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## **MARRIAGE AND MEDIATION: RELATIONS BETWEEN LINEAGES**

Communities often stood in traditional hostility against other communities, ready to take up arms and kill, but prepared after an affray to accept mediation.

It was inevitable that many of the lineages engaged in fighting one another were related by marriage or agnatic descent.

Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*

MAURICE Freedman's insights into lineage organization were, it goes without saying, remarkable. Those of us who leaned heavily on his work and conducted field surveys always found that he had provided the key to understanding lineage even when in matters of detail our findings might differ from the generalised picture he painted.

It is as regards a matter of detail that I want to look afresh here at the question of inter-lineage relations, which Freedman explored at some length in each of his two lineage books. Starting from my own field data, I want to take a leaf from my mentor's book and speculate on this question in the hope of producing an illuminating model.

## I

The village of Sheung Shui in the north-west of the New Territories of Hong Kong was founded around the end of the sixteenth century by the Liao lineage. By the mid-twentieth century the lineage—men, women and children—numbered well over 3,000 and had occupied a position of great prestige and power for many years. They were in fact one of the Five Great Clans which dominated the area (Baker 1966).

Following the lease of the New Territories to Britain in 1898, political circumstances began to change, obscuring traditional patterns, and change was accelerated during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong from 1941 to 1945, and afterwards. Fortunately, in the first few years after the lease, a complete land survey was made by the British colonial government, and ownership of every plot was recorded. There is reason to believe that in some cases this survey brought about changes in land ownership through misunderstandings or deliberate deceits, but for the most part it must reflect accurately the ownership pattern, and it provides a most useful guide to the economic and political conditions of the time. The 1906 land records for the Sheung Shui area were gone through carefully and ownership plotted on the Hong Kong Government's land maps of the period. The results show a very clear-cut pattern.

The village of Sheung Shui was built on a large area of inferior agricultural land which is raised a few feet above the surrounding fertile paddy land. Of the 614 houses registered in 1906, all but 20 were owned by the Liao. I was assured that no one other than a Liao could own property within the village precinct, and I therefore came to the conclusion that the 20 houses were lived in by *xi-min* 細民, hereditary servant families, who must have been wrongly recorded as the owners (Baker 1968: 154). In fact, the Liao kept the village precinct entirely in their own hands, allowing no one of another surname to own land or property there, only very few outsiders being allowed even to rent. With total ownership in Liao hands, lineage control over its base was absolute, and the lineage leadership could legislate and administer with complete authority. This gave the community a unity and strength *vis-à-vis* the outside world which, it seems safe to say, was not enjoyed by villages organized on other principles. The prohibition on outsider ownership in the village still applied in 1965 when I left Sheung Shui.

Surrounding the village were the rich fields from which it drew most of its wealth. Some 2,700 plots totalling 635 acres immediately around the village were owned by the Liao, and amongst them were about 250 plots owned by people of other surnames. This total area constituted what I shall call 'Liao Territory', within which again the lineage had virtually complete control. With this control and almost exclusive ownership, the lineage was able to invest money and effort in irrigation projects which

benefited all the Liao without significantly benefiting outsiders, without exposing the system to damage or interference from rival lineages, and without insoluble irrigation disputes between land users. The lineage elders were fully capable of settling intra-lineage disputes and enforcing the settlements.

As the above figures show, the Territory was not quite exclusive, only 91.5 per cent being Liao owned, but the occurrence of outsider-owned plots was not random. The vast majority of the 250 plots were located on the edges of the Territory at points where neither natural geographical features nor the proximity of other powerful lineages' lands made a clear boundary. Where other lineage territories did adjoin, the dividing line between Liao land and other land was sharp, and on the Liao side outsider-owned plots were not to be found. In simplified form, then, it seems to make sense to represent Sheung Shui and its Territory by a plain circle, as in Figure 1:

