

# THE RAMAGE SYSTEM IN CHINA AND POLYNESIA

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The Ramage System, as defined by Firth (1936), has a widespread distribution in a number of Polynesian islands, such as Hawaii, the Societies, Tonga, New Zealand, Marquesas, Tikopia, Easter Island, Mangareva, and Mangaia, and is one of the characteristic features of the Polynesian Culture. Sahlins (1954: Chapter X) was the first one who has attempted to interpret the ramage system and he considers it the result of ecological adaptation.

Here an attempt will be made to point out the analogous occurrences of the ramage system in China and some of the factors which seem to be responsible.

## THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE RAMAGE SYSTEM

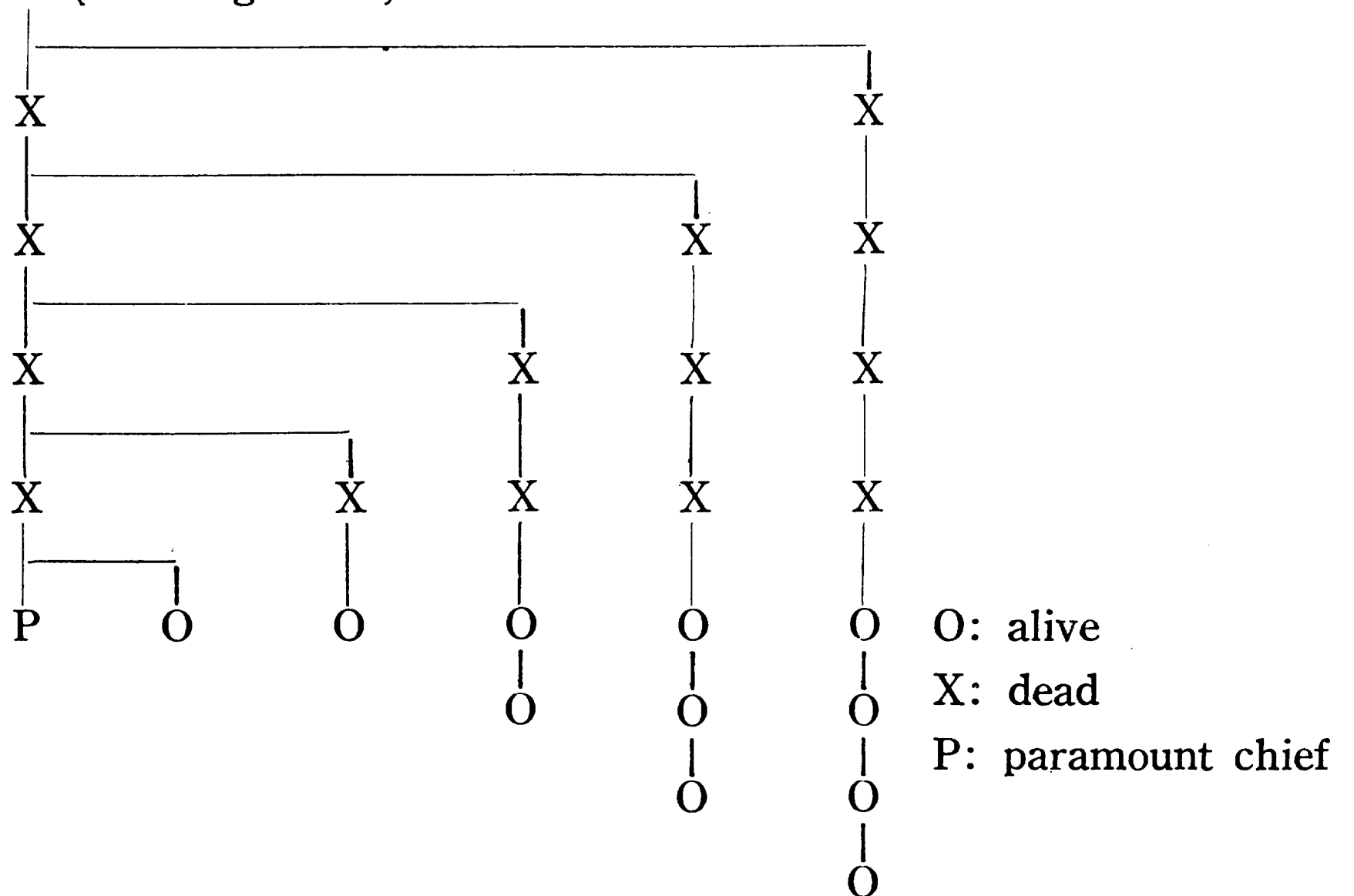
The ramage system was first defined by Firth (1936: 370-371) as follows:

