of an internally differentiated, exclusive 'caste-like' group. It took a couple of generations, during which time the size of the royal family increased rapidly, for this line of evolution to manifest itself. Initially of course royalty was an 'achieved' not an 'ascribed' status and certain vital marriages had been made before the accession of Rama I. Decisions made then about the allocation of rank indicate a high level of consistency in classifying royalty and formed the basis for the subsequent development and elaboration of the system. What would have happened
were it not for the changes introduced after 1873 is speculation. Nevertheless indications with respect to the very powerful Bunnag family suggest that caste-like arrangements might subsequently have developed throughout the khun nang. In 'Family politics in nineteenth century Thailand' David Wyatt notes how during the Third Reign (1824-51) the two leading Bunnags restricted their marriage obligations to other families and instead either placed most of their daughters in palace service or married them to first cousins (1968: 220). In other words they were in the process of consolidating their superior position and adopting the royal strategy of hypergamy whereby their women were either married upwards or within the family while they themselves continued to take women from inferiors. Thus even an elementary review of marriage within the upper strata reveals ample evidence of the political significance of marriage and the care with which such unions were arranged.

As noted earlier, recruitment to royalty (cao nāi) is conventionally described as being managed in such a way as to constitute a declining descent system. According to Mary Haas:

... the children of the king and queen are Somdet Chao Fa (somdet cao fā); those of the king and his wives not of royal birth are Phra Ong Chao (phra ong cao); the grandchildren are Mom Chao (mōm cao); the great-grandchildren are Mom Rajawongs (mōmrādchawong); and the great-great-grandchildren are Mom Luang (mōm luang). (1951: 585)

While it is true that a measured decline in rank in each generation can be noted in some actual case histories the underlying system of classification upon which rank was based is quite different. For the true cao nāi at least it can be stated that when men and women of the first rank married their children were also of the first rank. The same is true of unions between people of the second rank and logically it should be so for those of the third.

The element of declining rank occurs where parents are not from the same class. So, among the possible unions are for men of the first rank to marry women of the second and men of the second to marry women of the third, in which case the children were of the second and third ranks respectively. Another set of logical possibilities includes males of the second rank marrying females of the first, and males of the third taking women of the second. However, this type of union did not occur because of the rule of hypergamy whereby women must marry men of their own or a higher rank, so that the second set of possibilities belongs to the category of forbidden unions.
There are two main qualifications to this scheme of classification. The first is that the rank of King was such as to compensate in certain circumstances for that of the mother of his children. Hence children by women of the second rank were *cao fā* and those by third rank or non-royal women were *phra ong cao*. Secondly, there was, even after the initial period, a degree of flexibility which permitted some individuals to be elevated by the King. However these qualifications are neither surprising given the ideological absolution of the King nor do they undermine the analysis of the underlying classificatory scheme. On the contrary the limited ways in which the right to raise the rank of members of the royal family was recognized reveals the existence of a fairly consistent attitude towards ranking despite the apparent absence of any specific laws or digests governing the subject.

The most explicit source of information about procedures governing the allocation of rank is the document *Traditions of Royal Lineage in Siam* (Jones 1971) written in 1878 by Rama V, King Chulalongkorn. This is not a formal statement of the rules despite the authority and knowledge of its author; rather it is the King's attempt to interpret what had occurred and his 'rules' are essentially descriptive generalizations. Consequently the work requires a detailed genealogical and political analysis far beyond the scope of this paper. Here it is possible to refer to only a couple of examples which throw light on contemporary Siamese notions of classification and some of their political consequences.

The underlying order of Thai notions about royal rank is most readily revealed where for some reason adjustments were necessary, such as at the foundation of the dynasty or when the rank of certain individuals was changed. For example, when a monarch's children by a *mōm cao* were raised from *phra ong cao* to *cao fā* the King was constrained to raise the rank of their mother to *phra ong cao*. It was in achieving this kind of consistency in the early Bangkok period that decisions were taken which created certain problems of ranking which were exploited by the Bunnags.