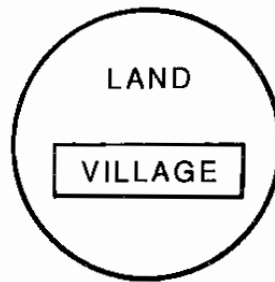
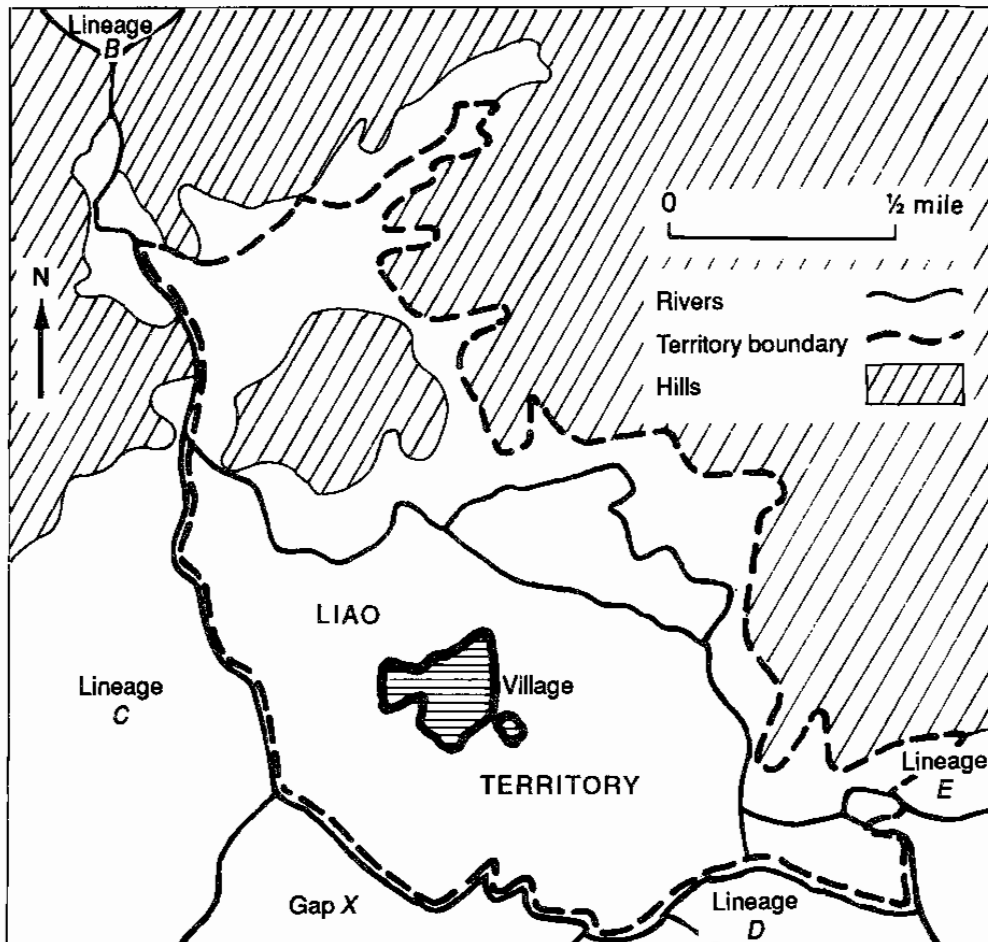


FIG. 1

In fact, the Liao Territory did not look very much like a circle. To the north, barren hills formed a barrier, and in other directions rivers, areas of less fertile land and the territories of other lineages all imposed upon the pattern. As I have suggested elsewhere (Baker 1968: 165), the shape and size of the Liao Territory were functions of the relative power of Sheung Shui and its neighbours modified by the constraints of physical geography.

Map 1 shows the relationship of Sheung Shui and its Territory with the surrounding physical and political landscape. The sharpest, clearest boundary was that with Lineage C territory, not one plot of land on the Liao side of that border (marked by a broad stream) being in alien hands, and only eight or nine plots on the other side of the stream being in Liao ownership. Lineage C, the Hou lineage of Ho Sheung Heung, were arch-rivals of the Liao. The area marked 'X' was an area of mixed ownership, the clear territory of no one lineage, though the Liao and several others were well represented there.



Map 1. Liao Territory

At this point, I would like to break away from the concrete to suggest that the exclusive territory of Sheung Shui was typical of the territories of the lineages of the whole area, and that we can attempt an understanding of inter-lineage relationships by looking at the pattern of Sheung Shui's relationships. Thus, Figure 2 substitutes the model circles of Figure 1 for the odd shapes of Map 1. Figure 3 goes one step further from reality by postulating the situation which might have existed had there been no hills to the north of Sheung Shui.