As a rule by historical tradition, and presumably in actual social process, they have arisen through the branching and rebranching of the family structure, acquiring greater autonomy and independence the further they move away from the parent stem. The tree metaphor is actually used by some native peoples in describing their social organization. Here, very often, great importance is attached to seniority as a principle of social differentiation. One term which might be employed to characterize such kinship groups is "ramage,"..... the branching process by which these groups attain individuality and yet keep their connection with the parent stem. It is also consistent in metaphor with the expression "genealogical tree." The process can be correctly described as one of ramification.

As a kinship group, the ramage possesses the following characteristic features: (1) The ramage system can be metaphored as a genealogical tree branching off on the principle of fission and dispersion. (2) The rule of succession is primogeniture: the eldest son succeeds to the position of his father, while the younger ones often move away with the offspring. Siblings are not equiva-

lent; the life crises rites of birth, puberty, marriage, and death of the eldest son are entirely different from his brothers. (3) Rank is differentiated through the operation of seniority. The chief of a ramage society is the direct descendant on the senior line of the reputed founder of the society. Other members of the group are ranked in proportion to the closeness of their relationship to the main line of descent. Accordingly, people related to branch-offs from the common ancestor of the society from a remote period are lower in rank than those descendent from a more direct relative of the main line. (Diagram 1, See Sahlins, 1954: 246.)

Diagram 1: X (The High God)\*



Thus, the rank of any individual is governed by his relative distance from the main line of descent in the group, the major chief being the direct descendant of the regarded founder of the society. (4) The basic group is the household which is usually a stem family rather than a joint family. Households of a ramage often inhabit a certain district, so ramage are more or less localized groups. (5) The ramage system was reflected in the system of ancestral temples. Each family has a temple and the temple of the senior family is considered the parent temple from which the others branched off.

Other common features include a strong emphasis on the patrilineal transmission of group interests coupled with readiness to admit interest through the mother; the corresponding fact that females could often carry and pass



on titles and land if the family has no male heirs; the prevalence of adoption into ramage; and the absence of the ramage's being an exogamous unit. (See Firth, 1936: 585, 597).

### THE TSUNG-FA SYSTEM IN ANCIENT CHINA

The Tsung-fa or Descent-line system according to Tao (1934: 17-31), has the following characteristics: patrilineal descent, patrilineal succession, patriarchate, sib-exogamy, and primogeniture. Its complete form began with the beginning of the Chou Dynasty and ended with the downfall of the same dynasty (1111-249 B. C.). It continued to exist for quite a long time after the Chou dynasty, but in decomposed and degenerated forms.

In the Shang dynasty, which is preceding the Chou, there was no trace of the Tsung-fa system at all. The kinship system of the Shang people as yet has not investigated in detail because of the scarcity of data. Nevertheless, we know pretty well the system of succession of Shang kings:

The succession rule of the Shang royal house is as follows: the main form of succession is to pass on to the younger brother, while the deviant form of succession is to pass on to the son when there is no younger brother eligible. Out of the thirty Shang kings, fourteen were younger brothers succeeding to their elder brothers (Wai-ping, Chung-jen, Ta-keng, Yung-chi, Ta-wu, Wai-jen, Ho-tan-chia, Wo-chia, Nan-keng, P'an-keng, Hsiao-hsin, Hsiao-yi, Tsu-chia, Keng-ting). Of the cases where the royal throne was succeeded by the son, it was mostly the son of younger brother rather than that of elder brother who succeeded (Hsiao-chia, Chung-ting, Chu-hsin, Wu-ting, Tsu-keng, Lin-hsin, Wu-yi). (Wang, 1940: 2-3).

