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Marxist Analyses and Social Anthropology

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INTRODUCTION

The Kachin of Upper Burma have gained a great deal of renown among anthropologists since the publication of Leach's Political Systems of Highland Burma. Although they were already receiving some attention from Granet, Lévi-Strauss, and others interested in the development of kinship systems, it is not until Leach that we get a clear documentation of the apparent oscillation between 'egalitarian' and ranked or even stratified social forms. It is not my intention here to discuss Leach's work in detail, since that would require a separate treatment which would be somewhat peripheral to the purpose of this analysis. Rather, using material from Leach and others, I shall attempt to present the Kachin in terms of a larger theoretical model in which what appears as oscillation is but part of a multilinear development generated by a specific structure of social reproduction, and the evolution of 'Asiatic' states as well as devolution towards more permanently 'egalitarian' big-man societies both result from the underlying properties of a single tribal system.

GENERAL MODEL

The goal of the following analysis is to account for a number of societies distributed in space in terms of a model of social reproduction which distributes them in time. Much emphasis has been laid by structuralists and functionalists alike on the distinction between synchrony and diachrony. For a great number of anthropologists, history is little more than a stream of events, somehow outside of social structure, and usually opposed to it. Even for evolutionists, the social forms that characterize the major stages such as band, tribe, and state are assumed to be institutional forms whose properties are fixed with respect to time. Evolution is thus reduced to something that occurs between stages, rather than presented as the outcome of processes that are inherent in the social forms themselves. Lévi-Strauss is perhaps the only anthropologist who has dealt systematically with social variation, and he must
Certainly be credited with having gone beyond the simple empiricism of his predecessors in order to arrive at the deeper structures which might generate such variation. But he has assumed that anthropologists working as they do with ethnographic material, are restricted to variation in space, whereas historians can deal only with variation in time. In effect, structuralist models do reveal the family relations among a number of different social forms, but they do not account for the mechanisms that produce the variants. The Marxist approach must transcend the false dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony by making the object of analysis the system of social reproduction, a system whose properties can be defined only with respect to time. These are precisely the properties to which Marx refers when he speaks of the "laws of motion" of society. In such an approach, history is incorporated into the field of analysis rather than being separated from it. The "stream of events" ceases to exist as an autonomous phenomenon. It is, on the contrary, something that can be derived from the properties of the system of social reproduction itself.

Structures of social reproduction are not of the same order as institutional structures. A kinship structure can easily be described without reference to time. It is only when we consider its reproduction that we are forced to account for another kind of relation, that which links kinship to production and distribution, which determines its function with respect to other institutions as well as to technological and environmental conditions. In order to deal with this latter set of inter-systemic relations, we must necessarily take the entire social formation into account, for it is only from its internal properties that we can generate the system of transformations which is manifested in the actual historical and geographical distribution of observable societies.

The social formation includes several distinguishable functional levels:

1. Forces of production—including here, for the sake of simplicity, the exploited ecological niches; in other words, the totality of the technical conditions of reproduction.
2. Social relations of production—the set of social (i.e. non-technical) relations which determine the internal rationality of the economy, the specific use to be made of the means of production and the distribution of total social labour-time and product.
3. Superstructure—ideological and political structures whose contents may be derived from, and whose functions must be defined in terms of, the existent relations of production and conditions of reproduction. In Capital, Marx attempts to demonstrate the way in which profit, interest, and rent are second-order ideological categories derived from the division of surplus value according to capitalist relations of production.

We must stress here that the above categories are functional and not cultural. It is absolutely necessary not to confuse the levels of function-
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in the social formation. If the technical conditions of production are
determinant 'in the last instance' it is because the structure of the pro-
ductive forces sets the outer limits on the variation and development of
all the other levels.

Working in the opposite direction, the relations of production
dominate the entire functioning of the larger system, defining the
specificity of the mode of production and its developmental tendencies.
Intersystemic contradictions appear when the dominant relations of
production cause several subsystems to reach their limits of functional
compatibility.

Determination and dominance are assumed here to be structurally
independent. Relations of production are not caused by the constraints
of the productive forces. They can only be said to be fully determined
where there exist necessary and sufficient constraints, i.e. where no
other set of social relations could operate the process of social repro-
duction. This would appear never to be the case, however, and it has
certainly never been demonstrated, though often implied. Similarly, we
must reject, as a variant of mechanical materialism, the notion pro-
pounded by Balibar and others of 'structural causality' where,

In different structures, the economy is determinant in that it deter-
mines which of the instances of the social structure occupies the
dominant position (Balibar in Althusser and Balibar 1968, II: 110;
my translation).

Here, again, while admitting the existence of a 'relatively autonomous'
dominant structure, it is assumed that the material aspect of social rela-
tions of production (material flows) determines the social form which it
will take, so that dominance becomes but a secondarily derived aspect of
determination. While technological determinism is rejected, material
flows, instead of being organized by social relations of production,
appear as independent and determinant of those social relations. This
seems an excessive attempt at reification of the material level, in the
purely physical sense, as opposed to other levels of social life. The
position adopted here is that social relations are material relations if they
dominate the process of material production and reproduction and that they
owe their origin not to that which they dominate but to the social properties
of the previous system of reproduction as a whole.

While it is necessary to separate dominance from determination when
considering the genesis of the levels of the social formation, this does not
deny the simultaneity of their presence in the process of reproduction.
From the point of view of the functioning of the social formation,
constraints are always present in reproduction—to the extent that the
properties of the forces of production, for example a production
function, are felt in the spheres of accumulation and distribution of
social product, more generally, to the extent that certain functions must
be fulfilled by the existing institutional structures if they are to reproduce
themselves successfully. In the example we shall discuss, the manner in
which a given social system uses its techno-environment profoundly
alters its own conditions of reproduction by causing the emergence of a
new set of constraints which are incompatible with the dominant social
relations of production, and which therefore imply a transformation of
the mode of production. Conversely, in other conditions of production,
the internal dynamic of the social economy leads to the evolution of a
new mode of production (class-state formation) without any major
change in the technological base, or where such change is largely the
outcome of the reorganization and intensification of existing productive
forces, a process dominated by evolving relations of production. In the
following analysis, we shall see, beginning with a single set of productive
relations, how the interplay of internal variation, structural dominance,
and intersystemic contradiction generates a multilinear evolution of the
social formation.

SPECIFIC MODEL

Our point of departure is the Kachin of the Triangle region of Upper
Burma. This is the region of lowest population density (5-6/m²), the
highest percentage of primary forest, and greatest soil fertility.1 Begin-
ning with these optimal conditions of production, we shall attempt to
show how the functioning of a specific social system generates several
different types of transformation in time. The environment which deter-
mines the conditions of production is not simply a limiting factor. It is
also a variable subject to change as the result of human activity, a part of
the production process as well as a determinant. As such, the trans-
formations that occur include significant changes in the conditions of
production themselves.

TECHNOLOGY AND ECOLOGY

The Kachin are swidden agriculturalists whose principal crop is dry rice,
which they cultivate on mountain slopes. Given the conditions of
abundant rainfall and rich soils, swiddening yields a considerable
annual surplus with a minimum labour input. This form of technology,
however, has certain very critical properties with respect to the local
ecology. In order to maintain high productivity it is absolutely necessary
to maintain the soil fertility, the latter depending largely on the ratio of
years of cultivation to years of fallow. The normal cultivation/fallow
cycle is in the range 1/14 to 1/20, the upper limit being 1/12. If fallow is
shortened to under twelve years the optimal conditions for reforestation
are no longer operant. Beyond this threshold, fertility and labour pro-
ductivity progressively decrease. More labour is required, owing
especially to the increased need for weeding, which becomes the most
time-consuming activity in the labour process. There may be less
organic matter to burn, the soil is more exposed to erosion, and output per acre is generally much lower. This lower limit for fallowing defines an upper limit for demographic density, since, in order to maintain the 1/12 ratio, any working population must have at its disposal thirteen times more arable land than it uses in one season.

A given technology in given environmental conditions constitutes a techno-ecological system whose internal properties impose a certain number of constraints on the functioning of the productive relations by determining the outer limits of technical reproduction of a population at a given level of productivity. The technology, however, is quite neutral with respect to the process of reproduction, and it is the relations of production themselves which determine the way a population will behave towards its own limit conditions.

