XIX. Kinship Range and Family Status

Kinship Range

An important feature of every kinship system is the range of socially recognized kin relationships included within the system. In the preceding discussion, an indication of the range of Chamorro kinship has been given in connection with the description of kinship terminology and the organization of various crisis rites. In this section, the data will be drawn together and conclusions presented in systematic form.

TERMINOLOGICAL AND OBLIGATIONAL RANGE

There are two distinct aspects to the range of the Chamorro kinship system. The first of these, the terminological range, refers to the relationships covered by the extension of kinship terms. The second aspect of range refers to the behavior associated with the terms. Among the Chamorros this behavior tends to crystallize around reciprocal rights and duties. Virtually every right is sooner or later associated with a duty, and it is convenient to consider the range of institutionalized kinship rights and duties as the obligational range of the system.

In the section on the extension of kinship terms, it was pointed out that the terminological range has two significant aspects: (1) an assumed range and (2) an observed range. The assumed range is that given by informants without reference to actual genealogies and is a kind of conjectural norm. The observed range is based on the use of terms in observed situations and on genealogies collected by the field worker. It was noted that the assumed range included third cousins, whereas the observed range seldom if ever extended beyond second cousins. The observed range of the terminology is therefore narrower than the assumed range.

The assumed and observed aspects of terminological range have their counterparts in the obligational range of the Chamorro system.

The obligational range finds expression in behavior primarily in crisis rites, particularly those associated with marriage and with
death. At these times, the system of the reciprocal giving of gifts and services in the form of chenchuli, ika, and ajudo comes into play, associated also with the obligations of attendance at the secular festivities connected with the rites. The range of the system becomes operative through these forms of reciprocity. They are the key to an understanding of obligatory range among the Chamorros.

Furthermore, obligatory range is particularly clear in forms of interfamilial reciprocity. In the preceding pages, an attempt has been made to show how custom emphasizes the strength of the elementary family as a social unit. Obligational range among the Chamorros cannot be understood only on the basis of dyadic relationships between individuals. The elementary family is the primary unit in the system of reciprocal gifts, services, and attendance.

If one combines the testimony of informants without reference to observed cases, and considers the resulting conjectural norm as the assumed obligatory range, one finds that the range includes second cousins at times of major crisis rites. However, the observed range includes first cousins surely, but not necessarily all second cousins. The observed range is somewhat narrower than the assumed range, thereby paralleling the situation with regard to terminology. The assumed obligatory range tends to be close to the observed terminological range. There is, therefore, a series of progressively narrower kinds of kinship range. I suspect that this differentiation of the various aspects of range is a result of recent change in the kinship system.

Obligational range may also be classed according to whether it is constant or fluctuating. It tends to be constant if it varies little from day to day; fluctuating if it shows swings from narrow to broad over a given period of time, such as a year. Among the Chamorros, obligatory range finds its widest expression at the time of crisis rites; in ordinary day-to-day affairs the system is quite restricted. Interfamilial economic co-operation is greatest between parents and married children, weaker between siblings, and sometimes negligible among cousins. Also, there is considerable variability, some brothers working closely with each other, others having little to do with each other. On the whole, however, in the daily routine there is no strongly marked feeling of obligation and economic co-operation among the members of a widely extended body of kinfolk. The Chamorro kinship system is a fluctuating type, in that obligatory range is narrow in day-to-day relationships, wide at times of crisis rites.
There is evidence that this difference was not always so marked and that formerly the range of the system expanded more frequently and at times other than at crisis rites. Examples are the building of houses and thatching of house roofs in the German and early Japanese periods, described by older informants as occasions when a wide circle of relatives would gather for the work. If a man needed his house thatched, he would ask his father for assistance. The father would tell his brothers, who could in turn inform their sons. All these relatives, together with those on the wife’s side, would then go out with their oxcarts for thatch. About ten cartfuls of coconut palm fronds would be needed. Then, for several weeks, in the evenings the women would sew thatch. On the appointed day, the new thatch would be put on the roof by the men, with a few older men supervising. After the job had been finished, a large meal would be served by the man’s family to the workers. The preparation and serving of the food would be supervised by a mentu halom guana, following the pattern of marriages, baptisms, and deaths today. Those who came would also give chenchuli to the woman’s family. A similar procedure took place at a house-building. It is probable that an expanded obligatory range was formerly more closely tied to economic co-operation in production than is the case today.