When he became King, Rama I raised all full siblings to *cao fā* and accorded his mother the rank of *cao* (i.e., he gave her a general royal status). His senior wife was made Queen and all her children *cao fā*. He did not however award royal rank to this woman, an apparent anomaly which is possibly explained in the light of her family connections. To have made her *royal* would have elevated her siblings, two of whom had married senior officials in Rama I's administration who had to be 'kept in their place'. In this instance consistency proved inappropriate.
and in the following reign the King, her son, raised her to royal rank as was correct for one who was mother of cao fā. What is significant about this case is that one of her sisters was married to the leading member of the aristocratic (khun nāng) Bunnag family, the main branch of which was later able to claim a special status (rādchini kūn) in being of a stock that had provided the mother of a King. Although one or two other families could also claim rādchini kūn status, the claim by the dominant Bunnags seems to have been of particular importance in providing an ideological base to their actual administrative and political superiority.

The practice whereby unions between close royal kin produced a relatively small number of the highest ranking claimants to the throne can thus be seen not just as a means of restricting competition and ordering relations within the royal family but as a way of avoiding the provision of political opportunities to the family of an aristocratic
woman mothering a line of kings. At the same time of course the practice of hypergamous polygyny bound members of the aristocratic elite to the royal family in a way that was unequal yet mutually beneficial. Furthermore it emphasized separateness without incurring an isolation disadvantageous to the monarchy which was dependent on the administrative services of the *khun nāng*.

The final genealogical result for the succeeding line of royalty of the structuring of relations in the manner outlined can be seen in the figure above. This by no means reveals the full extent of unions between kin, the fifth king for instance elevated no less than four of his half-sisters to be Queen-Consorts.

Another feature of the royal genealogy requiring emphasis is the manner in which the Bunnag family in particular, but also a number of others, presented daughters for service in the royal palace and to other lesser royalty. As far as this family is concerned it is sufficient, to note that what is interesting is not that their initial connection with the monarchy determined their success but that they fairly systematically built upon the connection by presenting women to succeeding monarchs. They then used the special link to differentiate themselves from the rest of the nobility, among whom by dint of their undoubted ability and skilful exploitation of political opportunities they had become dominant.

IV

In this paper it suffices to present a brief resumé of the Malay material to indicate that it fits the general analysis of elite marriage strategies. Despite their retention of an originally Indian-inspired model of absolute rule after the conversion to Islam, Malay elites differed in many respects from their Siamese counterparts. States like Perak and Selangor were too small and too poor to support the kind of bureaucratic administration found in Siam. Instead the state was divided into districts under semi-autonomous chiefs with the Sultan deriving a large proportion of his revenue from his own district which was the only area under his direct control. The great offices of the old Malaccan state bureaucracy were often vested in the hands of district chiefs who generally sought to restrict the power the Sultan could exercise over them.

In a turbulent and often seemingly anarchic world the use of genealogy with respect to the Sultan's and chiefs' lines of descent played an important role in political life. Not surprisingly marriage too was politically of immense significance in mediating relations between
aristocratic families, between them and the Sultan, and between competing factions of the royal family.

In *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* Gullick discusses the occurrence in Perak and Selangor of patrilineages among the elite of societies in which descent was generally cognatic. The existence of lineages was clearly important in restricting claimants to office and in establishing claims to legitimacy. Indeed, genealogy as a political resource is of special significance as witnessed by the different versions propounded by various factions and consequent difficulties of evaluation and interpretation. Whatever the truth of the matter it is relevant to note, for example, that in the nineteenth century a Sultan of Perak could claim to be a descendant of the Sultanate of Malacca which had lost its independence in 1511.

Even so, despite the emphasis on genealogy and patrilineal descent it can be argued that in a cognatic system such a lineal emphasis by itself was inadequate. Hence one has, as in Siam, the development of 'in marriage' to consolidate claims and differentiate the ruling line from other members of the royal group. Moreover there are further possible parallels with the Siamese material in the avoidance of any undue commitment to the chiefly families. Wilkinson, in noting the relationship of kinship between the chiefly lineage controlling the office of *Bendahara* and that of the Sultan of Johore, is at pains to point out that of course the royal family never let any of its women marry those not of royal stock. In other words, we have here another example of one-way exchange with women of the *Bendahara*’s line being married to the Sultan (Wilkinson 1971: 60-61).