In fact, one of the transformations we shall discuss consists precisely in violating the optimal limits of forest regeneration, resulting in ecological degradation, a gradual succession to secondary forest and grassland. Leach's so-called 'ecological zones' (Leach 1964: 22-8) are not natural zones but rather the result of the progressive over-intensification of a basically extensive technology, a phenomenon which is more closely linked to increasing population density than to any other factor. While rainfall is perhaps lower in the eastern regions of the Kachin Hills, though not significantly so (80-100 mm/year as opposed to 100-150 mm/year), both are areas of rapid regrowth, and the cultivation/fallow cycle is everywhere below optimal conditions, ranging from 1/10 to 2/10, 2/8, and worse. This appears to be due directly to population densities that are three to five times greater than in the Triangle region (reports of land shortage are frequent in these areas). With increasing degradation there are a number of more or less elaborate adaptations which occur. The extensive use of nitrogen-fixing bean crops is widespread among the eastern Kachin. Among all groups except the Triangle Kachin, the hoe is an indispensable item for working the increasingly difficult soil. We often find some kind of crop rotation, with beans and less demanding grains such as millet and job's tears replacing rice. Among the Chin, we find the most elaborate system of rotation in the area, with cycles of 4/30, 5/40, 6/18, etc., in which peas play an important role in maintaining fertility. The Chin, as opposed to other groups, can still get fairly good per-acre yields, but at a much increased labour cost. Irrigated terracing, which occurs among the Angami Naga and some eastern Kachin, may be an adaptation to extreme land shortage in areas of steep slopes, where dry terracing used to prevent soil runoff could easily be transformed into irrigation in the presence of high rainfall. As it does permit high settlement density, it might occur where there is a great deal of intervillage warfare, although this is by no means necessary. In any case, irrigation is not to be thought of as a technological innovation but as the most extreme form of intensification. While yields per acre are again fairly good, much lower than in ideal swiddening conditions, the labour productivity is very low and there is little possibility of rapidly expanding the cultivated area. This is in contradiction to the demands of the kind of tribal economy we shall describe, and groups which do use terracing revert to swidden cultivation wherever possible.

The ecological degradation and consequent technological modifications described above are the outcome of the dominance of a particular set of social relations, but they in turn cause a radical transformation of those relations.

RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

Leach has shown how Kachin society seems to oscillate between two political forms, one 'egalitarian' (gumla) without any sort of chiefship, where the largest political unit is the village, and the other, hierarchical (gumsa), characterized by the existence of large domains headed by hereditary chiefs and their aristocratic relatives. For the purposes of this argument we shall begin with the system at its structural origin point (gumla) in order to outline its laws of development towards centralized hierarchy as well as the contradictions that cause its breakdown.

PRODUCTION UNITS AND LOCAL LINEAGES

While the household is the smallest unit of consumption and cooperation, the local lineage (minor lineage) is the main unit of appropriation and exchange. This patrilineal, patrilocal group contains four or five households linked by a single altar dedicated to a common ancestor. Several such local lineages form a hamlet (kahtawng), which usually clears a single field. This in turn is divided into smaller lineage plots. A number of tasks such as clearing, burning, and maintaining footpaths are communal activities, but actual cultivation and appropriation is a local lineage affair. Several hamlets of ten or more houses (not more than thirty) form a village cluster (maw), which in gumla polity delimits the universe within which most alliances are contracted and in gumsa society becomes a political domain headed by a chief (dawa). Demographic growth leads directly to territorial expansion, a continuous dispersion of the population which more or less maintains density at a level permitting forest regeneration and high efficiency of agricultural exploitation. One might perhaps speak of an optimal settlement size which would enable most villagers to have their fields within easy reach. One might even be tempted to see the hamlet or lineage as a necessarily determined unit of cooperation. While one can certainly speak of theoretical optima for settlement size with regard to specific tasks, it would be a serious mistake to assume that cooperative units were technologically determined. This is the kind of error made by a number of marxists (Terry 1969; Meillassoux 1972), who confuse the fact of
cooperation with the social form that it takes. Clearing, burning, and cultivation are all necessary tasks, but the nature of the groups that perform them is not technologically determined. Among the Lamet, a group of only three or four households will clear and burn a field. Among the Naga, a village of several hundred households may perform the task. Further, local lineage appropriation is not the outcome of technological necessity but is a socially determined phenomenon. The larger cooperative group and the village cluster within which most exchanges take place might perhaps be linked to the long-term needs of social reproduction, especially if success in agriculture were variable over time. But, even if this were the case, I would argue that the modality of these longer-term relations, e.g., alliance, exchange, feasting, is predicated on the existence of separate socially defined units of appropriation, so that the argument for technological necessity is to a large extent vitiated. In the last analysis, all that can be claimed is a technological necessity for some form of distribution and cooperation, but we cannot tell from the forces of production what this form will be. In any case, the relations within the larger group are quite variable and are clearly dominated by factors other than the technological needs of long-term cooperation. Alliances can be restricted to the village or extended into a much larger region, and distributive feasts are not attempts to overcome variable productivity, which does not appear to pose a problem in this kind of techno-ecology, but essential elements in the political economy of the tribal system, whose existence can only be explained historically, with reference to the preceding mode of production.

What emerges, then, is that a number of necessary technical activities are organized socially rather than the social organization being determined by those activities.

The members of a hamlet or village cluster all believe in a common descent from a single distant ancestor–founder, who is simultaneously the territorial spirit. Higher levels of lineage segmentation are poorly defined in gulong society. But in spite of this lack of genealogical precision which, moreover, allows for the manipulation of kinship relations, the local lineage ancestors, territorial spirits, celestial spirits, and the highest deity (ga nat) are all linked in a single segmentary structure which, as we shall see, is instrumental in the evolution of gulong hierarchies.

EXCHANGE AND THE ARTICULATION OF ALLIANCE AND DESCENT

The Kachin are one of the classic examples of a society practising generalized exchange. As detailed analyses by Lévi-Strauss and Leach of this aspect of Kachin society already exist, we shall restrict ourselves to a number of points that are necessary for our discussion.

Generalized exchange can be defined minimally by a proscription against taking a wife from either the same patrilineage or from wife-taking lineages, i.e., a negation of endogamy and restricted or patrilineal exchange. This leaves a man the possibility of either renewing alliances to former wife-givers and wife-takers or establishing new alliances. The former case is equivalent to matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, but the latter defines the same kind of global structure in which all lineages are linked in one or more circles of wife-givers (mayu) and wife-takers (dana). The only difference is in the degree to which the same alliance circles are reproduced over the generations. As such, we might speak of a more or less open system depending on the percentage of new alliances over time. Open systems are closely correlated with political and economic expansion, where the population included in the circles expands and where there is consequently a multiplication of new lineage segments (Lehman 1963: 97).

Demographic growth has the effect of translating lineage segmentation into local segmentation. As the local lineage has a depth of only three or four generations, all segments which are beyond this narrowly circumscribed sphere are lost through genealogical amnesia. This effect is greatly reinforced by the high rate of emigration, which is linked to the dispersed settlement pattern. As a result, the local lineage contains but a few households at any one time. Segmentation tends, thus, to become fission, which in turn has a significant effect on the alliance structure, since the local lineage remains the only stable unit of exogamy. The articulation of lineage fissioning and generalized exchange produces a situation in which kin are continually transformed into potential allies. And, as the alliance relation is the dominant politico-economic relation in this society, as mayu/dana is the form of ranking, the structural preconditions of extensive hierarchization are well established.

The principal internal or intrasystemic contradiction of generalized exchange is the incompatibility between the transitivity of indebtedness, and thus of relative rank, implied by the asymmetrical relation and the closure of the marriage circle, which implies that the lowest-ranked group can become wife-giver to the highest.

\[ A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow \ldots \rightarrow N \rightarrow A \]
\[ A \rightarrow B > C \quad \ldots \quad N > A \]

While this contradiction is always latent, it is not necessarily realized. In gulong society, differences of rank do not exist at the lineage level. There is, perhaps, a kind of ritual superiority of a MB or WF with respect to his ZS or son-in-law, but this applies only to individual relatives and is not transitive. Further, and this is more important, small marriage circles of five or six lineages tend to maintain a single low brideprice for all groups, reinforcing equality through a strict control over exchange-values.