Thus, I propose a model of a landscape under a developed system of lineage organization where the ground is mostly covered by lineage territories which have expanded outward until their boundaries touch. In the interstices (that is, the gaps marked 'X') would be located small settlements of mixed surnames or weak lineages, and the land in these areas would not be exclusive to any one group, though the nearby powerful lineages would all be trying to acquire it. The settlements might well be heavily dependent upon, and subjugated to one or another of, their powerful neighbours, possibly paying protection money to them, and perhaps being required to perform services for them.

The model is static, but the actuality would not be: comparative lineage strengths would fluctuate as reproductive and economic success varied, and the territorial boundaries might well retreat or advance over a given period of time. Nor would the model circles necessarily represent single powerful lineages. In some cases, they might be alliances of weaker lineages or non-lineage settlements, which by long-lasting co-operation were able to maintain their independence of powerful neighbours. The Pat Heung alliance of contiguous small villages some way to the south of Sheung Shui seems to have constituted a unit of this type, keeping a large measure of autonomy despite the enormous power of their neighbours, the Deng lineage of Kam Tin (Baker 1968: 189, 197).

When a lineage had expanded to the point where its territory touched those of surrounding lineages it had to look elsewhere for land, and the obvious places to look were in the gaps (marked 'X') where the inhabitants might be less able to resist encroachment. Indeed, it seems to have been the case in the New Territories that the Liao would buy land in these gaps and then rent it back to the sellers, thus gaining for themselves at once income and an ascendancy over their tenants.

Liao land ownership was of two different types. One was individual family ownership, the right to ownership being inherited by the sons of the family. The other was ownership in the form of ancestral trusts. Thus, the Liao lineage had formed a trust for the benefit of all descendants of the founding ancestor of the lineage, and the land administered by the trust was rented out, the proceeds being used for such communal purposes as the trustees decided suitable (for example, the building of ancestral halls, the digging of wells, or the construction of irrigation systems). Many later