What is interesting about the practice of potential heirs attempting to consolidate their claims by taking as wife the daughter of a Sultan is that patrilineal in-marriage with parallel cousins is primarily associated with near-eastern Moslem societies. The practice was often effective in increasing the probability of succession. It must also be remembered that in Perak where the ruling lineage divided into three sub-lineages each providing a ruler in turn, the achievement by a claimant of a marriage with a daughter of a Sultan from one of the other sub-lineages was especially important.

V

Discussion has so far been limited to the control of women and its effects on hierarchical relations and the management of political power in the nineteenth century. For the Siamese material it is necessary to
consider why the notable developments in hierarchy discussed earlier occurred when they did and not before. Consideration of this problem highlights some of the differences between the Siamese and Malay data and certain factors become apparent which suggest why systems superficially closely related to the Siamese produced very different results.

The major change distinguishing the Bangkok period from its predecessors seems to have been the 'neutralization' of the political position of members of the royal family. This neutralization was achieved by elevation of the royal stock in such a way as to place members other than the King beyond participation in the main political arenas but which nonetheless granted them great prestige and an income befitting their high rank. There are two main facets to this elevation and neutralization: firstly limitations on the growth in numbers of royalty, secondly an exclusion from, or effectively restricted access to, crucial political resources such as offices and manpower.

As for the first, it is convenient here to contrast the Siamese with other Tai states, a contrast of which Chulalongkorn was himself aware when he wrote the introductory sections to his paper. In the Lao states there was no formal classificatory boundary beyond which royal descent ceased to be recognized; the bilateral proliferation of royalty was limited only by women of royal blood not marrying commoners. Many minor members of the royal family consequently lived in relatively humble circumstances and possessed no great prestige in Lao society. A very similar situation prevailed in the Malay states where the prefix Raja denoting royal descent was passed on without limit in the male line and, as in the Lao states, was no guarantee of high status. All three however shared the characteristic of restricting the marriage of royal women to outsiders. Whereas there does not appear to have been any formal rule, Gullick notes that the marriage of a Raja woman to a commoner was considered socially degrading to the woman (1958: 66). It thus seems reasonable to conclude that the rule of endogamy for royal women alone does not explain the greater elevation of royalty in Siam. Rather, it is the limitation on the intergenerational transmission of royalty outlined earlier and consequent greater exclusivity of royal blood reinforced by the marriage of kin which is the distinctive feature of Siamese society.

The history of the classification of royalty in the Ayuthaya period (1350-1767) is inadequately known, due principally to the scale of the destruction by the Burmese and editing of the surviving laws and other documents during the reign of Rama I. Consequently there is some
uncertainty and disagreement about even fairly basic features such as the dates of introduction of the ranks of cao fā, phra ong cao and mōm cao as well as on the interpretation of the overall system.

R. B. Jones (1969: 116) adopts a gradualist position in noting the accretion of new ranks and rules culminating in the fully elaborated system, purportedly of declining descent, by the fifth reign of the Chakkri dynasty. While she does not refute the notion of declining descent for the Bangkok period, Busakorn Lailert is more radical than Jones in asserting the absence of the declining descent principle as late as the Ban Phlu Luang dynasty (1688-1767). She notes that a mother's rank determined that of her child by a king or certain other senior royalty (1972: 159). Superficially this appears to be the same mechanism that in the Bangkok period ensured that a child of cao fā or phra ong cao parents received the same respective rank. In practice though the arrangement was different because in the earlier period there did not exist the close fit between birth and conferred ranks of the kind which strengthened the main line of the Chakkri family. On the evidence available it appears that not all the highest ranking queens whose children were cao fā were themselves of royal blood. Nor were consorts of phra ong cao status necessarily made queens of the first rank so that there is at least one instance where the child of the union was phra ong cao.