However, the very structure of generalized exchange allows for the kind of differentiation that would be blocked in a system of restricted
exchange. The unilaterality of the circulation of women defines the structural necessity of exchange goods that circulate in the opposite direction. The existence of such prestige goods (*hpaga*) permits the possibility of a valuation of women, of an alliance, or of the lineage itself, all of which is expressed in the variation of brideprice. But the motive force behind the rise and fall of brideprice can only be found outside the sphere of circulation.

**DISTRIBUTIVE FEASTS AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE LOCAL LINEAGE**

While generalized exchange is the structural basis for the development of ranking, it does not furnish us with necessary and sufficient conditions for such a development. There is, however, another institution, the community feast (*manaio*), which links production directly to social differentiation.

A local lineage that produces a substantial surplus can prepare a feast for the entire community. Buffalo (*mihan*) are sacrificed and their meat distributed along with a number of rice dishes and a great deal of rice beer. These *manaio*, in which the host represents the entire community before the spirits of fertility and prosperity, greatly increase his prestige. The capacity to produce a large surplus demonstrates the importance and influence of lineage ancestors with the higher spirits who appear as the source of all prosperity and wealth. Prestige so attained is converted into relative rank in the matrimonial circuit. By raising the 'social value' of the lineage, the value of its daughters is also raised, and they can, thereafter, only be married at higher prices. In this way, surplus that is converted into prestige generates affinal ranking. Matrimonial exchange and distributive feasts are thus linked in a single process of social reproduction.

*Figure 2* represents a positive feedback system in which the accumulation of prestige is converted into increasing rank differentiation and a simultaneous growth of absolute surplus, which amplifies the same cycle of accumulation. Lineage surplus enters directly into two circuits. First, it is used to acquire wives in a political strategy whose twofold function is the validation of status and the increase in the size of the local work-force, hence the surplus available for feasting.

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surplus → wives → [...]
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Second, it is converted, by means of community feast-giving, into prestige, which is then transformed into higher relative rank through the marriage of lineage daughters.

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surplus → prestige → rank → [...]
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The functioning of this system transforms the egalitarian marriage circles into a political and economic hierarchy of wife-givers and wife-takers. The end-product is not, of course, a simple transitive ordering but, rather, a regrouping of lineages into more or less closed circles of allies capable of paying a similar brideprice, i.e. a spiral of ranking, where at each level there are a number of lineages of approximately equal status. The *mayu/dama* hierarchy is generated by the differential accumulation of prestige, which depends in the last instance on the production of lineage surplus. But this resultant structure does not suffice to account for the nature of *gumsa* polity. We have still to explain the institutional form taken by lineage ranking: the hereditary chiefs, the aristocracy which surrounds them (elder brother lineages), and the commoners. In order to understand the passage from relative *mayu/dama* ranking to chiefdoms we must analyse the segmentary structure that links local lineages to one another in a network extending from ancestors to the supernatural world of territorial and celestial spirits (*Figure 3*).

**RELIGION, 'PROPERTY', AND THE FORMATION OF DOMAINS**

In the course of *gumsa* evolution, higher segmentary levels become more clearly defined to the extent that they begin to assume important
political functions. The principal levels, however, remain invariant throughout gamsai/gumlao oscillation.

All the lineages of a single territory are integrated in a series of increasingly inclusive segments in such a way that lineage and local segmentation always coincide and where local marriages can always be defined as endogamous in terms of higher genealogical levels.

The spirits (nats) are, in effect, no more than distant ancestors, but they possess "imaginary" functions that are critical for social reproduction and are the condition for the appearance of a new social relation. The supernature projection of the lineage structure is not, contrary to Leach (1964: 264), a simple reflection of a more concrete social reality. It is an integral part of that reality. The ancestor of the local group is the spirit who controls the welfare of his descendants and it is only through this spirit that one can approach the more powerful deities that are the source of all prosperity and fertility.

Community feasts are religious feasts whose dual function is the distribution of surplus/accumulation of prestige and the propitiation of higher spirits in order to increase the wealth and prosperity of the entire group. We might best characterize this as a religion of productivity in which the real work process is inverted in its immediate appearance. Surplus is represented not as the product of surplus labour, but as the "work of the gods".

Now, if we place the model of lineage political economy in this more complete structural context we can, I think, deduce a series of logical steps whereby surplus is eventually converted into the absolute superiority of a hereditary chief.

Tribes, States, and Transformations

1. A wealthy lineage head, A, who can afford to give great feasts to the entire village can only do so because he has good harvests.
2. But the way in which one gets such harvests is by sacrificing to the local and celestial spirits. That is, wealth is not the product of labour and control over others' labour but the 'work of the gods'.
3. Thus, if A is successful, it must be because he has more influence with the spirits.
4. But 'influence' can only be the result of a closer genealogical relationship.
5. Therefore, A must be more closely related to the local spirits, which is where the chain of supernatural communication begins.
6. The claim that A's lineage is the same as that of the local spirit, and that his ancestor is therefore the territorial deity, is perfectly natural.

Thus, the internal logic of the fetishized representation of the work process determines the form taken by political development. A chiefly lineage is simply one that succeeds in inserting itself at a higher segmentary level of the community's genealogical structure.
The relations of production we have discussed are articulated in a unified structure that can be represented as in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Articulation of Relations of Production

Religious feasts, the segmentary structure, the relation chief/community might all be designated as vertical, as opposed to the horizontal alliance and exchange relations. The close interdependence of the two structures is clearly revealed in the evolution of *gumsa* forms.

vertical: feast → prestige
horizontal: prestige → affinal rank
vertical: affinal rank → segmentary rank

This last transformation is decisive in that it determines the specific form of the *gumsa* domain. In the emergence of the chiefdom the *mayu*dama relation is re-presented simultaneously as an elder/younger relation between lineage ancestors. In this way, relative affinal ranking is converted into absolute social age with respect to a common ancestor. This process generates a necessary ‘after the fact’ endogamy since local lineages united by marriage are immediately included, by definition, in a higher-order segment. As the territorial spirit is also the community founder, the chiefly lineage which is descended from it is by definition the senior lineage in the domain, and all other affinal ranks can be re-designated in terms of segmentary distance from this line, i.e. in terms of the genealogical proximity of local lineage ancestors to the *mung nat*. This accounts for the fact that aristocratic wife-takers to the chiefly
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lineage are simultaneously classed as sibling lineages (elB lines where succession is by ultimogeniture—see note 5). What we have, in effect, is the development of a conical clan where lineages linked by marriage have an absolute rank position determined by their genealogical distance from the chiefly line (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Formation of the Conical Clan

In this chart, two kinds of rank are represented simultaneously. Affinal rank, shown horizontally, is transformed into segmentary rank for lineage ancestors. But ancestors are not simply a time-depth phenomenon. They can be taken to represent ‘older’, and therefore, senior branches. Structurally, age-ranking and affinal ranking are equivalent since they are generated in the same genealogical space. While, for example, X, Y, or Z appears as the parent to three sibling lineages, it is in fact a senior branch to them. It is not merely an ancestor, but a living local lineage having affinal relations with other lineages of the same ‘age-rank’ (corresponds to Leach’s rank-class). The transforming of affinal rank into segmentary rank implies that local lineage exogamy will always define a larger endogamous group at a higher genealogical level, which is by definition a higher level of social rank. In this way, the formation of a domain entails the formation of conical clan structure.