The Tsung-fa system, though absent among the Shangs, was brought into China by the new conqueror, the royal house of the Chou dynasty. The essential features of this system are detailed as follows:

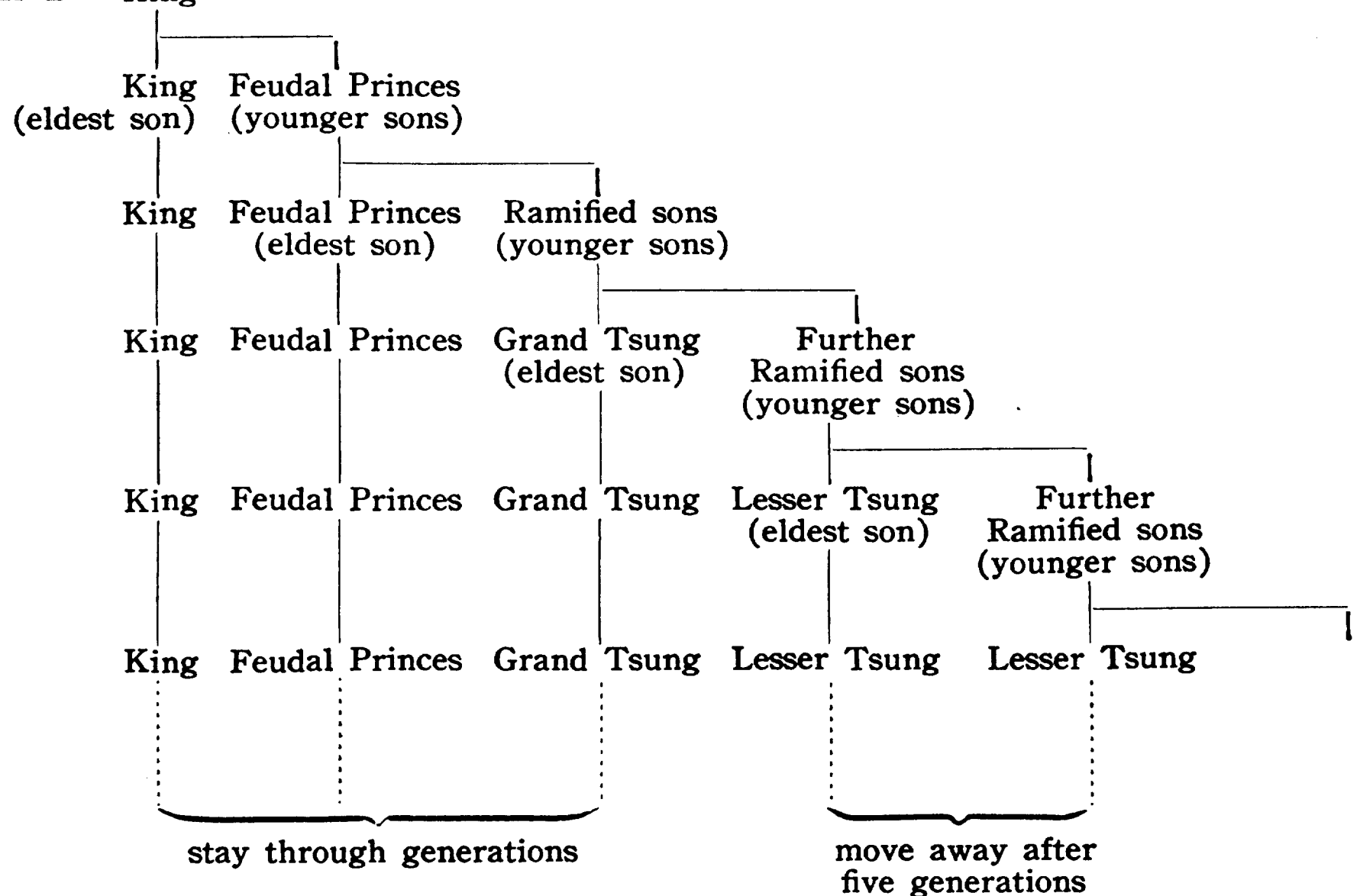
1) Ramification of descent lines. The basic principle of the Tsung-fa system is stated in *Ta-chuan, Li Chi*:

The ramified sons are founders (of descents groups). The descent lines following the ramified sons constitute the Tsung, while the descent lines following the further-ramified sons constitute the lesser Tsung. There are Tsung which would stay through generations and Tsung which would

move away after five generations. Those which would stay through generations are the descent of the ramified sons. The Tsung which follow the ramified sons are those which would stay through generations. The Tsung which follow the great-great-grand fathers are those which would move away after five generations.

This paragraph outlines the descent system of the feudal princes' families. Being viewed from a wider perspective, it represents a general pattern of descent of the royal house in general. This pattern can best be diagrammed in the following way (Diagram 2, See Tao, 1934: 24):

Diagram 2: King



There are various interpretations of this ramification system as stated in *Li Chi*. Diagram 2 represents a general outline.

2) Each Tsung is assigned a patch of land which is patrilineally inherited and in which the whole Tsung family and its governed sibs are dwelling. The chief of the Tsung is the absolute governor of the land, executing administrative, judicial, and educational functions and being the chief priest in his domain.

3) The rule of succession to both the title and the land is based on primogeniture. However, it is complicated by the following circumstances:

(a) Of all the sons born to the main wife, the eldest son succeeds.

*Kung-yang-chuan:*

Among the sons of the proper wife, the succession develops through the eldest, but not the worthiest and ablest.



(b) When some of the sons are born of the main wife, while others are by secondary wives, the eldest son of the main wife succeeds. *Kung-yang-chuan*:

Among the ruler's sons by the ladies of his harem, the succession develops through the noblest, but not the eldest.

(c) When all of the sons are born of secondary wives: the one who will succeed is determined by divination. *T'an-kung, Li Chi*:

When Shih T'aichung died, he left no sons by his proper wife and six sons by his second wife. The tortoise-shell being consulted as to help to choose the father's successor, it is said that by their bathing and wearing of their girdle-pendants. Shih Ch'i-tze, however, said "Whoever, being engaged with the mourning rites for a parent, bathes his head or his body, and puts on his girdle-pendants?" He declines to do either, and this is considered to be the indication. The people of Wei considered that the tortoise-shell had shown a (true) knowledge.

or the eldest one succeeds. *Tso-chuan*, Duke Seang, Thirty-first year:

Muh-shuh, "When the eldest son (by the wife) dies, his own younger brother should have the succession. If he has no brother of his own, then the eldest his father's other sons (by second wife)."

Confucius, however, denied the statement which the deceased's younger brother should have the succession. *T'an-kung, Li Chi*:

Chung-tze had passed over his grandson, and appointed one of his (younger) sons as his successor (the head of the family). . . . . Tze-yü asked Confucius (about the matter), and Confucius says, "Nay, appoint the grandson."

Important as showing the rule of succession to position and property, which means that Confucius does not hesitate to speak out the truth.

4) The system of adoption prevailed, but only in the grand Tsung. The lesser Tsung which has no successor should become extinct.

5) Normally, members of the same surname-group are prohibited from marrying one another. This exogamous rule holds good only of the Tsung-lines but not of all the members under their rule because they are not of the same surname.

It is clearly indicated by this short outline that the Tsung-fa system of the Chou dynasty resembles the ramage system of the modern Polynesians to such an extent that they can evidently be included in the same category and

called by the same term. All the essential features of a Polynesian ramage—the principle of fission and dispersion, the succession by primogeniture, the differentiation of rank through the operation of seniority, the localization of the ramage groups,—are present in Chou Tsung-fa system in ancient China. Both of these systems involve patrilineal inheritance and the prevalence of adoption, but involve no exogamy. Both of them are reflected in the system of ancestral temples. The sacrificial order of the Chou, the Chao-Mu system, which corresponds to the Tsung principle, is a complicated subject which is not within the scope of the present paper. All we need to say here is that the Tsung-fa system in the Chou dynasty in ancient China is essentially similar to the ramage system among the modern Polynesians.