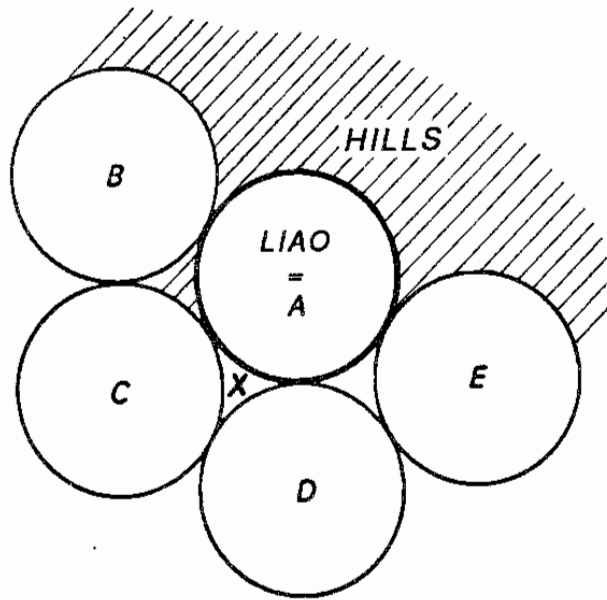


FIG. 2

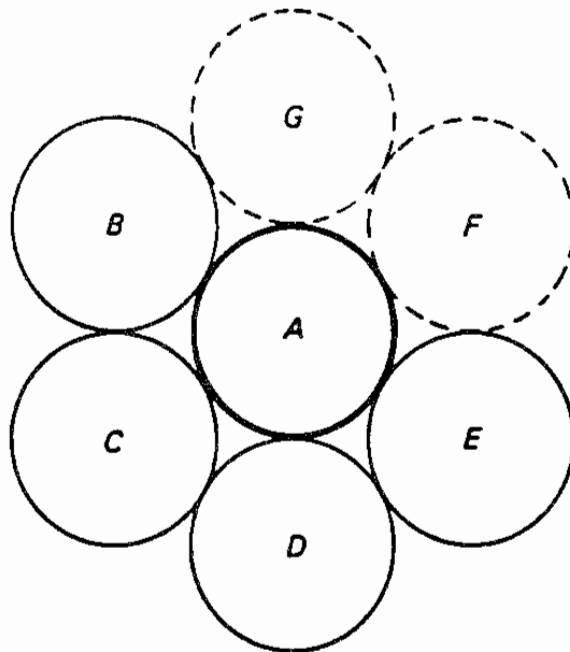


FIG. 3

Liao ancestors became foci of trusts, the income being used to provide feasts, school tuition fees or cash incomes for the beneficiaries. Now, in the Liao Territory, though both types of ownership were to be found, trust ownership amounted to only 42 per cent of the holdings. Yet of all Liao holdings (which I worked out at something over 970 acres altogether), 52 per cent were in the hands of ancestral trusts. In other words, a high proportion of the land held by Liao outside the Liao Territory was owned by trusts. The trusts were, in fact, an excellent vehicle for economic and political exploitation of the 'X' areas in that they required the existence of tenants to produce an income, and being corporately owned, they had call on enough manpower to ensure that the land was farmed and the rent paid in a satisfactory manner. Another factor which contributed to the weakening of the position of inhabitants of 'X' was that the Liao tended to purchase only the better-quality land there, being less interested in the low-yield plots. Thus, in the Sheung Shui Territory, where virtually all land was monopolised by Liao ownership, 35 per cent of the plots were classified as third-class land, while in one 'X' area only 13 per cent of the Liao holdings consisted of third-class land (Baker 1968: 170).

## II

The Chinese lineage, insistent on unity, internal co-operation and self-contained political control, was by the same token hostile to the similar groups by which it was surrounded. The lineage was also expansionist in that it sought to push its territory and its control ever further afield. Given a successful rate of reproduction, it was likely to grow larger, as all its sons observed the custom of remaining in the lineage settlement and bringing in their wives and raising their families there. The expansion of land holdings was both necessary to support the growing numbers and a prestigious and wealth-generating end in itself. Neighbouring lineages, each pursuing self-interested policies and attempting to expand territory, were almost inevitably in conflict.

I suggest, therefore, that one interpretation of Figure 3 is of a lineage (Lineage A) surrounded by a ring of hostile lineages (Lineages B–G), with each of which it is more or less permanently in conflict. Parlous as this position seems at first glance, further consideration shows that the hostile lineages cannot be *united* in their hostility to A because they are themselves to some extent in the same position—C is in conflict with D, B with G, and so on. I shall look further at this more complex interpretation below, but for the moment let me confine the discussion to the simple one-to-one relationship of A with each of its neighbours.

Sheung Shui's relationships with lineages C and D were indeed consistently strife-torn, and I have elsewhere given some details of the battles and rivalries which characterised them, a colourful if sordid history of conflict ranging from stone-throwing gangs of youths to full-scale bloody warfare and from prestige-enhancing contests in conspicuous consumption to serious struggles for economic control of markets (Baker 1968: 167, 190; Baker 1966: 40-1). With lineages B and E there was also some conflict, but they were both somewhat removed from Sheung Shui by minor geographical barriers and figured less prominently in informants' accounts.

To try to bear out the 'hostile ring' interpretation from the literature is to attempt the impossible, yet there is much apparent confirmation at least in emphasis on conflict between neighbouring lineages. In an old source, for example, we read:

On the northern side of the river, which is the mainland, the villages have nothing to separate them or prevent their hostile inhabitants from assailing each other. Accordingly, in these parts the management of feuds is reduced to a system, and the hostile families are ready armed with spears or bludgeons to enter these not always bloodless broils. Where the hostile parties live within a short distance, and carry on their labours and pursuits, each under the eyes of the other, occasions cannot long be wanting to call forth their cherished hatred. If one turns away the water-course from his enemy's little field to his own, and is too strong or obstinate to make reparation or be compelled to do justice, then not infrequently the signal-gong sounds, the two parties marshal their hostile forces, and the whole of the two villages are arrayed against each other in conflict. (*Chinese Repository* 1836: 412-13)<sup>1</sup>

And when the now quite full information on the New Territories is considered, the evidence for hostility between contiguous lineages is seen to be strong. The feuds between the villages of Ha Tsuen and Ping Shan, of Tai Hang and Tai Po Tau, of San Tin and Ho Sheung Heung, of Ping Kong and Fan Ling, were all cases in point (Baker 1966: 39-40), and so were the long-standing animosities between Muk Kiu Tau and Tin Liu and between Nam Pin Wai and Shan Pui which Freedman noted (1966: 110). The matters which set fire to the dry tinder of antagonism were often trivial in the extreme: the fight in 1960 between Muk Kiu Tau and Tin Liu was set off by a collision between a cyclist and a pedestrian; bloody fighting near Swatow in the 1890s described by Ashmore (1897) began as a quarrel over a duck; and minor irrigation disputes are frequently cited as the fuses of major battles.