Tribes, States, and Transformations

The evolution of the conical clan varies with the degree of hierarchization and only appears to be a well-established form in the Triangle zone and in Assam, where there were large gunasa domains and a certain development of class stratification. The conical tendency, however, is always present and has only escaped the attention of certain anthropologists because of an excessive empiricism that would treat the conical clan as a fixed institution while ignoring the internal processes

Figure 7 Gunasa Domain: Structure and Marriage Relations

by which it is generated. Fried (1957), for example, who categorically opposes the conical to the egalitarian clan, is forced to relegate the mechanisms of the former’s evolution to factors external to kinship structure. Leach, on the other hand, seems to ignore the existence of conical formations because of the rigid distinction he makes between the local lineage, which is a concrete entity, and the higher orders of the segmentary structure, which appear as mere ‘ideological’ projections. We have tried to show, contrary to these authors, that the formation of the conical clan is a logically implied aspect of the evolution of chiefdoms. The fact that the territorial spirit is also the community founder already defines a necessary endogamy among the included local lineages, though this may remain a purely ideological phenomenon in gunlao
society. When, however, a chiefly lineage comes to occupy that key position, the segmentary structure which was formerly latent in the supernatural realm redefines the rank relations between all local groups. As the ancestral hierarchy is also the hierarchy of territorial spirits, the political segmentation of the conical clan is identical with local and lineage segmentation. This isomorphism is not an institutional fact. Territorial spirits only exist for communities. They do not float about in a supernatural ether, waiting to be called upon when the need arises. The fact, however, that political communities, no matter what their size, trace their ancestral lines back to a territorial spirit implies that expanding chiefdoms will have the same structure at all levels. The smallest local units will possess spirits who are in turn the descendants of higher spirits representing more inclusive areas.

Gumsa domains result from the extension of the above-described processes to increasingly larger territories (Figure 7). Every domain must have, by definition, a single paramount chief below whom there are aristocrats who rule smaller domains, village clusters, or single hamlets. All levels are linked by the matrilateral and segmentary ties that characterize the Kachin conical clan. It must be remembered, however, that while the conical clan is the form that finally emerges in gumsa evolution, the alliance structure is the dominant relation in so far as it is the means by which hierarchy is established in the first place.

ECONOMIC FLOWS

All material flows in Kachin society are channelled through the vertical and horizontal structures that constitute the relations of production.

A chief, once established, receives tribute and corvée from his dependants. This follows directly from the logic of his position. In gumlao society a certain amount of surplus is used in community sacrifices to the territorial spirit, but the latter, as a relatively easily satiated ancestor, has a low cost of maintenance. We find an analogous situation in gumsa society, except that the cost now includes the living descendents of that spirit, who have a necessary imaginary role in communicating with their ancestors, who ensure the economic reproduction of the society. Tribute consists in a small but historically variable proportion of the annual crop, much of which is returned in the great manaoo feasts. It is not surprising in this respect that the chief's house is referred to as the 'paddy store' (htingsan). We note here that feasts are no longer distributive activities but have become entirely redistributive. Corvée amounts to the cultivation of the chief's greatly expanded fields as a communal duty indistinguishable ideologically from other communal tasks such as the clearing of the village field and maintenance of footpaths. The output of this labour is similarly channelled back into redistributive feasts. A certain portion of the surplus obtained in tribute and corvée is used by the chief in matrimonial exchanges and it appears

that chiefly marriages were very elaborate affairs indeed (Scott and Hardiman 1900, Pt I, Vol. I: 415). The tribute/corvée relation is clearly expressed, both ideologically and materially, in the obligation of all members of the domain to send to the chief the hind quarter of any animal hunted or sacrificed in 'his territory', and all such paramount chief's are referred to as 'thigh-eating' chiefs.

Chiefly surplus is supplemented in a very important way by the output of slaves. The latter are produced by capture and by internal indebtedness—mechanisms to which we shall return in the next section. Slaves invariably belong to the paramount chief, although an aristocrat may often possess several. They are either internal (timung mayam) or external (ngong mayam) slaves. The former live in the chief's house and are to all practical purposes equivalent to other members of his family. He pays their very low brideprice, but is entitled to all of the surplus they produce. In this they are similar to permanent children. External slaves have their own households and may be settled in other villages and are in most respects like low-status commoners, except that they pay a heavier tribute, which includes half the brideprice received for daughters, numerous first fruits, and every alternate calf born. This relation is surely an incipient form of class structure, and it is conceivable that it might develop not only as a result of capture, but also when villagers become heavily indebted to their chiefs.

Horizontal flows consist primarily of exchanges between allies. Matrimonial prestations are prolonged over many years and vary in size according to the rank of the lineages involved. Conversely, rank may vary according to the wealth of the lineage and its ability to meet a given price level. We note, however, that what appears at the local level as a horizontal flow may well turn out to be vertical from the per-
spective of the global structure. We refer to the gradient of brideprice as the degree to which bridewealth flows upward to nodal points in the hierarchy rather than remaining at the same rank level. This depends on the percentage of hypogamous marriages and the brideprice differential between ranks. When we consider the total affinal network, we may find that local horizontal flows serve ultimately to increase the rate of accumulation in the chiefly lineage.

Figure 8 summarizes the principal flows in *gumsa* hierarchies. The two most significant ratios are $S_1/S_2$ which measures the degree of hierarchization, i.e., the relative weight of vertical as opposed to horizontal flows, and $S_3/S_4$ which measures the degree of reciprocity in the redistributive sector. The evolution of the *gumsa* system entails an increase in both of these ratios; that is, a growing control by chiefs over the total social surplus.

$$\begin{align*}
\text{total} & \quad \frac{d^2S_2}{dS_1^2} > 0 \\
S_1 - \text{surplus} & \quad \frac{d^2S_2}{dS_1^2} > 0 \\
\text{surplus} & \quad \frac{d^2S_2}{dS_1^2} > 0 \\
S_2 - \text{controlled} & \quad \frac{d^2S_2}{dS_1^2} > 0 \\
\text{by chief} & \quad \frac{d^2S_2}{dS_1^2} > 0
\end{align*}$$

**EXPANSION AND CONTRADICTION**

The functioning of the Kachin economy generates two types of growth: (1) Political expansion and growing internal differentiation tend to develop in the direction of a state-class formation. (2) This process is accompanied by a rapid demographic and territorial growth (Figure 9). We begin here with the latter development as it determines the limiting material conditions of political evolution in the Kachin Hills.

We have shown how the Kachin economy is based on an increasing or even accelerating demand for surplus, which is utilized to accumulate prestige and an increasing control over labour and material flows. The demand for surplus creates a demand for labour. Large families have a high positive value—not that *relative* surplus will be higher—it may in fact be lower if the ratio of consumers to workers increases, but since prestige depends on the accumulation of *absolute* surplus, the larger the group of dependants the more powerful their leader. In the initial stages of prestige-building, the number of wives and children is evidently a crucial factor, but through the positive feedback processes of the economy this is supplemented, if not largely replaced, by the prestation of dependent wife-takers and debt-slaves. The hunger for labour power is expressed in the capture of large numbers of inhabitants from surrounding areas, most of whom become the slaves of chiefs. The latter may have houses as much as a hundred yards in length.

As a result of such mechanisms, local population tends to grow quite rapidly. But the constraints of the technology dictate that in order to preserve the rate of productivity, territorial expansion must at least compensate for demographic growth, i.e., in order to prevent increasing density. With a fallow cycle of $1/12$, territorial expansion must be at least thirteen times faster than the rate of increase in the labour force.

**Figure 9 External Expansion and Contradiction**

This constraint has some problematic implications for the political hierarchy. Assuming that a domain did expand territorially in accordance with the necessity of maintaining productivity, the political area would soon become so large that a noble installed in a peripheral region might easily accumulate his own dependent following. Such an individual could then enter into competition with the paramount chief and liberate himself from the latter’s domination. In effect, the *gumsa* system is not economically centralized enough to prevent this kind of domain fission, which tends, consequently, to set an internal limit to
material reproduction of the population irrespective of other social factors.

The properties of the above graph can be said to define a hierarchy of constraints which determine the limit conditions of technical reproduction of the social system. It can be represented as follows (Figure 11):

Figure 11 Hierarchy of Constraints of Production

While these are indeed material constraints, they are not determined solely by the technology, but by the totality of the conditions of production constituted by the combination of technology, environment, and demography. The production function defines the set of all input/output ratios along the axis of progressive ecological degradation, but the latter is brought about by increasing population density, which is itself determined by the relations of production. This is a clear case where we can distinguish inter- from intra-systemic properties. While intensification brought about by the economic system does not alter the internal properties of the techno-ecology, it does determine the manner in which they will be manifested. We must now consider the way in which the constraints of the productive forces are articulated with the internal structure of the relations of production.

The overleaf schema (Figure 12) depicts the process of internal political-economic expansion of the gunusa domain.