#### **THE LINEAGE SYSTEM AMONG THE PAIWAN AND RUKAI, FORMOSA**

The unsinicized or less-sinicized aboriginal tribes in the present-day island of Formosa are classified according to their cultural configurations into nine groups: Atayal, Saisiat, Bunun, Tsou, Rukai, Paiwan, Puyuma, Ami, and Yami. (Mabuchi, 1953: 6-8) One of the characteristic features which have distinguished two of these nine tribes, Paiwan and Rukai, from all the others is their distinctive lineage system and associated institutions.

The following descriptions of the lineage system of the Paiwan tribe are abstracted from Wei's report of his investigation in the Chala'abus village, Ping-tung Hsien, in 1955 (Wei, 1955: 21-28).

1) The Chala'abus village is situated on the southeastern slope of Mt. Nan-ta-wu and stands on the northern bank of the Lai-i River. Its population was 158 households and 948 persons at the time of investigation. With the exception of 12 households who had moved to Chingasan, which lies between the village site and the plain below it and formed a separate hamlet by themselves, all the other 146 households were concentrated on the two adjacent fan-shaped slopes which are referred as the village site. The village of Chala'abus hence consisted of two parts: the south and the north parts. Each of them occupied a fan-shaped slope. The south part was called Chinimoang or "the living land of the Chimo," and the north part Pinaiwanang or "the living land of the Paiwan." Chinimoang has 55 houses and Pinaiwanang 101. The cultivated fields around the village were possessed by the aristocratic households of both the Chimo and the Paiwan. By annexation and transition



the state of possession of these fields had become rather complicated. The distribution of aristocratic households had also become rather complicated. The whole village had 12 aristocratic households, 9 of them belonged to the Chimo. Among them was the *ruvaniau* which was of the highest rank.

2) The political system of Chala'abus village is aristocratic and resembles that of the feudalism of the Chou dynasty. It is established on two foundations: (a) the first is the tax and tributary system based on the ownership of land; (b) the second is the class system based on lineage rules.

The class system of Chala'abus differs from that of the North Paiwan. The North Paiwan system has three grades: the *mamatsangiran*, the *maluvtsivtsik*, and the *pualu*. The Chala'abus system lacks the third grade, *pualu*. The aristocratic class is called *mamatsangiran* and is divided into two subclasses: (a) the upper grade is called *avusamang*, (b) the lower grade is again subdivided into the *maluvtsivtsik* or consanguineous and the *naitsu a n'umax* or affinal. The big chief *ruvaniau* belongs to the Chimo group. Three *maluvtsivtsik* of the *ruvaniau* are the south *tsalas*, the north *tsalas*, and the *tsalungi*. The big chief *ruvaniau* possesses one third of the cultivated land of the village. The north and south *tsalas* possess another one third. And the remainder is in the hands of other chiefs of both Chimo and the Paiwan. These chiefs rent their lands to commoners of the village, so commoners are serfs of the nobles landlords. Each chief has a vassal household to take care of the rental business. This office is hereditary, but he is a commoner and owns no land by himself.

3) This aristocratic system is established on the basis of the lineage system. One who is said to have first established his household in the village is regarded as the founder of the grand lineage. The elder offspring, *regardless of sex*, is the heir to succeed the household. Other offspring will move away from the old household and establish new ones when they are married and are regarded as founders of lesser lineages. The succession of the lesser lineage is similar to that of the grand lineage. But offspring other than the heir of the lesser lineage will be degraded as commoners when they depart from the household.