Freedman refers to the enduring state of hostility between lineages which were agnatically related. The feuding lineages of Muk Kiu Tau and

1. For further examples see Lim 1958: 21; Smith 1847: 455; Fielde 1894: 128; Ashmore 1897: 215.



Tin Liu had a common ancestry, as did a much more influential pair of enemies, the Deng lineages of Ping Shan and Ha Tsuen:

Open hostility between lineages could exist when they were linked by agnation or by the ties of marriage.... It is of course possible that organized hostility regulated the relations between lineages which were linked neither by agnation nor marriage.... Hostility...was generally an aspect of kinship and affinity. (Freedman 1958: 106)

Here Freedman, through an untypical convolution of logic, comes very close to suggesting that hostility is *caused* by agnation or marriage, while, since I see agnatic kinship as being normally an instrument of co-operation rather than as enmity and since there seem to be no examples in the New Territories of serious intra-lineage feud where contiguous territories are not involved, I would interpret the hostility as being contingent in the first place upon conflicting expansionism. Thus, it makes sense to assume that agnatically linked lineages would be potential allies except where they have contiguous territories, when the more powerful principle of inter-neighbour hostility would come into play.

With regard to the role of affinity in inter-lineage conflict, it again seems to me that marriage ties were likely to give rise to co-operation rather than hostility. Indeed, Freedman's assumption appears to contradict his own statement a page earlier that at any particular time, extreme enmity and intermarriage were held to be inconsistent (*ibid.*: 105). This statement is backed up by a story told to me in Sheung Shui of an occasion when the Liao were fighting the Peng lineage of Fan Ling (Lineage D): a Liao woman married to a Peng was seen to be praying to heaven for a 'double-headed victory'. The narrator used the tale to explain why marriages with the Peng were rare. In fact, if my interpretation of Figure 3 is correct, then in order to avoid the 'inconsistency', it would follow that Lineage A would for the most part not enter into marriages with any of the lineages in its hostile ring. Here I must fall back on the Sheung Shui evidence, which is indicative rather than conclusive. While it is not true that there was no intermarriage with lineages B, C, D or E, there were certainly markedly fewer marriages than there were with many other major lineages of the area (Baker 1968: 177), and an inverse correlation between geographical proximity and the number of marriages contracted must surely be significant!

### III

But Figure 3 is not a complete model. The group of lineages A–G should not be considered in isolation, because they in turn would be surrounded