It is thus reasonable to suggest that a relative lack of consistency and integration in birth and conferred ranking procedures is a factor requiring careful evaluation for its role in increasing the competition and factionalism within the royal family that was such a disruptive feature of the latter phases of the Ayuthaya period.

As a usurping dynasty the first three Ban Phlu Luang kings sought to strengthen the monarchy against the khun nāng, from whom they themselves had arisen, by establishing a small number of large royal departments (krom). The succession dispute of 1733 revealed that the danger of too powerful a cao was an even greater threat than the khun nāng and so from the reign of Barommkot (1733-1758) onwards far more princes were appointed to head smaller krom, a policy which served only to further weaken the throne (Lailert 1972: 322-3).

A reason why factionalism was so damaging to the monarchy was the organization of these princes' krom. According to Akin Rabibhadana the freemen (phrai som) allocated to them were permanently alienated from the main pool of manpower (phrai luang) controlled by the central administration. Not only could phrai som be inherited, their
children also succeeded to their parents' status. Thus as the period progressed and more princes' krom established, the proportion of phrai luang, of freemen whose services in the form of corvée labour benefited the government as well as the officials of the departments with which they were registered, decreased. In Rabibhadana's opinion, this loss of manpower eventually left the king unable to mobilise sufficient forces for the defence of the country and so brought about the fall of Ayuthaya in 1767 (1969: 26-39).

The Bangkok period differs markedly from its predecessor in that the allocation of manpower was changed to ensure that phrai som, where allocated, were returned to the control of the government on the death of their 'owner' (1969: 58). Thus the establishment of departments headed by royalty could proceed in a way which provided the king's close kin with higher ranks and incomes than formerly yet which left them excluded from the business of general administration and with little scope for independent action. Without such controls the elevation in status of members of the Chakkri family would have been politically inept. As it was, these changes were closely associated with developments in the classification of royalty and formulation of marriage rules which further reduced the likelihood of succession disputes and general threat to a king posed by his fellow royalty. By means of these modifications the Siamese overcame many of the problems associated with their general model of kingship. Not only was the position of the king enhanced, so too was the level of political stability within the royal family. The major disadvantage, the degree of political power which passed to the nobility, was ameliorated by the extensive links of 'client kinship' established via the harem.

VI

The evidence on Malaya and Siam demonstrates the way in which particular marriage strategies can determine the overall system of stratification in a society even when associated with cognatic descent. What is especially important is that the significance of the absence of certain types of union becomes readily apparent. Too much emphasis has been placed on exogamy and the creation of alliances and not enough on the avoidance of certain types of alliance sometimes at the expense of causing women of particular groups to have a very low expectancy of ever marrying. In this respect it is evident that marriages between kin and hypergamy are in themselves not as structurally important as their occurrence in conjunction with circumstances
stimulating the development of bounded hierarchical groups. In such circumstances a pattern of development occurs which bears a close relationship to Lévi-Strauss’ theory of the evolution of caste. At a more abstract level the analysis offered here shows how the management of rights in women can not only express but also generate social inequality. In the absence of generalized exchange between unilineal descent groups marriage must be recognized as a contributory factor rather than as a mere reflection of existing social inequalities and patterns of stratification.

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NOTES

1 According to Lévi-Strauss the simplest formula for generalized exchange is that:

Generalized exchange establishes a system of operations conducted ‘on credit’. A surrenders a daughter or a sister to B, who surrenders one to C, who, in turn, will surrender one to A (1969: 265).

2 A definition which ignores the distinction usually made between hypergamy in which women marry those of superior status to themselves and hypogamy where it is the men who marry upwards.

3 Among the ‘back to front’ features noted by Leach are that:

... the systems in which hypergamous hierarchy is carried to the wildest extremes are associated with dowry rather than bride-price, while the systems in which matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is the rule mostly take the form that the wife givers rank higher than the wife receivers (1970: 109).