4) The kinship organization is a lineage group with a family as its nucleus. Each family has its own *umax* or house which has a particular name. One who is born in the house is named after the name of the house. Members living in the house include a married couple, the heir or heiress and sometimes

his or her spouse and other unmarried offspring of this married couple. The elder son or daughter succeeds his or her parents as the head of the lineage group and remains to live in the house. Other offspring are either married to the heir or heiress of another household or establish a new house if not married to a heir or heiress. There is, thus, a lineal relation between these households. One who has a further relationship with the household from which it is derived is lower in rank. Their lineage rules may be summarised as follows:

- (a) A household is the nucleus of this lineage system.
- (b) The lineage which first established their house in the village is regarded as the grand lineage or *mamatsangiran*.
- (c) The house and the name of the house are succeeded by primogeniture regardless of sex. The heir or *usam* must remain in the house and succeed to the name.
- (d) Each offspring other than the heir who is married to the heir of another household or establishes a new household and takes a new house name, if married to one who is not the heir, is called the lesser lineage or *maluvtsivtsik*.
- (f) Offspring of a vassal household other than the heir are degraded as commoners.
- (g) If the household has no heir, it is succeeded by the second son or daughter, even if he or she is married out. This second son or daughter who had established lesser lineage of his own, will give that up and return to his prime house to succeed to the lineage. If a lesser lineage had no heir, it may be succeeded to by members from the grand lineage. The vassal will take care of the grand lineage when the heir to succeed the lineage is not yet decided.

5) The Paiwan practise class endogamy but not in a strict sense. Marriage between first cousins is strictly prohibited but that between second cousins is forgivable.

It is both real and apparent that the Chala'abus Paiwan lineage system as stated above is again similar to the ramage of the Polynesian societies, so much so that one would be unable to distinguish when the Chala'abus is placed among the Tahitian (though the polyandry is absent) or Tongan (though the household is bigger) villages, as far as the lineage system is concerned. The lineage system of the Chala'abus Paiwan is described as an example; similar



occurrences are found in other villages of the Paiwan and in the Rukai settlements in basically similar forms. (Chen, 1953: 18-19, 1955: 104-114; a detailed bibliography of articles and books on the social organization of Paiwan and Rukai is given in footnotes 11 to 27 in Chen, 1955.)

### CLUES TO INTERPRETATION

It is briefly shown in the previous sections that ramage-like system existed in ancient China and are found in the Paiwan and Rukai tribes in Formosa today. It is curious to note that the ramage system with all its manifestations is not only found in ancient China and Formosa today but was prevailing in many of the societies in the remote Pacific islands: Polynesia. One who has noted this point would naturally wonder whether the Chinese, Formosan, and Polynesian ramage systems are related in derivation.

There are varying forms of social organization in the ethnological present-day Polynesia. According to Sahlins (195: 414):

The systems of social organization and stratification in Polynesia can be divided into three types: ramage organization and descent line organization on high islands, and the looser category, atoll organization.

These various forms to him represent different adaptations related to variations in technological-environmental conditions.

It was posited that these two systems, ramified and descent line, are alternative solutions to the problem of distributing surplus production, solutions related to the particular type of basic adaptation of the culture. It was reasoned that other things held constant, a ramified system would tend to develop where there was familial specialization of production of surplus strategic resources. The kinship connection between households in the ramified system may be seen as a framework by which an equitable distribution of the different productions might be obtained. It was deduced, therefore, that ramified systems would tend to develop where the spatial distribution of rich resource zones in the environment was one too scattered to be exploited by a single household, or where the range of crops was so large as to preclude effective exploitation of them by a single household or both. On the contrary, descent line systems should be found where the spatial distribution of rich resource zones is clustered in a small area; or where the range of crops is small, or both. Under the latter conditions, each family would produce the

same strategic goods as every other and the kinship connection between households which have split off from each other would tend to dissolve. Economic redistributions as well as social, political and religious functions would therefore be carried out within a localized cluster of kin groups. (Sahlins, 1954: 415-416)

The forms of organization on the coral atolls cannot be understood in the same terms as on high islands. Familial specialization of production is prohibited by small surpluses, and the consequent limitations on exchanges of strategic goods. Every type of resource is of vital importance to the continued existence of the society. It was postulated that effective exploitation of atolls can best be made if there is separate organization of people for exploiting each resource available. Without the possibility of producing large surpluses and hence of specialization, every person would have to be a member of each type of grouping. The result would be a particularly complex system of social groupings with each person, utilizing different types of alignment principles, belonging to each type of organization. (Sahlins 1954: 417)