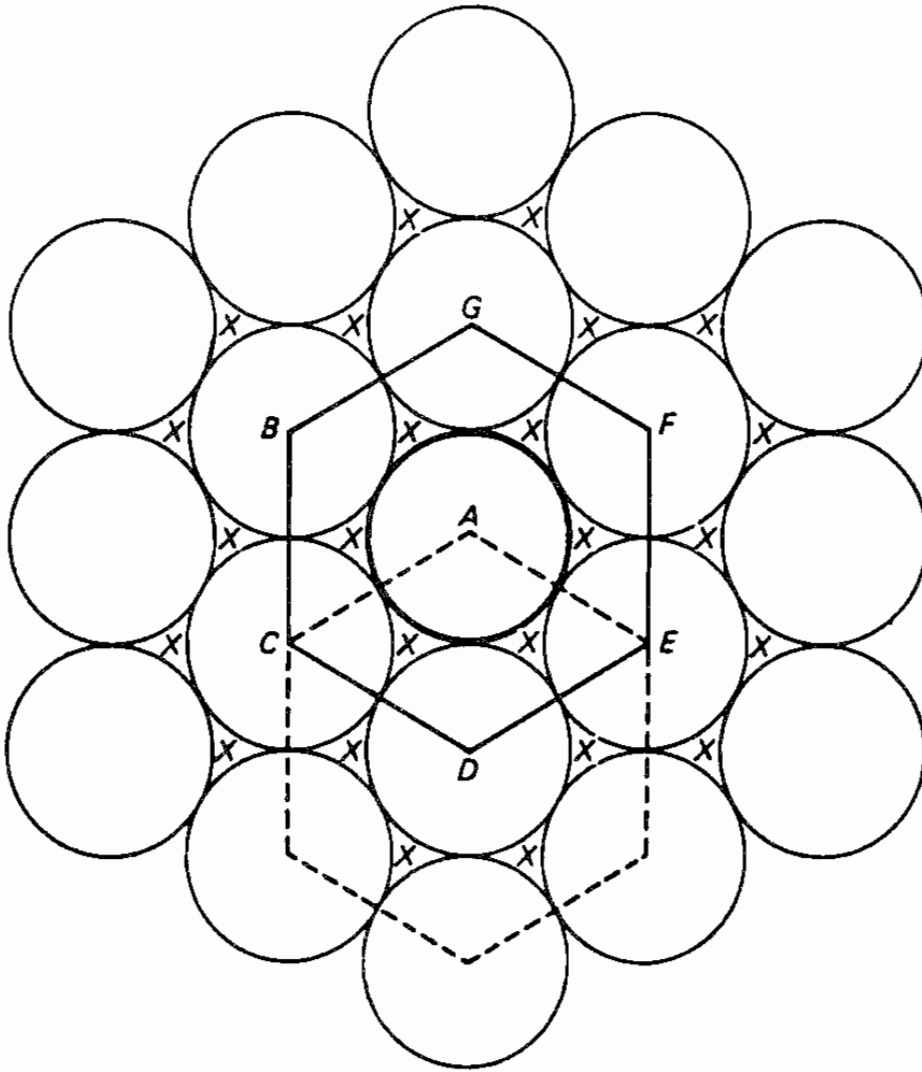


FIG. 4

by other lineages. Figure 4 adds another ring of lineages. It is important to realise that the model is egocentric, in the sense that the lineages around lineage A are two rings only when lineage A is considered the centre. As the pecked lines around lineage D show, any one lineage could be the centre of similar concentric rings. For the purposes of the model, all the interstices have been labelled 'X', though as Map 1 has shown, there might not always be such gaps.

Now, lineage A's relations with B–G were hostile because of border conflicts, but the same would not be true of its relations with the outer ring of lineages. In fact, each of the lineages of the outer ring is hostile to either one or two of the inner-ring lineages because of contiguity, and therefore the outer ring may be considered potential allies of lineage A. The imbalance by which A seemed to be outnumbered by its inner-ring enemies can now be seen to be redressed by the possibility of a 'sandwich' system of alliances with the outer ring.

Relationships with the inner ring were hostile, and marriage ties were not sought after. With the outer ring, relationships were likely to be friendly, and marriage ties were encouraged (indeed, where else should a lineage look for its spouses?). Here the bonds of affinity would have ramifications beyond the marriage tie itself as extra supports for long-standing alliances. And, of course, the inverse correlation between geographical proximity and marriages contracted can be seen as an important feature of the overall lineage system. That Liao marriages were for the most part made with spouses from major lineages beyond those of Sheung Shui's borders is true (Baker 1968: 177 and map), though I cannot reconstruct with certainty a clearly defined outer ring, perhaps because the landscape is not the unbounded plain which the model requires.

Figure 5 shows a portion only of the full model and traces out some of lineage A's and some of lineage D's relationships. A's relationships with D, E, and F are clearly hostile, and with H, J and K equally clearly likely to be friendly. If we look at D's relationships with the same group, we can see that H is hostile to D, not friendly, and F is friendly, not hostile: there has been a change of perspective. But J and K are unequivocal allies of both A and D, since they fall in the outer rings of both sets of relationships. The model enables us to see some clear choices for A and D in conducting their affairs in the delicate balance of power which kept those parts of Chinese society organized on the basis of lineage relatively stable. If A needs an ally either to attack or to defend against D, then H is an obvious preference. For D faced with A, F is clearly an ally.

At the beginning of this paper, I quoted a comment of Freedman's on mediation. Similar comments on the role of the mediator are to be found elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> but information as to how the mediation process worked is lacking, and it is generally assumed that respected gentry members of other lineages stepped in to cool matters down at such time as seemed politic. Figure 5 offers a possible explanation of the identity of the mediators. For A and D locked in feud, J and K are both interested friends, and might be expected to be unbiased neutrals. In fact, the complete model shows that only two lineages fulfil the condition that they should fall in the outer rings of both parties to the dispute, so there may