The increasing demand for surplus leads, via the cycle Feasts→Affinal rank→Brideprice→Feasts, to an inflation of all prestige goods (hipaga) and all prestations including brideprice and indemnity payments, which in their turn threaten every level of the social structure with increasing indebtedness. A given social rank implies the ability to meet all the exchange obligations of that rank. A noble lineage that does not have the resources to participate in the aristocratic alliance network eventually becomes a commoner lineage. A commoner, however, who becomes insolvent completely drops out of the kinship structure and
becomes a debt-slave. If he cannot afford to pay his brideprice and other obligations he loses his political and economic independence and is transferred to the chief’s house. The latter pays his brideprice but is entitled to all of his surplus. This transfer amounts to an increase in the size of the chief's 'family' work-force and serves to further his power of accumulation. While slave lineages can become commoners again after several generations, the obligations and debts generated by the functioning of the economy can only amplify the rate of extortion as well as the social inferiority of poorer lineages. The chief progressively gains control over the total surplus of the group, and his position is continually reinforced by his growing capacity to convert surplus into prestige and therefore to impose new obligations upon his subordinates.

**Figure 12 Internal Expansion of the Gumsa Domain and its Contradictions**

![Diagram showing internal expansion of the Gumsa domain and its contradictions]

that is, the technology must be capable of furnishing a real output corresponding to the accelerating demand. It is here that the very structure of the relations of production causes them to come into contradiction with the productive forces. All local lineages in a guma system are connected, from the highest to lowest, by a transitive mayu/dama network. As such, any increase in prestige at the top implies an increase in brideprice and other obligations at all levels. The rate of inflation of hpaga depends largely on the rate of accumulation by chiefs, one which is far greater than the average. As the chief has at his disposal a growing percentage of the total available surplus labour, by extortion as well as by the accumulation of slaves, he can easily counter the falling rate of relative surplus by increasing his accumulation of absolute surplus, i.e. at a rate faster than the deceleration of productivity. But this merely makes matters worse, since inflation goes on rampantly while most lineages are running into increasing difficulty in meeting their obligations.

$$\frac{dS_a}{dt^a} > 0 \implies \frac{dS}{dt^a} > 0$$

The above inequalities show how the chief accumulates an increasing portion of the total social surplus which, metamorphosed into higher inflation rates, entails a multiplication of debts at a rate faster than the real surplus required to meet them. This contradiction should emerge at the point where the rate of indebtedness begins to diverge from the rate of surplus (L on the graph, Figure 10), i.e. where increasing obligations become incompatible with decreasing means of payment.

$$t \implies \begin{cases} \frac{dS_a}{dt^a} < 0 \\ \frac{dS}{dt^a} < 0 \end{cases} \implies \begin{cases} \frac{dS}{dt} > 0 \\ \frac{dS_a}{dt^a} > 0 \end{cases}$$

The situation should begin to become critical at the point where the chief starts to accumulate an increasing portion of a decreasing surplus, so that there is no possibility of meeting debt payments (L on graph). This contradiction between forces and relations of production is manifested at the level of the social relations (the only 'lived' level) as a strain between all debtors and creditors, affines in the horizontal structure, and superordinate and subordinate chiefs and their dependants in the vertical structure. It is significant that the Kachin word for 'debt', hka, is also the word for 'feud'.

The material relations in the guma imply, further, that petty aristocrats, indebted village chiefs for example, are likely to be the focal
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points of discontent since it is they who have the most to lose. For while they have high rank, they are economically equivalent to commoners, obliged to cultivate their own fields with few or no slaves and largely unaided by their dependants. They are the first to feel the exorbitant inflation imposed from above, since they are in constant danger of losing their rank.

In *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Leach documented the existence of a long-term oscillation between *gumsa* and *gumlao* poles. At a certain stage in *gumsa* development *gumlao* revolts occur which destroy the political hierarchy, reinstating a more egalitarian organization. This is all quite predictable in terms of the model presented above. The return to *gumlao* consists in a general devaluation of *hpaga* values and of all *hka*, therefore the suppression of social rank. This is superficially similar to a capitalist depression. But since surplus is converted into relative rank and not capital, it all becomes a question of the devaluation of social status and not of property values. The *gumsa*/*gumlao* cycle is thus a social and not a business cycle. The egalitarian state resulting from the collapse of *gumsa* polity is similarly quite transitory, for while lineage rank is equalized in *gumlao* revolts the underlying mechanisms which generate hierarchy are left quite intact.

The restoration of *gumlao* organization brings with it the possibility of regeneration, not only of the *gumsa* structure, but also of the necessary techno-ecological conditions that are its basis. Political breakdown is accompanied by a redispersion of the population that permits the regrowth of primary forest without which the high productivity necessary for political development would be unavailable.

In sum, the dynamic of the Kachin system might be envisaged as an evolution towards increasing hierarchy and state-formation which comes into contradiction with its own material constraints of reproduction but which, by means of *gumlao* revolts, succeeds in re-establishing the conditions for a renewed evolution. As the material conditions of production are determinant in the last instance, we must now consider the multilinear effects generated by the same structure when these conditions are transformed.

**DEVOULATION**

The notion of devolution here is not meant to refer to a simple reverse kind of evolution. Rather, it is the structural transformation that occurs when a social formation reproduces itself in continually deteriorating conditions of production. The structures that emerge are quite unlike those of *gumlao* society, although in both cases there is an absence of political hierarchy.

*Long Cycles and Short Cycles*

We shall refer to the kind of variation which occurs in *gumsa/gumlao* oscillation as a short cycle. Its reproduction depends upon the long-run maintenance of the conditions of production, demographic density, and soil fertility. In the Triangle region, overall density has in fact been held at a very low level. While during *gumsa* periods there is certainly a tendency for increased demographic density within any one political domain with resultant overintensification leading to a partial degradation of the environment, the combination of continuous emigration with the dispersion which occurs in the aftermath of *gumlao* revolts re-establishes the conditions in which forest and the initial level of fertility can be regenerated. Thus, it is only where long-term territorial expansion is possible that the short cycle can be maintained. While this is the case in the Triangle itself, to the northeast, east, and southeastern Shan states and other tribes (Lolo, Lisu) with higher densities constitute both a political and a demographic barrier to Kachin territorial growth. In these areas there is a serious build-up of population. Density increases several fold (15–30/mi²) and the environment is progressively degraded as one moves east, changing from secondary forest into extensive grassland.

Diminishing yields necessarily weaken *gumsa* structures, which depend on the availability of a growing surplus. In this region (Leach's zones B and C, in Leach 1964: 23) the only chiefdoms are those which are able to exploit trade routes and valley Shan populations by taking a regular tribute. The political hierarchies are much less stable here and there are only *gunrawng*, 'boastful', chiefs who compete, like big-men, for political power as opposed to the *gumpchyeng*, paramount, chiefs of the Triangle. In the northeast, where there are neither Shans nor trade routes to exploit, all groups are more or less permanently 'egalitarian' and there is no evidence of any supralocal organization.

Where the average demographic density of a large region increases it provokes considerable changes in the techno-ecological base and the emergence of new constraints of reproduction which in turn bring about a radical transformation of the social structure. This second kind of development is not oscillatory but unidirectional, and the transformations generated in this process of devolution are distributed on a 'long cycle'.

In the graph (*Figure 1*) the short cycles have the long cycle as their 'envelope' curve, the latter being tangent to all of the former. Short cycles thus represent the variation that occurs owing to political-economic constraints operating within the technological limits defined by the long cycle. At any point along the graph of increasing density and real ecological degradation, there is the possibility of fluctuation similar to that which occurs in *gumsa/gumlao* cycles. The reversibility of the short cycle, however, is continuously displaced along the irreversible long cycle so that the very nature of the political and social variation must be quite different at different points on the envelope curve.

Population pressure leads to territorial competition and the multi-
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Aplication of wars and feuds (Scott and Hardiman 1900, Pt I, Vol. 1; 367). This in turn leads to the formation of larger villages; first, due to the slowdown of the fission process, a direct result of land shortage and, second, for reasons of military security. In the Triangle, maximum village size is about thirty houses. In the eastern trade route area it may be as high as eighty houses and farther north, where there are no trade routes, there are villages of one hundred and twenty-five houses. This new concentration of population brings about a topological transformation of the former structures. The formation of *gumsa* domains depends on the continual fissioning of the local lineage, its dispersal

*Figure 13 The Long Cycle*

![Diagram showing ecological zone and population density.](image)

A. Primary forest predominates
B. Secondary forest predominates
C. Lighter secondary forest, scrub grassland
D. Grasland predominates

over a wide area, and a well-developed genealogical amnesia so that non-local lineages are more or less severed from the parental group and become potential affines in an expanding *nayu/dama* network. Where territorial expansion is blocked this process can no longer function. The local lineage becomes a much larger segmentary clan of the type that we find among the Chin. The rule of exogamy is necessarily extended to the larger group, since the genealogical network linking the minimal segments has become a matter of demonstrable descent reinforced by the fact of co-residence.