Finally, for any given Chamorro family, obligatory kinship range is related to intrafamilial conflict and tension. The kinship structure achieves the breadth of its range through the system of ajudo, chenchuli, and ika and attendance at crisis rites. In cases of bad feeling between relatives—first cousins, for instance—the parties involved may refuse to attend each other’s social functions or give chenchuli. This is tantamount to a formal severing of relations. The person who does not give chenchuli to a relative at an appropriate occasion is ignoring a kinship obligation and consciously committing an act of non-recognition of a kin relationship.

The Chamorros are particularly touchy about attendance at social functions. If one cannot attend a guput, one should send a family member, preferably a grown, unmarried son or daughter, or explain carefully ahead of time why one cannot come, and perhaps leave a small gift. Two examples from field notes follow.

Alberto and his first cousin once removed, an older woman who may be called Maria, live next door to each other. Two weeks ago was primet communion for Alberto’s child, and a party was given by Alberto and his wife in honor of the event. Alberto and his wife invited Maria. Just before the
party, Alberto saw her, all dressed up, with a bundle of what looked like food, pass his door. "Where are you going?" he called.

"To the store," she replied.

Alberto said nothing but knew she was not telling the truth. "Dressed like that to go to the store!" he thought.

Actually Maria was on her way to another guput primet communion at the house of her sister. She did not attend Alberto's party, and he was hurt and angry. "To think of all the times I have helped her!" he said.

On the same Sunday as Alberto's party, Henrici and his wife were invited to three guput primet communion, given by various relatives and friends. Henrici and his wife could attend none of them because the latter's sister was leaving that day by ship for Guam, and they had to see her off. So they were very careful to explain to each family that invited them to a primet communion party the reason that made it impossible for them to attend.

So it is that the very mechanism by which obligational kinship range is achieved—reciprocal gifts, services, and attendance—is at the same time a principal source of tension and conflict that disturb the smooth working of the kinship system.

The Family and Status in the Community

One cannot understand the Chamorros without knowing the Chamorro concept of champada, "to compete," in particular, to compete for status, with an underlying feeling of jealousy, real or implied. Two men compete for the affections of a girl, two girls for the handsomer sodality dress, two housewives for the more pretentious sala, two men for a better job, two or more families for the largest fandango. Champada explains some oft-repeated observations made by the more thoughtful people: "The Chamorros are apt to be jealous; one man does not like to see another get ahead"; or, "The Chamorros are always competing with each other to see who is a little higher. I wish they would compete on their farms." Champada is related to the fact that the Chamorros are quick to criticize one another. It is, I believe, a basic factor in their difficulty in maintaining effective co-operating groups in situations where the group is not controlled by a strong authority. Champada also underlies the large guputs which Chamorros enjoy so much and to which they cling tenaciously, for the guput is a principal form for the validation of status. And finally, champada is a factor in the readiness with which Chamorros adopt new things, particularly goods such as radios, jeeps, washing machines and the like, for these are closely related to status. The newcomer to the village wonders why the few phonographs and radios (Guam has a radio station) are always turned up as far as the volume will go. The noise is deafening, the
sounds raucous, but it is all sweet music to the owner, for he is letting the village know that he is the proud possessor of the radio or phonograph. Champada is a theme that runs throughout Chamorro life.

Manuel and his father-in-law, Jesús, started a store. At the same time, Jesús’ wife’s brother, Henrici, also started a store next door. Manuel, Jesús, and Henrici agreed on a common frontage for the two stores. Also, Henrici would sell only beer, and Manuel and Jesús only canned groceries. After all, they were all relatives and why compete? But the first thing Jesús and Manuel knew, Henrici was selling canned goods, so Jesús and Manuel started selling beer. Then much to Jesús’ disgust, Henrici built his store out five feet more in front. Jesús was angry. So he and Manuel built their store out fifteen feet, ten feet beyond Henrici’s. Henrici bought a small radio, so Jesús got a larger one. Jesús’ played considerably louder, so Henrici hired a man to put up a higher antenna. Then his radio played as loud as Jesús’. But as soon as this happened, Jesús’ daughter administered a real blow by turning the volume up all the way on their radio, which had heretofore not been so extended. So Henrici bought a new radio, which is indubitably larger and louder than Jesús’. Henrici went bankrupt, but at least he has the consolation of having the louder radio. Here the matter rests.