4 I exclude from consideration in this paper any discussion of Negri Sembilan and matrilineal descent.

5 “The position of the children and grandchildren of mōmeao was ambiguous. They were not considered cao, and yet, unlike the phrai, they were not marked. Their position was similar to that occupied by the sons of nobles. They could be presented to the king through the ritual of thawai tua and appointed to occupy positions with the ranks of nobles, e.g., luang, phra, and so on” (Rabibhadana 1975: 104).

6 The five ranks were cao phraya, phrayā, phra, luang and khun.
In the reign of Rama IV a new first rank of somded cao phrayā was created for the leading members of the Bunnag family. (Rabibhadana 1969: 116).

7 On retirement an official retained half his former sakdi nā grade (Rabibhadana 1969: 23). As for the children of the nobility, their privileged status was preserved for one generation; the law prevented their being marked as phrai (1969: 103).

8 325 children were born to the first five monarchs (1782-1910) of the Chakkri dynasty. According to Prince Chula Chakrabongse (1960) the figures are as follows: Rama I, 42 children (17 male) by 29 mothers; Rama II, 73 children (38 male) by 38 mothers; Rama III, 51 children (22 male) by 35 mothers;
Rama IV, 82 children (39 male) by 35 mothers; and Rama V, 77 children (32 male, 44 female, 1 unborn) by 36 mothers, Rama V is also reported to have had a total of 92 wives.

The flexibility entailed by monarchical office being retained within the royal family but with no particular individual possessing a unique ascribed claim to that office is by no means unusual. However, the debilitating disputes between contenders to-office of the kind noted by Burling for the Marathas of India (1974: 58) were, at least in the Bangkok period, avoided. Relevant factors in this stability were the ranking system and manner in which the position of the designated heir (uparâd) was controlled. All uparâd appointed at the commencement of each of the first five reigns died before the King. Significantly the office was in each case then left vacant. Great care was also taken to reduce the uparâd's political influence by appointing as officials in his department, junior kinsmen of those already in the service of the King (see Rabibhadana 1969: 62-65).

The first three titles predate the foundation of the Bangkok dynasty (1782). Of the latter pair, mômradchawong was introduced by Rama IV (Mongkut) and the present usage of mômldlang was established by Rama V (Chulalongkorn) (see Jones 1971: 116). In fact as indicated in Note 5 those belonging to these two classes were only marginally royal. In his discussion of the subject Rama V emphasized the royal descent of the bearers of these titles while indicating that they were grouped with the nobility rather than the cao proper (Jones 1971: 85-87). The transitory nature of their status was retained; in 1932 following the revolution against the absolute monarchy the drafting committee of the constitution "raised members of the royal family from the rank of mômcao upwards 'above politics'" (Mokarapong 1972: 123).

See Michael Vickery's review of Jones' volume in which he suggests that one reason for Chulalongkorn compiling the document was to exalt his first cao fâ son whom he wished to make his heir despite the existence of an uparâd (1974: 159).

Of Rama I's two half-siblings, the daughter by a younger sister of his mother was made phra ong cao and a half-brother by an unrelated woman was raised to cao fâ rank (Flood 1972: 287).

So royal persons are not so numerous as in Lao states, as can be observed to the present day whether in Chiengmai or Luang Prabang, where royalty is not ordered in various ranks; all who belong to the royal lineage are called cao. There are even some of these cao in our own country in charge of nine or ten men (Jones 1971:9). Jones' translation of the term trakun here and in the title of the paper as 'lineage' is misleading; 'stock' is far more appropriate and accurate.

Jones places the adoption by the Siamese of the title cao fâ in the mid-sixteenth century, and that of phra ong cao in the reign of Phetracha (1688-1703). The right of children of cao fâ males to "bear the same title by virtue of their mother's rank, perhaps with the same restrictions against a princess marrying below her rank as were in effect when Rama V was writing", and the title of mômcao, were introduced in the reigns of Thaisa (1708-1732) and Barommkot (1758) respectively (1971: 116).

Michael Vickery however has queried the evidence for these developments and claims that Prince Damrong's statements on which Jones relies are "largely speculative" (1974:161-162).

During the Ban Phlu Luang period there were three possible types of consort. The second, sometimes referred to as 'lesser Queens' did not occur after 1782.
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