Furthermore, as it is no longer possible to send off one’s siblings to found new settlements, it becomes necessary to divide up the existing land. Inheritance of land in Kachin systems is merely the effect of inheritance of segmentary position, by either ultimo- or primo-geniture. Differential shares are inconceivable where all land is communal by definition and represented by a single lineage, descendant of the territorial spirit. As we pass now from Kachin to Chin and Naga groups, inheritance becomes increasingly democratic, but this individualization of rights is simultaneously the creation of a social relation to land which did not exist in the Kachin system. For as land becomes divided into inheritable titles it enters into the same category as other moveable goods. We witness here the emergence of lineage landed property which is negotiable like other forms of lineage property and which can be transferred and even accumulated in brideprice and other interlineage transactions. As land becomes negotiable it enters into the horizontal exchange structure, thus destroying the entire basis of the ‘Asiatic’ Kachin structure, where land was indivisible. An important verification of this is the existence in the Northern Chin Hills (Zahao, Siyin) of societies where there appears to be a conflict between chiefs who attempt to maintain control over all land, as a right attached to their position, and the growing negotiability of individual titles which are apparently accumulated by wealthy ‘big-men’. This is a clear expression of the growing contradiction between the collapsing vertical structure and the increasingly dominant horizontal structure. It should be noted that these most northern Chin have a relatively low density compared to the Central and Southern Chin, and their villages are much smaller, although large by Kachin standards (Zahao villages average less than 100 houses; Central Chin villages often have between 100 and 200 houses and there are some with 250).

Decreasing productivity makes interlineage hierarchization a problematic affair. Large conical domains with their paramount chiefs and great redistributive feasts disappear, replaced by a more competitive economy in which all available surplus is channelled into the horizontal circuits. Village feasts expressing the relation between chief, community, and powerful ancestors become ‘feasts of merit’ among Chin and Naga, the locus of competition between affines, potlatches whose function is to maintain or to raise relative rank with respect to allies as well as to the greatly increased number of kin who can never become inferior wife-takers.

The impossibility of converting lineage segmentation into local segmentation, the swelling of the exogamous unit, and the democratization of inheritance all combine to break the cycle whereby affinal rank is transformed into conical rank by destroying the relation between lineage hierarchy, ancestors, and territorial spirits. As there is no longer any continuity between local spirits and the higher supernatural powers, there can be no position equivalent to a *gumsa* chief, direct descendant of the territorial deity. On the contrary, the individualization of land titles and their absorption into the horizontal structure that now dominates the process of reproduction permits a new kind of hierarchization which might be described as pre-feudal. Surplus continues to be converted into prestige and inflated brideprice for daughters, but...
now land titles are often transferred in these as well as in debt payments, thus creating the possibility for the development of a landed aristocracy (Figure 14).

**Figure 14 Transformation of the Cycle of Hierarchization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kachin</th>
<th>Chin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surplus</td>
<td>Surplus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>Prestige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinal rank</td>
<td>Affinal rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segmentary rank</td>
<td>Accumulation of land titles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the Chin, a rather intricate agricultural adaptation including elaborate cycles of crop rotation has maintained a fairly good rate of productivity in intensified conditions so that an aristocracy has been able to develop on the basis of land-title accumulation. A small number of dominant lineages often own the majority or even the totality of a village's land. Ranking among such aristocrats, however, is always in a state of flux. The competition between allies is ferocious and brideprice inflation is very rapid. 'Chiefs' receive a small token rent from their wife-taker dependants, some of whom may also help to cultivate the former's fields, which must be quite large in order to provide the kind of surplus necessary for the 'feasts of merit'.

In any case, this secondary development of hierarchy is considerably weakened by diminishing returns and the general degradation of the conditions of production, which continues in spite of the elaborate technology. When we move on to the Naga, the clan begins to counter the political independence of the minimal exchange unit, making internal differentiation more difficult. Among the Chin, the clan may act as a unit of exogamy but it has few political and economic functions. The rules of inheritance, however, which divide property somewhat unequally among all brothers, tend to spread land titles among a wide range of collateral lines after several generations, and there is some evidence that this is meant to prevent the accumulation of land control in any one branch of the maximal lineage or clan (Stevenson 1968: 68). Among the Naga, the power of the wider group of kinsmen increases. The number of obligations owed to collaterals multiplies and the control over land becomes a direct concern of the clan elders—among many groups, all land not in use reverts immediately to the clan as a whole for reallocation. Inheritance is often egalitarian in the extreme, undivided for a generation before being distributed equally among
grandsons. The clan, of course, is also the relevant defence unit in feuds and disputes, which arise quite frequently.

The collapse of local lineage political economy, which is completely stifled by the growing dominance of the clan, diminishes the importance of generalized exchange. At maximal lineage and clan levels restricted exchange begins to predominate and exogamy is often extended to the clan group which occupies a village section. There are many cases of village moieties, and among all Naga groups there appears to be a mixture of dualist and asymmetric structures.

We can, nevertheless, detect a short cycle among the Naga. Where territorial expansion is possible the independent political economy of the local lineage assumes its former importance. Matrilineal exchange and accumulation of land titles, and therefore of dependants, occur among the Sema Naga, and chieflaincy does develop at the village level. However, the power of a chief depends on his ability to send off his sons to found new villages. Thus, the political hierarchy which, in any case, never extends beyond the village level disappears as soon as territorial expansion is blocked. Given the high demographic density in the region as a whole, it is evident that expansion can only take place through intertribal warfare. Both the Sema and the Lhota only appear to have reached a stage of internal political development as a result of their expulsion of the Ao Naga (Sema villages average 100 houses, Lhota 250, and Ao 500 [Allen 1905; Hutton 1921a: 34]). Even so, as density continues to grow, the relation becomes more frequent and the results more deceiving for the internal economies of the groups involved. In most areas, hereditary chiefs are entirely replaced by big-men or by clan elders. Individuals can still gain prestige through feasts of merit, but it is impossible to convert this into lineage rank because such feasts are not permitted by the alliance network and the ancestral hierarchy. Furthermore, labour productivity is too low to permit the acceleration of surplus necessary to interlineage competition. Among the majority of Naga groups big-men have prestige but little power. Among the Ao in particular, political functions are entirely transferred to the village council of elders. Here, competition leads only to a kind of unstable and negative egalitarianism.

The devolution of the system is most evident among the Eastern Angami Naga (Führer-Haimendorf and Mills 1936). Here every village has a tevo, supposed descendant of the sacred founder, mediator between the community and the supernatural, thus, structurally equivalent to a Kachin chief (duwa), representative of the higher unity of the group. In practice, however, the tevo is quite the contrary. He is formally excluded from all fertility and prosperity rituals. He is absolutely forbidden to give to or receive (especially food) from villagers. All sexual relations are prohibited during his first four years in office. He is subject to a whole series of ritual prohibitions, all of which are meant to ensure social reproduction. As such, the tevo appears as a symmetric inversion of the Kachin duwa. For the latter, all positive acts of generosity imply increased prosperity while, for the former, the prohibition of such acts permits survival. Here, political equality is founded upon the ritual negation of everything that led the society to destroy its own conditions of production.