This example might be taken as merely an isolated instance of friction among relatives. But similar cases are constantly occurring in the daily life of the community. They are all examples of champada and of sensitivity to status.

This competition in Chamorro life goes on with reference to rather clearly discernible bases of prestige, which are in turn the foundations of status. To one who comes to Saipan, the Chamorros do not at first appear highly differentiated in this matter. But the appearance is deceptive and due largely to the fact that the war wiped out all wealth except land, so that the people tend to live much alike. But differences are again emerging. What are the prestige bases that underlie status, in the sense that some people in the community are high and others low?

Wealth is probably the most important of the criteria of status. With wealth differentials largely wiped out by the invasion, the place of wealth in the total scheme is perhaps not as clear as before the war. In pre-war Garapan the wealthiest man was clearly at the top. He owned fourteen houses, all except one rented to Japanese, and his total holdings of real property were worth over 400,000 yen. No other individual or family was so rich, but there were about ten or twelve families who held considerable land, who were in the higher brackets of the tax rolls, and who were acknowledged as the superior Chamorro families of the island.
Today there is some shift evident, as some of the older wealthier men of pre-war times have died, and in the unstable post-war scene a few others are managing to acquire some wealth through merchandising. Until the economy is more nearly stabilized, however, wealth will be much desired but hard to come by.

Associated with wealth is "good taste" in house furnishings. A well-painted and comfortably furnished sala, running water in the kitchen, a washing machine, fresh curtains and drapes are all important to the Chamorro matron and are characteristic of the families of higher social status in the community. Also, servants are employed by a few families today.

Occupation is also significant. Office and store work are more desired than work on the farm by the Chamorros as a whole, although the man who was the wealthiest in pre-war Garapan has always been and is today, in spite of his advancing years, a devoted farmer.

Education, primarily literacy and the learning of foreign languages, is likewise accorded prestige. The reason is obvious, for the Chamorros have come under successive Spanish, German, Japanese, and now American regimes, and to be able to understand and inter-act satisfactorily with the succession of foreigners that have seized control of Saipan has demanded linguistic facility and put an emphasis on literacy and on a command of the language of the governing power.

Finally, political status is important. Although the post-war political organization is still in a state of flux, political leadership is of growing importance.

These status criteria are all inter-related, though the ones that are emphasized vary with the occasion. Yet the Saipan community is not large and these status criteria tend to cluster, so that wealth, occupation, education, and political leadership tend to form a combined base for the higher status of the more prominent families.

Status in the community is closely tied to the elementary family. Married siblings and their families do not necessarily occupy similar positions. It is true that since the war four brothers have joined forces and through shrewdness and hard work are accumulating wealth and they and their families are moving upward together; but, more commonly, adult siblings will occupy different positions, as far as the community is concerned. Likewise, there may be actual conflict between related families over the question of their status.

Mario and José are brothers who lived with their families in adjacent houses. Mario had a little better job in the administration than José. Mario's
wife had the interior of the house painted, and put up new curtains. She considered herself superior to José's wife and said so. Sometimes she sat complacently in the open window, which made José's wife angry, because she thought the other was gloating. The two women got on such bad terms that finally José sold his house and moved to a different neighborhood.

The status system of Saipan is not rigid from one generation to another. There is no sharply marked system of ascribed status associated with a hereditary class system, partly because Saipan was resettled in the nineteenth century, so that there are no families that have from time immemorial occupied high positions. The wealthiest man in pre-war Garapan, who is a respected leader today, is the son of a poor man who migrated from Guam. There is very considerable fluidity from generation to generation. At present, some twelve or fifteen elementary families are at the top, in the opinion of almost everyone. The rest of the community grades downward to the poorest families at the bottom, the members of which have also had the least formal education and exercise no political leadership.

Particularly important to a family's status are properly impressive secular festivities at the time of crisis rites, especially those at marriage and death, and at the time of family novenas. These are occasions of special importance to the women. Women are not political leaders and they do not occupy any of the best jobs, although some of them are in very responsible positions, and until the post-war period they did not receive as much formal education as the men. The Chamorro tradition is for women's interests to be centered in the family and, associated with the family, in the church. The relation of church to family is expressed to a large degree in crisis rites, while it is the secular celebration of these that helps establish a family's social position in the community. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, a matron's concern that her family's crisis rites be properly celebrated.