2. For example, in Macgowan 1907: 285; Baker 1966: 41; Krone 1967 [1859]: 126.

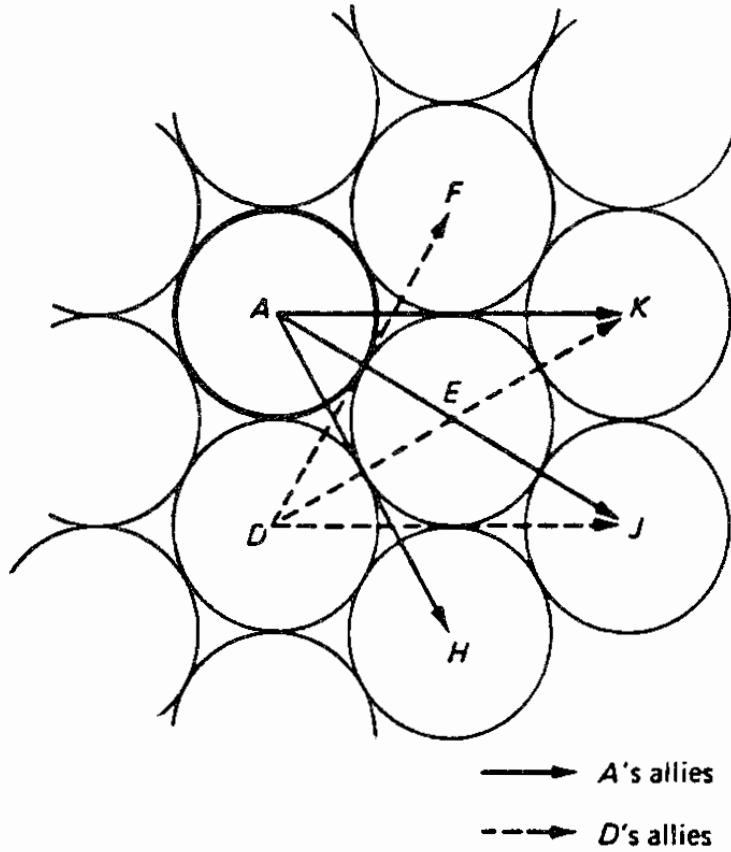


FIG. 5

well have been a high degree of certainty as to who should step forward as mediators in any particular conflict, and the process may have been more efficient for it.

Further possibilities are suggested by the model, such as that any one outer ring lineage may have complex relationships with A. Lineage K, for example, might be acting with A in feud against E, while at the same time it might be acting out a mediator's role by interceding with A on D's behalf. And the complexity of the many relationships might mean that, at some stage, K would find that an alliance with A against E overrode its neutrality towards D in such a way that it was constrained to take up arms against the latter.

IV

The model constructed here does seem to offer some insights into the workings of the lineage-dominated society which was found in much of South China. It gives a partial answer at least to two questions raised by Freedman in his first monograph on lineage:

The first question we must ask about south-eastern China is whether there were any patterns of intermarriage between localized lineages. (1958: 96)

With how many other local communities was a particular lineage linked? (Ibid.: 113)

It also goes some way towards describing a mediation mechanism for inter-lineage conflict resolution. It shows that conflict between agnatically related lineages was likely when they shared common territorial boundaries, but it points to a lack of affinal ties between permanently hostile lineages, so that Freedman was perhaps overstating the case in the second quotation used at the start of this paper.

On the other hand, the model tends to present an over-simple picture of 'inner ring hostile, outer ring friendly'. Clearly there were occasions when the exigencies of a situation—perhaps the need to combat one particularly ambitious and aggressive lineage—meant an outbreak of hostilities with an outer-ring lineage. At such times there must have been problems with affines, and they may have been serious enough to call forth a ban on intermarriage between the two groups. Such a ban might well have been only temporary, to be lifted when in the course of time relationships settled down; but it might also happen that a marriage ban would be of a more permanent kind, as in the case of the Liao and the Wen lineages of San Tin (see Baker 1968: 182-4). Again, there was always the possibility that an outside threat might necessitate the burying of the hatchet with an inner-ring lineage: two such instances in the past three hundred years have occurred between the Liao and their neighbours (Baker 1966: 37-8). We might say, though, that enmity with inner-ring lineages was more or less permanent, and friendship with outer-ring lineages was more or less normal.

The lineage landscape was thus composed of cells held in tension by a complex web of alliances and enmities, the end-result being a balance of power which tended to prevent either the acquisition of overweening influence by any one lineage or the prolongation of active hostilities to a point where bloodshed and damage could reach serious proportions.

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