However, he has made a speculation which arises out of the presence of ramified elements in all the descent line systems:

that the descent line system is an offshoot or divergence from the ramified organization under particular selective conditions. The proto-Polynesian culture may have been ramage organized with an emphasis on seniority and an organization of ranked, interconnected segments. Various customs found in descent line systems may be vestiges of an emphasis on the first-born and hence of a ramified structure. (Sahlins, 1954: 362-363)

This last point is especially noteworthy because it bears some significance to my immediate problem. In spite of Murdock's (1949) warning that analogous social structural traits found in diverse societies can hardly be regarded as having resulted from diffusion, one would naturally suspect that, if the proto-Polynesian society had ramage systems and if they came from the Asiatic continent, the Ancient Chinese and the Formosan ramage-like systems might have something related to the proto-form of the ramage-system of the present-day Polynesians. The widespread distribution of the distinctive Polynesian stepped adzes and patu-like implements over South and Central China and Formosa Island provides some additional supports to this suspicion. (Kano,



1952; Utsurikawa, 1934).

On the other hand, it is equally possible that the ramage system among the ancient Chinese, the present-day Paiwan, Rukai, and some Polynesian societies is the convergence-product as the result of similar adaptation to similar physical environments on the basis of similar technological properties. Due to the limits of time and space in this paper, a final interpretation is in no way attempted, while a future investigation on the basis of the clues pointed out here, among others, is anticipated.

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# 中國與玻利尼西亞的“枝族”制

(摘要)

李 卉

“枝族”(Ramage)一名為 Raymond Firth (1936) 所創，用以指稱玻利尼西亞若干島嶼社會(如夏威夷、大溪地、通加、紐西蘭、馬奎薩斯、提訶皮亞等等)之單系親族羣(lineage)，P. Kirchhoff 稱之為“錐形氏族”(conical clan)者。其特徵如次：(1)單系之親族羣兼地方羣；(2)立長制；(3)不以「外婚」(exogamy)為特徵；(4)重視族譜，以親族羣之建立者之後代中居長者一脈為主枝，居次以下者為分枝，族員之系譜如一分枝之樹，(5)基本之親族團體為家庭，其組成以核心家庭為多，同枝族之家庭聚居一區；(6)與階級制度相聯繫；系譜愈近主枝者位愈高，反之愈低；(7)亦與祭祀制度相結合；家有家廟，主枝有主枝廟，分枝有分枝廟，各廟之地位高低亦隨族之高低而排列。此種親族制度，具完備之形式者，在全世界以玻利尼西亞為主，其他地域所知甚罕。

然與“枝族”制頗為相似之形式却見於古代之中國及現代之臺灣土著。我國古代社會制度，所知較詳者以殷商為上限，殷之王室繼承似為傳弟及子。至周，行宗法制度，立嫡立長，由是宗族有大宗小宗之別，其分宗原理與玻利尼西亞之枝族制頗為相似。進而親族之宗法制復與階級制度、政治統制、及祭祀順序(昭穆制)相連鎖而結合成一有機之社會結構。現代臺灣之排灣族亦有類似枝族之單系親族羣，及相伴之階級制度、政治組織、與社會制裁制度存在。

本文之目的，主要為指出，中國古代宗法社會，現代臺灣排灣族之系嗣制度，在社會人類學之術語上，頗可以用以指稱玻利尼西亞之單系親族羣之枝族一詞指稱之。其間之類似性是否有歷史之意義，則尚待更詳盡之研究。傳統民族學家向以為玻利尼西亞人源自中國東南沿海，臺灣之排灣族固正位於此區，而周之宗室有封吳之說亦與東南民族不無牽連。另一方面 Marshall D. Sahlins 等主張玻利尼西亞之枝族制度為環境適應之結果，則各地類似之社會制度或亦可以此種眼光解釋之。