The long cycle leads, finally, to the Wa. Here density reaches its absolute limits and forest is entirely replaced by grassland. Villages are even larger than among the Naga, averaging between 500 and 700 houses surrounded by heavy ramparts. War is a daily condition of life and famines are quite frequent. There are apparently war chiefs whose power, however, is strictly limited to military leadership. Here, as among the Naga, headhunting is of prime importance, but for the Wa it becomes a well-institutionalized sport with its own special season, just before spring sowing. As among the Naga, it is assumed that the larger the number of captured heads, the better the crop will be. It is significant that, among the Kachins, individuals who might normally be killed by Naga and Wa are captured as slaves. Some Kuki-Chin groups that headhunt explain the captured trophy as a sign that the warrior will possess slaves in the afterworld, i.e. slaves are forsaken in this world in order that they might serve in the next. Among both the Naga and Wa, but especially the latter, headhunting is directly linked to survival, and human heads replace the buffalo-head trophies of the Kachins as a sign of prestige. Similarly, with respect to horizontal exchange, a man who fails to take a sufficient number of heads will have great difficulty in finding a wife. All of these transformations depict Wa society as a kind of morbid inversion of everything Kachin.

In many Wa villages there are large circular barrows, some of which have a circumference of four hundred feet. These are similar in form to the Naga ‘sitting Circles’ where founder ancestors are supposedly buried and which serve as ceremonial centres, perhaps for the dancing that occurs at great feasts. Kachin manao also make use of large circular dance floors. The Wa, in any case, are unaware of the origin of these circles, which have fallen into disuse. It is said, however, that the great stones (similar to those which are hauled to the village during Naga feasts of merit) which are strewn about in no particular order in these circles have their origin in the distant past when giant Wa ancestors, after doing battle, rested, their blood falling in great drops, which turned to stone.

It is the custom for passers-by to lay a leaf or stone on one of the stones, at the same time wishing for money, cattle, paddy and the repayment of debts (Draye, n.d. in Harvey 1933: 14).

**Evolution: Towards the ‘Asiatic’ State**

We limit ourselves here to a number of suggestions concerning the kinds
of structural transformation that might occur in gunsa evolution if it were to continue beyond the limits set by hill swidden technology.

Whereas the evolutionary process described above is characterized by the disappearance of vertical relations and the increasing dominance of the horizontal, the evolution towards state formation implies on the contrary a growing dominance of vertical relations. A gunsa chief participates in two relations at once. As representative of the higher unity of the community, he receives tribute and corvée. An important part of this wealth is used in redistributive feasts which, owing to his genealogical relation to the spirits, ensure growth and prosperity for the whole community. A chief, however, must also redistribute in order to guarantee his superiority through ‘generosity’. This latter relation is dominated by the horizontal structure in which exchange determines relative rank, the chief being at once a ‘father’ but primarily a wife-giver to his dependants. In the formation of conical domains, the vertical structure tends to become dominant. Rank no longer depends on generosity but is defined in terms of absolute segmentary position. If the power of a Kachin chief remains ambiguous owing to the conjunction of horizontal and vertical attributes, the progressive hierarchization of the system will tend to reinforce his absolute status as direct descendant of the gods, as opposed to his relative rank as a wife- and feast-giver.

We have seen how the internal logic linking surplus production to genealogical proximity to the gods serves to convert big-man status into chief-laincy. We can suggest here that any significant increase in relative, but especially absolute, surplus would merely accentuate this kind of development to a point where vertical relations were everywhere predominant. This could result from a simple move to the fertile plains of Assam or from the successful intensification that might occur in lowland riverine irrigation. Both would cause an enormous boost in absolute surplus due to greatly increased carrying capacity, even though relative surplus might remain unchanged when compared to the best swidden conditions. Kachin groups that descended into the plains of Assam did in fact develop into small class-structured states (Butler 1847: 126; Harnay 1847: 44; Leach 1946: 481).

Where verticalization becomes absolute, all political rank is automatically determined by genealogical distance from the chiefly line. The conical structure, once firmly anchored in the heavens, inverts the whole function of exchange. Since lineage rank is now definitely established by ‘descent’, the act of wife-giving or even feast-giving can no longer legitimately operate to define social superiority. Women, instead, begin to move in the opposite direction as tribute. There is no structural novelty here, only a change in dominance. Among gunsa Kachin, hypergamy does occur in secondary marriages along with the usual hypogamy. The former is permitted when there is a virtually absolute difference in rank between the wife-giver and the wife-taker. But this

relationship, which is secondary among the Kachin, becomes generalized during the evolution of ‘Asiatic’ states because all rank differences become absolute. Similarly, redistributive feasts lose a great deal of their former signiﬁcance and no longer function to maintain chiefly rank. On the contrary, using a much smaller portion of the total surplus, they symbolize the ritual-economic power of an already established position.

Expanding potential surplus is realized in the transformation of the old aristocracy. In the Kachin Hills a chiefly lineage can indeed exploit the labour of the community, but sibling lineages are excluded from such possibilities. The process of verticalization, by raising the status of aristocratic lineages, accords them a ritual importance which must appear necessary to economic success. In this way, all ritual is hierarchized and all aristocratic lineage ancestors are incorporated in a single segmentary structure headed by the deified ancestors of the chief, now a king or prince. The nobility belongs, as it were, to the imaginary, fetishized, conditions of social and economic reproduction. This is not a question of the ideological reflection of some more material reality, but of the very content of the principal relation of production. While tribal aristocrats are commoners in most economic respects, their increasing ritual importance entitles them to a portion of the total surplus. But these aristocratic rights depend entirely on ‘genealogical’ proximity to the royal line. The emergent structure, a quasi-sacred aristocracy, the conical clan-state can be found among the earliest Chinese states (Shang, Chou), which are similar to much-enlarged Kachin-type domains. These states, often considered feudal, are surely some of our best examples of the marxist definition of the ‘Asiatic’ social formation. There is even evidence of the development of elaborate bureaucracies in these pre-irrigation states, i.e. long before supposed necessary by proponents of the hydraulic hypothesis (Wittfogel 1957). The doubling of genealogical ranking by an ordered series of administrative functions reinforces status differences with a largely imaginary division of labour, which tends to reduce competition by defining necessary functions for each segment in a larger bureaucratic entity. This is an instrumental mechanism in the process whereby the exploitation of a community by a single lineage is expanded into class exploitation. A sacred segmentary hierarchy whose function is to control the reproduction of the society through its access to the supernatural emerges as a class which is identical to the state. The two phenomena are indistinguishable in ‘Asiatic’ social formations.

The structural transformation outlined above presupposes only those expansionist mechanisms which are already present in the tribe. Slaves are captured as well as generated internally, and the two categories tend to be reintegrated as a lower class, one which is entirely cut off from the essential rituals of fertility and prosperity and which is, therefore, completely dependent on the aristocracy for its own well-being. This process is a necessary concomitant of verticalization where tribute and
corvée are the main transfers of wealth in an imaginary division of labour between real producers and a sacred uneacock.

The ‘Asiatic’ state evolves directly out of tribal structures in the process of verticalization of the relations of production. Following this, the principal economic flows are determined by absolute segmentary position. *Gumla*, *gumsa*, and ‘Asiatic’ state societies can be said, thus,

**Figure 16 Conical Clan Structure in the ‘Asiatic’ State: Pre-Han China**

![Conical Clan Structure Diagram]

...to lie on a continuum. Relative rank is first established by horizontal exchange, then converted into absolute rank through claims on the supernatural. With the continued growth of surplus and the emergence of the state, the political hierarchy which had formerly been generated by the economic flows of horizontal exchange comes, finally, to dominate that flow. The chief who becomes a sacred king naturally appropriates all of the community rituals. This is certainly the case for pre-Han China, where all shrines were housed in the royal compound. The head of state climbs a good deal further up the ancestral hierarchy—he is no longer the representative of the community to the gods, but descends from the heavens as the representative of the gods to the community (Figure 16).

**CONCLUSION**

Our object has been to show how a single model of social reproduction might generate a number of variants whose order of appearance is determined by the evolution or degradation of the conditions of production, and in which, at least for devolution, the transformation of these conditions might be the result of the functioning of the social system itself. Devolution and evolution appear as two modes of transformation of a single structure in expansion. The tribal system tends towards increasing verticalization in a way which demands the acceleration of surplus production. Where technological conditions permit such a development, the system evolves toward an ‘Asiatic’ state formation. In usual conditions of hill swiddening, however, the limits of productivity, especially of land, create an absolute barrier to the internal tendencies of the relations of production. Where ecological degradation occurs, a number of transformations follow: the segmentary hierarchy collapses and landed property appears—the latter can serve as the basis of a new ‘semi-feudal’ hierarchization if there is a new growth of productivity. Large exogamous acaephalous clans develop where big-men compete to little avail, being eventually replaced by village councils of clan elders. Asymmetrical exchange can no longer be maintained. Reciprocity increases between exchange units, and restricted exchange, warfare, and headhunting become the dominant transactional modes.

We have tried to demonstrate how all of these variations are parts of a single system of transformations in which particular variants are determined in the last instance by the transformation of the conditions of production which limit the possibilities of variation of the relations of production and of the entire social structure. The notion of determination implied by the present approach will undoubtedly be at odds with a number of other materialist models. Determination in the last instance is never a necessary and sufficient determination by which the existence of a particular social form can be explained. In order to arrive at truly deterministic statements we must consider the intersection of two forms of determination, one dependent on the dominant relations of production, which generates structural variation, and the other, the constraints of the productive forces, which limits that variation. But even this is not enough, for structural transformations occur only within the larger process of social reproduction. We must, of course, consider the tendencies that emerge from the continual confrontation of dominant productive relations with their constraints of reproduction, but we must also include in our analysis the internal logic of the social formation as a whole, for it is this logic which determines the way economic functions may become dominated by new structures, i.e. where the entire material structure of reproduction is altered. This is what occurs in the verticalization process leading to state formation as well as in the horizontalization which leads to the possibility of pre-feudal structures and,
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at the same level of productivity, to acephalous clan formations. These changes in mode of production cannot, I think, be understood in terms of technological constraints alone, nor in terms of the organization of work, which, as we have shown, can be seen only as the result of the imposition of the relations of production on a particular set of organizational possibilities afforded by the productive forces.

A change in dominance can be explained only by taking the whole social formation into account, for if we restrict ourselves to the infrastructural level alone, we exclude the possibility that a formerly superstructural element will become part of the relations of production, a phenomenon which characterizes the great majority of historical transformations.

We are, in effect, discussing two kinds of variation. The first occurs within a level of a social formation and is equivalent to the Lévi-Straussian notion of system of transformations where all variants can be generated by a single underlying structure. Here we refer to the internal properties of cultural systems or institutions and not to their functions in material reproduction. The second kind of variation is more difficult, since it logically includes, as a higher-order phenomenon, the intrasystemic variation of the cultural structures. This intersystemic variation occurs where infra- and superstructural functions are redistributed among new institutional or cultural forms. But the two kinds of variation are inextricably linked in a larger structure. Thus, the cultural transformation whereby a formerly affinal relation between the chiefly lineage and the highest deity becomes patrilineal, where the genealogical distance to that deity is greatly reduced, occurs simultaneously with the verticalization by which the formerly superstructural aspects of the relationship between the community, its ancestors, and the higher deity become essential properties of the dominant relations of production. Change of form and change in place are thus generated as aspects of the same process. While it would be disastrous to confuse the two kinds of variation, it must be stressed that both occur simultaneously in the process of reproduction, so that in order to delineate the different modes of transformation we must ultimately discover the deeper structures that link internal structural variation to material intersystemic variation. The deeper structure which we are brought to face when we consider the process of transformation is one whose properties can be defined only with respect to time. It would seem to imply that any particular social formation is no more than a cross-section of a larger diachronic system, and that synchronic models are deducible from the properties of diachronic models, appearing as the various stages in a multilinear system of trajectories.

If we are to transcend the false determinism that claims to be able to explain a society in terms of one of its parts, systematically doing away with the problem of history, we must aim at a complete theory of structural transformation in which determination is correctly located at

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the juncture of intra- and intersystemic variation in the process of social reproduction.

Notes

1 Reported population densities for the three 'ecological' zones, while not highly accurate, are nevertheless quite useful for comparison:

    data from Gazetteers of
    Upper Burma, Census Tables 1921,
    and Harvey (1933)

    Zones: A   5-6/mi²
          C   12-30/mi²
          B   30-45/mi²

2 We oversimplify here to some extent. In fact, the main structural difference between gunna and gumma is the hereditary claim to rank in the former case. The matter is discussed more fully in Friedman (1972). See also La Raw Maran (1967).

3a For an extensive critique of this position see Ekholm (1974).

3b Maya rank higher than nama, as can be seen in the process outlined in Figure 2.

4 Cattle, the most important prestige item in Kachin economy, have little or no cost of production since they live by browsing in the jungle and are so tame that they can always be got when needed. The cost must certainly increase, however, when density goes up and the forest is reduced to lighter vegetation and grassland.

5 Where succession is by ultimogeniture, as among most Kachin, the yoS ranks highest within any generation, while between generations superiority is in accordance with natural seniority. In either case, the internal logic is identical, since what counts is social age, i.e. political superiority, and not real birth-order. We note, however, that among the Tsase Kachin of Assam, where class structure was the most evolved, primogeniture replaced ultimogeniture.

6 This graph and the following analysis are to a large extent based on the very important article by I. Sachs (1965) who first attempted to deal theoretically with the problem of surplus in the context of social reproduction, thus taking the discussion much further than earlier anthropologists had done.

7 The inequities here do not capture the whole truth. It is not enough that the chief controls an increasing proportion of the total surplus. The real contradiction occurs when he begins to control an accelerating portion of a decelerating surplus (L₂ on the graph) and this is intensified to critical limits after L₃, where he begins to accumulate an increasing portion of an absolutely decreasing surplus:

\[
\begin{align*}
    \frac{dS_c}{dS_a} > 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \frac{dD}{dS^a} > 0 \\
    \frac{dS}{dY^a} < 0
\end{align*}
\]

8 With a new development of productivity it seems quite possible that a feudal class structure will evolve. This kind of phenomenon is represented by the Lolo of Yunnan, where an endogamous land-owning aristocracy, the Black Lolo, exploit White Lolo commoners and slaves, both of whom cultivate their fields.
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9. "The authority of a Sema chief is quickly sapped when he can no longer shed off his brothers and sons to found new villages with retainers of their own" (Hutton 1965: 23).

10. It is interesting to note that the title 'village founder' applies to secular chiefs among the Sema and continues to be a rank attributed to those who have given a certain number of merit feasts among the Western Angami.

11. It appears, however, that 'els', non-reigning, lineages may sometimes be included in the chiefly upper class, specifically when they perform crucial judicial and ritual functions (La Raw Maran, personal communication). This is exactly the kind of phenomenon which we discuss here as instrumental in 'Asiatic' class formation and which gives that class the appearance of a bureaucracy necessary to the well-being of society.

12. Most bureaucratic functions were directly tied to court life and to ritual activities, not to the organization of production. Even economic officials, however, were more concerned with the collection of taxes than with the management of the technology, which was largely controlled at the village level.

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Maurice Bloch

Property and the End of Affinity

‘dès qu’on s’aperçut qu’il était utile à un seul d’avoir des provisions pour deux, l’égalité disparut, la propriété s’introduisit, le travail devint nécessaire, et les vastes forêts se chargèrent en des Campagnes riantes qu’il fallut arroser de la sueur des hommes, et dans lesquelles on vit bienôt l’esclavage et la misère germer et croître avec les moissons.’

Discours sur l’Origine et les Fondements de l’Inégalité parmi les Hommes

J.-J. ROUSSEAU

Marx’s concept of mode of production has been much discussed recently in anthropology. Much of this discussion has been difficult since the concept was first elaborated with capitalism very much in mind. Marx of course discussed other modes of production than capitalism but in less detail and perhaps with less insight. Two problems seem to me to stand out in the discussions which have followed from the attempt to apply marxist concepts to pre-industrial societies. The first is what is superstructure and what is infrastructure in these societies? In particular is kinship to be treated as part of the relations of production and of reproduction, in other words as part of the infrastructure or as part of the superstructure? The second question follows from the first: if with Marx we accept that the infrastructure must be, in the last instance, the driving force of the superstructure, how does this driving force affect the societies we are considering? The relationship is for Marx and for all honest social scientists complex but, clearly, the degree of complexity is dependent on the ‘distance’ of the social phenomenon from the material base. In this way the relationship between kinship and the material basis of society cannot be postulated until the former question concerning the status of kinship is answered. The way out of such circular problems lies in a materialist examination of history and this is what will be presented here. In doing this I attempt to show that such an approach is not a device to overcome problems arising from its own definition but a way of accounting for history, which is the task of anthropology and the other social sciences.

Before considering the relationship of kinship and the mode of pro-